

**Jolanta Lenart**

University of Rzeszów

## **Sustainable growth and decent work as central ideas of career counseling and life design in an international debate: For a new semio-technique of counseling<sup>1</sup>**

This article reflects on the issues discussed at the International Conference *Career and Life Design Interventions for Sustainable Development and Decent Work*, organized jointly by the UNESCO Chair on Lifelong Guidance and Counseling (Institute of Pedagogy, University of Wrocław) and the European Society for Vocational Designing and Career Counseling (ESVDC) in Wrocław, Poland, on 6–8 June, 2016. Citing the arguments advanced in the conference presentations, the author focuses on three dominant themes, i.e., the accelerated unsustainable growth and its ramifications; the concept of decent work; and career and life design interventions for sustainable development and decent work. Corresponding to the conference's first thematic block, the opening part of the article serves as an introduction outlining a background for further discussion and listing the social and economic consequences of unsustainable development. The second part examines the idea of decent work and measures for facilitating access to work. The third part explores Life Design, i.e., the contemporary (postmodern) paradigm of career counseling, and its reception in counseling practice. In conclusion, implications for future career counseling practice are proposed.

**Keywords:** sustainable growth, decent work, Life Design paradigm, career counseling

### **Introduction**

To integrate local and global efforts in fostering responsible use of natural resources has become a strategic objective for achieving harmony in the triadic society-environment-economy relations (Zabłocki, 2002). The idea of enhancing the quality of life by tending to the factors that fundamentally determine the future of society, economy, and environment is associated with promotion of decent life and dignity

<sup>1</sup> The subtitle added by the editors (cf. also Kargulowa, 2016, pp. 73-94)

of life. Unsurprisingly, the idea has proved of interest to career scholars and counseling researchers. The concept is widely addressed in discussions, debates, and studies, as exemplified by the conference on *Career and Life Design Interventions for Sustainable Development and Decent Work* organized jointly by the UNESCO Chair on Lifelong Guidance and Counseling (Institute of Pedagogy, University of Wrocław, Poland) and the European Society for Vocational Designing and Career Counseling (ESVDC), which was held in Wrocław on 6 – 8 June, 2016.<sup>2</sup>

As stressed by Jean Guichard (Head of the UNESCO Chair, University of Wrocław, Poland, & CNAM, Paris, France), Laura Nota (President of ESVDC & University of Padova, Italy), and Violetta Podgórna (UNESCO Chair, University of Wrocław, Poland) in their opening addresses, the primary objective of career and life design interventions is to help individuals and/or communities to deal with issues they confront when designing their personal and working lives. Informed by this central idea, the Wrocław conference was emphatically depicted as continuing the themes and concerns tackled at prior events organized under the auspices of the IAEVG/AIOSP (International Association for Educational and Vocational Guidance/Association Internationale d'Orientation Scolaire et Professionnelle) in Montpellier (France) in 2013 (cf. Słowik, 2014, pp. 123-135/293-305) and in Florence (Italy) in 2015 (cf. Kwasieboriski, 2015, pp. 182-185/354-357).

In this article, it is not my purpose to reproduce verbatim the conference presentations or to provide a detailed account of the event as a whole. Instead, I will outline my interpretation of the central issues raised in discussions, focusing particularly on the assessment of changes in the cultural, political and economic contexts of counseling practice that “call for” transforming the “semio-technique” (to use Michael Foucault’s term) (Foucault, 1998, p. 100) of counseling, i.e., for re-inventing the meanings, senses, methods, and techniques of counseling. In my argument, I will presents views, research findings, insights, and conclusions relevant to the contemporary organization and practice of career counseling.

