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## **Immersion: Insights into Counselling in *Studia Poradoznawcze/Journal of Counselling***

*Studia Poradoznawcze/Journal of Counselling* is a journal published annually by the Naukowe Towarzystwo Poradoznawcze (Counselling Association). Eleven volumes have appeared since the launching of the *Journal* in 2012. This paper results from my immersionist exploration of the content of the papers published in the *Journal*, which resulted in the identification of three planes on which counselling-studies inquiry has been carried out: the plane of counselling practices, the plane of counselling experience and the plane of ideas informing research on counselling. At the same time, my argument traces immersion processes in various research projects, which lean towards an anthropology of counselling, and also ponders whether a shift towards the notion of the counselling-seeking subject as an explicitly dominant agent triggers a performative turn in counselling and counselling studies.

**Keywords:** immersion, immersionist paradigm, counselling studies, performative turn in counselling and counselling studies

Immersion<sup>1</sup> is present and identifiable in the technical sciences, physics, optics, in the study of foreign language teaching, in art, in computer game theory and in the concept of simulacra, to list a sample of relevant fields. It entails increasing the clarity of the picture and fostering the capacity to perceive tiny details by magnifying them gradually (the way the immersion lens is used in the microscope). At the same time, in astronomy, immersion means the passing of one celestial body into the shadow of another, which can be construed as a symbolic absorption or interception.<sup>2</sup> Yet immersion also means attentively listening to sounds and noises, tuning-in to the atmosphere of the surroundings and experiencing these surroundings, such as in the reception of a literary text or a musical piece and in becoming

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<sup>1</sup> A polysemous term in science, ‘immersion’ is etymologically derived from Latin *immergere, immersio*, meaning ‘to dip into.’

<sup>2</sup> Such an engrossment of the protagonist who is led to experience liminal states is narrated in Jean Baudrillard’s essay on the art of disappearance (2009) and Jan Komasa’s film *Suicide Room* (2011).

steeped in a different culture, in the language of this culture (Eco, 1992; 2007). Immersion is associated with presence, with being 'in' a distinct space, whether physical or symbolic, whereby such a presence is defined as engaged across the scales of involvement: cognitive, intellectual, mental and emotional (Kłosiński, 2018). This implies that immersion may denote the *state* of being steeped in, of penetration of, or a *process* of becoming steeped in and penetrating the space of one's goals, the space of one's interests, fascinations, passions and/or actions.

In this paper, my focus is on immersion as bound up with research processes in the social sciences and the humanities, which includes reading texts in their context and researchers' involvement in their research field. Accordingly, the space of my interests is demarcated by *Studia Poradownicze/Journal of Counsellogy* (from 2012 to 2022; vols. 1–11),<sup>3</sup> and my argument seeks to identify immersion and its applications in research on counselling practice, that is, of counselling-studies—or counsellogical—research. Therein, I want to establish whether **being** and **becoming** immersed can be traced in the papers published in the *Journal* and, if so, what exactly that looks like.

### Immersion in the Research Field

In the social sciences and the humanities, immersion is addressed as a state and as a process in discussions of methodological concepts. The paradigm of immersionist research has been depicted by (post-Bronisław Malinowski) Anglo-American scholars, who have linked it to field research and individual anthropological studies carried out by researchers as they enter and settle in various cultures and communities to share the daily rhythms of life with those whom they intend to explore, understand and then depict (Winkin, 2007, p. 126). In this sense, immersion is a situation in which a researcher is 'in there' and has an opportunity to transition from being immersed to the process of becoming immersed. Yet immersion is also recognised in endotic, 'domestic,' locally oriented research that is conducted in researchers' familiar and well-known territory, where they feel 'at home.' In this case, becoming immersed is a natural process and a natural experience (Winkin, 2007; Czaja, 2010). To generalise, immersion as such needs (or, perhaps, is premised on having) a more or less defined field. What is indispensable is a research field that researchers approach, step into, become steeped in and penetrate, a field in which they are simply present. In counselling, the field of immersion can be both very tangible, physical and geographical (a counselling facility, a school, a therapist's

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<sup>3</sup> When referring to *Studia Poradownicze/Journal of Counsellogy* in this paper, I will call it the *Journal*, and when citing individual papers published in it, I will provide the parenthetical citation with the author's name and the date of publication, without detailing further information. All the papers can be downloaded from the website of the *Journal* (<https://studiaporadownicze.pl/ojs/index.php/sp>).

office), and it can also be formed by the site of coincidental encounters and casual conversations (a place that does not exist permanently but is forged for a given moment when help, advice and support are offered). In this sense, a 'field' can also be provided by the space of a text, the space of a narrative situated 'between author and text' (Eco, 1992, p. 67), texts of guides and self-help books, others' accounts of their experience and a person's biography (Demetrio, 2000); or, as Barbara Fatyga proposes, a research expedition 'up to the cognitive horizon' can become a field too. The 'field' can thus also be understood metaphorically or symbolically (Fatyga, 2011, pp. 93–103).

