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**Jean Guichard, Marcelline Bangali, Valérie Cohen-Scali, Jacques Pouyaud, Marie-Line Robinet (2017).  
*Concevoir et orienter sa vie: les dialogues de conseil en life design [Designing a life: the life-design dialogues].*  
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In the societies of liquid modernity, according to Anthony Giddens, identity is a reflective project, for which individuals take responsibility (Giddens, 2001, p. 105). Constructing identity is a dynamic, holistic and non-linear process, encompassing all its dimensions and relating to the entirety of life. Counseling, as a professional form of helping, provides support in this process, and the assistance model that seems to be best suited to the needs of modern people is *Life Design*, developed on the basis of the multi-faceted paradigm put forward by Mark Savickas, Jean Guichard, Maria Eduarda Duarte and others (Savickas, 2011; Savickas, Guichard, Duarte, 2009; Duarte, 2014). The goal of *Life Design* is the completion of tasks that result from the current reality and enabling the counsees to reflect on their self. Thus, people seeking assistance through counselling often expect not the instructions, hints or recommendations as to what they should do, but rather they seek help in finding their own place in the world, in choosing such kinds of activities that will make their existence coherent, meaningful and will open new perspectives. When they come to see the counsellor, they ask existential questions, trying to understand what is happening to them, what they wish and what they can do with their life (Rutkowiak, 2012, p. 159). The new model of counselling (in a way analogous to therapy, described by Giddens) is not something that is 'done' to the client, something that 'happens' to them, but is a specific *experience* by which the individual gets involved in a systematic reflection on their life trajectory (Giddens, 2001, p. 99).

Looking for answers related to the meaning and direction of one's life requires other methods of work between the counsellor and the counselee used

(and still in use) when the goal of counselling interventions was merely to help the client adjust to the requirements of the labour market. That is why the book *Concevoir et orienter sa vie: les dialogues de conseil en life design* [*Designing a Life: the Life-Design Dialogues*], published in 2017, was conceived to introduce the possibility of applying another model of assistance to readers such as counsellors, consultants, therapists, coaches and other ‘helping professionals’ (Holt, 1971). Following many theoretical publications on the *Life Design* paradigm, it is an excellent book that offers an opportunity to learn a new approach to problems reported by clients. The book under review includes not only the theoretical basis, but also practical recommendations for conducting *Life Design Dialogues*.

The authors are very well known to all those who are interested in contemporary counselling in the globalised reality. First of all, we should mention Jean Guichard, who is one of the most important counselling scholars in the world. He is currently professor *emeritus* at CNAM in Paris, but previously he served as the Head of *Institut National d’Etude du Travail et d’Orientation Professionnelle* and was the initiator and the first Director of the UNESCO Chair on Lifelong Guidance and Counseling at the Institute of Pedagogy of the University of Wrocław (2013–2017). His contribution towards and involvement in the development of counselling led to the creation of an international network of universities UNITWIN NETWORK *Life designing interventions (counseling, guidance, education) for decent work and sustainable development*. Other authors are no less known. In her work, Marcelline Bangali, a member of the research group at the *Centre de Recherche et d’Intervention sur l’Education et la Vie au Travail (Université Laval, Québec, Canada)*, focuses on the psychology of labour. Valérie Cohen-Scali (CNAM, Paris, France) leads a research team *Psychologie de l’Orientation* at the *Centre de Recherche sur le Travail et le Développement*, while also serving as the deputy lead editor of the journal *Orientation Scolaire et Professionnelle*, as member of the Scientific Board of the UNESCO Chair and a member of the scientific committee of the European Doctoral Program in Career Guidance and Counselling. Jacques Pouyaud, who started his career as a counsellor and later worked as a lecturer and a researcher at INETOP-CNAM, is currently working at the University of Bordeaux, and serves as a member of the scientific board of the UNESCO Chair. His research focuses on the recognition of the self-creation process and the analysis of counselling practices. The last of the co-authors, Marie-Line Robinet, is both an experienced practitioner, assisting people in their professional transitions, and a PhD student, teaching at the INETOP-CNAM and pursuing research that addresses the dialogical process of *life design* meetings.

The central category of the book is dialogue. The word ‘dialogue’ is used widely and in many, often very different contexts. Despite many studies, in-depth

studies, diverse interpretations and multi-faceted analyses (within philosophy, sociology, political science, theology, cultural studies, linguistics, philology, pedagogy and psychology) the concept still has a potential that has not yet been tapped into.

