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► **To cite this version:**

Svetlana Radtchenko-Draillard. Theoretical and Methodological Priorities in The Psychology of Higher Education in Western Europe. PSYCHOLOGY OF EDUCATION: EDUCATIONAL POTENTIAL PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT- VI Scientific and Practical Conference Siberian Education Psychologists, Sep 2020, Irkutsk, Russia. hal-02979864

**HAL Id: hal-02979864**

**<https://hal.science/hal-02979864>**

Submitted on 27 Oct 2020

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# **Theoretical and Methodological Priorities in The Psychology of Higher Education in Western Europe**

Svetlana Radtchenko-Draillard

## **Abstract:**

The objective of my theoretic and empirical research to define the main axes of the development of academic psychology in Western European countries on three main axes: scientific research, the teaching of psychology at university and professional practice in public and private institutions. The main goal is to define the priorities of modern academic psychology based on analyses of theoretical work, as well as my experience as a university teacher and practical psychologist.

**Keywords: interaction, interdependence, cognition, psychosocial and psychoanalytic connections, empirical methods**

## **Introduction**

West-European academic psychology is marked by very large theories and experimental work. As for the forerunners and main creators of psychology in Western Europe, there is a substantial reservoir: in Germany and Austria, we will remember the physiological orientation of Fechner, Freud's psychoanalysis, and then Wundt's experimental and psychosocial work. For Great Britain, we will think of Bentham, Spencer, Galton and Pearson or the contributions of Cattell, MacDougall, Winnicott, and Klein. For France, Ribot, Janet, Piaget, Piéron and Lacan remain prominent figures in psychology. For Switzerland, Jung and Binswanger are taking their steps in European psychology. For Russia, Vygotsky, Leontiev, Rubinstein, Louriya, Ananiev bequeath us the greatest theoretical and experimental legacy for all European psychology. Finally, in the United States, Dewey, James, Watson, Maslow, Asch, Allport, Lewin are anchors for European psychological thought. Therefore, my main working hypothesis is that the development of psychology is realized in the vertical direction with the creation of the new branches and in the horizontal direction in the dichotomous interaction with different divisions of psychology (internal links) and with different sciences (external links). From my point of

view, physiological, medical, natural, mathematical, physical, sociological and political influences are felt and generate significant tensions; approaches (phenomenological, functionalist, associationist, behaviourists, gestaltists, etc.) compete and interact together very strongly. From this undeniable movement of enrichment of thought, to multidisciplinary commitments, a European psychology (research, teaching, professional activity) with very broad, multiple and well-differentiated orientations will emerge. Currently, its role is a original role for empirical approach 1) adaptation (observation, surveys, tests, questionnaires, etc.) ,2) synthesis (reunification in the same methodology of tests, psychoanalytic psychotherapeutic processes, surveys of real cases and events, etc.), 3) innovation (using a high degree of expertise, a varied panel indexed to its needs and types of analysis, statistical analysis, content-analyses, observation, negotiation, etc.) that will be in a position to apply to professional reality (in university, public and private institutions, hospitals, consulting firm, etc.) theoretical achievements and teaching practices.

### **1. The interdependent interactions of European psychology in the field of research, teaching and professional activity**

The efforts of psychology is to understand the essential phenomena of social, societal, economic or political life (influence, communication, conflicts, social representations, human factors in the production of wealth, ideologies, etc.) and perpetuate a form of mind and questioning contrary to experimental and theoretical work. As a universe of knowledge in university research, modern European psychology intervenes mainly as a mediating field in several respects: a) transfer of techniques or transposition of phenomena, b) the provision of lighting, c) complementary specifications from one field to another, etc. In this logic it is important for me to examine its interdisciplinary character and priorities in its main branches: social psychology, cognitive, differential and developmental psychology, clinical psychology and psychoanalysis. As a result, when it comes to social psychology, the link between psychology and sociology takes place within social psychology. It should be noted that, under an order of interdependence between the psychological and the social, main phenomena are freed from the levels in the social reality, insofar as they are detectable and salient in their specificity at all levels (individual, collective or global) with the modes of internalization and externalization of the social. They decisively affect psychological or physiological functions and processes;

