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Why We Need Counsellogical Research: Towards an Anthropology of Counselling

The article explores various meanings of counselling as understood in colloquial, psychological and sociological terminologies and contexts. Starting from these definitions, the article argues strongly for research into counselling and investigation of counselling-related issues and problems. The resultant findings, compiled and synthesised in the form of hypotheses, interpretations and generalised principles, contribute to the science of counselling, i.e. counsellogy. The article seeks to characterise the existing counsellogical knowledge – knowledge on counselling and counselling research – and foster thinking about counsellogy in terms of an anthropology of counselling.

Key words: anthropology of counselling, *homo consultans*, counselling, counsellogy, counsellogical knowledge

Why Should We Do Research into Counselling?

A participant of social life processes in Poland can easily notice two parallel phenomena.¹ One of them is a steady increase in the population of clients of various therapy and counselling facilities. Coupled with the growing numbers of those who seek answers to their haunting questions in prophecies, fortune-telling, divinations and advice proffered by sundry “helping experts,” they make up a vast group of the vulnerable and the excluded, who need and want to use an array of services counselling offers. The other phenomenon is a proliferation of social voices (politicians, social activists, journalists, etc.) that advocate an accelerated inclusion of these “confused” people by providing them with direct help. This means a plea for expanding the areas of social resourcefulness and self-reliance through setting up various advisory facilities for those in need of advice as well as for those in charge of various helping institutions. Observably, analytical and advisory units and sections are also being increasingly established in production plants, educational institutions and cultural facilities. This is paired with a multiplication of self-help

¹ For various modes of participation in social life, see my article in the previous issue of *Studia Poradnawcze/Journal of Counsellogy* (Kargulowa, 2012).

and advice publications and programmes on the book market and in the media, respectively. The Internet is by no means lagging behind, with a variety of websites and networks brimming with advice. All these phenomena add up to a *counselling boom*, which could not have gone unnoticed or ignored by social life researchers. Hence, advice-seeking/giving has been acknowledged as a research object in its own right that deserves to be studied within a separate, specialist research framework. Clearly, research on various counselling forms probes into a very complex field of immediate topical importance.

Significantly, counselling is not only a “hot” current issue, but also one readily accessible to research now. We should remember that seeking counselling and guidance from various people, “agencies,” and institutions, as well as seeking various forms of help, hits the eye now, but since it does not always have to be openly registered, its irresistible visibility and availability for research may be a temporary matter only. It may easily change as the time goes by. Frequently, what goes on in counselling and related areas evades recording, is obscured by other activities it is enmeshed in, remains undetectable to the third parties or is even purposefully concealed by the counselling support-seekers. If we keep postponing our research, we may risk losing precious empirical data and find assessing the social contexts of counselling-related phenomena now rife in Poland ever more difficult.

Studying the existing “counselling micro-world” seems indispensable now and, importantly, not very challenging in methodological terms. Such projects seem to fit very well with the mainstream social research. They can be conducted in the traditional methodological framework, in the so-called intervention model or as action research, which *aims to solve the essential social problems by means of open, democratic investigation in collaboration with those most affected by the problems*, as Mieczysław Malewski emphasises (2012, p. 40). Its principal feature is that it seeks to capture what is going on in “the here and the now,” opts for qualitative approaches, promotes a researcher’s autonomy not only in choosing methods, tools and techniques, but also in selecting research objects and interpretive frameworks, and identifies *moral and effective action in the world* as its ultimate goal (*Ibid.*). Such research methodologies and methodics seem most aligned with the ways of collecting empirical data on counselling (cf. Červinková, Gołębniak, {eds.} 2010; 2013), and this intuition has already been corroborated by the literature (Siarkiewicz, Trębińska-Szumigraj, Zielińska-Pękał, 2012).

Scientific analyses and accounts of counselling need to conform to methodological standards mandatory for any research on the social life, but they also need to adopt general philosophical and ethical assumptions which pertain to the questions posed by the counselling participants (guidance-seekers and counsellors alike), their understanding of life and their attitudes to the world.² The analyses and

² Anthony Giddens aptly outlines the scope of such questions: *These issues have to do with the nature of human action and the acting self; with how the interaction should be conceptualized and its relation to institutions; and with grasping the practical connotations of social analysis* (Giddens, 1984, pp. xvi-xvii).

accounts need also a terminology which could adequately render the phenomenon they cover. Briefly, they need to be informed by a science of counselling, a theory a counselling, counselling in one word.

Attempts to Define Counselling

It makes sense to start with tracing back the term “counselling” and inquire how our (prospective) research object is (to be) defined and understood. That, actually, turns out to be highly challenging and ambiguous. Counselling, namely, is neither a simple physical phenomenon nor a tangible thing graspable by the senses. It can be discussed only if a certain conceptual apparatus is developed in the first place. “Counselling” is, nevertheless, a so-called sensitising concept in that it affects the imagination and, thereby, even if not accompanied by any illustration, it conjures up an image of what it refers to (cf. Konecki, 2000, p. 38). Such a sensitising concept is indispensable in accounts of genuine counselling practices, and the simpler its definition, the better. The popular (schematic and unambiguously termed), simple, commonsensical definition has it that counselling is the provision of guidance which helps the advice-seeker solve his/her problems. We need to add, however, that the commonsensical view is only one of the many images of counselling put forward in the literature. It is worthwhile to survey them briefly.

