A SHORT REVIEW OF THE HISTORY OF THE BELGIAN PSYCHOLOGICAL SOCIETY

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This review of the history of the Belgian Psychological Society was written on the occasion of the 50th anniversary. It includes a report of the conditions under which the society was created, a summary of the first four years of working, and a sketch of the major developments that have taken place since the foundation. The review also contains information about the presidents of the society, the members, the honorary members, and the BPS journal Psychologica Belgica. Finally, there are sections on the national and international initiatives of the society, and on the activities organized during the academic year 1995-1997.

Psychological Research in Belgium Before the Society

Somewhat ironically, it may be noted that three of Belgium’s most famous “psychological researchers” worked in the nineteenth century, decades before psychology was established as a science and taught at universities. They were Adolphe Quetelet (1796-1874), Joseph Plateau (1801-1883), and Joseph Delboeuf (1831-1896). Quetelet, director of the Royal Observatory and professor at the Belgian Military Academy, was a statistician who first applied the normal distribution to individual differences in the domains of anthropometrics, psychology, and sociology (see, e.g., Muncie, McLaughlin, & Langan, 1996). Plateau, professor at the University of Ghent, was a physicist who discovered the law of mixing colors by means of rotating discs and who experimented with the stroboscopic effect. Among other things, he made a lasting contribution to the field of psychophysics (e.g., Laming & Laming, 1996). Delboeuf, professor at the University of Liège, also played an important role in psychophysics.

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This article is a slightly expanded version of a text written for the “Proceedings of the 50th Anniversary Meeting of the Belgian Psychological Society” (Coeuremans, Kohinsky, & Mortier, 1997). The authors wish to acknowledge the help of Jeremy Puict, André Vandenberghhe, Géry d’Yvigneux, An Speeijer, and Bernard Rimé.

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The Foundation of the Society

The foundation of the Belgian Psychological Society is exceptionally well documented, because the first volumes of Psychologica Belgica largely consisted of the minutes of the Society (see also below). Even Michotte’s seminal invitation letter of October 25, 1946, was published in full length (both in French and in Dutch). Because of the availability of these sources (see also the Newsletter of November 1996) we will not recapitulate the origins of the society in detail, but will instead concentrate on the minutes of the meeting of December 8, 1951 (Psychologica Belgica, 1, pp. 45-47). These present a French review of the activities during the first four years of the Society. The translation below is not literal, because in some places irrelevant details have been omitted, in other sentences it has been added to better situate the minutes in context.
Minutes of the 8 Dec. 1951 BPS Meeting

History. On November 30, 1946, M. Michotte van den Berck, professor at the University of Louvain, convened a gathering of professors interested in teaching psychology. This took place in the buildings of the Fondation Universitaire/Universitaire Stichting in Brussels. The purpose of the meeting was the creation of a Belgian Psychological Society which would assemble the specialists from the four Universities (Louvain, Brussels, Ghent, and Liège) and which would be open to those having a positive approach to the discipline. Such a society should establish relationships between researchers, help researchers educate one another in their area of specialization, extend the domain of applications, and protect the title of psychologist, which was manifestly abused.

In the aftermath of this meeting, a commission was established to draft the statutes of the Society. It consisted of MM. Michotte (Louvain), Nysse (Brussels), Franca (Ghent), Nautin (Louvain), and Paulus (Liège; secretary). Preliminary statutes were drafted by this commission and sent to the attendees of the first meeting.

On February 15, 1947, a new meeting took place, during which the final statutes were established. The Bureau of the new society, consisting of Albert Michotte (president, Louvain), Auguste Ley (vice-president, Brussels), Sylvain De Coster (secretary, Brussels), Joseph Nautin (treasurer, Louvain), Frans Fraene (delegate, Ghent), and René Nihard (delegate, Liège) was elected. The statutes were published and from that date onwards the Society formally came into being. Its regular activities started at the end of 1947.

Death of founding members. During 1947, the BPS deplored the loss of two of its founding members, MM. Heerem and Nihard. A public homage was given to them by M. Michotte, president, during the meeting of October 18, 1947. M. Paulus replaced M. Nihard in the Bureau of the Society.

Recruitment of new members. On February 15, 1947, the Society consisted of 24 members. Strict standards were imposed on entrance to the Society. At the end of 1951, the number of regular members amounted to 40.

