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SYSTEMIC THERAPY IN GERMANY - FROM THE ORIGINS TO THE PRESENT

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The origins

First experiments in the German speaking countries applying psychotherapy to families have been reported from the work of Alfred Adler in Vienna of the twenties and thirties. These first steps had though little consequences. Instead, the first relevant movements towards a family therapy in Germany took place in the sixties. Starting from the psychoanalytic tradition they aimed at introducing social and generational aspects into psychotherapy. First milestones on this way were two books written by the psychoanalyst Horst-Ebehard Richter in the years 1963 and 1970: "Eltern, Kind und Neurose" (*Parents, Child, and Neurosis*) and "Patient Familie" (*Patient Family*). However, a consistent re-orientation of the German speaking practitioners towards family therapy took place first in the late seventies. At that time, the first large congresses took place, and the first professional associations were founded. This development reaches its peak at the Zurich Congress for Family Therapy in 1979 which focussed intensively upon the new Milan Approach of "systemic family therapy".

One other important result of the notable engagement of H.-E. Richter in the seventies was the reader "Familie und seelische Krankheit" (*Family and mental illness*, Richter et al. 1976). Also during this decade Helm Stierlin returns from the United States and installs his Working Team at the Department for Psychosomatics of the University of Heidelberg (e.g. Stierlin 1975, 1978). In addition, different groups that were interested in practice and training began their work, mainly outside of the universities, e.g. the 1975 by Maria Bosch grounded Institute for Family Therapy in Weinheim, South Germany. An impression of these first developments is given by the reader: "Familietherapie in der Sicht psychotherapeutischer Schulen" (*Family Therapy from the Viewpoint of Psychotherapy Schools*, Schneider 1983). In 1976 Helm Stierlin and Josef Duss-von Werdt founded the first journal in German with the title "*Familiendynamik*". Other important impulses were given by the Zurich congresses to which Rosmarie Welter-Enderlin and Josef Duss-von Werdt used to invite every two years the international *elite* of family therapy. Finally, in 1978 the first umbrella organisation of German family therapists was founded: Deutsche Arbeitsgemeinschaft für Familientherapie DAF (*German Working Group for Family Therapy*).

The era of psychoanalytic oriented family therapy began losing importance and some of the approaches that had been developed in the USA were adopted, such as the directive-strategic,

structuralist and personal growth orientations after, among others, Jay Haley, Salvador Minuchin and Virginia Satir. Towards the end of the seventies a dramatic turn towards the Milan approach took place, and North Italian usages were abruptly introduced into Germany, especially by the teams at the universities of Heidelberg (e.g. Weber und Stierlin 1989) and Hamburg (e.g. Ludewig 1992). From the theoretical point of view, an important culminating point is a well-known essay by the Swiss psychiatrist Gottlieb Gunttern (1981): "Die kopernikanische Revolution in der Psychotherapie: der Wandel vom psychoanalytischen zum systemischen Paradigma" (*The Copernican Revolution in Psychotherapy: a switch from psychoanalytic to systemic paradigm*). Theoretically speaking, the Family Therapies had abandoned their usual paths in which they borrowed their conceptions from biological and mathematical system theory and had begun elaborating a genuine meta-theoretical position that was grounded on cybernetics and structuralism.

Systemic therapy

The initial impulse towards switching from Family Therapy to Systemic Therapy was given, in my opinion, by Paul Dell in a legendary speech delivered at the Zurich Congress in 1981 (cf. Dell 1982). Leaning on the neurobiological epistemology and the concept of autopoiesis of the Chilean biologist Humberto Maturana Dell triggered a theoretical discussion that would have lasting effects upon the further development of family therapy; it should finally conduce to the emergence of Systemic Therapy (e.g. Ludewig 1983). These theoretical influences were quickly complemented by the so-called 2nd Order Cybernetics of the Viennese physicist, Heinz von Foerster, and the so-called Radical Constructivism of the Swiss-Austrian linguist, Ernst von Glasersfeld. The pre-requisites for the formulation of a Clinical Theory (theory of practice) were elaborated, at that time, in the USA especially by Harry Goolishian and Steve de Shazer. All of this should have a decisive impact upon the development of psychotherapy in Germany.