Dialogue is also a central concept of the counselling inquiry. Alicja Kargulowa called 'dialogical' one of the counselling theories that she distinguished, seeing it as a 'golden mean' between the directive-oriented and the liberal tradition (Kargulowa, 1986). In many publications, dialogue has been treated as a necessary element of the counselling relationship, as a basis of the interaction or the counsellor's working method. It has often been used as an equivalent of conversation, but it is worth noting that, from the point of view of the anthropology of counselling (Wojtasik, 2001; Drabik-Podgórna, 2009; 2016; Kargulowa, 2016), dialogue is much more than pure conversational technique, revealing itself as a much more complex phenomenon. In the dialogical sense, dialogue is something more than a conversation, more than exchange of information or reaching an agreement, more than just listening and replying. Conversation only provides raw material, a necessary departure point for building a dialogue as an authentic meeting and a significant *existential event* (Baniak, 2004, p. 8). The core of such an event is not only the mutual impact that people have on each other, but also the development and co-creation of identity, discovering and defining subjectivity, the meaning-making in one's life that leads to the construction of the Self and the constitution of personhood.

The leitmotiv of the publication is the thought that dialogical quality is an integral and constitutive element of the human Self. It becomes the basis for calling human beings *homo dialogicus* (Sidorkin, 1999; Ostrowska, 2017, p. 35). The book reminds us that each person is conducting different dialogues – with other people (interpersonal), with the surrounding world (and its artefacts) and with themselves, both internal and imaginary (intrapersonal). Through this dialogical activity, which is the most natural form of communicating and being with others, a human being constitutes his or her dialogical, narratively structured Self (Puchalska-Wasył, 2006, p. 16). The book claims that such opportunities of self-constitution are created through *Life Design Dialogues*, promoted by the authors. The counselling dialogues they describe are to provide an alternative for interventions that aimed at directing counselees' lives in line with current employment norms. They have been elaborated through a synthesis of the most recent insights from the fields of psychology, sociology, philosophy, social theory and semiotics, to become the basis for the outline of a self-creation model (*se faire soi*), put forward by Guichard (Guichard, 2004, 2005). Within the model, the Self is perceived as a dynamic system of subjective identity forms, with identity thus becoming complex and plural. The main objective of *Life Design Dialogues* is assisting the counselees in becoming aware of important expectations held by themselves and about them by their environment, as well as assisting them

in defining those kinds of behaviour that would make fulfilling these expectations more probable. The dialogues lead to the emergence of different narrative Selves and to their inclusion in the perspectives of different 'You' (the polyphony of You), so that, finally, one's own existence may become meaningful. They are based on the rule of *Primum relationis* by Francis Jacques (Jacques, 1982), which means that the dialogical relationship, by producing different 'I', 'you', 'he/she' positions, creates an opportunity for expressing different voices. The authors consistently focus on the method of creating a relationship between the counsellor and the counselee, and convincingly demonstrate that the dialogues make space for working out previous ways of thinking about self, for letting go of old, worn out, everyday ways and, finally, for the emergence of new potential Selves. The authors make a caveat, however, that for these new Selves to manifest in reality and for the person to engage in the process of becoming the expected 'I', it is necessary that they possess a certain emotional potential, a dream, a desire to become such Self. The authors point out that the 'I' that is being constituted in the relationship can benefit from the counsellor's presence, which creates an occasion for discovering dreams and plans, to fully express all expectations and to reflexively construct the future. Telling one's own story may help, and so can discovering and assigning meanings to biographical events, or finding life themes and relating them to the future designed and possible Selves (Duarte, 2014).

The book has been divided into five chapters. In Chapter 1, the authors address the fundamental issue of counselling, trying to show how individuals living in today's diverse world can answer the question: 'What kind of active life can give a meaning and a perspective to my life?' The authors discuss different reformulations of the basic (generic) issue of counselling in the context of changing systems of labour organization and exchange of its products. The chapter has a twofold aim, on the one hand it demonstrates the role of the new kind of support beneficial in the late post-modern society, while on the other hand, it presents the specificity of the *Life Design Dialogues* against the backdrop other forms of assistance, such as e.g. guidance (also that based on testing), career education or provision of information. The authors show how *Life Design Dialogues* may help the counselees define the norms and values that will lead them to find answers to questions about the meaning and perspectives of their existence.