influence mental, behavioural, perceptual and cognitive structures, stimulate symbolic and imaginary systems, through interpersonal and intergroup dynamics, on social representations and ideologies, communication phenomena and societal norms and laws, etc.). In this sense, experiments and theoretical studies related to Festinger's cognitive dissonance are fundamental here because, when explained by a change in attitudes, change in actions is a matter of "the effects of social coercion and personal commitment of the individual; in addition, a state of impasse exists within learning theory largely because some of its major assumptions stand in apparent opposition to certain well-established experimental results" [1]. It takes into account with the analysis of the modalities of social influence on the individual, the group and human society. The psychosocial approach analysed by Hewstone, Stroebe, Codol and Stephenson (1988) brings together European scientific contributions in the broadest sense (Great Britain, France, Germany, Belgium, Netherlands, Spain, Portugal and Italy). Sensitivities and orientations of this research are varied and applied in the university program for students in psychology and social sciences where they address various topics: ethology and social psychology, social nature of development, social cognition, attribution theories and social explanations, strategies of attitude change and psychoanalysis, interpersonal communication and intergroup relations, aggressive behaviors, conflict and negotiation, group performance. Social identity, social representations, international relations, ideology and discourse make up a body of research and teaching of European university psychology. Precisely, the collaboration between British, French, Belgian, Swiss, German, Italian, Danish, Irish, Greek, Spanish psychologists (Parton, Garrett, Ferguson, Moscovici, Deschamps, Dorna, Bourhis & Leyens, Doise & Mugny, Spieb & Bruch, Billig, Fischer, Colucci & Camussi, Valencia & Villarreal, Politis, etc.) reorient the perspective of judgment (attributions, stereotypes, discrimination) to lead to promising work (conflictology, judgement, communication, negotiation, ideological discourse). These results obtained in social psychology would then be only the means of specifying certain factors that intervene in human behavior and these specifications must be related to the foundations of general and cognitive psychology, psychophysiology or psychopathology. Everyone knows the influences of Durkheim, Piaget, Freud, Levi-Strauss, Vygotsky and Rubinstein on the theoretical approach to social representations of Moscovici "In his study on the reception and circulation of psychoanalysis in France. It is understood as the collective elaboration "of a social object by the community for the purpose of behaving and communicating". [2]. Then, regarding cognitive, differential and developmental psychology, epistemic and theoretical movements of the same type have contributed to the creation of international psychological cognitive models. These mental representations will thus be found

in the laboratory of university psychology in the form (for example, of measuring emotions, thought, perceptions, attention, memory, language, etc.) even in genetic approaches inspired by Piaget. Also, Stern proposed to combine chronological age and mental level to a single extent, in the form of an "IQ- intelligence quotient". It should also be added that the work of Russian and Soviet psychologists (Vygotsky, Leontiev, Rubinstein and Ananiev) is also carefully studied in Western Europe. In the Great Britain, France, Germany, Denmark, Sweden, Greece attempts to reconstruct psychology preceded those of its deconstruction, thus establishing fundamental critical perspectives of psychology in general, while developing reflections in the fields of cognitive psychology, development and education (Armistead Woodhead, Lubart, Zenasni, Finke, Faurholt-Jepsen, etc.). All these assumptions could be grouped into coalitions supporting all the fundamental theories of the child, adolescent, adult. Currently the research and university teaching of Western European cognitive psychology is highly centralized on creativity, the performance of the thought process and the cognitive factors that contribute to the formation of judgment during the analysis of information processing (especially via computer networks). Regarding clinical psychology and psychoanalysis, it is analyzed and taught in the context of the interaction between experimental psychology and clinical psychology. Precisely, from Austria Freud's psychoanalysis has developed widely in England, France, Italy, and Switzerland. We must add here the phenomenological and psychoanalytic currents (Husserl, Jaspers, Binswanger, etc.), personalists (Stern), genetic psychological (Wallon and Boehler). Currently many university courses have been introduced to the methods of American clinical and social psychology (i.e. Moreno's psychodrama, Lewin's group dynamics, and Rogers' non-directive orientation, Training Groups, etc.). Moreover, Freud's psychoanalytic theory is widely studied and taught at the university in connection with his identical theoretical, psychic development and the use of psychoanalytic cure. As Freud indicated (1937) "Analytic experience has taught us that the better is always the enemy of the good and that in every phase of the patient's recovery we have to fight against his inertia, which is ready to be content with an incomplete solution" [3]. The eclectic psychoanalytic approach is also used in the theory and teaching of academic clinical psychology in order to theoretically take concepts from different theories without worrying about their coherence from the moment they have a heuristic effectiveness in relation of the dyad/ triad (subject-subject-object) studied in their empirical work. This ambition brings both structuralist epistemology to integrate the multiple psychoanalytic theories (e.g. of Lacan, Klein, Winnicott, Jung, Bion, etc.) that have emerged in the field of psychoanalysis, as well as systematic epistemology allowing the integration of theories ranging from neurobiology and medicine to society, theories concerning

the functioning of human beings studied holistically. Finally, psychoanalytic theories are also studied and teaching at university in connection with the psychopathological problems of individuals (neuroses, psychosis, mental, psychosomatic disorders, intrapersonal, family conflicts, etc.).

