

Borbély-Pecze: Digital career guidance in Hungary

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## OPPORTUNITIES FOR DEVELOPING DIGITAL CAREER GUIDANCE IN HUNGARY. CURRENT SITUATION AND ACTION POINTS [A DIGITÁLIS PÁLYAORIENTÁCIÓ FEJLESZTÉSÉNEK LEHETŐSÉGEI MAGYARORSZÁGON. JELENLEGI HELYZET ÉS CSELEKVÉSI PONTOK]

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**Abstract.** Digitalisation is a process that is transforming the framework of social and economic coexistence, and career development professionals must also be part of it. At the same time, the digital readiness and culture of individual European countries differ. The coronavirus crisis that started in 2020 has forced all of us to adapt to this digital challenge. In this article, we present the changes in Hungary and make recommendations for the possible directions of national development.

**Keywords:** digital pedagogy and society, career guidance/development, career education, Hungary

### Digitalisation, regionalism and career development

The world is moving from the information society to the digital age. Part of this great transformation is the transformation of career development services. The careers guidance professional, the user and the state/province in charge of designing and managing services are all being forced to adapt at the same time. 'The process of evolution derived from the information society through the intensive use of technologies and digital media where the internet positions itself as the information tool itself and whose decentralized set of networks form a union in access and transmission collaborative learning' (Sandulescu Budea, 2021).

At the same time, the level of digital development, including the level of technology use, varies between countries and societies. It is also true to say that never before in human history has it been possible to catch up so quickly, in terms of technology adoption. On the other hand, there are additional requirements for catching up; i) human behavioural patterns and ii) the geographical opportunities (Pounds, 1997) of individual countries give different results in global competitiveness, even at nearly the same level of technology. The

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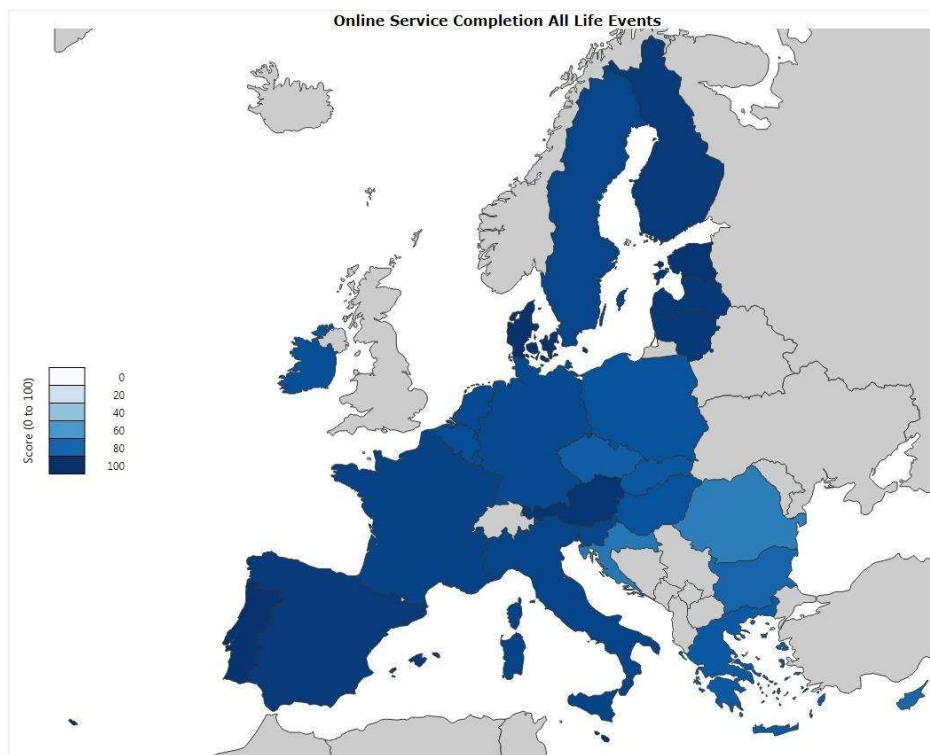
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technology (in civilian life at least), no longer CoCom (Coordinating Committee for Multilateral Export Controls) listed, is available to all countries, although the use of it with sufficient efficiency is a more complex issue. Both the professional using the technology and the citizen who wants to use the service play a crucial part in the efficient use. It is exactly this complexity that is taken into account by the European Union's DESI Index (The Digital Economy and Society Index).

