On the counselling of a network society

Alicja Kargulowa

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The network character of phenomena: generating human problems

In descriptions of today’s social world, such terms as variability, ambivalence and the unpredictability of events dominate. In descriptions of industry there is talk of an information age, globalisation and networking. In reflections on culture it is terms such as mass, intercultural and transnational culture which are mentioned, along with the cultures of individualism, fundamentalism and speed. All the terms are employed to convey an image of contemporary reality, to emphasise to a greater or lesser extent both the appearance of new phenomena and the emergence of various variants of these and also the connections being created not only on a local/community scale, not only in individual states or territories, but also on a global scale. The applied terminology draws attention to the kind of relations present in contemporary reality which on general examination – in the opinion of the Spanish sociologist Manuel Castells –

are undefined, and sometimes indefinable. These are networks of capital, production, communication, crime, international institutions, supranational military apparatuses, non-governmental organisations, transnational religions, movements of public opinion and social movements of all kinds, including terrorist movements (Castells 2004, p. 357).

The aforementioned networks intersect and create nodes which eventually give shape to the processes occurring in them and reinforce their influence but at other times are in conflict with each other, leading to situations experienced by nation states and communities in various ways, but most importantly, they impress themselves in
different ways on the day to day experiences of individuals. For day to day life – as Piotr Sztompka figuratively remarks – is both the originary source and mirror of everything else that exists in society – systems, organisations, structures, culture (Sztompka 2008, p. 215). It is in this daily life that, just when the world becomes too large to be controlled, social actors aim to shrink it back to their size and reach. When networks dissolve time and space, people anchor themselves in places, and recall their historic memory. (Castells 2004, p. 69). The reconstruction of the world of everyday life completed by individual human beings thus expresses itself in an attempt to fathom and reduce a complicated networked reality, by a return to cultural community and by the pursuit of a definition of their own identity. This is often a turning in on themselves, towards their “internal lives”, towards their subjectivity and answers to the question of “Who am I?” constructed through their relations with other members of the community.

These psychological processes were recognised as fundamental in counselling and psychotherapy by Carl Rogers as early as the 1940s. It is predominantly these which are found as the root cause for seeking help from others and have become the impulse for the creation of different kinds of therapy, coaching sessions and relaxation exercises, and have also initiated the provision of counselling aid in the form of “the helpful conversation” and “meeting groups” in specially generated structures. Nowadays these structures are subject to “blurring” and the commonly observed concentration on oneself, the search for support in identifying oneself and above all making use of the help of others at critical moments and times of transition are defined by Małgorzata Jacyno (2007) as therapeutic discourse. This is neither unitary in character nor is it something that is completely organised, coherent, uniform or realised in specially created institutions. On the contrary, it is a dynamic, multi-stranded discourse proceeding in the private sphere of individuals and in the public space of social life. It is one of the processes of social life involving various people, associations and local, national and international organisations as well as a diverse media. A process whose flexibility and intensity in a large measure results from relations which are established between, on the one hand, “dispensers of knowledge” and “problem experts” or individuals who are considered to be such and were employed by various institutions, sometimes people with missionary instincts rushing to help others who voluntarily make a concerted effort to unravel the complexities in the fates of the contemporary world and people who aim to find a way out of problematic situations; and on the other hand, with people whose hopelessness, doubts, uncertainties and fears have become so severe that they desire, or need, to enlist the help of the first group of people. It is precisely these events, in the form of the passing on/receiving of counselling, advice, signs of understanding, empathy and support and also information and instructions which are created by people, who influence each other and which come into play at various levels of social life but leave their stamp on daily life, which together comprise the social process which is described as counselling.
A full grasp of the scope, directions of development and factors deciding the trajectory flow of the processes of advice giving, psychological support, counselling and empathetic togetherness is impossible. Nevertheless occasionally the temptation occurs to take a closer look at their component parts, explain the forces they exert and understand their roles in the lives of individuals, organisations or society. In such quests one repeatedly finds oneself turning first to the institutional actions and descriptions of institutions practising professional counselling which are committed to “impacting a sense of order” to helping actions. Initiatives appearing at the beginning of the last century, the epoch of early modernism are revisited and attempts are undertaken to find explanations for the usefulness and adequacy of counselling in response to the needs of individual and those of society, i.e. search for the sources and causes of the creation and development of institutionalised counselling in particular, but also the exploitation of “natural” counselling. The results of these undertakings do not however always deliver answers which would be satisfactory and useful at the present time.