### **Accelerated unsustainable economic development and its ramifications**

The first keynote lecture titled *Making sustainable life and career choices: A view through the lens of existential economics* was presented by economist Christian Arnspenger (University of Lausanne, Switzerland), who addressed the effects of the

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<sup>2</sup> Approximately 70 academics from Poland and 14 other countries attended the Wrocław conference. About 53 papers were read at plenary and thematic sessions. Career counseling researchers pondered how the idea of sustainable development was implemented, what actions were taken to make it a reality, and in how much career and life design interventions could actually contribute to fair and sustainable development and promotion of the decent work idea across the world.

accelerated civilization development on the economy and society.<sup>3</sup> Rather than focusing on the well-known positive effects of progress, he looked into its negative consequences, the most important of them being the unsustainable socio-economic development observable in various parts of the world and social groups. His talk was very engaging and eye-opening. Arnsperger reminded that speeding capitalism and the associated prosperity in developed societies did not make them happy in fact. It only made people dependent on consumption and, thus, enslaved them. In Switzerland, he noted, it was ever more palpable, like in other affluent countries. Arnsperger underlined the exigency to reform the capitalist system, and challenged the listeners to think how changing the system they could “disadjust” themselves, gaining more liberty and obtaining a certain autonomy. He insisted that people needed to change their lifestyle and adopt alternative (centrifugal) lifestyles for the sake of heteronomy and freedom of choice to live. According to the researcher, the economy stifles such thinking. As people experience constant pressure to meet their increasingly excessive needs (mainstream, centripetal lifestyles), they find themselves unable to think critically. Proper education is, therefore, necessary to prevent people from being merely productive, but unthinking tools. The system which is governed by fear leads to unhappiness. In some poorer societies, people are happier because they do not have so many concerns. We must take into account the role of people as actors not only in changing the world, but also in changing themselves, urged the speaker.

Referencing his own country, Arnsperger observed that the young Swiss were growing more inclined to emphatically oppose the mainstream lifestyle and the system of work. The capitalist economy in Switzerland disintegrates. The academic and political circles propose measures and approaches to organize the economy democratically, relying on three models: “green capitalism,” “green socialization,” and “deep experimentation.” In the quest for a greater economic and social balance, various forms of supporting citizens are considered, including guaranteed wages or an average salary for all citizens. Capitalism produces opulence indeed, but the status quo cannot possibly be maintained, continued Arnsperger. The world population of the poor is increasing while wealth is distributed more and more disproportionately and owned by merely 1% of people, who claim to have produced it. Consequently, a balanced distribution of goods and access to decent work must be the objectives in measures for sustainable development.

Croatian researchers (Vanja Međugorac, Iva Šverko, Toni Babarović, and Ivo Pilar, Institute of Social Sciences, Zagreb) highlighted yet another problem linked

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<sup>3</sup> The opening of the conference and the morning plenary session took place in a beautiful, historic interior of the Marianum Oratory of the University of Wrocław, which only emphasized the solemnity and importance of the event. We awaited the plenary conference excited, knowing that shortly we would learn from the leading Polish and international counseling researchers about the latest developments in career counseling, current research on counseling, and measures for sustainable development of people and their environments taken across the world.

to unsustainable development, i.e., the overexploitation of the planet, exacerbating inexorably since the early 1970s. To illustrate the gravity of the problem, they pointed out that currently we use the equivalent of 1.6 planets to meet people's growing needs and to dispose of our waste. If the process keeps escalating, it will inevitably destroy the Earth (kill the planet). What we need is "green growth," i.e., curbing the misuse of natural resources coupled with re-casting both industrial technologies and social needs (changing consumption habits). Poignantly, sustainable development is defined as one that does not compromise the future generations' ability to meet their own needs (*Report of the World Commission on Environment and Development*, 1987). To face these challenges adequately, career counseling must instill environment-friendly attitudes and contribute to the establishment of new occupations (i.e., "green jobs" that strengthen environmental balance) demanded by new types of businesses. Jean Guichard concluded that, according to the current predictions, 66% of today's students would be working in professions that do not even exist yet.

