



4th European Conference on Positive Psychology

Rijeka – Opatija, July 1st – 4th, 2008

The Fourth European Conference of Positive Psychology took place in Opatija, Croatia. The conference was organised by the Department of Psychology, University of Rijeka and the local Psychological Association. About 500 conference attendees came from 39 countries, with particularly high attendance from United Kingdom, US, Australia and South Africa. A total of 526 authors and co-authors presented their work in positive psychology. The number of attendees and presentations indicate the rapid expansion of the positive psychology community.

The broad range of positive psychology topics was addressed during the conference, such as general well-being, correlates of well-being, well-being in specific contexts, gratitude and altruism, optimism, life goals, human strengths, resilience, meaning and purpose, flow, thriving and flourishing, and positive psychology programs. The conference programme included 324 presentations in 30 thematic sessions, 12 symposia, five round tables, seven workshops and 98 posters, indicating the growing interest for positive psychology.

The conference was comprised of various keynote addresses and symposia, individual papers, round table discussions, workshops and poster presentations. Given the great number of thematic sessions, round tables and workshops, many parallel sessions (up to seven) were scheduled in the programme. The number of presentations was nearly double than that held on the previous conferences in Italy and Portugal, and it can be expected that the interest in positive psychology will continue to grow.

On the first day of the conference, Lisa Kamen presented a movie called “H-Factor...Where is Your Heart?” She interviewed people as diverse as Los Angeles county prisoners, New York cabbies, the homeless, children, and researchers like Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi and Robert Biswas-Diener. All of these people were asked the same question: what is your happiness? The movie was very well received by the audience and sparked many interesting questions.

Six invited speakers covered different approaches to positive psychology. Ed Diener (University of Illinois, USA) opened the conference with a keynote speech on Well-Being on Planet Earth, calling for a broader approach of positive psychology beyond the individual. Using the Gallup World Poll data, Ed Diener talked about how national accounts of well-being can simultaneously help policy-makers create better societies and positive psychologists confirm their results. He compared objective and subjective indicators of well-being of representative samples of 132 societies, which contain over 96% of the planet’s population. Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi (Claremont Graduate University, USA) talked about helping people connect. He said, “It’s not just how you feel; action is more important than the feeling. What are the ways we can positively impact society?” He talked about the role of flow in positive psychology through linking up flow - the major component that helps create an engaged life - to the society, including the workplace, education and the urban environment. Randy Larsen (Washington University at St. Louis, USA) talked about the ratio of positive to negative emotions. He pointed out that this ratio must exceed

three-to-one in favour of positive affect over negative affect to produce subjective well-being (SWB). Larsen suggests that efforts to speed adaptation to negative events may be more important to SWB than the increase of the duration of positive events is to SWB. Stephen Joseph (University of Nottingham, UK) provided an overview of the field of growth following adversity and discussed the relevance of this research activity for how we think about trauma. Marta Fülöp (Hungarian Academy of Sciences, Hungary) talked about the differences of happy and unhappy competitors. She discussed the characteristics of the competitive situation and the competing persons from the cultural perspective. Todd Kashdan (George Mason University, USA) gave a provocative talk encouraging the audience to give more consideration to purpose in life as a system that creates and sustains health and well-being. He concluded that findings ranging from life expectancy and satisfaction to mental and physical health may be explained best by considering the motivation of the individual, a motivation that comes from having a purpose and living in accord with that purpose.

Invited symposia brought together researchers on problems of measuring well-being, enhancing personal and organizational well-being, Self-Determination theory and positive psychology, as well as flow theory, research and application.

Round tables addressed interesting topics. Antonella Delle Fave and her colleagues presented empirical studies in various countries (Europe, Australia and South Africa) and offered great insights on cross-cultural-level eudemonic happiness based on data. Cross-cultural studies, though widespread, gather data through scales and questionnaires developed by Western scholars and grounded in Western theories and constructs. Conceptualizations of happiness and well-being can deeply differ between cultures and we still know very little about these differences. Another round

table on the future of positive psychology discussed how positive psychology makes a better future. Speakers' diverse viewpoints showed that there are indeed many challenges yet to be faced, but more importantly there are also many opportunities ahead for positive psychology, both in academia and in practice. Dmitry Leontiev from Moscow State University focused on the lessons from Abraham Maslow which the positive psychology of today may apply. He highlighted what can be learned from history scholars, their philosophies and their theoretical concepts in order to make better sense of the tasks and challenges in the 21st century.

The conference provided opportunities for meeting of two positive psychology associations - the IPPA (International Positive Psychology Association) and ENPP (European Network for Positive Psychology). The ENPP members discussed the work and the structure of their organisation. It was decided that the 5th ECPP will take place in Denmark. An IPPA-ENPP joint meeting was aimed at discussing the ways of future relationships between the two associations as well as with other regional and national positive psychology groups.

Apart from doing research on positive psychology it is equally important to promote evidence from the research and to apply the results broadly and cross-culturally, to form a connection between scholars and practitioners, and to educate both lay people and professionals. The entire conference was promoting one clear message: positive psychology is flourishing in Europe and the goal now is to help connect different people. To conclude, one attendee said: "To me, nothing can bring more happiness than sharing and interacting with a group of interesting, intelligent, and fun folks with similar life missions and beliefs in such a positive environment!"

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