Irrespective of the kind of **problem** that the guidance-seeker experiences, the situation of advice-giving, counselling, guidance-provision, etc. can be viewed in terms of a **specific social system** made up by the counsellor and the counselee. It is the bare fact of its being there that is essential for counselling to take place, and counselling is here an action/process/phenomenon/fact in which the participants face up to the counselee’s diverse possible problems (Kargulowa 2004). The problems can range from personal ones concerning private life, through problems affecting the groups or organisations the counselee is engaged with, to the problems pertaining to broader systems, possibly even managed by the counselee, if s/he is a policy-maker or a local, regional or state functionary. The problem-solving process should lead to a change in the counselee, to a *transformation of [his/her] experience, knowledge and action structures* (Alheit, 2011; Kargulowa, 2012; 2013). Counselling is in practice a specific performance – a collaboration effected mainly through words, an event/fact/process which is by definition performative (Siarkiewicz, 2010a). This popular understanding of counselling includes constitutive elements of counselling and its various perceptions in everyday life. In this narrow sense, counselling can be considered to have generally been identified, with its particular aspects still to be explored in order to define general laws and principles pertaining both to its nature and to its social role. Hence, it is still essential to scrutinise other available definitions of counselling.

According to the definitions of first dictionaries and encyclopaedias, the social interaction in which counselling is practised tends to be described as **the counsellor's action** undertaken vis-à-vis the counselee.³ This account seems typical of the sociological line of reasoning to be found across analyses of the process of social life. The action can be professional (performed by a professionally trained counsellor) or non-professional (undertaken by any advice-giver⁴), yet it always has its distinguishable subject, object, aim, methods, tools and means, course and measurable effects. The action is always located in a particular natural, social and cultural environment. If we delve more deeply, counselling can be seen as the performance of a role/profession of counsellor or, alternatively, as the provision of specialised services.⁵ Optimally speaking, the service consists in **cooperation** of the counsellor and the counselee, who jointly address the latter's problem. Sometimes, however, it may gravitate towards **rivalry**, particularly if the counselee has been pressed by others to seek counselling while it is not what s/he really wants at the moment. It can also dwindle into **bought friendship**, when the counselee is eager to sustain contact with the counsellor, without however trying to solve his/her problems or make important change in his/her life with the counsellor's help. The counselee pretends only to wish such changes in order to pass for a "cool" or "up-to-date" person; and the service-providing counsellor merely listens to the client's outpourings, possibly helping him/her out and making him/her feel comfortable and content by offering "ready-made" identities (e.g. a macho, a new sensitive guy, a business woman, etc.). This happens without the counselee investing any effort and without the counsellor fathoming the counselee's emotions and experiences. The counsellor might therein resort to various "intermediaries," e.g. technical devices, statistical data or ready-made patterns. The buying of friendship does not necessarily mean that the counselee cynically purchases the counsellor's attention and manifestations of amity. The act might as well be enticed by the counselee's acute loneliness in the unkindly environment (Kargulowa, 1996).

In psychological terms, and particularly after the „Rogerian turn” (cf. Glad-
ding, 1992, pp. 12-13), counselling tends to be identified with **the counsellor-
counselee relationship** as such. It is even sometimes regarded as a so-called “pure

³ For example, in *Mały słownik języka polskiego PWN [The Small Polish Language Dictionary]* from 1968, the “counselling” entry on page 604 reads: ”providing guidance, instructions and information within a certain defined scope; the activity of counselling services.”

⁴ The term “counsellor” as a rule refers to individuals who are professional counselling practitioners bound to adhere to the code of professional ethics. “Advice-givers” are not constrained by any formal obligations or regulations: advice provision may be their own initiative driven either by a desire to help the advisee or by their own self-interest.

⁵ According to Jeremy Rifkin, the term “services” usually denotes activities whose outcomes are shot-lasting and are consumed while being produced and have no material value: *Services do not qualify as property. They are immaterial and intangible. They are performed not produced. They exist only at the moment they are rendered. They cannot be held, accumulated or inherited* (Rifkin, 2000, pp. 83-84).

relationship,” i.e. one which is sustained because both partners derive pleasure from the mere fact of being part of it and offering each other psychological support, understanding, kindness, tolerance, and security while they jointly seek solutions to the problem (Kargulowa, 2004, pp. 47-50). The counselling relationship which they enter, create and construct is produced in a situation which is specific and demarcated enough to actualise at all, to be separable and distinguishable from all other situations and, at the same time, open enough to simply “be” and “become,” to give opportunities for the participants’ expressive actions, candid displays of feelings, deep reflection, intellectual analyses and emotive experiences. This refers to the situations which take place in counselling facilities, to the situations which take place in unstructured, incidental, random circumstances of real life (cf. Siarkiewicz, 2010) and to the situations in the virtual reality created at the interface with the media (cf. Zielińska-Pękał, 2009; Zierkiewicz, 2004). Whatever happens in a counselling situation, which comes into being because such a dyad produces a space of cooperation, is called counselling. And the site in which the relationship is being made and the time and circumstances in which it develops add up to its context. In this sense, counselling is often identified with delving into existential problems, with partnership-based “Buberian” dialogue, with empathetic communication and transmission of sincere, usually supportive and positive messages (cf. Czerkawska, 2009; Drabik-Podgórna, 2009).