Visiting psychologists from abroad. The Society had the pleasure to receive the following psychologists: MM. Klineberg, Köhler, Revész, and Ombrédane. Since he has been taking charge of the teaching of psychology at the University of Brussels, M. Ombrédane has been given full membership of the Society.

Meeting of the Society. Following the stipulation that monthly meetings be held, such meetings took place every second Saturday from October 18, 1947, on, with the exception of the months of July, August, and September. These meetings were initially held at l’institut des Hautes Etudes de Belgique, but subsequently they were regularly convened at the Fondation Universitaire.

Activities of the Society. The main activity of the Society consisted of monthly intellectual contacts including a presentation (by one of the members or by a guest speaker), followed by discussion. Both national languages were used in the presentations.

Two visits were organized, one to the laboratory of Experimental Psychology at the University of Louvain, the other to the Psychotechnical Centre of the Army at Everberg.

The talks always resulted in animated and instructive discussions. Thanks to these, one goal of the Society was achieved from the first year of its existence, namely to inform researchers, scattered over Belgium, of developments taking place throughout the country.

In this respect, it is important to note that besides the papers, communications of 15 minutes were allowed by the statutes of the Society. The duration of the discussions, however, has sometimes prevented these communications from taking place.

Other activities. 1. The Belgian Psychological Society has sent the bibliography of its members during the years 1940-1945 and 1945-1948 to the UNESCO, upon the latter’s request. 2. The Society has tried to compile a Yearbook of its members, providing information about their work. This enterprise has not been successful.

Relations with foreign societies. The statutes of the Society have been sent to most of the corresponding societies abroad.

The Society was represented at the ceremony of the 25th anniversary of the foundation of the Société française de Psychologie.

The Society became member of the International Union of Psychological Science.

Projects. Of the various objectives listed in the manifesto of the Belgian Psychological Society to justify its existence, two merit particular consideration, and have been a source of continuous preoccupation to the members of the Bureau. 1. Defense of the title of psychologist. Upon the foundation of the Society, this defense was proclaimed to be necessary. Unforeseen circumstances, however, have prevented a public examination of the question. 2. Publications of members. From the very start, the Society has sought to promote and
facilitate publications of its members. Circumstances and a lack of means have prevented the Bureau of the Society from finding a solution to this problem. However, the Bureau is of the firm opinion that these two objectives cannot be forgotten.

Summary of the report of the treasurer concerning the first four years of the Society.

1947
receipts (membership fees) 4,200
expenditures (printing etc.) 3,027,50
balance on December 31, 1947 1,172,50

1948
receipts and in hands 5,327,50
expenditures 270,30
balance on December 31, 1948 4,357,00

1949
receipts and in hands 11,557,00
expenditures 648,25
balance on December 31, 1949 10,909,25

1950
receipts and in hands 20,709,25
expenditures 2,000,00
balance on December 31, 1950 18,709,25

1951
receipts and in hands 25,676,25
expenditures 2,532,00
balance on December 31, 1951 23,134,25

The amount of money we saved over the past four years allows us to consider publication of a Yearbook of the Society. (End of the Minutes of the 1951 BPS meeting.)

Further Developments of the Society

The first statutes of the Society were largely inspired by the format of the Royal Academy of Sciences and Arts. There was a limited number of highly selected working members (max = 50) and adhering members, gathering on a regular basis (minimally four times a year) during which one of the members presented a paper, which was afterwards discussed. A summary of the talk was made available to the Society and published in the proceedings (which turned out to be Psychologica Belgica, not published until 1954). Most of these characteristics have gradually been relinquished. In 1960, the maximum number of working members was dropped, although the distinction between working and adhering members still exists today (the former being defined as those who have a university degree in psychology; the latter as those who do not work related to psychology, without having a university degree; adhering members have the same rights as working members but cannot vote at the General Assembly).

