Miran Možina, Tanja Fercher, Anja Kurent, Tina Lasič Andrejević, Matthias Ochs, Božidar Popović, Umberta Telfener, Francesco Tramonti, Matej Vajda[1]

Systemic resonances and interferences: Impressions from the congress of the European Family Therapy Association (EFTA) from 7th till 10th of September 2022 in Ljubljana

Sistemske resonance in interference: Vtisi s kongresa Evropskega združenja za družinsko terapijo (EFTA) od 7. do 10. septembra 2022 v Ljubljani

Resonances are those special assemblages
created by the intersection of different systems that include the same element.
Different human systems seem to enter into "resonance"
from the effect of a common element
in the same way that material bodies can begin to vibrate
from the effect of a given frequency.«
Mony Elkaim (1941-2020)

1 Mag. Miran Možina, MD, psychiatrist and psychotherapist, University Sigmund Freud Vienna – Ljubljana branch, miranmozina.slo@gmail.com
Mag. phil. Tanja Fercher, systemic psychotherapist, office@tanjafercher.com
Anja Kurent, student of systemic psychotherapy, University Sigmund Freud Vienna – Ljubljana branch, ancyancy@gmail.com
Tina Lasič Andrejević, student of systemic psychotherapy, University Sigmund Freud Vienna – Ljubljana branch, andrejevictina@gmail.com
Prof. dr. Matthias Ochs, psychologist and psychotherapist, Hochschule Fulda, University of Applied Sciences, matthias_ochs@web.de
Božidar Popović, psychiatrist and psychotherapist, University Sigmund Freud Vienna – Ljubljana branch, salutogeneza1@gmail.com
Umberta Telfener, health & clinical psychologist and psychotherapist, president of EFTA, utelfener@gmail.com
Francesco Tramonti, psychologist and psychotherapist, tramonti.francesco@gmail.com
Matej Vajda, student of systemic psychotherapy, University Sigmund Freud Vienna – Ljubljana branch, mvajda@gmail.com
All photos are by Dobrin Tavčar, dobrin.foto@gmail.com

Figure 1

Monica Whyte, the president of EFTA, during her opening speech at the EFTA congres on September 7, 2022 in Ljubljana. To her left is a poster with the mascot of the congress, the bird Dodo.

1. Before the congress

The European Family Therapy Association (EFTA)[2] unites systemic (family) therapists from all over Europe. Since 2011, the systemic psychotherapy unit at the Sigmund Freud University – Ljubljana branch (SFU Ljubljana) has also been a member of EFTA. EFTA organises its congresses every three years[3], and SFU Ljubljana succeded in its application to host the 2022 congress in Ljubljana, which with around 800 participants went down in the history of Slovenian psychotherapy as the largest psychotherapeutic event to date. Miran Možina, director of SFU Ljubljana, was selected as the Slovenian delegate to the EFTA cientific committee[4] of the congress and the host coordinator. He formed

2 EFTA is also a European Accrediting Organisation (EWAO) of the European Association for Psychotherapy (EAP). This means that it is entitled to sign ECP (European Certificate of Psychotherapy) applications for practitioners in the systemic modality.

3 Before the Ljubljana congress the last EFTA congress was held in Naples in Italy from 11th till 14th of September 2019 with the title *Visible and Invisible; Borderline Change in Systemic Family Therapy.*

4 The EFTA Scientific Committee was formed by: Matthias Ochs, Miran Možina, Monica Whyte (as the EFTA president who concluded her term during the congress in Ljubljana), Nevena Čalovska, Júlia Hardy, Lucie Hornova, Martine Nisse, Viola Sallay, Joana Sequeira and Umberta Telfener (new president of EFTA since the congress in Ljubljana).

Slovenian scientific and organisational committees that included representatives of the four systemic therapy schools that provide training in systemic and family therapy in Slovenia[5].

Since one of the most prominent members of EFTA, Mony Elkaim (figure 2), Moroccan-Belgian psychiatrist and psychotherapist, died on 20th of November 2022 at the age of 79, the title of the congress - *Systemic resonances and interferences in a (post)pandemic, climate change and migration context in Europe* – was chosen to honour his memory (https://efta2022ljubljana.org/) since, in his publications and performances he had introduced a special understanding of the concept »resonance«.

Figure 2

Mony Elkaim passed away on November 20, in Brussels, after a long battle with illness. To all those who knew him, Mony leaves the memory of a man with exceptional charisma, a brilliant theorist, an extraordinary therapist with unique intelligence and intuitions. He was a pioneer of family therapy, which he helped introduce in Europe. He was an outstanding, internationally recognised trainer in systemic family therapy, stimulating the deployment of the sensitivity and skills of the many therapists he trained and supervised around the world.

5 Members of the Slovenian scientific committee were: Miran Možina, Lea Šugman Bohinc and Katarina Možina from SFU Ljubljana, Robert Cvetek, Katarina Lia Kompan Erzar and Sara Jerebic from the Faculty of Theology University of Ljubljana, Nina Mešl and Mija Marija Klemenčič Rozman from the Institute for Family therapy and Dubravka Trampuž from the Institute of Family and Systemic Psychotherapy. Members of the Slovenian organisation committee were: Alenka Jeran, Neža Kožar from SFU Ljubljana, Saša Poljak Lukek from the Faculty of Theology and Urška Kranjc Jakša from the Association of Marriage and Family Therapy of Slovenia. The main task of the Slovenian scientific committee was to help with the collection and selection of active contributions, while the organising committee helped the Greek congress organisation company SYMVOLI (with its main representatives Vicky Papadimitriou and Anneta Pavloudi). SFU Ljubljana and the Faculty of Theology offered their rooms for the congress events for free.

2. The concept of the congress

Based on Elkaim's concept of resonance the EFTA scientific committee formulated a broader concept for the congress, in which four key points of departure for the content of contributions were proposed: change of relationships, change of tools, practices, and procedures, change of requests and change of context.

Change of relationships: The development of (family) relationships in the 21st century is characterised by diversifications of (family) forms, structures, and life cycles and, also, by socio-economic divergences and polarisations. We are confronted with increasing levels of inequality, poverty, health problems, massive changes in fertility and family structure, decreasing level of trust (social capital) and, as some social scientists are stating, the triumph of individualism over community. The corona crisis has worked in some ways like a magnifying glass, which has highlighted our changing social relationships. Are we fated to slide into ever-increasing levels of polarisation between rich and poor, regularly and precariously employed, men and women, old and young, white and black or is there reason to expect that the disruption is merely a temporary condition and that societies will self-organise themselves? And if self-organising can take place what form will it take? Are destructive dynamics exacerbating or aggravating under the (not so) new global conditions of pandemics, climate changes, and migration movements? What possible resources and new horizons emerge out of these global conditions regarding relationships? As systemic family therapists, we are experts on complex order-order-transitions and on working with immanent polarities of systems.

Change of tools, practices, and procedures: As Peter Fonagy once stated: the new conflicts in counselling and therapy will no longer unfold between different psychotherapy schools – but between online and offline formats. We all experienced, because of pandemic related social-distancing and lockdowns, doing digital/ online counselling/ therapy/ supervision. We learnt about the pros and cons of these formats – and still do... we faced the challenges of doing online therapy not only with one patient but simultaneously with all family members – and some of us even with (little) children... and we tried, in approved systemic manner, not to fall into the trap of an either-or position, but to test an as-well-as approach: using a mix of online/digital/offline/blended formats. And at the same time we are trying to support traumatized migrants, who don´t speak our language; we are working with young people, who are suffering from some kind of "climate change depression"; we are faced with family violence and a perceived increase in mental illness in the context of the different lockdowns. How are our tools, practices and procedures changing in the face of all this?

Systemic therapists and counsellors have much to offer. One of the gifts of therapy and counselling in time of increasing polarisation can be the reconsideration of our work and approaches in terms of a Cartesian dualism of mind versus matter, individual versus society, personal versus political, intimate versus public, psychological versus social, God versus man, elite versus people, chosen race versus others, nation versus nation and man versus environment.

Change of requests: Yes, times have changed and the requests of clients as well. Many come with a (good, well-known, mild) mixture of anxiety, depression and somatoform disorders without any clear symptomatology, while others are very perturbed but have learned to act adaptively – not infrequently with a little help from the colourful world of old and new drugs and addictive behaviour habits. Personality disorders organise and influence the symptoms while the traumas seem to have expanded. The problems brought to therapy seem to have widened with social troubles becoming enmeshed with psychic ones and clinicians need to open up to curiosity and flexibility.

The healing message of systemic therapies in particular and psychotherapy in general is that mental disease or psychopathology is the breaking down of communication between people and psychotherapy permits a development of communication and healing through communication. Most of the world's troubles derive from a lack of intercommunication and cooperation. Psychotherapy should give an example, showing how intercommunication and cooperation can be re-established by persuasion and not by force, because civilization began when communication through persuasion replaced brute force. Civilization constitutes itself through networks of conversations and the language of persuasion.

Change of context: We are not working any more within the security of the four walls of our office. Professionals now leave their rooms and participate in wider contexts, meeting real situations of tragedy, working in refugee camps or with multiprofessional teams in the living rooms of their patients and families. Or do they just open the digital windows of their offices to the outer world, working with severely disturbed people without ever seeing them in real life? Many cooperate with the legal system in dealing with violence or adoption issues and custody decisions, while others work with community organisations dealing with social issues.

3. The challenge of the congress

The organisation of the Ljubljana congress was a special challenge, because due to the covid epidemic and restrictive measures, it was still uncertain even at the end of February 2022 whether it would be possible to hold the event live at all

or whether it would only be online. Despite all the uncertainty, which increased further with the start of the war in Ukraine, the scientific committee and the conference event management team met regularly and decided to take a risk and announced in March 2022 that the congress would be held live. Fortunately, not all decisions were so challenging. Among the easier ones was the selection of an attractive logo for the congress, based on the morphology of Ljubljana, using the cityline as a tool, where some of the most important city landmarks are depicted. The parallel lines reflected a key concept of the congress – resonances.

Happily our big decision turned out to be successful, as about 600 applications for the congress were received between March and June 2022 (later, about 200 more participants were registered, for a total of about 800), mostly from Slovenia and Greece. For the programme 11 key note speakers - Edouard Durand, Celia Jaes Falicov, Renos Papadopoulos, Günter Schiepek, Wilhelm Schmid, Justine van Lawick, Lieven Migerode, Maria Borcsa, Valeria Pomini and two from Slovenia – Renata Salecl and Christian Gostečnik (figure 3), around 45 invited speakers and more than 400 individual presentations were confirmed.

Figure 3

Prof. dr. Christian Gostečnik (right), one of the plenary speakers, leader of the faculty study of couple and family therapy at the Theological Faculty, University of Ljubljana. On his right prof. dr. Robert Cvetek, his close co-worker, at the reception in Cankarjev dom on September 7, 2022.

4. The opening of the congress

On 7th of September 2022, the opening of the congress took place in Cankarjev dom, which is Slovenia's main cultural and congress centre. Following the opening speech of EFTA president, Monica Whyte (figure 1), the dean of the Theological Faculty, Janez Vodičar (figure 4), the president of the Association of Marriage and Family Therapy of Slovenia, Urška Kranjc Jakša, the president of the Slovenian Umbrella Association for Psychotherapy, Romana Kress, and Miran Možina, director of SFU Ljubljana, had their welcome speeches.

