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From Crisis to Sustainable Well-Being,
28th International Congress of Applied Psychology
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On 8-13 July, 2014, Paris hosted the 28th International Congress of Applied Psychology titled *From Crisis to Sustainable Well-Being*. It was organised by the International Association of Applied Psychology (IAAP), whose efforts were supported by the Consortium of Psychology Associations, the French Society of Psychology and the French Federation for Psychologists and Psychology.

The scholarly sweep and depth of the Congress was astounding. It assembled above 4,000 participants from more than 100 countries scattered across six continents (550 guests came from North America, 200 from South America, 1,800 from Europe, 315 from Africa, 800 from Asia and 450 from Australia and Oceania). Such an impressively wide resonance can be explained by the worldwide impact of this psychological congress and the prestige it enjoys. The Congress is intended as a platform of exchange and dialogue among various theoretical paradigms and practical interventions embedded in them. It is a site of encounter and interpenetration of multiple cultures, experiences, ideas, their applications and transformations as well as a tool facilitating the collaboration of researchers and practitioners. The Congress epitomises the benefits applied psychology offers to particular individuals and to entire societies.

The organising committee had received more than 6,000 abstracts, therein 5,537 papers and various communications and 150 keynote lectures. The programme included 600 theme-focused symposia, round-table discussions, invited symposia, thematic sessions, brief oral presentations and e-posters. Since such a huge academic enterprise required an adequate space, the Congress Centre in Paris was chosen as the conference venue. The opening ceremony held on the first day of the Congress took place in a vast amphitheatre and featured, among others, music by Russel Daisey (USA), who had composed a piece dedicated to psychology especially for the occasion. The opening lecture titled *The price of everything and*

the value of nothing – sustainability “after the crisis” was given by Tim Jackson (UK), an economist and the author of the famous book *Prosperity Without Growth*.

The sessions were held simultaneously in 18 divisions corresponding to the structure of the Association of Applied Psychology: organisational psychology, psychological assessment and evaluation, psychology and societal development, environmental psychology, educational and school psychology, clinical and community psychology, applied geropsychology, health psychology, economic psychology, psychology and law, political psychology, sport psychology, traffic and transportation psychology, applied cognitive psychology, student division, counselling psychology, professional practice and history of applied psychology. Within each division, lectures, presentations and discussions were held in a number of parallel sessions scheduled over five days. Given this diversity and multitude, it is a sheer impossibility to write a detailed report of this extraordinary scholarly meeting. Even supposing it should be at all possible, the size of the report would exceed not only the scope of this paper but also the limits of the entire volume of *Studia Poradownicze/ Journal of Counselling*. Suffice it to say that conference materials include a 608-page book, which only provides organisational details, lists the presentation titles and the names of speakers and contains abstracts of the 150 most important talks. It was not within anybody's powers to participate in all sessions, workshops and lectures.

That is why I will limit my report only to the most important events in the Counselling Psychology Division as the issues tackled therein are particularly pertinent to counselling studies. The five days filled with talks and discussions – including six divisional keynote lectures, 18 symposia, 11 thematic session, brief verbal presentations and e-posters held in parallel sessions – were very intense and absorbing.

The Division's work was supported by the European Society for Vocational Designing and Career Counselling (ESVDC), which held its annual meeting, general assembly and elections during the Congress. Jan-Pierre Dauwalder was replaced in the office of President of the Society's executive board by Laura Nota from the University of Padua. Another important event at the Society's assembly was Awards Ceremony, during which the ESVDC Research Award was presented to Professor Mark L. Savickas from Northeastern Ohio Medical University and Kent State University (USA), a distinguished expert and one of the leading researchers of contemporary counselling. His theory of career designing and narrative counselling underscores that individuals construct their careers through giving meanings to their vocational experiences and aspirations and incorporating them into life-designs. As President of the IAAP Counselling Psychology Division, Prof. Savickas gave the divisional presidential address, in which he talked about career-designing by actors, agents and authors. He highlighted the seminal paradigmatic change, whose consequences for career counselling include a shift away from the focus on the choice of and adjustment to vocation toward prioritisation of life-designing as such, in which work is integrated with the individual's overall experience. This change is reflected

also in the language used to describe counselling-related phenomena. The life-design paradigm has affected the ways in which career is defined. Viewing career as a process of attribution of meanings, Savickas emphasises the importance of life stories and life themes. His narratology is based on psychological constructivism and assumes that the stories/narratives one tells are reflections of life, but the meaning one gives to one's experiences remains in a way enclosed within and inside the narrative. The narrative shift is closely linked to social constructionism, which points to an even broader perspective – the narratives not only “tell about life” but are also lived and authentically experienced. They are capable of shaping lives, while their meaning is produced in relations. Particularly meaningful are stories told in families because, referring to key values, they give shape to young people's identities.

