

**Velomobiles and their Diversification:
An Approach towards Greater Acceptance in Societies?**

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1. Introduction

The diversification of products in our societies is like a Janus face. On the one hand it seems that pluralisation brings ‘bright colours’ and ‘great choices’ for our lives, and on the other hand it seems that all these ‘things’ create more complexity than we are able to handle. Sometimes diversity of products seems rather a hurdle than a relief. In addition, we live in the age of extremes (Hobsbawm 2006), post-modernity or liquid modernity (Baumann 2008). A unique sign of this age is social and technical acceleration (Rosa 2005), in which individuals must design their own life rather than count on stable social structures and social governmental policies. Furthermore, the leading key word in our societies is individualisation (Degele/Dries 2005; Kippele 1998), which requires a permanent new concept and classification of the “self”. With regard to individualisation, the aspect of diversification functions as a means to an end. Also, with diversification the growing aspect of complexity comes into societies which the individual has to manage.

The ‘velomobile system’ is the perfect response to the age of individualisation. Not only the wide range of models offer all different types of aspects of individualism (the everyday cyclist, the family type, the “man” of pleasure, the fitness, racing type etc.), even the guarantee of spacious isolation or, in other words, perfect private atmosphere is given. Moreover, the range of models generates more uncertainty than certainty because the customer got lost towards diversity. And if diversification is the key code to attract the individual, how does a producer reduce the complexity of the situation? Currently, the identification of a growth in counselling in knowledge-societies is remarkable (Faust 2006: 286). Furthermore, counselling is a social phenomenon the situation of which itself is crucial because of an asymmetric constellation between two persons (Alemann 1996: 16 f.). Finally, the paper deals with the so-

cial concept of counselling under the aspect that velomobile producers accept the asymmetry of knowledge between producers and customers instead of playing an active role-taking.

2. Individualisation and diversification as a topic for societies

Individualisation

The discussion about individualisation or the individual is on the one hand formed by several key words as 'Ich Gewinner' (I-Winner), 'Ichlinge' (lot's of I's) (Keupp 2003: 297), and on the other hand individuals are described as 'players', 'flaneurs' and 'tourists' (Baumann 1997) who have to face a constant situation of risk taking, uncertainty and social de-embeddedness. Furthermore, individualisation is a dynamic process. Therefore, not only negative but also positive actions can be identified. Moreover, the relation between the individual and the society can be described as a constant differential. The ambivalent relation produces 'winners and losers of individualisation' in postmodernism (Baumann ebd.). Georg Simmel (1992) as one of the classical sociologists demonstrates the challenges of society towards upcoming forces of individualisation as well as the description of individual perspectives, i.e. social and technical acceleration¹. The situation of individualisation causes 'Self Care' (Foucault) and non-constant biographical developments (Simmel ebd.). The identification of the Care of the Self is engaged in a discussion which concerns the 'self-acting' individual conducting life beyond social policies and welfare options.

Nevertheless individualisation is a societal process where several 'shoves of individualisation' could be identified (Majan 1998: 170). These changes between the individual and society cause several dimensions of individualisation (Kippele 1998: 242) whereas the autonomy of the individual (i.e. possibilities in societies, self-control, self-response) is a central aspect of individualisation. Moreover, our life styles which could be expressed about brands or branding not only demonstrate the personal position of everyone in society (Quart: 2003), but also the economic concept of utilisation: this dominates the self whether finding a work place and/or being a hyper creative individual (Keupp ebd.). Individualisation is not a single topic for society. In combination with diversification (i.e. of products or lifestyles) it offers on the one hand lots of possibilities which are identified as a well appreciated side effect, but on

¹ See Rosa (2005) for social and technical acceleration as a driving force in societies.

the other hand it causes disorientation and complexity (Matjan ebd. and Kippele ebd.).

Diversification

Diversification is a broad notion for other terms like change, diversity, pluralism or pluralisation. The access to the topic of diversification is given by two points. The first one explains the concept of diversification which could be summarised to aspects of consumer culture or the area of market research. With regard to market constellations, Bruno Hake (1966: 19ff.) explains diversification as a concept which not necessarily means growing production, but the development of new products while reaching new target groups as customers. The second point is the sociological perspective allowing a discussion about effects of diversification for societies. With regard to that topic the sociological perspective occupies the causes and side effects instead of developing strategies for diversification. Accordingly, this meta-perspective gives a different idea of diversification. In general, one possibility to identify the phenomenon is to describe it as pluralism or diversity of life styles and products. In particular, as a second step, diversification means the reduction of complexity of systems (Kippele ebd.) (i.e. velomobile producers).