### **Counsellogy: The Perspective Adopted in the *Journal***

Before discussing the findings of my immersionist exploration of the *Journal*, let me briefly revisit the goals that its Editors defined for their venture in the 'Foreword' to the first issue:

[The *Journal's*] primary function [is that] of a forum for the exchange of theoretical and practical findings and implications of Polish and international research. The journal engages with the current debates triggered by the noticeably increasing interest in the provision of help through counselling. The change is manifest in development of diverse counselling facilities, employment of counsellors in various institutions, proliferation of degrees and courses training 'help specialists,' as well as abundance of publications on advice, guidance, consultations, therapy, psychological support and the like. This has mobilised both counsellors and reflective practitioners to all the more insightfully probe into the multifarious and still diversifying 'spectrum' of counselling. This is a welcome development for, although counselling is by no means a new social phenomenon, the research on counselling is a relative scholarly novelty. Producing results whose theoretical merit sometimes falls short of desired and expected standards, counsellogy needs joint efforts of academics and creative professionals to upgrade and mature. (2012, pp. 195–6)

I believe that what calls for special attention is the very term *counselogy*, which is pivotal to the passage. As the Editors explain:

The English title of the *Journal* reflects the editors' effort to find an adequate equivalent for the Polish term 'poradownictwo,' which in the Polish scholarly tradition denotes the 'theory of counselling.' While coining the term 'counselogy,' we used the definition by Thomas Wilson and Aaron B. Stills, who wrote that the term multicultural counselogy refers to '(...) the study of the process of counselling from cultural perspective' (*Journal of Non-White Concerns in Personnel and Guidance*, 9.3, July 1981, pp. 103–108). But our understanding of the term 'counselogy' expands its meaning to include historical, social, cultural and also interpersonal perspectives. Parallel to the names of other sciences (anthropology, psychology, sociology, etc.), the coinage implies that the science of counselling is

a distinctive, though admittedly inter-disciplinary, branch of scholarship. It has its own distinct research field, peculiar terminology, unique conceptions and specific, reliable methodology and procedures. According to Alicja Kargulowa, (re-)inventing the term 'counselogy' concludes the formative phase of the theory of counselling. With counselogy crystallised as a science in its own right, researchers will be encouraged to expand their explorations and reflection. (2012, p. 195)

Extensively quoted above, the 'Foreword' explicated the guiding idea and purposes of the *Journal* and invited contributions from Polish and international scholars. This invitation has been heeded ever since. Below, I outline and bring into relief the immersive approach of counselling researchers which I have found in the *Journal*, an immersive approach that the Editors themselves proposed and encouraged.

### **Immersion in Counselling Research**

I understand immersion in counselling as a dynamic research/explorative approach which is as a rule a complex process that helps refine one's perception of the problems experienced by individuals and social groups, adding depth to the perspective of both the counsellor and the counsellee, along with their relationship. In order to outline and explain the methodological framework of an understanding insight into counselling and to develop a graphic model of immersionist research on counselling (Siarkiewicz, 2010, p. 33), I drew on the methodological contributions of educators, ethnographers, ethnomethodologists and humanistic and critical social scientists with a view to symbolically 'fathoming' counselling practices as part of general lived reality (available to the public as formal counselling-provision, comprising the activities of the government, social welfare agencies and institutions), as embedded in everyday life (implemented as non-formal and informal counselling) and as unfolding in intimate spaces (an individual's personal and unique experience inscribed in their biography) (Fig. 1). I relied on this tripartite approach to explore, identify and depict an array of counselling practices. Further opportunities afforded by immersive research in the counselling space can be surveyed in many counselling scholars' contributions to the collected volume of *Uczenie się – Doświadczenie – Imersja. Poradnictwo Zaangażowane* [Learning, Experience, Immersion: Engaged Counselling], co-edited by Elżbieta Siarkiewicz and Bożena Wojtasik (2016) also publication Alicja Kargulowa, Counselling anew. 2023.