The performative character of the interaction space can be indeed indicated; the cultural “frame” of the situation can be indeed delineated; a general formula of a counselling relationship as “help provision through counselling/using counsellor’s help” could be indeed drawn up; and the particular stages in the provision and reception of help can be indeed distinguished. Yet neither the values brought into the counselling situation, nor the degree to which its participants invest their resources in it, nor the nuances of how the executors of the general formula will actually behave or feel about it, nor the effects of the “help provision/reception in counselling” can be codified and fully planned for an individual and for society, let alone for the whole globe. The relationships of this kind are as a rule considered unique and studied phenomenologically.

Counselling means still something else when it is identified with **operations of institutions** and facilities whose names feature “counselling” in them. The entirety of institutional activity, and not only the actions of particular counsellors, is called counselling. The term includes then all kinds of technical and bureaucratic solutions, which organise the social and psychological dimensions of everything that is going on at the facility (mainly advice-giving, guidance-provision, consultation, individual and group “mild therapy,” etc.). The counselling facility can be a state-managed institution or it can be set up by societies, foundations, political organisations, etc. Democratisation of social relationships fosters proliferation of state and non-state counselling centres. Their activities – counselling – become the target of **social policies** and are perceived largely as a political and economic phenomenon

characteristic of a given country in which such centres are set up, professional counsellors are trained, tasks of particular counselling facilities are appointed and their performance assessed. Discussions are in progress on the ideological and conceptual aspects of counselling, its theoretical assumptions, expected outcomes and side-effects, and about its real and desired organisational structures. The number of the centres, their diversity, availability, and degree to which they are furnished with the indispensable “resources” all seem to evidence the state’s care about the citizens and its effort to meet their needs. Such notion of counselling is meant when one speaks of Polish, French, German or Dutch counselling, of European, Canadian or North-American counselling ideology, and of the career, family, medical or legal counselling systems (cf. Bilon, Kargul, 2012).

The aforementioned counselling *boom* encourages still another perspective in which to explore counselling. Counselling, namely, seems to be not only a social process made up of particular counsellors’ and counselees’ actions, but first and foremost a **process of social life**. Social life with its values and products, constructed in interpersonal relations, can be perpetuated and handed down in some actions or, conversely, destroyed and debased in other ones. Even preliminary observations and superficial analyses suffice to state that counselling is a reinforcing process of social life. By definition friendly, counselling is “an ethically engaged entity,” which seeks to be ethically effective.⁶ Counselling is a social practice, and as such it has long ceased to be the domain of specialists only. Practised not only by qualified counsellors or counselling researchers – counsellologists – and not only in its conventionalised, nearly ritualistic form, it is engaged with also by people who play various social role -, diverse professionals who interlace their non-counselling vocational pursuits with counselling practices.

Counselling transgresses structural limits and boundaries, developing thereby into a network and, concomitantly, into a flow of knowledge and ideas, a stream of human problems, scientific discourses, helping practices, various supporting actions and material objects as well as appliances which transmit, select and store counselling texts (cf. Castells, 2007). To use Bruno Latour’s apt formulation, counselling is [*r*]eal as Nature, narrated as Discourse, collective as Society, existential as Being (Latour, 1993, p. 90). Arguably, counselling has become a discourse of everyday life and, hence, is subject to all changes that have an effect on the everyday. Counselling as a process of everyday social life is undeniably affected by the philosophy of individualism, globalisation, spreading digitisation and reflexive modernisation. We view it as an international grid of interrelated guidance-provision/ reception on the Internet, in other media or in the real world (cf. Bilon, 2010, p. 58ff).

My major point in the foregoing was to show that, as research implies, counselling could be defined on the interdisciplinary and interparadigmatic basis, yet

⁶ This, however, does not mean that counselling is an invariably highly moral social entity and that all actions that counsellors undertake aim at common good.

to rule ultimately what would and what would not count as counselling in real life is a major difficulty. Most researchers believe that the final decision should be left to its “stakeholders,” i.e. participants of the counselling relationship, performers and recipients of particular counselling actions, employees of the counselling facilities. Others postulate that the question should be settled by counselling researchers, especially by counsellologists. So far, no consensus has been reached on this matter, and hence we need to accept the diversity of opinions on the scope of counselling, though some issues do call for a more general agreement.