The lecture set a direction for further reflections. Mark Savickas's perspective was the referential framework also for other scholars who spoke about possible applications of constructivism in counselling analyses. Jean Guichard (INETOP, France) discussed life-designing dialogues, which provide opportunities for constructing various narrative selves (both provisional and final ones) and, consequently, designing one's life. He emphasised the role of reflectivity in projecting future visions. It is through life-designing dialogues that some ideas take on a recognisable form, expectations and imaginings get specified, future perspectives can be constructed and, ultimately, the meaning of life is identified. Such dialogues channel actions and prompt people to find out what behaviours can contribute to the actualisation of expectations. Similarly, Kobus Maree (RSA), who talked about his own experience with research and practice within the life-design model (based first of all on administering career-designing/constructing interviews), showed how life themes addressed in counselling dialogues further the construction of life portraits. Maria Eduarda Duarte (Portugal), who replaced Mark Savickas as President of the IAAP Counselling Psychology Division, stressed the urgency of re-thinking career counselling, applying the life-designing and -co-creating model and developing plans and standards of care for tomorrow. Thereby, she showed a viable way of making well-being a reality through counselling. Guðbjörg Vilhjalmsdóttir (Iceland), in turn, spoke of career counselling in conjunction with P. Bourdieu's habitus theory, observing that the very choice among various options is in itself a certain privilege and distinction.

The applications of the *Life-design* concepts in various ways and spheres were discussed in thematic sections and invited symposia. The symposium convened by Christiane Schiersmann (Germany), who is a coordinator of the international academic collaboration scheme ERASMUS – NETWORK NICE, focused on the state of and perspectives for counselling research in Europe. The first European doctoral programme in career guidance and counselling launched by the University of Padua was discussed in the session coordinated by Laura Nota (Italy), who described the components of that training programme. The wide international project aims to develop a common curriculum for PhD. students who do research in

career counselling. At the same time, it perfectly exemplifies the current re-thinking of helping models and bodes promising for fusing and balancing practice and research.

Also the symposium convened by Paula Hartung (USA) showcased the narrative shift in counselling psychology and ways of using the narrative approach in life/career designing. The issues discussed included assistance in discovering subjective identity forms, narrative career constructing from career assessment, co-constructing life and turning decisions into actual action.

Narratability and biographicity were addressed also in the symposium headed by Annamaria di Fabio (Italy). The discussions attended to the postmodern contexts and were anchored in positive psychology (Jennifer El Corso, USA). The proposed intervention strategies aimed to reinforce personal resources, develop effective group counselling interventions and help women construct life portraits (Jacobus Maree, RSA). Mark Rehfuss (USA) recommended using Future Career Autobiography as a tool in identifying both values and motivations as well as the already implemented and anticipated changes in the clients' stories. He also insisted on the urgency of verifying the effectiveness of narrative interventions.

In her symposium, Valérie Cohen-Scali (France) presented research findings on constructing identities and societal representations in young adults and reflected on the feasibility of applying constructivism and the life-design model in interventions for youth. Speakers from various countries shared their knowledge and experience of good practices in this field. Mary McMahon described the organisation of constructivism-informed counselling process in Australia; Hazel Reid analysed the psychosocial approach and narrative counselling in Great Britain; Lea Ferrari discussed the effectiveness of an online programme called "Three steps into the future" in Italy; and Barbara Bassot (UK) presented so-called career thinking sessions as a fruitful method of career-design counselling.

The symposium chaired by Laura Nota (Italy) addressed the issues related to an even younger group. Career counselling is usually offered as a form of support targeting youth and adults, with children rather disregarded as their vocational plans tend to be viewed more as fantasies than as genuine plans. The symposium, however, combined vocational designing with issues of prevention and education. Hence, career development was analysed starting from childhood, and attention was devoted to prevention programmes aimed to forestall the emergence of negative and pessimistic visions of the future. The role and efficacy of group counselling were examined in this respect. Mark Savickas stressed the essential impact of developing adaptability and skills of story construction in the family environment.

The theme of career adaptability as an indispensable competence in designing was explored in a separate session (Bita Azimi, Iran), which featured discussions on coping strategies used in challenging career decision-making, balanced time perspective for shaping adaptability (José Silva, Portugal) and the role of the temporal dimension in career planning. The analyses tackled also interrelations between

career patterns from the family of origin and marital satisfaction in married couples (Anna Paszkowska-Rogacz, Poland).