### **What is decent work actually?**

The most effective method of reducing poverty is by enabling all people in need to work and earn enough to provide for themselves and their families. This is the cornerstone of the concept of "decent work," but there is much more to it than just that. More comprehensive definitions of "decent work" were presented during a panel discussion by Annamaria Di Fabio (University of Florence, Italy) and Kobus Maree (University of Pretoria, South Africa). In their view, decent work is one that enables all employees to attain self-respect and personal dignity, and feel free and safe in their workplace. Other features of decent work, as discussed by Di Fabio and Maree, include the possibility to choose a suitable occupation and, importantly, to enjoy satisfactory income sufficient for livelihood and social security. The moderators also reminded of what is referred to as the preventive function of work, which protects people against marginalization and mental imbalance. Other ethical criteria of decent work comprise also equal pay for equal work, observance of the labor law, recognition of employees as agents, acknowledgment of and appreciation for their achievements, and appropriate interpersonal relationships. In conclusion, Di Fabio and Maree stated that the aim of decent work was to fight and reduce poverty, and that the notion banned any form of coercion, discrimination, or physical violence against workers.

Guichard insisted that the ethics of human work must be disseminated and reinforced by all available means to promote sustainable development. Such efforts are crucial and must extend also onto poor communities, for example in Africa, where people, marginalized and abandoned to fend for themselves for years, have suffered dehumanization in their lone fight for survival. Their plight is expressed,

among others, in disregard of rules and ethical standards as well as in dislike of developed societies. As an example, Guichard cited African children, many of whom do not believe that having a job is a necessity since crime could offer them better income (e.g., the problem of widespread piracy in Somalia). Maree insisted that it was something we must not allow to happen. Visibly moved, he urged that every effort should be braved to transform the lives of those people, prepare them for work, and preach the good news by actions. He summoned everybody to work and believe in what they are doing to make people who are invisible become visible again and people whose voices are inaudible become audible again. That these were not just empty words is evidenced by Maree's own work and great commitment to help and improve the living conditions of poor communities in South Africa.

The audience could learn about daily routines of Africans in a very vivid way (some photos, such as an image of a cesspit in which a little boy had drowned, were shocking but aroused deep compassion at the same time). We all listened to Maree with hope and optimism when he said that several steps instrumental to changing this dismal reality had already been taken. As an example, he mentioned projects launched under the "Good Work" Foundation, e.g., computer courses for adults, vocational training, cooking courses, support schemes for entrepreneurship (small businesses), creating new jobs, and opening hospitals and schools. "Decent work restores the meaning of life and is the key to success," concluded Maree.

Research on work and the value of work is robust at many universities. A qualitative study in this field has been carried out recently by David Blustein and his colleagues from Boston College. Methodologically, the project was underpinned by what Blustein calls "the psychology of working," in which work is addressed as one of the basic necessities of life. In other words, decent work is the basic condition of "being alive" in this world. In the study, respondents reported their experiences in looking for a job and working as such. They defined the place of work in their lives. Most respondents actually assigned work a central position. Besides the obvious financial factor, they listed the need to be with others and the need to interact with colleagues among reasons for work. They deplored the lack of contact with other employees when working from home, which resulted in losing a sense of community. The respondents also cited difficulties in keeping up with changes in the world of work. They expressed concerns about losing the job, realizing that it would mean alienation from the social environment. As stated by Blustein, the findings will significantly expand the theory of psychology of working, which in an interdisciplinary manner (combining general psychology, sociology, and economics) explores the question of "How do the lack of work and inability to meet basic needs influence people?"

Similar findings have been generated by an international research team including Genevieve Fournier (Laval University, Quebec, Canada), Valérie Cohen-Scali (INETOP – CNAM, Paris, France), Gabriele Aisenson (University of Buenos Aires, Argentina), Annamarie Di Fabio (University of Florence, Italy), Kobus Maree

(University of Pretoria, South Africa), Jonas Masdonati (University of Lausanne, Switzerland), and Marcelo Ribeiro (University of Sao Paulo, Brazil). The study on the representations of work carried out across the world resulted in developing a conceptual framework of people's attitudes to work and the major needs it meets. The researchers distinguished four configurations in which to place work:

1. Work takes the central place in the individual's life and has a positive value ("Work is my main occupation in life and affords me a lot more satisfaction than all other activities.");
2. Work takes the central place in the individual's life, but tends to bear a negative value ("Work plays a key role in my life, because I have nothing else to do.");
3. Work takes a secondary place in the individual's life, but it has a positive value ("Although work is important for my personal balance, other activities are as important.");
4. Work takes a secondary place in the individual's life, and its value is rather negative ("Work is one of my priorities, but what I do is of very little importance to me.").