It would seem from the remarks above that it is urgent to probe more deeply into counselling and provide scientific accounts of it which would show its affinities with and differences from other “formative” social phenomena and processes, e.g. socialisation and upbringing, teaching and learning, therapy and mediation, self-education and rehabilitation, mentoring and coaching, or advertising and propaganda for that matter. Counsellogy strives to compile and systematise the multifaceted research on counselling that has so far been undertaken by various scholars and diversely engaged participants of the “counselling micro-world.”

Counsellogy

The term “poradoznawstwo” (counsellogy) is the Polish name of a science of counselling, a social sub-discipline with a specific object of research (counselling), an interdisciplinary theory of counselling, and a generalised reflection on counselling. Because the name usually not only denotes a thing (an entity/being), but also means something (since formulating a notion entails including some of its features and relations), counsellogy means knowledge of a specific social practice, i.e. counselling. I coined the term and introduced it into the humanities to distinguish various practical helping actions and activities performed by counselling from a reflection on them. Consequently, on the one hand counsellogy studies the often closely interrelated real personal (psychological) and social facts, events and processes whose essence lies in providing help by some people to others through a counselling relationship jointly constructed and developed by them. And on the other, counsellogy explores typologies, interpretations, explanations and personal as well as social meanings of a counselling relationship provided by many scholars, and on this basis draws conclusions, infers laws and makes generalisations.

In broad lines, counselling is supposed to be counselee-friendly and aim to help him/her. However, to capture the entirety of counselling is a serious challenge because, as intimated above, it is an extremely complex process/fact/event which has its diversified and often subjectively perceived nature, dramaturgy and dynamics.⁷ In a very narrow sense, counselling practically comprises consciously

⁷ L. Brammer (1973) distinguishes eight stages of a counselling encounter: entry, clarification, structure, relationship, exploration, consolidation, planning, termination.

undertaken actions, social processes and personal feelings of both parties (individuals or groups) to the relationship, which are oriented first of all toward solving the problem faced by the counselee/s. These include the prospective counselee's attempts to define the problem, efforts to cope with it independently, endeavours to find an appropriate counsellor; later, relation-constructing and sustaining by the counsellor and the counselee; the counsellor's activities commonly dubbed as "devising and transmission of guidance"; the counselee's experiences upon the reception of guidance, advice, and instructions; and finally other related events such as counselees', counsellors' and advice-givers' participation in other events, including both everyday relationships as well as mediations, consultations or negotiations.⁸

Counsellogy as a theory is supposed to systematise and order reflection on counselling as practice which materialises in the aforementioned social behaviours and actions, that is on counselling as an interpersonal relationship, a purposive social action, an organised institutional, local or global activity, and an unplanned, occasional incident. Counsellogy is supposed to deliver a scientific account of them, present their various understandings and provide an opportunity to inquire into them.

In social reality, the "presence" of counsellogy can become manifest in:

- 1) operations of institutions involved in research on counselling, which produce and legitimise counsellogy;
- 2) publication of books and journals devoted to counsellogy-related issues;
- 3) scholarly and common knowledge of counselling compiled in the specialist literature and/or in social consciousness;
- 4) primarily, the development of theory; in assuming a research perspective and looking into the social reality through "culture-tinted lenses" productive of descriptive, interpretive, emancipatory and critical scientific knowledge, a perspective which provides a framework for exploring the meanings of "counselling micro-worlds" (Kargulowa, 2004). As the British methodologist David Silverman (2009) claims, the point in constructing a theory-providing knowledge is not so much to explain the phenomenon it addresses itself, but to determine the relationship between the theory and this phenomenon, reality or practice, and to establish in how far the theory is instrumental in finding out about and/or understanding of these "objects," often not through analysing them in the available reality but sometimes through deconstructing the "object of research." Following his assumptions, as I have already discussed elsewhere (Kargulowa, 2012a), we could state that counsellogy as a mature science/theory of counselling intends to be (1) a set of premises, (2) a system which compiles and systematises accounts of facts, processes or events and/or (3) a result of generalisations and

⁸ The term "counsellor" usually denotes a person who provides guidance on professional basis and is obliged to observe a code of professional ethics. An "advice-giver" is not bound by any formal obligations or rules and provides advice to meet the advisee's needs or to serve his/her own interests.

predictions. Having achieved a degree of maturity but remaining constantly open to development, change and new findings, *by provoking ideas about the presently unknown, theories provide the impetus for research* (Silverman, 2010, p. 110).

