



Psychology in Romania

ROMANIA is located in south-eastern Europe, sharing borders with Hungary, Serbia, Ukraine, Moldova, and Bulgaria. Having been a colony of the Roman Empire, it developed a strong sense of identity as a Latin nation, and proudly preserved its Roman heritage. Indeed, the name 'Romania' is a derivative of the Latin word *Romanus* ('Roman'), and Romanian is a Romance language that sounds similar to Italian. Given its geographical isolation from other Latin nations, and numerous invasions by its neighbours, Romania represents a fascinating blend of Eastern and Western traditions. For example, Romanians are the only Latin people to have embraced the Orthodox faith.

In the UK, Romania is probably best known for its 1989 revolution, when the horrors of Nicolae Ceausescu's dictatorial communist regime were revealed to the rest of the world. After the revolution, Romania faced numerous challenges in its transition to democracy and market economy. As one of the latest entrants to the EU, the process of transition is continuing, and Romanian people are looking towards the future.

The development of psychology in Romania

Psychology was introduced in Romania as early as 1893, when E. Gruber, a former student of Wundt in Leipzig, set up a psychological laboratory in the University of Iasi. Two other former students of Wundt followed shortly afterwards: in

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1900, C. Radulescu-Motru started teaching psychology in the University of Bucharest; and in 1922, F. Stefanescu-Goanga organised the first Romanian Institute of Psychology at the University of Cluj. All three centres blossomed rapidly, but developed distinct research interests: Cluj specialised in experimental and developmental, Bucharest in theoretical, and Iasi in social psychology (Foreman, 1996).

Unlike in other former Eastern-bloc countries, such as Slovenia (see the article in *The Psychologist* archive at www.bps.org.uk/fubz), this promising start was cut short in the 1970s by the regime's decision to outlaw psychology as an independent academic discipline. This happened when a number of psychologists invited some international colleagues to organise training programs on transcendental meditation. Alarmed that this initiative would undermine communist propaganda, Ceausescu decided to forbid the teaching and practice of psychology in Romania. Of those involved in the transcendental movement, the most prominent were sent to prison, while the others were forced to work in factories in unskilled jobs.

Psychologists who were not part of the transcendental movement were transferred to other academic departments, such as philosophy and educational sciences. It is in these departments that psychology survived during this period. As a result, many of today's mid-career psychologists hold philosophy rather than psychology degrees.

After 15 years of underground existence, psychology was re-instituted as

an academic discipline in 1990, shortly after the collapse of the Ceausescu regime. Since then, there have been nine generations of psychology graduates, including around 3000 practitioners.

Psychology in universities

Psychology courses accredited by the Ministry of Education are currently taught at four main state universities: the Alexandru Ioan Cuza University in Iasi, the Babes-Bolyai University in Cluj-Napoca, the University of Bucharest, and the University of the West in Timisoara.

In line with the departments' initial development, the research strengths in these four universities are somewhat different. The University of Cluj has work/industrial/organisational psychology as its main focus, but also has a strong research team in cognitive-behavioural therapies. The University of Iasi has its strongest research focus in social psychology and high national visibility in this area through the publication of a large number books. The University of Bucharest has a broader research focus, showing research activity in clinical, industrial/organisational, educational, and social psychology (David *et al.*, 2002).

Undergraduate degrees in psychology currently last for four years and are followed by up to four semesters of masters. However, this is changing, as Romania is adjusting to the Bologna 3 (Bachelors) +2 (Masters) system.

Research in psychology

Due to the large number of minority groups living in Romania, research in social psychology has been especially concerned

References

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with ethnic differences, attitudes, race stereotypes and prejudice, ethnic conflicts, national identity and values. Work/ industrial/organisational psychology is also very popular, especially at universities in Bucharest, Cluj and Timisoara. The focus is mostly on matters like occupational stress, job satisfaction, personnel selection, job analysis, emotions at work and health psychology.

Psychodiagnostics has lagged somewhat behind, mainly because copyright of psychological measures has always been an unresolved issue. However, the last three years have seen a sea change, culminating in the creation of a highly successful locally crafted test battery for cognitive abilities, and the validation and commercial distribution of a number of internationally established measures.