The first half of the eighties were marked by a rapid spreading of systemic ideas in the realm of practice. Many of the most important private training institutes in Germany were founded at that time, e.g. in Cologne and Frankfurt (1980), Berlin and Heidelberg (1983), Hamburg (1984) and Bremen (1985). A second, clearly systemic oriented journal was founded in 1983 by Juergen Hargens: *Zeitschrift für systemische Therapie* (Journal for Systemic Therapy). There was a growing run to congresses and workshops seeking to meet the mainly US-American masters or, at least, to have seen them once personally. A characterising example of that period was the 4th Conference of the DAF in 1982. This yearly meeting took place for the first time with the participation of some of the well-known speakers from the United States... and Milan.

The divulgement of the systemic approach reflexes itself professionally in the foundation of additional associations. The Dachverband fuer Familientherapie und systemisches Arbeiten DFS (*Umbrella Organisation for Family Therapy and Systemic Work*) came to existence aiming at an effective representation of the professional and political interests of the German family and systemic therapists. At the same time, the Systemische Gesellschaft SG (*Systemic Society*) was founded in order to represent the "systemic" training institutes. Finally, at the turn of the millenium, DAF and DFS fusioned into a new Deutsche Gesellschaft für systemische Therapie und Familientherapie DGSF (*German Society for systemic Therapy and Family Therapy*) with some 1.500 individual and 80 institutional members. Meanwhile both societies - SG and DGSF - have overcome their earlier

difficulties with each other and are co-operating on many levels, very especially with regard to a common professional policy.

From the nineties to the present

Beginning in the nineties one may first speak in Germany of the establishment of a genuine theory and practice of Systemic Therapy. A first comprehensive basic book was written 1992 by Kurt Ludewig: "Systemische Therapie. Grundlagen klinischer Theorie und Praxis" (*Systemic Therapy. Foundations of Clinical Theory and Practice*). New journals reinforced this trend: "System Familie", "Systeme", "Systema" and "Kontext" - the old DAF-journal in a new look. In 1995 a first textbook written by Arist von Schlippe and Jochen Schweitzer appeared: "Lehrbuch der Systemischen Therapie und Beratung" (*Textbook of Systemic Therapy and Counselling*); this textbook enjoys a great popularity and has become a best-seller of the field. Meanwhile, the scientific programme of Systemic Therapy allocates itself more and more within the theoretical discourse of so-called post-modernism. The optimism held by the ideals of modernism implying that mankind would sometime grasp "the" truth through devising comprehensive conceptions with universal claims is slowly replaced by manifold co-existing, middle-range concepts and practices. This trend reflects itself in a conference that took place 1991 in Heidelberg and turned out to be the most successful one of its kind with more than 2.000 participants "Das Ende der großen Entwürfe und das Blühen systemischer Praxis" (*The end of the Great Designs and the Blooming of Systemic Practice*; cf. Fischer et al. 1992). Unfortunately, one must also admit that in spite of all success in the domain of professional practice the scarce systemic presence at the universities kept on noticeably reducing itself from the beginning of the nineties. Systemic Therapy was in danger of becoming a non-university approach that will have a rough time trying to demonstrate its scientific value.