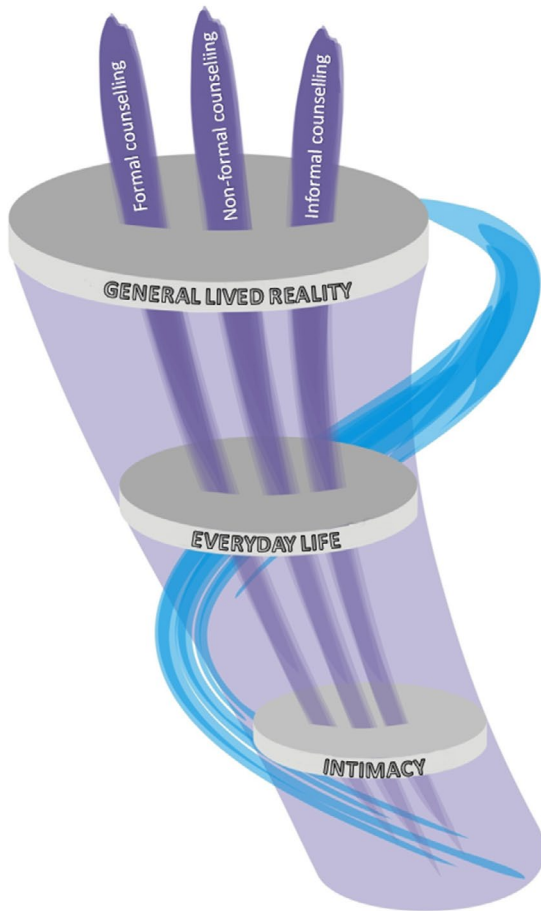


Figure 1. Immersionist insight into counselling based on methodological experiences and propositions of field researchers, ethnographers and ethnomethodologists (source: Siarkiewicz E., 2010, s. 33)

Building on this prior work, below I investigate the research field of the scholars with an interest in counselling who have shared their experience, research findings and reflections in the *Journal*. My graphic model of the scrutiny of counselling is supposed to help me illustrate the immersive process incorporated in the research projects I have come across in the *Journal*. My analysis of the *Journal* publications neglects their chronological sequence and, instead, opts to discern and identify immersionist research designs ‘spatially’ – on three planes: in the space of counselling practice, in the space of counselling experience and in the space of ideas in and of counselling studies. I focus on each of these spaces one by one.

## Researchers in Research: The Space of Counselling Practice

In attempting to identify processes of becoming immersed in counselling practice, one should best begin from inquiring what this space of counselling practice is and what it is like. This is in fact far from obvious, if informal counselling included in the figure that renders the immersionist insight into counselling is taken into account. It is far more straightforward to demarcate this space in the formal, institutionally circumscribed variety of counselling. What drew my attention in the paper by Sanna Vehviläinen of the University of Eastern Finland was her notion of counselling as ‘a family of practices’ that not infrequently merge in clients’ experiences. In Vehviläinen’s view, counselling practice and its scholarly depictions are implicit in various research disciplines, and that ‘implicitness’ makes this practice somewhat diffused and underpinned by unclear and incoherent research tenets, which causes tensions and conflicts, yet at the same time promotes its perception as robust and powered by almost inexhaustible inspirations (2021, pp. 293–5). The family of these implicit counselling practices, for example woven into interactions whose complexity is unveiled by Vehviläinen, encompasses the research experience of Boris Cyrulnik of the University of Toulon (2015). He builds an informal support resource of resilience caregivers, that is, significant people who appear where individuals are exposed to dramatic experiences (e.g. sites of warfare), and makes it part of counselling practices. Such caregivers may be actors, football players, singers and celebrities, whose presence and commitment in encounters with traumatised children trigger coping processes in the youngsters, boost their will to live and buttress their hopes for change. This practice also comprises self-help writings and incidental support offered by the media, found on the Internet and explored by Polish researchers for several years now (Zielińska-Pekał, 2012; Śliwerski, 2015; Zierkiewicz, 2016; Rusinek, 2019). Aleksander Nalaskowski (2019) has examined the sex education standards, understood as a guidance compendium, in terms of a specific instance of self-help writings (regrettably, his analysis has gone largely unnoticed without prompting the authors of these standards and policy documents to respond to Nalaskowski’s arguments and reasoning). In his analysis of the conflation of advice and guidelines anchored in the space of the documents, Nalaskowski has unveiled one of the many processes of becoming- and constructing *homo consultants*, as identified by Alicja Kargulowa. In the same issue of the *Journal*, Kargulowa (2019) ponders whether *homo consultants* is an opportunity or a problem for counselling (or perhaps, let me add, a scourge, including for him/herself).