Currently, all three types of theory-oriented inclinations are observable in counselling. For many researchers of counselling, counselling is slowly becoming shared knowledge comprised of previous findings, erected upon methodological tenets (paradigms, as Thomas Kuhn [1968] has taught us to think), but providing a basis for new discoveries and new practical solutions. Anna Bilon, who has thoroughly analysed the literature aimed to develop such a theory and generalise knowledge on counselling, observes, among others, that *McLeod, similarly to Polish researchers, claims that given the contemporary state of counselling psychology and theory, it makes more sense to speak of approaches to rather than theories of counselling in analyses of counselling practice* (Bilon, 2010, p. 65). The British researcher believes that *currently there are many more ways of "doing counselling" than there are sets of ideas applied to counselling*. To give up on speaking about the theory of counselling seems all the more proper as *an approach (conception) includes philosophical statements, styles, traditions, tacit knowledge and methodical knowledge* (McLeod, 2003; in: Bilon, *ibid.*), and not only abstracted ideas, defined notions, laws or regularities which make up a clear structure. This is what theories on the whole, and theories of exact sciences in particular, are commonly supposed to deliver. That is why, counselling, a still germinating and highly "imperfect" theory, should perhaps be rendered in a metaphor not of glasses or lenses, but rather of a flickering kaleidoscope that we raise to our eyes to look at the world through and search for – to use Earl Babbie's phrase (2011, p. 15) – *the relationship between attributes and variables* of counselling with its multiple practices, contexts and implications.

The Nature of Counselling Knowledge

In its general content, counselling knowledge is interdisciplinary and combines findings of counselling researchers across various social fields: personal feelings, family life, vocation and employment, childrearing, teaching and learning, health- and beauty-care, culture of coexistence, organisation and management, production, policy-making and politics, etc. This knowledge, as the literature confirms, is produced by researchers from various disciplines and draws both on the humanities and the social sciences, but also on medical, economic and technical sciences. First and foremost, it is generated in research and reflection undertaken by counsellors as such (Kargulowa, 2004). This knowledge corroborates Edmund Mokrzycki's claim that *reflection on the human being, society, culture, etc. is never empirically*

ungrounded since it is always rooted in the rich resources of one's own mental and social experiences (Mokrzycki, 2007, p. 158).

Counsellogical research is intrinsically interparadigmatic and builds on both quantitative and qualitative methodologies developed in other, more mature humanities. On the one hand, its analyses may strictly abide by an ordered procedure, which often leads to discovering new features of participants in counselling processes and their correlations. In such case, *changes in external conditions (environment) and mental processes (personality) must be captured so as to enable an analysis of an interplay between the two*. On the other hand, the analyses may take on the form of *exhaustive conversations which are later meticulously interpreted. (...) Such interpretive work, which is usually performed by a research team who discuss things together, focuses on "reproducing and reconstructing the subjective interpretations of research subjects in order to grasp the interdependencies between their actions and the social context"* (Tilimann, 1996, pp. 29, 30-31).

The contemporary international literature on counselling implies that counselling has been evolving due to such interdisciplinary and multiparadigmatic research (cf. Bilon, 2010). Currently, as already mentioned, action research is becoming more and more widespread, with the counselling stakeholders – counsellors, counsees, owners of counselling facilities, social life organisers – becoming, in parallel, ever more articulate in it.

Empirically rooted, the generalised counsellogical knowledge has been equally importantly augmented by findings and discoveries of the more traditional human sciences, such as philosophy, anthropology, sociology, psychology and educational sciences, as well as by more recent communication sciences, such as the theory of social communication, media studies, cultural studies, social politics, and the like.⁹ They conceptualise and explain human behaviours, emotions and intentions. Drawing on them, counsellogists can, to a certain extent at least, describe, account for and interpret particular stages of counselling, such as counsees' behaviours and mental experiences when seeking help, counsellors' preparation for their role; both parties' behaviours and emotions while constructing a counselling relationship; as well as their behaviours and emotions consequent upon the termination of help provision, i.e. behaviours and emotions which are time-delayed ramifications of participating in a counselling situation. Counsellogists can discover the contexts of counselling practice and its latent dimensions, as well as changes that take place within it and in its participants.

Though the types of knowledge that counsellogists derive from the aforementioned sciences are seldom sharply delineated, there are two major models of

⁹ Anna Bilon, who tries to pinpoint the difference between counselling and earlier theories of counselling, observes that the researchers who previously dealt with counselling – mainly psychologists and psychiatrists – felt bound to their "original specialisations" and anchored their concepts/theories in their respective research tenets, while contemporary counsellogists are predominantly interdisciplinary in their take on counselling and counselling-related phenomena (Bilon, 2012).

counsellogical knowledge organisation in Poland can be distinguished: an object-oriented pattern and a problem-oriented pattern. The former pertains to descriptive knowledge of objective facts, which are perceived as either “inclusive of” or instrumental to counselling. The latter pertains to inquiry into the general laws operative in the counselling reality, values, personal and social dimensions of counselling and its meanings for its participants and broader communities.