In addition to the meanwhile traditional orientation on the systemic models as proposed, especially, by Humberto Maturana, Heinz von Foerster and Niklas Luhmann there is in the nineties a growing interest in concepts stemming from other than the human sciences, e.g. synergetics after the Stuttgart physicist Hermann Haken, logical theory after Spencer-Brown (e.g. Simon 1988) and Wittgensteins "language games". On the other hand, some of the teams working systemically place a strong accent upon linguistics and social psychology as represented, for instance, by Kenneth Gergen and John Shotter. In the "mainstream" of the systemic field a slow drift begins to happen moving away from imports from the natural sciences (cybernetics, autopoiesis) and towards the genuine subject-matter of psychotherapy, i.e. the social phenomena (sense, language, dialogue, meaning) or the "social construction of reality". An important impulse comes from the German sociologist, Niklas Luhmann (1984, 1997). With his theory of social systems and communication he proposes a solid theoretical basis for this shift. By focussing on "Sinn" (untranslatable German word with some equivalence to "sense" in terms of what makes sense, but somewhat different from the more empirical English concept of "meaning") as the basic operation of both psychic and social systems Luhmanns theory enables to describe social phenomena without having to recur to physical or biological mechanisms or analogies. These theoretical conceptions cleared the way for the elaboration of a Clinical Theory that conceptualises psychotherapy and other means of professional help on grounds that are theoretically encompassing, that is, as social phenomena (cf. Ludewig 1992, 2001).

An unexpected drawback. The growing interest on the systemic approach within the professional domain conduced to an even larger demand for systemic training and thus to the foundation of more

training institutes (Taken altogether there are presently some 100 training institutes in Germany; considering only the larger ones the number reduces itself to some 30-40 institutes covering the whole of the territory and installed mostly in the large cities). On the other hand, the Deutsche Bundestag (*German Parliament*) passed 1999 a long expected law that regulates the profession of the non-medical psychotherapist. This law would though change radically and unexpectedly the whole of the psychotherapeutic landscape in Germany. One important difference to the foregoing situation was to restrict the exercise of psychotherapy only to psychologists including especially qualified paedagogs only for child psychotherapy. That left many well trained psychotherapists stemming from other professions who has been doing psychotherapy for many years out the work; they were actually converted into "outlaws". A more general consequence of this law was the installation of a so-called "Wissenschaftlicher Beirat Psychotherapie" (*Scientific Council Psychotherapy*) which came to existence by itself and nominated its members on its own. Its aim was to give scientifically grounded advice to the Federal Bureaus in charge of registering the newly recognised professionals. According to the law this council is supposed to appraise whether a specific psychotherapy approach is accepted within the profession. Instead of keeping to this task the council decided on its own to define new criteria of acceptability in close accordance with disputable standards of traditional empirical psychology. As it could be easily expected, the results of this clever political maneuver revealed themselves in terms that all psychotherapy approaches that had developed outside of the realm of academic psychology were rejected.

Trusting on the fact that Systemic Therapy had been developed world-wide within the scientific community, it was the first approach that applied at the Scientific Council for scientific recognition. Since the criteria of acceptance drew upon evidence-based, disorder-oriented research the systemic approach that builds upon a different scientific orientation could not meet the arbitrarily set requirements. Systemic Therapy was rejected under extremely disputable circumstances. Consequently, a strict application of this rejection would mean the legal prohibition of Systemic Therapy as a method of treating people with mental and emotional disorders, as well as the implicit prohibition of undergoing further training within this approach. Fortunately this has not gone that far, yet! Following the rejection of Systemic Therapy all other approaches that underwent examination were also rejected. Only very recently, client-centered psychotherapy has been recognised as scientific after many frustrating attempts. This means that, in the end, in Germany only those approaches may be therapeutically implemented and taught which had been recognised before the law was passed; these are: cognitive-behavioural and psychoanalytic psychotherapy. It is almost needless to state, that all members of the council are University professors who teach and research in the areas of either cognitive-behavioural or psychoanalytic psychotherapy. The latest news from the council are that it has recognised CBT as a scientific method of psychotherapy in its last meeting just before ending its first period of 5 years – under the described circumstances, not quite a surprise! Psychoanalysis and psychoanalytic psychotherapy which run in Germany as distinct psychotherapeutic approaches have been requested by the council to officially apply for recognition. Although they are already legally accepted and are in no need to do so, they are supposed to be on their way of responding to this request in accordance with international customs, that is, as a unified "psychodynamic approach". As far as it is officially known, this has not happened yet.

