

Report from the 13th Alps-Adria Psychology Conference

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At the end of September, from 27th till 29th of September, the Department of Psychology, Faculty of Arts, University of Ljubljana, organized the 13th Alps-Adria Conference. The Alps-Adria psychology conferences bring together researchers from all countries of the Alps-Adria region: Austria, Croatia, Italy, Hungary, and Slovenia. The conferences have been organized every two years since 1987, with the location of the conference rotating between the included countries. This year the conference returned to Ljubljana after 10 years.

Around 180 original scientific contributions were presented at the conference, mostly as individual oral presentations, and almost 70 posters and 7 symposia took place. Participants also had an opportunity to listen to five engaging keynote lectures from different research fields given by esteemed professors from the included countries. A rich and diverse scientific program was accompanied by a stimulating social program.

On Wednesday, 26th of September, two pre-conference workshops took place. Andraž Matkovič, a teaching assistant and researcher at the Laboratory for Cognitive Neuroscience at the Department of Psychology, Faculty of Arts, University of Ljubljana, and at the Department of Neurology, University Medical Centre Ljubljana, carried out a cognitive psychology workshop with the title “Basics of EEG and its use in the study of cognition”, in which he shortly presented the history of the EEG method as well as some new methods of EEG analysis and possible directions of future developments. The focus was on the widely used ERP technique. Also, a demonstration of EEG recording, from preparation of the EEG cap and the equipment to measuring and presenting the signals, was demonstrated live. The second methodological workshop titled “Comparing means: why does measurement invariance matter, what is it and how do we test it?” was led by Luka Komidar, an assistant professor of psychological methodology at the Department of Psychology, Faculty of Arts, University of Ljubljana. Measurement invariance (MI) refers to measuring the construct(s) of interest in the same way for different groups or time/conditions. The aim of the workshop, which was divided into a theoretical and a practical part, was to explain why MI is a prerequisite for means comparisons, to present definitions of MI from different aspects, and to equip the participants with basic knowledge for testing the measurement invariance across independent groups.

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The conference officially started on Thursday, 27th of September, with the opening ceremony during which Roman Kuhar, the dean of the Faculty of Arts, Valentin Bucik, Head of the Department of Psychology, and Anja Podlesek, Head of the Conference Organizing Committee, welcomed the participants. Also, the student of psychology Mateja Kralj prepared two short musical performances. After the opening ceremony, Martin Voracek from the University of Vienna gave the first keynote lecture on a general problem of empirical research in psychology and other social sciences. The lecturer presented the problem of numerous flexibilities in data-analytic decisions and therefore the problem of disagreement about which data to analyze, and how to analyze it. Dr. Voracek presented, compared and discussed a variety of novel and not yet widely known approaches to this general problem of empirical research. An interesting debate, which followed his intriguing presentation, continued informally during the first coffee break. Later, the participants scattered across three sections, cognitive psychology, personality and individual differences and social psychology, during which individual oral presentations were given. The cognitive psychology section covered various themes and was finished by the presentation on working memory systems, where evidence for a second system – the active maintenance system – was presented. In the personality and individual differences section, five presentations covered various research topics. The social psychology section was opened by the presentation on social influence in experiencing music, where the role of musical preferences and personality was examined. Lunch was combined with the first poster section in which 35 posters of diverse topics were presented. In the afternoon two more sections with educational psychology and neuroscience oral presentations took place concurrently with the first symposium on work, stress and health. The symposium covered six research topics and provided new insights on how the work context contributes to stress and related conditions. Several presentations discussed burnout in relation to various aspects, e.g., cognitive performance. Some presentations also focused on advanced methodology and objectively measured outcomes. Throughout the symposium, various work-related conditions were discussed, thus highlighting the importance of healthy employees. After another inspiring and interactive keynote lecture delivered by Maria Chiara Passolunghi from the Department of Life Sciences, University of Trieste, “The influence of cognitive and emotional factors on mathematics learning”, a welcome reception took place at the Department of Psychology. The lecturer highlighted some studies that investigated the importance of the affective factors as determinants for math achievement. She presented the role of anxiety in math achievement and touched on differences between genders in experiencing math anxiety. She highlighted the importance of investigating cognitive and emotional factors, such as general and math-specific anxiety, and therefore developing a comprehensive theoretical model, which includes those relevant factors that should be taken into consideration in math learning.

