

# Exploring the world of psychology

**I**n a sense, psychology in the UK is international; the roots of the British empirical tradition are traceable to the 19th-century laboratories of Germany, and much current literature emanates from the US. International journals and editorial boards, international congresses, global partnerships in research and e-mail exchanges mean that psychology in the UK does not and could not operate in isolation.

But on the other hand, the diet of information that we receive about psychology outside the UK is thin and filtered. Linguistic and cultural barriers prevent us from knowing, for many countries, what psychologists are practising and teaching, and how these activities reflect local national concerns. This month we begin a series of articles in *The Psychologist* to redress the balance.

## Breaking down barriers

With a few exceptions regionally (see weblinks) and globally (e.g. Kazdin, 2000; Pawlik & Rosenzweig, 2000), comparative information on psychology across the world is thin on the ground. *The Psychologist* has run the occasional article on psychology in far-flung places, but they were usually the result of a chance encounter. Ironically, while national psychological societies are typically inclusive – representing a multitude of views and interests – inclusion seems to halt abruptly at national boundaries.

This exclusivity may stem partly from the fact that, to some, British and American psychology can seem self-contained and



**NIGEL FOREMAN** (*Chair, International Committee*)  
introduces a new series of occasional articles on  
*psychology beyond the UK.*

self-sufficient. Historical factors have had the effect of marginalising other influences. But the European Union is now the equivalent of the US in terms of its economic power, larger in terms of population, and it will become larger still. Better integration among European psychologists is just one aspect of wider integration; and as the largest and oldest European society, the BPS is committed to playing an increasing role in this process.

But the BPS currently lags behind the American Psychological Association in terms of international profile. The APA has an international office, and a *Psychology International* publication that is widely read internationally. It serves as an effective vehicle for the expression of goodwill as well as information exchange between US psychologists and the international community. The BPS has no such vehicle or role.

## What are we missing?

Within Europe, under the influence of the European Federation of Psychologists' Associations (EFPA), the teaching of psychology is likely to become better integrated. Initiatives such as the proposed European Diploma in Psychology may promote greater job mobility for psychologists between European states. Such developments have potential benefits in terms of greater integration of syllabuses and perhaps incorporation of pan-European sources and materials into teaching. Comparing the evolution of psychology within alternative political and social contexts ought to shed light on the subject itself. But it's a fair bet that the majority of UK psychologists could not list their present counterparts abroad, let alone recall

past formative influences in any country other than the US. Indeed, many historical pillars of psychology in one country may be entirely unknown in another. Take Russia as an example (see Grigorenko *et al.*, 1997). While some Russians (Pavlov, Vygotsky and Luria) are well known internationally, many such as Ananyev, Teplov, Uznadze and Leontiyev are all but unknown, despite their prominence among Slavic psychologists. In our opening article the Finnish psychologist Kaila is brought to the attention of non-Finnish psychologists, in most cases probably for the first time.

Moreover, there are important and interesting cultural features that give flavour to national psychological traditions. Richard Gregory has pointed out that one sees further by standing on the shoulders of past theorists than by treading on their toes. Nevertheless, criticism (of the undermining variety) is at the heart of Western psychological discourse. But this may not be so in other cultures in which criticism is sometimes regarded as disrespectful. Ethical issues also vary from one country to another; surprisingly, when writing their own ethical code, the Canadian Psychological Association found it necessary to rewrite the prescriptive APA code in favour of a more process-oriented Canadian code. Publishers have often recognised that in order to suit the European market, textbooks need to be restyled – sometimes radically so – from the US originals.

