The 20-Year old Piran story

How did the concept of the ANSE summer university come to life?

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Abstract

Recollections from my participation in the 2002 ANSE general assembly in Piran (Fiesa). My previous memories about Piran connected to supervision while participating in the HASI project. As president of the Association of Hungarian Supervisors I tried to win the support of the ANSE board for an international supervision summer university. We faced worries and mistrust in connection with our proposal. I presented my arguments and previous experience to prove the viability of summer universities as a possible way of connecting studying, recreation, encounter and cross-cultural communication. I assessed the characteristics and suitability of the to-be host town of Salgótarján. The board supported the plan for the supervision summer university in the end and it was organized in Salgótarján in 2003.

Salgótarján, Central Square

It happened two decades ago now that on a beautiful day in 2002 - filled with positivity and good ideas but being a little anxious because of the challenge awaiting me - I got into the minibus of our institute in Budapest to set off to the Slovenian coastline. I did not go for a holiday this time; I was to participate in the 6th general assembly of ANSE in Piran (Fiesa) where I would have a very weighty task to do. Because of that, as chairman of the union I also took Emőke Bejczy, secretary of the Association of Hungarian Supervisors (MSZT), and Győző Kovács, vice president of the Association, along to support me. Of course, Erzsébet Wiesner, the then Hungarian member of ANSE's board also joined us. We also took a couple of bottles of the famous Hungarian apricot palinka with us; their part they played will become clear in my story. The destination was all the more attractive to me since it would not be the first time for me to visit there. In 2000 we had gathered in Piran to take part in the HASI project.

As I unfold my story I will neglect describing the important points on the Agenda of the general assembly. However, I do need to tell you who were the members of the ANSE board present in Piran. The chairman was Louis van Kessel (LVSB, the Netherlands), and the members were Edeltrud Freitag-Becker (DGSV, Germany), Renate Wustinger (ÖVS, Austria), Ueli-Bartley Brönnimann (BSO, Switzerland), Janko Mijoc (DS, Slovenia), who also hosted the assembly, and our compatriot, Erzsébet Wiesner (MSZT, Hungary).

But what was this challenge, this weighty task that I referred to in my introduction? I had to win the ANSE board to approve and support the idea for a summer university for supervision. It did not seem like an easy

task because when we first presented our concept, the programme-plan for the summer university without any precedent, it was not received perfectly well. The point of the proposal was that in the following year, in 2003, we could organize the first ANSE international summer university for supervisors from the member countries under the umbrella of ANSE in our homeland in Hungary, recommending the town of Salgótarján as the location. It would not be noble to name the persons in hindsight who had apprehensions and thought it would not be right to combine a holiday and tourism with serious professional work and training-type conferencing, those who wanted to safeguard the nobleness of the discipline against forms considered unserious and lax and against the atmosphere of free-time programmes. Perhaps there were some colleagues who did not trust in Hungarian supervisors who could be considered freshmen, or the young MSZT, or in Hungary as the organizer of the planned programme, which country was just trying to catch up with the level of development in Western Europe. However, I can openly say that we were supported by the chairman Louis van Kessel, since he had previously spent a lot of time in Hungary over a period that lasted for almost a decade and did the lion's share of educating Hungarian trainers and establishing supervision as a profession here.

In an atmosphere not too favourable for us and not too accepting towards us we had to make use of all the intellectual, spiritual arsenal we had. Primary of this was the palinka we earlier mentioned as part of the luggage belonging to our company of travellers, more precisely defined as spiritus by its name in Latin, thus a spiritual weapon. Its strategic function was to make preparations on the battlefield for us as an outpost.

Now let me show you the other weapons I used as arguments. First of all I referred to my own experience. A couple of decades earlier I used to organize pedagogical and psychological summer universities in Szeged every July, they always had a lot of Hungarian and foreign participants. This was a telling sign of their success. The daily schedule of the one-week long events looked like this: in the morning we had big lectures and smaller seminars and in the afternoon there were outings, cultural programmes, time for recreation or private free-time activity. We intended to use this established schedule for the supervision summer university, too. This idea was supported by the fact that people here in Europe were used to devoting part of their summers to leisure activities, relaxation, travelling and recharging their batteries, and what they really sought was new experiences.

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I also proved to my colleagues that a summer university is the framework and stage for more serious encounters between people. Especially during free-time programmes, when we tend to take off the masks of our professional roles, we can get closer to the inner essence of one another. As a person-centred psychologist, as a follower of Carl Rogers I can authentically promote encounter and present the significance of either group or pair encounters. On the other hand, as an andragogist I could recommend this versatile and free form of adult education with strong convictions.

