Maxwell Jones, Harold Bridger and the ‘two’ therapeutic communities: an interview with Juan Parés y Plans (Corelli) about the development of the Centro Italiano di Solidarietà (CeIS).

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ABSTRACT: There has always been a certain distinction between the ‘two’ therapeutic communities: the European democratic milieu-oriented psychoanalytical TC and the American hierarchic drug-free concept TC. Yet, several authors have tried to build bridges between both approaches, indicating several common characteristics, such as the concept of ‘social learning’. Maxwell Jones, perhaps the most famous initiator of the democratic TC, tried to connect both traditions, not only in his writings but also ‘in the field’. During the last years of his life (1986 – 1990), he worked as a consultant for the Centro Italiano di Solidarietà (CeIS) in Rome, which was developed as a concept TC for substance abusers, based on the Daytop-model, an American concept-TC approach. Also Harold Bridger who took part in the Second Northfield Experiment at Hollymoor Hospital in 1944 and started to develop there his ideas of ‘the hospital-as-a-whole’ and the ‘social club’ as well as Dennie Briggs, who developed some pioneering therapeutic communities in prison settings (initiated in the fifties), have had a not be underestimated influence on the development of CeIS. This article presents the most speaking parts of an interview with Juan Parés y Plans (Corelli), the vice-president of CeIS, focusing on how the democratic TC ‘met’ with the hierarchic TC at the development of CeIS and to what extent Maxwell Jones and Harold Bridger played a role in that encounter.

Introduction

The term therapeutic community (TC) is commonly used to define different types of treatment modalities (see e.g. Kennard, 1998). Generally, two major traditions are highlighted: the (European) democratic milieu-oriented psycho-analytical TC, which was pioneered mainly by Maxwell Jones in the beginning of the forties, and the (American) hierarchical drug-free concept TC for substance abusers. The latter originated in Synanon (founded in 1958 by Chuch Dederich) and developed itself in the United States through several pioneering therapeutic communities such as Daytop Village (O’Brien, Casriel and Deitch) (see e.g. Acampora & Stern, 1992), Phoenix House (Ramirez, Anglin and Rozenthal) and Odessey House (Densen-Gerber) (Broekaert, 1996). In the seventies, these communities also had a major influence on the development of the TC for substance abusers in Europe (Broekaert et al., 1999).

Although both types of TC differ substantially on some aspects, they also share several common characteristics. Broekaert et al. (1999, p. 258) e.g. write: ‘Jones’ (1984, pp. 29–35) principle of ‘social learning’ is now
considered one of the cornerstones of the drugfree TC'. These findings lead some authors (see e.g. Broekaert et al., 2000; Sugarman, 1984) to plea for an integration of the ‘two’ therapeutic communities. Next to advocating rapprochement in several articles (Jones, 1979 and 1984 a), also Maxwell Jones actively tried to build bridges between the democratic and the hierarchical TC

In 1984, CeIS (Centro Italiano di Solidarietà - a concept drug-free TC for (predominately young) substance abusers) organised the First World Institute of (drug-free) Therapeutic Communities in Castel Gandolfo (Italy) (Ottenberg, 1984). CeIS was founded by Don Mario Picchi in 1968 in Rome (Italy) (Parés y Plans (Corelli), 1984 and 1998; Briggs, 1993) and was influenced by Daytop Village. Due to the translation of the ideas of this American TC to the Italian context, quite substantial innovations were realised, e.g. the involvement of the social network as a possible resource (see e.g. van der Straeten, 1996). This led Don Mario Picchi to talk about ‘Progetto Uomo’ (Project Man). It is not a method or a therapy, it is ‘una scuola di vita’ (a school of life) which draws the attention on the human person (Picchi, 1994, p. 14). ‘Progetto Uomo’ had an important impact on the development of the therapeutic community in Southern Europe and South-America (‘Proyecto Hombre’) and influenced in that way the further dissemination of the therapeutic community.

At the Institute (organised by CeIS in 1984), Maxwell Jones and Harold Bridger, representing the democratic milieu-oriented TC, were invited as key-speakers and during the consequent Conference (CeIS, 1984) Jones did a presentation, entitled ‘The two therapeutic communities – a review’ (Jones, 1984 b). In this plea, Jones goes into the similarities and differences of the ‘two’ therapeutic communities, concluding that both traditions could learn much from each other.

During the last years of his life (from 1986 till 1990), Maxwell Jones, as well as Harold Bridger and Dennie Briggs were invited by Juan Parés y Plans (Corelli), the vice-president of CeIS, to work as consultants for CeIS. The influences (and the concurring difficulties) of these (democratic TC-) experts on the organisation and development of the drug-free TC of CeIS can be considered as an outstanding example of how both TC-traditions ‘met’ at the development of several treatment services (read ‘therapeutic communities’) throughout Europe. It is the aim of this article to explore these influences and to investigate if and to what degree both TC-movements influenced the development of CeIS.