1. *map. Online Service Completion All Life Events\* / Completed Online Services for all life events]*



(EC, 2020)

Definition: Share of the steps in a Public Service life event that can be completed online (Online availability sub-indicator for User centricity of the eGovernment benchmark).

Over the last decade, the European Union and a significant number of EU Member States have been at a strategic competitive disadvantage in this area, which they are striving to make up for in the current and next decade (EC, 2021). The DESI measures the digital maturity of Member States and shows that there are also significant differences between Member States.

1. **táblázat.** DESI composite index in the Nordic countries and Hungary 2020 (Source: EC, 2020)

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HU	86.8
FI	95.8
DK	98.6
SE	91.8

In this article, we use the broad definition of digital education/pedagogy given by Lengsfeld (2019) as a starting point to define the situation of digital career guidance in Hungary and possible future directions for its development. Our situation assessment presented here is based on a combined evaluation of survey and interviews conducted in 2020 (Tajtiné Lesó, Borbély-Pecze, Juhász, & Kenderfi, 2020), which were carried out within the framework of the Career Guidance Section of the Hungarian Pedagogical Society. In the article, we use the Scandinavian experiences and the results of our own domestic studies to analyse the situation of digital career guidance and career counselling in Hungary.

In a comprehensive understanding, “digital education” refers to the formation of a person in the sense of a comprehensive and holistic spiritual, physical, social and cultural development into a reflected personality who is aware of all facets of his or her being as a human being in a digital world and is able to draw conclusions for the shaping of his or her life in the digital age based on this (Lengsfeld, 2019).

The digitalisation of the learning process results in breaking down the system of traditional education and the walls of the ‘brick and mortar’ school building. We are witnessing a similar revolution in school career guidance/education and adult career counselling. Previous models based on the role of the expert career counsellor are being disintegrated all over the world and replaced by counselling activities based on online/digital cooperative and collaborative techniques. Kettunen, Vuorinen, & Sampson (2015), Kettunen (2017a) have directly suggested that the former supply-driven conceptions of career guidance should be replaced by demand-driven formulae.

### Digitalisation in Hungary

It only makes sense to talk about career guidance through digital channels or the role of social media in guidance practice when the digital space of a society is mature enough to make it possible for new digital solutions to replace face-to-face and traditional telephone channels. During the COVID-19 pandemic, this adaptation, or lack thereof, was observed worldwide (Cedefop, European Commission, ETF, ICCDPP, ILO, OECD, & UNESCO, 2020).

This means both physical access, digital literacy levels, content consumed and created since Web 2.0, and the channels and platforms used for digital timing. Kettunen's observation was made in a country where 4.92 million individuals were already using the internet in 2018, and where the coverage in 2020 was 93.7%. Given that the country's total population is 5.5 million, non-internet users may even be contacted individually by Finnish counsellors, social and educational services. In Hungary, only 59% of the population were



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regular internet users in 2011, and in 2018 the figure was still only 75% (Hungarian Central Statistical Office, HCSO, 2020) for the population aged 16-74. A Hungarian person aged 16 or over spent an average of 3.8 hours online per day in 2018, and the proportion of Hungarians aged 50 and over who used the internet at least once a month was 63% (NMIA, 2019; Klenovszki, 2020). The most frequently used social applications are Facebook, YouTube, Google+ [until 2019] and Instagram.