What could I say about the location for the planned programme? I honestly told them that Salgótarján is not a particularly beautiful place, it is an industrial and mining town which rapidly grew in the sixties, and where the cityscape is dominated by 'Stalin-baroque' and 'concrete-romanticism' instead of monuments. Still it has an atmosphere, you can find some interesting buildings here and there, it has values and what is especially attractive about it is its surroundings, the countryside which is great for outings. It must have also been considered an advantage that Slovakia was just a short trip away, so there was the possibility to pop over to another neighbouring Central and Eastern European country.

There were also advantages to the few sights, the poor business life, the minimum amount of entertainment facilities and the relatively small size of the town – they did not tempt people to skip lectures and seminars, there was nowhere to go alone. However, we had two buildings of Népjóléti Képzési Központ (People's Well-being Training Centre, NKK) with a good infrastructure at our disposal; these were the buildings of the institute I was leading. There was a seven-storey building to accommodate guests and a modern restaurant of our own could supply food for them. Also, both buildings had big, medium-sized and small lecture halls and seminar rooms to provide for in-depth professional work. I also mentioned to my colleagues that supervision as a profession in Hungary was born in these very buildings.

As ultima ratio I referred to the significance of intercultural relationships as well as to the possibility that an international programme could greatly advance the development of supervision as a profession in Hungary (and what is more, in Central Europe too). I also said a quiet word about Hungary being relatively cheap for Western Europeans, consequently colleagues intending to come from that region would not have problems with financing their stay.

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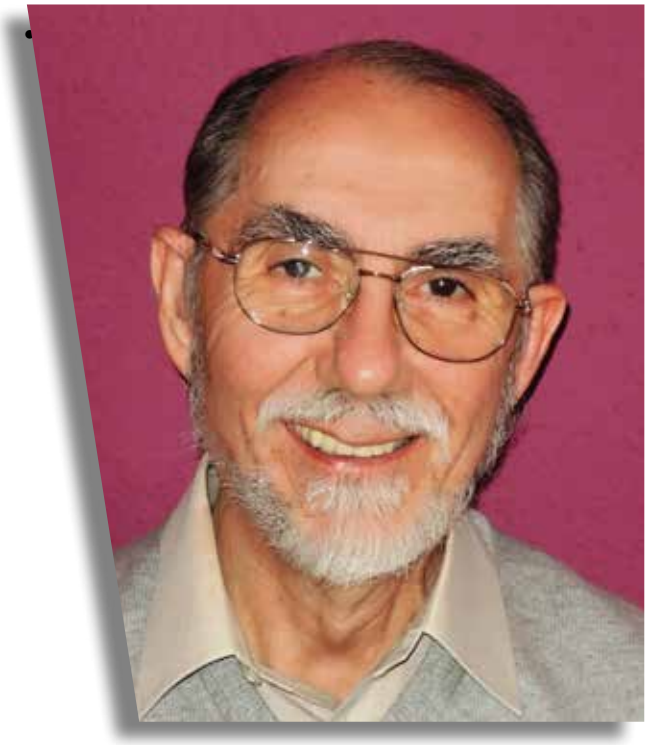
In retrospect, this kind of arguing seems easy and self-explanatory. We won the battle, we won the support of the ANSE board. 2003 became a year of great significance for us; we could organize I. ANSE International Summer University on Supervision with the title Intercultural Dialogue in Supervision. Supervisors from several countries took part in it in great numbers and left satisfied - according to their feedback. We consider establishing a tradition as the biggest achievement of this event. Over the past 20 years the supervision summer university has been organized on 9 occasions in different countries each time, becoming a recognized and crystallized form of event in the professional community of supervisors of ANSE in Europe.

This was our story 20 years ago and it finished with a happy ending. Maybe it was worth recalling. It is very encouraging for me, too, to remember the success of it now in my mid-nineties when I still cannot stop doing the work of supervision. ■



Iván Török is honorary president of MSZCT, was born in Miskolc in 1938. He got his degree as a psychologist in 1961, then he became a pedagogical psychologist. For long years he was researching the issues of theoretical and applied andragogical psychology and he also taught them in university. He founded and lead the national base institution for Hungarian social training in Salgótarján. He took part in launching supervisor training in Hungary and was the president of the Association of Hungarian Supervisors and Coach-supervisors (MSZCT). He is also a qualified coach-psychologist. Besides the above he also worked as the president of the Hungarian Association for Mental Health and the Hungarian Society of Person-centred Psychotherapy and Consultancy. He is still a practising supervisor.