The monthly reunions were gradually replaced by a general Annual Meeting. This happened for the first time in 1962, when the reunions of May and June were replaced by an Annual Meeting, held on Saturday May 12 in the Psychological Laboratory of the University of Brussels. After a series of papers in the morning and the afternoon, the meeting was concluded with a General Assembly of the Society during which a new Bureau was elected for the years 1962-1964 (exactly the same format still prevails today). In a transition period, starting from 1968, the monthly reunions were replaced by gatherings of the scientific committees. These committees had been created within the Society in 1963, and consisted initially of (i) a Committee for General and Experimental Psychology, (ii) a Committee for Genetic Psychology and Psychological Consultation, and (iii) a Committee for Social Psychology and Industrial Psychology. They were largely autonomous from the Society (although in the beginning they had a representative in the Bureau). In later years, the number of committees (so-called working groups) proliferated until in 1991 they were over 20. In addition, the activities of most of these committees had slowly declined and they did not meet any more. This actually meant the end of the former monthly reunions.

Finally, in 1965, Psychologica Belgica was no longer considered as the Yearbook (minutes) of the Society, but as a regular journal (further confirmed in 1968, with the publication of more than one issue per year and the creation of an autonomous editorial committee). The activities of the Society were summarized each year at the end of the journal until 1973. Around that time, it was decided to start an Information Bulletin of the Society. This Bulletin appeared in January 1972, February 1973, and then stopped. In November 1975, it was "re-invented" (at least it started again at number 1) and continued until January 1980 (number 14), when the Belgian Federation of Psychology was founded (see below) and took over the Bulletin. In January 1985, the Bulletin was for the third time re-instituted (again starting at number 1) and this time it lasted until the end of 1991, when it was replaced by the Newsletter, which still exists today.

Presidents

From the very beginning of the Society, the terms of the presidents and the
vice-presidents have been limited (varying between two and four years in different periods). One of the presidents (M. Osterrieth) resigned prematurely due to health problems. As a rule, presidents came from different universities (in the beginning there were four universities: Brussels, Ghent, Liège, and Louvain; after the division of Brussels and Louvain into French- and a Dutch-speaking universities, there were six). This gave the following sequence of presidents:

1. Albert Michotte van der Berck (Louvain, 1947-1951)
2. René Nyssen (Brussels, 1952-1955)
3. Jean Paulus (Liège, 1956-1959)
4. Léo Coetzier (Ghent, 1960-1961)
11. William De Coster (Ghent, 1975-1978)
15. Paul Bertelson (Bruxelles, 1984-1987)
16. Léni Verhofstadt-Denève (Ghent, 1987-1990)
17. Véronique De Keyser (Liège, 1990-1993)

Members

In the first years of its existence, the number of members grew steadily from the 24 founding members in 1947 to a maximum of 464 in 1973. Around that time, the Society was confronted with two moves that affected virtually all general and national societies: specialization and internationalization. As knowledge grew, research in the different areas of psychology became increasingly specialized and difficult to fully grasp by outsiders. In addition, due to the increased mobility of researchers, societies were founded with a narrower scope and a geographically larger audience. Because of the higher level of relevant expertise in these societies, researchers increasingly turned to them. As a result, the number of members of the Belgian Society during the subsequent decade dropped to slightly above 300, a number that has since remained pretty constant (in 1995, there were 325 members; see the Appendix), despite the fact that the number of students obtaining a degree in psychology has sharply increased. Initially, the Society tried to cope with the growing specialization by the creation of "working groups" (see above), but this has not always been very successful.

Honorary Members

According to the statutes, the Society is allowed to award honorary membership to outstanding psychological researchers (up to a maximum of 10 at the same time). Thus far the Society has been rather frugal in conferring this privilege. Only on four occasions have persons been given honorary membership.

1. On the occasion of the 15th International Congress in Brussels (1957)
   F. Bartlett H. Langfeld
   O. Klineberg J. Piaget
   C. Kluckhohn H. Piéron
   W. Köhler
2. On the occasion of an invited conference given before the Society in 1981 on "Unité et diversité de la psychologie d'aujourd'hui et de demain"
P. Finsie
3. On the occasion of his honorary degree at the ULB (Brussels, 1984)
   D. Broadbent
   J.L. McClelland