Figure 4

At the opening of the congress (from the left): Monica Whyte, president of EFTA, Miran Možina, director of SFU Ljubljana, Prof. Doc. Janez Vodičar, dean of the Thelogical Faculty, University of Ljubljana, and Dodo puppets. During the congress, Monica handed over the post of president to Umberta Telfener.

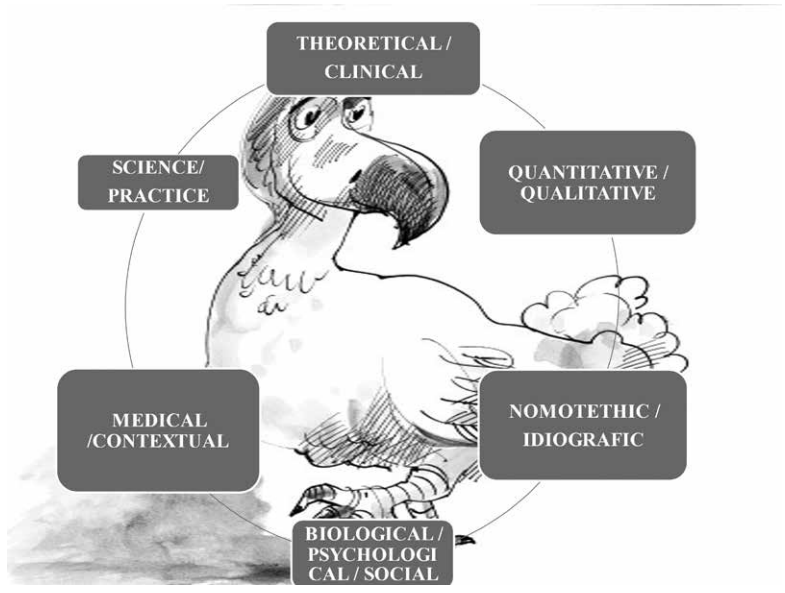
In his opening welcome speech, Miran Možina, as a representative of the hosts, desribed the key points of interest in Slovenia and the state of Slovenian psychotherapy, which, unfortunately, is not yet recognised as an independent profession. Therefore, he pointed out that the congress was also an opportunitiy to support Slovenian psychotherapists in their efforts for a psychotherapy law that would define psychotherapy as an independent profession and an autonomous scientific discipline.

In addition, he introduced the Dodo bird as the mascot of the congress[6] in a humorous way. He emphasized that in 1936 Rosenzweig referred to the Dodo verdict (Everybody has won and all must have prizes) when pointing out the common characteristics of different psychotherapy modalities and the possibility of their integration. With the development of psychotherapy science his idea of common factors evolved into the empirically validated common factors theory and contextual model, which is becoming in the mental health field increasingly attractive as the alternative to the medical model. Based on the abundance of clinical evidence and research findings, psychotherapy science now offers to practitioners of different therapy modalitites the possibility of a paradigmatic leap into a new, more integrated understanding of the profession of psychotherapy as an independent profession, into more efficient and effective forms of clinical practice and prevention as well as more comprehensive, didactically advanced forms of training. Možina suggested that the Dodo could be the symbol that goes beyond any particular psychotherapeutic school. As a meta-integrator the Dodo could be understood as the promoter of the vision for the broader, systemic integration of science and practice, biological, psychological and social, quantitative and qualitative methodology, nomotheticity and idiography, personalized medicine and psychotherapy and of the medical and contextual models (figure 5). Thus, with the help of Dodo, Možina invited the participants of the congress to accept as a challenge not only the development of systemic psychotherapy as a modality, but also the aforementioned different levels of integration.

Figure 5

Dodo bird could be understood as a meta-integrator that, based on the systemic science of complexity beyond different schools of psychotherapy, invites psychotherapists to integrate science and practice, theoretical and clinical, biological, psychological and social, quantitative and qualitative, nomothetic and idiographic, and medical and contextual models.

6 Later in the course of the congress, at the symposium with the title *The Dodo story: Common factors, complexity science and integration in psychotherapy* Možina, together with Günter Schiepek and Matthias Ochs, elaborated a vision of the development of systemic therapies according to the Dodo's integrative taste. Systemic therapies in a broader sense are all those therapies, which meet the four criteria: (1) the focus of the treatment has systemic qualities (e. g. neuronal, mental, interpersonal systems) and can be modelled by system-theoretical methods; (2) no a priori constriction to a specific level of functioning (e.g. biological, mental or interpersonal-communicative) is made; (3) systemic therapies are not limited to psychotherapy – neurobiological, biomedical, psychological, social treatments can just as well be systemic to this effect as can psychological or social ones; (4) no a priori constriction to particular interventions or therapy school is made in the field of psychotherapy.



5. The impressions from the congress

The opening ceremony was followed by an inspiring plenary lecture from Wilhelm Schmid (which is published in full below), a round table in memory of Mony Elkaim and other plenary lectures. To describe, even briefly, all the congress contributions that took place in the following days would far exceed the space available for this report. Some of the participants were therefore asked to give some of their impressions of the Congress, which follow below.

5.1. Impressions of Tanja Fercher[7]

Ljubljana, Slovenia. Wednesday, September 7th, 2022 in the morning: A conspicuous stream of people is moving towards Cankarjev dom. No, this is not an impressively designed church, but a socialist-style concrete building from the early 1980s that serves as a culture and convention centre. On the way there, a nice taxi driver gives me an impressively dense and complex insight into Ljubljana's "k.-and-k." history and architecture. In the end I arrive at the architecturally rather less attractive Cankarjev dom, and he asks me what I'm doing there. I reply that there is a family therapy conference going on. I see a facial expression that is so complex that it can hardly be interpreted. The man struggles for words "Family therapy... what is that? Who needs this ..." Well, good question, but difficult to

7 Originally published in German: Fercher, T. (2023) Ein Universum familientherapeutischer Inspiration: der EFTA-Kongress 2022 – Systemic Resonances and Interferences. *Netzwerke 01/23*.

answer in a few words, so after a not inconsiderable pause I answer: "We try to support people to find their way and here we will talk about how we can."

So, I set off and dive into a universe of inspiration. This universe is co-created by the European Family Therapy Association, the Sigmund Freud University Vienna - Ljubljana branch, the Faculty of Theology at the University of Ljubljana and several hundred therapists from all over Europe, America ... Infinite spaces, infinite possibilities, an infinite number of experiences and individual stories in a circumscribed time.

As you can imagine with these numbers, the programme was broad in content, and it took a large part of the 4-hour journey to Ljubljana to decide what my personal trip through this universe of family therapy inspiration should be. On the one hand, it makes sense to hear and see the big names in the field, then obviously there are my interests. And congresses are not only there to present traditional specialist opinions, but also to give space to new ideas. The decision was not easy. A personally important claim is to work in a way that is evidence based combined with practicability and usability. I ended up choosing a mix of topics such as therapy research, hypnosystemic topics, trauma, and dreams. I also had the challenge ahead of presenting and discussing my own little research project there. Despite this diversity, a kind of golden thread emerged.

At the end of the conference, **Günter Schiepek** was due to give a keynote speech entitled *From research-based practice to practice-based research - the paradigm shift to complexity science in psychotherapy*. This speech carried me through those days and gave post hoc additional meaning to my own practical research project. It expresses in a few words what drives me in my professional work. On the one hand, how do I make the knowledge of our subject - both empirical and practical - useful for clients. But also vice versa, how do you transfer knowledge from practice, directly from the clients and practitioners, back to research. How do you constructively fill the proverbial "theory-practice gap"?

I received relevant information at the *Invited Dialogue: Systemic Practitioner Research*, moderated by prof. **Matthias Ochs** (Fulda University of Applied Sciences). Lucie Hornova PhD (EFTA NFTO Board Member) and **Günter Schiepek** (Paracelsus Medical University Salzburg) spoke there (figure 6). My research project is based on synergetics (the research field from Schiepek et al.) which made this lecture very close and familiar to me. Here, too, it was emphasized that not only practice should be evidence-based, but that research should also be practice-based, which of course spoke to my heart. **Lucie Hornova** did her PhD on "Practitioners Research" and reported about it. To be honest, it was the first time that I consciously noticed this term. No wonder because this research approach is rather new in our field. It is traditionally used in education, social

work and nursing science. Practitioners research focuses on the fact that practitioners conduct research in their own field of work. This can refer to evidence based practice and evaluation, but also case studies, studies on interventions used or basic assumptions, effectiveness. It is postulated that practitioners who also do research become better practitioners and researchers who work in practice are better researchers (Fox, Martin & Green, 2007). Schiepek also noted that important information and impulses for research come from the realm of practice.

Figure 6

Günter Schiepek had several contributions at the congress, including the closing plenary lecture. His work on applying complexity science and synergetics to the study and monitoring of the psyhcotherapy process is one of the most promising lines of research in the field, with significant implications for clinical practice.

My mind started to connect these points: practitioners research – a very interesting concept to bring academic research institutions into discourse with practitioners. Professional discourse can take place via publications. As a systemic therapist, I assume that things arise and develop in communication. As a very classically trained psychologist, I have found that a solid body of evidence helps in practice and that "there is nothing more practical than a good theory" (Lewin, 1951). At the same time, I also know that in no natural science can we find one single theory sufficient to explain the world with its diverse phenomena, and this is especially true in psychology. We usually operate with normally distributed attributes and our clients do not always do us the favour that their issues correspond exactly to the central tendency of the Gaussian bell distribution.

In other words, it is up to us to balance the standardised research reality with our client's individual reality to connect research with practice in a beneficial manner. In fact, every theory is a construct about "reality" that we agree on in scientific discourse. Practitioners should co-design them. We should make our discursive contribution to practice-based evidence so that we don't have to live with an evidence-based practice one-way street, but actively co-create our professional world. At that moment I was happy that I would courageously make my contribution to a small piece of discourse at this congress.

My contribution was not originally based on this noble consideration, but just because I wanted to learn about psychotherapeutic process design. It was supposed to be my thesis for therapy training. As a clinical psychologist, an important reason for therapy training was to develop a solid base of knowledge and experience about the psychotherapeutic process design. The synergetic approach with the generic principles (Haken & Schiepek, 2010; Schiepek et al., 2013) opened a horizon for me and I wanted to know more about it. The theory is that generic principles help therapists make relatively rational decisions. I would really like to be at least relatively rational in my professional work, even though I know that this is an idealistic goal, that can never be fully achieved. However, we have to try. Nevertheless, in Austria "lege artis" is legally required, which means acting on the basis of the current state of research (§14 PthG: RIS - Psychotherapiegesetz - Bundesrecht konsolidiert, Fassung vom 03.02.2023 (bka.gv.at)) In Austria this is particularly relevant to the background of the academization discussion in psychotherapy. We are currently in the process of an amendment to the psychotherapy law. I assume that practitioners research cannot only make a contribution to the academization of psychotherapy, but it also ensures the quality of our work and enriches classic academic research. Of course, practitioners research also has weaknesses. If I reflect on my own project critically, I have to admit that I observe myself in my actions and it was for practical reasons not possible to control this experimenter bias. To counteract this topic in the future, I would like to follow the example of the Greek research group around **Athena Androutsopoulou**, from "Logo Psychis - Training and Research Institute for Systemic Psychotherapy", who are researching their cases as a group.