Object-oriented knowledge records and typologically describes various kinds of counselling (e.g. family counselling or vocational guidance, etc.), organisations of counselling work (e.g. individual, group or mass counselling, etc.), or counselling methods and tools (e.g. direct counselling or phone-, Internet-, television-mediated counselling, etc.). Problem-oriented knowledge is heuristic; it compiles questions and answers generated in the course of studying experiences, feelings, emotions, reflections, intentions and social behaviours and actions implicated by an individual's presence in the “counselling micro-world.” That is, it is generalized knowledge inferred from analyses of counsellors' and counsees' biographies (Minta, 2012; Wojtasik, 2003; Słowik, 2013), ethnographic studies of facilities in which counselling situations take place (Drabik-Podgórná, 2005; Kargulowa, 1979; Siarkiewicz, 2010; Skałbania, 2012), explorations of routine and creative counselling practices (Czerkawska, 2013; Drabik-Podgórná [ed.], 2007; Siarkiewicz, 2010a; Słowik, 2013; Walulik, 2009) both in organisations (Kłodkowska, 2010; Szumigraj, 2011; Mielczarek, 2009; Wołk, 2009) and in everyday life (Straś-Romanowska, 2009; Siarkiewicz, 2010; Zierkiewicz, 2004), scrutiny of counselling service reception (Minta, 2012; Słowik, 2013; Trębińska-Szumigraj, Zielińska-Pękał, 2013), etc. This knowledge comes also from findings of researchers of other social fields which are, in one way or another, related to counselling, e.g. education (Czerepaniak-Walczak, 2006; Gołębnik, 2009; Piorunek, 2004; Potulicka, 1996), psychotherapy (Kozakiewicz, 2013; Kulczycki, 1998), social work (Czerniawska, 1997; Ładyżyński, 2009; Kozdrowicz, 1993; Marynowicz-Hetka, 2006), rehabilitation (Oleniacz, 2012), public health (Dec, 2012; Izdebski, 2012), the media (Zielińska-Pękał [ed.], 2009), and even economy and production (Bańka, 2007; Nowacki, 2001; Rachalska, 1987, and others).¹⁰ Counsellogy as a science aspires to be, as Silverman would put it, a system which compiles and systematises accounts of facts, processes and events and seeks to *play the narrow-minded precision of laboratory science off against the narrow-mindedness of everyday consciousness and the mass-media and vice versa* (Beck, Giddens, Lash, 1994, p. 31).

In the most general terms, counselling researchers seek to find out *what counselling is*. Having set such a goal, they nevertheless do not pre-determine the final “outcome,” the end-product of their pursuit, counsellogy. Doing their research, they try to make the science of counselling conform to the requirements Giddens sees as typical of generalised expert knowledge – explicative knowledge which shows

¹⁰ These are but a handful of many Polish counselling researchers.

interdependencies, sometimes formulates cause-effect principles, but mostly reveals the sense and meaning of counselling. At the same time, they want the science of counselling to stand up to the permanent verification of “the reflexive everyday.” Therefore, resorting to Giddens, we could say that in its expertise counselling knowledge *is in a fundamental sense non-local and decentred; (...) is tied not to formulaic truth but to a belief in corrigibility of knowledge, a belief that depends on a methodical scepticism (...) the accumulation of expert knowledge involves intrinsic processes of specialization;* and its resources and content show that *trust in abstract systems, or in experts, cannot readily be generated by means of esoteric knowledge.* Hence, to be deemed scientific, this knowledge must be well grounded. And in real life, *expertise interacts with growing institutional reflexivity such that there are regular processes of loss and reappropriation, by people employed in the institutions, of everyday skills and knowledge* (1994, p. 84). Following Jacek Piekarski, we could add that counselling is not only a result of *inquiry into practice because it contributes to constructing the social image of relations in all its participants* (Piekarski, 2007, p. 235).

Towards an Anthropology of Counselling

When construed as a humanistic (psychological-educational-sociological) discipline which is being verified on everyday basis and relies on scientific knowledge rather than on esoteric considerations, counselling seems to approximate anthropology of counselling. In this shape, namely, it is a science about human beings, it probes into their intentional activities rather than into the products of such activities, it does not rely on the preconceived human nature and values, and hence it is anchored in philosophical, cultural and social anthropology.

The anthropological model of counselling, as a rule, endorses a hierarchy of research questions. It prioritises general questions about the human being as a representative of the *homo* species, about its world and its relationship to the world and to itself, about the way it handles the task of self-creation and being-in-the-world, about its biographical experience and viability of relying on it. These questions go beyond a simple inquiry into “man in a (in this case counselling) situation.” More detailed questions – about mental and social processes that counselling participants are involved in when seeking help, finding themselves in a counselling situation, “constructing guidance” or receiving it – are secondary and derivative of the former set of questions.

To answer the general and more specific questions, counselling researchers draw on educational sciences, andragogy, general psychology, developmental psychology, psychology of personality or individual differences and also on anthropology, philosophy, ethics and aesthetics. Because counselling inquires into general facts and events pertaining to broader processes of social life, which are related

to counselling or provide its contexts, it articulates also with social anthropology, sociology, economy and politics. Counsellogy poses also questions about values achieved in or through counselling, which foregrounds the cultural embeddedness of support provision and reception, the role of counselling as a product of culture and the relationships between counsellogy and cultural anthropology. Clearly, although counsellogy is interdisciplinary in its approach to counselling, it can be defined as “counselling anthropology.” We could even contend that heuristic counselling knowledge is first of all anthropological knowledge. We should nevertheless add in passing that this knowledge keeps changing, not least because of the new developments in ontogenetic anthropology, genetics and holistic medicine and the latest findings about the structure and functioning of the central nervous system in humans (cf. e.g. Meijers, 2012; Szendlak, 2012).

