

Psychology

in



Slovenia

SLOVENIA was the first region to break away from the former Yugoslavia, publicly declaring its independence in 1991. After 10 days of aggression by the Yugoslav army on Slovenia, its independence was recognised. It is a country of barely two million people, sharing borders with Austria, Croatia, Italy and Hungary. In 2003 the country voted overwhelmingly in favour of joining the European Union, and psychologists have been prominent among those helping Slovenia to define its own role and identity within the enlarged EU.

Psychology's applied profile

From 1954 onward, professional psychology was in the forefront, particularly within the vocational guidance centres, where many psychologists worked. Clinical psychology was centred in hospitals and guidance centres. Throughout the 1990s, applied fields were gradually introduced, such as organisational, economic, environmental, political, forensic, sports, family, military and applied social psychology (Musek, 2003). Later, with the growth towards a market economy, the psychology of advertising and marketing became important fields of application.

There are now about 1500 graduate psychologists in Slovenia working mainly

*Slovenia joins the European Union this month, and its psychologists are keen to develop their subject and structures in line with the rest of Europe. Here, **VELKO S. RUS** and **VID PEČJAK** outline the history and current state of Slovenian psychology.*

in education, health, economics and marketing, social welfare, administration, the army and police, and in academic institutions. One third of elementary schools have in-house psychological services, and one third of all psychologists work in the educational sphere. A quarter

'Slovenian psychologists remain influential in government circles'

of all psychologists work in mass media and administration, reflecting the universality and wide applicability of their educational curricula. Only a small number of psychologists are unemployed, usually only for a short time after graduation.

The Slovene Psychological Association (SPA) recently instigated an attempt to introduce a 'law of psychological practice', which would have provided state registration for all psychologists. The preparation and discussions have lasted almost 10 years, but have been particularly intense in the last four. The foundation of a 'Chamber of Psychologists' was one of important goals of the project. But this long-standing proposal was not accepted by the Slovenian parliament, with only

40 per cent of delegates supporting it. Nevertheless, Slovenian psychologists remain influential in government circles: for example, the former Deputy President of the SPA, Agata Zupančič, now advises the government on its public health programmes. Slovenian psychologists have been members of parliament and mayors of some cities.

Psychology as a science is both professionally presented and popularised in the Slovenian media, especially successfully by Dr Mojca Vizjak Pavšič, newly elected as the President of the Slovene Psychological Association in October 2003.

Teaching centres

Psychological courses had been taught from the foundation of the University of Ljubljana in 1919, in the Faculties of Philosophy and Education by Veber and Ozvald. After the Second World War there was a rapid growth and diversification, partially influenced by the industrialisation and modernisation of Slovenian society and in part by the sudden decline of the philosophical psychology approach. This went hand in hand with the development of empirical research, reported in textbooks written by Slovenian authors.

In 1950 the Department of Psychology

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was founded within the Faculty of Philosophy at the University of Ljubljana, followed in 1952 by the Institute of Psychology. The first professor and the chairman of the department was Mihajlo Rostohar (see 'Key people' box), who taught general, developmental and social psychology, the history of psychology and psychology of the handicapped. The department has published two books of readings: *Prispevki k Psihologiji* (*Contributions to Psychology*) (Pečjak et al., 1960), and *Oddelek za Psihologijo, 40 Let* (*Forty Years of the Department of Psychology*) (Žagar & Marjanovič-Umek, 1992).

Almost all Slovenian psychologists studied at the University of Ljubljana, the psychology department having more than 30 professors and assistants. In the 1990s it had several hundred students, but since then the number has been reduced through official limits. Degrees are offered in theoretical and applied psychology, mandatory courses spanning the breadth of psychological subdisciplines. After four years of study candidates may apply for a diploma that entitles them to work as professional psychologists and to become members of Slovene Psychological Association.

Although the University of Ljubljana still has the only department of psychology in Slovenia, many courses are offered by other departments and by the University of Maribor, faculties and colleges (social work, social sciences, economic and sports colleges and a college of education). Psychology is a mandatory course at many

THE ROOTS OF PSYCHOLOGY IN SLOVENIA

'Psychological' writings from the Slovenia region can be traced back to the Renaissance. David Verbec was the first Slovenian to write a psychological book (*Disputatio de Temperamentis*, 1598). The first books to be written in the Slovenian language were *Iskustveno Dušeslovje* (*Experiential Psychology*, 1889), written by a teacher Fran Gabršek, and *Dušeslovje* (*Psychology*, 1889–1890), written by a priest France Lampe, which remains the largest single psychological book in the Slovenian language. The early authors were influenced mostly by associationism of the 19th century, especially but also by J.F. Herbart.

Before the Second World War only about 20 psychological books were published in the Slovenian language, most about general and school psychology, the most significant work was by Franc Veber. Veber originated a kind of holistic and mentalistic psychology, which he called 'geometry of mind', under the strong influence of Alexius Meinong's 'theory of objects' (see ontology.buffalo.edu/smith/book/austrian_philosophy). Meinong was a philosopher who founded the first psychological laboratory in Austria (conducting systematic experiments in gestalt psychology). He believed that all psychic acts are oriented towards an object, but whereas Meinong wrote only about 'objects', Veber added 'subject' or self (Pečjak, 1982).