Another seed that was sown in me is the idea of dealing more with different qualitative research methods. For example, right before I gave my presentation, **Leoš Zatloukal** (Palacký University Olomouc, Czech Republic) spoke. He presented the "Recursive Frame Analysis" (Keeney, 1991; Chenail, 1995) with which he analysed the course of therapy sessions to show the changes in discourse. A method of "mapping" therapeutic conversations. Lucie Hornova also spoke about some interesting methods that made me curious.

This family therapy inspiration made me return to Vienna with a vision. A vision of a collegial-intervisory, a cheerfully inspiring, co-creative, self-organized Practitioners Research Group that nurtures each other's professionality and contributes to the development of the subject. A step closer to this vision is this article, in which I was able to sort my thoughts and maybe even address colleagues with similar ideas. I would be happy to get in touch. The next step is the publication of my project, despite the weaknesses mentioned above, with the hope of stimulating a discourse on practitioners research and practice--based evidence.

5.2. Impressions of Anja Kurent

Annette Kreuz Smolinski, psychotherapist from Centro Fase in Spain, and **Eda Arduman**, clinical psychologist and supervisor from Bilgi University in Istanbul presented the "beckoning" technique from the Psychobiological Approach to Couples Therapy **(**PACT), founded by Stan Tatkin (2012). PACT integrates attachment theory, insights from neuroscience, and knowledge of emotional regulation. "Beckoning" is a therapeutic intervention related to attachment. It encourages couples to connect and express themselves in a non-verbal way, without words, in silence. Non-verbal communication activates a different brain centre than verbal communication. And the intervention aims to achieve exactly that - activating the implicit unconscious and creating a safe space for connecting between partners.

They demonstrated the intervention with the help of two participants who played the role of a couple. The first instruction was for the couple to move 10m away from each other, or as far apart as possible in the room. Then they asked one participant to invite the other to them with non-verbal communication, facial expressions, movement and posture. The other had the task of responding to invitations, also only non-verbally. Then they switched roles. The two participants really beautifully staged what they wanted, which deeply impressed all the listeners present.

Zana Marović, clinical psychologist and psychotherapist from South Africa at the workshop *From therapeutic impasse to therapeutic competence: reconciling the professional and personal self of the therapist* highlighted an important aspect for therapists in experiencing themselves through their professional and personal self. She pointed out that the integration of the professional self through supervision and the personal self is often ignored, but is nevertheless still important. As a supervisor, in her practice she has often encountered how the therapist had the feeling that the therapeutic process with the client was stuck and as a way out of the so-called "dead end" she invites her supervisees to research their

genogram, and their life and to look for similarities, perhaps blind spots, with the clients' story. The approach is based on postmodernism and cybernetics of the second order, and the resulting attitude that the client and the therapist co-create is a process in which the therapist's self "plays" a specific role. This approach has been developed through 25 years of practice and supervision (under the auspices of Professor Mauricio Andolfi, Mony Elkaim, Susan McDaniel, and the University of Rochester). During the lecture, she briefly presented the differences between modernism and postmodernism and postmodernism in psychotherapy. The participants were then invited to an "exercise" - a reflection on a therapeutic case where they felt or feel as if they were a bit stuck. She invited us to draw the client's genogram and then to draw our own genogram and then to reflect on the similarities. Most of those present surprisingly reported interesting correspondences between the two.

Peter Rober, clinical psychologist and family therapist from Leuven in Belgium, probably had the largest attendance at the conference (figure 7). I visited his workshop *The family therapist's emotion regulation: How to be empathic, responsive, and hopeful in the process of family therapy.* He pointed out that emotional regulation is learned in the period between the second and fourth year, with the help of the adult world. We learn self-regulation in the process of co-regulating the emotions of our parents or guardians (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2016). And similar learning takes place in therapy - the client learns self-regulation in the relationship with the therapist through co-regulation. The lecturer pointed out that it is essential for the therapist to be in contact with their own emotions through self-observation while at the same time observing the client or the client's system.

Figure 7
Peter Rober from Leuven in Belgium was among those, who attracted the most attention at the congress.

He divided the (dis)comfort experienced by therapists in the therapeutic process into three levels: (1) "level of strong discomfort", in which the therapist questions and worries about how he will "survive" as a therapist and how he will "survive" as a person; (2) "level of enduring discomfort" is the optimal level, as the therapist can reflect on various questions, for example "how do I feel", "what does it mean that I feel this way at this moment" and "how can I connect this with the client's family dynamics or client system"; (3) "level of too much comfort", when the therapist is unable to connect with the client and remains distant and experiences themselves as an object. He emphasized that therapist's self-care is essential. It invites the therapist to act mindfully and observe herself in the process, to reflect her feelings within the therapeutic alliance and to encourage dialogue.

Stefanos Gkaitatzis, psychiatrist and psychotherapist from Germany, at the workshop presented the method »Dot, dot, comma, slash - the solution perspective is complete« ("Punkt, Punkt, Komma, Strich – fertig ist die Lösungssicht"), which he actively uses in his psychotherapy and supervision work. It involves drawing the client's story. While listening to the client's story, he uses a symbolic drawing technique to present it pictorially. It uses two different colours to illustrate functionality and non-functionality. He points out that it is another dimension of seeing or even experiencing one's own story, and at the same time it could be understood as one of the externalization techniques.

Michel Maestre, clinical psychologist and psychotherapist from France, at the workshop presented an analogous technique. With the help of two people from the audience, he demonstrated the use of dolls in couple therapy. Three pairs of dolls were used for the basic setup. The first layout represented the dolls they had chosen for each other, the second layout illustrated the present couple relationship (they each had to choose their own doll), and the third layout represented the dolls they had chosen for each other for the beginning of their relationship. He then placed the three selected pairs of dools in the room, which symbolically indicated the present and the past. Then followed the exploration from the present back to the past. In the dialogue, he always first invites couples to share the perspective of the other. Only then does he explore the feelings of the individual. The purpose of the technique is to travel from the problem "today", back to the positive past - to the beginning of the partnership.

5.3. Impressions of Tina Lasič Andrejević

After the official opening of the conference, there was a plenary lecture by the contemporary German philosopher, **Wilhelm Schmid**, entitled *The Art of Living in Times of Crisis*. In his sophisticated reflection on the art of life, he questioned happiness and unhappiness and at the same time devoted himself to the cultural

and social context of today's postmodern society and man's involvement in it, which, under the burden of globalization, migration, consumerism, the ecological crisis and the media, rejects the most fundamental ontological area of reality, which is logically independent of the human mind, society and dominant ideologies. The general social climate, the situation in which today's man finds himself and the position of scepticism, subjectivism and relativism from which he judges the world dictate, according to Schmid, the necessity of reintroducing the concept of the art of life into the philosophical and public debate, with an emphasis on a different ethical perspective, which would be an important contribution to human well-being.

It is about the ethics of self-realization, about the personal and authentic search for what is in the service of personal self-development and nurturing responsibility for one's own life and the preservation of individual freedom. About ethics that transcends the moral context, but at the same time does not exclude fellow human beings. About the ethics of genuine acceptance, which is the opposite of absent-minded and inattentive surrender to the flow of events, and manifests itself in the opportunity and effort for a self-reflective way of life, an element that in postmodern society, in which we are exposed to almost unlimited possibilities, is a prerequisite for the search for freedom and the possibility of making decisions.

Schmid therefore places the individual ethics of self-development at the starting point of the art of life, whereby the object of the art of life is the subject themselves, and they understand the human ability to interpret and make sense of life and life circumstances as the fundamental skill of practising the art of life. In this way, the individual constructs their own reality, whereby the essential assumptions of psychological well-being are criticality and openness of mind, which enable reflection on various possibilities for interpretation, unencumbered by one's own egoism and egocentricity.

With his speech, Schmid indicated a systemic or cybernetic fact, which was the topic of several lectures in the course of the conference, namely that a person cannot be unilaterally controlled, as they have their own power and competence to create an interpretation based on "autonomous hermeneutics", on one's own experiences and a self-reflective mind. The creation of new states of order, even in psychotherapy, cannot be understood in a linear way, but rather the creation of conditions for the development of something that is qualitatively new, whereby Schmid's concept of the active process of the art of living is one of the possible conditions for creating the infinity of the possible, for creating the so-called "philosophical happiness", which depends not only on coincidences and momentary feelings, but on the balance of all the polarities of life, success

and failure, pleasure and pain, peaks and abysses, and not only happiness and unhappiness. It is about the happiness of abundance, a consciously accepted attitude to life, which is expressed in liveliness, vitality and tranquility.

Kristoffer James Whittaker, a clinical psychologist from the Norwegian clinic Modum Bad, presented the model of Integrative System Therapy (IST) and the results of research in which he and Bruce Wampold and other colleagues investigated the connection between trauma, the therapeutic alliance and the outcome of psychotherapy.

5.3.1. Integrative System Therapy

The meta-theoretical and meta-systemic basis of integrative system therapy (IST) gives therapeutic practice a perspective that goes beyond established ideas about specific therapeutic models and demarcations in the context of psychotherapeutic treatment. It uses concepts and interventions from different psychotherapeutic approaches, combining different systemic levels (individual, partner and family). From the perspective of IST, the repeated pattern of interaction occurs simultaneously on two levels (intrapsychic and in interaction with other members of the system) and has a circular effect on the members of the system.

The key characteristics of IST are:

1. It is a five-pillar model – epistemological (progressive learning); ontological (multi-systemic); sequential (patterns and sequences); causal (network of different influences); constraints (what sustains the problem).
2. The importance of integrating individual, partner and family therapy. Objectives often overlap.
3. The theoretical framework synthesizes the concepts and interventions of therapies that take place at different systemic levels.
4. Consideration of the importance of specific factors (e.g. interventions specific to a particular model) as well as common factors (e.g. the therapeutic alliance, positive expectations...)
5. Use of blueprint and essence tools for case conceptualization, planning and implementation of psychotherapeutic interventions, and evaluation.
6. It is not a specific therapeutic method, but rather a metamodel that guides the therapist in the implementation of interventions, strategies, plans.

Presentation of research findings - Childhood trauma as a predictor of change in partner and family therapy: A study of treatment response

The research was conducted on a sample of families who were staying at the Modum Bad clinic and were included in the residential program of hospital treatment due to the complexity of the problems they faced (problems in couple relationships, problems related to parenting, psychiatric diagnoses of at least

one parent or child, etc.). The objectives of the research focused on researching treatment and psychotherapy with the aim of: developing and improving the scheme of hospital treatment; investigating demarcations and the relationship between psychiatric and psychotherapeutic treatment and improving the psychiatric treatment.

The purpose of the longitudinal, quantitative and qualitative study of the impact of developmental traumatic experiences on the couple relationship and on the outcome of couple therapy was to check whether there were differences in the response to couple and family therapy between clients with a history of developmental trauma and clients without such experiences. The research focused on the question of the possible need to adapt couple therapy to the characteristics of a particular family, with the aim of reducing and limiting negative experiences from childhood.

