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Guiding Learners in the Learning Society: The Situation in Nine Central and Eastern European Countries

Introduction

Up to a few decades ago, guidance was, in many countries, largely restricted to the provision of information and advice to individuals and groups as they reached stages in their lives where they had to make decisions as to which educational and career trajectories they wanted to follow (Madsen 1986; Collin and Watts 1996; Sultana and Sammut 1997; Budapest Conference Report 2000). Such decisions were often high-stake ones, in the sense that pathways were then conceived as linear and closed—once you embarked on a particular route, within specific curricular or occupational tracks, the likelihood was that you would remain within it, and that at best, mobility would be vertical and not horizontal. Indeed, traditional mainstream career development theories considered workers who changed jobs regularly as “immature”.¹ The discourse about guidance has now shifted to accommodate a different view

of both education and employment, as well as of the links between these two (Killeen 1996; Watts 1996a, 1996b).

Two main developments can in fact be identified as having had an impact on the definition and scope of guidance.² The first is the widespread legitimacy that the idea of lifelong learning has attained, whether among educators, policy-makers, or society at large. Lifelong learning is not a new idea, of course. Indeed, in classical Greece, a lifelong dedication to knowledge was considered the foundation and sign of a virtuous life (Lê Thành Khôi 1995). That notion and understanding, together with more economic as well as humanistic and radical interpretations of the term (Ranson 1998; Jarvis 2001; Borg and Mayo 2002), started to become current in adult education in the west at the turn of the 20th century, culminating in what should perhaps still be hailed as the master text in the field, the 1972 Unesco report by Faure and his colleagues entitled *Learning to Be*.³ What is new, as Gelpi (1985) has pointed out, is the favour and general popularity that the notion has attained at all levels of society. The idea of learning throughout life has been sustained by fresh perspectives on how individuals learn, by changing and more complex views on intelligence, and by advances in pedagogy, in assessment, and in information technology, all of which have led to the re-conceptualisation of educational pathways so that they provide young people and adults with flexible and multiple entry and exit routes (Sultana 2003a). Flexibility in provision, in certification, in entry and exit points will ensure that even those who have failed to profit from traditional education routes will now be successfully engaged in the education and training enterprise. Learning is much less bounded in time and space (Kress 2000; Young 1998), and as a result, many argue, young people and adults will need guidance throughout their lives in order to navigate complex opportunities into and out of specific education and training pathways, and into and out of employment routes.

A second development, which is both linked to and, in many ways, actually drives the first, is the notion of post-industrial, post-Fordist societies in “knowledge-based” economies. Internationally, it is claimed (*inter alia* Brown and Lauder 1991; Brown *et al.* 2001),⁴ economies are restructuring—or need to restructure—themselves towards the high ability sector, demanding work profiles with a broad range of skills in the new technologies. This is the key strategy to gain and retain competitive advantage in a global market. Over and above competence in information technology, economies require workers to demonstrate a repertoire of “soft” skills, a personality package that includes such qualities as creativ-

ity, communication skills, linguistic competence, ability to work in teams, and so on. The key quality that anchors and permeates the profile of the worker/citizen in the learning economy is his/her flexibility. Given the vagaries of the open economy, and the accelerated developments in technology, workers/citizens need to be always open to new learning, capable of flexibly adapting to new environments, and of creatively restructuring and re-inventing themselves so that they can retain their “use–value” in the labour market. It therefore becomes essential for what ultimately is an “unstable society” (Schön 1973) to provide multiple and flexible routes into learning and training, throughout a citizen’s life. The learning society therefore becomes “a society in which learning is the whole of life and the whole of life is learning” (Van der Zee 1998, 75). It follows “naturally”—at least this is increasingly the view within mainstream policy discourse—that members of such a society require guidance in order to manage what has become an increasingly challenging life project.

This chapter sets out to critically consider the prevailing discourse about the learning society, and particularly the role of guidance within that society. The focus is on the way the discourse on “guiding learners and workers in the learning society” is produced within the European Union, and following that, more specifically on how such a discourse circulates in nine Central and Eastern European countries (CEECs). The goals of the contribution are therefore threefold. First, recent developments in lifelong guidance policies at EU level are presented. Second, a review is made of the state of the art in the provision of guidance in nine CEECs, with due attention given to the identification of trends, especially as these connect with policy developments in Europe. Third, mainstream notions of guidance within the learning society—as these are being articulated and promoted within the common European space,⁵ and as they are being received by, and accommodated within, new Member States—are critically considered and challenged, with a view to considering more emancipative alternatives.

Guiding European Citizens in the Learning Society

The EU Policy Context for Lifelong Guidance

It is clear that the European Union has enthusiastically embraced—and indeed is equally enthusiastically promoting—the particular social and discursive construct captured by the phrase the “learning society”, and

the attendant notion of “lifelong guidance”. From the point of view of the European Council, lifelong and life-wide learning has a key role to play in fulfilling the EU’s aspiration to become “the most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based society in the world” (Lisbon European Council, March 23–24, 2000). Based on that premise, the Member States and the Commission were invited by the European Heads of Government/European Council “to identify, within their area of competence, coherent strategies and practical measures with a view to fostering lifelong learning for all”. The Education Council/Council of Education Ministers was requested to “undertake a general reflection on the concrete future objectives of education and training systems, focusing on common concerns while respecting national diversity”. As Gordon Clark (2002) has noted, “the European Commission’s response to the invitation of the Lisbon Council was to develop, in cooperation with the Member States and Social Partners, a range of policy responses in the forms of Communications and Reports in education, training and employment and to undertake a number of interrelated initiatives in terms of follow-up work programmes.”

One important *tranche* in the intensification of Commission and Member State activity in the field of education and training as a contribution to the strengthening of a knowledge-based Europe concerned lifelong learning, with the development of a *Memorandum on Lifelong Learning* and the launch of a wide consultation process in Member States, candidate countries, EEA countries, social partners and other civil society elements. On the basis of consultation input, the Commission issued a Communication entitled *Making a European Area of Lifelong Learning a Reality* (EC 2001a), while at the behest of the Ministers of Education of the EU, of pre-accession countries and EEA, following a meeting in Bucharest in June 2000 the Commission established a Working Group which produced a *European Report on Quality Indicators for Lifelong Learning* (2002a).

Guidance features in all of these documents,⁶ and is defined as “a range of activities designed to assist people to make decisions about their lives (educational, vocational, personal) and to implement those decisions” (EC 2002b, 57). Guidance personnel are also considered to be “learning facilitators”, inasmuch as they enable “the acquisition of knowledge and competences by establishing a learning environment” (EC 2002b, 58). Guidance is one of the six key messages proposed in the framework of the Memorandum with a view to structuring the open debate on lifelong learning, where the challenge of ensuring easy access to “good quality information and guidance about learning opportunities

throughout Europe and throughout their lives” is considered to be central to the coming about of a competitive, knowledge-based economy, peopled by flexible and mobile workers constantly open to re-training. According to the Memorandum, *holistic* guidance, overcoming the traditional distinctions between educational, vocational and personal guidance, had to be continuously and locally *accessible* for all; it had to be *client-centred*, by reaching out to citizens and following up on their needs rather than waiting for them to come; it had to serve as a *brokerage* service on behalf of clients, and to be *networked* to related personal, social and educational services; it had to also be offered through such *non-formal and informal channels* as NGOs and community-based associations, so as to more effectively reach disadvantaged groups; it had to be a quality service, with agreed minimum *standards*, and improved initial and continuous *training* of guidance workers.⁷

These “policy leads” found a resonance in the Memorandum consultation process, as can be seen in the *Communication on Lifelong Learning* (2001), the strategy paper published subsequently by the Commission, which identified information, guidance and counselling as one of six “priorities for action”.⁸ This synthesised the various inputs and organised them around six strategic building blocks for policy development and implementation.⁹ The implications for lifelong guidance are clearly articulated in several of these blocks. Thus, access to lifelong learning is facilitated if learning providers develop strong *partnerships* with those offering information, guidance and counselling services (EC 2002b, 21). Those involved in guidance can help develop *insights into the demand for learning* through the client surveys and consultations they are involved in (EC 2002b, 22). Guidance workers can promote lifelong learning if they “*raise awareness* of the individual/social/economic benefits of learning, and... encourage diversification of studies and non-traditional career/learning choices” (EC 2002b, 25). They can also facilitate access to learning opportunities by being a “key interface between learning needs and the learning on offer [and] in helping learners find their place in increasingly complex learning systems” (EC 2002b, 24).