Psychologica Belgica

As indicated above, one of the main purposes of the Society was to promote publications of its members, so that Belgian researchers could take notice of each other's work. To scientists confronted with a system of "publish or perish", this goal may seem opportunistic, but it probably was not. In the first place, up to very recently, formal incentives to publish were virtually absent in Belgium. Academic appointments and promotions were (and are) mainly based on educational needs, so that - at best - professors were part-time researchers (Bertelson, 1996). Also, due to the scarcity of research funds provided by the Belgian government(s), academic positions have always been limited in number, so that all the work had to be done by the same small group of people. Under these circumstances, publishing was a pretty idealistic business, as can be concluded from the fact that Belgian psychological researchers over the years have contributed to some 0.5% of all publications covered by PsychLit (this figure has been remarkably stable throughout the period between 1974 and 1996, and there are no reasons to believe that the situation was different before this period of time; on the other hand, it may be noted that 0.5% still makes a
total of 1273 journal articles between 1991 and 1997).

Furthermore, the Belgian situation has been complicated by the existence of two official languages (Dutch and French), which were not always fully mastered by the members, and which formed a combination that seemed to be virtually absent outside Belgium. For these reasons, it is an open secret that from time to time the editors of the journal (and the members of the Bureau) have had to be encouraging to receive enough adequate submissions. As such, in conformity with its goals, Psychologica Belgica has published a fair amount of Belgian research that otherwise probably would not have been publicly available.

The driving force behind the creation of Psychologica Belgica was Joseph Nuttin from the University of Leuven. As we saw above, already in 1951 he commented that the Society had enough money to afford its own publication. Until the creation of an editorial committee in 1968, he was the only person responsible for the journal (the first seven volumes, covering the period between 1947 and 1967, with the acknowledged support of K. Swinnen and M. Flamen). In 1968, a distinction was drawn between the Editorial Board and the Editorial Secretariat. Until 1983, the Editorial Board consisted of one person from each university (i.e., four members between 1968 and 1969, and six members between 1970 and 1982). In 1983, the Editorial Board was enlarged in order to include a greater variety of expertise in the different areas covered by the journal. The Editorial Secretariat was the managing body of the journal and until 1995 consisted of one French-speaking and one Dutch-speaking person. Since 1969 the Editorial Secretariat has received invaluable assistance from Betty Vandoren Bavelye. The respective Editorial Secretariats were:

1970-1977: Jean Costermans & Gaston Vandendriessche
1978-1982: Xavier Seron & Paul Eelen
1983-1984: Jean Rondal & Paul Eelen
1985-1986: Véronique De Keyser & Paul Eelen
1987-1988: Véronique De Keyser & Alfons Marcoen
1989-1993: Serge Brédart & Alfons Marcoen
1994-1995: Guy Lories & André Vandierendonck
1995-: André Vandierendonck

From 1954 till 1967, the languages used in Psychologica Belgica were French and Dutch. In 1968, English became accepted as third language and it was decided that each article should have an English abstract. With the change of editorship in 1994, the Bureau of the Society decided that all articles should be in English (although initial submissions in the national languages were still allowed). The two major reasons for this decision were: (i) the observation that most Belgian psychological researchers read articles more easily in English than in the other national language, and (ii) the awareness that the heterogeneity of languages hindered international distribution of the journal. Because of this language policy, the presence of two persons with a different mother tongue in the Editorial Secretariat was no longer felt necessary, and when Guy Lories asked to be relieved from his editorial duties, he was not replaced. Since 1992, André Vandierendonck has been the sole editor of Psychologica Belgica. At the moment, the term of editor is limited to three years, and can be renewed only once.

Before 1968, Psychologica Belgica mainly consisted of the minutes and statutes of the Society, the curriculum vitae and publications of the members, and summaries of the papers given at the monthly and annual meetings. Gradually, full length articles of the talks were included. In 1968, Psychologica Belgica became a regular journal. From then until 1994, issues of Psychologica Belgica appeared on the average twice a year, although occasionally there have been three appearances or only one (depending on the number of submissions). In 1994, it was decided that Psychologica Belgica should be a quarterly journal to reduce the publication lag. In practice, however, due to the inclusion of double-volume special issues, appearances have been limited to three times a year. The journal is distributed among the members of the Society, and is available in some 80 university libraries over the world. The abstracts are listed in eight sources, including Psychological Abstracts and Current Contents. In addition to articles, the journal includes book reviews. As many of these are French books, Psychologica Belgica has unintentioned turned out to be a major English window to these publications.

