

History of IFP

As you may already know, the Board has decided to have the history of IFP been written up. IFP past president Edgar Heim was commissioned to do this work for us. In our Newsletter 02-03, we started to publish short summaries of some of our past presidents. Pierre-Bernard Schneider (IFMP president 1969-1979) was the first to share his subjective thoughts and appraisals of the time of his presidency with the current IFP membership. Now it is Finn Magnussen's term: he was IFMP president until 1988. At this point in time, I am not quite sure whether Finn Magnussen took over presidency in 1973 or in 1979. Edgar Heim will clarify the historical details in due time. Anyway, I am delighted to present Dr. Magnussen's summary!

Prof. Ulrich Schnyder, MD
President, IFP

Oslo, May 22nd 2003

Annotations on the activities of the IFMP - in the years 1973 -1988, during my tenure as general secretary and president.

My earliest memories of the IFMP goes back to the 4th international congress of psychotherapy in Barcelona 1958; I recall the almost prophetic figure of Professor Frankl, with his raised hand and call for the existential core of psychotherapy.

From the following congresses those of us from Scandinavia brought home important impulses and useful contacts with key people in the world of psychoanalytically oriented therapy.

Some time after the Wiesbaden congress in 1967 'The Norwegian Psychiatric Association' was approached on the possibility of having a congress in Norway. It seems that they had offered our Swedish colleagues the arrangement at first but turned to us when the Swedes could not agree among themselves.

At that time I chaired the Norwegian Psychiatric Association, with a board of young and enthusiastic colleagues. The then general secretary, Dr. Fierz, and president, Professor Schneider, visited us in Oslo, to check out our professional and practical credibility, and we needed to get their experiences and ideas of the implications of such an arrangement.

At this 9th international congress of psychotherapy in Oslo 1973 I was elected general secretary at a Board meeting at the end of the congress.

I shall dwell on the organization of this congress because the concept and structuring of it became essential to my work on the board.

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We realized early that the point of having such an arrangement was not only to serve the cause of the IFMP and psychotherapy in general, but the leverage it might have on a national level.

Thus, we mobilized as broadly as possible the whole psychiatric community, involving senior colleagues in psychiatry and psychology in an advisory council and many others in various sub-committees. The task might be to show films relevant to therapy, chair discussion groups, organize private parties, cultural events etc..

Our chosen theme, "What is Psychotherapy ?" permeated our professional life for some years and we also hosted a two-day pre-congress seminar for all major speakers and section- and group chairmen in order to imbue them with the theme and thus facilitate the expected discussions. And to make it a real congress, that is, a meeting of minds, we aggressively invited participants to enroll in daily discussion groups, according to language preference, after the main mornings lectures. We even managed to have the some 30 discussion group leaders lunch together, to exchange ideas and experiences.

The congress explored its issue from rather extreme positions; dr. Seidel from the DDR saw psychotherapy from his Marxist platform as an adjustment to society, Dr. Szaz from USA saw it as just another way of influencing people. But the main emphasis was on the various clinical and prophylactic implications of psychotherapy, as an attitude or as one of many methods applied on an individual, family, group or community level.

And the strategy of involving as much as possible of the psychiatric community paid off in an increased interest in psychotherapy and a major push to implement an extensive training in psychotherapy in the psychiatric specialty training in Norway.

During my time as president (1979-88) I used this experience when encouraging other societies to plan the next congresses, which appeared to me the main concrete responsibility of the federation, although we also discussed other aims.

It seems that annual European congresses of psychotherapy was initiated as early as 1926, with professor Kretschmer as one of the key persons, and held annually, in Baden-Baden. Carl Gustav Jung was the president from 1934-40. He allegedly made it into an international federation in order to provide membership for the Jewish colleagues who were ousted from the German societies in the 1930-ies. After the WW-2 the English Dr. Crichton. Miller reorganized the federation and a congress was held in Zurich 1946. This congress discussed "14 gemeinsame Punkte der Psychotherapie aller Richtungen" - an approach which since has prevailed as an ecumenical orientation of the IFMP.

For reasons unknown to me the present numbering of congresses, however, started only with the London congress in 1948.

The IFMP has subsisted on a minimal economy, based on small per capita fees from the various member societies, barely covering expenses for stamps and stationary and the very occasional travel for board members to secure congress venues.

During the Oslo congress we became aware of the psychotherapy societies in Eastern Europe and their great difficulties, economically as well as politically, in participating in a normal professional exchange. We had the opportunity to invite some of them to the Oslo congress, and from this grew an awareness of the use of the IFMP to support these societies by visiting them and thus represent a window to the West, which seemed welcome.

Over the following years some of the board, not least myself, attended and spoke at national psychotherapy meetings in Erfurt, Dresden, Warsaw and Krakow, one of the meetings even specifically intended as an East-West-German get-together. Our past gen. secretary Michael Geyer will be able to comment on this aspect of the IFMP as he was a key person in DDR. We even discussed the possibility of having the 1991 international congress as a joint German arrangement, long before the Berlin wall fell. It went to Hannover, as a West-German affair,. but to my regret it did not use this excellent opportunity to focus on the mental hygiene and therapeutic implications of such a dramatic and possibly traumatic event as the unification must have been.

On the wider international level we never managed to interest the large and self-sufficient Anglo-American psychotherapy societies, in spite of serious attempts. It seemed that we served our

purpose by being an umbrella organization for smaller societies worldwide, who felt the need for a common ground.

We did, however, try to broaden our scope by seeking congress venues internationally, with a first ever congress outside Europe, in Rio de Janeiro, in 1982.

The board also managed to keep representatives from all over the world, from Chorea and USA, Australia, India in addition to the core European societies, representing at times some 40 different member societies.

Suggestions were forwarded during the 1980-ies for regional chapters, e.g. in Latin-America. The German. speaking world, The Far East. The idea was that such organizational structures would be of use in between the triennial congresses. At the time the larger board voted down the suggestions with the argument that time was not yet ripe, whereas the executive board had felt the need for such expansions.

Essentially - as the IFMP is an umbrella organization for national and regional societies but also more narrowly defined psychotherapy groups, and not a service union for individual members, there were obvious limits to its activities. That left us with the task of providing a tradition of international congresses, and in particular to find the professional groups and milieus which not only was capable of managing such an event but which also could make good use of it in their own development at that time, in addition to give a world-wide audience a chance to meet the key people in psychotherapy research and practice.

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