Differences in national styles and approaches (romantic versus experimental, psychodynamic versus empirical) that complement and reflect on our own also often emerge at international and European congresses. Traffic psychology is a

## WEBLINKS

BPS International Committee:

[www.bps.org.uk/about/intcom/index.cfm](http://www.bps.org.uk/about/intcom/index.cfm)

The International Union of Psychological Science:

[www.iupsys.org](http://www.iupsys.org)

British and East European Psychology Group:

[bandedpg.infm.ulst.ac.uk](mailto:bandedpg.infm.ulst.ac.uk)

European Federation of Psychologists' Associations:

[www.efpa.be](http://www.efpa.be)

recognised 'subdiscipline' of psychology elsewhere in Europe but is not recognised here. (Living in London, I wonder why not.) Special circumstances within a country can create what we might call a natural psychological laboratory. The first article in this international series illustrates some features of Finnish psychology that are particularly tailored to the needs of Finland or that reflect differences among groups within the Finnish population.

Understanding a nation's psychology helps us to understand that nation, and in turn perhaps helps us to understand ourselves. The late Michael Argyle's work on Japanese traditions highlighted the ways in which psychologists could contribute to international understandings, by better appreciating the social norms of a very different culture. September 11th and the aftermath point to an increasing potential

role for psychology in international issues, such as conflict resolution, for which deeper social and cultural understandings are required. Psychology ought to have a prominent role to play, but psychology often features in the political domain more strongly abroad than in then UK. Outside the UK we are probably seen as self-obsessed and inward-looking. Our series on non-UK psychology can be regarded as a first tentative step toward broadening the areas of international interest covered by the BPS and by *The Psychologist*.

#### References

- Grigorenko, E.L., Ruzgis, P. & Sternberg, R.J. (1997). *Psychology in Russia: Past, present and future*. New York: Nova Science.
- Kazdin, A.E. (2000) *Encyclopedia of psychology*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Pawlik, K. & Rosenzweig, M.R. (2000). *The international handbook of psychology*. London: Sage.

### What are we trying to do, and how can you help?

*The Psychologist* would like to feature a different country every few months, but as always we need your help in the form of contributions. Our overseas readers may like to tackle their own country. UK readers might consider their students: at any time, academics host large numbers of postgraduates from a wide catchment, and given their mobility and firsthand experience they might be a valuable source. The first article below could be seen as a template, but *The Psychologist* would also welcome any contributions on psychology worldwide that would be of interest to our wide-ranging, non-specialist readership. Enjoy, comment, and write or seek out contributions yourself!

# Psychology in FINLAND

KLAUS HELKAMA and NIGEL FOREMAN look at a country with one of the highest density of psychologists in the world.

**A**LTHOUGH Finland is one of the largest European countries, it has one of the smallest populations – approximately five million, 10 per cent living in the capital (Helsinki). Finns have earned a reputation for creative design, and for social innovation; for example, Finland was the first country in Europe to grant full political rights to women. It is a new nation; after many centuries languishing under Swedish and then Russian rule, the Finnish nation came into being in 1917. The Swedish link still remains since the country is officially bilingual, and 7 per cent of Finns use Swedish as their first language.

It is perhaps surprising that Finland, having been pulled apart by internal

struggles after the 1917 Russian revolution, now enjoys perhaps the most consensual politics of any European country. That is not to say that it lacks cultural diversity; for centuries, eastern and western Finland were quite separate ancestral groups, and genetic distinctions have interesting resonances in contemporary Finnish psychological research. Some unique cultural factors in Finland have created a natural psychological laboratory – and we will begin by considering some of these national concerns.

**The 'Finnish persona'** One obvious factor in the unusual density of psychologists in Finland is their rapid societal transition, which gave rise to a need for psychological services.

One may also speculate that the apparent ambivalence of the Finns toward communication might play a role. It is hard to write about Finland without engaging stereotypes, in part because Finns tend to use stereotypes when referring to themselves; even their own tourist brochures describe Finns as taciturn. The Finns often regard themselves as uncommunicative, and several studies show they are not bothered by long silences in interpersonal communication.

Perhaps the unique combination of historical, geographical and climatic circumstances of Finland – an often bitter winter climate, long dark nights and geographical dispersion – may have had lasting impacts on the Finnish persona.