The inadequacy of systemic counselling in the new reality

The organised system of counselling at the beginning of the 20th century carried an unambiguous message: the support of helpless people through the provision of clear directions on how to live, what to do, what to avoid and what to prevent. As I have written elsewhere (Kargulowa 2009), the first period of modernity often called “simple modernity”, expressed itself – in Zygmunt Baumann’s view – as the realisation of two principles, presented synthetically by Zbigniew Bokszański:

(1) a human being should be a disciplined person; his/her activities should be regulated, predictable and susceptible to regulation. (2) a human being in him/herself does not constitute a self-sufficient “whole”, “capable of survival”, so (s)he has to engage with others, conforming to the general requirements that are laid down (Bokszański 2007, p. 39).

The social order at the onset of modernity was internally cohesive and durable. The identity of the individual residing in it was supposed to be a lifelong project constructed according to a plan established from above. The individual was supposed to realise her “calling” – referring at that time, not only to the clerical lifestyle but also the secular – by incorporating essential, commonly shared values into her biography. Counselling, as one of the institutionalised forms of social life, contributing to the maintenance of the social order through diagnostic and advisory\(^1\) action, was supposed to make it easier for

\(^1\) Counselling and advice work are often incorrectly identified with each other. By counselling, I understand an interpersonal relationship between advisor and client entailing the provision of help to the person in need of it by the reflexive working through of her problems, the provision of counselling and help,
individuals to both discover that calling and to progress more smoothly through transitions and to find their place in the social structure in the spheres of production, culture and the distribution of goods and services etc.

Therefore, directives were given to people, exhibiting helplessness either in their lives, in choosing a profession or in seeking work, by qualified counsellors employed in counselling centres opened by the state or local charitable, industrial, trade or religious associations, among others. As Tadeusz Aleksander describes in his analysis of the practices of one of the occupational counselling centres of this period, these specialists conducted observations of social life and academic research, constructed tools for the measurement of people’s opportunities and skills, delivered lectures on the significance of a suitable choice of profession and even conducted courses preparing former psycho technicians and occupational counsellors, but above all provided counselling on the basis of psychological and psycho technical researches. The significance of the presented diagnoses and provided recommendations was affirmed by an organised system of “guarantees”, for… in many environments, certificates confirming the suitability of students accepted onto occupational studies courses had to be made out at counselling centres (Aleksander 2009, p. 118). Even from this example it can be seen to what extent the interlinked systems of education, employment and production represented a distinct unified whole – oriented towards the gaining of predictable results that were expected and achieved by a community of “producer-executors” – and also how the occupational counselling embedded in this system fulfilled the task of optimising the whole complex system, while being a strongly united element of the whole, integrally linked with it and not straying beyond it when reaching practical solutions.