The second day of the conference started with a keynote lecture by Norbert Jaušovec, University of Maribor, titled “Neurobiological underpinnings of intelligence: From correlation to causation”. The lecturer presented a broad overview

of research about structural and functional brain characteristics that underlie the psychological construct of general intelligence. Some theories, based on functional studies of the brain-intelligence relationship, were presented. Also, some recent attempts to use rTMS or tACS and fMRI to determine the causality between brain function and intelligence were discussed. Again, two sections with oral presentation followed, one combining presentations from cognitive psychology and the other from social psychology. At the same time the symposium “Aspects of personality predicting digital media use and well-being in emerging adulthood” took place. Three more symposia followed, one concerning the “New developments in wisdom research at the University of Klagenfurt”, the second about “Bullying and cyberbullying – antecedents, consequences, and solutions”, and the third regarding “Aspects of financial socialization and financial behavior”. In the poster section, more than 30 authors presented their original work. In the afternoon, a symposium “Understanding driving – Looking back, looking around, looking forward” was held. It touched on previous research on all major factors of driving safety and presented empirical research based on simulator-based or real driving studies. Findings on negative effects on driver’s state and visual attention of talking on the phone while driving were presented, as well as effects of cognitive load on reaction times in drivers throughout the lifespan. This symposium highlighted the role of psychology in driving research and provided an agenda for future studies in traffic psychology. The mentioned symposium and two sections of oral presentations from the field of educational psychology and personality and individual differences were followed by a keynote lecture “Plastic fantastic: What can cognitive training tell us about cognitive plasticity?” delivered by Andrea Vranić from the University of Zagreb. The keynote speaker presented the topic of cognitive trainings. She started by presenting a brief history of cognitive plasticity – the brain’s ability to change – which is the basis for cognitive interventions. Later on, she described different types of trainings, such as strategic training, process training, multimodal training, and cardiovascular training. She discussed the effectiveness of cognitive trainings and its transfer, and also touched on the topic of the effectiveness of various brain training applications. After an interesting and humorous lecture, participants were invited to take a walk around the city or to the castle, which was followed by a formal conference dinner at restaurant Šestica.

On Saturday morning the last plenary talk was presented by András Láng from the Institute of Psychology, University of Pécs. In his lecture “Unintentional manipulators? – The developmental psychopathology of Machiavellianism” the lecturer presented the relations between dark personality characteristics, Machiavellianism, developmental issues and psychopathology. Machiavellianism is a dark personality characteristic defined by interpersonal manipulative strategies, cynical world view, and moral disengagement. The lecturer highlighted the difference between traditional approaches that treat Machiavellianism as a trait beneficial for the individual but harmful for the society, and the research of the relationship between Machiavellianism, developmental issues, and psychopathology that portrays Machiavellian people as immature in their personality organization. Dr. Láng

presented some research evidence for the second line of research, stressing that Machiavellian individuals are unintentional manipulators, and the correlation of their manipulative intentions with their early environment and raising. The final sections were composed of a symposium “Social (networks): virtual and/or real?” and individual oral presentations in the fields of social media, sports, developmental, clinical, and work psychology. The conference concluded with a closing ceremony in which the awards for best student contributions were presented. The performance of Urška Baškovič, a psychologist and a singer, enriched the closing ceremony and made the event even more memorable. The conference was held under the sponsorship of the Alps-Adriatic Alliance, the company Ljubljanske mlekarne and the Department of Psychology, University of Ljubljana.

During the conference, special attention and energy was devoted to making participants feel accepted in the tightly knit scientific community. As promised in the invitation letter, we tried to put together pieces of different kinds of puzzle – the vast puzzle of psychological knowledge and the puzzle of international connections and unlimited friendship.