Psychology as a profession

Most psychology practitioners in Romania work in governmental institutions, such as different ministries and departments like Child Protection, Domestic Violence Prevention, Addiction Prevention and Rehabilitation. There are also over 1000 educational psychologists active as vocational orientation counsellors in public schools.

Self-employed psychologists usually do not work freelance, but rather in private consultation centres, and have a difficult time to survive; this is clearly visible by the fact that most of these centres do not have a clear focus, but rather provide clinical diagnosis, counselling, therapy, work psychology, traffic evaluation... all jumbled into one.

As Romania has one of Europe's highest numbers of car accidents per capita, it also has one of the largest numbers of psychological centres working in traffic-related areas: over 300 centres, employing over 1000 psychologists. These are private small businesses, but approved by the Ministry of Transport.

One of the most attractive employment opportunities for young psychologists is in human resources. Business psychologists are also active in the areas of marketing, consumer research and branding. Some of the leading business research and consultancy institutions in Romania explicitly claim to be run by psychologists, not by marketers or sociologists.

Until 2004, clinical psychologists were required to pair up with a psychiatrist and work under their supervision in order to

practice in the clinical field. The situation was better for therapists, for whom the objective-oriented and very professional activity of the Romanian Federation of Psychotherapy has been able to ensure international recognition, therefore allowing therapists independence from other professionals. So far, psychological services are still not recognised by the public health insurance system as medical interventions and thus not compensated on an insurance-based mode, but this situation is currently changing.

A refreshing and hopefully lasting new outlook is observable in child psychology, especially in the case of abandoned children living in foster families or in institutions. The causes for this renewed interest are at least in part due to the harsh international reactions to the state of Romania's 80,000 or so children in the care of the Romanian National Authority for Child Protection.

Most child care in these institutions is not provided by psychologists. However, following the example of their colleagues abroad (see *The Psychologist*, July 2006; tinyurl.com/y4tf9u and www.bps.org.uk/diay), psychologists in Romania have found a renewed interest in becoming involved in this area. Looking back at a previous article on Romania published in *The Psychologist* more than a decade ago (Foreman, 1996), there are signs that things are slowly starting to move in the right direction, partly due to continued support of international activists in child psychology.

Looking towards the future

In May 2004 the Romanian parliament passed the law regarding professional psychology, aiming to create an institution based on statutory regulations, which would have the function of registering practising psychologists. This institution, 'The Psychological Commission' (Colegiul Psihologilor), has been active since January 2006. Although regulations are still rather fuzzy and the Commission does not effectively cover all the areas of professional psychology, they already register practitioners in the areas of work/industrial, educational and clinical psychology. Not covered and not addressed yet (though they are explicitly called for) are some key problematic (mainly legal) areas regarding professional insurance and copyright infringement on psychological measures.

Also, the law is a rather restrictive one, and there are signs that these regulations will continue. The right to practise psychology in Romania only applies to individuals having a valid Romanian graduation. Problems of workforce migration after EU admission (particularly the Bologna regulations) do not seem to be of concern at the moment.

Other governmental initiatives regarding psychology are not to be found. Even the law regarding professional psychology has only been passed after four years of continued lobbying and then in a less than ideal form. This is probably due to the current status of the psychologist in Romania, too often associated with the medical profession (and even there only with a minor, supporting function). Sociologists clearly gain the upper hand among humanist professions, and even though business psychologists are active in such areas as human resources and organisational consultancy, political and electoral marketing and consumer research, they do not seem to really have political/social visibility.

Clearly, Romanian psychologists will have to negotiate their own path and lobby for the creation of their own regulations. Unfortunately, they currently lack cohesion as well as a strong-willed representation: hopefully this will change in the near future and lead the profession onwards and upwards.

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WEBLINKS

Romanian Psychological Association: www.apsi.ro

Romanian Psychological Commission: www.copsi.ro

Romanian Association for Industrial/Organisational Psychology: www.apio.ro

Romanian Association for Analytic Therapy: www.psihoterapieanalitica.ro

Romanian Psychotherapeutic Federation: www.psihoterapie.ro

Association for Clinical Hypnosis, Relaxation and Ericksonian Therapy: <http://paradigma.ro/arhte>