Nevertheless, this state, which is characteristic of “simple modernity”, is becoming impossible to maintain in the conditions of the significantly more complex “second modernity”, in the epoch named “fluid modernity”, “late modernity” and “reflexive modernity”. The fragmentation of reality, the changeability and ambivalence, characteristic of modern times have blurred the boundaries that were earlier fiercely adhered to by emerging systems and have called into being fluid structures that adapt their form and practices to the requirements of the moment and frequently of almost immediate use in the world of “purchaser-consumers”, even when they support specific organisations like a workplace. Whereas earlier a unit was created in large manufacturing plants known as a “personal counselling” unit, currently counselling is practised in these by different services, more often than not as an activity supporting or accompanying educational processes or tailored to the form, time and place of production, especially when this is based on new technologies and IT. Examples of this include teleworking, and consultations and psychological support. Sometimes counselling is called the activity of a counsellor, the activity of a complete counselling institution or even a complete system or network of counselling centres. Advice giving is a narrower concept and denotes activity in general limiting itself to the provision of straightforward advice, pointers, directions or tasks to complete. It is closer to what is known as directive counselling.
staff, leasing, outsourcing, mentoring, coaching and outplacement as new forms of non-standard employment which to a varied extent entail counselling help (see Wolk 2009) in accordance with the concept of human relations (HR).

Castells thinks that the whole of contemporary reality is constructed from flows, by which he understands purposeful, repetitive, programmable sequences of exchange and interaction between physically disjointed positions held by social actors in economic, political and symbolic structures of society (Castells 2010, p. 412). Counselling, while it remains within the sphere of personal and social services, is also one of these flows, which locates itself in various social structures of a local, national and international character.

Whereas counselling in the epoch of “simple modernity”, by taking up helping activities, was able, to a large extent, to determine the shaping of the identities of the people benefiting from it, since it took into account the desire of people taking part in social life to find their place in the social structure and supported their efforts to be included in the established system and their attempts to adhere to principles and activity that complied with socially accepted models. Contemporary counselling must take into account that we are faced with the need to continually make new choices from among multifarious propositions relating to values, lifestyles, work, ways of spending free time, even kinds of identity and also that we are trying to meet the requirements of reflexive participation in the pulsating and dynamic world of life and must be aware that all of these choices carry with them the risk of uncertainty, because they may turn out to be misguided, since by adopting them we are not automatically guaranteed lasting benefits.

Currently, counselling increasingly seems to be in the form of help sought by marginalised or psychologically weak, helpless people and also resourceful people, confused by a profusion of propositions: people putting forward their own proposition or undecided with regard to which to choose or make use of. The changes described earlier mean that counselling cannot crystallise into the form of an optimal system gathering together enlightened “experts on life”. Those advice workers that practice counselling have to depart from the traditional role of diagnostician, prognostician and expert, drawing from a bank of verified, documented, irrefutable knowledge and

It is evident that the first conceptualisations of the tasks of occupational counselling as a service on an international scale were contained in a EWG Council Decision from 1963 that laid down general principles for the execution of occupational counselling. In subsequent years, three forms of cooperation in this area were adopted by the Community: from 1967 the drawing up of periodic reports on the state of occupational counselling in separate countries; from 1978 the realisation of programmes and initiatives indirectly and directly supporting the realisation of occupational counselling’s aims; from 1987 the development of occupational counselling for the long term unemployed. A key moment was the decision by the Council of the EU on 6th December 1994 to establish a European Community programme of activity in the field of education and training policy which is called the Leonardo da Vinci programme into life, which is completely devoted to the development of occupational counselling (cf. Paszkowska-Rogacz 2001, p. 7; Siarkiewicz R. 2004, pp. 141-142).
instead assume the difficult role of partner: sometimes a patient interpreter, sometimes a doubting guide through the various complexities of life, sometimes an irony-equipped companion through the wide-ranging territory covered by “existential consumption”, sometimes an educator and even a therapist (Minta 2009). This has numerous consequences as evident in the organisation of counselling on a global and national scale as well as in the vision of the counsellor-client relationship (see Czerkawska 2004; Drabik-Podgórna 2009; Malewski 2003; Mielczarek 2009; Wojtasik 2009).