Chapter 2 describes the theoretical basis for life design dialogues. Starting with the importance of scientific understanding and realising the possibilities and limitations of different theories, the chapter then focuses on the epistemological framework of *Life Design*, provided by the constructivist and constructionist approaches. The authors point to the fact that these approaches rest on the premise that the Self is constituted in a continuous and dynamic process through narrations/stories, and is being constantly 'overwritten' (Bruner, 1994, p. 53). In the central part, the chapter brings forth the model of self-creation (*Se faire soi*) by Jean Guichard and its different variants (Guichard,

2004, 2009). Subjective identity is presented as a dynamic system of subjective identity forms (SIF), developed through two forms of reflexivity: dual and trine. The chapter also discusses the basic rule of *primum relationis* that conditions the dynamics of *life design* dialogues.

The most important part, the 'core' of the book is Chapter 3, which presents the framework and rules of implementing life design dialogues. The dialogical methodology of *Life Design Counselling* is presented with great precision, and illustrated with specific examples drawn from real-life situations. In this part, the reader will find instructions on how to lead an effective dialogue in counselling practice, how to understand the processes that occur in the counsees while they develop their reflection. The chapter provides a manual, a set of instructions, and a presentation of steps that the counsellor and the counsee should take within the developing dialogue.

*Life Design Dialogues* consist of four phases, each of which can occur during one or more meetings. The first phase relates to the construction of work alliance (setting up a contract) and focuses on defining the interlocutors' mutual expectations. The second phase is an exploration of the system of subjective identity forms of the counsee, it addresses main areas of their current life, important roles they played in the past and their plans for the future – in particular, the anticipated subjective identity forms. In the third phase, which constitutes the central point of the method, the authors emphasise the necessity to get involved in an in-depth reflection, based on a detailed analysis of main areas of activities and life experiences of the counsee, as well as relationships that obtain between them. It is during this phase, precisely, that projects for the future start to emerge. They are identified, discussed, tested and/or modified. Then, in the last phase, which relates to the implementation of the elaborated project, the counsellor assists the counsee in defining practical ways and activities in which they can engage in order to reach their goals.

The dialogues that the counsees hold with themselves find expression in the dialogue with the counsellor. The counsee, by building their identity, are slowly revealing themselves, analysing themselves from different spatio-temporal perspectives within the horizon of their whole life. The fragmented and episodic nature of life, so characteristic of the contemporary world, are here overcome, due to reflective narration that creates a common perspective for perceiving the past, the present and the future, thus bringing together the mosaic of life episodes.

Events, experiences, thoughts, feelings, projects and plans become linked through meanings that the individual is now assigning them. Of course, this model only offers a framework for taking actions that are, of their very nature, flexible, since every time they need to be adapted to the 'unique' characteristics of a given person and each and every interaction. That is why the dialogues can have a form of a series of meetings (2 to 4), held depending on the needs of the

counselee. The outline of the model can be found in a paper by Jean Guichard published in this issue of the *Journal of Counselling*. The book elaborates on these issues in much more detail, providing analysis and discussion against the backdrop of specific examples.

Chapter 4 describes the dialogue techniques. The target group here are the counsellors, and especially those for whom this will provide a completely new way for their practice. The first part of the chapter presents relationships between the non-directive rules and the constructivist epistemology on which *Life Design Dialogues* are based. The second part explains the meaning of the 'listening for understanding' attitude, while the third part describes suggested working techniques (mainly non- or semi-directive), as well as roles that they can play in the counselling process. Among them there are different forms of questions, paraphrasing, emotional mirroring, summary, silence, confrontation and clarification. These examples indicate that the proposed techniques enable a more in-depth reflection, lead the counsees to restructure their selves, and make it possible for them to create anticipated identity forms, imagining themselves in new roles, and increasing their self-confidence.

The last chapter demonstrates how to build competences and perfect them in the course of *Life Design Dialogues*. It is addressed to those who are responsible for training new counsellors. It suggests pathways, educational patterns, exercises and tools that should allow the counsellors-to-be to develop skills for conducting such dialogues. The authors stress the importance of promoting good conditions for *Life Design Dialogues* and for feed-back.