Other concerns that arose from the consultation process, and from the Commission’s own policy analysis of the field, included the allocation of European Social Fund resources to the training of guidance workers; the training of employees and managerial staff to act as guidance workers or mentors to others; the development of competencies among guidance personnel that would enable them to promote tolerance and democratic values, particularly given the challenges of living in multicultural societies;

and the promotion of a *European dimension of guidance*—through such actions as the European CV, the exchange of good practice Europe-wide, the launch of PLOTEUS (the Portal on Learning Opportunities throughout the European Space), and the mobilisation of the Euroguidance network as a source of information, responding to the needs of guidance workers to be familiar with other countries' education, training and guidance systems, labour market systems and programmes.¹⁰

Many of these guidance-related considerations have implications both for defining the field across Europe, and also for establishing quality standards—in other words, for benchmarking those aspects of the service that are promoted Europe-wide as worthy of emulation.¹¹ Indeed, two documents relate specifically to the latter dimension. The report on *Quality Indicators for Lifelong Learning* (EC 2002a) mentioned above,¹² for instance, notes that while common indicators had not yet been developed Europe-wide in this field, a number of areas ought to be focused upon, including (i) target group coverage, (ii) social, economic and learning benefits from counselling and guidance, (iii) qualifications of guidance and counselling practitioners, and (iv) frequency of in-service training of practitioners. Similarly, the document detailing the *Future Concrete Objectives for Education and Training Systems in Europe* (Council of the European Union 2001b) sets out three criteria for education and training systems, in the form of objectives that need to be reached in order to fulfil the aspirations for the EU as defined by the Lisbon Council. These include (i) the improvement of the quality and effectiveness of education and training systems, (ii) the facilitation of access to education and training for all, and (iii) opening up education and training systems to the wider world. Quality guidance provision is identified as one of the activities that operationalises these strategic goals by, for instance, assisting in broadening access to lifelong learning, increasing recruitment to scientific and technical studies,¹³ and motivating young people and adults to participate and to continue in learning.

Many of these objectives, strategies, and policy leads in relation to guidance are also to be found in a parallel stream of documents linked directly to concerns regarding the European labour market and to the aspirations articulated by the Lisbon Council. In its *Action Plan for Skills and Mobility* (EC 2002c), for instance, the Commission identifies three main obstacles that the EU has to overcome if its labour markets are to be accessible to all. These are inadequate occupational mobility, low geographical mobility, and fragmentation of information and lack of transparency of job opportunities. Guidance is singled out as one of the

measures by which all three inadequacies can be addressed, and the report notes that improved access to quality public and private information, guidance and counselling services is required, and especially so in the workplace, where such services are still largely absent. Member States are indeed encouraged to evaluate the existing services (with a view to ensuring transparency and coherence in provision), to widen access to guidance services (especially through the use of ICTs), to reallocate public funds to this area, and to set up a one-stop European Mobility Site as part of a wider European network to provide comprehensive and easily accessible information to citizens on key aspects of jobs, mobility, learning opportunities, and the transparency of qualifications in Europe. Guidance services are to facilitate the more effective matching of European human resources and the European labour market, through EU-wide mobility information campaigns, and through promoting an improved image of occupational sectors that are not attracting enough workers. In another document, *Increasing Labour Force Participation and Promoting Active Ageing* (EC 2002d) guidance is called upon to target the inactive and unemployed—and, by implication, older workers—in order to help create an adequate supportive environment in an effort to integrate them into the work force.

Other recent European Commission documents further feed into the overall effort to mobilise guidance services in support of attaining lifelong learning goals for Europe. The *Joint Employment Report* (EC 2001b)—which provides an overview of the employment situation and a political assessment of the progress made by Member States in the implementation of the agreed Employment Guidelines articulated with reference to the European Employment Strategy¹⁴—notes that only half of the Member States have achieved clear progress in developing comprehensive lifelong learning strategies, and these have remained at an early stage of implementation. Guidance is promoted as an effective manner for facilitating cross-sectoral learning pathways that help to improve the overall coherence of available learning. Similarly, and also in the context of the European Employment Strategy, the *Joint Statements of the European Public Employment Services on their Role in the Labour Market* (2002e) highlights the role of guidance in assisting jobseekers, employed and unemployed, and for processes in support of lifelong learning, including the responsibility of Public Employment Services (PESs) to assist individuals throughout their working lives in order to promote occupational mobility and flexibility. Those persons who are most difficult to place in employment are to be targeted for “more intensive counselling.”

An Evolving EU Agenda

The above review of recent developments in key policy documents leaves us with little doubt that, despite the sovereignty of Member States in educational matters, Europe has much to say in relation to guidance, and that the field has a broad appeal as a mechanism that facilitates the attainment of a number of central and inter-related EU goals. Indeed, going by the documents referred to above, the expectations from guidance are nothing short of enormous. Guidance, duly reconfigured to cater for new realities—including non-linear, multiple entry points into education, training and work across time (lifelong) and space (Europe-wide)—is called upon to:

- accompany the citizen throughout life, supporting transitions and promoting the attitudes, knowledge and skills needed to be active contributors to, and participants in, the learning society/economy;
- connect clients with local, regional, national and European educational and occupational opportunities;
- be impartial while at the same time fostering science and technology as an attractive educational and occupational pathway;
- enhance social inclusion, through re-engaging reluctant learners in educational and training tracks, and through acting as “job broker” on behalf of the unemployed;
- present up-to-date information that responds to client and employer needs, is transparent, user-friendly, and enables consolidation of knowledge across the educational and labour market sectors;
- cater for the individual and for targeted groups (e.g., women returnees, persons with disability, long term unemployed, unqualified school leavers, immigrants) in a way that responds to their particular needs;
- foster a personality package in clients that is functional to the labour market—including flexibility, mobility, entrepreneurship, and so on;
- establish itself more firmly within sites other than the school and the public employment service, including places of leisure and of work;
- network with NGOs, voluntary and community-based providers in order to more effectively respond to clients with specific needs, including minority groups, for instance;

- exploit more effectively the potential of ICTs in order to attain many of the objectives stated above—including transparency, accessibility, permeability, connectivity—and to encourage clients to engage more proactively in constructing educational and occupational life projects;
- mobilise itself more professionally, in terms of improved pre-service and in-service training, and in terms of developing sound quality indicators that are promoted and benchmarked across Europe.

This, therefore, is the EU's agenda in a nutshell. In view of arguments that will be made in the final section of this chapter, it is important to stress the point that this agenda is driven both by an *economistic* concern (how best to make Europe competitive in a knowledge-based global economy), and by a *social* one (how best to ensure access to productive and rewarding labour market involvement to as many European citizens as possible). It is an agenda that is increasingly taking shape and form, partly as the discourse around guidance intensifies and converges within formal documents, and partly as the Commission uses the instruments it has at its disposal to transform objectives signalled in such documents into action—whether through funding leads via EU programmes and initiatives, through promoting good practice, through open co-ordination, or other means.

Given the visibility and pull of the EU in the larger Europe, it is also an agenda that is increasingly having an impact on the candidate countries involved in the accession process as they try to “measure up”.¹⁵ In the section that follows, we will consider how nine Central and Eastern European countries, as candidate countries or as new Member States of the EU, are articulating goals for guidance, within a context that targets the upgrading of the knowledge and skills base of the population with a view to addressing unemployment, to meeting the demands of forward-looking knowledge-based economies, and to ensuring that the supply and demand of labour are in harmony.