The network character of modern counselling

In a fluid reality, counselling has become – to use Castells’ terminology – a flow, a stream created from human problems, emotions, knowledge, action and behaviour as well as material and symbolic products (associations, organisations, equipment), a flow which is global in character yet possible to grasp in day-to-day life, even anchored in daily reality and retained through it. It has become an extremely diverse process of social life to a large extent “undefined and indefinable”, as Castells would describe it, which does not mean, however, that all the specialised forms developed earlier have been renounced in it or that the actions of qualified counsellors formulated within the area it covers have been replaced by the advice of friends and “well-informed people” or that deeper reflection on its meaning, significance and practice methods or results is in decline. It might even be said that the complete opposite is the case.

Powerful specialist consultancy and counselling firms which attempt to advise on the resolution of global problems are familiar throughout the world, the advisory bodies of representatives of national governments at various grades of administration are expanding and the role of counselling in the resolution of problems of migrating populations, in the struggle against exclusion and the marginalisation of people not keeping pace with the development of civilisation and the struggle against terrorism and crime.

3 An example is provided by the IEAVG International Conference which took place on 3-5 June 2009 in Jyvaskyla in Finland, whose title alone, Coherence, Co-operation and Quality in Guidance and Counselling, is indicative of the continual search for a scientific basis for counselling and advice work activity that would guarantee coherence, cooperation and a quality of service provision on a global scale. Cf. also Wojtasik (2009a); Szumigraj (2010).

4 A role of this kind is fulfilled by such bodies as the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, whose Committee on Education and Committee on Employment, Labour and Social Affairs, on the application of representatives of the 2000 Lisbon Summit, undertook a review of policy in the counselling field. The review was initially embraced by 14 European countries and also Australia, Canada and Korea. Whereas counselling policy within the EU had been focused on the passage of young people from school into the workplace, the proposed review was concentrated on lifelong learning among young people and adults (Watts 2003). This may attest to states passing over responsibility for their careers to individual people, the shrinking of the political apparatus of caring nations and the development of a neo-liberal
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has been elevated in the global economy. The most diverse advice and counselling are also transmitted by the mass media and Internet. The dispensed diagnoses, expertise and prognoses are honed down to prescriptions, directives and recommendations and these in turn are submitted to a social consultation processes, a procedure which is supposed to provide proof of the reflexive relationship of the organisers of social life to global problems, common concern over the social order and the bolstering of people in their attempts to cope with the dynamics of change through the development of counselling, among other processes (see Watts & Sultana 2005).

Common features of the aforementioned firms, consortia and advisory bodies are their openness, dynamism, adaptability and the short term nature of the activities they engage in. These bodies are not, in general, discrete elements simultaneously built into the structures of power, production, administration or defence, as was once the case. Very often they are groups of people employed to complete specific tasks, groups composed of competent people who function in several different groups interlinked with a network of connections with a parent firm and other organisations producing knowledge, processing information and distributing it among different clients. Thus the components of the network are both autonomous and dependent vis-à-vis the network and may be part of other networks and hence other media systems aimed at different targets (Castells 2008, p. 179). Besides this, each of the elements in this network, both internal and external, is rooted in specific cultural-institutional environments (nations, regions, cities) which influence the network to a varied degree (ibid., p. 196).

In such a network of ties it is difficult to unequivocally and definitively point to one source of knowledge from which advisors draw, or to determine one kind or discipline of science which predominates in its production, or identify one group steering the flow or to give all the conditions reinforcing or weakening the dynamics of counselling’s development on a global scale. Counselling’s fluid structure leads to it eventually assuming the form of specialised, organised actions executed by large institutional groups committed to the provision of counselling, not only in private matters affecting individual clients, but also often advising within a wider arena on national or international affairs; on other occasions it simply comes down to a two-person counsellor-client relationship. Sometimes this is an intimate face to face dialogue between the person seeking help and a person committed to providing it, while at other times it is a virtual meeting through the agency of the mass media between an anonymous receiver and anonymous counsellor.

culture. National policy changes with regard to counselling and the changes in career counselling itself since the changeover of power in 1989 are presented by Marcin Szumigraj (2011).

