



8th Alps-Adria Psychology Conference

Ljubljana, October 2nd – 4th, 2008

The 8th Alps-Adria Psychology Conference took place at the Faculty of Arts in Ljubljana, from Thursday, October 2nd, until Saturday, October 4th, 2008. The timing of our conference coincided with some other professional gatherings and also fell within the period in which the university lectures period had already started, so not all of our colleagues could attend. However, those scientists that managed to arrive to Ljubljana made a great contribution to the advance of psychology in the Alps-Adria region, and the organizers wish to thank all of them for coming.

A total of 207 participants attended the conference. Most of them came from the countries in the Alps-Adria region, that is, from Austria, Croatia, Hungary, Italy and Slovenia. There were also attendees from Serbia, Iran, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Macedonia, Kazakhstan, United Kingdom, Germany, Spain, Australia, Czech Republic, Pakistan, Poland, Switzerland, The Netherlands, Turkey and The United States of America. The Organizing Committee accepted 189 abstracts, while the program consisted of five invited lectures –one from each country of the Alps-Adria region, in the established tradition – two symposia, 107 oral presentations structured in 20 sections, and 72 posters (including students' posters and posters presenting work in progress).

The informal cooperation of psychology researchers in the Alps-Adria region turned into official meetings in the 1980's. Ljubljana hosted the 3rd Alps-Adria Psychology Conference in 1993. Since the conference is organized in triennial intervals, in 2008 it was again Slovenia's turn to

organize the next, this time the 8th, meeting. The Department of Psychology at the University of Ljubljana undertook the organizational tasks because at the time when the venue of the 8th conference was decided the Department in Ljubljana was still the only Department of Psychology in Slovenia. When the time comes for the organization of the 13th conference, the decision on the venue will no longer be automatic, since there is now a new Bologna-compliant psychology programme in Maribor.

At the opening ceremony the conference participants were welcomed by Klas M. Brenk, the president of the Organizing Committee; Herbert Janig who transferred the support of the Alps-Adria Rectors' Conference; Valentin Bucik, Dean of Faculty of Arts in Ljubljana and Marko Polič, Head of Ljubljana Department of Psychology. The conference was opened by its official sponsor, Ljubljana City Mayor Zoran Jankovič. In his invited address he stressed the importance of psychology, especially of its role in helping the society to understand the events that happened in our region in the last two decades and to understand and embrace the changes that could (or must) be introduced to gain the respect of future generations. The opening ceremony was rounded with the performance of the choir of psychology students.

The scientific program of the conference started with the invited lecture held by Giovanni Bruno Vicario, University of Udine, Italy. He talked about a list of problems in investigations of optical-geometrical illusions. By presenting several examples of illusions he emphasized that there is a clear

distinction between illusions and perceptual errors. Namely, when it comes to errors, we easily accept the fact that our perception was wrong, whereas when an illusion takes place we are surprised to learn that we did not see the display correctly and we cannot change the mistake. Among the open questions in this research area are the absence of naming convention, the existence of numerous different classifications, interference with other visual phenomena, the relation between the perception of 3D world and its 2D representation, whole-parts relation, the problems of measuring illusions, and the causes of their existence. Vicario proposed a nomenclature for optical-geometrical illusions and stressed that an atlas of illusions should be constructed in order to categorize a vast number of different illusions and determine the prototypic illusions and their interpretations.

Dražen Domijan from University of Rijeka, Croatia, presented the neurodynamics of figure-ground organization, an important early step in visual processing. He showed various principles dating back to Gestalt psychologists, more recently described factors and related neurophysiological investigations. Then he presented different computational models of figure-ground organization, and showed the advantages of the filling-in models over the border-ownership models. The filling-in models (among them the author's own model) are able to explain more recent principles of figure-ground organization, such as the effects of spatial frequency, lower region, top-bottom polarity and extremal edges. The filling-in models, however, do not relate precisely to neurophysiological data, so future work will have to unify different accounts.