Moreover, individualisation in combination with diversification is a 'common' and 'accepted' topic in knowledge-societies and therefore an argument that both topics are function as a mean to an end in order to describe social order. Apart from a positive definition a negative explanation is standardisation or automation which symbolise fordistic and tayloristic working schemes (Matjan 1998: 171ff.). Georg Ritzer (1993) describes this negative effect of individualisation as the "*McDonaldization of Society*". With regard to diversification a need for stabilisation in societies is described (Baumann ebd.). Furthermore, the identification of the paradoxical situation between diversification and standardisation shows how 'fragile' societies react towards unstable, unpredictable structures or in other words: the dynamics of complex structures within societies is visible and stable structures are responsible for regulation.

In general, the system-theoretical perspective after Niklas Luhmann explains how systems and their complexity work (Degele/Dries ebd.). In particular, this theory suggests that each system in modern society produces its own complexity. Therefore, the access to other systems is limited by barriers of specific 'structures'. The usage of 'binary codes' (i.e.: system of economy: have vs. have not; system of sport: victory

vs. defeat) and 'programs of communication' (economy: investment in diversification; Sport: rules of competition) guarantee a certain understanding and interlinking with other systems (Degele/Dries ebd). Complexity is caused by every system itself (Degele/Dries ebd.). Therefore, one consequence for the individual is less (social) orientation and/or in other words: diversification confronts the individual with a growing perspective of powerlessness (Kippele ebd.: 240). The explanation whether individualisation in relation to diversification causes positive or negative effects is one topic which focuses the discussion on a perspective describing how systems 'organize' their complexity or how every system tries to reach acclimatisation.

Avowedly, every system is dealing with its own logic (politicians and their promises before elections). Therefore, the constitution of societies from a system-theoretical viewpoint could be described as a so-called 'shoe box society'. Moreover, the individual is part of a system, but not a part of the society itself. Also, the individual expresses diversity about posttraditional communities which are one last source for social guidance and security (Hitzler et al. 2008). This re-embeddedness works with the help of (cultural) topics. Instead of counting on 'traditional' structures, i.e. family, clan, village etc (Tönnies 1991), these forms of collectivisation exist without any spacial reference. Moreover, Gregor Marjan (1998: 172) suggests that the social net acts within a limited social and political horizon. This discussion leads to the question how an individual gets access to other systems? With regard to the reduction of complexity, one common means is the concept of counselling for knowledge-societies. The 'looking for advice society' tries to handle individualisation and diversification by means of minimisation of complex irritations.

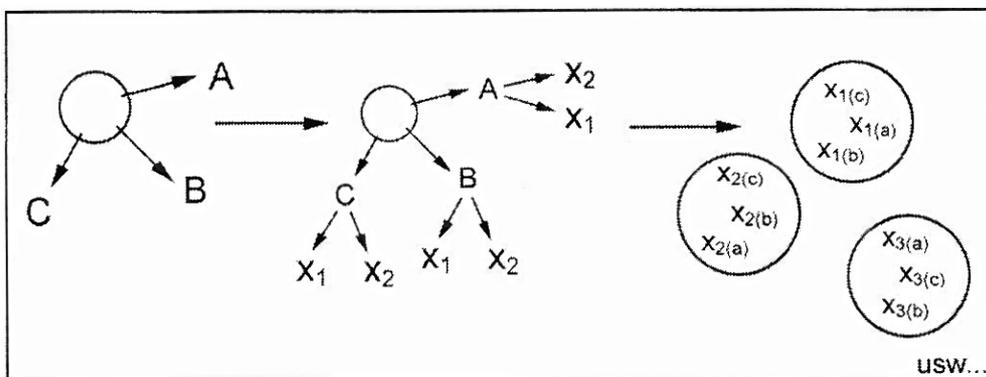


Illustration 1: Subtly Distinction and functional order (Degele/Dries 2005: 79).

3. We live in the age of counselling

Velomobiles have a lack of identity and vehicle development is narrowed because of societal view on personal transport (Cox / Van de Walle 2007: 126ff.). Therefore the complexity of the system called transport is already reduced to a certain minimum of understanding how transport should be (if we like it or not!²). Nevertheless, apart from the fact that this system knows very well not only how to reduce complexity but also to transport that message (information) clearly to its participants, it seems that velomobile producers can't manage to transport information of the enormous technical richness of velomobile types (Dydymos 1990).

The argumentation (part 2) that diversification on the one hand is a driving force and on the other hand is the cause for uncertainty (Marjan ebd.) follows the perspective of an 'advisory society' (Faust 2006: 277). The assumption that counselling has a 'clearing-up' function confirms the meaning as a social reference in society. Moreover, this constellation relies on asymmetric knowledge as well as on the assumption that the consulting person has a 'problem'. Also, the counsellor is more than an expert. An expert has a special knowledge in his/her field which allows giving expert's opinion. The counsellor needs some more qualifications because the consulting person needs advice for a certain problem. Therefore, the counsellor has to 'translate' technical or special language into 'every-day-language'. This means that counselling must be the intervention of possibilities, technical expertise and general knowledge. According to the consulting person, it is assumed that empathy for a development of the different life styles (= individualisation) helps. Moreover, a set of pluralistic patterns of counselling is required as well as principles (or codices) to produce trust (Alemann ebd.).

