



Report from the President

Rainer K. Silbereisen, PhD —President, IUPsyS; Professor, University of Jena



Rainer Silbereisen

When I looked back at the first year of my time as President of IUPsyS, I realised just how much I have travelled on the Union's behalf. Since my election at the ICP in Berlin in July 2008, until the end of 2009, I will have made official visits to 11 countries, some more than once. Travelling, of course, can bring pleasure - meeting new people, seeing new places, experiencing new cultures -

but, as anyone who has missed a plane, lost their luggage, or been stranded in some remote place while on a tight schedule will know, travelling can also be very stressful. I am happy to say that, while I have had my share of travel mishaps, IUPsyS travel over the past months has been largely positive. Here is a summary of some recent travel.

Würzburg

From a very positive point of view, I recently travelled to Würzburg in southern Germany to meet with the Officers of IUPsyS. Our regular officers meeting was followed by a meeting of the newly constituted Advanced Research and Training Seminars (ARTS) steering committee (see <http://www.iupsys.org/arts/index.html>). A special feature

was the location - not just Würzburg itself, which is a beautiful old town by the River Main, but the Himmelsporten monastery, dating from 1252, in which the meetings were held. This medieval Cloister was first built to house Cistercian Monks, but its function changed frequently throughout its fascinating and chequered history until it was renovated to a stunningly high standard in 2005 to become a meeting place for groups with a people-oriented mission. As you might imagine, the atmosphere in such a place was very conducive to peaceful and productive meetings, and I think we all came away feeling we had achieved a great deal.



ARTS Coordinating Committee and sponsoring organizations.. Gonca Soygut (IUPsyS), Nandita Chaudhary (IACCP), Heidi Keller (President IACCP), Merry Bullock (IUPsyS EC), Tom Oakland (IAAP), Xianghong Sun, ARTS Coordinator

Bergen

Directly preceding the meeting in Würzburg, I attended the World Social Science Forum in Bergen, Norway. Here IUPsyS sponsored two events by supporting the travel of invited speakers. One event in particular - an invited talk by John Elster entitled, "One Social Science or Many?" - drew a large crowd. I had been asked to

comment on this paper and I have to admit I found it extremely interesting, as well as challenging to my own perspective at times. I am interested in the effects that social and political transformation, such as the breakdown of the socialist countries and the challenges of globalization, may have on adaptation and development with regard to major aspects of psychosocial functioning of those affected. Against this backdrop I listened with great interest to a fascinating *tour d'horizon*, from a definition of social science, over a critique of the reportedly unifying rational choice approach, to epistemological and methodological advice as to how scientific insights in the social sciences can be achieved. In particular, and most thought provoking, was Elster's conception of social science where psychology plays a major role by providing the "mechanisms" that ultimately explain phenomena on the social structural level.

As a psychologist, I was also pleased to hear that Elster subscribes to the idea that the aim is to "deal with the proximate causes of behaviour", and I am also sympathetic with the concept that, in order to study the influence between social phenomena, one has to attend to the agentic behaviour of the individuals affected. What surprised me in the first instance, however, was that, according to Elster, the causes of behaviour that social science is interested in are actually psychological phenomena, namely, "beliefs, desires, perceptions, and emotions". My first thought was, "Aren't social institutions and structures the hallmark of sociology and other social sciences? Or is this a definition that deliberately includes psychology as a social science, which not all psychologists would like?" Well, after a while I understood the position better. Obviously this is a particular understanding of the causal mechanism. It is conceived as the link between the macro level of societal structures and the micro level of individual behaviour, whereas the antecedent social structures and consequences on the macro level, which possibly result from micro level actions, are not seen as part of the mechanism.



Opening Session, ISSC World Forum

Sadly, there is not enough space here to go further into this remarkable and interesting presentation, or to relate the intense discussion that followed. Suffice to say that for me such events provide the ultimate reward for working with and for IUPsyS: To meet colleagues, to hear and discuss different and new perspectives on old and fresh topics, to make plans to extend the outreach of our discipline and the Union, and to bring people together who might otherwise maintain an unhelpful distance from one another.

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Jena

I would just like to mention one meeting that is yet to be: In November this year we will hold a workshop in Jena, Germany, on 'Bereavement Research and Practice' that will cover the topic of bereavement from a broad perspective, ranging from the normal lifespan-related loss of family, friends and acquaintances, through loss due to accidents and natural catastrophes, to loss caused by armed conflicts. The aim of the workshop is to provide learning opportunities for young investigators and PhD students interested in clinical psychology and related fields, such as developmental and social psychology, and to do this by having presentations from several international experts in the field of bereavement. We will also include group work where issues raised by the presentations will be discussed. Participants will be invited from three Caucasus countries, Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia.



The workshop, which is an element of the International Union of Psychological Science (IUPsyS) Capacity Building program, is also important for other reasons. We have been fortunate enough to secure funding for this workshop from the German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD) as part of its program entitled, "Prevention of Conflict in the South Caucasus Region." This funding will enable us to invite and host participants from the three Caucasus countries already mentioned, as well as participants from Germany. Any participants invited from the rest of the world will be funded from other sources, including, of course, the Union. I see this joint funding as a major step forward in extending the outreach of the Union's activities, especially concerning its Capacity Building program, and in helping us to fulfil several aspects of our Strategic Plan.

Guatemala, Oslo and Cape Town



IUPsyS Breakfast, SIP Conference

During the summer the Union was active in its representation at two regional congresses and one national conference. In July I briefly attended the Interamerican Congress of Psychology in Guatemala City, and

met with presidents and representatives of Central and South American psychology associations at a lively breakfast meeting organized by IUPsyS as outreach to Latin American colleagues and encouragement to join the Union <link to power point>. I was invited to speak in a Presidential symposium on challenges to psychology <link to power point>. Directly afterwards I was in Oslo

at the European Congress of Psychology where I met good old friends of the European Federation of Psychologists' Associations (EFPA) and learned that they had elected Robert Roe as their new President. Together with fellow officers I met colleagues from other international organizations, gave an invited keynote lecture on behalf of IUPsyS, and also together with the publishers celebrated a farewell reception as outgoing editor of EFPA's journal *European Psychologist*. The success of this journal reminded me of the importance of international journals as official outlets of a scientific society like ours.



Rainer Silbereisen (IUPsyS) & Mike Knowles (IAAP)

Finally, I was in Cape Town, South Africa and attended the 15th congress of the Psychological Society of South Africa. I was even invited to open the congress and



15th PSYSSA Congress

thereby show IUPsyS's commitment to the country and its psychologists. It was a moving moment - as a scientist interested in social change I looked into the audience and knew how deeply involved they all have been in the transformation to a democratic society, and yet what long a way it will be to overcome all the divides of the past. We will do as much as we can to provide support and show our appreciation. The

Executive Committee also met in Cape Town, and I am very satisfied to let you know that we achieved quite a bit, especially concerning the activities of the work groups on topics such as capacity building and training for psychologists. The International Congress of Psychology that will be held in Cape Town in 2012. Please don't forget to put that in your diaries; after all, 2012 is not so very far away.