The study also helped to update knowledge on the aims ascribed to work. Seven basic purposes of work were identified: 1) work as a source of self-fulfillment and well-being; 2) work as a source of social utility; 3) work as a source of social contacts; 4) work as a basis of financial security; 5) work as a source of social prestige; 6) work as a way of spending time; 7) work as a source of contact with one's peers (identification with others). The researchers stressed that identification of priorities in life – the values and preferences of different societies and social groups – is essential to the recognition and development of individual and social identities, and to the construction of links between individuals and the world of work. The project helped to determine the level of consistency/inconsistency between people's systems of values and their actions.

One of the thematic sections dealt with the problem of decent work for older workers (Lyn Barham, Czeslaw Noworol, Christian Heslon, and David Blustein). The debate made it clear that the issue demanded urgent attention and intervention. The statistics indicate that, given the increased life expectancy, the current birth rates are too low to ensure the substitutability of workers leaving the labor market. In the coming years, the labor market will lose about 10 million workers while only 6 million new workers will enter it. In addition, another 2 million new jobs are expected to be created in the emergent sectors. As the future will see a shortage of workers, only 50% of the projected 30 million jobs will have a chance to materialize. These developments produce new opportunities for older workers, who, though often highly-skilled and experienced, tend to be discriminated against, underemployed, or forced to retire because of their age. Guichard reassured, however, that dropping birth rates entailed also that there would be correspondingly fewer people with consumer needs to be met by reduced industrial production.

Marcelo Ribeiro (University of Sao Paulo, Brazil) voiced another reflection or, rather, concern regarding decent work, asking whether it was fair to base decent work on the informal economy, where 32% of people worked illegally. Answering the question, Guichard stated that this was a serious social problem that called for urgent, but well-considered actions. However, it could only be solved in collaboration with the political authorities and social organizations. Governments must ensure that societies have access to decent work. Continuing, Guichard insisted that our task was to inform governments of various difficulties and present proposals for effective solutions, and their task should be to take effective action..

### **Career and life design interventions for sustainable development and decent work**

Another strategic action for sustainable development and decent work involves providing relevant counseling for all needy people. In this context, the speakers (Annamaria Di Fabio, Christian Heslon, Maria Paula Paixão, Jacques Pouyaud, Bożena Wojtasik, Alicja Czerkawska, Elżbieta Siarkiewicz, Marcelo Ribeiro, Gudbjörg Vihjálmsdóttir, Maria Eduarda Duarte, and others) analyzed, interpreted, and reinterpreted the concept of career and life design proposed by Mark Savickas and Jean Guichard.

On this model, career counselors seek to develop and shape their clients' self-awareness, helping to construct individual identities. People cannot build their identities in isolation from others because, as Maria E. Duarte (University of Lisbon, Portugal) noticed, in order to create our identities, we need other people and the feeling of kinship, e.g., historical, and cultural kinship; we need to see a reflection of history in the eyes of others. Identity construction is, in fact, the process of self-recognition. Self-awareness and the sense of national (collective) identity are vital in designing one's own life. According to Duarte, such counseling interventions are comparable to choosing works of art in an art gallery, where different available models correspond to different models of life. Duarte reminded that shaping individual and collective identities requires responsibility as unduly emphasis on differences could spark nationalism and hostilities among nations.