Guidance and Counselling in CEECs

The Context for Comparative Analysis

Before launching into the presentation of the state of and developments in guidance in nine rather different CEECs—namely Bulgaria, Estonia,

Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Romania, Slovakia and Slovenia—it is important to justify why they are here being considered as a “unit” for the purpose of comparative analysis. There are, after all, important geo-political, economic and cultural differences both between—and sometimes even within—these nine countries. Some of the CEECs reviewed here—including Poland, Romania and Hungary—are quite large, while Estonia, Slovenia, Latvia and Lithuania are comparatively quite small.¹⁶ Some of the CEECs have a relatively homogeneous ethnic composition (e.g., Poland, Slovenia), others are quite multi-ethnic (e.g., Estonia, Latvia). Some—such as Bulgaria, Romania, and Slovakia—have significant numbers of minority groups. There are also significant differences between the CEECs in the per capita income they can command (with Slovenia going beyond the 10,000 Euro threshold, with the rest ranging between 4,500 and 9,500 Euros per capita). In some countries, the political context encourages stakeholders to make important contributions to the policy-making process as well as to provision of services. Other states from among the CEECs appear to be more reluctant to adopt a social partnership model.

Different histories, traditions, ideologies, and policy regimes have had an impact on shaping the educational systems in the different CEECs, with some embarking only recently on questioning centralised systems that encourage early streaming and tracking, and that seriously limit the extent to which individuals can “choose” educational and occupational trajectories. Career guidance has deep roots in Latvia, Lithuania, and Poland, but in the other countries involved in this review it has developed only recently, without much of a heritage to build upon. Culturally too there are significant differences between the nine CEECs, with religion (mainly Christian—with its Catholic, Orthodox and Protestant varieties—but Muslim as well), and the family playing quite a significant role when it comes to shaping young people’s futures, occupationally or otherwise. All these factors, together with the variable composition of the different countries’ economies, have a significant impact on the way careers guidance is perceived, on how it is organised, on the challenges that have to be overcome, and on the issues that need to be addressed.

Over and above these differences, however, are a number of factors that make the attempt to consider the nine CEECs together a meaningful one. First of all, the countries in question are either one step away from accession in the EU (Bulgaria and Romania), or joined the EU in May 2004 (all other countries in question). As such, their own policy-making has been greatly influenced by EU policies, including *the EU Social Char-*

ter, *EU Employment Action Plans*, and structural indicators that focus on employment, innovation, social inclusion and economic reforms. Indeed, the very participation in joint thematic reviews such as the one concerning guidance, as well as in the “open method of co-ordination” in both the employment and social policy fields, tends to generate a concerted EU approach, even though legal competence and authority in such areas remain with the individual Member States.

Furthermore, the nine CEECs have only recently embarked on a transition from a centrally planned to a democratic market economy, which means that they have to deal with “radical changes in the role of the state, the individual and the economy”, which have “an immense effect on the starting point, nature, and investment in, career development” (Fretwell and Plant 2001, 1). Indeed, most of these countries report an intensified interest in career guidance. This is understandable, given that labour demand and supply were previously an outcome of state planning, and as a result insecurity about employment and economic futures is a relatively new experience for many citizens in Central and Eastern Europe. As the Budapest Conference Report noted:

After WWII the paths of East and West diverged sharply. In central and eastern Europe further development of career guidance and counselling services came to a grinding halt and remained in hibernation for almost half a century. Full employment under the command economy invalidated the need for guidance to be more than a referral service. [...] In general, the period of transition to a market economy, and the resulting turmoil in the labour market pushed the issue of career guidance into focus again. (2000, 7)

Methodology

The premise therefore is that the underlying dynamics and processes connecting these nine CEECs facilitates comparative analysis, and certainly justifies the presentation of a cross-country state-of-the-art review of the guidance field. The review draws on a detailed database compiled by the European Training Foundation (ETF), generated on the basis of a questionnaire distributed to experts from CEECs during the summer of 2002. These experts completed their task by drawing on their own in-depth knowledge of career guidance in their country, and in some instances after an extensive consultation exercise with key decision-makers and providers in the field.

The questionnaire follows closely the survey instrument developed by the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD),

as part of its recent thematic review of fourteen countries,¹⁷ where the goal was to develop benchmarks—enabling participating countries to gauge how well they are doing in career guidance provision in relation to other comparable countries—and to facilitate the sharing of good practice, providing countries with an opportunity to promote their successes and to learn from practices elsewhere. On the basis of the proven usefulness of the OECD survey, the Commission, with the help of the European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training (Cedefop), extended the collection of information to the remaining EU Member States (France, Italy, Portugal, Greece, and Sweden) as well as one member of the EEA, namely Iceland, with the ETF overseeing the same exercise in relation to Bulgaria, Cyprus, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, Poland, Romania, Slovakia and Slovenia. The World Bank, on its part, has launched a parallel review in seven middle-income countries (starting with Turkey, involving Poland and Romania again, and extending its purview to include Chile, the Philippines, Russia, and South Africa), again using the OECD questionnaire. The involvement of these key partners—all using the same survey tool—is expected to lead to the most extensive harmonised international database ever on guidance policy and practice. Each organisation has commissioned a synthesis report to be written on the basis of the outcomes of each cluster of completed national questionnaires (Sultana 2002; OECD 2004; Cedefop 2004; Watts and Fretwell, 2003). A “synthesis of syntheses” identifying the key points from all the reviews is also available (Watts and Sultana 2004).

A State-of-the-Art Review

The information from the ETF database, presented in Sultana (2002), is here analytically organised around four main categories that are of most relevance to this essay, and namely in response to the questions:

- How is guidance defined and valued in the CEECs?
- Who is targeted for guidance in the CEECs, and in which contexts?
- What are the modalities for the provision of lifelong guidance in the CEECs?
- Who provides guidance in the CEECs?

These questions are addressed in turn, with an emphasis placed on developing critical insights on the construction of the field of guidance in relation to the knowledge-based, learning economy. Such critical per-

spectives are enhanced through the trawling through of the ETF, OECD and Cedefop databases in order to identify contrasting perspectives regarding guidance that exist in the CEECs and in those OECD and older EU Member States that took part in the survey.

Defining and Valuing Guidance in the CEECs

The range of activities covered by guidance has been usefully summarised by Plant (2001) to include: informing, advising, assessing, teaching, enabling, advocating, networking, feeding back, managing, innovation/systems change, signposting, mentoring, sampling work experience or learning tasters, and following up. Generally speaking, guidance facilitates decisions that have to be made about trajectories through educational and occupational pathways, and in some OECD and older EU countries, boundary distinctions are drawn between more generic personal counselling types of activities—which address a range of developmental and inter-relationship issues—and educational and career guidance proper. These distinctions are rather loose, especially since, in some contexts, guidance personnel are also, if not primarily, counsellors, and that both “categories” of staff follow the same certification route, which often involves a specialisation in psychology.

It is clear that most of the CEECs covered by this review are engaged in several of the activities referred to by Plant, though such engagement obviously varies from country to country, and from sector to sector within each country. Despite the fact that guidance services have a rather long presence in some of the CEECs—in Poland, for instance, they started in 1918, while in Latvia and Lithuania guidance services were already being offered in 1929 and 1931 respectively—a history of central labour market planning generally militated against the notions of “individual choice” on which liberal guidance models are predicated—a point made earlier in this chapter. Occupational roles tended to be ascribed, in response to, and as a function of, the requirements of the economy, where the individual’s aspirations were secondary to the perceived or projected needs of the labouring, producing community.

Such dynamics may partly explain why one gets the strong impression from the ETF database that guidance, as it is usually understood across in OECD and older EU countries, is more present in many of the CEECs discursively and in formal declarations than in actual practice. Many of the CEECs, for instance, have only recently promulgated legal instruments promoting career guidance and stipulating it as a citizen right (e.g., Bulgaria, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Slovakia). This “lag” is also partly due to the accession process itself, where specific

policy models and strategies, not to mention policy discourse, circulates among the ruling elite both via formal channels associated with the *acquis communautaire*, but also through benchmarking and emulation of “good practices” promoted informally through, for instance, the “open method of co-ordination”. All in all, however, there is a lack of determined strategic leadership in many of the CEECs when it comes to steering guidance, and most countries involved in this review note that several legal provisions have been adopted but have not been implemented. This is the case with Latvia and Poland, for instance, and Bulgaria has yet to establish the Career Information and Guidance Centres that its vocational education and training law refers to. Such implementation gaps are only partly due to the tight budgetary situation which prevails in most of the countries under review, where fiscal restraint translates into little funding accompanying the intentions expressed in legal instruments. The gap, together with a lack of strategic leadership, could also probably be attributed to the lack of expertise within Ministries—Estonia, for instance, is a case in point here—where bureaucratic inertia and a reluctance to give up old ways of doing things lead to policy torpor.