To understand the experience of being digital and the use of social media, it is also necessary to look at the issue of confusing concepts in digital literacy. 'The term information proficiency has become rooted in Hungarian practice as information literacy, which is commendable, but less emphasis is placed on its connection with literacy. In contrast, the concept of Media and Information Literacy

(MIL) was born and UNESCO is promoting its dissemination as a tool for empowerment, i.e., for developing, strengthening and expanding the individual's capacity for self-management' (Koltay, 2018). For example, the oldest Hungarian population is practically excluded from the digital and social media landscape to this day.

Hungary has had a Digital Education Strategy (DES) since 2016, which includes the need for digital career orientation. The strategy also lists the need to develop career guidance websites, strengthen career awareness and oppose early school selection.

In 2020 and 2021, the limitations of COVID-19 and the impossibility of face-to-face meetings provided an opportunity to examine the implementation of digital education and digital strategies in other areas (e.g., public administration) from the point of view of the digital availability of career guidance and career counselling. The Hungarian research presented in this article is composed of an on-line survey of practicing counsellors (Tajtiné Lesó, Borbély-Pecze, Juhász, & Kenderfi, 2020) and additional interviews with counsellors which were conducted in the first phase of the pandemic.

### How counsellors work during a pandemic

In Hungary, a state of emergency has been declared at the first time (and still in force until the Spring of 2022) from 11 March to 17 June 2020 due to the epidemic situation. The restrictions imposed during the emergency have seriously affected not only schools, but also the feasibility of human services related to the various career guidance activities. Using its limited, voluntary-based, resources, the Career Guidance Section of the Hungarian Pedagogical Society conducted a survey among colleagues who work in career guidance and/or career counselling and career information roles in Hungary (Tajtiné Lesó, Borbély-Pecze, Juhász, & Kenderfi, 2020).

The research focused on the coping strategies of these professionals, their infrastructural provision and the transformation of personal (individual, group) forms of counselling. As there is no statistical data available at national level on the number and type of organisations that provide career guidance and the number of professionals involved, our research could

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unfortunately not be representative, but our data based on the questionnaire and additional interviews showed that the change was dramatic. Our research was exploratory and revealed more serious problems than expected in the field of guidance. From reliable career information to tools and capacity building of available counsellors, we found a number of gaps.

Our first survey was conducted between 23 April and 10 July 2020, using an online questionnaire and a complementary interview survey. 106 career counsellors responded to the online questionnaire, which was followed by 11 additional interviews. Due to gaps in the counsellor population, we were mainly able to work with the responses of those who are members of the Hungarian Pedagogical Society or are affiliated with the Society, so we could only use the snowball sampling method. The interviews were conducted with colleagues who work in different types of institutions and were familiar with their characteristics.

The responses from 15 types of institutions were grouped and analysed according to the sectoral classification of the institutions. A third of the respondents work in public education, a fifth in vocational education and training, and the remainder - 13-16 per sector - were roughly equally divided between those working in the employment sector, adult education/adult counselling, and the civil or ecclesiastical sector. We were not able to reach higher education counsellors or the social sector (only one of them), probably because these sectors did not provide this type of counselling during the quarantine. This is supported by an interview with a counsellor working in childcare: in the social sector, 'career guidance was not the main task during the emergency'.

The target group was an important element for our research, as the presence and cooperation of parents is essential in counselling work at a certain age, and the questions and decision situations that arise during counselling are often age specific. In terms of the nature of the clientele, almost half of the respondents deal exclusively with school age (primary and secondary school), one third exclusively with adults, and 21 respondents deal with both age groups.

### **Client retention**

One of the basic questions of our study was to what extent and in what form counselling continued during the period of social distancing, to what extent tele- and e- counselling was used and what percentage of counsellors were able to retain their clients (Figure 1).