Differentiations

Most of the training institutes in Germany would classify themselves to a great extent as systemic-

integrative although they represent quite different positions within the realm of possibilities. The usual conceptions run from rather directive and interventive approaches as they were originally put forward by the Milan Team and later adopted, for instance, by the Heidelberg Team to approaches that are conceived of as rather co-operative and mildly interventive as represented by Tom Andersen; they run also from language-oriented and "social-constructionist" positions after Harry Goolishian and narrative approaches after Michael White to brief-therapy and solution-oriented approaches after Steve de Shazer. In addition, there are also groups that make reference to Attachment Theory and Infant Research, e.g. Rosmarie Welter-Enderlin in Zurich and Tom Levold in Cologne.

A special remark should be made on the so-called *Hellinger-Phenomenon* (cf. Weber 1993). A former catholic priest and missionary in Africa, Bert Hellinger, has created together with his followers his own - so-called "systemic-phenomenological" - school drawing on a questionable ideology and using the method of family constellations (sculptures). This development threatens to noticeably polarise the field of systemic therapists in Germany. While some of them take their clients on a pilgrimage to Hellinger's performances, others, for instance, the Boards of both professional societies have reacted either sharply critical or altogether rejecting. Hellinger is a charismatic figure with an unusual intuition, and that would be no reason for great concern since not few of the pioneers of family therapy have had an impressive impact on people exactly because of their charisma and their intuitive skills and successes. What provides with grounds for concern is, however, that so many professionals of the helping field, especially systemic therapists, will not limit themselves to adopt the method of family constellations into their repertoire but are also inclined to adopt Hellinger's more than questionable interpretations. They seem to succumb to what Maturana has brought to the point under the denomination of the "Temptation of Certainty".

Research

The conceptional and practical development of Systemic Therapy in Germany has taken place mainly outside of the mainstream of "scientific" psychotherapy. The explanation for this is self-evident. The established psychotherapy research takes place almost exclusively at the universities. In Germany, this means at the Clinical Departments of the Institutes of Psychology and at the Departments of Medicine that are relevant for psychotherapy, that is, the clinics for Psychiatry and Psychosomatics. With this fact in mind, one may quickly realise that the executive positions of these Departments in Medicine have been traditionally occupied by psychoanalysts, whereas the corresponding positions in Clinical Psychology have been occupied since the seventies almost exclusively by behaviourists. A certain exception to this rule is found at the clinics for Child and Adolescent Psychiatry and Psychotherapy where one may find a greater openness for systemic ideas, for including families and other social systems in the treatment as well as for practicing interdisciplinarity.

In spite of the described limitations there are systemic researchers at different universities investigating special aspects but working mostly by themselves and with little or no official support. The most interesting research perspective is represented at present, in my opinion, by the psychologist Guenter Schiepek (1999). Working consecutively at the universities of Bamberg, Muenster and Aachen he has developed methodological approaches that entail become more and more practicability. This methods aim at considering the complexity of therapeutic processes

without unnecessary reductionisms. Leaning heavily on synergetics and the theory of non-linear dynamics Schiepek has developed mathematical schemes of description and analysis that are compatible with the constantly changing dynamics of psychotherapeutic processes. However, and in spite of his indisputable scientific achievements, Guenter Schiepek could not find a way to a professorship within a German university.