36 couples and 9 individuals (N=81) were included in the research. 30.3% reported exposure to physical and/or sexual abuse in childhood. T-tests, which were used to determine whether there were statistically significant differences between the two groups, showed that from admission to discharge, symptoms of anxiety and depression significantly decreased in both groups, and satisfaction in couple and family relationships improved (size effects ranged from 0.31 to 0.92). An independent sample T- test showed that the group of subjects with a history of childhood trauma had more symptoms of anxiety and depression at admission for treatment than the group of subjects without stressful childhood experiences. The research also showed that those exposed to childhood abuse responded worse to treatment than people without a traumatic history.

The generalizability of this study is limited by the relatively small sample size drawn from the psychiatric population. Nevertheless, these findings suggest that couple and family therapy is an appropriate treatment for individual symptoms both for those who suffered childhood trauma and for those who were not exposed to such experiences in childhood. The results should stimulate future research on the impact of trauma on the outcome of psychotherapy treatment.

The qualitative part of the study was conducted after the completion of the hospital treatment and focused on the question of the limitations of participation. An in-depth interview on the topic of the therapeutic experience was conducted with the research participants. All couples expressed some ambivalence about their own perceptions of treatment outcome, including the post-discharge period. All participants were satisfied with the therapy and the outcome of the therapy, they reported greater satisfaction in family relationships and reduced symptomatology, and at the same time they additionally thought about how the outcome of the therapy could be even better, as they believed that some of

their problems were not well enough addressed or addressed at all. In addition, some couples expressed that they felt that one partner had a better relationship with the therapist than with their own partner. 5 out of 6 participants could not accurately define the influence of traumatic experiences from childhood on the outcome of therapy (e.g. topics related to trust, meaning...). The research in this part showed that the relational perspective in the therapy of traumatized individuals has the potential to reduce the burden of shame and guilt and that trauma significantly affects the relational pattern in a partnership. In addition it was shown that:

- systematic monitoring of the process and outcome of therapy is necessary (e.g. monitoring of family functionality);
- it is necessary to be aware of one's own therapeutic style and check its appropriateness with the client (it may suit one of the partners, but not the other);
- it is necessary to determine whether the client is in or outside the tolerance window (the same applies to the therapist);
- a negative explanation can be helpful (e.g. theory of constraints);
- hypotheses should be explicit and should be discarded when they are no longer useful;
- there are good couple therapies that target PTSM / trauma with coexisting relationship problems (e.g. Sijercic et al., 2022).

Peter Rober in his workshop *The therapist's emotional regulation: How to be empathic, responsive, and hopeful in the process of family therapy* addressed the topic of the therapist's experience of strong emotions during the meeting with the client system (especially those that, in principle, do not contribute to a good therapeutic alliance or are even destructive for the therapeutic process) and the issue of the therapist's emotional regulation during the session. In the packed hall of the theological faculty, he reflected on the importance of the therapist's sensitivity to their own experience during the meeting, on the careful monitoring of the implicit invitations of the client system to the therapist towards potentially destructive relational scenarios, on the possible negative and lasting effects of such interactions with the family and, consequently, on the prospects for more constructive continuation of therapy.

Rober, like some other authors before him (Elkaim, Flaskas and Larner), considers the therapist's experience as a tool that can be used in the therapeutic process, even if it is sometimes the experience of feelings of hopelessness, helplessness, anxiety, shame, sadness, fear, anger or even sexual desire. Despite the complexity of the therapist's experience during the session, he emphasizes the importance of the therapist's vulnerability and openness to exploring the meaning of their own reflection, with which some difficult and ambivalent

experiences that the therapist experiences during the session can be transformed into a useful tool for promoting collaborative, therapeutic dialogue. He supported his thoughts with the results of some research and examples from practice.

In the presentation, Rober pointed out some facts that are especially important for therapists who are just starting their careers. Experiencing negative emotions is an inevitable part of the messy and unpredictable process of psychotherapy, which should not be considered a sign of a bad or inexperienced therapist. He believes that family therapy, compared to individual therapy, is probably more emotionally demanding due to the extreme complexity of the family therapeutic conversation and its saturation with expressed emotions, and it is often difficult for the therapist to find a place in the vortex of suffering, implicit fears and conflicting interests of family members. Just as psychiatrist and family therapist Camillo Loriedo asked in the presentation entitled *How to use/control the therapist's emotions - the use of self in therapy*, Rober first asks how to get through the session emotionally, and only then deals with the question of how to be supportive and helpful to the family, aware of the fact of the unpredictability of the therapeutic change, which cannot be mastered or controlled.

In order to address the complexity of the family therapist's position, he points out the importance of the therapist's dedication to their own process of experience, which can simultaneously serve as a source of information about what is happening in the meeting with the client's system. He suggests that the therapist should understand their own experience during the encounter with the client's system as an implicit invitation to join the family members in the relational scenarios, thinking about the possible negative and lasting effects of this and exploring dialogic opportunities to use their experiences to continue the session in a constructive way. It should come from the awareness that change is made possible by, among other things, establishing and maintaining a therapeutic relationship. The emotional vulnerability, which the therapist experiences when seeking contact with a client, gives them insight and substance for persistence in the process, for dialogue and a safe relationship with the client system and with themselves.

In the afternoon cycle of lectures on the topic of using and controlling the therapist's emotions during therapy, clinical psychologist and director of the Centre for Family Therapy in Valencia, **Annette Kreuz Smolinski**, and Italian psychiatrist and system therapist, **Camillo Loriedo**, presented experiences from their rich practice of working with couples and families. Annette Kreuz emphasized in her lecture that couple therapy is among the most demanding and among those forms of therapy with less lasting effects. A therapist who witnesses couples' deep despair, constant struggle, misalignments and misunderstandings,

combined with covert invitations to hidden alliances, awakens a whole range of complex emotions in the therapist. Kreuz presented a modern model of emotional attunement with clients based on mirror neuron theory, attachment and modern trauma theory. Assuming that the most important figure of attachment for an adult individual is the intimate partner, whereby the latter acts as a strong modulator of neuropsychological processes in the autonomic nervous system or the so-called "mirror neurons", the task of the therapist is to promote positive processes of social regulation and self-regulation, as well as the reconstruction of deep partner connections.

In order for the therapy to be effective, a person must experience positive changes in the neurological system, in the brain, during the therapy. The neurons of an anxious and depressed person work in the "fight, flight or freeze" mode of the limbic brain, and effective therapy must help the person reduce the level of nervous system arousal and bring them to an area, where they stop reacting to "danger" and where the prefrontal cortex enables awareness and clear thinking. The human brain has many mirror neuron systems that specialize in imitating and understanding the actions of others, their intentions, and the social significance of their behavior and emotions. The therapist's ability to be at ease with a person in distress affects and helps the client's mirror neurons to simulate the desired state of mind. In an atmosphere of respect, tenderness, trust, directness and responsiveness, the client will feel safe and emotionally open with the therapist, and this helps them to develop a sense of self-respect, hope and inclusion. Kreuz concluded by emphasizing the importance of the therapist's use of awareness, self-regulation, and communication.

In the second part of the lecture, Loriedo drew attention to the knowledge of second-order cybernetics about the therapist's involvement in the system, whereby the therapist actually neglects one of the supporting members of the system, as long as they are not aware of their feelings. Like Rober and Kreuzer, Loriedo also warned about hidden invitations of clients into secret alliances and potentially destructive relational scenarios, and about the possible negative and lasting effects of such interactions with family members or with one of the members of the couple system. He said from experience that therapists who work with couple and family systems are exposed to significant stress, physical, emotional and mental exhaustion caused by long-term involvement in emotionally demanding situations, burnout syndrome, isomorphic behaviour, experiencing many negative emotions, etc. and with many examples from practice, that indicated the need for personal and professional engagement, which represents an important protection against risk. Among the preventative factors, he points out the importance of rest, self-awareness, continuous education, maintaining

a balance between empathy and appropriate professional distance, taking care of one's own mental health, leaving the initiative to clients and being aware and respecting one's own limitations.

Adolf József Papp and **Réka Melinda Balázs** from Romania, using a contextual model that addresses intergenerational patterns of family bonding, focused on the assessment of family interaction and conceptualization of these dynamics through a case study of two families. The model of contextual family therapy, developed by Ivan Boszormenyi-Nagy, one of the first founders of the American Association for Marriage and Family Therapy, is based on the thesis that individual and subsequent family disorders are an expression of imbalances in give and take and in entitlement and fulfillment, especially in connection to care. This systemically designed style of therapy is based on the roots of forgiveness, ethics, justice and morality, and brings into practice intergenerational healing, reconciliation and recognition. Contextualizing the problems and understanding the client's system is made possible by exploring the ways in which generations are inherently connected to each other while simultaneously considering intrapsychic and interpersonal dynamics. Individuals are inevitably rooted and outwardly often invisibly loyal to their primary family. This legacy, based on accumulated experience, spans through generations and affects later established family systems. In new relationships, the individual continues their role from the family of origin, regardless of whether these patterns are healthy or not, and in order to balance the relationship in each system, it is necessary to take into account justice or what is termed "relational ethics", which contributes to the well-being of the other. In order for the relationship to become trustworthy, each of the members of the system must first resolve their debts and rights. Understanding and trust between family members leads to dialogue, and establishing a sense of interpersonal responsibility enables change. From this point of view, the essence of healthy relationships is revealed in trust, and the collapse of a trusting relationship due to the abandonment of care and responsibility lays the foundation for the development of pathology and relationship problems.

The experiential workshop in the memory of Humberto Maturana (1928 – 2021), a Chilean biologist, philosopher and theoretician of second-order cybernetics, was led by Croatian psychiatrist and psychotherapist **Dragan Puljić** and Italian psychologist and psychotherapist **Francesco Tramonti**, author of numerous publications in the field of clinical psychology and systems thinking. In the course of the interactive discussion that took place among the participants, we delved into our own reflection on some key questions related to the origin of human behaviour, emotions, cognition, knowledge and love, and above all we

wondered about the imprint that Maturana left in the systemic conceptualization of psychotherapy.

Maturana's contribution to the science of the complexity and understanding of human experience comes from his interpretation of the observer, revealing the observer as someone who, through the use of language, acts as a constitutive participant in everything they do as a human being. Maturana's recursive, circular and systemic view is present in all of his reflections and explanatory arguments. With the latter in mind, the following is a summary of his contributions:

- A circular, non-linear systemic view of the living system, with which he contributed to an epistemological change in the relationship between the observer and the observed. Knowledge is a biological phenomenon that can be studied and known as such, while life must be understood as a process of knowing that takes place in the harmony of existence between the organism and the medium.
- Mind is a relational phenomenon that refers to the relational dynamics of an organism with another organism (or environment).
- The ontological explanatory system of human existence and experience. Living beings are structurally determined systems, therefore structural changes resulting from interaction with the environment are not determined by external factors, but rather by the structural dynamics of the living being, whereby the living system is only affected by those external factors that its structure allows. Any change that occurs as a result of psychotherapeutic intervention must therefore be understood as a reorganization of the client's experience, which can only be decided by the client themselves.
- Denial of the separation of mind and body. A living system exists both in the domain of structural dynamics and in the domain of its actions and interactions as a whole, neither domain being reducible to the other. Mental disorders are not the result of a biochemical deficiency in the brain, although the latter enables the appearance of such disorders, but are a response to the relationship between the organism and the environment.
- Denial of the reductionist genetic determination of the organism's behaviour. The identity of a living organism is a systemic, social phenomenon that arises in language and is maintained through cooperation and the acceptance of conditions that make it possible. The internal structural changes of the client can therefore be changed through language and are possible in psychotherapy if the therapist establishes an interaction with the client that does not belong to the domain of identity preservation, whereby the client will allow changes only up to a limit that will not threaten the realization of their organization as a living system.

