

IUPSyS National Capacity Building Workshop for the South-East European Region

Sofia, Bulgaria 2009

As part of the South-East European Regional Conference of Psychology in Sofia, Bulgaria, the Union held a one-day event on 31 October to enable leaders of psychology associations in the region to share experiences and to explore possibilities for developing psychology in the region. The workshop was led by Professor Pam Maras, IUPsyS Executive Committee member, with the support of other members of the Executive Committee and IUPsyS Officers.

While the workshop did not attract as many participants as hoped, there were representatives from a range of regional psychology associations, including Bulgaria, Cyprus, Greece, Hungary, Slovenia and Turkey. In addition, colleagues from The Netherlands and the US (representing IAAP) attended for part of the workshop. Discussion was lively, and, as well as getting to know each other and building relationships, participants shared information and learned about national psychological associations in the region. In particular, the workshop helped identify some key questions, issues and concerns about developing psychology in the region.

One set of issues and concerns were on how to make a national psychology association relevant and attractive to members. There was an acknowledgement that the policy-level activities of national associations, whilst important, can often seem remote or boring to potential members. Discussion focussed around three areas: promoting the benefits of membership, engaging with members, and encouraging student members. Ideas and suggestions in these three areas are in Box 1.

Box 1: MAKING NATIONAL ASSOCIATIONS RELEVANT AND ATTRACTIVE

Benefits of membership

- Having legal regulation of psychology makes benefits clearer
- Help define and support the identity of being as psychologist
- Think creatively about marketing of membership benefits
- Provide a members-only section of the website, with information on services, such as lists of psychologists working in private sector
- Have clear answers to the question "I pay, what do I get?"
- Advertise the content of member pages on the front page of the website

Engaging with members

- Devolving activity to subgroups is a good way of getting members more involved
- Support active divisions of the association through regional events
- Enable members to present their work to others, meet colleagues and make friends
- Hold social events, such as an annual party, to foster social links
- Identify and involve enthusiasts; this also helps with succession planning
- Providing regular communication and engagement with membership (e.g., through newsletters, workshops, meetings)
- Plan to deal with queries promptly (e.g., ensure phone transferred to someone who is available; guarantee email response in four days)

Encouraging student members

- Form a students' association within the national organisation
- Support student-relevant events or activities (e.g., student conference; poster sessions; "open bar" at conference)
- Provide a low membership rate for students to build the habit of membership
- Involve a student president or official in executive committee meetings
- Seek funding for student activities or exchanges

A further set of issues focussed on communication – with and amongst members, with the wider public, and with governmental bodies and other agencies. Key ideas are summarised in Box 2.

Box 2: IMPROVING COMMUNICATION

With and amongst members

- Promoting member communication is vital: news on activities, issues of practice
- A newsletter holds the association together and helps in the development of divisions or interest groups (“the more you differentiate, the more the whole organisation holds together”). Members who join divisions are more likely to stay in the association and get involved
- People love to see themselves in the newsletter: include brief interviews or descriptions
- Provide opportunities to communicate online, especially for smaller organisations. Use of blogs, twitter or social networking may be better than email for discussions. Online communication may encourage members into organisational roles or attend meetings

With the wider public

- Use the popular media to help promote psychology as a science and a profession. An example is the use of TV reality shows, often involving psychological and ethical issues, with opportunities for psychologists to become involved. This can be a strong driver within the public to recognise psychology as a profession.
- Producing a popular journal can be problematic and requires involvement of commercial organisations
- Where feasible, have a “media committee” which identifies and works with major media sources. Ensure that the press gets into the habit of contacting the organisation.

With governmental bodies or other agencies

- Identify people in the association who can handle political and legal issues, to ensure psychology is not omitted from relevant policy matters and is not linked with unscientific activity
- Involve politicians and others in events, awards, dinners. Particularly influential are key people who have had personal good experiences with professional psychologists.
- Develop mechanisms for advocacy and “lobbying” to improve involvement in government decision-making.
- Provide appropriate information to members of parliament in clear and simple form

A final area for discussion at the workshop was the education and training of psychologists, and the national structures and regulations governing both educational provision and professional recognition. The discussion led to the identification of a number of emerging issues:

- ◆ The difficulty of introducing regulation to a currently unregulated professional area
- ◆ Regulation is an expensive activity. How should the association be involved, and is it good value for members?
- ◆ The role of EuroPsy (a framework for achieving professional recognition within Europe): the EuroPsy project has looked at psychology programmes across Europe, where there is a good deal of commonality at the undergraduate level, and at the requirements to be a competent practitioner in psychology, where there are large national differences, with each country having specific laws and regulations.
- ◆ Problems are generally at the societal level, not the academic level. It is important for Associations

to have a long-term view of making changes, and that this should be based upon scientific criteria.

Participants left the workshop feeling that much had been discussed but that in some areas they had hardly scratched the surface.

A symposium at the forthcoming International Congress of Applied Psychology (ICAP) will explore how National Capacity Building Workshops might best support the needs of the Union’s National Members.



National Capacity Building Workshop, SEERCP 2009