Multiple researchers have observed that the broadly conceived context of life, as it were, propels changes in the situatedness of counselling practices. Professor Magdalena Piorunek<sup>4</sup> (2022) calls for ‘predicting the unpredictable’ and for a reflexive exploration of the ideas of counselling practices; she outlines the possible future

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<sup>4</sup> Chairwoman of the Pedagogical Guidance Section of the Polish Academy of Sciences.

educational and labour-market scenarios and cites the notion of the fourth-generation industry to highlight risks abounding in the naive forecasting of the future. Piorunek emphasises the relevance that investigations of the current and future social, cultural, economic and demographic tendencies bear for designing counselling responses to the needs of actors who look for help and support. In this way, she opens up the institutional and non-institutional space of counselling and a space for counselling. In her discussion of the life-design approach, life counselling and career counselling, French scholar Valérie Cohen-Scali (2019) directly articulates the necessity of bringing counselling out of its classic visions and embedding it in complex settings faced by adolescents and young adults, who construct their identities and careers and design their lives. Cohen-Scali insists that the proper space for counselling is to be found in dialogic and narrative processes, which in fact have long been studied by Polish researchers, notably by Bożena Wojtasik (2012), Violetta Drabik-Podgórná (2013, 2019) and Aneta Słowik (2017, 2020). Michał Mielczarek (2017) identifies and unveils ‘a counselling field’ that is an image of an internally complex, pulsating counselling practice anchored in a broad context, which is never neutral to the practice itself. The urgency of launching changes in counselling practices, particularly in counselling at the intersection of education and guidance, is advocated by Belgian scholars Émilie Carosin and Damien Canzittu (2019) of the University of Mons, who describe the GOAL counselling project that integrates teaching and guidance. Carosin and Canzittu insist that the integration of counselling practices must be based not only on the engagement of educators and counsellors but also on constructing ‘links’ within this ‘family of practices’ in ways and shapes adequate to the dynamics of changing lives and to the contexts in which these lives are constructed/lived. In her framework of the social practice theory of career guidance, Rie Thomsen (2016) of the University of Copenhagen proposes abandoning the formal and institutionally established counsellor-counselee relation for the sake of fostering small communities founded on mutual trust and on guidance competencies acquired and recognised by these communities.

These critical interpretations of and approaches to counselling practices and the identification, fathoming and naming of these practices that step out of institutional arrangements seem to have been made possible by the researchers looking beyond the institutional obviousness and pursuing an understanding insight into the intermediary and mediated counsellor-counselee relationship. Immersion processes appear to (have) be(en) experienced by multiple researchers, and they do not fail to recount these experiences, for example by reporting the difficulties they have encountered in identifying the spaces intended for, appointed and open to counselling with its dynamic and unpredictability. If I were to identify a special case of immersion comprehended as submergence in the penumbra of and a complete adoption or appropriation of somebody else’s perspective, I would pick a unique relation between the writer and the reader and the morphing of self-help books into no-helpers (Śliwerski, 2015; Zierkiewicz, 2016; Rusinek, 2019). I would also

pick the interplay of empowering and overpowering in the space of guidance, support and social welfare, as explored by Daria Zielińska-Pękał (2012) and Anna Kola (2015), and the entanglement of counselling relations in coping with adversities one experiences. In her study of self-reconstruction processes in confrontation with challenging, sometimes traumatic, situations, Maria Mendel (2020) highlights the complexity of going through a liminal phase as one that either promotes or thwarts the experience of change, maturation and development. In doing so, Mendel exposes the illusions and meaning(lessness) of some experiences, including counselling experiences. Similar ideas are articulated by Gaston Pineau (2021) of the University of Montreal, who identifies 'experiential learning' and situates counselling in it as a natural, culturally-anchored assistance to individuals, which is itself enmeshed in several other processes. Portuguese researchers Mafalda Frias, Luís Alcoforado and António Cordeiro (2022) display a like line of reasoning as they draw up a portrayal of 'suspension' experienced by adolescent NEETs (youngsters not in education, not in employment and not in training), which presents a serious challenge not only to education, counselling or society, but primarily to themselves.