History and tradition could possibly also explain an approach to guidance in CEECs that to some extent contrasts with what can increasingly be referred to as “mainstream” definitions of the field. The ETF database suggests, for instance, that educational and career guidance is conceptualised rather more in terms of *provision* than as an activity that can be engaged in by the client in a self-service and self-directed mode. This is only partly due to the lack of resources, be they print or ICT-based. It reflects a view of guidance that is strongly marked by a psychological orientation, where it could be argued that, given the standing of that science/discipline in the academic and professional sectors in the CEECs, guidance ends up being defined as a psychological intervention where a more knowledgeable or expert provider comes to the assistance of a client or clients that are perceived to have a “deficit”. This deficiency could be a lack of adequate information about educational or labour market opportunities, for instance, of job search and self-presentation skills, or even of the adequate personal qualities that make an individual more employable. Of course, as both the OECD and Cedefop syntheses suggest, this is not specific to CEECs—the difference is only one of degree.

The contrast between provision-led and self-service led approaches to guidance, and the balance struck between the two approaches, has important implications for the development of a service that is more rou-

tinely accessed and made use of throughout one's life, in response to specific needs linked to developmental, educational or occupational aspirations and opportunities. While in CEECs the balance is still clearly tilted towards a provision-led type of service, the ETF database does suggest that there is an identifiable effort, on the part of some of the countries under review, to develop strategies that enable clients to access guidance services proactively, and to engage in self-service mode. This is the case with the Vocational Information Counselling Centres (CIPS) in Slovenia, while the career guidance software developed in Poland (Counsellor 2000) also stimulates client input into the decision-making process. In some of the CEECs, therefore, we find an increase in the use of self-administered, self-scoring assessment instruments, with clients resorting to an individual guidance interview only after they have terminated the self-exploration process that has been guided by print- or ICT-based resources. Increasingly, therefore, one of the contexts for educational and occupational guidance will become the home and sites associated with leisure—though this of course will very much depend on the extent to which the personal computer and the Internet penetrate such sites.¹⁸

Who is Targeted for Guidance in the CEECs, and in Which Contexts?

The repertoire of activities that Plant (2001)—and such professional bodies as the International Association for Educational and Vocational Guidance (IAEVG), for instance—associate with the field are addressed at a whole range of clients across most ages and identifiable by a broad range of social characteristics and ascriptions. Formal education for/about work can start as early as in primary schools, and educational and occupational guidance can accompany a citizen throughout life up to—and in some countries, beyond—retirement age. The rationale behind this is that in the learning economy “narrative”, citizens are expected to be malleable and mobile, flexibly moving between jobs in response both to the needs of a rapidly changing labour market and, presumably, to their own aspirations. In such a context, guidance cannot be limited to key decision-making points at school, and at the moment of transition from school to work. Rather, guidance facilitates entry and exit routes into and out of specific educational and training options, as well as occupations. In addition, in some OECD and EU countries, guidance also entails “leisure management”, especially when such leisure is experienced as an imposition (a paradox if ever there was one) through unemployment, redundancy, and retirement.

Despite these trends, however, much educational and career guidance remains focused on, or even limited to, the traditional clients, namely students who have to make choices between curricular and school options, young people who have to consider which occupational paths they will pursue, and the unemployed. This is to some extent also true of some of the OECD and EU countries, albeit to a lesser degree than in CEECs. Let us briefly give an overview of the key client targets, before we consider the significance of such trends for the construction of a learning society.

Educational and occupational guidance is, perhaps understandably, rare in primary education settings, though this will depend on the way the system is structured, the extent to which different curricular and “ability” streams exist, and the pervasiveness of high-stakes assessment measures that determine which tracks pupils will be placed into. Of the nine CEECs, only Slovenia and Slovakia report any forms of occupational guidance at this level. All CEECs, however, report that they offer a variety of guidance-related services at the secondary level, and increasingly at the post-secondary and higher education level. Interestingly enough, there is a divergence between countries in terms of whether vocational education and training establishments do offer guidance. Some, such as those in Hungary, do, while others, as in Slovakia, do not, arguing that students in vocational education and training have already made their educational and occupational choices, and are not in any pressing need for further guidance. The same can be said of university-level guidance, where the field tends to be quite underdeveloped compared to OECD and older EU countries, but where one can note an interest in developing services. Poland, Romania and to a lesser extent Estonia have made important strides in this direction, with guidance bureaux offering personal counselling, study skills, stress management, educational and occupational information, interview training, as well as job brokerage and graduate placement services.

Certainly, then, students are among the lead clients in the field, and as we shall see, the bulk of the resources carrying information and guidance-related functions that are created, imported or adapted are directed at them.

One category of student that has been specifically targeted by guidance services in many OECD and EU countries is the early leaver, or the “drop out”. In the European context, this is quite understandable, given the emphasis on reducing unemployment and increasing labour market participation, particularly of those considered to be “at risk”. It also con-

nects with the “social inclusion” theme that sustains the social economy model adopted by the EU. CEECs, while generally demonstrating awareness of the special guidance needs of this group of young people, have not developed specific strategies or mobilised resources to effectively cater for them. OECD and EU country experience suggests that the best way to support the transitions of this group is to develop outreach services that are offered by community-based staff who are close to the realities of young disaffected people, and who can respond to their needs in a flexible manner. As the Slovenian report notes, it is very difficult for guidance personnel based in schools to connect with “drop-outs”, because, despite good intentions, they are immediately associated with the setting which these young people are so keen to avoid.

Young people who have just left school, as well as a whole range of adults are, in all CEECs, a second main target group for guidance services, most often catered for within the context of public employment services. The main focus is on the unemployed, who are often classified according to specific categories associated with specific active employment measures, the goal of which is insertion—or re-insertion—in the labour market. Among the most common categories are young people without any experience of work, formal education, or certifiable skills; long-term unemployed; older workers who have been made redundant due to the impact of restructuring; women who wish to return to work after raising a family; and workers with disabilities. Another group that is of concern consists of young people and adults in the remoter regions of CEECs, with distance educational and career guidance increasingly on the agenda given the opportunities provided by ICTs in reaching clients who would otherwise not have access to a service. Poland, Romania, Estonia and Latvia all report efforts to create portals and Internet points in an effort to provide a flexible network of inter-linked services. Latvia, where Internet penetration is rather low even when compared to the other CEECs, has set up a peripatetic guidance service, with mobile teams meeting clients in the seven regions which do not have Professional Career Counselling Centres.

Information provided by the ETF database leads one to conclude that there are two main limitations with guidance services offered to adults. First is the fact that many of the activities organised within the context of public employment services in the CEECs do not carry much of a guidance function. Rather, the focus tends to be on supplying information, on getting clients into training or re-training, on helping them develop self-presentation and job-getting skills, and on acting as job

brokers with a network of potential employers. This is, of course, understandable, given that the very *raison d'être* of the PES is to enhance employability, and to combat long-term unemployment. Indeed, the situation in the CEECs is quite similar to that reported for OECD and older EU states. It should be noted, however, that some countries have successfully integrated guidance functions into their active measures. Foremost among these have been Poland, Lithuania and Slovenia, where the unemployed receive support in drawing up an individual employment plan.