Among Finns there is a frequently expressed love of wild open country and islands, isolated wooden forest houses, admiration of survival without domestic luxuries, and indulgence in country passions such as hunting. But does this reflect shyness? On some indices of communicativeness, Finland gets top marks, for instance on the number of amateur drama companies or portable phones per capita. The sauna culture, associated especially with Finland, hardly implies shyness, nor do male social rituals surrounding hunting and the imbibing of vodka. Finnish and Swedish speakers within Finland, when directly compared, do show some differences in lifestyle and social activity; this is the subject of a current study by Rauni Myllyniemi.

**Alcohol research** Sales of wines and spirits in Finland are restricted and allowed only through the government monopoly, Alko. Concern about alcohol abuse – several national Finnish figures, including Jean Sibelius, were blighted by overdrinking – has resulted in tight government control. Taxation on alcohol is high but the revenue generated is spent on research (via the Finnish Foundation for Alcohol Studies) and in the treatment of alcoholism. In fact, despite the male social habit of drinking vodka to excess, alcohol consumption in Finland is now similar to that in the rest of Europe.

**Heart disease in eastern Finland** The population of eastern Finland, originating

from the Karelian population centuries ago, was found to have an exceptionally high rate of death from heart disease. The National Institute of Public Health undertook a prolonged study of lifestyle and diet, finding that a genetic factor was present in this population, compounded by a high-fat diet, predisposing to high blood cholesterol levels. Attempts were made to encourage the replacement of fats with carbohydrate, in one of the first examples of health psychology in practice. This large-scale community intervention resulted in a substantial reduction of coronary risk factors (Puska *et al.*, 1985)

**Mobile phone technology** The Finnish company Nokia, a world leader in the development of portable phones, was a large factor in Finland's emergence from economic recession during the 1990s. Nokia now provides financial support for courses in the applied psychology department of Helsinki University, and it employs a number of psychologists graduating from such courses.

Where is psychology applied? Eino Kaila's interest in the positivistic philosophy of science and personality typologies (see below) probably contributed to the rise of differential psychology in the 1940s and 1950s, simultaneous with the emergence of a strong school of psychometrics. The foremost representative of this school was Yrjö Ahmavaara, the developer of transformation analysis of factorial data. Indeed, the excessive use of factor analysis

was a peculiarity of Finnish psychological research up to the late 1960s.

Factor analysis was put into use in careers guidance, one of the most active fields of applied psychology in Finland at the time. In 1967 more than one quarter of the members of the Finnish Psychological Association worked in careers guidance. This preponderance that can perhaps be explained by the abrupt transition from an agricultural to industrial and post-industrial society, which took place faster in Finland than anywhere else in Europe, and by the ideology of social planning then prevalent in all Nordic countries.

Psychoanalysis and psychotherapy are also important: led by Dr Eero Rechardt, the Finnish Psychoanalytical Society is the largest in Scandinavia and provides training in Helsinki in the Freudian tradition both for Finns and others from neighbouring Baltic states.

### Psychology professions and the public

The number of professionally active psychologists is currently about 4300. A substantial majority work in medical care, followed by social services and labour force administration. A relatively small proportion work as private practitioners (5 per cent) or in private enterprises (7 per cent).

The professional activity of psychologists is regulated by the Act Concerning Health Care Professionals (1994), which restricts the use of the title 'psychologist' to those approved by the National Board of Medico-Legal Affairs. This kind of legislation is unique in Europe.

Psychology receives quite a high public profile in Finland through the popularity of psychology books aimed at the general public (popular ones cover issues such as self-esteem and national identity). The weekly Ben Furman show on TV is a rather idiosyncratic source of popular psychology. Furman is a psychiatrist, but a range of topics in psychology is covered. There is also an open university which provides academic TV broadcasts. The current Finnish Prime Minister, Paavo Lipponen, took social psychology as part of his degree.

