

# Reaching the parts that need it?

*Although American psychology continues to occupy a dominant position in most of the world, there is an increasing awareness in many countries of the need to develop psychology as a science and profession for meeting local needs and for coping with local contexts. (Lunt & Poortinga, 1996, p.504)*



**INGRID LUNT** on achievements and challenges in the international organisation of psychology.

**T**HE last decade has seen individuals and organisations seek to make psychology more international in a number of ways, but there remains a considerable need to extend current methods of internationalising psychology. In this short piece I will consider how organisations have attempted to internationalise psychology, and highlight some of the challenges facing attempts to build on this.

## Organisational perspectives

Since the first International Congress of Psychology in Paris in 1889, there have been a number of organisational attempts to make psychology international. These include the formation of international and regional organisations which bring together

national psychology organisations. Of these, the most extensive is the International Union of Psychological Science (IUPsyS). This is a federation of 68 national psychology associations, under whose auspices the International Congress of Psychology is organised every four years and which publishes the *International Journal of Psychology*; it is also involved in the organisation of regional congresses and Advanced Research Training Seminars for scholars in less developed regions of the world where most of the population live – the ‘majority world’ (Rosenzweig *et al.*, 2000). The equivalent federal organisation within Europe is the European Federation of Psychologists Associations (EFPA) which serves a similar purpose, bringing together 31 European psychology associations. The European Congress of Psychology is organised under its auspices and the journal *European Psychologist* is now the official organ of EFPA. These organisations have achieved a certain level of international awareness among national organisations, and include in their aims the promotion of greater mutual understanding and exchange among psychologists from different countries.

## International institutional perspectives

In addition to these larger ‘federal’ organisations that bring together national

psychology organisations, there are other international organisations that provide an international perspective or forum for individual psychologists. These include the International Association of Applied Psychology (IAAP), founded in the 1920s and the oldest international organisation for individual psychologists, and the International Association of Cross-cultural Psychology, which has made extensive efforts to work in partnership with psychologists from the majority world to give greater prominence to indigenous psychologies.

If we were to consider the internationalisation of psychology through the number of international organisations in existence, we would conclude that there is substantial and longstanding activity; for example the International Forum of Psychology Organisations, organised by the IAAP and convened every two years at an International Congress, brings together over 20 different international organisations reflecting different subfields of psychology; the European Forum demonstrates similar activity across Europe.

## Challenges

However, international organisations such as these have been criticised for maintaining the status quo, perpetuating a dominance of Euro-American epistemologies and paradigms, and

## WEBLINKS

International Union of Psychological Science:  
[www.iupsys.org](http://www.iupsys.org)  
 International Association of Applied Psychology:  
[www.iaapsy.org](http://www.iaapsy.org)  
 International Association for Cross-Cultural Psychology: [www.iaccp.org](http://www.iaccp.org)  
 European Federation of Psychologists' Associations:  
[www.efpa.be](http://www.efpa.be)  
 EuroPsy Project: [www.europsych.org](http://www.europsych.org)

privileging Western psychologies over indigenous or Eastern-inspired psychologies – in other words a form of ‘ethnocentrism’ (e.g. Kim, 1990). This is in part due to a continued imbalance in terms of resources between the so-called ‘developed’ and ‘developing’ world. There are still large numbers of psychologists in the Western world in comparison with the majority world. Of the latter even those psychologists who exist are rarely able to afford participation in traditional modes of internationalising psychology, such as congress attendance or journal publication.

Accusations of ethnocentrism are also in part due to the perceived limited relevance of ‘Western’ topics and methodologies to the societal needs and preoccupations of the majority world. Adair (1998) has considered factors facilitating and impeding psychology’s contribution to national development, and suggests firstly that much psychological research is not on topics of national concern (to the majority world) and secondly that an imported, developed world psychology is inadequate, calling for indigenisation or for a more culturally appropriate psychology. There is growing awareness, particularly in majority-world countries with low GNP and limited access to education, that societal needs are different and Western solutions may not apply. For example, unemployment, work–life balance and life stress may provide important focuses for applied research in some Western countries; however, in the majority world research is desperately needed on topics such as HIV/AIDS, violence, terrorism and poverty, to name but a few (and see Jahoda, 1973).