Published in the *Journal*, the investigations of formal counselling practices implemented in institutions also accommodate an immersive scrutiny of the spaces of counselling facilities. This is the case in Barbara Skałbania's study that pictures a counselling centre as a place of learning or of magic, where, as I understand it, a range of rites of passage take place. In his in-depth exploration of the space of vocational guidance, Piotr Krawczyk (2016) reveals discrepancies between the assumptions and the realities of counselling projects, which threaten, in my view, to trigger confusion in subjects and send them 'afflutter.' Similar issues are foregrounded by Sébastien Pesce (2017) of the University of Tours, who recognises potential pitfalls of counselling relationships in his analysis of counselling practice, ranging from its classical, institutional models to approaches based on semiotics and pragmatist philosophy. Likewise, Viviana Valenzuela (2021) from Argentina identifies counselling practices in the space of art, specifically in encounters with music (emotional expression, tension reduction, support for and boosting the subject's agency) to claim that socio-educational projects bear a remarkable counselling potential.

The application of engaged research perspectives, manifold modes of participation in the practices under study and the adoption and recognition of receptive attitudes, all appear to have promoted research immersion in the world being investigated and the identification of counselling practices in formerly unstudied spaces. This engaged standpoint has helped capture plentiful contingent and intentional links among the counselling practices that form counselling networks which, fragile and impermanent though they may be, emerge in places vitally relevant to counselling (Wojtasik 2012). An immersionist insight into the plane of counselling practice has revealed a range of informal practices which also unfold in formal institutions and has made it possible to provide accounts of the complex counsellor-counselee



relationship, including its mediated types, and relations to the self, channelled by word and silence (Siarkiewicz, 2014; Czerkawska, 2018). In the course of such endeavours, concepts are redefined, ideas about counselling diagnosis and relation are revised and, first and foremost, reflection on practice is sparked in those who construct, effect and depict this practice, as pointed out by Barbara Skalbania and Marek Kawa in their co-authored article (2022). My immersionist study of the content of the *Journal* papers stemming from the work of counselling scholars from across the world (Poland, Canada, France, Finland, Belgium, Denmark and Argentina) who study a varied array of counselling practices made me think of a research perspective that Victor Turner had called 'performative reflexivity' to highlight *researchers' engaged and engaging pursuits*, their creative anxiety, their self-reflection and their conscious inspection of their research experiences (Turner, 1988; Denzin & Lincoln, 2011, pp. 549–833).

### **Counsellors on Themselves and on Counselees: The Space of Experience**

Another of my three planes, immersion in one's own world, in experience and in experiencing, always brings to our mind Socrates, who defined the major aim of his presence in the social, public world as triggering others' critical thinking and boosting their reflection on their own actions (Plato, 1899, pp. 23–4). In the social sciences and the humanities, such an in-depth self-reflection on one's own pursuits, experience and experiencing is particularly espoused by grounded theory, autoethnography and autobiography as methodologies promoting insight into one's own world (Konecki, 2000; Denzin & Lincoln, 2011; Mielczarek, 2020). Research designs informed by such premises are usually an invitation into the spaces of everydayness and intimacy located at the deepest level of experience, as represented in the model of immersionist research project (two bottom tiers in Fig. 1). Readers of the *Journal* have been invited into the space of counselling experience (one's own and that of others – counsellors and counselees) by Canadian scholars Sandra Collins, Nancy Arthur, Candace Brown and Barbara Kennedy (2013). They share their experiences in counselling work in culturally diversified settings and use the critical incident technique (CIT) to convey the relevance of cultural sensitivity in counsellor-counselee relations, to underscore how toxic the sense of lacking agency and commitment to the cause one undertakes can be and to capture gaps in counsellor competencies and training. A phenomenological study of the experiences of adolescents/young adults who used the support of multicultural counsellors has been carried out by Anusha Kassen, Amy Rose Green and Jasmine Nattoo (2017) of the University of Calgary. Their focus on young people's experience of multicultural counselling and the identification of the 'multicultural skills' category affords an immersive insight into counsellors' counselling competencies and helps recognise