Another significant figure was Karl Ozvald, his view being much influenced by German mentalistic psychologist Spranger and partially by the phenomenologist Husserl. Neither Veber nor Ozvald was empirically oriented, and despite some attempts to build an empirically based psychology, a metaphysical and philosophical orientation prevailed.

high schools. New departments of psychology are likely to be founded in the near future at the University of Maribor and University of Koper (Capodistria). Psychology has also been notably taught in the Faculty of Theology, by Aleš Ušeničnik before the Second World War, and afterwards mostly by Trstenjak (see 'Key people' box).

Temporary training centres have been founded by the Slovene Psychological Association, for example the Institute for Clinical Psychology. The SPA is currently making preparations for a transition to

a course structure that meets the requirements of the Eurodiploma in Psychology.

Research centres

Slovenian psychology is mostly eclectic in nature, though there are also tendencies for more synthetic and integrative approaches. All of the main fields that feature in world psychology have been researched, although some have been emphasised: these include psychophysics, psycholinguistics, cognitive psychology, devising or adapting tests, the history of psychology, creativity, self-image, contemporary social psychology and, most recently, political psychology.

Developmental work has often featured Piagetian methodology. Psychoanalysis is relatively strong; at first it was primarily Schultz-Hencke neoanalysis, and later especially the analysis of object relations, while Lacan's structural analysis is more spread among philosophers and some young psychologists. Some humanistic techniques (e.g. gestalt therapy, transactional therapy and Radix) are also practised.

Theoretical and research work has been done mainly at the Department of Psychology, but also in the Faculties of Social Sciences and Education and in institutes such as the former Institute of Sociology and the present-day Institutes for Clinical Psychology and Personality, plus in some clinical institutions. Academic links exist with several European and

KEY PEOPLE IN THE HISTORY OF SLOVENIAN PSYCHOLOGY

Mihajlo Rostohar (1878–1966) studied with Meinong in Graz, Wundt in Leipzig, and Külpe in Würzburg. He originally co-founded the University of Ljubljana (in 1919), writing the first university statutes, then moving to the new Czechoslovakia, founding a department of psychology in Brno (1925), and later one in Ljubljana (1950). Rostohar published several papers on political psychology (e.g. 'National feeling' in 1904, 'What is nation?' in 1914, and an anti-Soviet paper 'For new socialism' in 1922). He published some books in the Slovenian and Czech languages in Prague, and became the first President of the Slovene Psychological Association.

Anton Trstenjak (1906–1996) studied with Gemelli in Milan. He produced some 70 books, lectured in foreign universities and in the University of Ljubljana, adopting a holistic perspective in teaching perception, personality, many other psychological disciplines and popular psychology. He was one of the few people who succeeded in integrating empirical, experimental and anthropological perspectives.



American universities, and new diagnostic tests have been adapted and developed in the Ljubljana department.

Developmental Slovenian developmental psychology has an old tradition. The first such studies were done before the foundation of the department (on children's imagination, beginner's reading, and concept formation) at the beginning of last century by Mihajlo Rostohar, who came out with the idea of mental structures and stage development. Pečjak (1999) referred to Rostohar as 'Piaget before Piaget'. According to Rostohar, mental development is not only quantitative growth, but also qualitative change. His investigation of language brought him close to Chomsky's generative grammar, because he differentiated kinds of deep and surface language structures (Pečjak, 1999). Ivan Toličič and Leon Zorman investigated the relation between socio-economic level of family and school success. Today developmental psychological research is related to the problem of readiness for school, cognitive development, gifted children and the process of ageing. School psychology is influential and occupies about one third of psychologists.

Social Rostohar was also the originator of social psychological research in Slovenia. In his 1922 paper 'For new socialism' he criticised Soviet practice and foresaw its self-destruction because of its

lack of emphasis on work motivation (Pečjak, 1983). From the foundation of the Ljubljana department in 1950 to the beginning of the 1980s, social psychology was taught as a one-year course, but from the second half of eighties, there have been serious attempts to elaborate it as a traditional, societal, cross-cultural and applied discipline (Rus, 2000). Social cognition and social constructionism are also important parts of the social psychological programme. Public opinion polling has not been developed in the Department of Psychology but in the Faculty for Social Sciences, where annual polling began in 1967.

Applied Work and organisational psychology was already strongly encouraged in the days of the former Yugoslavia. Slovenian applied psychology has parallel strands: theoretical and empirical. The Centre for Professional Counselling was founded in Ljubljana as early as 1938, its chairman being Vlado Schmidt, who later became professor of pedagogy at the University of Ljubljana.

Towards the future

When the political system changed in 1990, publication of psychological books increased and psychological disciplines, no longer under ideological pressure, experienced change. The psychology of advertising and marketing, which formerly scarcely existed, became an important field of application, and Slovenia got its first

private clinical psychologists. A sudden growth in some psychological disciplines was not due only to changing ideology but via a change in zeitgeist within Slovenian academic institutions. Formerly, they were overwhelmed by ineffective scholars, professors supposedly having been elected on the basis of scientific and educational work, as well as by political and ideological criteria, though the latter were often the most important. Criteria now emphasise academic achievement.

As one aspect of drawing Slovenian psychology into line with other European countries, the Slovene Psychological Association has introduced an ethical code, accepted in October 2002, which has been translated into English and sent to the European Federation of Psychologists Associations.

On the one hand, the communist system in Slovenia stimulated psychology to speed up economic growth and some other aspects of social life. But on the other hand, the system impeded psychology because of many forbidden themes, ideological and political reasons and inappropriate atmosphere in the academic institutions. Slovenian psychology has become more and more integrated into European and world psychology, and now has the possibility of developing along a positively accelerating curve.

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