**Methodology**

The authors went to the administrative centre of CeIS in Rome (on May 31, 2001), for a meeting and interview with Juan Parés y Plans (Corelli). Beforehand, a document, explaining the main topic of the research, was sent (by email and fax) for preparation to Juan Parés y Plans (Corelli). There has been deliberately chosen not to forward the actual questions, in order to prevent any sort of bias which could have been appeared otherwise. It was the aim
of the authors to use a questionnaire to interview Juan Parés y Plans (Corelli), but he proved to be so well prepared that the interview took place as a sort of monologue, in which all the questions appeared to be answered.

This article is a slightly modified reproduction of the most speaking parts of the literally transcribed tape-recorded interview on how the development of CeIS was influenced by the democratic therapeutic community movement in general and by Maxwell Jones more in particular. The modified text of the most speaking parts of the interview (as used in this article) was sent to Juan Parés y Plans (Corelli). At the same time, he was asked to add supplementary and/or correcting remarks.

**Interview with Juan Parés y Plans**

**Juan Parés y Plans (Corelli):** ‘What I will say is, of course, influenced by my own point of view. It is – in many ways – my personal story. At the beginning of CeIS, we went to Daytop in the United States and asked some of the staff members there to help us in establishing a therapeutic community (for substance abusers). I expected from the start that this would be done in a critical and constructive way. I did not want to believe everything just like that, because I always thought (and still think) that training supposes discussion. For me, transmitting knowledge is elaborating; it is not simply communicating all the information. This is especially true when you focus on the knowledge about the TC, which is actually a very ‘simple’ one. So, certainly for me, discussion is the most important aspect of training.

About 6 months after we started the cooperation with Daytop, I became a little disappointed with the whole training programme. I tried to encourage the staff members of CeIS to become more critical, to analyse more why they acted that way or another. So I felt not very comfortable about the programme (in CeIS) anymore, which led me to distance myself a while from the actual programme. At that time, I started to develop the international aspects of CeIS, which lasted until 1988. I have to say that although I was not directly responsible anymore for the programme at that time, I’ve cut myself a space in the training institute. This gave me the opportunity to add issues to the training institute, that could put everything in an upside down perspective, which is more humanistic than the Daytop-model is. I would not say democratic because I do not like the word, but I would say more…’

**Eric Broekaert:** ‘… human ?’

**Juan Parés y Plans (Corelli):** ‘more… well, in my opinion, you have to work with your head and not just play roles. I prefer staff members willing to ‘work’ and ‘grow’ in their job, rather than just ‘act’ professional.

I went to London and asked Harold Bridger to supervise me, which he thoughtfully accepted. Besides the meetings with Harold, I also organised some Tavistock-conferences in Rome: some of them were exclusively for staff
members of CeIS, others were open to everyone interested. I favoured the meetings on which everyone was welcome, because these major conferences were – in my point of view – excellent opportunities to learn. This was particularly interesting because I was constantly looking for things to learn which could increase our knowledge.

Next to Harold, Maxwell Jones was also a very valuable consultant, not only for CeIS as an organisation, but also for me, personally. Unfortunately, Maxwell was already old at that time and it was sometimes very difficult for him to work in an area which he was not used to. Dennie Briggs was maybe even more important for the development of CeIS, he was really excellent! I tried to keep him as a lifetime consultant, but I realised that this was not preferable. Everybody is constantly in evolution. I think that people cannot fully share the common beliefs of an institution for a very long time. Of course, I can understand people’s remark about me, being here already more than 20 years, although I have never been part of the actual organisation. Moreover, I’ve never worked clinically; I am just the strategist, which is something different. I have never been personally nor emotionally involved, which is inevitable when you work close to the clients. When I came to CeIS, being in my forties, my life was already ‘lived’, and I can honestly say that CeIS has not given me much. It has given me an opportunity of being in a creative space, but that is all. I simply enjoyed being here.

Being a consultant, Dennie wrote a very interesting report. Yet, Dennie was not exactly a ‘traditional’ consultant. Personally, I am more used to the ‘English’ way of consulting, which means essentially that I never expect an ‘English’ psychoanalytical trained consultant instructing me what I have to do. Dennie is more American and even if he has ‘grown’ with Maxwell Jones, he cannot avoid to ‘save the world’. Partly because American people often strongly believe in what they do. And partly because you have so much Jewish influence in America, which explains a bit why American people are sometimes ‘Messianic’. What Dennie wrote forced me to make the translation only by myself. I found that very difficult to do, because that putted me too much into decision, you understand? I prefer a more open way of consulting.