the need to radically individualise counselling provision and to extend the counselling relation beyond prescribed helping interventions in order to construct a broad field of support and reinforce counselling outcomes. What I have found in the paper by Brazilian scholars Marcelo Afonso Ribeiro, Maria de Conceição Coropos Uvaldo and Fabiano Fonseca da Silva (2016) is delving into the latent layers of profoundly intimate experiences and sensitivities that can trigger adults' problems. The authors rely on the narrative paradigm to identify narrative patterns of working identity construction, which they consider to be an axial relation, and their implications for counselling emphasise the persistence and effects of stereotypes that undercut agency, curtail coping skills and contribute to mobbing as an instance of improper, toxic power relations. Alicja Smolbik-Jęczmień's (2020) study of the coexistence of various generations on the labour market points to a dynamic that, inherent to this space as it is, may generate the need for counselling interventions. The process of fathoming particularly sensitive layers of the intimacy of counselling needs and experiences has been investigated by Agnieszka Chojnacka (2021) in her paper on grief counselling for women who have suffered procreative loss, and by Andrzej Ładyżyński (2012) in his contribution on the counselling needs of future parents in adoption procedures or in another text (2022), where he singles out the family from among other spaces and portrays it as a sensitive subject of counselling or therapeutic interventions. Rather than revealing the experience of such counselling, these scholars expose its defectiveness, imperfections and outright infractions (e.g. downplaying difficult experiences, ignoring knowledge derived from experience, dismissal and vulgarisation of issues). Importantly, they rely on and cite their own work experience in support-provision and their own reflections related to these pursuits. The process of penetrating and fathoming counselling experience is epitomised by the research project reported by French researcher Hervé Breton (2021), who steeps himself in adults' narratives and develops a unique counselling model that leads from diagnosis to narrative conceived of as counselling experience. He also portrays the French counselling tradition of sustained reflection on one's own experience, life history and identification of personal coping methods. Dedication to penetrating and fathoming the experience of dialogue appears in multiple papers and is particularly pronounced in the work and thought of Jean Guichard, (2018) and Cohen-Scali (2019), who explore the role of dialogic and narrative processes in spawning reflection on one's own life, goals and aspirations. Alicja Czerkawska (2018) identifies a 'dialogic bond' which is constructed in the counselling process in counsellor-counselee dialogues in order to ultimately initiate counselees' dialogue with themselves. At the same time, Czerkawska looks into the context delineated by the counsellor's notion of counselling, which may brim with a counselling potential (experience of sensitivity, caution, mindfulness, active listening and presence) or cripple such a potential (formalisation of counselling experience, instrumental assessment, directive guidance). This appears to be another latent space of

counselling experience, along with continuity and change, which are inscribed in such experience and which are studied by Jolanta Lenart (2020).

These exemplifications of the counselling power inherent in the exploration of experience and experiencing speak, in my view, to the process of (re)constructing what Violetta Drabik-Podgórna studies, drawing on the philosophy of encounter and dialogics and calls '*dialogue-sensitive anthropocentric thinking*' (2013). Researchers refer to counselling agency, which inheres in individuals' experiences, as a resource used by both counselees and counsellors. The resources of agency are undercut, dented or lost in confrontation with difficulties, unexpected adverse events and traumatic experiences. Counselling agency may emerge in dialogical and narrative processes, from one's personal experience, from one's biography and life history, from informal and formal competencies one acquires, that is, from 'performative reflexivity' (Turner, 1988). Counselling agency appears to come forth in order to construct counselling power and readiness to engage in the counsellor-counsee relationship and in a reflexive, in-depth relationship with the self.

### **Reading Counselling Studies: The Space of Ideas**

To immerse myself in the space of ideas as the third plane of my immersionist analysis, I will quote the Editors again. In their 'Foreword' to the first issue of the *Journal*, they explain that the term 'counselling' 'implies that the science of counselling is a distinctive, though admittedly inter-disciplinary, branch of scholarship. It has its own distinct research field, peculiar terminology, unique conceptions and specific, reliable methodology and procedures' (2012, p. 195). I will draw on this statement to outline the idea that emerges from the papers published in the *Journal*, an idea that I perceive in counselling studies as such, boasting its own distinct research field, peculiar terminology, unique conceptions and specific, reliable methodology and procedures. The researchers who have accepted the invitation of the Scientific Board of the *Journal* have shared their thoughts on difficulties in defining the object of counselling research and the distinctiveness of counselling, in drawing the line between the theoretical and the practical and in handling language issues (the *Journal* is bilingual and the papers are published in Polish and English). A deeply thoughtful letter sent by Professor Guichard to Professor Kargulowa not only fuelled considerations on how to develop the *Journal* but also kindled involvement in dialogue, as expressed in 'Response to Professor Jean Guichard.' This response was provided by counselling-studies scholars affiliated with the University of Wrocław, the University of Zielona Góra and the University of Lower Silesia: Alicja Czerkawska, Joanna Kłodkowska, Elżbieta Siarkiewicz, Daria Zielińska-Pękał and Edyta Zierkiewicz, with their contributions compiled and arranged by Kargulowa (2013). The 'Response' certainly represented an important overview and analysis of ideas circulating in the field, and at the same time it answered the Editors' call for