In the conclusion, the authors discuss the challenges faced by contemporary counselling and emphasize the role that *Life Design Dialogue* interventions can play in facing them. These are not only suggestions of practical solutions. Apart from *Life Design Dialogues*, the book also discusses other similar methods, especially the *Career Construction Interviews* by Mark Savickas (Savickas, 2011). The authors stress, however, that contrary to these, the dialogical approach requires not only working with internal micro-narratives but also paying attention to the meaning of words that have been used, since experiences and sensations must be named and verbalized. The authors think that in order for that to happen, there needs to be a well-established relationship, so that a true transformation can take place in the counselee's life. They note that modifying the 'I' position and opening up to a new story about 'Self' occurs due to the trine reflexivity, possible through applying the techniques of work described earlier. The last issue discussed in the conclusions takes the form of a question about how to develop interventions within the *Life Design Counselling*, so that they provide assistance in facing global risks. Modernity is calling everyone to make the efforts leading to making both human labour and human life decent and to contribute to a sustainable development of the world built on justice and solidarity.

I think it is worth mentioning that the authors of *Concevoir et orienter sa vie: les dialogues de conseil en life design*, having gender equality in mind and also not wishing to burden the text with both gendered pronouns when writing about the participants in a counselling relationship, decided to apply an interesting solution. Every time they write about the person providing assistance, supporting, conducting a counselling conversation – they use the feminine form of the French *conseillère* (counsellor), while the person seeking assistance and support is called *demandeur* (the masculine form of counselee). Since both women and men are counsellors and counsees, the authors decided to use such forms to avoid discrimination.

Summarising the most important aspects of the book, I need to note that the promoted model of *Life Design Counselling*, i.e. going beyond assistance in finding employment, planning a career, professional adaptation, and focusing on a broad range of activities in which people engage, enabling an in-depth analysis of how individuals are looking for direction and how they shape their living space, makes the anthropological categories of meaning and value of life especially significant, which will surely spark an interest in them in counselling science.

I am persuaded that the book under review can play an important role in changing our approach to how we do counselling, since it stresses the priority of dialogue. In the macro scale – the dialogic perspective covers very broad contexts, spanning ecology, politics and economy, which in the past have not always been taken into account by the theoreticians and practitioners of counselling. Counselling in the book has been presented as a social activity and is perceived within the context of global problems, having an ambition to address them, which requires a bigger effort and a different kind of involvement than those we have read about elsewhere. In this work, counselling means dialogue with the world that surrounds us, and it is through dialogue that counselling wishes to contribute to transforming the world.

This ambitious objective is very difficult to reach in the macro-scale, but in the micro-scale (at the level of the methodology of counselling meetings) the changes introduced by counselling in the form of *Life Design Dialogues* can be seen more clearly. It is worth noting that even though no counselling meeting can happen without conversation, not all conversations create an opportunity to work with dialogue, in dialogue and through dialogue.

The dialogical relationship of the proposed model of course requires the counsellor to be prepared, to have a specific attitude and to take the stance of dialogic openness. At the level of university studies, acquiring competences in this respect may be an interesting experience, available through participatory action research projects. In counselling institutions, however, it would require more time and bigger involvement from the parties, which can prove difficult from the organizational point of view. Unfortunately, these institutions are

often funded and have reporting obligations based on the number of clients. Sometimes, the fact that they tend to favour directive methods based on testing is mainly due to economic reasons.

The book under review obviously cannot cover all potential of the dialogue category. What seems to be missing is references to the philosophy of dialogue (Buber, 1992; Levinas 1998, 2000), providing important insights for understanding this basic category, creating an opportunity to have an in-depth look at humans in the context of the whole axiological anthropospheric universe (Ostrowska, 2017). Seeing dialogue and relationality as a way of being characteristic for humans makes it possible to understand dialogue beyond its technical or instrumental uses, as a specific existential stance and a principle of being with others and with the world.

Without any doubt, the book *Concevoir et orienter sa vie: les dialogues de conseil en life design* constitutes an important and meaningful voice in the counselling discourse, stressing the primacy of the dialogic life design support over the diagnostic-based directive approach. On the other hand, with a detailed description of the methodology of *Life Design Dialogues*, the book is a practical method-oriented manual. For both reasons, it should become one of the major positions on the book shelves of counselling scholars and professional counsellors.

*Translated by Katarzyna Byłów-Antkowiak*

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