I think it is very important to have trustworthy consultants. I don’t know how long I’ll continue to work here, but I am sure that I can not cope with the organisation of CeIS without a consultant, for myself personally. And Harold is already becoming very old…

**Eric Broekaert** : ‘Yes, isn’t he in his nineties…?’

**Juan Parés y Plans** : So, I was influenced by a lot of persons: the issues I learned from Maxwell Jones – and that typifies Maxwell – were mostly not written anywhere. Instead, he was constantly ‘creating situations’. I remember one famous example of him creating a situation. When he came here for the Institute, everybody expected to see Maxwell Jones speaking. But instead of giving a prepared presentation, he simply said: ‘I have
nothing to say’. That is creating a situation, because – at that moment – he worked with the angeriness of the people. The people were open enough to analyse themselves and to reflect on themselves in the group, which was a very interesting learning experience for them. Another time he asked Mario and me to come 45 minutes late on a staff meeting. All the staff gathered, sitting there and waiting for Mario and me and Max said: ‘Don Mario Picchi and Juan are late.’ And the staff said: ‘We are sure they are sick or they had an accident.’. But Maxwell insisted on the fact that we were late. Yet, the staff members kept saying that something happened. It was interesting to see Maxwell Jones handling the situation, creating a living-learning experience. It had a positive counter-effect because Maxwell was a very strong man, using paradoxal effects in a positive way. He worked a lot with the paradox. But as already said, the experiences have not been written down, which is so typical for Maxwell.

In 1988 Mario asked me to engage myself in the programme. You have to know that, at that time, the American consultants such as Don and Martha Ottenberg, who had facilitated a lot of change and development, were leaving CeIS. First, I refused, because I didn’t really like some aspects of the programme. Don Mario told me that he didn’t also agree with some parts of the programme himself, such as the guilt feelings, the treating of people like babies… All those things of which Mario told me that he was not very keen about. I personally was not worried about those things in the first place, I was worried more about the whole Synanon-concept, the general concept.

‘So why would you put me in charge in the first place ?’, I asked to Mario. ‘I may be ruining the whole programme, because I am new here, I know nothing about drug abuse, I know nothing about psychology, I know nothing about groups. In short, I am the perfect ‘dilettante’ (novice)’. But I suggested that I would give more freedom to the staff members, because – in my opinion - they had not enough space at that moment. Actually, I felt that the staff was kept in a situation of being dumb. They were not allowed – so to speak – to make a mistake, which is a pity. Personally, I learned more from the wrong steps in my life than of my successes. It is not healthy when you are not allowed to analyse your mistakes in order to learn from them.

Finally, I agreed of engaging myself in the programme. At that point, I tried to get a sort of collaboration with some ‘experts’ who were actually working in the programme.

And I said to them: ‘I am like a sail, I catch the wind, I will also catch the progress, the change. My aim is to travel to a better place, figuratively speaking. But I need someone to confront me, someone to discuss with. I need someone to which I can say: ‘Sorry, I was wrong’ and vice versa. Later, some more members of the staff felt the same because they noticed that I was not planning to change the actual programme but that I was going to change the structure of the programme instead. At that time, we had the programmes Santa Maria and San Carlo and the ‘only way to go was up’: climbing the ladder of success as you
were first a regular staff member, after which you became a coordinator, then you were assistant and finally director. I tried to change the structure of the programme, as it used to be a monarchic model. This is, what I would call monarchy: Don Mario Picchi was the king and I was the queen, or whatever you want to call it and then you had the supervisors who were like the prime ministers.

The first thing I did was - in a way - milieu-therapy. I took away the offices. There were no desks anymore, so you could not work alone. You had to work with the groups. And I refused to go to any staff-meeting.

And then, we noticed that a lot of the things that Maxwell and Dennie said became true, not in the sense that we did what was e.g. written on page 120 of the report, which Dennie wrote for us. No, quite the contrary, we found a theoretical basis in the report after having already executed the change. Because the most important aspect when changing the structure of a programme like CeIS is that it always has to be oriented on the person asking for help, the client. This has heavily influenced ‘our’ theory and methodology. If this is not the case in a programme, all reports are just ‘nice’ pieces of paper. Luckily, we were able to change a lot because Mario gave us a lot of experimentation possibilities.

The second thing I did was to cancel ‘accoglienza’ (entrance). In my opinion, accoglienza was a way of keeping the community unaware of what happened outside. Accoglienza was already a selection. Don misunderstand me, I am not against selection, but selection has to be very scientifically controlled. I am not against a planning. I am against an emotional planning, you understand?

During the change, we felt theoretically supported by the work of some leading authors. The motivation, sense of values,… comes from Frankl. Self-analysing, sharing,… comes from Moreno. And you can actually find a lot of influences in the programme, but you really have to look for them. I mean, I know they are here because I know the story of CeIS and I - in some respects - am digging to see them. But, I don’t think that you can see it very easily. Yet, I think everybody can see and understand that the humanistic part of a TC is very important.