combining the efforts of counselling researchers and creative reflective practitioners. Re-reading Kargulowa's 'Why We Need Counselling Research: Towards an Anthropology of Counselling' (2013) almost ten years after its publication, I realise that the *turn towards an anthropology of counselling* it heralded/identified is perceivable in a range of texts by scholars and reflective practitioners published in the following issues of the *Journal*, which I have quoted above. Focused on constructing methodological identity in counselling research, these collaborative endeavours have produced texts that develop theoretical concepts resulting from reflection on counselling and analysis of research findings. This is exemplified, for instance, by the idea of a 'counselling field,' which is itself rooted in Pierre Bourdieu's concept of the 'social field' (Mielczarek, 2017). The idea of a 'counselling field' dovetails with the idea of expanding counselling interventions beyond the socially conceived counselling situation (Kassen, Green, & Natoo, 2017). Brazilian researcher Maria da Conceição Passeggi (2021, p. 250) attends to an individual as the subject of counselling interventions, explores the autobiographical subject immersed in relations and takes this as a starting point for developing the idea of counselling for the subject capable of narrative reflexivity – for the vital agent. It is such a socially engaged agent reflectively responding to current developments (such as global warming) that is championed by Lucyna Kopciwicz (2021). The study of counselling is consistently developed by Anna Bilon, who is particularly dedicated to the idea of social justice and fuses theoretical and methodological concerns in her research projects and papers (2013, 2019, 2021). I detect a similar consistency in papers authored by Slowik, who is immersed in the idea of counselling implemented in the culturally diverse world, in the varied narratives and experiences of counsellors and counsees who come in touch with or constantly face this diversity (2014, 2017, 2020, 2021). The idea of sustainable development, which is addressed by Lenart (2016), has been embraced as an important research goal by Guichard and Maria Eduarda Duarte, along with the idea of embedding counselling in life-design processes. They have symbolically 'captured' their tenets in publications included in the *Journal* (2014, 2016, 2018) and invigorated them by 'setting them in motion' in the pursuits of the UNESCO Chair on Lifelong Guidance and Counselling (established at the Institute of Pedagogy, University of Wrocław) and in international conferences and workshops. Guichard (2022), who proposes a critical scrutiny of vocational guidance and career counselling and puts forward framework for active life construction aligned with fair and sustainable development, identifies the recent multidimensional crises as a 'turning point' that promotes and calls for the recognition of the agency potential in help- or support-seeking subjects. A similar model of commitment is noticeable in Thomsen (2016), whose *Journal* paper is devoted to constructing the social practice theory of career guidance and who at the same time gives talks and runs workshops as part of the UNESCO Chair activities, of the Counselling Seminars at the University of Lower Silesia (in collaboration with Wojtasik) and of the Helping Horizon project (launched at the University of

Lower Silesia by Elżbieta Siarkiewicz). These events have been related in the 'News and Chronicle' section of the *Journal*. The section has become essential for Polish and international counselling researchers because it offers access to and an overview of current events focused on the idea of counselling studies and makes it possible to follow the development of this new subdiscipline. The section includes reports on the completed PhD projects, conferrals of the *doctor habilitatus* degree and awards related to counselling and counselling studies. The section is a site of the institutional construction of counselling studies, where the idea of helping through counselling is being fostered and implemented and stands as a valuable living image of the building of a science of counselling and evidence for the dynamics typical of a young subdiscipline, which I perceive on the third plane of the *Journal's* immersionist investment.