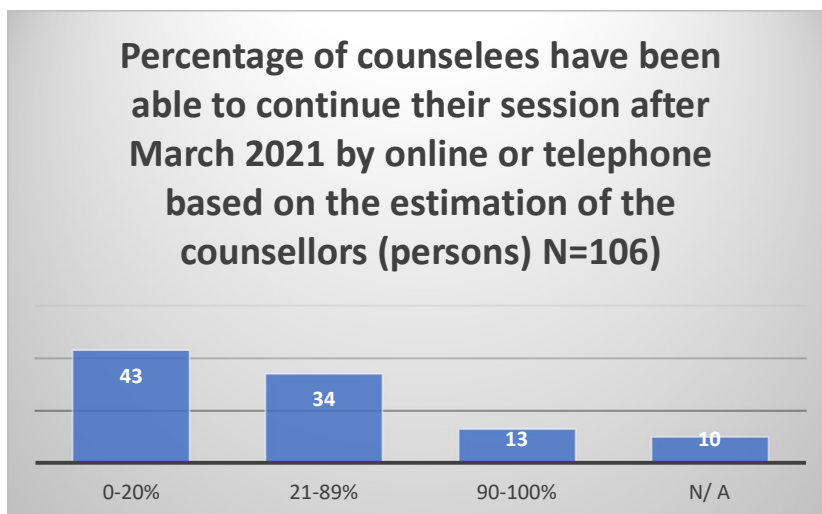


FIGURE 1. Percentage of clients retained during the COVID-19 period

(Source: authors' own editing)

It is clear from the responses received and from the interviews that the loss of clients is significant, as the majority of counsellors have not been able to maintain contact with the majority of their clients. As digital education did not reach all schoolchildren, this was even more the case for quarantine counselling. Contact with the majority of young people was lost: two thirds of the counsellors working with school children were able to continue advising less than a quarter of the pupils.

Among the reasons for the dropout from counselling, we found the lack of adequate internet and IT tools available to those seeking advice, which is one of the characteristics of the existing digital divide, the lack of a well-developed methodology and tools for e-counselling, and the reluctance of the clients to take part in counselling not face-to-face.

The lack of tools and infrastructure for guidance counsellors, who mainly work with young people and students, was typical, but we should also mention the lack of uniform, updated online career information systems, which are essential for e-counselling, and the unavailability of online, updated, validated self-assessment procedures, which would form the basis of e-counselling. Fresh, up-to-date information and validated self-assessment procedures were mostly only available through paid platforms, which were not funded by the providers in most sectors.

### ICT tools and skills of counsellors and advice seekers

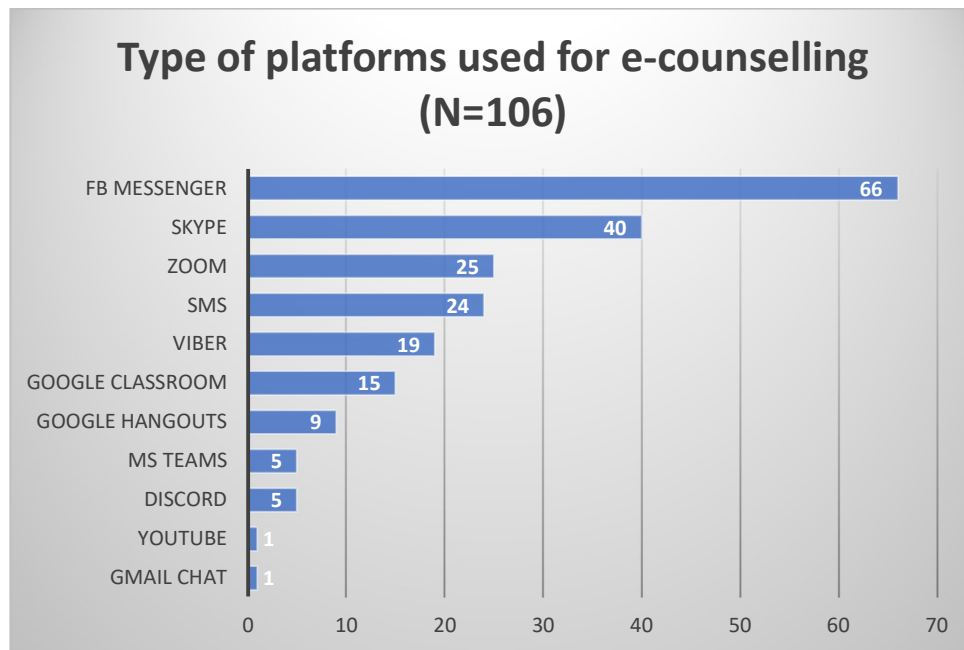
The acquisition and installation of ICT tools and software has created challenges on both sides, for both counsellors and clients. Inadequate IT conditions not only hindered the establishment of the relationship, but also played an important role in its quality.

