

# THE PERSON-CENTERED APPROACH IN HUNGARY

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## Summary

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The paper presents the development of the person-centered approach in Hungary from the beginnings in the 1980s, when Carl Rogers came to Hungary, until 2004, the year when Hungary joined the European Union. The most important areas of application of the person-centered approach are addressed, such as psychotherapy, student-centered schools, higher education, etc. A short addendum reviews some of the most relevant developments in the area during the last ten years.

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**Key words:** person-centered approach ■ history ■ psychotherapy ■ education

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## Összefoglalás

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A cikk bemutatja a személyközpontú szemlélet fejlődését Magyarországon az 1980-as évekbeli kezdetektől, amikor Carl Rogers Magyarországra jött, 2004-ig, amikor Magyarország az Európai Unióhoz csatlakozott. Érinti a személyközpontú szemlélet alkalmazásának fő területeit, a pszichoterápiát, a diák-központú iskolákat, a felsőoktatást, stb. Egy rövid kiegészítés áttekinti az elmúlt tíz év legjelentősebb új fejleményeit.

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**Kulcsszavak:** személyközpontú szemlélet ■ fejlődés ■ pszichoterápia ■ oktatás

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Psychology in Hungary was a neglected, even forbidden discipline between 1949 and 1957. Psychologists, psychotherapists who had been trained before the war were practicing, but the education of new psychologists at the universities was stopped. The situation changed somewhat after the revolution in 1956. Education of psychologists started at one university, and small workshops were formed in some hospitals and in private homes where psychotherapy training started in the early sixties. It was mainly psychoanalytically oriented, dynamic psychotherapy

conducted by psychiatrists and psychologists who belonged to the psychoanalytic school of Budapest before the war. Carl Rogers and his ideas were known only by some scholars that time, as opportunities to keep professional contacts with abroad were also rather limited.

## 2. HISTORY OF THE PERSON-CENTERED APPROACH IN HUNGARY

The first publication in Hungarian that made Rogers' ideas, first of all those concerning empathy, widely known was Béla Buda's book (Buda, B. 1978) that described the development of empathy as well as its application in different human relationships such as education, therapy, working relationships, etc. Then, in the early '80s, in a collection of papers on psychotherapy (Pszichoterápia, 1981), client-centered psychotherapy was already represented by one article by Carl Rogers and one by Reinhard Tausch.

László Tringer, who is now professor of psychiatry at the Medical University in Budapest, made contact in the middle of seventies with the Humboldt University's Psychology Department where Professor Helm and his team were conducting research on client-centered therapy. After having finished his training in 'Gesprächspsychotherapie', he launched a training program in Hungary in 1981. Professor Tringer's book (Tringer, L. 1991) on client-centered therapy is a basic Hungarian handbook for students who learn client-centered therapy, although his way of presenting the topic has been strongly influenced by the cognitive approach.

Another opportunity for encountering the person-centered approach and personally Carl Rogers personally emerged in 1983 when Sándor Klein invited some person-centered professionals from the USA. The next year, the Hungarian Psychological Association invited the Person-Centered Approach Institute International to organize its yearly Cross-Cultural Communication Workshop in Szeged. It was the first time that this big international meeting of person-centered people met behind the iron curtain, and the first occasion for psychologists, psychiatrists and lay people from Hungary and the other 'socialist countries' to encounter person-centered professionals. There were approximately 150 people from Hungary and about the same number from abroad participating. The meeting was such a great success that the Cross-Cultural Communication Workshop was held again in Szeged in 1986. It was the last such workshop where Carl Rogers was present before his death in 1987. There was one more Cross-Cultural Communication Workshop in Hungary which was organized by Mihály Elekes in Tata in 1993.

The personal relationships, that were built during the cross-cultural workshops, have helped those people who deemed the person-centered approach close to their ways of working to find each other, and has helped small teams to

start working in the PCA spirit in educational, therapeutical and other working environments. It has also provided opportunity for some people to join the person-centered training program that was offered by the Person-Centered Approach Institute International, a European training centre founded by Rogers, Devonshire and Zucconi. Thirty-five Hungarian psychologists, psychiatrists and other helping professionals finished the 3-year training programs of 1000 hours in France between 1985 and 1993.