- Language takes place in the domain of temporality, which interprets the experience of current events. A word, sound or gesture therefore does not indicate something external, but rather they are elements that create meaning in the course of actions and emotions.
- The conception of the observer as a constitutive and active participant in everything they observe. Reality appears as an interpretation of the experience of the observer rather than as a transcendental entity. In this sense, human experiences are based on premises that have already been mediated by direct experiences in the past and appeared in language and emotions. Change in psychotherapy is only possible if the client changes their emotionally accepted premises through interactions with the therapist.
- The nervous system works as a closed neural network, which participates in maintaining the structural connection between the living system and the environment and creates structural changes in the living system through sensory-effector correlation.
- Psychotherapy must provide the client with a basis for generating consciousness and self-awareness. Self-awareness occurs in human experience when a person is able to distinguish themselves from the "I," when they are able to observe the observer.
- Regardless of the form of psychotherapy, the therapeutic goal is always achieved when the client consciously or unconsciously abandons the systematic denial of themselves and others by restoring the biology of love as the central thread of life.

Maturana's systemic view of human experience led to a change in the perception of humanity and a revaluation of emotions as the foundation of human experience and cognition, the understanding of which is essential for psychotherapy.

5.4. Impressions of Matthias Ochs

EFTA people love to meet, to chat, to interact in person, all-over Europe! This means that EFTA people have been suffering very much under the social constraints and reduced opportunities for meeting and for physical contact due to the restrictions of the corona pandemic. However, EFTA people are also tough and know how to use the difficulties and adversities that life brings with it, and furthermore, to build resilience out of it. So therefore, as EFTA people, we learned how to do digital therapy, how to handle zoom meetings and how to stay in touch with each other via emails and whatsapp. But nonetheless we love embodied life and face to face in- person contact. So, we were persistent. Despite all insecurities, and concern as to whether a huge congress would even be possible in September 2022, particularly in the face of an ongoing pandemic, a war in Europe and the

growing reluctance of people to fly across Europe, due to the climate crisis and possible pandemic associated health issues, nevertheless despite all this, the organizing and planning of the congress continued.

And this was only possible because of the wonderful cooperation of our partners in Ljubljana at the Sigmund Freud University (SFU Ljubljana), especially with Miran Možina (figure 8) and at the Faculty of Theology, University of Ljubljana as well as SYMVOLI, the conference event management team. This persistency was in some ways a tour de force – in a good sense. Until July 2022 it was unclear whether we would have enough participants to manage the congress without a significant budget deficit. Also unclear was whether all our keynote and invited speakers and colleagues would be able to come to Ljubljana because of possible travel restrictions or pandemic associated health issues. But in July 2022 it was clear: we concluded we can make it and we went for it – full throttle. At the end we had around 850 participants, and most of our keynote and invited speakers and colleagues actually made the trip to the wonderful city of Ljubljana. A colleague from the United States told me that he admired our braveness in arranging such a huge conference in the context of all those incalculable uncertainties. He said that because of this, yet again in the United States, most of the scientific conferences would be cancelled for autumn/winter of 2022.

Figure 8
In the preparation of the congress, Matthias Ochs (left) and Miran Možina formed the main collaboration axis between EFTA scientific committee and Slovenian scientific committee.

In terms of themes and contents - it was clear to us, that we wanted to capture the "Zeitenwende" in Europe. (This is a term, that the German counsellor Olaf Scholz

used to describe the changing of the times in this current multiple crisis-ridden Europe). With this in mind we asked the Berlin philosopher **Wilhelm Schmid**, one of the great experts in Europe regarding a Foucauldian understanding of the art of living, to provide in an opening keynote some reflections on how we could make sense out of all the crises such as the pandemic, war, and climate change mess in Europe. We asked him to address how we could best relate to these challenges and improve ourselves and our systemic practice. His keynote was thoughtful and was received very positively by many, although controversially for some, as his 'art of living' advice was down to earth, practical and applicable... though it seems some people would have liked a more dramatic presentation of his ideas with new perspectives and inspiration.

There was a brilliant keynote *Apathy and aggression in times of post-truth* from **Renata Salecl**, a Slovenian philosopher, sociologist, and legal theorist. She gave a sparkling intellectual analysis about the psychological benefits for people to spread fake news and conspiracy theories. She suggested that neo-liberalism promotes fraudsters and contributes to an increase in anxieties about ourselves. Violence was the overarching theme of her joint keynote alongside two of the real experts in Europe regarding systemic work in the context of family and couple violence: **Justine van Lawick** and **Lieven Migerode** from the Netherlands and from Belgium respectively. Their decades of long practice and expertise, paired with a lively presentation style, was for a lot of the attendees, one of the highlights of the conference.

But all in all, it is difficult to pick out specific highlights – because there were so many of them. The diversity and plurality of contributions, which is built in with systemic practitioners all over Europe, and is something that overseas colleagues sometimes envy us a little bit for, (as a colleague from the United States told me off the record). Some colleagues talked enthusiastically about the contribution of **Peter Rober** from Leuven University in Belgium, who talked about how to use dialogical feedback questionnaires in family therapy, and to work with your own inner voice as a therapist; others were inspired by the dynamic systems theory informed research concept, named Synergetic Navigation System (SNS), that **Günter Schiepek** from the Paracelsus University in Salzburg/ Austria developed; again others were impressed by the solid and deep systemic research work that is done by colleagues from Norway, such as **Kristoffer James Whittaker**, **Terje Tilden** or **Rune Zahl-Olsen**.

Very important for us all as EFTA people was the invited round table honouring the EFTA founder president **Mony Elkaim**, who sadly died in November 2020. Present were companions of Mony, such as **Michel Maestre** (PSYCOM INSTITUTE, France), **Edith Goldbeter- Merinfeld** (Free University of Brussels),

Robert Neuburger (Centre d'étude de la famille association), **Nevena Čalovska Hercog** (Association of Systemic Therapists RS), Carmine Saccu (SRPF SRL), **Romano Scandariato** (Université libre de Bruxelles), **Malvina Tsounaki** (Athenian Institute of Anthropos), **Maurizio Andolfi** (University of Rome), who all shared generously their experiences with and memories of Mony Elkaim.

One of our key aims was to broach the issues associated with the multiple crises we are facing in Europe and put them in the context of systemic work. Inspiring examples of this included the keynote of **Maria Borcsa** from the University of Applied Sciences Nordhausen in Eastern Germany and **Valeria Pomini** from the University of Athens. They shared with us brand new data from an empirical study that they are conducting regarding the use of digital formats in systemic family therapy.

Another wonderful example was the associated keynotes of **Celia Falicov** from the University of California, and **Renos Papadopoulos** from the Centre for Trauma, Asylum, and Refugees, based at the University of Essex, United Kingdom. They referred to systemic practices with immigrants as complex cultural and sociopolitical encounters and illustrated how to work in a way that supports a resilience orientation in that context.

Finally, another example was the invited round table about *Thoughts of Therapists and Systemic work in times of war; Past, Present, Future*, with **Radmila Vulić Bojović** (Association of Systemic Therapists, Belgrade, Serbia), **Igor Okorn** and **Sabina Jahovič** (Peer group "Sophia"), **Larysa Hushchina** and **Olena Dobrodnyak** (Systemic Family Therapy of the Ukrainian Umbrella Association of Psychotherapists (UUAP)), **Kira Sedykh** (Department of Psychology of the Poltava National Pedagogical University), **Bojana Vuković** (Association of Systemic Therapists). Olena Dobrodnyak talked about the challenges of families in the Ukrainian war, considering how to offer systemic support to families such as when the father is a soldier stationed on the front line of the war.

EFTA people do not only love to meet, but as systemic people they also love complexity – and the conference was definitely a complex endeavour in many ways: many cooperative partners all over Europe, many venues all over Ljubljana, and many (met and unmet) expectations from the participants. And as we know from the great French complexity scientist Edgar Morin: the only way complex systems develop is by moving through chaos and disorder – so, although the Ljubljana conference was definitely not a chaotic event, naturally sometimes things did not work out the way they were planned! On the other hand, most of the events were inspiring, enriching, and joyful. This was due to the high quality of the contributions, and also because of the embodiment of the conference. After more than two years of not meeting each other in person we could again

smile, touch, and hug with each other in one of Europe's most beautiful capital cities, and that´s what humans are made for!

5.5. Impressions of Božidar Popović

Federico Sarink who lives and works in Spain, in a crowded small hall at the Faculty for Theology in Ljubljana, in his workshop *Provocative Therapy, the importance of creating new contexts* demonstrated his enoromus potential in nonverbal practice. He created a humorous and joyful atmosphere through presentation, demonstrating well-known 9 dot patterns, a video of a therapy session and playing music. The author presented actual scientific knowledge based on his PhD research on the role of humour in psychotherapy, expressing his gratitude to others who had trod this path and in particular to the founding father Frank Farelly who invented Provocative Therapy. He pointed out that there are a lot of similarities with the work of Maurizio Andolfi, the ideas of Watzlawick, Weakland and Fish and Viktor Frankl. In the workshop the author looked at how we can help families by using a mix of good contact, humour and challenge. He demonstrated how the provocative style can help by using the power of incongruence and confusion to change context and perspectives with the objective to reinforce resilience through the psychological and relational flexibility of our clients.

Daniel Stillwell and **Dana Riger** from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill in their workshop *Ethical non-monogamy and the future of relationships* presented and demonstrated how systemic therapists are well-suited and can prepare to engage with the diversity of ethical non-monogamy in relationships. Based on their experience and practice in the USA, more and more relational systems are expanding their boundaries to include other committed partners. This is attributable to the lessening of the power in the institution of marriage, the increased awareness in the fluidity of sexual orientation and preference, the increased recognition of the seasonality of partnered relationships, and the increased social openness towards diversity and inclusivity. The presenters discussed various ethical non-monogamous (including kink or polyamorous) contexts and specific poly-friendly paradigms, interventions, and culturally sensitive strategies. Despite awareness of cultural differences, particularly from the Mid-European perspective, their concepts and everyday practice in the USA seemed to me far away from mine, under the constraints of social discourse institutions where I live and work. In spite of that, Stillwell and Riger expanded my perspectives in the context of non-monogamy or polyamorous practices.