Similarly, Marcelo A. Ribeiro underlined the need to include intercultural considerations in counseling dialogue. In his view, in multicultural and mosaic societies, which are common in most countries today, both the theory and practice of career counseling must be immersed in actual realities and take into account people's psychosocial condition and cultural distinctiveness. The intercultural dialogue must endorse prevalent values and discourses of all communities and ethnic groups as equal, without imposing any hegemonic ways of being and identity building. Ribeiro believes that since all social relations have an intercultural dimension and are produced somewhat "in between," it is imperative to know given cultures

and recognize their contexts and differences, also political ones. Citing the *Santos Annual Report* (2014), Ribeiro posited that since global social injustice was closely linked to global cognitive injustice, the struggle for global justice must be a struggle for global cognitive justice. A new challenge for researchers is, thus, to develop frameworks to facilitate exploration and understanding of the heterogeneous and complex modern world – frameworks meaningfully applicable also to the study of a range of psychosocial phenomena observable in the world of work.

In his contribution to the discussion on the use of dialogue in career and life design, Jacques Pouyaud (University of Bordeaux, France) stressed the importance of dialogue in fostering individuals' self-identification efforts (self-construction) and life construction. He referenced Guichard' model of the Dynamic System of Subjective Identity Forms (SSIF) as a useful instrument in such interventions. He explained that it was an especially helpful tool in processes of self-construction and self-fulfillment, and also when crafting one's own ways of being, acting and interacting in accordance with a particular way of representing oneself within a given setting. It can help one assume and perform a given social role as perceived and practiced there. The process of individual identification with the closest social environment is a stabilizing factor productive of personal and social balance. Most people want to "be like..." or live and act in conformity with the norms and values endorsed by a certain social group. Dialogues and narratives offer people an opportunity to scrutinize their own past and reflect on their experiences as well as on their specific future plans from a distance. According to Pouyaud, when exploring the past from new perspectives, one engages in a peculiar "recycling" of one's prior and present life achievements (personal experiences).

The sense of coherence can be an important factor in the process of self-recognition and self-construction, argued Magdalena Piorunek (Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznan, Poland). Formed across the human life-course, coherence is based on individual experiences and is culturally diverse. Its inseparable elements are: comprehensibility (structured, consistent, and predictable professional experiences), resourcefulness (capacity to cope effectively with vocational difficulties), and meaningfulness (the perception of the socio-occupational world as meaningful, developed as one engages and participates in career decision-making). The stable and strong sense of coherence contributes to efficient career-construction throughout the human life-cycle.

Sharing her insights, Elżbieta Siarkiewicz (University of Lower Silesia, Wrocław, Poland) explained that "counseling can be understood as a performative project interpretable through the lens of human biography, as a practice inscribed in various processes of becoming in a dynamic, changing, and unpredictable reality (becoming a student, becoming a worker, becoming a parent, becoming a woman/man, becoming reflective, becoming responsible). Embedded in the life-course, such counseling is complex and involves counseling processes and practices implemented in the dynamic, multi-dimensional, interactive human life-space." Counseling can be

viewed as an activity intertwined with human life and as a practice unfolding across the course of life. The practice and/or the process can take a variety of forms, such as formal, institutional actions, the third sector operations, and pro-social or charitable activities. Counseling interventions are also undertaken as part of everyday human intercourse by informal counsellors and relatives as well as by people met by chance. Additionally, a space for guidance/advice provision and reception is offered by the proliferating online help-and-support communities.

Other speakers talked about how counseling is practiced today and how new career counseling paradigms and needs are reflected in this practice. Bożena Wojtasik (University of Lower Silesia, Wrocław, Poland) talked about the dilemmas of Polish counselors confront today. On the one hand, their clients expect to be offered quick-fix solutions. Asking who to be and what choices to make, they want ready-made answers typical of prescriptive counseling of the bygone era. At the same time, other clients look for a counsellor-therapist who “will alleviate their fears, repair weakened social bonds, listen to them, support them in (re)constructing their lives and designing identity projects, and help them make sense of things,” i.e., a liberal counsellor. Therefore, both modern and postmodern paradigms are applied in Polish counseling. In the ongoing discussion on the direction of changes in career counseling, the relevant, attention-demanding parameters of the transformations at hand include counseling focus on sustainable development and decent work, awareness of global developments, rejection of extreme individualism, other-directed thinking, reflectivity, and critical thinking, concluded Wojtasik.