**Discussion**

It cannot be denied that Maxwell Jones, Harold Bridger and Dennie Briggs have had a major influence on the development of CeIS, which evolved essentially from an exclusively behaviourally oriented programme towards a more ‘humanistic’ approach. Also the ideas of V. Frankl (Frankl, 1962), in search for the meaning of existence and Z.T. Moreno, known as the initiator of ‘psychodrama’, had their impact.

When identifying some further key-points in the development of CeIS, discussion and exchange of thoughts should be emphasized. Training is considered as an ‘encounter’ of different (culturally influenced) viewpoints, in which everybody is ‘teacher’ and ‘pupil’ at the same time. The domination of one set of
beliefs (one could call that a ‘theory’) at the expense of other ideas is always prevented.

A respectful cooperation with field workers of CeIS invoked a deep and intensive discussion, making the change within CeIS sufficiently supported by the basis (i.e. clients and the staff members who are in a direct relationship to them). This resembles very much the concept of ‘social learning’ (Jones, 1982), focusing on facilitating the knowledge from within the group, rather than ‘teaching ex cathedra’. This powerful and sometimes painful ‘method’ was often used by Maxwell Jones in CeIS (see e.g. the example of Maxwell refusing to lecture at the Institute of 1984) and typifies his way of handling group processes in general. The use of ‘the paradox’, putting everything in an upside down perspective and creating situations in which one was actually ‘forced’ to disclose his or her personal point of view, appeared to be used quite often by Jones.

Combined with the difficulty of translating this mode of working into printed resources, it clarifies the obvious emergence of theory after practice. From this point of view, the construction of theoretical concepts is always grounded in practical and personal experiences. This seems to have become one of the characterising attributes of Maxwell Jones’ professional career, since he was constantly trying to explain - post hoc - observed change and evolution (see e.g. ‘The process of change’, 1982). Also Bridger, who was originally educated as a mathematics teacher, recognized the importance of practice: ‘In Coventry, he had found that by concentrating on a practical task (such as running a school stock exchange) otherwise reluctant pupils became involved in mathematical concepts and processes’. (Harrison & Clarke, 1992, p. 702). This focus on the process rather than on the outcome has always been an important concept in therapeutic communities and was also often focused on by Maxwell Jones.

In CeIS, Jones also had the opportunity of teaching people the importance of really ‘working together’. Formally, possibilities to work on group-level were created by ‘closing’ offices and removing desks, by which the necessary structural change was made possible. Bridger (1984) describes how he always worked with the institution as a whole, indicating space-time (transitional) experiences as the conditio sine qua non for change, whether it is for substance abusers, soldiers suffering from effort syndrome and traumata, … He felt theoretically supported by psychoanalysis in general and the theory of Winnicott (see e.g. 1964), who identifies e.g. the child’s teddy bear as ‘transitional object’, more in particular. The ideas of Bridger within the development of CeIS can be regarded as a social implementation of psychodynamic theory, by which he was far more influenced than Maxwell Jones.

When considering the (structural) development of CeIS, the emphasis has always been laid on the client’s perspective, for whom the programme is designed in the first place. The broadened implementation of humanistic (e.g. the belief in the ‘power’ of the individual) and psychoanalytical (e.g. self-analysis) ideas within CeIS provoked the evolution of the
organisation towards the therapeutic community as it is today.

**Conclusion**

Centro Italiano di Solidarietà (CeIS) might be considered as an example of how especially Maxwell Jones and Harold Bridger influenced the development of the therapeutic community in Europe. It is clear that the concepts of ‘social learning’ and ‘the-institution-as-a-whole’ are extremely important when considering the core characteristics of any therapeutic community, whether it is ‘hierarchic’ or a ‘democratic’ one. When focusing on CeIS more particularly, following ‘conditions for change’ seemed to be indispensable within the development of the organisation:

1. Thorough discussion on all levels.
2. Translation of concepts to the cultural context.
3. The client is always the primary focus.
4. Practical experiences lead to the construction of a theory.
5. The process of change is considered more important than the outcome.
6. Structural changes can facilitate the development of a TC towards an open system.
7. Psychodynamic concepts are socially implemented within the therapeutic community.
8. Creating situations by using ‘the paradox’ (living-learning experiences).

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**References**


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1 Centro Italiano di Solidarietà (CeIS), Via Ambrosini 129, 00147 Rome, Italy
2 The modifications are solely meant to improve the readability of the text, without touching the actual content of the interview. Unnecessary repetitions, unintentionally omitted words, etc. were corrected in order to make the text more clear and transparent.
3 The literally transcribed text is kept at the Department of Orthopedagogics, Ghent University, Belgium