5 A good example in this case would be the renowned specialist Prof. Tony Watts, who is employed as a visiting professor at the University of Derby and Canterbury Christ Church University, he is a Knight Order of the British Empire, has co-founded and worked at non-governmental organisations in Great Britain and is an expert on various organisations but is best known in Poland as a World Bank expert.
Counselling as a process “happens” not – as was once the case – in individual isolated institutions or groups but in the wide space of flows which grants it material support and links what is occurring in it at the same time. In Castells’ opinion, the space of flows is material organisation of concurrent social practices which operate through flows (2010, p. 412). It is comprised of three elements: (1) a place which could be both a physical space like a nation, city or region, even a specific counselling institution, or a technical infrastructure, i.e. equipment which currently often relies on microelectronics, telecommunications, computer processing and information technology; (2) nodes and concentrators (nodes are sequences of actions and organisations locally grouped around key network functions, while concentrators coordinate the fluid interactions of elements integrated into the network).

Every network defines its sites according to the function and hierarchy of each site, and to the characteristics of the product or service to be processed in the network (ibid., p. 444).

As far as counselling is concerned, the nodes could be both research groups trying to determine areas of helplessness and the possibility of help being provided by counselling, higher education establishments that train counsellors, groups of “help specialists” developing new work methods, counsellor associations and also individual counselling centres and incidental counselling situations occurring on a micro-scale and often assuming the form of a conversation between and counsellor and client; while the concentrators could be congresses, academic seminars, joint publications, conventions and specialist discussions assessing counsellors’ work methods and drawing up directives, acclamations and recommendations on a local or international level.

The spatial organisation of the dominating interests specific to a given social structure is the last (3) element of the space of flows. It is not structural, but “is enacted, as a matter of fact devised, decided on and implemented by social actors” (Castells 2008, p. 415). It could rely on the preferences of specific counselling actions which could be taken up in order to solve the problems of individuals and local, national or global problems in such counselling fields as educational, occupational or career counselling or by counselling for people at risk of social isolation or marginalisation (see Plant 2003). The domination of individual tasks (interests) over others might be determined by organisers of social life (power elites) calling on the services of various counselling centres or advisory groups, local social activists, representatives of individual groups awaiting help from counselling centres, counselling researchers or other bodies. The real social domination – as can be read in Castells –

stems from the fact that cultural codes are embedded in the social structure in such a way that possession of these codes opens the access to the power structure. For in practice… the space of flows is made up of personal micro-networks that project their interests in functional macro-networks throughout the global set of interactions in the space of flows (Castells 2004, p. 416).
The organisational space of the dominating interests can thus influence the opening or closing of specific counselling institutions, the introduction or discontinuation of directions of study at higher education establishments preparing counsellors, the level of funding directed at academic research important for counselling, the purchase of materials, books and research tools, the participation of counsellors and researchers in conferences and even counselling’s content. Counselling, as can be seen, belongs to that kind of social flow whose *aims and change of targets are continually shaping and constantly revamping the structuring of resources* (Castells 2008, p. 179). And these phenomena can have a personal, sometimes local, character but are increasingly, together with the globalisation of the economy and policy in the field of social services, assuming an international character (Watts 2003). For example, at the IEAVG International Conference in Finland mentioned earlier, a final declaration directed at politicians throughout the world was prepared in which attention was drawn to the significance of counselling during an economic crisis, its role in the maintenance of a highly qualified workforce and the high economic level of society as well as its involvement in the maintenance of social stability through the provision of help to individuals in the rebuilding of their shaken self-confidence. Hence we can read that the AIOSP/IAEVG, as the largest worldwide guidance practitioners association, appeals to providers, practitioners and policy makers, to increase their efforts to provide a service that helps people overcome the impact of the current crisis, adapt to the rapid changes in the labour market and to contribute to the long-term societal and economic outcomes of economically focussed guidance (after Szumigraj 2010).