### Development of national centres of psychology

The generation of Finnish psychologists originally trained by Kaila included Kai von Fieandt in Helsinki, Martti Takala in Jyväskylä and Johan von Wright in Turku and later in Helsinki. Von Fieandt

## THE ROOTS OF PSYCHOLOGY IN FINLAND

The first psychological laboratory was established in 1922 in the former capital, Turku, by the psychologist and philosopher Eino Kaila (1890–1958). Kaila moved to Helsinki, where psychology was first offered in 1930–31 as a part of practical philosophy.

Kaila was not only a prominent Finnish psychologist (his experiments on the reactions of the infant on the human face, carried out in Vienna in the early 1930s, were internationally well known) but also a major influence in Scandinavian cultural life. In 1934 his most influential book, *Persoonallisuus* (Personality) was published, three years before the publication of Allport's *Personality*. Kaila drew on a wide variety of sources – gestalt psychology, Freudian psychoanalysis, but also the works of Lewin and Lashley. Kaila's student, Professor Martti Takala, summarises Kaila's conception of the human as 'an animal living in the world of symbols' (Takala, 1991). Although Kaila's cultural influence in Scandinavia was broad – he greatly influenced the Swedish film director Ingmar Bergman, for example – he was not well known outside Scandinavia.

Following the Second World War, many Finnish psychologists took advantage of the bilateral Fulbright grant scheme with the US, and American psychology became a major influence. Many psychology professors appointed in the 1960s and 1970s had studied in the US. However, the legacy of Kaila remained, and behaviourism never caught on in Finland; the Lewinian picture of human beings as possessing consciousness and goal-directedness was preserved.

## WHERE IS PSYCHOLOGY TAUGHT AND RESEARCHED?

Psychology features at high-school level, where it forms an optional part of the matriculation examination. Psychology is increasing in popularity, in terms of the numbers selecting psychology, although the choice of psychology by a student at that stage is not essential to their entering a psychology degree. Finnish universities currently receive over 20 applications for each available place. The first degree leads to the award of a master's qualification after five years of study. Obtaining a PhD typically takes three to five years after that.

Six universities have chairs in psychology: Helsinki, Turku (in Swedish- and Finnish-language universities), Jyväskylä, Tampere, and Joensuu. In addition, medical and social psychology feature in Kuopio University and educational psychology in the context of teacher training in Oulu University.

Approximately two thirds of all psychological research in Finland is carried out in the six universities that train psychologists. One third takes place in research institutes such as the Psychological Department of the National Institute of Occupational Health. Organisations such as the Finnish Association on Mental Retardation also employ psychologists and conduct psychological research (e.g. Numminen, 2002).

**Helsinki** (see [www.helsinki.fi/english](http://www.helsinki.fi/english)): Among the current research traditions, one of the best known is the programme on cognitive brain research conducted by Risto Näätänen at the University of Helsinki. It has aimed at clarifying issues in selective attention, information processing and consciousness using the mismatch negativity (MMN) component of the auditory event-related potential. This phenomenon was discovered by Näätänen in collaboration with a Dutch laboratory in 1975. Mismatch negativity has received a number of potential applications, for example in

the assessment of auditory abilities and musical talent (Näätänen & Winkler, 1999). Näätänen (with Heikki Summala) has also done some pioneering work on traffic psychology, which has featured particularly strongly in Finland. In some other parts of Scandinavia (and within EFPA) this is a recognised subdiscipline of psychology. The Laboratory of Industrial Psychology of Helsinki University of Technology also undertakes traffic research.

**Jyväskylä** (see [www.jyu.fi/indexeng.shtml](http://www.jyu.fi/indexeng.shtml)): The Jyväskylä Longitudinal Study of Social Development by Lea Pulkkinen has followed the same participants (born in 1959) from age eight up to their mid-thirties. The most recent focus was on lifestyles and emotion regulation (Pulkkinen & Caspi, 2002). Jyväskylä University incorporates the Niilo Mäki Child and Youth Neuropsychological Research Unit, founded in 1990 and funded by the Niilo Mäki Foundation.