Training

Training in Systemic Therapy takes place almost completely at private institutes which, having to survive economically, must organise their work according to the market. This means for the length and intensity of the training courses that they are limited by the level of costs. Following a period of "wild growth" in which each institute defined its programme arbitrarily most of the institutes guide themselves, at present, by the standards proposed by the Systemic Society. Requested is a minimum of 900 hours within 3 years: 300 hours of theory and method, 150 hours of supervision, 150 hours of self-reflexion, 200 hours of practical work with clients and 100 hours of self-organised group-study. The courses of the training institutes have been attended by thousands of physicians, psychologists, paedagogos, social workers and other members of the health and helping professions. A survey in 1997 including all organised institutes revealed that round 15.000 members of the helping professions had attended some kind of systemic training. About 5.700 of them have had enough training as to fulfil the conditions for national accreditation at the associations of Systemic Therapy; these were round 500 physicians, 2.000 psychologists and some 3.200 members of other professional groups (paedagogos, social workers, theologists, sociologists etc.). Presently, that is in 2004, there should be around 3.000 - 5.000 more professionals who are entitled for accreditation.

Conclusion

Regardless of the strong acceptance among the professionals of the health and other helping professions Systemic Therapy has not achieved in Germany the secure position of a socially, legally and politically accepted psychotherapeutic method. The rejection inflicted to systemic Therapy by the so-called Scientific Council Psychotherapy is an attack against methodological diversity that makes little sense. And that happens in a region of the world that has both a notable tradition of scientific creativity including also noticeable developments in the field of psychotherapy as well as a very dark history of reducing diversity down to a stadium of sterile and problematic unification. It is to be hoped that the present aberration will turn out to be a transitory appearance that will soon be forgotten.

A significant aid in this unbearable situation has been the explicit support from the part of many of the national associations organised in the *European Family Therapy Association* (EFTA). They have addressed the German authorities expressing their concern, but had to find out that because of a lack of clarity in the law there is no one to really address: the government passes the complaint to the federal authorities which, in turn, attaches the responsibility to the Scientific Council which refuses at all to take responsibility since all it does is to give advice. In addition to these efforts the Boards of EFTA have assigned the German associations with the organisation of the 5. *European Congress for Family Therapy and Systemic Practice*. This congress will bring together some 2.000 family and systemic therapists from all of Europe. The title is "Creating futures. Systemic Dialogues across Europe", and it will take place from 29th September - 2nd Oktober 2004 in Berlin

(<http://www.efta2004.de>) . From this event we expect an impressive impact upon the German officials since it will show unequivocally that Family Therapy and Systemic Therapy are not just a spleen of a couple of fuzzy thinking Germans but an approach that is well established all over in Europe as a serious and effective method of psychotherapy. This and other initiatives help empower the systemic therapists in Germany to participate in the socio-political discourse on a more self-secure and offensive basis. Systemic Therapy in Germany is not at all supposed to ever become one of those "movements" and transitional vogues that disappear in history leaving no track behind them.

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Short CV

Kurt Ludewig was born 1942 in Valparaiso (Chile) as son of a German father and a Chilean mother; he lives since 1965 in Germany.

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Positions: From 1974-1992 Clinical Psychologist and Lecturer at the Department for Child- und Adolescent Psychiatry of the University of Hamburg; since 1992 Consultant Psychologist at the Clinic for Psychiatry and Psychotherapy of Children and Adolescents of the University of Muenster/Westfalia.

He is co-founder of the Institute for Systemic Studies in Hamburg and the Westfalian Institute for Systemic Therapy and Counselling in Muenster. From 1994-1999 Founding President of the German Systemic Society; since 2001 a member of the Board of the Chamber of the National Family Therapy Organisations (NFTO) of the European Family Therapy Association EFTA.

Publications: About one hundred publications touching on different aspects of systemic theory and practice, among them the books: "*Systemische Therapie. Grundlagen klinischer Theorie und Praxis*" (Systemic Therapy. Foundations of Clinical Theory and Practice, Stuttgart, 1992), "*Leitmotive systemischer Therapie*" (Leitmotifs of Systemic Therapy, Stuttgart, 2002) and together with Ulrich Wilken (eds.), "*Das Familienbrett. Ein Verfahren für die Forschung und Praxis mit Familien und anderen sozialen Systemen*" (The Family Board. An Instrument for Research and Practice with Families and other Social Systems, Goettingen, 2000).