Donna Schultheiss (USA) anchored her symposium in the framework of intersectionality theory, an approach rarely used in Polish counselling as yet. The theory of intersectionality addresses the points or spheres where various social categories intersect and overlap. Intersectional analyses expose interconnections among the social class, nationality, ethnicity, gender, disability, etc., revealing how various discriminatory practices interpenetrate and reinforce each other. With intersectionality theory integrated with vocational psychology (Richard Young, Canada), the discussions focused on discrimination against women, women's career development, jobs and employment women are in and the necessary helping interventions. Such analyses were usefully augmented with U. Bronfenbrenner's concepts and his ecological view of the human place in the world, examined by Rachel Cinamon (Israel).

Transitions were another frequently addressed issue. The new sub-discipline, that is, the psychology of transitions, attends to the processes in which identity changes unfold in various contexts. The relevant research explains how identities are (re)constructed and navigated in social relationships, for example those made in international student groups (Natalee Popadiuk, Canada), by immigrant women or by people whose employment is often forcefully discontinued (Nancy Arthur, Canada). Cultural transitions seem an important challenge to career counselling, in which counsellors are required to be partners offering assistance in coping with problems (Jenny Bimrose, UK; Richard Young, Canada).

Importantly, issues of professional ethics were discussed in a separate symposium which I convened under the heading of universal values in counselling. The invited guests tried to decide whether there are any such values in counselling in the first place (Christian Heslon, France), find out what ethical dilemmas counsellors are likely to be confronted with in their practice (Alicja Czerkawska, Poland) and reflect on how to become a reflexive counsellor capable of attaining an equilibrium amidst the clash of ethical principles with the oppressive facets of counselling practice (Hazel Reid, UK). My own account of ethical issues was embedded in dialogic personalism, which I consider an essential source of anthropocentric, dialogue-oriented thinking. Also Jérôme Rossier (Switzerland) chaired a symposium devoted to accountability for interventions launched in career counselling.

Discussions in the section led by Maria Paula Paixão (Portugal) addressed interdependences between career development and well-being. One of the themes was the role of psychology in an interdisciplinary approach for sustainable well-being. Speakers presented also their research on young people's self-perceived well-being and interconnections between career indecision and emotional aspects of psychological well-being in young adults.

Scrutinising the socio-economic context and, in particular, racial inequalities and cultural diversity, Gabriela Aisenson (Argentina) and Marcelo Ribeiro (Brazil) discussed challenges to career counselling in South America. The contexts of

social violence were also evoked to stress how urgent it is to think about the future and, accordingly, devise strategies of and consider perspectives for counselling addressed to students in all age-groups.

Some sessions focused on relatively narrow research fields, which by no means made their insights any less interesting or less weighty. Particularly illuminating were discussions in the session on career development of Chinese students (Seung Ming Leung, China), which is powerfully influenced by parental expectations, communication within family and filial obedience.

Besides the symposia and thematic sessions, 20 brief verbal presentations were also held in the Counselling Psychology Division, for which special venue was arranged in the hall of the Congress Centre. The presentations included research reports, reflections on and proposed solutions to urgent problems in career counselling – they were, by necessity, highly “compressed” to fit within the mere five minutes the presenters had at their disposal. They were chiefly students who had only just started research and wished to share their initial explorations with others. Expectedly, the themes tackled in these presentations were highly varied, including, e.g. the use of psychometric research, coaching, effectiveness of peer counselling and career constructions of workers in São Paulo. Additionally, 40 e-posters were also presented at computer stands in the hall, based on the announced schedule. The themes of e-posters were similarly divergent: career development in India, self-efficacy and decision making, micro-counselling, etc. This wealth of events was further augmented by workshops devoted to selected fields, such as, for example, observation methods in psychological research, ethical issues in supervision and opportunities and challenges that digital technology offers to psychologists.

In conclusion, the meetings and debates of the Counselling Psychology Division were undoubtedly an unparalleled opportunity to get a glimpse at how multidimensional counselling is. The sheer number of absorbing presentations made it impossible to fully satisfy my cognitive curiosity. Not blessed with the gift of bilocation, I was forced constantly to choose between the sections that seemed fascinating and those that sounded intriguing. Scholarly debates in and across sections, conducted in the climate of mutual respect, understanding and dialogue, promoted and strengthened the international academic collaboration. Fully aware of how selective my account of the Congress is, I hope that I succeeded in conveying at least a fraction of the scholarly feast it was my honour and pleasure to partake of.

Translated from Polish by Patrycja Poniatońska