Contrary to official statistics, the responses also suggest that internet coverage for the general public is not almost complete: a quarter of the counsellors surveyed said that a large proportion of their clients had problems with this. The text responses also show that, in addition to the availability of access, the quality of the connection can be a problem, for example, video connection was not always available for applications that could use it. Many of the counsellors indicated as a fundamental problem of “quarantine counselling” that the counsellors do not have the right equipment or, if they do have it, they are unable to use the tools. Clients living in extreme poverty could at best be contacted by telephone.

In the case of counsellors, there are remarkable correlations when looking at tools provided by the employers by sector. The two extremes are represented by the ecclesiastical/civil sector and public education: while in the former all respondents, only half of the respondents in the latter clearly indicated that they had been provided with the necessary equipment and software. A quarter of all the counsellors we interviewed felt that their employer lacked help in this area. We know of few cases where the employer has covered the cost of home use or installed paid applications on the computers. Several problems were reported such as having to upgrade tools and pay for phone calls at their own expense. The use of personal devices was not only a financial burden: as will be discussed later, it inevitably led to a mix of private life and counselling, contrary to the basic principles of counselling.

### **Platforms of counselling and their use**

The frequency with which digital platforms are used and the way they are used also indirectly responded to how the different content of distance and digital counselling is interpreted by counsellors (Figure 2).



2. FIGURE 2: Platforms used for online advice and counselling

Email and telephone were identified as the most commonly used platforms, ideally providing formal, rather than private, contact. However, the interviews revealed that this was not the case for counselling colleagues working in public education institutions, who, in the absence of an office phone, had to make their private mobile phone number public in order to be contacted.

The lack of data protection was mentioned as a problem by many when using the platforms (mixing up personal and professional identities of the counsellors), which is an important element because counsellors have to comply not only with the GDPR but also with their own institutional data privacy policies. Respondents were unanimous in their lack of a centrally operated and continuously updated career information platform that would cover all types of training.

### Other methods used

We asked counsellors what methods they used when they were unable to provide remote advice to their clients. There is also a significant number of those who developed or further developed some kind of digital methodological 'toolkit', with half of the respondents who have created online career guidance games, career guidance videos or other information materials that could be accessed and used even on a smartphone. Several of them stressed that they had used tasks and materials they had invented and developed themselves, independently, based on innovative ideas. After aggregating the materials described, it



became apparent that many of the digital materials were on similar topics and with similar content, which may indicate a lack of coordination and cooperation, as well as a lack of professional workshops (even within the workplace).

Positive experiences of forced transition were also reported, with many mentioning that it was easy to switch to digital methods with young people, and that some adult clients and parents benefited from flexibility in time and location. Many respondents were positive about the cooperation of the counsellors, the helpfulness of their colleagues, the fact that they were forced to look for creative solutions, produce their own games and online exercises. Many have made career guidance tools available online, which were previously only available in person. Others see the possibility of moving some elements of group counselling, such as the job-search club, into closed Facebook groups.

Among the factors that make e-counselling difficult and impossible, respondents highlighted the lack of a maintained national career guidance portal available 24/7, in addition to technical difficulties (installation and use of machines, software and apps). Three National Career Guidance Portals have already been created in the 2007-2021 EU programming periods but they were characterised by continuous rewriting instead of being operational.