My presentation together with **Srečko Karić** *Posttraumatic stress or/and posttraumatic success: 15 years later,* based on fifteen years of practice with war trauma in Croatia, has emphasized the salutogenic conceptions of post-traumatic

success, growth, and resilience, exploring layers of survival and resilience as marginalized and subjugated narratives in the dominant social construction of trauma. The first part of presentation involved scientifically based psychotherapy practices with individuals, couples, families and groups. Using the theory of nonlinear complexity I demonstrated my understanding of the continuum from the domain of "stress" to the other pole of "success or growth or resilience". I also emphasized the shift from psychotherapy practice to ethnographic research. I presented the current course of research within my doctoral dissertation based on three genres: pictures, videos and literature. In conclusion I remarked that under the strong and powerful discourse of trauma there emerges cracks of subjugated stories of visionary, mission, courage, resilience, boldness, friendship, humour and love.

The second part of presentation introduced my artistic practices in the theatres and documentary films. A documentary film was shown that was created by myself (without any lessons about screenplay or directing). The 25-minute documentary *The whisper of the wind tears down the walls* followed the narration of a micro-fragment of the memory from the period of the Croatian Homeland War 30 years ago. Among a thousand prisoners this documentary follows four protagonists from the Stajićevo concentration camp who are forced to sing the Yugoslav anthem "Hey Slavs". A single verse from the anthem encouraged Croatian prisoners into defiance and spite, resilience and creativity, courage and ingenuity, and enabled the creation of synchronicity, and atmosphere. This atmosphere is seen not only as a fragment of the memory of the past but also as a potential for networking multiple temporalities and intertwining the past, present, and future.The discussion that followed in the context of the international reflecting team well understood the meaning of the messages which the film managed to convey. The created narratives around one small topic from „there and then" enabled those present to create a warm, intimate context „here and now".

5.6. Impressions of Umberta Telfener

A congress is a specific universe where time and space can be suspended and one finds it each time for the first time, usually not knowing the city in which the congress takes place. A sort of a bubble where we arrive with what we know, curious to learn more, to meet new people and encounter old acquaintances, ready to challenge our usual ways of thinking and for us psychotherapists also to practice our work. A space where we realize the existence of multiple universes. If we are lucky it becomes a very special experience of encounter with oneself and a reflexive space where time becomes loose and everything can happen.

The usual rules for our days are suspended and we wander in search of stimuli and surprises, of confirmations and news of differences. Of disappointment, critics and shared discontent as well. As systemics we know that every reflexive space is a generative space, a congress can become a generative self-organizing galaxy.

Figure 9

Umberta Telfener, teacher of the systemic Milan approach, at the reception party in Cankarjev dom on September 7, 2022, who became the new president of EFTA since the Ljubljana General Board Meeting, before that she wa the chair of the EFTA-TIC board.

We create a suspended gathering, jointly shared with friends and strangers, in which a generative practice, transformative to all the people included, takes place. If we are aware of the importance of the experience we can make it nonjudgmental: a morphogenetic space organized by resonance. The participants who managed to abandon themselves to the congress experience may have lived a visceral participation, in which their conscience has enlarged, including more and more modules of internal and external elements that strictly connected. These are the concepts that can organize the congress experience and that organized the content themes of this 2022 congress: Systemic Resonances and Interferences. An isomorphism just there!

Isomorphisms between our daily work, the themes of the conference and our possible personal experiences brought about resonances, the creation of the observing system (von Foerster), the possibility to vibrate on the notes of what is offered, the chance to enlarge the field of possibilities, and gain a participative positioning.

I felt the opportunity of a special relationship with myself and with those stimuli that surprised me walking through the roads of the beautiful city of Ljubljana. It was like a treasure hunt to go from one hall to the other, leaving the Congress Centre, looking for the Ljubljana branch of the Sigmund Freud University or the Faculty of Theology, recognizing every time better the landmarks that would take me where I wanted to go. I enjoyed meeting a friend by chance, deciding to go and drink a lassie – a cultural bounce into the Indian culture in the middle of Europe -, sharing an umbrella with a stranger with the same membership label on their chest once it rained, helping a young student to find the proper stimuli for her expectations in a late hurried morning.

The boundaries that defined us participants have been the systemic thinking and practicing that many of us proposed in the numerous presentations (seminars, symposia, workshops, keynotes, posters ...) that I will not comment on singly. I can only say that I still crave the ones I did not attend and loved the ones that I attended, in both situations, if I could appreciate them deeply or when I felt I would have organized the process completely differently, not agreeing with the content and criticized them.

I was happy to realize once more that systemic thinking is an established theory that needs no a priori explanation and that our practices were transversally material of curiosity and reflection for other systemic activists. Because therapy is a political act that emerges from the coexistence of multiplicity and unity, of difference and repetition. Because therapy is a creative act based on ethics, aesthetics and politics, as I proposed in the symposium I ran with three dear colleagues of mine[8], each coming from a different clinical experience.

A congress is a deep social experience. What you get out of it is a question of attitude and style both on the organizer's side and on the side of the participants. If a congress is organized with integrity and good will, each person gets from it what they are ready to absorb. I was part of the Scientific Committee and we met every 15 days for a long time and we did our very best to invite interesting people and to offer stimuli and news of differences as well as consolidated practices. We had a vision, we organized many proposals, we communicated with trust between each other, we set some rules, then the conference took over its own process and emerged as a recursive social process. I am personally satisfied with the result, thank you all for attending and see you in 2025 for the next EFTA congress!!

8 Maria Esther Cavagnis, director of the Fundación Familias y parejas, Buenos Aires, Argentina; Britt Krause, anthropologist and systemic thinker and practitioner, Tavistock Clinic London; Valerie O'Brian, program director M. Sc Systemic Psychotherapy, University College Dublin.

5.7. Impressions of Francesco Tramonti

In this thought-provoking presentation *Applying research on social determinants of family interactions to clinical practice,* **Manuel Tettamanti** from University Hospital and Faculty of Medicine in Geneva presented multiple data and contributions that point to the relevant weight of the social determinants of mental health. Far from being a self-evident issue, the role of social disadvantage and economic inequalities needs to be properly recognized by psychotherapists, who operate in a given social and cultural context that inevitably influences their work and the lives of people seeking psychological help. This also has ethical consequences, since acknowledging the importance of themes concerning social justice needs to be considered as a relevant responsibility for professionals engaged in the promotion of the psychological well-being of individuals, families and communities.

As emphasized in the presentation *The paradox of counterfactual reasoning in the Milan Approach: a prison leading to rumination and a hotbed triggering change* by **Margherita Luciani** from Switzerland and **Pietro Barbetta** from Italy, the Milan school is currently deepening our understanding of the use of linguistic devices that are correlated to counterfactual reasoning, which is the tendency to mentally create alternatives to past events and to think about what could have happened if different choices had been made in specific circumstances. As with many other aspects of thoughts and feelings, counterfactual thinking can be a double-edged sword, leading to rumination on the one hand, or triggering complex thinking and paving the way for positive changes on the other. It is a matter of how much the therapist succeeds in being a catalyst for a "good use" of counterfactual thinking that makes the difference, and the use of proper words is a crucial issue in these circumstances.

Among other important contributions to this conference, **Dana Riger** and **Daniel Stillwell** addressed the overlooked theme of online dating in relationship formation, and how it is perceived by individuals, couples and families seeking psychotherapeutic help. Using data from large scale populations, the presenters demonstrated that the incidence of perceived stigma is still high for people who met through dating applications. Therapists must be aware of this, and they must do everything they can to avoid reinforcing such a stigma. Being up-to-date about the use of new ways of forming relationships - which are no longer a prerogative of minorities, such as those sharing very specific interests in particular sex practices - is probably mandatory for professionals working in a changing landscape of starting and developing relationships.

Jennifer Denis and **Caroline Winkopp** from Belgian University of Mons in their presentation *When care is invited to care: a systemic model of supporting health professionals during covid-19* pointed out, how the global covid-19 epidemic forced healthcare professionals to invent new ways to care, not only for patients but also for other healthcare professionals. As any emergency psychologist knows, emergency time is a time when resources are far less than necessary; thus it is not possible to simply intensify habitual responses to a heightened need. Faced with a huge request for support from health professionals, and after a careful analysis of the request, the Belgian colleagues chose to "support the supporters": coordinators and psychologists of the structures asking for help. This is not a truly new way of working, but we must consider the special context in which this has been achieved. In this context, the support to the supporter amplifies some positive effects, mainly the empowerment of the resources and relationships of the pre-existing working groups, avoiding the risk of thinking that only external help can solve their problems. The focus on the analysis of the demand and the empowerment of the working groups are certainly two unmistakable characteristics of a systemic practice, even more important and effective in a context of global emergency.

In her workshop *Metaphors in systemic individual and family online therapy,* psychologist and family therapist from Luxembourg, **Marie Jeanne Schon**, managed to create a strong emotional synergy in the classroom, allowing participants to experience firsthand her way of working in individual and family therapy settings. Among the various tools she commonly uses throughout the therapeutic process, Schon presented the DIXIT cards (Roubira, 2002), used as a therapeutic "object" that, by presenting different images to be chosen, helps patients to express emotions more richly than by the simple use of words. Discussing themes elicited by the cards, new interpretations of feelings or problems can arise in therapy. The workshop included a practical exercise in which participants were allowed to experience the use of DIXIT cards in small groups, acknowledging the power of metaphors in connecting the "here and now" of the present moment with the "there and then" of memories emerging in our minds. As Schon has emphasized, metaphors are a means to the end of "going beyond", of creating new possibilities on both cognitive and emotional grounds. It is interesting to reflect on how the use of these tools can fit with the virtual settings of online therapies, which are more frequent day by day due to obvious reasons related to the pandemic. On the one hand, these techniques can elicit emotions and preserve a strong relational bonding even at a distance, but on the other hand we should consider how differently emotions may flow without physical proximity and through the medium of a screen.

In their presentations about *Paediatric medical traumatic stress in children with cancer and their parents: differences in levels of posttraumatic stress symptoms* **Sandra**

Klašnja, **Ivana Kreft Hausmeister**, **Marko Kavčič** from University Medical Centre Ljubljana, and **Robert Masten** from Psychology Department of the University of Ljubljana, pointed out how serious illness is a potentially traumatic event not only for the person affected but also for their relatives. Therefore, when a disease such as cancer involves a child or a young person, the burden on the parents must be carefully considered. The research presented focuses on factors that influence the severity of PTSD in both children and parents. Some relevant factors are mainly individual (mothers appear to be affected more than fathers by PTSD symptoms; relapses and intensity of treatments appear to be related to the severity of PTSD), while others are relational: the severity of the parents' post-traumatic stress disorder correlates with that of their children. There are two main issues this study emphasizes: the traumatic memories of very young children and the shared meanings related to the disease.

With respect to the first theme, using a psychotraumatological lens, it could be useful to monitor younger children over time, as for them the traumatic memories may not be accessible at the explicit, conscious verbal and visual level, but they could remain at the implicit and somatic level (coenesthetic) and perceptive level (mainly auditory and olfactory). This problem is also linked to the role of the body in psychotherapy, and in particular raises the question of how to consider it in a systemic framework.

The second theme relates to the role of co-constructions of meanings with respect to traumatic life events in families, and how they can influence not only PTSD severity of children and relatives, but also some other relevant individual and familiar dynamics. It would be very interesting to extend this accurate and well-documented research, which involved 183 parents of 133 children, also to emphasize the important role of a systemic framework in the study of chronic disease.