In his richly illustrated presentation that continued the theme of foundations of institutional counseling, Henryk Jarosiewicz (University of Wrocław, Poland) argued that “people are typical,” which should be utilized in the career-constructing process. The approach was inspired by Savickas’s insight that “when the music changes, the dance changes.” Jarosiewicz explained that “people tend to choose certain dances in their lives and careers” and, to corroborate this claim, he drew on literary works (*The Little Prince* by Antoine de Saint-Exupéry) and the psychological literature. Based on that, he identified four types of human behavior and four corresponding psychological types of people, i.e., open, restrained, task-focused, and people-oriented. According to Jarosiewicz, belonging to a given type determines human pursuits since “like map (image of the world), like ride.” Human activity can be extrovertly oriented on the external situation, where one acts spontaneously, displaying oneself and one’s products (actor); it can be oriented on things and processes, i.e., on knowledge (doer); it can be oriented on the emotionally experienced relations of dependency (agent); and, finally, it can be introvertly oriented on the “inner world,” which the individual uses in self-formation (author). “Types of activity influence the way a person designs his/her life and career, and ‘organizes him/herself’ to act. Like music, like dance; and like person, like counseling,” Jarosiewicz summed up.

Certain personality types, especially those introvertly oriented, can easily fall into internal conflicts. One of them is existential conflict. Alicja Czerkawska (University of Lower Silesia, Wroclaw) talked about how such conflicts could be “tamed” by the counselor. She referred to existential (internal intrapersonal) conflict as “a dispute within oneself concerning the needs, ideas, feelings, values, behaviors, expectations, aspirations, goals, and plans. Usually, it is a process through which the individual musters strength to achieve equilibrium.” Such conflicts are increasingly common. They arise mostly from natural causes, but can also be triggered by negative experiences. Alleviating existential conflicts is a very difficult field of contemporary counseling interventions. According to Czerkawska, in such cases, counselling assistance should consist in channeling a process in which counsees can “tame” the conflict (conflicts) they experience. The actions the counselor and the client undertake jointly in such a process should aim at:

- ◆ fostering self-knowledge, self-understanding and acceptance of existential conflicts as relevant and inevitable in life; developing or improving coping strategies; achieving a new quality of life; and devising further projects in a reflective manner (in case of natural existential conflicts)
- ◆ analyzing the situation and relations in conflicts that have emerged; promoting self-understanding and exploration of one’s life-course; learning from the biography, through reconstructing one’s life story and organizing one’s experience; leaving suffering behind; verifying one’s behavior in relationships with others; controlling transference; acquiring new skills in life; and making significant changes in life (in case of conflicts triggered by negative experiences).

According to Czerkawska, the purpose of the interventions is to help the individual to develop a mature identity, expressed in the ability to choose his/her own values, goals, and aspirations, and to execute them in personal and vocational life.

Jolanta Lenart (University of Rzeszów, Poland) highlighted the problems involved in the implementation of appropriate and much-needed career counseling in Polish schools. Reminding that vocational guidance had been made part of the school system responsibilities, she observed that neither schools nor teachers had actually been trained to provide guidance, and, thus, never effectively performed guidance tasks. In their efforts, both teachers and education administration prioritize teaching, whereby educational work, including the preparation of students for career-planning and transition to the labor market, is marginalized and only simulated. Additionally, there has never been sufficient funding for guidance and employment of school-based career counselors. This has led to a deplorable situation which requires a decisive intervention and rapid organizational and systemic changes as Polish school-leavers (including university graduates) lack key labor-market competences.

