

Echoes and Impressions After the Conference

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The 33rd Conference of the European Health Psychology Society was a cornerstone for me. Every conference of the Society is memorable for every member in its own way: it could be a scientific interest, a research encounter, the birth of a new idea, the meeting of a new friend, a specific experience - be it gastronomical, social, academic, climatic, or more broadly cultural, or it could simply and most desirably be the beginning of a new chapter. I am not overestimating the magnitude of this gathering - if one tries to inspect more closely their memories and impressions of the event, their thoughts and emotional reactions, one will inevitably find some of the characteristics of their own interaction with the Conference among the inexhaustible and disorderly list that I just tried to make. It is important to reflectively make sense of the meaning of this congress, so that one identifies how to improve one's professional path and make use of all possibilities for change and alteration of the routine, which stifle creativity and innovation. Therefore, I will not so much report as use this opportunity to make sense of the Conference, to create a piece of meaning and not simply give account of events.

The question, which is of concern, is how does the last Conference of the European Health Psychology Society create meaning in my view and what is memorable and influential and will stand in time.

It is always of significance where the stage is set. In this instance, the beautiful Dubrovnik, which is gifted with marvelous nature and dreamy

architecture reminiscent of past affluent times, bringing the taste of summer sultriness, time that has stopped, dazzling sun, blue shimmering sea, vast tranquility of the landscape, being out of breath, but being able to exist in this state because all motions have been slowed down. So in this standstill, you feel that you can get in touch with times long passed, you can feel and go through the layered times and experience the scent, the dream, the spirit of all the symbols of this place. Suddenly, you are here and now, but also here and then at some point, and here and then - at another one, and you are at all of those times all at once. It is one of those pulsing places synchronised with the core of the Earth and the Universe, in which one as if travels through time and imagination is unbound, in which one can live through the collective memory of the history etched in those hills. The first whiff of memorability of this Conference is the unmatched setting of Dubrovnik, which frames everything else that happened during the event.

The second, and to me most important, pillar of meaningfulness is the substance of the Conference. It is not something new, but it is a worthy characteristic of the event that it always hosts a variety of topics within the field of health psychology. The adaptability and versatility of both the content and the form of the Conference is a definite advantage.

On the first day of the Conference, I presented my research focusing on cross health behaviour beliefs in the session on multiple health behaviours. The included studies were riveting and I was particularly impressed with the quality of the analyses applied, the high level of research, as well

as the in-depth theoretical basis of the projects of my colleagues. I was glad to present my work just before my good friend Gabriel Nudelman, who had some bold and innovative research to share – using network analysis in order to identify centrality of health behaviours. Further, there were some interesting talks on organ donation and mediators of descriptive norm effects. The programme continued with other compelling sessions on social inequalities, adjustment, adaptation, and coping with illness, stress reactivity, and interventions in managing diabetes and cardiac risk.

The second and third days of the Conference were also packed with various topics, some of which were intriguing to me, and others completely new and therefore attractive. Due to space constraint, I would like to focus on the last day, when I visited a remarkably impressive oral session dedicated to stress, mental health and chronic illness, with a lot of innovation and gripping conclusions. It was discussed that compassion predicted lower blood pressure in people without familial risk for hypertension (Aino Saarinen). Yori Gidron presented fascinating results from research showing that physician's empathy when giving bad news was associated with increased hopelessness and inflammation in cancer patients, thus challenging the recommendations for approaching such situations. Fiona Mahler shed light on the effects of stress of parents of and children with diabetes type I on metabolic control. The last presentation by Mikaela Law was about environmental enrichment and its effects on human skin healing. Multi-sensory enrichment significantly improved skin recovery, and in addition, enjoyment was a mediator between the enrichment and recovery. Furthermore, there were high quality key-note lectures and poster sessions throughout.

Thirdly, creation of meaning during the Conference was achieved not only through the scientific programme, but also through **social interactions** both during the event and outside of

it. This is an opportunity to find others interested in your work, who can give you an invaluable idea or perspective. In such an environment, you also find more meaning and significance in your own work and manage to place it in the larger scheme of health psychology. After all, we come together driven by the impetus to find out something about the psyche and the behaviour of people with the aim to help improve their health and well-being. So, fundamentally, we explore, we want to know, to uncover, to comprehend, to make sense of. Thus, the core of the driving force behind our work, originally, is knowledge, which is freedom from illusions and the settled ways, freedom to understand, freedom to act, freedom to change, and to dare to be free.



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