## Summary

The quarantine of institutions, the rapid depopulation of schools, universities, chambers and most workplaces due to the coronavirus has also put the Hungarian career guidance and counselling profession in an extraordinary situation. Similarly, to public education, vocational training and the employment services, career guidance and counselling are essentially based on personal presence although they have been digitally prepared for decades. Our main findings were in line with the key outcomes of the international reports, as a Russian guidance researcher explained; 'All attempts to do what they did before, only remotely, look home-grown and artisanal.' (Cedefop, European Commission, ETF, ICCDPP, ILO, OECD, & UNESCO (2020 p. 39.)

According to our survey, during the lockdown most counsellors lost most of their clients, many all of them. The loss was very significant, and in addition to the natural difficulties of the new approach, the fact that education during the emergency was focused on delivering the curriculum, with no energy or attention devoted to anything else, contributed to this. The missing digital tools, software, and sometimes telephones that enable classical tele-advice, can be replaced by rapid investment in infrastructure although respondents were very sceptical about the scale of government investment in education and human development. In addition to the provision of equipment, it would be important that counsellors should not have to bear the operating costs of teleconsulting, and that they should be provided with training and ongoing assistance in the use of tools and software.



The further development of the methodology of digital counselling and career guidance deserves more attention than hardware and technical platforms, and this is more time-consuming than replacing hardware. It seems essential to develop a truly comprehensive, maintained and publicly available National Career Guidance Portal for distance guidance, remote support and digital guidance in general.

There is a serious lack of a professional protocol that defines career guidance and its subsystems (career guidance/pedagogy, career counselling, career information) from a quality assurance perspective in a sector-neutral way, which can be used in the context of distance guidance, and which is accepted and applied in practice by the Ministry of Human Resources and the Ministry of Innovation and Technology, as the ministries currently responsible for education, along the same conceptual framework. In the absence of this, the system is a mixture of a few minutes of information, e-mail replies and several hours of counselling over several meetings. It is unclear which organisation provides which service and where the advice seeker receives what, often with wide variations within the same type of institution.

Hungary is still in its infancy in terms of the development of digital career guidance and counselling content and, in particular, the services associated with it, and the change in the attitudes of professionals (Borbély-Pecze, 2020). However, the nature and speed of the digital revolution means that this change is imminent and, once it is underway, it is likely to happen very quickly. Changes in the use of technology simply mean that the needs of citizens and advice seekers - generally in relation to public services, education and social policy - have changed/are changing. Modern web-based communication solutions are alienating and separating the counsellor, who communicates from the expert role of the supply chain manager, from the advice seeker. For example, they choose careers based on the opinions and examples of YouTube influencers and Instagram stars. It is becoming increasingly difficult to maintain counsellor-advice seeker, teacher-student relationships where asynchronous solutions via landline phone, email appointments and voicemail remain the basis of communication, or where online, personalised career information, career guidance solutions built in LMS, learning materials are not available alongside online questionnaires.

On the other hand, digital solutions threaten and destroy the personal space and privacy of career guidance teachers and counsellors in unprecedented ways. Think of the impact of a simple Facebook post or Instagram entry. Taking possession of new concepts such as those proposed by Kettunen (2017b) seems essential in the coming decade. Technological lockdown does not seem to be a viable escape route. It is no coincidence that in the last decade, the development of digital literacy for career guidance teachers and counsellors, the definition and development of digital competences beyond the professional and vocational level, has been so much emphasised in the international literature and in the training of career guidance counsellors in many Nordic countries.

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**Absztrakt.** A digitalizáció olyan folyamat, amely átalakítja a társadalmi és gazdasági együttélés kereteit, és ennek a karrierfejlesztési szakembereknek is részesei kell, hogy legyenek. Ugyanakkor az egyes európai országok digitális felkészültsége és kultúrája eltérő. A 2020-ban kezdődött koronavírusválság mindannyiunkat arra kényszerített, hogy alkalmazkodjunk ehhez a digitális kihíváshoz. Ebben a cikkben bemutatjuk a magyarországi változásokat, és javaslatokat teszünk a nemzeti fejlődés lehetséges irányaira.

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