Founded upon philosophical, cultural and social anthropology, counselling anthropology today promotes reflexivity as the chief human feature and the imperative of taking responsibility for self-creation. Wondering “*what is ‘reflexivity?’*” Scott Lash proposes that *to this question two answers must be given. First, there is structural reflexivity in which agency, set free from the constraints of social structure, then reflects on the “rules” and “resources” of such structure; reflects on agency’s social conditions of existence. Second, there is self-reflexivity in which agency reflects on itself. In self-reflexivity, previous heteronomous monitoring of agents is displaced by self-monitoring* (1994, p. 115). Clearly, individual reflexivity of a *homo sapiens* representative pertains, in his opinion, both to the human “essence” as such and to the external world. It is both a reflection and a reflexion.¹¹

Career counselling researchers, members of a research group on *life design counselling* (Savickas, Nota, Rossier, Dauwalder, Duarte, Guichard, Soresi, van Esbroeck, 2009) approach individual reflexivity in this way and assume that the participants of a counselling interaction enter it purposefully, intentionally and rationally in order to support the counselee in defining his/her identity and in de/re-constructing his/her project of being-in-the-world in the existing social and cultural conditions.

The group endorse Jean Guichard’s *self-construction model* (Guichard, 2009), the concept which, as Guichard himself reports, combines sociological, social-cognitive and dynamic approaches. It holds that in the process of self-creation, people in the postmodern world do use ready-made identities offered to them by their communities, but they also constantly self-reflect and choose the option they find the most suitable in a wide array of all variants on offer. The social-cognitive aspects pertain to identity frameworks and forms which individuals produce. J. Guichard assumes that cognitive structures which are generated in human memory enable the formation of both self-images and images of others. These specific cognitive structures come into being under the impact of conversations and relationships an

¹¹ While “reflectivity” means reflecting on something, “reflexivity” is a *self-confrontation*, denoting self-reflexion and reflecting on reflection (Beck, Giddens, Lash, 1994, p. 6).

individual engages in in his/her community. Guichard calls them identity structures and believes that they are bound up with such social categories as gender, religion, sexual preferences, vocational interests, performed professions, etc. Individual cognitive identity structures are composed of sets of features which contain default values shaped by social stereotypes (e.g. the “masculine” default value is attributed to a set of features framing the gender dimensions of the vocation in the “engineer” identity, for example). In the minds of socially situated people, identity frames produce ordered systems which enable them to situate others and themselves both in relation to other people and in relation to the community. Identity self-construction, according to Jean Guichard, consists in the internalisation of self-images or images of other people that are to be found in socialisation fields based on a selected identity framework (cf. Duarte, 2009; Guichard, 2010). Challenges to self-construction can make one seek help, including a counsellor’s assistance.

The counselee could be called *homo consultans*, or *homo sapiens consultans*, in the semblance of coinages invented to depict participants of other dimension of social life, e.g. *homo faber* (work), *homo ludens* (play), *homo patiens* (suffering), etc. Yet, I would treat the label of *homo consultans* rather cautiously, without insisting that it encapsulates “generic” properties of each and every *homo*, which is what the terms *homo sapiens sapiens* and, as Huizinga argues, *homo ludens* convey. *Homo consultans* refers, namely, only to a “socialised” human being embedded in a community. Rather than comprising any human creature simply by virtue of its being born, the term denotes an active human being who intentionally engages in (mental and/or physical) purposive activities in seeking others’ help upon encountering an obstacle s/he cannot overcome on his/her own. An inactive *homo* does not need counselling, and help/advice-seeking is not an autonomous activity dissociated from all other types of activity. A person seeks advice on something, approaches somebody for help or provides guidance to somebody often in order to understand/validate the sense of action, though sometimes in order to facilitate and shorten independent problem-solving. In the latter case, using (technological) counselling proves the person’s laziness, yet still advice/help-seeking even here is not undertaken for the sake of advice/help-seeking itself.

Mark Savickas argues that if a guidance-seeking young person has a reflexive attitude to his/her life, his/her career trajectory – and, we could add, his/her reflexivity development – proceeds in three stages: an actor, who on the basis of experience accumulated in socialisation reproduces a social role heavily dependent upon the habitus; an agent, who seeks to individually meet social expectations and manifests his/her life potential; and an author, who consciously constructs his/her vocational career, which is also his/her life career (Savickas, 2011). And perhaps not all of these stages can be reached by all people, yet in each of them people may need and expect counselling support (Minta, 2012).

According to Lash, *reflexivity passes through the “loop” of or is mediated by expert-systems* (1994, p. 151). In all cases, however, reflexivity is bound up with “action.” It

is a result of an intellectual effort invested by a human being whom Bauman sees as *homo eligens* – “man choosing” (Bauman, 2011, p. 22); and as such it results from career-related choice-making and from decisions to use a counsellor’s help.

