



ICCT2025 Antwerp 27-28-29 October 2025 International Conference Contextual Therapy

The need for connection. Relationship challenges in today's world.

CATHERINE DUCOMMUN-NAGY – keynote speaker

The theory of change in contextual therapy and the place of the approach in the world of postmodern therapies.

Summary:

People outside of the community of contextual practitioners tend to see contextual therapy as an older form of therapy that is not based on the second order cybernetics, and that is not part of the cutting-hedge, post-modern therapies.

The presenter will demonstrate that the best way to argue against these outdated presentations of contextual therapy is to examine its theory of change and to show that the approach contains elements that are characteristic of postmodern approaches.

The presenter will start with a presentation of the theory of change that applies to contextual therapy. She proposes that this theory of change is based on the notion of bifurcation as used by I. Prigogine (Prigogine & Nicolis, 1977) and introduced to the field of family therapy by Elkaïm and his colleagues (Elkaïm et al., 1987). This will allow her to show that contextual therapy cannot be seen as an old, so-called modern approach that promote only first order changes. Instead, she will demonstrate that believe that contextual therapy clearly belong to the world of second order cybernetics.

The presenter will then proceed to discuss the place of contextual therapy in the word of postmodern approaches like narrative or solution-focused therapies. She will show while there is not a clear consensus about what constitutes a postmodern approach, postmodern family therapists agree on wanting to work collaboratively with their clients, not from a position of all-knowing and on seeing reality not as an objective reality but as a co-construction. She will demonstrate that these characteristic features of postmodern therapies have an equivalent in contextual therapy and that contextual therapy goes even further than these approaches when proposing a relational definition of the self (Ducommun-Nagy, C. 2024).

The presenter will start with a theoretical presentation of her ideas and a discussion of their implications for the practice of contextual therapy, followed by a period of discussion during which the participants will be encouraged to bring in their questions and comments. The goal of this plenary presentation is to offer the participants a chance to gain a new insight on the theory of change that applies to contextual therapy and new tools to present the approach to family therapists of other schools or professional from other horizons.



Presenter:

Prof. Catherine Ducommun-Nagy MD is a Swiss board certified specialist in psychiatry and psychotherapy of children and adults and a contextual family therapist. She is a Clinical Associate Professor of couple and family therapy at Drexel University, Philadelphia and the president of the Institute for Contextual Growth, Inc. founded by her late husband Ivan Boszormenyi-Nagy in Glenside PA. She is teaching worldwide as a presenter at national and international conference and as invited lecturer for private and academic programs. She publishes extensively on contextual therapy and its applications in French and English.

References:

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- Elkaïm, M., Goldbeter, A. & Goldbeter-Merinfeld, E. (1987). Analysis of the dynamic of a family system in terms of bifurcations. *Journal of Social and Biological Structures* volume 10, Issue 1(21-36)
- Prigogine, I. & Nicolis, G. (1977). *Self-organization in non-equilibrium systems* (4th ed.). W.W. Norton