The Foundation of the Belgian Federation of Psychologists

In the 1970s, the Society seriously started to tackle the problem of the legal protection of the title of psychologist. Previously, a few scattered initiatives had been taken (such as sending a letter to the responsible minister), but there was little persistence in these efforts. The problem was that everybody could call himself "psychologist" without proof of relevant studies and/or work experience. The aim of the Society was to restrict the title of "psychologist" to persons who had obtained a university degree in psychology. However, it soon became clear that in order to be get such a legal protection through parliament, it was necessary to come up with very detailed proposals about the status of a psychologist, the characteristics of the profession, the deontological code to be followed, sanctions for possible breaches, and so on. Thus, a large part of the activities of the Society in the 70s was devoted to these writings and to amendments asked by different institutional agents (see the Bulletins of the Society from 1975 till 1980).
By the end of the 1970s, however, it became increasingly clear that the Belgian Psychological Society had a number of serious handicaps to achieve success in this matter. For a start, there were problems with the representativeness of the Society. As a group of predominantly academic researchers (see also the evolution in membership described above), it was mainly concerned with academic psychologists (e.g., clinical psychologists, school psychologists, vocational psychologists) who by that time had founded their own societies. Furthermore, the continuous efforts necessary for achieving the legal protection started to exceed the capacities of the Society, and eroded its scientific activities.

For these reasons, contacts were sought with other societies and during an assembly on December 1, 1979, the statutes of the Belgian Federation of Psychologists were signed in the University Foundation by 50 representatives of the different societies. The existence of the Federation was made official in Het Belgisch Staatsblad/Le Moniteur belge of March 20, 1980. In order to ensure that the Federation would be representative of all psychologists and not just one society among many others, a principle of reciprocity was adopted. This principle implied that nobody who wanted to become member of one of the constituent societies automatically had to become member of the Federation, and that nobody could be member of the Federation without additionally being member of one of the Societies.

Although this is not the place to present further details about the history of the Federation, it should certainly be mentioned that the Federation succeeded in its first goal. The title of psychologist is legally protected in Belgium since January 1, 1997 (laws approved in 1995).

International Contacts

As Michotte was not only the founder of the Belgian Psychological Society, but also of the “International Union of Psychological Science” (I.U.PsyS) and the “Association de psychologie scientifique de langue française”, the relationships between the Belgian Society and these two international societies were very tight. For instance, three times a member of the Belgian Society has been president of the I.U.PsyS: Michotte (1957-1960), Nuttin (1972-1976), and d’Ydewalle (1996-2000). In addition, the Belgian Society has organized two International Congresses of the I.U.PsyS (1957 and 1992). Both occasions have been considered as milestones in the history of the Society (and of scientific psychology in Belgium; cf. the chapter by Richelle, Janssen, and Bredart (1992) about “Psychology in Belgium” in the Annual Review of Psychology). It may also be recalled that on the occasion of the 1957 Congress, the Society awarded its first honorary memberships, and that the 1997 honorary member, J.L. McClelland, was an invited speaker of the 1992 Congress. In 1971, the University of Liège organized the 17th International Congress of Applied Psychology (of the International Association for Applied Psychology). On this occasion, Psychologica Belgica published a special issue (1971, 1-2) with an extended survey of Psychology in Belgium, edited by Jean Costermans and Gaston Vandendriessche. Finally, several members of the Society have been active in the French Association of Scientific Psychology (e.g., de Montpellier was president in 1960).

The Society in the Academic Year 1996-1997

Although it is tempting to write at great length about all the initiatives taken by the Society during the 30 years of its existence, we will restrict ourselves to a description of the activities in 1996-1997 and, where possible, relate these to previous happenings. By doing so, we hope to give a more lively picture of what the Society stands for today.

The activities of the Bureau of the Society start with the beginning of the academic year (October) and end with the Annual Meeting (usually in the beginning of May; this year exceptionally at the end of April due to the large number of free Fridays in the beginning of May). The Bureau meets every last Monday of the month at the Laboratoire de Psychologie Expérimentale of the Université Libre de Bruxelles, from 5 pm until 7 pm. Generally, attendance is fairly good. The language spoken is English, as this is equally well mastered by the members of the two language communities.