Professor **Camillo Loriedo** in his presentation *How to use/control the therapist's emotions - the use of self in therapy* began by quoting the text *Failures in family therapy* (Coleman, 1985). In that context, therapeutic failure is defined as the partial or total failure to achieve therapeutic goals co-constructed with patients, couples or families. Loriedo invited the audience to pay special attention to the early signs of "danger" in our therapeutic practice. For instance, failures can be triggered by not considering the problem that the patient brings us to be important, and only looking for what "lies behind" the request; or by making a diagnosis that becomes a "label" for the patient, and a constraint for growth possibilities; or by thinking that one's therapeutic approach works well with all relational systems. Failures can also derive from other, different behaviour or attitudes, such as being passive or inactive, or even being too thoughtful, silent

or too careful. Nonetheless, failures can allow therapists to maintain humility, learn by trial and error, reduce the gap between therapists and patients, implicitly redefining family difficulties and reducing dependence. But, if on the one hand failure helps us not to be a victim of omnipotence, on the other hand it is our responsibility to grasp the early signs of failure risk (problems with referral, heavy atmosphere, explicit attacks or therapy disqualification, frequent absences, worsening of symptoms, etc.) to try to prevent miscarriage. In the end, Loriedo provided us with useful insights for surviving these failure risks: avoiding "psychobubbles", a therapeutic use of non-therapy, being flexible and accepting doubts or patients' help, asking for more details about patients' dissatisfaction, using self-disclosure and, in the end, accepting failures.

In his other presentation *The role of Isomorphic Processes and Focused Genogram in Couple Therapy,* **Camillo Loriedo** initially illustrated the use of the genogram, a well-known graphical instrument that by the drawing of the family tree helps in gathering information on patients' families and their relationships over at least three generations. This can provide an immediate picture of complex family models and can build the narrative and relational "plot" of patients' personal and family histories. In this respect, Loriedo then introduced the concept of isomorphisms as structural models of relationships which, repeated over time, can become chronic and replicate themselves at an intergenerational level, at times creating dysfunctionality and leading patients to potential developmental blocks. Within the context of couple therapy, dysfunctional isomorphisms can keep the couple in a stalemate, and a "Focused Genogram", which incorporates and integrates family systems and attachment theory (DeMaria, Bogue & Haggerty, 2020), can help to shed light on these intergenerational processes. The identification and redefinition of such processes and transmissions within the dyadic context, can trigger or facilitate a process of awareness by partners, especially with respect to the critical areas of their relationship. In this way, the emotions that have "survived" across time and among generations, may be the target of specific interventions aimed at promoting therapeutic change.

Miran Možina in his presentation *The development of common factors theory from first meta-analyses to Schiepek's synergetic nonlinear dynamic model w*ithin the context of a symposium *The DODO story: Common factors, complexity science and integration in psychotherapy* opened the discussion by presenting the history and development of common factors theory, and its relevance for a systemic perspective on psychotherapy research. The presentation started with the first theorizations of common factors and ended with a glimpse into the most advanced approaches to the study of psychotherapeutic process from a systemic perspective. Among such approaches, Günter Schiepek's synergetic system for

the monitoring and study of non-linear trajectories of change in psychotherapy has a central role in the field, as highlighted in this presentation.

Introduced by the previous presentation by Miran Možina, **Günter Schiepek** took part in the symposium dedicated to common factors through presenting his synergetic model for the study of therapetic process and its non-linear change dynamics. Such a model is clearly informed by complexity science and the most advanced developmental system theories, and uses specific device, called the Synergetic Navigation System (SNS) for monitoring change trajectories during therapy. This is an extremely refined way of using systems thinking as a framework for both case formulations and the analysis of therapeutic relationships, which can also provide a solid scientific background to the theory of common factors.

The presentation of **Matthias Ochs** *In which way does a systemic perspective help to address the challenges of psychotherapy research in the future?*, which concluded the symposium on common factors, emphasized how systems thinking could be helpful in making sense of the growing data coming from psychotherapy outcome research. The field is undergoing a continuous evolution, and data about the efficacy of psychotherapy can vary so much according to the different methods employed and to the quality of different research designs. This led to a thorough discussion about the role of psychotherapy for improving individual and relational well-being, and about the possible outcomes of psychological treatment in different circumstances. Systems perspectives are a precious framework for revitalizing the debate on psychotherapy and for re-thinking the results from research studies that – at times – may appear contradictatory .

In their key-note speech *Virtual relations and systemic therapy: towards a third--order cybernetics,* **Maria Borcsa** and **Valeria Pomini** presented an up-to-date state of the art on the use of virtual settings in systemic practice across different countries. The issue is much more complex than it was thought in the beginning, when the use of this device was necessary at the time of the pandemic. At that time, some therapists - especially in some countries - were already used to conducting on-line sessions with patients and families, whereas others never had the opportuniy or the necessity to use this option. At present, many psychotherapists have gained experience of this way of working, and the opportunity of doing virtual sessions will probably survive the pandemic and become a new option for conducting therapies, or part of them, when the conditions make it useful. Thus, thinking about the contraints and new possibilities of these options is probably mandatory for psychotherapists today. There are not only parctical and logistic reasons to do so, but also epistemological implications to deal with. Second-order cybernetics has brought the observer into the system.

Then, as Borcsa and Pomini asked: who is the observer in virtual settings? This is a relevant question for moving towards a third-order cybernetics.

The last key-note speech of the conference *From research-based practice to practice-based research - the paradigm shift to complexity science in psychotherapy* was **Günter Schiepek's** *lectio magistralis* on practice-based research and complexity science in psychotherapy. It was probably the best conclusion possible for such a rich and stimulating conference. Schiepek's work on applying synergetics to the study and monitoring of the psyhcotherapy process is one of the most promising lines of research in the field, with significant implications for clinical practice. Schiepek clearly exposed the limits of currently prevailing approaches to the study of psychotherapy outcomes and process - including the misuse of randomized controlled trials -, and has advanced a convincing alternative for properly grasping the complexity of psychotherapy, with its multiple variables and unpredictable trajectories. Schiepek's work is also a call for integrating different levels of analysis, which can entail different modalities of treatment, and systems thinking is proposed as the most powerful meta-framework for implementing such an integration. Over the years and decades we have learned that psychotherapy must fill the gap between research and practice, and Schiepek's approach seems to be one of the most convincing steps in this direction.

5.8. Impressions of Matej Vajda

Systemic resonances, a concept of the recently deceased **Mony Elkaim,** were joined by interferences in the title of the conference, which brings to mind not only ripples and echoes, as we could see for four days in the attractive logo of the event, but also the stability-instability dichotomy, one of the key pillars of systems thinking.

The originators of the leading idea of the conference took the idea of change as a basis - of attitudes, tools, practices, procedures, clients' expectations and, last but not least, the context. It is true, the highlighting of changes as a constant in life has already been attributed to Heraclitus, who spoke about the fact that you cannot step into the same river twice. Even 2,500 years later, we are dealing with the same topic, but even more dramatically - every day we can hear how the rhythm of life, science, technology, etc. changes ever faster and how we must catch the train that is accelerating more and more. This is also a constant and is seen in the context of our clients' lives: families and living patterns are changing, we are faced with ever-increasing differences in socioeconomic status and well-being, mutual trust is declining and the divide between political groups is deepening, and social, solidarity and intergenerational contracts are collapsing.

The corona crisis showed all this in an even stronger light and brought with it new symptoms and "symptoms" and transferred much of our work into new, especially digital forms. The time seems ripe for systems knowledge, for views that can and do understand complex systems dynamics and that can use the advantages of a meta-perspective to look beyond first-order interpretations. The conference, which brought together European systemic therapists in one place at least for a short time, addressed some topics from this really wide range, offered suggestions, reflections and criticisms for overcoming the traditional and modern dualisms that we face in the theory and practice of psychotherapy. It also invited us, in addition to looking into the future, to look back to our roots, to pay due attention to the elusive context, to question our own, our client's and society's concepts (into which we are all too often forced by the tendency to pathologize), to return to the basics: to our relationships and communication, from which cooperation arises, with the help of which we can build - and change - the world.

For the Slovenian and neighbouring participants, the extraordinary and extremely practical location of this gathering of systemic psychotherapists came out of, as we heard during **Miran Možina**'s lively introductory speech, the "resonance" between Nevena Čalovska from Belgrade and Božidar Popović from Belišće in Croatia, who is a teacher of systemic psychotherapy at SFU Ljubljana. The resulting wave apparently gained enough momentum and perhaps also some luck that four years later EFTA hosted this event in Ljubljana, which is of great importance for Slovenian psychotherapists, which we are not (yet?) fully aware of.

I It may therefore be right that the recommendation mentioned in one of the introductory lectures by the contemporary German philosopher **Wilhelm Schmid**, which as a guideline for the "art of living" (Lebenskunst), especially in times of crisis(es), emphasizes that meaning is more important than happiness (Schmid, 2007). To this we can add two more echoes, including the nice guidelines for the start of the conference that we heard on the first day: the invitation to "practise wonder" and the emphasis on the fact that "bonds matter".

Lieven Migerode, a clinical psychologist, EFT therapist, supervisor and teacher from Belgium, focused on the topic of intimate partner violence and emphasized that we should love the person and judge the action. In his lecture, he highlighted two interesting and useful concepts for understanding partner dynamics based on attachment theory: the so-called proximity-seeking violence, which appears in a moment of panic at the threat of loss of attachment, and the so-called distance-seeking violence, where one of the partners wants to withdraw, but the other does not let them, so they become aggressive in the fight for their peace and space. After plenary lectures of Justine van Lawick (*A Polyphonic and Embodied Dialogue Around Family Violence*) and Renata Salecl (*Apathy and Aggression in Times of Post-truth*), Migerode, as a session chair, also contributed to the interesting dialogue about various aspect of violence (figure 10)

Figure 10

After plenary lectures of Justine van Lawick (far left) and Renata Salecl, Lieven Migerode led an interesting discussion about various aspect of violence in families and society.

Attachment theory is also one of the bases for the PACT approach. the "beckoning" technique, a form of valuing attachment and intervention at the same time. The dynamic duo of **Annette Kreuz Smolinski** (from Spain) and **Eda Arduman** (from Turkey), in addition to the theoretical explanation of this non-verbal form of mutual play, which includes physical gesturing (and a strict ban on speaking), gave us a moving demonstration where we could feel the possibilities and potential for change, when the body movement in therapeutic work is used. In addition, the leaders of the workshop also offered a useful parable for the well-established, but somewhat technical, scientific-sounding expressions of anxious preoccupied and avoidant attachment. Let's imagine these people, they proposed, rather than islands and waves! A more charming and pleasant perspective.

Guests from the USA, **Daniel Stillwell**, who works in private practice, and **Dana Riger** from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, had four interesting presentations. The first of them was dedicated to the topic of ethical non-monogamy and the future of relationships. In their pleasant and dynamic style, they presented the basics of non-monogamous relationships and research in the field of relational diversity, and also highlighted the aspect of the

assumptions we have, especially regarding stereotypical relationship patterns and gender roles. In this way, we broadened our horizons together and thought about where in society we all encounter default mono- and hetero-normativity regarding the types of partner relationships, e.g. on various forms, where we tick certain categories (man, woman, married, single, partner's name); what role does the privilege of classical marriage play in society compared to other types of partnerships; how, when we mention the partner of a person we don't know yet, it automatically draws us into the idea of a person of the opposite sex from the interlocutor or interlocutors, etc.