Counselling is a social situation which relies on trust between two persons. In addition, the activity is time limited but not necessarily a single event. The situation of counselling constitutes options which means that counselling makes offers for the consulting person but it is not offering final solutions. Security is created because special knowledge is offered. Finally, the consulting person has to make a decision which means (again) risk taking. The counsellor offers knowledge but not the final testing of it. Therefore, the consulting person is not only confronted with an asymmetric situation of counselling but also with the acceptance of power differences. The

² With regard to the car system everyone knows it's re-production of complexity: traffic jams, pollution, climate change etc...

performance of the counsellor has to be perfect in order to take a convincing position. Moreover, the 'logic of a counsellor' doesn't allow incompetence at all.

Chart 1: Counselling in Postmodernism

Counselling and Society	Characteristic	Dimensions
Microlevel of counselling (Interaction of two persons)	Interaction of two partners; asymmetric power constellation	Unsecurity is a condition for counselling (How to make one to look for advice; How to reduce complexity) Process of understanding and definition.
Macrolevel of counselling Institutions, like private and public forms of counselling (banks, funeral directors, spiritual welfare, child guidance service, welfare state)	Postmodernism causes demand of counselling (unresting and helpless society)	Every system creates its own performance of counselling

Own demonstration, following Faust (2006), Alemann (1996).

4. Velomobile producers and the scenario of counselling

There has been a remarkable development in model diversification as well as a substantial increase in the number of velomobile producers in the last 15-20 years. The development of velomobiles shows that the producers understand how to create a wide range of different model types as the "individualisation code" demands. Moreover, velomobile producers are experts within the system. They are busy with developing (or technical acceleration) (Rosa ebd.) rather than thinking about social constellations of action. The lack of development of a professional counselling scenario is to be identified as well as velomobile counselling takes place within the social networking community. Accordingly, the constellation of velomobile counselling is a product of social networking. In general, counselling offers different scenarios towards pluralism of life styles (codes of individualisation), and in particular the network counselling offers a common general knowledge, which determines a certain 'state of the art counselling'.

With regard to an analysis of a counselling situation, it is a process and not a singular matter which gives an alignment. Moreover, the purpose is to produce a stable situation and not a "maze" of general knowledge. With regard to the internet-counselling situation, it is necessary to find common codes for velomobile consulting instead of

re-producing complexity. Michael Faust (ebd.: 284) assumes that social networking produces institutionalised knowledge which ties a certain attitude. The point to mention is not the valuation of social networking rather than the explanation how systems work and react and how stable structures can be. The current client who is interested in buying a velomobile relies on the networking scheme where all 'sorts of information' are given or superficial knowledge is presented. Therefore, the networker is not an expert as closely as the expert is not a counsellor. Moreover, the expert has to develop a 'counselling scenario' in order to get access to the system (or not to lose the access) of clients. The access happens if the counsellor is able to give orientation or the translation of the expert language. The crucial point for the counsellor is to get access to each client and not to use one counselling method like a recipe (=individualisation demands individual attraction). Professional velomobile counselling would be able to break down diversification onto a level on which the counsellor produces transparency by using his/her expert knowledge and translating it.

One consequence of the development of an own systematisation of counselling of the velomobile producers would be a certain division of the network community. In comparison to the network counselling, the systematic of the producers would be different in order to distinguish it; otherwise both systems would produce a whole bundle of complexity. One constructive question would be how social network community and velomobile producers might concentrate their capacities. The strategy to develop a different concept would produce 'scapegoats', because of the loss of 'political correctness'. It is to assume that members feel betrayed³. Furthermore the concentration of competences seems a possible answer because of limited resources (developing diversification AND counselling).

5. Summary

Counselling is an underestimated aspect in the discussion of velomobiles and their diversification. There is a lack of descriptions concerning cycling in society in general and 'velomobile cycling' in particular. Moreover, not only cycling and counselling are no topics at all but also velomobile producers leave counselling to the network community. Cycling is more a political off state within our society rather than a serious

³ Faust (2006) describes similar scenarios for the area of management consulting. In terms of cycling: some VSF (working co-op bike shops in Germany now more than 150) gave up the idea of working as co-op's. During this development it was easy to tell who will be the winners and losers or the so called scapegoats of that discussion. The ones who decided to choose a more professional way of counselling for cycling or for bike trade were confronted with criticism of a political idea.

topic. Therefore, establishing a system which takes topics like counselling serious might be an access to demonstrate the seriousness of over 50 years of experience. One forecast for the future could be to establish a professional velomobile counselling scenario in order to get more transparency or a growing acceptance by the society.

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