Similar appeals, suggestions or points of emphasis can also be put forward or applied by other bodies.

“Personal” counselling – participating in a micro-network

Considering counselling on a global scale through the prism of fluid modernity, it is far from working through all the changes which have occurred in it as a social life process, a social activity and as an interpersonal relationship. Whereas counselling’s fluid character, so typical of “reflexive modernity”, when perceived on a national or global scale, appears to be something new which is characteristic of modern times, it has been a familiar phenomenon in people’s daily lives for a long time, completely natural, especially when we have in mind non-professional counselling in the form of advice from devoted and sympathetic people, those who are better informed and more competent or loved ones. However it is worth reflecting whether the fluidity of this “natural” counselling has not undergone some kind of change in the epoch of “fluid modernity” and whether it is the very same traditional counselling practiced in interpersonal structures.
The researches of Elżbieta Siarkiewicz (forthcoming), among others, on fragments of daily life deliver partial answers with regard to this and to some extent reveal the changes which counselling, rooted in everyday life, has undergone (see also Zielińska-Pękał 2009a; Trębińska-Szumigraj 2009). It is also clear from the debates which are in progress on the subject of identity, ways of shaping it among modern people and getting through the problems connected with it. In the modern world, identity – in the opinion of some –

is an energetic dialectical force opposing the dislocating dynamics of the network society. (...) it appears as the alienated “other” of globalisation, “timeless time” and the “space of flows” devoid of a concrete location, in other words it is proof of opposition to the pressures of the network society.

In the opinion of Anthony Giddens, it is something else, a “reflexive undertaking” each of us complete in our daily choices. However, in the opinion of postmodernists it is something practiced “upon” people in the process through which they are inserted into social relationships, and something practiced by people in the appropriations they accomplish in the generation and circulation of social discourse. Identity is a lot like a network (Barney 2008, pp. 169, 175-176).

Depending on the way identity is presented, the problems which link it with its shaping or expression can be defined in various ways and other challenges can appear before counselling.

Already resonating in this debate are the changes which have taken place on a global scale and in the private sphere, changes visible in the evidence of the growth of social consciousness which are more often than not demonstrated publicly and physically present in various areas of life. They are perceptible in this case in the organisation of professional work and the attitude to it which has been brought about by international commercial exchange, the appearance of new technologies and the growth in the employability of women; it is clear how they are linked with the transformations emanating from the development of an increasingly globalised popular culture; and that they are linked to the growth of diverse risks – both health risk tied to the poisoning of the environment and those emerging from social inequalities, crime and social deviation (see Giddens 2009). The phenomena implied by the large changes in daily life on the whole appear imperceptible yet are evident enough to resonate with the researches of sociologists. As Piotr Sztompka (2008, p. 214) notes;

(...) sociology is striving to go beyond what is obvious, to probe more deeply into ordinary experienced events, to analyse them, construct classifications and decode them; it is enough to browse through the catalogues of the largest international publishers of recent years to notice how many books are being published about seemingly obvious and sometimes trivial matters: the sociology of conversation, of love, friendship, the body, health, travel, shopping, money, play, humour and
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laughter, of dignity or some kinds of regularities providing the basis for theoretical
generalisations. The sociology of daily life applies the “hermeneutics of suspicion”
(...) it hauls out into the daylight all these fragments, these small scale situations,
these banalities which, by establishing themselves, create the essence of existence.