### 3. THE PRESENT SITUATION

#### *Person-centered psychotherapy*

The person-centered approach is accepted in Hungary as one of the schools of psychotherapy in which medical doctors and clinical psychologists can be trained as psychotherapists. It is one of the many branches of psychotherapy that is practiced in Hungary, but certain members of the psychiatric establishment look upon the approach as one that provides the 'basic, non-specific conditions', but which does not provide specific solutions to certain diagnostic categories.

Many psychologists and psychiatrists practice person-centered psychotherapy as their basic approach in hospitals, in ambulatory clinics, and in private practice, both with adults and with children of different age. Some others look upon the person-centered approach as a valuable basic attitude, and combine it with other psychotherapeutic techniques such as psychodrama, cognitive methods, etc. The person-centered approach is present not only in psychotherapy but also in some social institutions such as in retirement homes, shelter for battered women and their children, institutes for the chronically mentally ill, etc.

#### *Student-centered schools*

There are two schools in Hungary for children of age between 6 and 18 years that declare themselves being student-centered. One of them is the Rogers Person-Centered School in Budapest (Gádor, A. 1992) that was founded in 1990, right after the change of regime in Hungary, and the other one is the "Colorful School" in Tata. The way of being with the students is based on Rogers' ideas on the 'freedom to learn', but there is also a struggle to find a balance between the "freedom to learn" and the demands of the educational system. Both schools provide integrated education for children of families that highly value the freedom of such an institution, and for children who came to these schools to find a tolerant atmosphere after having failed in the traditional schools system.

### *Training*

The training program of the Hungarian Association for Person-Centered Psychotherapy and Mental Hygiene is acknowledged by the National Council of Psychotherapy as part of the general training for psychotherapists. The admission requirement is a postsecondary education in some of the helping professions (medical doctor, psychologist, teacher, etc.) The training consists of 425 hours (150 hours of self-development in group, 50 hours of theory: 100 hours of practice in counseling in group, 25 hours of counseling in pairs, and 100 hours of supervision in group) At the end of the training process, a case study has to be submitted, and a theoretical exam made. For medical doctors and clinical psychologists the training can be part of the psychotherapy training. The others get a certificate on person-centered counseling. This training program was started in the mid-eighties and approximately 150 people have finished it by now (Pintér, G. 1989).

Another training program was run between 1993 and 2000 by Mihály Elekes under the umbrella of the Person-Centered Approach Institute International. This program was more based on the principles of the Institute and Carl Rogers' approach to the freedom to learn. It consisted of 1000 hours in a period of three years, during which the members of the group decided on the topics they wanted to address, and the means of learning, too. There were 7 'intensive sessions' of 10 days and about 12 weekend sessions during these three years. The main emphasis during the training was on personal development and the experiential learning of the person-centered approach.

### *The person-centered approach in higher education*

Some psychologists, trained and working in the person-centered approach, are now involved in the education of different helping professionals (psychologists, social workers, teachers, etc.) at universities. They not only teach in a person-centered way, but also introduce topics, such as encounter groups, with the aim of promoting self-development, developing skills and attitudes for helping relationships. Postgraduate courses on mental hygiene for helping professionals started in Hungary in 1990. Now they are running in three different universities, and in two of them the person-centered approach is one of the basic theoretical foundations.

The person-centered approach is also strongly represented in the postgraduate course on clinical psychology for psychologists. Client-centered therapy is the psychotherapeutic method they learn first, and it is one of the methods offered for them as the way of supervision, too.

*Focusing*

Gendlin's book on focusing was published in Hungary in 1989, and it was widely read and practiced. Training and application of focusing got better organized when a group of helping professionals took part on a focusing training in the Netherlands in the mid-nineties. Later on trainers came to Hungary from the Netherlands and started training programs together with Hungarian colleagues. Many people apply focusing now in therapy, with children in schools and pre-schools, in child guidance clinics and in other settings, e.g. as a preparation for natural childbirth.

