

## ALPS ADRIA PSYCHOLOGIST'S COMMUNITY

### Alps-Adria Psychology Symposia

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#### *Alps-Adria Working Community*

Despite the existence of numerous cooperation activities beyond borders in Europe, the Alps-Adria Working Community is surely unique. At present, approximately 20 republics, states, comitats, provinces, regions and cantons are full or observing members of this working community. It is organized into 6 committees dealing with joint questions in the field of regional planning, environmental protection, traffic, economy, tourism, agriculture and forestry, mountain farming, health, youth and, finally, culture and science.

This political association served as a basis for the foundation of the Conference of Rectors of the Alps-Adria Working Community in 1979. Its tasks include the selection and coordination of events of importance for the entire Alps-Adria Region. And this working community appears to be a suitable platform for international contacts of the psychological institutes. It should not be forgotten that the participating regions and states are linked by a rich and conflict-filled common history, while their cultural, political and economic resources vary considerably; all the more reason for welcoming an opportunity for communication and cooperation.

The working community comprises today more members than at the time of its foundation, having been joined by regions from Germany, Italy and Hungary. These additions have not been merely quantitative, but have undoubtedly brought new qualitative aspects, as well.

#### *Psychology at the Alps-Adria Universities*

There could scarcely be greater differences in the conditions under which psychologists at the universities in the Alps-Adria Working Community are working. As an indication of these differences, the number of permanent staff members at the institutes (professors, lecturers and assistants) is mostly between 10 and 30, with the exception of Padua and its two institutes of psychology, which together boast more than 120 staff members. It is possible to graduate in psychology in Graz, Ljubljana, Munich, Nuremberg, Regensburg, Würzburg, Padua, Rijeka, Salzburg, Trieste, Zadar and

Zagreb. In all other universities, psychology acts as a service department for other courses of study.

The number of students at the institutes offering psychology as a main subject ranges mainly from 100 to 300 (numerus clausus). However, Graz has 1,700 students while Padua has almost 10,000. Many institutes of psychology are located in old and established universities - the University of Padua, founded in 1222, is the oldest in the region, while Graz is over 400 and Zagreb more than 300 years old. Other universities are comparatively recent, such as those at Rijeka, Maribor or Klagenfurt. Some of the institutes of psychology are very old, while others, such as Verona, were established only recently. In Udine there has for some time been a professorship for psychology without a separate institute.

The situation of the institutes differs not only in terms of their institutional and formal environment, but also with respect to their research situation. Some institutes concentrate their research on a small number of narrowly defined areas, while others spread their research activity more widely. It is obvious that at the two institutes of psychology in Padua - one for general psychology and one for developmental and social psychology - with more than 120 full-time university teachers, it is possible to carry out intensive research in practically all fields of psychology, while other institutes must select their own specific points of emphasis. The type and amount of research activity is also influenced by external conditions: an absence of a restriction on the number of students combined with a comparatively small number of staff has meant for instance that the teaching personnel at the Austrian institutes of psychology are overburdened with supervisory activities, which has clearly led to a restriction of the amount, but not the quality, of research. The institutes in Croatia, on the other hand, are due to the external conditions, burdened by limited personnel and resources combined with research and supervisory activities that were previously not to be found to this extent and in this manner in their list of duties.

Over the last few years the position of psychology as a university subject has undergone radical changes. The teaching is often marked by a noticeable discrepancy between student's expectations and university practice. The application of psychology has featured the establishment and expansion of psychological professional fields, competition between various sub-disciplines of psychology on the one hand and medicine on the other, as well as the increasingly visible dis-

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parity between society's high expectations of psychology's ability to solve problems and the inadequate ability to come up to such expectations in many cases.

These changes are reflected in research by an explosion in the amount of available knowledge, an increasing number of psychologists in public and private research facilities and the increasing differentiation and expansion of the fields of research. New contents of psychology are being added to the traditional ones. Psychological research is considerably oriented towards the Anglo-American culture. This concerns professional publications, the acceptance of current trends in research topics, the dominance of certain psychological paradigms, as well as the contacts between academics and students including conferences and study visits.

The situation of psychology as described above applies to many European countries and is an important reason for encouraging cooperation between psychological institutes in the provinces, states and regions of the Alps-Adria area. Academic collaboration also has to be stimulated.

#### *Preparation of the first symposium*

Roughly 10 years ago I was confronted with the idea of the Alps-Adria Working Community. This organization appeared to me to be suitable for confronting the traditional academic approaches with an orientation that is obvious for reasons of the geographical, historical and cultural connections.

At the beginning of the preparations, two - already mentioned - considerations dominated:

- The first concerned the fact that psychology currently appears to be in a state of upheaval and reorientation. The signs of this are internal differentiations, attempts at stabilization and the search for new paradigms more capable of describing psychological and social events. Psychology as a whole, and every individual psychologist, is confronted with an increasing pressure of expectation triggered by the particular needs of individuals, social groups and institutions. At the same time more and more trained psychologists are searching for an appropriate field of professional activity.