1996 was the beginning of a new Bureau consisting of:

Bernard Rimé (ULG, president)
Géra d’Ydewalle (KULeuven, past-president)
Geert De Soete (RUG, Dutch-speaking vice-president)
Monique Radeau (ULB, French-speaking vice-president)
Frank Van Overwalle (VUB, Dutch-speaking secretary general)
Vincent Yzerbyt (ULG, French-speaking secretary general)
Robert Schets (treasurer)
Marc Broyhaert (KULeuven, deputy treasurers)
Guido Peeters (KULeuven, deputy secretary, Newsletter)
Jean-Pierre Thibaut (ULG, deputy secretary, Newsletter)
Axel Cleeremans (ULB, adviser, electronic messages, Annual Meeting)
Florence Diercy (ULG, adviser)
André Vandenbergendonck (RUG, Psychologica Belgica)
Betty Vanden Briele (KULeuven, Psychologica Belgica)

The previous Bureau (under the direction of Géra d’Ydewalle) had, more or less by accident, it must be admitted- discovered that the Society was founded...
in 1946/1947. The new Bureau was urged to organize some celebration. A number of proposals were taken into consideration (e.g., the organization of a two-day meeting, a special celebration at the University Foundation where it had all started) but rejected because either it was feared that the members would not be interested (e.g., in a two-day meeting, which would cost considerably more), or because they were too expensive. Finally, it was arranged that the Society would try to organize a "normal" Annual Meeting in the buildings of the Royal Academy, followed by a dinner in a restaurant. Axel Cleeremans agreed to take care of the former, Marc Brysbaert was asked to make arrangements for the latter. It was also decided that because of the special occasion, the Society would apply for extra funding from the Dutch- and the French-speaking Funds for Scientific Research. Significantly for the growing separation between the two language communities, the application was successful on the French side but not on the Dutch side. The support from the French side, however, helped to invite a special guest speaker (J.L. McClelland).

The Bureau was again reminded of the Society's past, when it received a very kind letter from H.F. Bartlett together with an integral bibliography and CV of his father, Sir Frederic Bartlett. This was sent to the Society in appreciation of the honorary membership awarded to Sir Frederic Bartlett in 1957. As most of the younger members of the Bureau were not aware of the fact that honorary memberships had been awarded in the past, it was concluded that a short history of the Society would be appropriate on the occasion of the 50th anniversary. Marc Brysbaert volunteered to write this. Robert Schels, the member with the longest adherence to the Society (going back to 1960) and the largest archive, offered his support. At the same time, an idea took root that the anniversary would be a good occasion to award a new honorary membership (it may be remarked that no membership had been awarded on the occasion of the 1992 International Congress, in contrast to the 1957 Congress). It was further decided that the seminal invitation letter of Michotte marking the inception of the Society, and the letter of H.F. Bartlett would be published in the Newsletter to inform the members. The bibliography and CV of F. Bartlett were copied and sent to all university libraries of the country.

Still on the matter of publications, it may be remarked that in preceding years the Society has made considerable efforts (i) to have an electronic mailing list, and (ii) to have an interactive web site. Geert De Soete has taken care of the former, Axel Cleeremans of the latter. The electronic mailing list mainly serves to inform researchers about upcoming seminars at the different universities, the web page to provide members and non-members with the most recent information of the Society. Although these developments have made information distribution easier and less expensive, it is to be feared that traces of these initiatives may no longer be available for future historians. Besides the electronic messages, the Society has also renewed its flyers in which the Society is presented and new members asked to join.

In 1995, a "Best Thesis Award" contest had been started (initiative of Frank Van Overwalle) to honour the best master's thesis of each year. The selection procedure consisted of two steps: first, each thesis was read by two independent referees from universities other than the candidate's; second, the outstanding theses were all read by a committee that made the final decision. The first award, worth 25,000 BEL and given at the Annual Meeting of 1996, was for Walter Schroyens (KULeuven). There were a total of 16 submissions, five of which were clearly outstanding. Given the large amount of time spent in adjudicating the competition, a discussion took place within the Bureau concerning the best strategy to follow in the future: either to require higher standards from submissions, or to make a first selection on the basis of the abstracts. This was particularly relevant because in 1996 the number of submissions had increased from 16 to 35. The winner of this contest was Francis Tuerlinckx (KULeuven).