Given this, we cannot divide humankind into those who only seek others’ guidance and those who only provide guidance to others. Depending on particular circumstances, the social roles of the parties to the counselling relationship can change, and a counselee can prove an expert (counsellor) in another matter. Giddens notices that *the individual who consults an expert could have sat in that person’s place, had he or she concentrated on the same learning process* (1994, p. 89). Concurring with Giddens, as we might, on this point, we need nevertheless remember that an expert-counsellor must meet also other criteria beyond commanding a certain knowledge.

It needs to be emphasised that the term *homo consultans* denotes a person who is in a sense uncertain/vulnerable and lacking in something (knowledge, skills, or inner strength) and, because of it, enters a relationship with another person – a counsellor. Thereby, the term captures both the counselee’s self-attitude and his/her participation in a social relationship.

To sum up, anthropologically speaking, persons that resort to counselling are perceived as “normal,” engaged, and active individuals who exercise reflexive self-control and seek to understand themselves and the world, though at a particular moment they cannot cope with certain problems. To use Beck’s formulation (1994, p. 14), they are viewed as involved in *the manufacture, self-design and self-staging of not just [their] own biography, but also its commitments and networks, as preferences and life phases change*. It is assumed that, generally, each human being is capable of a cognitive effort (*sibi consulere*) which fosters self-knowledge. With this, an individual can present his/her self and vocation, and engage in a personal task of identity self-construction. This task is always embarked upon and performed in particular mental and socio-cultural conditions.

Counsellogists specify that the situations perceived as difficult, new and/or uncertain require the greatest cognitive effort that engages biographical knowledge. They believe this is the case even if experiencing such circumstances is not tantamount to facing a problem situation (cf. Szumigraj, 2009). And if a problem situation does occur, they claim, people usually cope with it on their own at the beginning, only later seeking help in a relationship with the Other, with a *consultor*.

As a result, we could observe that irrespective of the outcomes of counselling and their assessment, the anthropological approach offers a multiperspectival view of counselling. It perceives counselling as an interpersonal relation, a product of culture and a process of social life. In their research, counselling anthropologists focus on the meanings of help provision in counselling as well as on the meanings of help reception in counselling (cf. Czerkawska, Drabik-Podgórna, Teusz, Straś-Romanowska, in: *Poradownawstwo*, 2009). The counsellor and the counselee enter a relationship which is firmly located in cultural, social, political and economic

realities, and by participating reflexively in it they analyse the counselee's heretofore life-course, assess his/her biographical transitions, define the meaning of problems, construct projects of changes in his/her "being-in-the-world" and form his/her life trajectory. At the same time, they make sense and meanings of the relationship itself, which is crucial from the counsellological point of view. They prove that the counselling process is intrinsically ethical.

We could state, therefore, that the anthropological analysis of counselling seeks to answer the following questions:

- ◆ which behaviours, sensations and experiences indicate how people cope with problems, particularly those pertaining to their identities and being-in-the-world?
- ◆ where, amidst these ways of coping, is counselling located?
- ◆ what facts, processes and events make up counselling?
- ◆ what are the basic laws of coping, guidance-seeking and support-provision?

Even though it is predominantly assumed that counselling is counselee-friendly, counselling is neither consistently nor uniformly applauded. S. Lash is clearly averse to this form of help, noticing that: *It is only when things have really broken down that we bring in the "expert-system", either as a set of legitimating arguments for our side of the dispute, or, worse [my emphasis], as professionals in the flesh* (1994, p. 163). Lash motivates his objections to counselling, pointing out that our tendency preventively to use expert-systems tends in anticipation to create a semantic deficit in intimate relationships (*Ibid.*, p. 163), because it meets the deep human need of communicating with others. Close relationships, which have so far been made and sustained within families, are today rather easily made outside families due to, among others, widespread availability of expert help (offered by counsellors, psychotherapists, etc.).

This is not the only example of censure that the counsellological literature offers in the face of unpredictable ramifications of counselling (cf. Holt, 1981; Kargul, 1985; Mielczarek, 2009; Zierkiewicz, 2004). The well-known critical voices increase the complexity of accounts of *homo sapiens consultans* and of counselling help effects. Equally importantly, they compel counsellology to go beyond reflection and engage in self-reflexive practices.

Anthropology of counselling is a new perspective and a new discipline within the counsellological discourse. In the above, I could only outline it very briefly. I believe that its essence is most aptly grasped by Prof. Jean Guichard, who in a footnote to his report on the inaugural conference of the UNESCO Chair of Lifelong Guidance and Counselling wrote: *Counsellology can be defined – in line with Alicja Kargulowa's work – as an anthropology based on the insight that man is fundamentally a speaking being, able to look at things from the perspective of the other, and, in doing so, to give advice to other people or to him/herself as well as to receive advice from others or from him/herself* (available at www.pedagogika.uni.wroc.pl/unesco). Further

research, analyses and discussions around this idea will undoubtedly contribute to development and advancement of anthropology of counselling.

(Translated from Polish by Patrycja Poniatowska)

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