## **2. The methodological stakes of European academic psychology**

In the methodological objectives of European academic psychology it is experimentation on small groups that has a very wide exploration with the consideration of influence phenomena in their general form (e.g., conformity-deviance, conflict and resolution, leadership and hierarchies, normalization and social pressures). I want to make it clear that at the methodological level, the emphasis also is on individual development and differences in the study of the relationship between children and adults; these empirical analyses are associated with differential quantitative and qualitative approaches. Also, the relationships between different methodological orientations are widely used in university curricula with the very frequent application of qualitative and quantitative multidimensional statistical methods with significant criteria of internal validation of research in psychology, (notably, the methods developed by West Europeans Galton, Pearson Spearman, Binet, Janet, Stern and others). With regard to social psychology, it is rather socio-political considerations, economic and societal rather than the issues of psychic functioning, which define normality. In addition, sociometric analysis of small groups; statistical methods of surveys, observations and psycholinguistic texts and political discourses with an ordinal analysis of their conditional probability, interval and frequency scales complement the empirical procedure of cognitive social psychology. More recently, by applying Deutsch's theory on the evolution of cooperative and competitive relationships in small groups to the study of conflict and negotiation within dyads and large organizations, European academic psychology is currently studying negotiation methods in the approach to interaction. The development of this field owes much to the contribution of game theory as it developed in economics, law and political science and applied to psychosociological and psychoanalytic theories and methods of interaction. From the perspective of Radtchenko-Draillard (who develops various methods of negotiation) (2011): "The essential problems of negotiation analysis (real or in the laboratory) are grouped into four categories: a) the nature of the activity, the directions, objectives and functions of the negotiation, 2) the analysis of

negotiation processes and its underlying factors, 3) communication, cognition and negotiators' emotions about process and outcome, 4) determining outcomes and the consequences of these results on international relations" [4]. Transcultural studies, which are also developing, bring a significant extension to the understanding of psychic and psychosocial phenomena. It should be noted, however, that they often encounter methodological difficulties: 1) rigorous sampling of various cultures and societies; 2) replication procedures and the choice of variables; 3) interpretation of cultural variations in the interaction between observed variables. Regarding cognitive and differential psychology, the experimentation of its tests or investigations has the advantage of treating variables and fundamental relationships, and eliminating the disruptive or incidental elements that are supposed to surround phenomena in the reality of human activity. On the other hand, observation in clinical psychology is more controlled and natural, because it is likely to provide the means, to take into account all the elements of a system, and to reintroduce experimentation into reality by adding psychotherapy or psychoanalytic cures, thus ensuring the possibilities of generalization and correction of facts, symptoms and psychological disorders. Second, the experience and competence of the psychologist-researcher are placed in the methodological sequence, taking into account their relationship to empirical reality and theory that are part of a framework for verifying sets of hypotheses and implementing the conclusion.

### **Conclusion:**

Our theoretic-methodological study revealed that academic psychology in Western Europe has strong psychological and psychoanalytic concepts (motivations, needs, objectives, desires, behaviours, processes and psychic states, etc.), various transdisciplinary interactions (sociological, political, legal, medical, economic, managerial, digital, etc.) and widespread applications (norms, roles, reference groups, communications, languages or attitudes, conflicts, ethics and, etc.). The multipolarity of intrapsychological orientations has also fostered the emphasis on their fundamental character in relation to the intrinsic needs or multiple delimitations of human activities in our article we found interdependent links in the daily life and relationships of individuals and groups, to intellectual, individual or collective creation, to politics, and the economy of ideologies, jurisprudence, medicine; all this seems to go into the realm of psychology. Our empirical theoretical study has identified some broad outlines of the workings of European academic psychology, which has well integrated North American and Russian research and has also appreciated in its new reflections the multidisciplinary methodological approach to designing, explaining or reasoning the reality of human activity.

Finally, our panoramic view of the applications of psychology in research, teaching and professional activity largely validates our hypothesis, but it also underlines the heterogeneity of its development in different Western countries that is linked to the cultural traditions of their theoretical schools or to the contradictory positions of their internal or external objectives.

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