A second weakness or lacuna in the gamut of guidance services offered to adults is the lack of attention given to adults *in employment*. Much guidance remains remedial in nature, seemingly forgetting the needs of those adults who might require support in making progress in their careers, in switching tracks due to changing interests or changes in the skills provides required by the company they are employed in. None of the CEECs reported any incidence of leisure, third age, or retirement counselling. Such lacunae are serious, especially when contrasted with the rhetoric associated with the learning economy. The CEECs database suggests that this kind of adult guidance is only offered rarely, and then only in the largest of companies that have strong HRD departments or units. In contrast to the reports for some OECD and older EU countries, trade unions, even less than employers, fail to offer any formal guidance services through trained personnel—at best assistance is offered informally to members going through or facing the trauma of unemployment. Only Romania, and to a lesser extent Estonia, referred to a modest service that some trade unions are slowly building up.

It is important to point out in this context that some of the OECD and older EU countries compensate for the lack—or narrow range—of guidance services offered to adults via the development of *private* (e.g., Greece and Sweden) or *community-based* employment services (e.g., Luxembourg and Spain). Both are, however, largely underdeveloped in most of the CEECs, though increasingly the trend is for governments to outsource services to specialised foundations, NGOs, or even the private sector in order to make up for their own lack of capacity deficits (e.g., Bulgaria, Estonia). Changing legislation and increased acceptance of privatisation ideology, together with modernised lifestyles do suggest that private providers of guidance services might start to flourish, though at present, where they have been established (e.g., in Bulgaria, Latvia, Lithuania, Slovakia), they still currently tend to focus on job-brokering and job-matching functions, and to a lesser degree in the provision of

print- or web-based information, including further study manuals. Community-based employment services, offered by NGOs in several of the OECD and EU countries, are still largely missing in CEECs, where the state is still the main or sole provider. It was only Bulgaria that reported a non-state, community-based initiative, in this case organised by the Open Society Fund.

What are the Modalities for the Provision of Lifelong Guidance in the CEECs?

As has already been noted, educational and occupational guidance in the CEECs tends to give pride of place to the relaying of information, either via traditional methods or, increasingly through enlisting the potential of ICTs. CEECs report that educational institutions, public employment services, employers, and occasionally trade unions and private entities produce education- or occupation-related information in print format, usually as brochures, flyers, leaflets, posters, but also as manuals, adverts in the press, and so on. Much of the responsibility for the production and dissemination of such information remains with the state, with government agencies collecting data, organising it, and disseminating it free of charge. Information is often published at a national level in the CEECs, with data fed to a centre via a network of regional and local providers. Typically, such information includes classification of occupations, occupational descriptions, macroeconomic indicators and labour market trends.¹⁹

One of the problems that CEECs share with guidance services in OECD and older EU countries is that education and labour ministries and departments tend to collect different information, and not much effort is made to consolidate different data sets in such a way as to help clients make better sense of options and opportunities. As a result, connectivity between career information, educational information, and labour market data (such as vulnerability to unemployment, earnings compared to minimum salary, and so on) tends to be rare, though the situation is reportedly better in Bulgaria, Poland and Romania. Estonia and Slovakia are attempting to deal with the difficulty by organising joint seminars between the education and labour ministries and by establishing formal co-operation agreements, while Bulgaria has gone as far as to issue a law specifying the nature and extent of ministerial co-ordination in the delivery of guidance information and services.

There are signs that call-centre technology, with clients phoning in queries (as in Lithuania, for instance), is catching on, though such help

lines tend to be used rather more to deal with crisis and personal counselling than with educational or occupational guidance.

Practically all the CEECs also report a keen interest in the use of ICTs, often to present the same information available in print formats, and less frequently to support guidance functions and to enable interactive education or career decision-making via CD-based software, career navigation systems, or the Internet. Much of the software used tends to be adopted from other countries, and adapted to the realities of the labour market in the CEECs. This is the case of Romania, for instance, which uses Canada's *Interoptions*. Slovakia and Slovenia use an adapted version of the British software *Adult Directions*. Others have successfully produced their own ICT-based systems, including *Counsellor 2000* in Poland, which permits a multi-dimension analysis of occupations, and stimulates clients' efforts and assists them in choosing an appropriate job. Similarly, Slovakia has produced a *Guide to the World of Occupations*, software developed under the Leonardo programme in co-operation with the Czech Republic, Greece, Cyprus and the UK. Funds for the development of new or adapted ICT-based guidance systems have also come from the World Bank (e.g., to Poland and Romania) though, as with most external funding, the challenge as to how to keep the system up and running and up-dated after the initial donor input has been used up still remains.

The "qualitative" or "formative" functions of guidance-related activities listed earlier—including advising, assessing, teaching, mentoring, sampling work experience—are less in evidence. Education for and/or about work does not feature centrally as a separate subject or as a cross-curricular theme in most of the school systems in CEECs, and it is only Romania, Poland and Latvia that report initiatives in this regard. Guidance certainly does not seem to permeate the ethos of schools as it does in a number of countries internationally, where the potential contribution of guidance to the evolution of a learning society has been carefully and strategically articulated, sometimes in school development plans. In CEECs, guidance staff typically broach the world of work with students via individual interviews and, less commonly, group seminars, often scheduled outside the regular school programme. Few schools have dedicated rooms for guidance-related activities. Stakeholder input is sporadic and minimal, with trade union officials, and more frequently employers, addressing students or providing information about their respective organisations and enterprises at career fairs and exhibitions.

Increasingly, schools in CEECs organise experiential and supervised exposure to the realities of the labour market and of employment via “work shadowing” or “work experience” schemes, and more rarely through in-school entrepreneurship projects. Most institutions organise these on their own initiative, though some countries—such as Estonia—have central policy leads that encourage the trend in this direction.

A key identifying aspect of educational and occupational guidance provision is the emphasis placed on giving a service rather than making resources available so that clients use them proactively to engage in a self-directed, decision-making process. Again, compared to OECD and EU contexts, and possibly due to the psychological orientation and centrally-led traditions referred to earlier, self-help, self-evaluation strategies where the client is in charge of his or her own development are still rare in CEECs, although Romania and Slovenia, for instance, have made a policy commitment shift practices to a self-service mode. This has important implications in ensuring access to the benefits imputed to guidance, particularly in contexts where supply of guidance personnel does not match demand.

Who Provides Guidance in the CEECs?

As has already been noted, guidance is largely offered by graduates who have majored in psychology—or, less frequently, in a social science, such as economics or sociology, or in some cases (e.g., in Romania) even law or engineering. Very few CEECs offer specific degree or post-degree level training in guidance (e.g., Poland), though many do provide in-service specialised training which, in some cases, leads to formal certification (e.g., Latvia). Entry requirements into the profession differ both across CEECs, as well as between sectors within the CEECs, where there is no mutual recognition of guidance qualifications between education and labour services. This situation in fact prevails internationally, as McCarthy’s (2001) review of the issue in 23 countries indicates. The training of guidance personnel has been boosted in many CEECs as a result of the process of accession, with staff benefiting from opportunities made available by Academia and Phare, and through the setting up of the Euroguidance network.

Despite the increasing opportunities for training, it is only in a few cases that CEECs have specialised staff providing guidance services in schools (e.g., Slovenia). It is more often the case that guidance is offered by regular and class teachers who have no specific training, other than through short in-service courses (e.g., Latvia, Bulgaria, Estonia, Romania). School staff involved in guidance also have a tendency to focus

rather more on personal and educational counselling than on occupational guidance, partly because of the above mentioned predominance of psychology as the formative discipline in the preparation of professionals, but also because schools are increasingly the sites where young people act out their frustrations. Recourse is thus often made to specialised career guidance services outside of the school (e.g., Latvia and Lithuania), drawing on personnel from public employment services who have a better knowledge of labour markets.

Staff in the public employment services tend to have benefited more fully from funding resources in order to develop their professional capacities. This is in part due to the fact that tackling unemployment is top on the agenda for most CEEC governments, with the European Employment Strategy priorities framework also having an impact on developments in most PES setups.