One of the key ideas of ethical non-monogamy is the notion of conscious free choice, i.e. questioning default choices, being informed about options and following our own desires. But so that the whole thing does not sound too anarchistic, the two lecturers emphasized that the basis of ethically non-monogamous relationships is communication, namely a lot of it and at a high, demanding level. This is something that definitely applies to "normal" monogamous relationships as well, but with the inclusion of several people, the number of variables naturally increases, and with it the need to check and coordinate even the most basic assumptions and starting points in relationships, which we usually skip (in the way "because that's clear anyway").

The American guests warned us about the so-called *Relationship bill of rights* (https://www.morethantwo.com/relationshipbillofrights.html) from the book *More Than Two* (Veaux & Rickert, 2014), which leads us to think about what is really important for us in a relationship, e.g. that we choose our own level of involvement and intimacy with another person; that we partake of the truth; that we can make mistakes; that we clearly understand the various rules that will apply in the relationship even before we enter into it; that the partner consults with us regarding decisions that will affect us, etc.

Another tool recommended by the lecturers is *The relationship anarchy manifesto* (Nordgren, 2006), which not only offers interesting starting points for thinking about values in our relationships, but can also serve as a basis for developing our own unique "manifesto", something the lecturers invited us to do. The word anarchy refers here mainly to the direct meaning, i.e. to the absence of hierarchy, where in our relationships we should not place or value one higher than the other (e.g. partnership vs. friendship, "best" vs. other friendships, etc.), but also to its philosophical meaning, which emphasizes the voluntary cooperation of free individuals.

The third tool goes in a similar direction, which is called *The Relationship Anarchy Smörgåsbord* (which could be translated as the Swedish table of relational anarchy, or as the relational Russian buffet), which is a tool for talking about what

kind of relationship I want, we want or what from the rich and varied possibilities appeals to us the most and we would immediately put on our relational plate (a clear Yes), what we might be ready to try at this moment (Maybe) or sometime later (Maybe in the future), or that which we already know does not suit us (a clear No). The graphic offers only a certain set of the most common categories of relational life (e.g. the manner and frequency of communication; emotional intimacy; physical intimacy; public display of affection; household chores; cooperation; etc.), since the so-called relational anarchy (explained above) allows for the uniqueness of circumstances and of course cannot include everything that human experience offers or enables, and here again users are encouraged to adapt the tool to themselves and their needs, desires, fantasies. As we can see, it also works here, just like e.g. in the feedback tools mentioned below, in fact for the so-called conversational tool, a starting point for conversation development and not a "measuring instrument" in the sense of a quiz that will give "correct" answers. This perhaps further clarifies the meaning and usefulness of tools from this specific world of relational research, which, like psychotherapy, values, develops and uses communication as one of the cornerstones of its existence and development.

Peter Rober, a family therapist and professor of clinical psychology at the medical school of the University of Leuven in Belgium, presented some interesting feedback tools that he uses in his own practice. Above all, he highlighted the use of questionnaires as conversational tools, not just as measuring instruments. Together with a colleague (Rober & Van Tricht, 2015), he developed what he termed the *Worries Questionnaire*, which is used at the beginning of therapy and the *Dialogical Feedback Tool* with five questions, which is used at the end of one meeting as a starting point for the next and is especially useful when the client's feedback is critical or detailed, because, as he pointed out, positive feedback is useless, except it can reflect that the relationship is not secure enough.

Rober recommends three steps in feedback: all family members fill out the questionnaires at the meeting, the therapist reads and reflects on them during the meeting, and at the next meeting establishes a dialogue to clarify the received feedback and to consider adapting the process to the findings. The key to any feedback questionnaire is that it is clear, concise and that the feedback it collects is actually used. The therapist's message to clients with such a questionnaire is - "I would like to understand you and the dynamics of our meeting" and it is actually sometimes more important for clients to talk about the feedback they gave than about the meeting itself. But the key is that we check, and that we constantly check. A therapist can use quantitative measurements to monitor progress and demonstrate effectiveness, as well as qualitative measurements

to allow clients to describe their therapy experience. It is therefore a question of the complementarity of feedback measurement instruments, which, at the risk of burdening clients with filling out (admittedly short) questionnaires at each meeting, offer the therapist and the client many opportunities to develop therapy that actually leads to therapeutic change (Rober, Van Tricht & Sundet, 2020). Interested colleagues can download these questionnaires from the website www.intherapytogether.com (which is also the title of his book - Rober, 2017), and adapt and translate them if desired for their own use and the development of more feedback-informed work with clients.

Dimitra Doumpioti, a Greek psychologist and couple therapist, working in a multilingual mental health centre in Spain, presented a reflection on the use of systems theory as a key to integrating existing epistemologies in the field of mental health. She covered the idea in her book *The Story of WE*. As she says, it is about finding a balance between the whole and the individual part, the patterns, similarities and connections between all of us, from which she develops the concept of holistic systems theory. This reminds me of the big pictures and broad ideas in the thinking and writing of Matej Černigoj's book (2007), *I and We* (where, among other things, the author also deals with the idea of singular and plural), and indeed from a more sociopsychological point of view.

David Joseph Humphreys from the Stort Valley & Villages NHS Primary Care Network in Great Britain in the workshop *Social prescribing: an opportunity for systematically informed practice in primary medical care in England,* introduced the idea of social prescribing, which could perhaps be operationalized as a social referral (or prescription). It is an interesting and exciting concept of introducing a triage/dispatch centre for people who have come to see a general practitioner due to mental problems. A well-coordinated team of lay workers (so not necessarily psychotherapists, social workers, etc.), who have been educated and well equipped with information and skills for working with people, through conversation and primary, basic diagnostics of the complaint according to the specifics of the case, diverts the person from excessively long waiting times (9-12 months was mentioned in the specific case) of overworked psychotherapists to alternative points of help - charities, specialized associations and other sources where they can get what they need. In practice, it is the case (and we psychotherapists know this well, and so do doctors) that many people turn to us for help because they want to solve mental health problems, which sometimes turn out to be, after just one or a few meetings, strongly connected or even a direct consequence of other problems, mostly social, financial, living, organizational or systemic. As the lecturer informed us, there are several such centres in Great Britain, and the innovative idea is also being developed in a few other countries.

6. Epilogue: The congress as an opportunitiy to promote psychotherapy as an independent profession and an autonomous scientific discipline in Slovenia

For the Slovenian participants the congress was not only a celebration and festival of systemic psychotherapy, but of psychotherapy in general. Therefore, the Slovenian organizational hosts used the opportunity to present and promote psychotherapy as an independent profession and an autonomous scientific discipline to the Slovenian public and media. On Friday, September 9, 2022, the congress program included round table and conference entitled *Psychotherapy regulation across Europe: What can Slovenia learn from other European countries?* It was organized in support of the efforts of Slovenian psychotherapists for the legal regulation of psychotherapy. The colleagues who reported on the regulation of psychotherapy in various European countries were: Krzysztof Klajs from Poland, Nevena Čalovska from Serbia, Wolfgang Dillo from Germany, Gerda Mehta from Austria, Egita Plavina from Latvia and Romana Kress from Slovenia (figure 11).

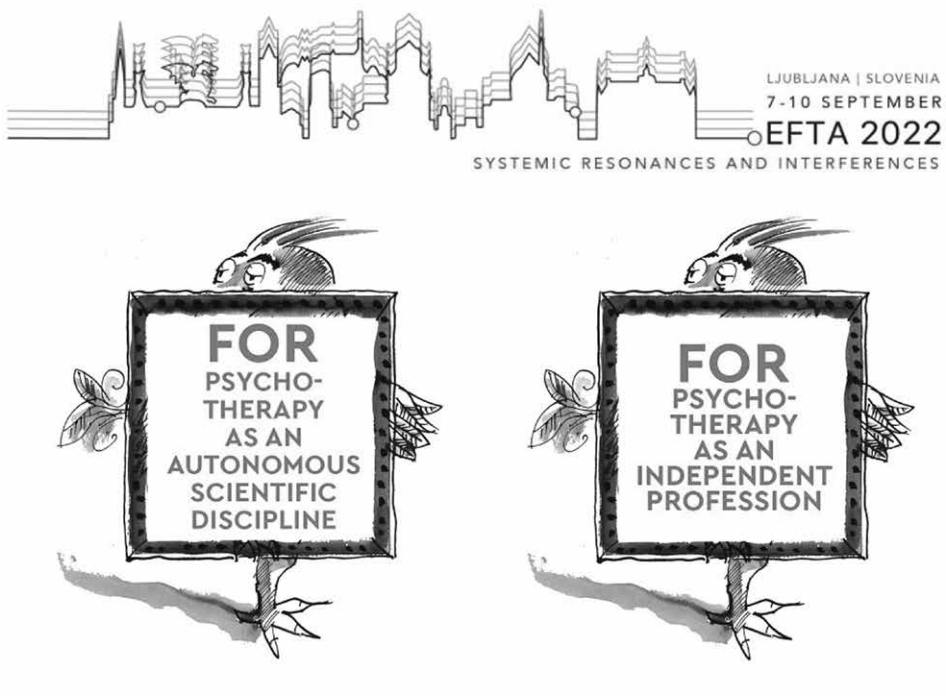
Figure 11

Round table about psychotherapy regulation across Europe: (from the left) Miran Možina, chair of the round table, and presenters Krzysztof Klajs, Nevena Čalovska, Wolfgang Dillo, Gerda Mehta, and Romana Kress.

The main conclusions of the presentations and discussions were that although the psychotherapy law is not a magical solution to the major mental health problems and challenges of modern society, the regulation of psychotherapy as an indenpedent profession and as an autonomous scientific discipline can contribute an indispensable part (figure 12).

Figure 12

During the congress Dodo strongly supported the efforts of Slovenian psychotherapists fort the regulation of psychotherapy as an independent profession and as an autonomous scientific discipline.



And what can Slovenia learn from other European countries? The main conclusions of the round table were:

- The lesson from Austria and Germany is that direct study of psychotherapy immediately after secondary school is a key educational path.
- A sufficient number of psychotherapists and other professionals with additional psychotherapy skills are needed to provide psychotherapy and good access to psychotherapy services.
- Inter-ministerial cooperation is necessary for the normative regulation of psychotherapy and mental health care.
- Cooperation between different mental health professionals and services is crucial to prevent the fragmentation of care.
- Doctors, psychiatrists and (clinical) psychologists must be additionally trained to perform quality psychotherapy.
- The Chamber of Psychotherapists with mandatory membership is the highest professional body for regulating psychotherapeutic professional activity.

- It is important to increase the scope and availability of low-threshold psychotherapy.
- Psychotherapy must be equally accessible in both urban and rural areas.
- The Chamber of Psychotherapists is responsible for the scientific validation of psychotherapeutic approaches.
- Academization is crucial to intensifying psychotherapy research.
- Given the excessive consumption of psychopharmaceuticals and the positive costs and benefits ratio of psychotherapy services, it is necessary to increase public funding for psychotherapy.
- In addition to the legal regulation of psychotherapy and counselling, the legal regulation of psychology is also required.

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