**Turku** (see [www.turku.fi/english](http://www.turku.fi/english)): In Turku University groups established by the late Kirsti Lagerspetz have studied aggression in mice and humans from a variety of multidisciplinary perspectives, including issues of heredity, the impact of TV violence on moral judgements of aggression, and bullying in school.

**Tampere** (see [www.uta.fi/english/index.html](http://www.uta.fi/english/index.html)): Antti Eskola has applied the perspective of historical social psychology to personality and personality research, and contributed to the development of alternative research methods.

**Joensuu** (see [www.joensuu.fi/englishindex.html](http://www.joensuu.fi/englishindex.html)): Situated in north Karelia in eastern Finland, Joensuu psychologists have specialised in educational psychological research, academic career study, women's studies and individual and cultural aspects of change.

developed research in perception in Helsinki. Both Takala and von Wright have represented a broad functionalist-cognitivist orientation in the spirit of Kurt Lewin and Frederic Bartlett. Takala, who has also had important national and

international administrative duties (including becoming rector of his university) was originally oriented towards personality psychology but has enlarged his research interests towards developmental, educational, and social psychology. Von Wright's main interests have been in memory and learning.

The subsequent generation of psychologists – pupils of the Takala and von Wright 'generalist' schools – were able to specialise more in their research. An internal evaluation (Niemi, 1987) showed that in the mid-1980s psychophysiology and neuropsychology, the psychology of aggressive behaviour, and cognitive processes were fields in which Finnish research teams had attained an international reputation. Three trends were common to all subfields of Finnish psychology:

- starting from the systemic approach, seeing humans in terms of different simultaneously operating subsystems;
- treating human behaviour as active and goal-seeking; and
- replacing a variable-centred approach with an emphasis on more complex real-life activities.

Some of the main research activities at centres of psychology throughout Finland are given in the box above.

■ *Professor Nigel Foreman is at Middlesex University. E-mail: [n.foreman@mdx.ac.uk](mailto:n.foreman@mdx.ac.uk).*

■ *Professor Klaus Helkama is in the Department of Social Psychology, University of Helsinki. E-mail: [klaus.helkama@helsinki.fi](mailto:klaus.helkama@helsinki.fi).*

### NATIONAL ORGANISATIONS

The Finnish Psychological Society (FPS: see [www.psykologienkustannus.fi/sps/seurasta/index.htm](http://www.psykologienkustannus.fi/sps/seurasta/index.htm)) was established in 1952. It grew out of the Psychology Society of University Students, established in 1935. The FPS publishes the English-language journal *Acta Psychologica Fennica* (back issues contain many useful articles on Finnish psychology) and a Finnish-language journal *Psykologia*.

Since the creation of the Finnish Psychological Association (FPA: see [www.psyli.fi/english/index.html](http://www.psyli.fi/english/index.html)), a trade union, in 1957, the FPS has restricted itself to scientific issues. However, from the early 1980s, the two organisations have regularly arranged joint national congresses. The head of the FPA is current EFPA President Tuomo Tikkanen. The FPA has a news bulletin, *Psykologiuutiset*.

### References

- Näätänen, R. & Winkler, I. (1999). The concept of auditory stimulus representation in cognitive neuroscience. *Psychological Bulletin*, 125, 826–859.
- Niemi, P. (1987). Evaluation of psychological research: The Finnish experience. *International Journal of Psychology*, 22, 387–392.
- Numminen, H. (2002). *Working memory in adults with intellectual disability*. Research Publication no. 85. Helsinki: Finnish Association on Mental Retardation.
- Pulkkinen, L. & Caspi, A. (Eds.) (2002). *Paths to successful development: Personality in the life course*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Puska, P., Nissinen, A., Tuomilehto, J., Salonen, J., Koskela, K., McAlister, A. et al. (1985). The community-based strategy to prevent coronary heart disease: Conclusions from ten years of the North Karelia Project. *Annual Review of Public Health*, 6, 147–194.
- Takala, M. (1991). Eino Kaila's contribution to Finnish psychology. *Acta Psychologica Fennica*, 12, 3–9.