A large part of the discussions of the Bureau were devoted to the question of the relations with the Belgian Federation. Since the Federation achieved the goal of protecting the title of psychologist (see above), the Society has felt less involved with the workings of the Federation. In addition, there have been some frictions because the Federation has considerably augmented its fee, which on account of the principle of reciprocally has had implications for the members of the Society as well. There were long debates between members who thought that the Society should restrict its activities to the scientific side, and others who were convinced that the Society should play a role in the further developments of the Federation, in particular with respect to the schooling of psychologists. Gradually, the latter conviction has gained ground.

The Annual Meeting of the Society is usually organized in one of the universities, in order to keep attendance and organization costs low. So, the last meetings took place at the Université Libre de Bruxelles (1991), the Katholieke Universiteit Leuven (1992), the Université Libre de Bruxelles (1994), the Université Catholique de Louvain (1995), and the Vrije Universiteit Brussel (1996). Because of the 50th Anniversary, the 1997 meeting was not organized in the ULB but in the Royal Academy, on April 25, under the auspices of the National Committee for Psychological Sciences. The management was in hands of a "ULB team" (see Cleeremans, Kotinsky, a Moosty, 1997, for further details). After some welcome and introductory remarks, the meeting started with a lecture of J.L. McClelland on "Why there are complementary learning systems in hippocampus and neocortex: Insights from the successes and failures of connectionist models of learning and memory". This was followed by the honorary membership award and the BPS best thesis competition award. During the rest of the day, 33 lectures and 72 posters were presented, for a total of 185 (paying) participants. In the
evening, there was a cocktail and a dinner. The latter was attended by 68 persons and took place in “hôtel Métropole” (Brussels). On the menu were “fonds d’artichaut frais à la salade de crepe” and “pâchloen gevulde met gestoofde groenten, fine champagnes en kasteelvriepelen”.

The balance of the Society at the end of 1996 was positive. On the incoming side, there was 1,164,697 BEF. Expenditures equalled 888,343 BEF, making a difference of 180,354 BEF. The latter, however, was slightly inflated because it contained membership fees for 1997 (178,600 BEF), as well as expenses for 1997 (70,250 BEF). So, the real balance was 72,504 BEF.

Future of the Society

Belgium is a small country, divided in two distinct language communities, and devoid of politicians willing to invest heavily in the psychological sciences. Given these constraints, it is not to be expected that the Belgian Psychological Society will ever play a worldwide role. The maximum number of members it could possibly attract is probably below 2,000 (coming from 7 different universities including Mons). For some researchers, this has been enough reason to leave the Society aside and turn directly to more prestigious associations in the US, France, and the UK. For others, it has not prevented them from investing seriously in the organization. Indeed, the Society has had the pleasure of counting some of Belgium’s finest researchers among its most active members.

Michotte’s first reason for founding the society still remains the main basis for its existence today: At some level, researchers in psychology must be represented and given the opportunity to meet one another and talk about their work. It cannot be that Belgian researchers have to go abroad to hear what their colleagues from nearby universities (or even their own university) are doing. The success of the Annual Meetings proves the need for such a regular gathering. In addition, a good deal of decisions are still made at the Belgian level of the language communities. These include grants for collaboration from the Federal Government (such as the Interuniversity Attraction Poles fostering collaborations between universities of the two communities), and grants from the Fonds de la Recherche Scientifique. The Annual Meeting is the ideal convention for candidates to present their work and for committee members of the funding agencies to hear persons they are asked to judge about.

For these reasons, the Society is likely to continue its -rather quiet and modest- existence along the same lines, and the future will probably be very different from the past. However, as the present review hopefully shows, this is not such a bad record after all.

References

Appendix

Members of the BPS at the end of 1996 (plus year of first adhesion)

ADLER Anouk 1983  COLIN Césile 1995
ALEGRUA Jesus 1959  COMBLAIN Annick 1995
ANTHONYSEN Claire 1996  COMPERNOL André 1977
ARQUIN Jean-Marie 1980  CONTENT Alain 1987
BARBIER Rénéquique 1995  CORVÉLEYS Jozef 1978
BARFOLUS Erich 1992  COSTERMANS Jean 1963
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Received May, 1997
Accepted July, 1997