*Gordon training*

Zsuzsa Várkonyi, a Hungarian psychologist made contact with the Gordon Institute in the USA in the mid-eighties, and started training in the Gordon method in Hungary in 1987. By now, Thomas Gordon's basic training books for parents, teachers, leaders, etc. have been published in Hungarian. The Hungarian Gordon Institute, which was founded in 1990, has provided training for nearly 30 000 people. Now they offer parent effectiveness training, trainings on adult relationships, effectiveness training for women, young people and couples expecting babies. Some training courses are accredited i.e. the participants are financially supported by their employers, such courses are running for teachers, kindergarten teachers, social workers, civil servants, etc.

*Person-centered association*

The Hungarian Association for Person-Centered Psychotherapy and Mental Hygiene was founded in 1987, first as a working group within the Hungarian Psychiatric Association, and later on as an association. Originally, it represented the group of person-centered therapists trained in the German tradition, and there was a separate association for the other group trained by the Person-Centered Approach Institute International in France. Now the Hungarian Association for Person-Centered Psychotherapy and Mental Hygiene is the only active association which unites professionals from both traditions. One important step was, when two years ago the association offered for those trained by the PCAII to make their training accepted in Hungary.

The association now has about 100 active members. We have a yearly conference which provides opportunity both for encounter with our members, and some theoretical discussions and/or practical demonstrations. Now we have a so called person-centered club where people can meet for one evening every

month and can discuss personal, professional, theoretical, etc. matters. We also invite our foreign friends to our club, if they happen to be in Hungary. The association is a member of the Network of the European Associations for Person-Centered and Experiential Psychotherapy and Counseling (PCE-Europe).

### *Addendum in 2014*

The article above was written in 2004 on the invitation of the German language person-centered journal 'Person'. The journal dedicated its first issue in 2004 to articles written by colleagues from countries that joined the European Union that year. One of those articles was the paper above. The original English language version of the article was published in the Person-Centered Quarterly (2013).

Now I want to expand the paper by some new developments of the last ten years.

- Person-centered training for psychotherapists to be and other helping professionals has been continued. One or two training courses are started every year by the association that is called now Hungarian Association for Person-Centered Psychotherapy and Counseling ([www.maszkpte.org](http://www.maszkpte.org)).
- The association has been very active in the last decade both in the Network of European Associations for Person-Centered and Experiential Psychotherapy and Counseling ([www.pce-europe.org](http://www.pce-europe.org)) and in the World Association for Person-Centered and Experiential Psychotherapy and Counselling ([www.pce-world.org](http://www.pce-world.org)).
- Sándor Klein organized a large person-centered workshop in 2009, on the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the first Cross-Cultural Communication Workshop in Szeged, Hungary. It has been very successful and it was decided that the tradition of Cross-Cultural Communication Workshops will be continued every second year. The 2011 and 2013 workshops were held in Pécs, and the next one is also planned to be there in 2015.
- A small group of person-centered professionals started an encounter group in 2004 by meeting three times a year for a residential week-end. The group is still functioning. A second encounter group was started after the CCC Workshop in Szeged in 2009, and a third one in 2011. They are still running. Several such groups have been started since and were running for shorter or longer periods. This year, a so called 'open encounter group' was launched. It provides an open space for people to meet in a person-centered atmosphere for a three hours period every month.
- The student-centered schools that were mentioned in the paper above still function ([www.rogersiskola.hu](http://www.rogersiskola.hu) ; [www.rogersakademia.hu](http://www.rogersakademia.hu) ; [www.szinesiskola.hu](http://www.szinesiskola.hu)). One new student-centered school was established in Szeged this year ([www.rogers-iskola.hu](http://www.rogers-iskola.hu) ).

- The influence of the person-centered approach is especially strong in the education of psychologists and mental health professionals in the Károli Gáspár University of the Reformed Church in Budapest.

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