Counselling cannot escape from the effects of these changes and clearly remains un-
der their influence, because – fundamentally, from the point of view of its development
– the emerging sense of loss, a certain disorientation and the trauma of change – direct
people’s interest towards the daily sphere of life (ibid.) and strengthen the demand for
help in setting it in order. Counselling studies researches confirm that these changes
are reflected in the forms of work engaged in with counselling clients, and even in the
content of conversations between the counsellor and person seeking advice (Kargulowa
2009a; Siarkiewicz 2010) For one of the indicators of the new situation is a changed
language, the appearance of a whole new vocabulary for denoting the new forms of
behaviour which become possible due to new technical equipment and new organi-
sational forms (Sztompka 2008). Above all, it is possible to note a marked growth in
mediated counselling. The researches of Daria Zielińska-Pękął (2009) indicate that this
kind of counselling often encompasses progressively wider circles of people in a man-
ner beyond its own control, irrespective of their sex, age, level of education or pursued
profession. For the advice contained in the mass media, and especially on television, is
often conveyed unintentionally, not only through the media, but also, alongside other
media, and also in the media, when it is “given” by some of the protagonists in films
and television serials or news reporters to their co-protagonists. Viewers become recipi-
ents of this advice in a planned manner or en passant. Counselling received in various
ways is sometimes passed onto others through informal contact situations as part of
what is known as chance counselling, “doorstep counselling” (Siarkiewicz 2009) or
“corridor counselling”, by means of the Internet or a mobile phone (Zielińska-Pękął
2009a), or in other “places” – to use Castells’ language – facilitating the functioning of
micro-networks. Its presence in daily life has markedly altered the form of “personal
counselling”. A person seeking advice need not leave her house to receive counselling
from specialists or sympathetic people such as those surfing the Internet, involved in
discussion forums or in a television studio. In fact, she might have already turned to
a guide in book form or the advice contained in a magazine (Zierkiewicz 2004), but,
nevertheless, she currently has access to a significantly wider spectrum of “nodes and
concentrators”, which stimulate self-reflexivity and even identity transformations.

The changes also affect direct counselling conducted by professionals. This is in
fact evident in the evolution of Carl Rogers’ views. This therapist and researcher is
the famous creator of “client-centred therapy”. It was the diagnosis in the first stage of
therapeutic work of a client’s internal experiences, her aspirations, desires, feelings of
anxiety and lack of self-acceptance that was most important for Rogers and determined
the course of therapy in accordance with the humanistic concept of supporting others.
For aid in the definition, extraction and disclosure of problems in a safe therapeutic environment was at that time the aim of helping activities and the basis of the provision of counselling\(^6\). In his later works, however, Rogers began to appreciate much more the value not only of the psychoanalytical but also the social aspect of the counselling situation and directed the majority of his attention towards the course of the relationships which formed between himself and the client, the client and other members of the group and also between all the members of the therapy group. These established relationships, which facilitated reconciliation with and acceptance of oneself, represented nothing other than the client’s redefinition of her identity and the achievements of the intended aim of therapy (Rogers 1991).

As can be seen, Rogers’ visionary foresight was grounded in the fact that, when beginning his work in the 1940s, he found to some extent a remedy to the problems of people of this period, the period known as simple modernity. At the time, the problems that individual people were experiencing resulted from their desire to adapt themselves, as far as possible, to social requirements while concurrently fulfilling their life missions. These problems underwent a change at the end of the century, when the main problem became the desire to be in a community and the need for people to maintain (in spite of this) their own individuality and autonomy.

Questions of the choice of values or redefinition of one’s own identity currently appear in the work of the counsellor on a daily basis, yet the responsibility for the choices made and decisions taken is transferred to the person seeking advice. For the client of the modern counsellor is increasingly a greater specialist in the area of her own problems than anyone else and the task of the counsellor supporting her is not to define these, but to cooperate with her in the reflexive contemplation of the; to offer help with the understanding of their significance from a biographical perspective and the examination of their diverse causes, contexts and effects; to offer help not so much with the resolution of these problems as with coping with them (Straś-Romanowska 2009; Szumigraj 2009; Teusz 2009).