What is the 'shared' thread braided across the third plane – of ideas? The emphasis is on counselling immersed in relations, narratives and the space of ongoing reflection—'areas' which the researchers appear to regard as *the natural environments of the counselling-seeking subject*. Counselling as depicted by them is humanistically underpinned and guided by a clear vision of the human being as a social being and of the world that humans inhabit (Czerkawska, 2018; Guichard, 2018, 2022; Cohen-Scali, 2019; Drabik-Podgórna, 2019). Counselling-studies theoretical analyses appear to endorse the agency of the 'adversity-facing' or 'calamity-stricken' subject, and this is probably the reason why there is a clear tendency to champion dialogical and liberal counselling models, while relinquishing directive counselling approaches informed by behaviourism and psychoanalysis (Kargulowa, 1986; Wojtasik, 2012). Such standpoints and attitudes channel the researchers' methodological pursuits towards an anthropology of counselling and towards the concept of the counselee as *homo consultans*, a troublesome issue for researchers, counsellors and also him/herself (Kargulowa, 2012, 2013, 2019). The *Journal*, which brings into relief and elucidates the idea of counselling studies as a young subdiscipline, has become immersive.

## Conclusion

The papers published in the *Journal* have noticeably created a place and opened a space for research on counselling and for constructing counselling studies. The Editors have invited researchers from across the world and scholars affiliated with various disciplines to collaborate and encouraged academics involved in inquiry into multiple spaces of the social world and, at the same time, focused on counselling and counselling studies, to produce immersionist accounts of counselling practices, counselling experiences and counselling ideas. Ten years and eleven volumes later, I could examine responses to this call and the effects of the collective effort undertaken by the researchers who have accepted the Editors' invitation. In doing

so, I relied on an immersionist exploration of counselling and ultimately identified the *Journal* as a space of sharing experiences and ideas across disciplinary lines. The debate proposed by the Editors has been joined by psychologists, educators, philosophers, social scientists, psychiatrists, counsellors, social workers, culture organisers, artists and medical doctors. This varied group of scholars and practitioners have to some extent unveiled multifarious, complex and unobvious counselling spaces, employed a counselling idiom intelligible to all researchers, depicted methodological dilemmas and solutions, accumulated theoretical inspirations, fathomed tensions and identified lacunae and gaps. Their considerable activity has sparked further pursuits, as attested to by the number of conferences and seminars, thematic foci of international doctoral schools and the volume of publications probing counselling, help and support, only some of which have been reported in the 'Reviews' and 'News and Chronicle' sections of the *Journal*.

Discernible in the papers I have examined, the counselling researchers' engaged and engaging presence in the world under study – a presence steeped in and penetrating the dynamic of this world, capturing changes in place, initiating and sustaining these changes – can be an indicator of a performative turn at hand in counselling and counselling studies. The framing of the counselling-seeking subject as an agent that contributes to change processes, goes through maturation and develops, as a subject that needs such agency, is a further sign of this turn. Moving from counselling conceived as adaptation to difficult situations to counselling understood as emancipation from crippling experiences that constrain agency can be as essential as transferring the dominant counselling activity from the counsellor onto the counselee, for whom the promise of change offered by the counselling process can work as a performative potential that triggers action. Consequently, counselling can legitimately be viewed as a 'performance' put up and experienced by *homo consultans* (Kargulowa 2013, 2019) or as a 'performative project' geared to achieving a particular aim, internally complex, consistently executed and tapping into intellectual, emotional and material resources (Siarkiewicz, 2010, 2016, 2018). This approach is conveyed in the observations that Ewa Domańska, who explored the theme of trama, offered in her account of the performative turn in the humanities and the social sciences:

In the humanities, research into themes is a therapy for individuals or communities, helping them work through trauma and resulting either in mourning (healing) or in melancholy (depression). In the context of the performative turn, the point is to reach beyond the melancholic contemplation of trauma and entice individuals or communities to engage in mourning rituals or anniversary celebrations, which are a species of social performances. (2007, p. 57)

Gleaned from the *Journal*, the direction of research on counselling and its findings illuminate the phenomenon of online counselling practices and experiences in which we could participate and which we could watch and launch during the

COVID-19 pandemic. At the time, counselling came to flourish in the virtual world, interlaced with people's everyday lives, within arm's reach, as an event, an engaging experience and engagement at the same time. *Homo consultans* looked for support, designed, organised and offered support and received support. The subtly woven counselling network afforded conditions for safely going through challenging experiences, for activating one's potential and agency, but at the same time it arrested and petrified the challenges experienced and forestalled any change of the situation (Kargulowa 2010, 2019; Wojtasik 2012; Siarkiewicz 2016, 2018). In the face of counselling practices and counselling experience, *homo consultans* became independent and agentive, albeit often lonely.

*Translated by Patrycja Poniatowska*

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