Across both the labour market and education sector, and in contrast to the situation in many OECD and EU countries, CEEC staff involved in delivering guidance are, in most cases, not yet professionalized. Not only do they tend not to have specialised and regulated guidance qualifications, but there also are no clear entry, qualification or progression routes into and along clearly defined occupational roles, supported by an extensive network of professional associations²⁰ and research and training organisations. Only Poland and Lithuania report some developments in this regard, with Poland adding career guidance to the National Classification of Occupations and Trades, and with Latvia and Romania having associations that promote professional and ethical standards. In most cases, occupational roles and clear codes of practice and of conduct are not formally defined or regulated by legally-binding documents, and competence frameworks have not been formally established, except in Estonia, Slovakia and Poland. In addition to this, the practice of guidance in most of the CEECs has not been subjected to a degree of reflexivity, which is the hallmark of established professions. In other words, few of the CEECs report a capacity to evaluate their work, to measure the impact of educational and occupational guidance services on clients, to gauge the extent to which the services are being used, or to which clients are satisfied with the services they have received. There are exceptions of course—Latvia, for instance, regularly carries out surveys to establish the different guidance-related needs of school and students, and of the unemployed, while Estonia, Lithuania, Poland and Romania report that they do collect some quantitative data regarding outcomes of guidance in terms of client placement in employment.

One of the key features in the provision of guidance services in both OECD and older EU countries is use of para-professionals as well as stakeholders—a strategy which enhances effective delivery both because it makes up for the lack of availability of guidance personnel, and because clients can benefit from different perspectives brought to them. Few CEECs report the use of such para-professionals (e.g., Youth Information Officers in Romania and Estonia) or “linked professionals” (social workers) to support the work of guidance staff. It is more common for CEECs to make use of stakeholders—such as alumni, parents, business and community leaders, trade union staff, and so on—particularly in educational settings. Such attempts are often the result of personal initiatives on the part of institutions. Hungary, however, seems to have formalised such input through the activities of parent organisations that provide students and parents with information about educational and occupational pathways. Student organisations and associations are also increasingly active in providing information, particularly where, as in Estonia, there is a lack of government-funded provision. Even then, however, and as noted earlier, stakeholder involvement is underdeveloped when compared to OECD and older EU countries, possibly because the public is not necessarily fully aware of the benefits of a well-functioning career guidance service, and partly because some policy-makers have not yet embraced styles of leadership that involve social partnership.

Guiding Citizens... Through the Traps of the Learning Society?

Distilling Trends in Guidance

The overview presented above in answer to four structuring questions or categories provides us with quite a clear indication of the key trends that could be said to characterise the guidance field in the nine CEECs reviewed. The assumption is that, despite the differences between national contexts, a cross-country analysis distilling main flows in policy-making can be made. One way of presenting these trends is with reference to what I have occasionally referred to above as increasingly “mainstream” approaches to guidance, which largely accept the notion that a post-industrial, learning-based economy and society requires the channelling of educational and career guidance in specific directions. In other words, one way of describing what is happening in the CEECs reviewed is by claiming that practices there are attempting to make up for the “lag” in development—due to the nature of the economic and political leadership

they experienced prior to 1989—and that they are now involved in a process of “catching up” with the more “advanced” practices in the EU, membership of which they have either just gained, or are aspiring to. This is indeed the perspective presented in the conclusions to the Budapest Conference on guidance in Central and Eastern Europe, where it is noted that the “career–quake” that occurred across North America, Europe and other post–industrial societies is now hitting the CEECs. The process whereby old notions of a career which, in more economically advanced countries, have been “shaken and in many cases destroyed”, replaced by “a new concept of career [...], redefined as the individual’s lifelong progression in learning and in work” (Budapest Conference Report 2000, 6), is now having an impact on transition societies as well.

Such a perspective is easily justified if one considers the trends that can be elicited from the ETF database, and places them along a continuum marking “origins” (or what guidance practice tended to be like) and “destinations” (or where guidance practice is trying to get to). Indeed, this would be to map each country internationally along the categorised continuum for comparative purposes. For the CEECs collectively, the continuum would capture the following flows:

**Table 1. The continuum of flows
in educational and occupational guidance**

From a service that...	To a service that...
Is considered to be secondary, not central	Citizens are legal entitled to
Is provided mainly at key decision points	Is provided lifelong
Focuses on provision	Focuses on self–access and self–service
Is offered on institutional sites	Is available on leisure sites, community, home
Is exclusively provided by the state	Is also provided by private entities
Is delivered only by guidance staff	Includes input by stakeholders
In relation to students, is outside the curriculum	Permeates guidance issues through curriculum
In relation to adults, addresses un-employed	Also caters for within/between career moves

Continued

From a service that...	To a service that...
Is centrally co-ordinated	Is decentralised but monitored centrally
Is largely homogenous, irrespective of client	Is differentiated, responding to specific needs
Is segmented according to sector	Values cross-sector collaboration
Targets mainly individuals	Maximises effect by also working with groups
Tends to fail to connect education and labour market data	Uses ICTs to consolidate different data
Is staffed by non-specialised personnel	Requires pre- and in-service training
Is poorly professionalized	Has clear entry and career progression routes
Is unregulated	Has codes of conduct and standards of practice
Is under-researched	Is systematically reflexive

The representation of guidance in terms of such flows is probably useful, in that it does capture where the field is coming from, and where it may be moving to, with different countries being able to locate themselves in that space of flows, recognising and agreeing with the general framework in relation to which those movements are taking place, and which can be simply referred to as the “learning society”.

The point I would like to make in conclusion, however, is captured by the challenging question: “Is the representation of the learning society, on which much of the current conceptualisation of guidance depends, a *correct* one?” I am here using the word “correct” in two ways, i.e., first, does such a representation correspond to the economic and labour market realities that underpin it; and second, does such a representation of the learning society correspond to what we would consider the “good life”, wisely and virtuously “performed”? Let us briefly consider these two issues. In doing this my intention is to take up the baton and run with the counter discourse that is becoming progressively more vociferous in relation to the mainstream representation of the learning society, and which I will here apply to the field of guidance more specifically. For it is my view that the Lifelong Guidance train, following hot on the heels of the learning society one, is being obliged to run on two divergent rather than parallel tracks, and that in hoping to respond to both the post-industrial imperative, and the democratic one, it is finding itself in quite impossible binds.

...But Who is Knocking at the Gates of Lifelong Guidance?

Earlier I noted that Commission agendas for both the learning society and for lifelong guidance are marked by two logics, the economic and the social. Several authors have noted how this particular blend—mirroring the attempt at developing a social economy, where market forces are given free reign, but whose excesses are tempered by a concern for the social—is appealing in post-1989 Europe, and is indeed a hallmark that sets the EU apart from the more bullish celebration of free markets in the USA, but it nevertheless creates tensions that are quite impossible to resolve.²¹ One of the ways in which such tensions are managed is through the development of complex and multifaceted discourses, such as the ones surrounding notions of “lifelong learning”.

This very complexity is indeed *constitutive* of the effects of the discourse—in other words, the rhetorical and policy appeal of the learning society can be explained by the way it works as a “chameleon concept”, changing its ideological colours according to the context in which it is applied. The “strategic management” (Casey, 2003) of the learning society debate—though, in relation to guidance, one would be forgiven for asking: *is* there a debate?—is of critical importance as on it depends our understanding of the nature of “learners”, of the process of “learning”, and more specifically, of *why* “learning citizens” should require ever more “guidance” throughout their life, in what some, in Foucauldian mode, are referring to as the “counselled society” (Edwards and Nicoll, 2001). As suggested in the analysis of trends in guidance in CEECs, a consideration of the lifelong learning discourse as an “achievement”, and of the learning society as a “construct”, is especially appropriate for so-called “accession countries” because “entry rights” can only be gained by those countries that “buy into” a number of world-views that are keenly held and promoted by corporate Europe, with lifelong learning as a path to the “learning economy” being one of them.

The European Commission documents referred to in the first section of this chapter illustrate the points that I am making quite clearly, and they are good examples of how contradictory strands are interwoven in a way that renders the learning society discourse particularly potent. Contradictions are ignored or submerged, with the Commission discursively accomplishing that which is materially impossible: pleasing both “god” and “mammon”.²²

It is relatively easy for those involved in guidance to connect with the dominant discourse surrounding lifelong guidance, for strands of it reso-

nate with the broadly humanistic—even empowering and emancipative—orientations of most practitioners in the field. This, after all, is a service that sets out to maximise the choices available to clients, to help them re-engage in learning despite their negative experience of schooling, to enable them to navigate in increasingly complex and stormy waters, to plan and manage fulfilling life projects despite the uncertainties and instabilities of the labour market, to lead dignified and productive lives, and even to overcome obstacles in access to such lives due to class, gender, ethnicity, or prior employment background.