Hence the counsellor can be a specialist in some field, a close person connected by blood ties, a devoted person deriving satisfaction from simply participating in a counselling situation or a “bought friend”, i.e. a counsellor professionally involved in the provision of counselling satisfying the needs of her clients (see Trębińska-Szumigraj 2009). Counselling can be given in a specialist’s consulting room furnished with the clients’ sense of well-being in mind and also in a place certainly not arranged for it, a somewhat “virtual” counselling centre symbolically assigned to the space of school corridor, kindergarden hall, library, café or park bench (E. Siarkiewicz 2004; Z-art. 2009). But the real novelty here is most often not the helplessness of the person seeking help, but encompasses the whole situation in which it comes into being and the whole emotional-mental-behavioural context in which it is created as well as the wider socio-cultural conditions of counselling as a form of help.

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\(^6\) The term “counselling” refers here not to the text of the spoken words conveyed by the counsellor to the person seeking help, but encompasses the whole situation in which it comes into being and the whole emotional-mental-behavioural context in which it is created as well as the wider socio-cultural conditions of counselling as a form of help.
help so much as the relative incompetence of the counsellor and her helplessness in the face of the help-seeker’s problem, which results from the unpredictability of the world, the ambivalence of values and the profusion of information flowing from various sources in which both the help-seeker and counsellor are embedded.

In counselling, to a large extent, the focus of the counsellor’s attention is being transferred from the search for resolution techniques to the ethnical aspect of the relationship (see Czerkawska & Czerkawski 2005; Drabik-Podgórna 2007; Malewski 2003). This changes the way in which narratives are conducted, transforms “counselling language” and modifies the circumstances of the encounter (Wojtasik 2009). These days, it is not just a question of the giving of advice, but instead the joint construction of counselling; it is not about choosing a career for a client but the analysis of the client’s career, crucial from her biographical point of view; it is not about the solution of some problem but about possible methods of coping with a problem etc. Therefore, as can be seen, the changes in counselling are expressing themselves through an emphasis on the development of the partners’ reflexivity, an increase in independence and responsibility and the ability to construct and reconstruct narrative identity, whatever that might signify (see Gołębiak 2009).

For, as Manuel Castells notes,

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\textit{in the world of global flows of wealth, power and images, the search for identity – collective or individual, ascribed or constructed – becomes the fundamental source of social meaning. (…) People increasingly organise their meaning not around what they do but based on what they are, or believe they are} \quad (\text{Castells 2010, p. 3}).
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Counselling, through modifying its aims, modes of action and organisational forms and through “melting” into the space of social life and becoming one of the flows hidden in everyday reality, participates, as it were, in the process of the construction of the identities of counselling clients or those participating in other social interactions established in various circumstances and having as their aim the support of certain people by others (Malewski 2003). The analysis of one’s own biography and social reflexivity, which “refers to the fact that we have constantly to think about, or reflect upon, the circumstances in which we live our lives” (Giddens 2009, p. 100), are the main processes which characterise contemporary counselling examined as a type of flow both in the global network of international institutional and interpersonal ties and in the micro-network of social life and individual people.

Bożena Wojtasik (2009a), when depicting the personal micro-network, uses the image of a spider web for which individual nodes created from the intersection of family “activities”, school, people in the immediate environment, peer and social groups and also the mass media and influences of counselling institutions of various grades can – at successive life stages – be the dominant “place” – in Castells’ understanding – for the shaping of identity. The use of the professional or non-professional help of a counsellor
is, in this case, nothing other than the insertion of yet another network society node into its own micro-network, a node representing help through counselling.

When analysing network society from a counselling science perspective, it can therefore be noted that there is such a space of flows, such a “place” in which counselling explicitly loses its definite “format” and form, a place in which it becomes a flow, and by adopting a structure, whether that be one of “natural” interaction or one of a helping relationship established in organised systems or networks, expresses itself in the fluid connection and disconnection, by people in their daily lives, of various forms of help provided by the diverse counsellors supporting them in the difficult process of identity construction and the challenge of coping with the problems linked to this.

*Translated from Polish by Philip Palmer*

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