### More indigenous psychologies?

This growing awareness, amongst other things, has led to a call for more indigenous psychologies. The indigenous psychology movement has traditionally had three main areas of focus. It is against:

- a psychology that perpetuates the colonial status of the ‘native’ mind;
- the imposition on a majority-world country of psychologies developed in and relevant to industrialised countries; and
- a psychology used for the exploitation of the masses.

In addition there has been a well-

documented distinction between a collectivist and an individualist behaviour and the psychologies used to understand human behaviour (see Triandis, 1995; Sinha *et al.*, 2002). In the face of this kind of criticism, according to Berry *et al.* (1992), ‘one of the goals of cross-cultural psychology is the eventual development of a universal psychology that incorporates all indigenous (including Western) psychologies’.

### Towards a universal psychology

The development of a more universal psychology is clearly an appropriate goal, but its achievement is more difficult. There are tensions in relation to, on the one hand, the pressures to follow established literature and curricula in order for students to be able to compete ‘internationally’ (i.e. in terms of a Western literature) and, on the other hand, the need to integrate a more ‘indigenous’ psychology across different countries (Shams, 2002). Moves for greater mobility (both for students and professionals) and the formation of mutual agreements across regions of the world may herald the start of a more international curriculum. The EuroPsy Project to develop a European Diploma in Psychology (Lunt, 2002) and a similar initiative planned at a more global level by IUPsyS provide immediate opportunities for a creative approach to a more international curriculum.

There are tensions also in relation to research; again, established research tends to use ‘Western’ paradigms, and competition for scarce funds usually requires this kind of approach. The enormous increase in the numbers of practitioners, and particularly the predominance of practitioner psychologists in majority-world countries, poses particular challenges for a more universal or ‘international’ psychology, since psychology practice is inherently context-specific and dependent on local languages rather than the ‘lingua franca’ which pervades congresses and academic publication.

We see therefore a number of pressures and tensions inevitable with increased globalisation and the growth of psychology and psychologists. On the one hand, psychology has never been more international, with the increase in congresses, international publications, academic and professional exchanges, student mobility; on the other hand,

psychology has rarely been more local in terms of the local needs of the majority world.

How far these tensions can be resolved depends on initiatives at individual, national and international levels. Exchange and visit programmes enable individuals to learn more about each other’s work, while national organisations such as the BPS have begun to take seriously the importance of understanding more about psychology and psychologists across the world, as for example through the articles published regularly in *The Psychologist*. The first major international congress located in the majority world, the International Congress of Psychology in Beijing in summer 2004, enabled psychologists from all over the world to interact with Chinese psychologists and psychology; 2012 will see this congress in South Africa. These efforts hold out hope that psychology and psychologists are reaching out beyond traditional boundaries, and that this will result in greater shared knowledge and understanding.

■ *Professor Ingrid Lunt is Dean of Research Degrees at the Institute of Education, University of London. E-mail: i.lunt@sta02.ioe.ac.uk.*

### References

- Adair J. (1998). Factors facilitating and impeding psychology’s contribution to national development. *Interamerican Journal of Psychology*, 32(2), 13–32.
- Berry J., Poortinga Y., Segall M. & Dasen P. (1992). *Cross-cultural psychology: Research and applications*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Jahoda, G. (1973). Psychology and the developing countries: Do they need each other? *International Social Science Journal* 25, 461–474.
- Kim, U. (1990). Indigenous psychology: Science and applications. In R. Brislin (Ed.) *Applied cross-cultural psychology*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage.
- Lunt, I. (2002). A common framework for the training of psychologists in Europe. *European Psychologist*, 7(3), 180–191.
- Lunt, I. & Poortinga, Y.H. (1996). Internationalising psychology: The case of Europe. *American Psychologist*, 51, 504–508.
- Rosenzweig, M., Holtzman, W., Sabourin, M. & Belanger, D. (2000). *The history of the International Union of Psychological Science*. Hove: Psychology Press.
- Shams, M. (2002). Issues in the study of indigenous psychologies: Historical perspectives, cultural interdependence and institutional regulations. *Asian Journal of Social Psychology*, 5(2), 79–91.
- Sinha, J.B.P., Vohra, N., Singhal, S., Sinha, R.B.N. & Ushashree, S. (2002). Normative predictions of collectivist-individualist intentions and behavior of Indians. *International Journal of Psychology*, 37, 309–319.
- Triandis, H.C. (1995). *Individualism and collectivism*. Boulder, CO: West View Press.