What is however less immediately apparent—and rather less humanistic in tenor—in this lifelong learning/guidance discourse is the way it sets out to mobilise individuals and services around the presumed needs of the economy. Given that we have now apparently reached “the end of history” (Fukayama 1989), with no alternatives to capitalism as a way of producing, distributing and consuming wealth, present economic arrangements are the “givens” around which all social practices must gravitate. In the field of lifelong guidance, this submission to economic imperatives leads to an interpellation and mobilisation of citizens in very specific ways. Individuals must remain engaged in learning, ever flexible and ever nimble, constantly re-shaping and re-inventing themselves in line with unpredictable changes in the labour market. They must be ever ready to enter and re-enter learning, training and working routes, and, given the “European dimension”, to move to wherever such training and employment opportunities exist. All this, it must be stressed, in a context where the citizen is being urged to do more for ever diminishing economic and social returns. It is indeed striking that this radically restructured context—where, for instance, rights to a minimum wage, to satisfying work, to social support, to a pension, to leisure, to graceful ageing, are slowly being eroded—has not generated strong forms of counter-hegemonic practices in the guidance field, and that the discourse revolves solely around opportunity, and not outrage (Davey 2003).

For gone, here, are considerations of life inspired by a vision of humanity that projects “an expansive view of people with a range of subjectivities that extends beyond the production–consumption nexus” (Borg and Mayo 2002, 21). Here, the learning society’s primary function seems to be that of guaranteeing the availability of suitable human resources necessary for the reproduction and accumulation of capital in a knowledge-based economy, with guidance acting as the lubricant, providing skills, information, knowledge, and even the technology to reach the fur-

these enclaves of the personality, in order to shape it and help attain a “fit” in this brave new world.

It is part of the irony, and also power, of this discourse—which, as we have seen, is increasingly accepted within the CEECs reviewed—that the whole concept of a lifelong submission to capital is often rhetorically bathed in a bright, glowing light. Frequent job changes caused by restructuring and the redeployment of resources are seen, in the lifelong learning/guidance discourse, as realities that present exciting and stimulating opportunities in the construction of “career narratives” and life projects. Less readily acknowledged is the way the loss of lifetime employment contracts leads to precarious lives lived constantly in the shadow of insecurity, and to the demise of work-based communities as sources of solidarity, sociality, pride, and meaning. Mobility across Europe, aided and abetted by Euroguidance and other networks, and facilitated by the harmonisation of standards and qualifications, is presented as a multiplication of opportunities for the citizen/worker. Little acknowledgement is made, however, of the implications that such uprooting from community ties, in response to the needs of European enterprises for mobile labour, has on individuals and their families. Given this chapter’s focus on CEECs, where the GDP per capita is less than a third to a fifth of the average in the older EU Member States, the economic logic behind the “mobility agenda” of the EU, duly transmitted via the humanistic discourses of lifelong learning and guidance, cannot be ignored: what could be more advantageous to capital, one might ask, than the availability of mobile, well-trained, suitably socialised “human resources” from hitherto economically depressed countries, who could be used either as comparatively cheap sources of labour, or/and to drive down wages for “mainstream” European workers whose “exorbitant” demands depress profit margins, making the old continent “less competitive”? And does guidance really want to be party to this, when at the heart of its mission is the good of the client?

But there are other, less normative, more “pragmatic” objections that could be brought to bear on the whole field of lifelong guidance as it is being constructed. As we have noted, the assumptions underlying much of the policy discourse here revolve around a specific understanding of knowledge-based economies, where the context and content of education, training and employment are changing. And yet, there is an increasing amount of literature that suggests that the labour market is not quite moving in the direction predicted for so-called “high-ability” societies. What empirical research is showing is quite the opposite: a preponder-

ance of low-skilled, low-ability jobs that are not only surviving but are actually *increasing* in number. As Casey (2003, 5) notes, drawing on such authors as Gallie (1991), Felstead and Jewson (1999), and Ritzer (1996):

Irrespective of the upward mobility enabled by education and training for some, and manifest productivity and market gains, numerous industry sectors—including the knowledge-intensive—not only retain but newly generate low-knowledge, low-skill, neo-Taylorised jobs simultaneously with knowledge-rich jobs. Importantly, the persistence, and even growth, of drudgery jobs—jobs that are dull, repetitive, intensely managerially controlled (including those requiring emotional labour: the smiley jobs)—and the wide expansion of deregulated, contingent employment practices, including zero hours contracts is widely evident. [...] A growth of low-paid and casual employment in service industries from food and entertainment services to globally marketed call centres represents a competing trajectory to that of a highly paid and over-employed technological and knowledge-rich service sector. (Casey 2003, 5)

Clearly, guidance workers cannot resolve the tensions and contradictions inherent to the lifelong learning/lifelong guidance discourse, for these are structurally induced and not easily amenable to individual shaping. Watts (1996c, 362), in his discussion of socio-political approaches to guidance, is most probably correct when, while acknowledging the ideological binds that many in the field find themselves in, nevertheless asserts that “the professional task of the guidance practitioner is to identify what is morally and pragmatically appropriate in particular contexts.” It is nevertheless disquieting that the guidance field, internationally—and in CEECs as well it seems—should so readily and unreflectively accept what I have been referring to as a “mainstream”—i.e., conservative, positive economic, neo-liberal—position in mediating transitions between education, training, and employment on behalf of its clients. My argument is that, given this privileged location, more should be done to “unmask” the presumed innocence behind the lifelong learning debate, where we examine not only the way we, as social actors, use the discourse, but more importantly, the way the discourse uses us. It is in doing so that we can rise to the challenge of intellectual work which, following Bourdieu (1998, 106), involves “...freedom from the powers, criticism of received ideas, demolition of simplistic alternatives, restitution of the complexity of problems.” Such a task requires us—and anybody who

would presume to “guide” citizens in the learning society—to ask such uncomfortable questions as: what kind of learning, for what kind of society, which works in whose interests?

Notes

1. See Clarke (1980) for a review of this with reference to theories of career development in the UK.
2. Killeen (1996) identifies the following set of inter-related phenomena as having changed the face of guidance since the late 1970s: technological change, the rise (or intensification) of globalisation and regional free trade, industrial restructuring and the emergence of the service sector, the installation of mass unemployment as a regular feature of economies, the increasing participation of women in the labour market, and an ageing workforce. For the purpose of this essay, most of these phenomena are captured in a consideration of the discursive and material construction of the Learning, post-Fordist Society.
3. The critical humanistic tenor of that document is caught nicely in the following excerpt—one among many that serve to remind us how far the present discourse surrounding lifelong learning has moved from what many consider the foundational ideas of adult education: “Is this not the time to call for something quite different in education systems? Learning to live, learning to learn, so as to be able to absorb new knowledge all through life; learning to think freely and critically; learning to love the world and make it more human; learning to develop in and through creative work.” Significantly, this quotation appears on the homepage announcing the year 2000 international conference on lifelong learning, held in Saskatchewan, 24–26 November [<http://www.usask.ca/education/edfdt/lifelong/>—Accessed on 28th March 2005].
4. There have been several portrayals of the main features of the discourse, ranging from the benign (European Round Table 1995) to the highly critical (Edwards 1997; Ranson 1998; Field 2000; Jarvis 2001; Greenwood and Stuart 2002). Here we rehearse the key elements that are most often circulated within mainstream policy circles and can be found in such documents as the European Commission’s *White Paper on Education and Training* (1996), its *Memorandum on Lifelong Learning* (2000), and its final Communication *Making a European Area of Lifelong Learning a Reality* (2001a).
5. And, as it will become clear by the end of the chapter, how the international research field and collaboration between such key organisations as the OECD, the World Bank, and the EU has created a specific and shared/overlapping understanding of what guidance is about, and indeed of the whole enterprise of education in the 21st century (see Akkari, Sultana and Gurner 2001; Hirtt 2001; Laval and Weber 2002).