Bernadette Péley from University of Pécs, Hungary, talked about narrative psychological content analysis in studies of therapeutic impact, pointing out that the measuring of therapeutic impact is a difficult task, especially in a statistical manner. However, patient's narrative discourse, obtained in a non-intrusive setting, can provide the basis for diagnostic judgments of his/her psychological states, and data obtained are apt to statistical aggregation. The lecture showed how the changes in the therapeutic discourse can be tracked and how the efficiency of the therapy can be assessed using several narrative patterns (activity-passivity, mentalization, intentionality, evaluation, and characters' psychological functions). In sessions where therapists perceive progress, the frequency of activity and intentionality increases.

Christa Neuper from University of Graz, Austria, spoke about brain-computer interfacing and neurofeedback. Brain-computer interfaces (BCI) are used to operate an external system (a neuroprosthesis) through "mind-control", i. e. by using a person's brain activity. When a person intends to do something (e.g., move an arm, grasp), specific features – which are recorded non-invasively (with EEG, MEG ...) or invasively (with microelectrodes inserted directly into the motor cortex) – are automatically extracted from the recorded brain signals and the neuroprosthetic system trans-

lates intentions into actions. When users are provided with a feedback about their brain activity, they may learn how to regulate this activity. A touching movie with a patient with severe motor disabilities using a prosthetic robot arm was also shown as a part of this lecture. In clinical therapy and rehabilitation, BCIs could also be useful for improving patients' cognitive function and regulation of emotions.

The final invited lecture was given by Maja Zupančič, University of Ljubljana, Slovenia. She presented recent developments in child personality research. For adults, the Five-Factor Model is accepted in many countries and language communities as a viable model of the organization of personality traits. Developmental precursors of the five domains were identified for children living in different societies. The use of an ecologically valid assessment tool ICID in Slovenia showed that personality traits are consistent from early through middle childhood, that personality traits are organized into three to four replicable personality types, and that FFM is valid for predicting of children's emotional and social adjustment, sibling relationships, differential parenting, academic skills, academic motivation and achievement.

The two round tables were dedicated to issues in teaching psychology and to the Bologna process. Participants from different institutions presented the psychology programs at their departments and discussed the challenges they face with the implementation of the new study programs. It was concluded that the institutions in the Alps-Adria region should continue exchanging the experiences, ideas and *know-how*, and create formal groups that could work on finding the solutions for different issues.

The excerpts from the conference presented here are only a part of a rich scientific program. More about the program can be found on the web page: <http://psy.ff.uni-lj.si/alpsadria08/>, and selected lectures and sessions will soon be available on-line.

Continuing the tradition of a fee-free scientific research-oriented conference, the AA conference was an excellent opportunity to create or renew the bonds among psychological research institutions from the neighbouring countries, to strengthen our cooperation, to exchange new findings in psychology and related disciplines, and to discuss the difficulties we are facing every day in doing research and in transferring our knowledge to the young. Another and perhaps even more important impact of the AA Psychology Conference was on the social plane. Old friends came together and new contacts were created. The poster party and the social dinner in hotel Lev played an important role in making bonds between psychologists stronger. After great food and wine at the social dinner, participants were willing to take part in an "AAvision" singing contest. National choirs (Slovenian, Croatian, Austrian, Hungarian, Iranian and Italian) joined their voices in singing folk and art songs for children and adults. As hard to believe as it might be, the psychologists from various countries were actually able

to carry a tune, and Austrians even managed to harmonize! The final results were tied ranks actually, but we can certainly declare that the Iranian couple received the loudest applause for their bravery. A spontaneous "We are the world" symptom emerged later and all together sang several popular songs.

To conclude, I believe the conference was efficient in both the scientific and the social aspects and that its goals were achieved. The Scientific Committee of the Alps-Adria

Psychology Conferences decided that the meetings will be organized every two years from now on. The next Alps-Adria Psychology conference will be held in Klagenfurt, and probably the organizers will not take it hard on me if I invite the readers of this journal to come there. So, see you in two years in Austria!

Anja Podlessek