-The second consideration is based on the fact that international academic contacts between psychologists are largely determined by geopolitical factors. The geographical and historical proximity of the various institutes by no means corresponds with the desired or actual cooperation activities. Apart from a few exceptions that have been developed over a long period of time, there have hardly been any contacts within the Alps-Adria Area, as yet consequently, the encouragement of communication and cooperation can, by changing the surrounding conditions, help to compensate for a one-sided state of dependency.

During the preparatory work it was necessary to coordinate to some extent and to find a compromise on the different regional aspects, specialist academic demands, cultural differences and differences in the psychological view of the in-

dividual. Consequently, we agreed on English as the language of conference and that the first event would permit a "tour d'horizon" and, hence, a wide range of subjects.

The author held preparatory talks with the heads of departments and representatives of the institutes in Padua, Trieste, Udine, Venice, Ljubljana, Maribor, Rijeka, Zadar, Zagreb, Graz and Linz. The preparatory work for the first symposium took 2 years. After an initial attitude of doubt and scepticism as to the success of such cooperation, all parties became willing and interested in contributing to the success of the first Alps-Adria Psychology Symposium and in submitting themselves to the efforts of intercultural cooperation.

At the end of September 1986 a preparatory meeting at the University of Klagenfurt was attended by representatives of the psychological institutes from the above-mentioned universities. During these discussions, concrete measures for joint work and reciprocal exchange were agreed in order to expand existing contacts and to initiate joint projects. It was also agreed that the informal working party consisting of representatives of the institutes located in the centre of the region, would meet annually.

#### *Alps-Adria Psychology Symposia*

The first symposium took place at the University of Klagenfurt from 16th to 18th September 1987. There were 65 speakers from 13 institutes of psychology who presented lectures, discussed the results of their research and got to know each other. The participants came from Graz, Klagenfurt, Linz, Ljubljana, Maribor, Padua, Rijeka, Trieste, Udine, Venice, Verona, Zadar and Zagreb. The symposium was under the patronage of the Conference of Rectors of the Alps-Adria Working Community, with the necessary financial support being provided by the Province of Carinthia and the Austrian Federal Ministry for Science and Research.

A major aspect of the symposium was the mutual exchange of information concerning the position of psychology in the Alps-Adria Region, and second one was work on joint research projects. The contributions to this symposium referred to a wide variety of fields of psychological research. Several contributions were presented in the fields of personality psychology, intelligence research and test theory, pedagogical psychology, clinical psychology and psychotherapy, with particular attention given to the fields of perception and cognition and applied psychology.

The second Alps-Adria Symposium on Psychology was held in Trieste from May 30th to June 1st 1991, organized by Riccardo Luccio and under the patronage of the Conference of Rectors of the Alps-Adria Working Community. 170 authors from universities of Rijeka, Milan, Verona, Linz, Zadar, Ljubljana, Padua, Split, Trieste, Manchester, Maribor, Klagenfurt, Vienna, Budapest, Salzburg, Pecs, Pavia, Umea, Florence, Regensburg, Rome, Zagreb, Würzburg, Szeged and Graz presented the results of their research in 50 papers and 60 posters. In addition, there were also round table discussions on „the policy of psychological research in Alps-Adria

regions“, „the policy of psychological publications“ and an invited report presented by Denis Proffitt on the subject of „Stereokinesis: Perceiving Depth through Motion“.

The third Alps-Adria Symposium of Psychology was held in Ljubljana from 2nd to 5th June 1993. The event was organized by the Institute of Psychology at the University of Ljubljana under the direction of Janek Musek. Almost 130 speakers presented 80 contributions (posters and papers) on their academic work. The participants came from Milan, Rijeka, Budapest, Umea, Ljubljana, Trieste, Lancaster, Zagreb, Maribor, Bratislava, Murcia, Santiago de Compostella, Graz, Zadar, Padua and Osijek.

#### *The future*

In the course of the years since the initiative on collaboration between the Alps-Adria institutes was started, there has been a wide range of research, conferences, teaching and other contacts between the institutes concerned. The tendency

towards cooperation continues to increase. The exchange of staff to present guest lectures and guest courses at the universities, collaboration in research projects and the exchange of scholarship holders are examples of the cooperation activities. Preparatory work for an academic psychology journal has been successfully completed at the Zagreb institute. This journal is intended to be accessible to all colleagues in the Alps-Adria universities as a forum for publications. The last few years have seen huge political and economic changes in the Alps-Adria Region, which have not been without effect on the practical aspects of our cooperation. Certain, perhaps too ambitious projects, which might have been able to boost cooperation, have had to be postponed. A willingness to cooperate continues to exist, and members of the informal working party meet annually to investigate cooperation opportunities and to provide mutual encouragement. The question of the future of the Alps-Adria cooperation between the institutes of psychology also depends to a considerable extent on the take-up of the existing opportunities for action. The foundation of the „Review“ is unique opportunity for stimulating academic contacts, and gives a new quality to our relations.