6. The document *Recent Policy Developments in Lifelong Guidance at European Union Level* tabled at the first meeting of the European Commission's Expert Group on Lifelong Guidance on 13 December 2002, was particularly helpful in providing the overall picture in this section.
7. Many of these insights about the nature of guidance service were also reinforced recently through the White Paper *A New Impetus for European Youth* (2002) detailing youth concerns as these were obtained through a comprehensive Europe-wide consultation process. Here too young people expressed a need for flexible, user-friendly information, guidance and counselling systems that used a personalised approach, that were easily accessible in places where young people spend their time, that connected with opportunities available locally, regionally, nationally, and across Europe; and that made good use of stakeholder input to ensure more effective services.
8. The other five priorities are: (i) valuing learning; (ii) investing time and money in learning; (iii) bringing together learners and learning opportunities; (iv) basic skills; and (v) innovative pedagogy.
9. These are: (i) partnership working across the learning spectrum; (ii) creating a learning culture; (iii) striving for excellence; (iv) insight into the demand for learning; (v) facilitating access to learning opportunities; and (vi) adequate resourcing.
10. Section 3.2 of the Communication (EC 2002b, 32) highlights three strategies for strengthening the European dimension of information, guidance and counselling. These include (i) the establishment of a European Guidance Forum of policy-makers and social partners to develop common policy approaches in the field of guidance—this has in fact not been implemented in that format, but has instead been constituted as a less high profile European Commission Expert Group on Lifelong Guidance; (ii) the establishment of an Internet Portal on Learning Opportunities, providing information on lifelong learning in Member States and candidate countries (see the PLOTEUS portal on <http://europa.eu.int/ploteus/portal/home.jsp> maintained by the Euroguidance network); (iii) the evaluation of existing European networks for both education and training to establish a coherent and cross-sectoral learning framework for the scope and activities of those networks. Another document focusing on *Modernising Public Employment Services to Support the European Employment Strategy* (1998), highlights the way fuller integration between EURES (the European Job Mobility Portal) into the national Public Employment Services could bring a greater European dimension to the information, counselling and brokerage services offered to jobseekers and employers. The development of a EURES website would ensure that information about skills shortages and surpluses by country and by region would be easily accessible.

11. The “open method of coordination” has been considered by some to be a most promising—albeit controversial—policy instrument in the EU, and involves on-going national level experimentation, combined with EU-level monitoring, the publicizing of good practice, and the activation of civil society in policy formation, comparison and critique. Guidelines, or policy objectives, are established at the Union level, setting out quantitative or qualitative targets for Member States, and then requiring Member States to report progress in achieving those goals to the European Commission and the Council of Ministers. These may in turn use harder or softer enforcement mechanisms, require longer or shorter reporting intervals, and choose to set guidelines at the EU level or delegate responsibility to individual Member States (de la Porte and Pochet 2002). Since its use in harmonizing Member States, the open method of coordination has increasingly served as a form of policy making, particularly in the areas of employment policy and social inclusion policy (Overdevest 2002).
12. This report grouped 15 quality indicators around four main areas, i.e., (i) skills, competencies and attitudes; (ii) access and participation; (iii) resources for lifelong learning; and (iv) strategies and systems development. Guidance and counselling were considered under the latter area.
13. The same message regarding the value of guiding young and adult learners into scientific and technical careers is repeated in the *Science and Society Action Plan* (2002).
14. Launched in 1997, the European Employment Strategy rests on the so-called “four pillars”, namely (i) employability, (ii) entrepreneurship (iii) adaptability, and (iv) equal opportunities. The first pillar seeks to enhance employability through a variety of measures and strategies, including improved training in appropriate skills, increased access to lifelong learning, and better access to guidance services throughout one’s life.
15. Needless to say, there is much overlap between the EU agenda for guidance and the increasingly hegemonic understanding of the field internationally, and as it is promoted by such organisations as the World Bank and, given its research lead in the area, by the OECD.
16. At the macro level, scale can matter for guidance when, for instance, it comes to managing a decentralisation process, and to developing strong municipal career service structures operating within the framework of a steering national policy. At the micro level, scale can also matter in shaping occupational destinations, not least because small, close-knit societies are more likely to develop extensive personal networks where “who you know” can sometimes be more decisive in clinching a job than “what you know”.
17. The countries that took part in this review are Austria, the Czech Republic, Denmark, Finland, Germany, Ireland, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Norway, Spain, the UK, Australia, Canada, and Korea. For an account of the

process adopted for the purpose of this review, see Sweet (2001). The author of the chapter was involved as an external expert on the country reviews for Luxembourg and Spain. Material related to the OECD review can be accessed at the following website: www.oecd.org/els/education/careerguidance

18. Access to the Internet varies a great deal between CEECs. The European Innovation Scoreboard for the year 2002, basing its report on Eurostat figures of 2001, provides information regarding Internet access as a percentage for the whole population. While the average for EU Member States is 31.4%, this is only matched by Slovenia (30%), with Slovakia (16.7%), Hungary (14.8%), the Czech Republic (13.6%), Poland (9.8%), Bulgaria (7.5%), Latvia (7.2%), Lithuania (6.8%) and Romania (4.5%) being far behind. The difference between the older EU Member States and CEECs is even more in evidence when one considers home Internet access. The older EU Member State average is 37.7%, and again it is Slovenia that comes closest to that (24%). The Scoreboard only provides information for a few of the CEECs, namely Poland (8%), Latvia (3%), Lithuania (3%) and Hungary (2.6%). [For the European Innovation Scoreboard Report, see the Cordis website: ftp://ftp.cordis.lu/pub/focus/docs/innovation_scoreboard_2002_en.pdf].
19. It is clear that most CEECs are still attached to a centralist model of policy making and implementation. It must be pointed out, however, that while decentralisation may be increasingly ideologically appealing in a European context where subsidiarity is highly valued, the devolution of responsibilities within a policy vacuum can lead to costly overlap, excessive disparity that gives rise to inequalities, and a deficit in standards. In the case of Poland, the winding down of the national network of labour offices in favour of local government provision has led to a serious deterioration in the quality of provision. Decentralisation can also be a convenient mechanism to devolve responsibilities to local government without passing on the necessary funding, as is noted in the report for Latvia. Both the Polish and Latvian experiences support the view that the best way forward may very well be to have a judicious mix of centralised and decentralised models, where municipalities develop their own policy in the context of central guidelines that have been arrived at after wide consultation with stakeholders. Estonia seems to have adopted such a model, stipulating contracts between central and regional government to avoid problems of great variability between regions.
20. It may very well be that the lack of development of strong associations in the field can at least partly be explained by the “feminization” of the profession. It is mostly women that are found in guidance, and their share of the sector can be as high as 90% (Poland). This has implications for occu-

pational identity, for the status accorded to the activity by society, and consequently for the salaries and resources that the profession will be able to command. It must be added, however, that the phenomenon of feminization has also been noted in the EU and EEA countries involved in the Cedefop survey (Sultana, 2004).

21. See I. Greenwood and M. Stuart (2002) for a useful review. See also Casey (2003), and Sultana (2003a). For Europe as a normative space, see Therborn (2001) and Habermas (2002).
22. This religious imagery is not being used flippantly. There is much about the EU that revolves around religious—and more specifically, Christian—symbolism and practices, starting from the Union flag’s twelve stars on a blue background taken directly from the apocalyptic imagery related to the Madonna to the notion of “subsidiarity”, which Delors—a devout Catholic—borrowed from a concept developed by Pope Pius XI in his 1931 *Quadragesimo Anno* (Pakkala 1997). That the Catholic Church is keen to occupy the vacuum left by the collapse of communism is hardly news, and the lobby to inscribe “God” in the European Constitution is merely a surface sign of much deeper dynamics that mark a proselytising church keen to equate European values with Christian ones. More importantly for the purpose of this essay is the impact of the “social market” consensus that underpins the social doctrine of the Catholic Church, and which finds an echo in EU macro-economic policy.

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