Evan Faidley, who collaborates with Mark Savickas at the Kent State University Exploratory Advising Center (U.S.), was a little more optimistic in his talk. He presented career counseling models introduced at his university, i.e., *Career navigation* and *Constructing possibilities*. They are offered as 15-week courses that help students to make a final decision on what degree to choose. Assisted by a professional career counselor, the students develop also their preliminary career projects.<sup>4</sup>

Closing the conference, the ESVDC award presentation was definitely an important and solemn event. This time, the awardee was Professor Alicja Kargulowa of the University of Lower Silesia (Wroclaw, Poland), a co-founder of the Society set up in Padua in 2011.<sup>5</sup> She joined other award-recipients from different countries, including Jean Guichard (France), Salvatore Soresi (Italy), Mark Savickas (U.S.), and Maria Eduarda Duarte (Portugal). Thanking the ESVDC, Professor Kargulowa recounted her career path and declared that she saw the award as a recognition of the work of the entire academic community of Wroclaw and Zielona Gora, with which she identified.

### **Implications for the counseling practice and counsellogical reflection**

A number of valuable implications for the future counseling practice were voiced during the conference. The insights make it clear that a range of changes and revaluations are exigent, including redefinition of the semio-technique of vocational guidance. Today, people expect high-quality forms of support from career counselors. Marta Rabikowska (School of Creative Arts, University of Hertfordshire, U.K.) postulated that in their interventions counselors should work toward restoring their clients' hope and meaning of life. Counsellors must show that every cloud has a silver lining, she concluded on a metaphorical note.

As stressed by the speakers, the world has changed, and it cannot be reversed. Societies have also changed, and career counselors must respond to this change: they must make every effort to improve their education and to develop critical self-attitudes (critical self-awareness). This goal can be furthered by "being together" and sharing experiences, thoughts and ideas, but also fears and doubts with other counsellors. The project of the UNESCO Chair at the University of Wroclaw is an

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<sup>4</sup> The papers cited in this article are only a sample of all the presentations given during the three days of the conference. To discuss them all is beyond my capacity and the scope of this article. It should be noted, however, that they were all examples of fine scholarship. Furthermore, all the participants were unmistakably deeply committed to the multicultural and multinational dialogue aimed to reconcile differences and alleviate injustice in the world. Hence, I would like to express my gratitude to the organizing committee for giving us an opportunity to join this international community of career-counseling researchers and practitioners, and to make our own contributions to the discussion on sustainable human development.

<sup>5</sup> Cf. ESVDC Newsletter 2/2016 European Society for Vocational Designing and Career Counseling.

important example of such community-building attempts. It helps to revive the narrative lost 100 years ago, as Blustein observed.

Another relevant conclusion is that career design interventions should be launched very early, i.e., at the pre-school stage, because families often do not know enough about preparing children for decent work. Given this, children and youngsters should be encouraged to engage in the life of their kindergartens, schools, and local communities, supported in making career choices and transitions, and prevented from discontinuing education or dropping out.

When working with adults, it is also necessary to act early and to think broadly, realizing that some groups of people have lower career-planning competences and need integrated support from a variety of sources. Consequently, the process of self-construction should be aided by dialogue in which they come to understand what life options they have and how they can enhance their wellbeing. As Michelangelo vividly put it, “every block of stone has a statue inside it and it is the task of the sculptor to discover it.”

Blustein argued that a major obstacle that counselors encounter in their work lies in the inability to abandon the old paradigm of career development, or in attempts to combine the traditional concepts with the new ones. It is therefore necessary to redefine the terms we use and to articulate them precisely. We need to employ interdisciplinary approaches and to define the limits of career design interventions.

At the end of the conference, Duarte appealed to abandon rhetoric and to embrace practice, for the course of things depends on what we actually do. The measure of our achievements is the positive impact our work has on the lives of the poor. If no improvement is effected, our efforts are irrelevant.

The intensity of the conference discussions suggests that the attendees – counseling researchers, organizers, and practitioners – will carry the idea of sustainable development and the concept of decent work back home, i.e., to universities, research centers, guidance services, schools, non-governmental organizations, and administration offices. However, putting them into practice may be a very complicated process.

*Translated by Joanna Lenart-Młyniec*

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