

conference report

SOPHIA, The Symbol of Wisdom, welcomes psychologists from the region and the world.

Irina Todorova
President
European Health Psychology Society

At the end of October 2009, an important event took place in Sofia, Bulgaria: The Southeast European Conference of Psychology: Paradigms, Schools, Needs and Achievements of Psychology in the Region. The place was Sofia University "St.Kliment Ohridski", the organizer was the Bulgarian Psychological Society, in collaboration with The Institute of Psychology (Bulgarian Academy of Sciences) and the Association of Young Bulgarian Psychologists.

The Conference had two main aims: to present the achievements of psychology in the region and also to support capacity building for teams and organizations in the area of Southeastern Europe, as well as in broader international collaborations.

Regional conferences of psychology have been taking place since 1995, when the first one was held in China. They are an initiative of the International Association of Applied Psychology (IAAP), in partnership with the International Union of Psychological Science (IUPsyS) and European Federation of Psychologists' Associations (EFPA). They take place every 4 years, alternating with the IAAP conferences. Sofia was the location of the 8th Regional Conference, which addressed the accomplishments, needs and professional networks of psychologists in Southeastern Europe and aimed to foster connections between scientists and professionals. Additionally, this year, the SEERCP was also held under the auspices of the International Association of Cross-Cultural Psychology (IACCP) and the European Health Psychology Society (EHPS).

The EHPS received an invitation from Plamen Dimitrov, President of the Bulgarian Psychological Society and of the SEERCP to support the Conference – I presented this to our EC and it was accepted enthusiastically. Our support took the form of widely publicizing the conference among our members, both from the Eastern European region and beyond, liaising with other professional organizations to ensure a substantial and high quality representation of the health psychology field at the conference through symposia, papers and posters, ensuring EHPS members' participation in the conference and working on developing the program. The EHPS and the IAAP, particularly the Health Psychology Division of IAAP, have a long and productive history of collaboration,

through supporting each other's activities and organizing invited symposia at each other's conferences. I saw the SEERCP as another opportunity to realize a collaboration between IAAP, EHPS and the Bulgarian Psychological Society.



Opening ceremony: Bulgarian folk songs

The Conference received over 350 submissions, which were mainly from the SEE Region (from Bulgaria, Romania, Macedonia, Turkey, Serbia, Greece, Russia, etc.) but also from many other areas of the world, including US, Canada, Northern Ireland, Australia, Iran and others. Thus, the scientific program included plenary and keynote sessions, 12 thematic streams and in tune with the capacity building aims of the event – also a wide variety of more than 25 workshops, open forums and round tables. The opening session included welcoming remarks from Plamen Dimitrov (BPS and President of the SEERCP); Michael Knowles (President of IAAP), Rainer Silbereisen (President, International Union of Psychological Science IUPsyS), Irina Zinovieva, Department of Psychology at Sofia University, the Bulgarian Minister of Science and Education, and the ambassador of South Africa to Bulgaria. I welcomed the delegates on behalf of EHPS, presented the resources that our society has for health psychologists, and coincidentally, the string of EHPS annual conferences which will be taking place in the region: Cluj-Napoca, Romania in 2010, Crete, Greece in 2011 and Prague, Czech Republic, 2012.



SOPHIA, The Symbol of Wisdom, welcomes psychologists from the region and the world.

With the Program Committee we organized the health psychology stream, and identified relevant papers and posters. After some discussions about which papers should be in the Health Psychology stream and which in the Clinical Psychology stream, we still created a full-day Health Psychology program. Our stream began with the following three keynote lectures:

Ray Fowler (US, President-elect of IAAP) Positive Psychology and Positive Health: Increasing Longevity, Health and Happiness

Linda Berg-Cross (US, Howard University) Defining Issues in Health Psychology and Behavioral Sleep Medicine

Irina Todorova: Bulgaria, Health Psychology Research Center: The Role Of Health Psychology In The Health Crisis Of Southeastern Europe.



SEERCP at Sofia University St. Kliment Ohridski

We continued with the full day paper session in health psychology – thankfully, we co-chaired it with Adriana Baban and took turns, and even managed to have a lunch break and finish on the dot. Many posters in the poster sessions also addressed health psychology topics. The presentations attested to the development of health psychology in the SEE region, as well as to the importance of this field for the region, considering that many of the health problems have significant psychosocial dimensions and that many health inequalities are evident. The papers were impressive with the diversity of topics, the sophistication of the theoretical frameworks being not only used, but creatively developed. The papers showed detailed attention to mechanisms of interaction of psychosocial, behaviors and health constructs, and employed quantitative and qualitative methods. Additionally, the health psychology stream had diverse international representation from the SEE region and beyond: from Romania, Serbia, Northern Ireland, Croatia and Bulgaria. Many of the papers were already in

partnerships between different countries and institutions. Youth health was a major topic and several joint projects were presented: collaborations were between Bulgaria and Romania; Poland, Germany and Bulgaria; Greece and Bulgaria.

However, the stream offered opportunities for discussion of future plans for cross-cultural research. Plans were made for attending the 2010 EHPS Conference in Romania.

Though taking place in the peak of the flu season in Sofia, the conference was very well attended and highly successful in achieving its goals. I am happy that the EHPS supported this successful and network building conference in the SEE region, and as such was able to collaborate with the Bulgarian Psychological Society, The International Association of Applied Psychology, The International Union of Psychological Science, the International Association of Cross-cultural Psychology and The European Federation of Psychologists' Associations. When starting my term as president of EHPS an important part of my platform was to highlight the accomplishments of health psychology in Eastern Europe, and expand health psychology initiatives and presence in the region, of which the whole EHPS has also been very supportive. What happened at SEERCP for health psychology was very important, and I am particularly moved by the fact that it happened in Sofia. I'd like to thank all delegates for coming to our beautiful city and making it all possible!

Irina Todorova

President, European Health Psychology Society