

ALPE's Argentine Delegation, as organizer of the 2nd World Congress of Existential Therapy has developed an interview with a series of questions to leading representatives of Existential Therapy in the world. ALPE will post this interview in their page.

Name: Jak Icoz

Country: Turkey

City: Istanbul

Place where you operate:

Existential Academy of Istanbul

### Why did you decide to be an Existential Therapist?

I can't really say it was a choice made purely by logical reasoning. My life generally evolves as I follow people, groups and places in which I find inspiration. When I was an undergrad psychology student, existential therapies were almost non-existing in Turkey, just mentioned by the name. However this was not limited to this approach, same would go for many others. Choices were limited to psychoanalytically or CBT based trainings. So, first I came across a lecturer, who happened to be an existential therapist as well, and tried to remain close to her as much as I can. In later years she became my clinical supervisor and even dissertation supervisor in grad studies. Another turning point was coming across Viktor Frankl's Man's Search for Meaning. I was so moved by the book, in less than a year, I enrolled in the logotherapy trainings offered in Dallas, Texas. Lastly, by hundred percent chance, I encountered Emmy van Deurzen at a congress in Sydney, Australia, without knowing her previously. I really liked the way she thought and presented existential therapy, which led the way to my doctoral studies at New School of Psychotherapy and Counselling in London, UK.

### How far is E.T. developed in your country?

As an established approach, E.T. is quite new in Turkey. There have always been individual practitioners in the past few decades, and existential ideas have always found some audience, that's for sure. But it was not until 2012, when Existential Academy of Istanbul and Turkish Association for Existential Psychotherapies, that E.T. took root. Existential Academy has provided the vigorous



two-year-long fundamental training in E.T. to 53 practitioners up until now. 80 more practitioners are actively being trained at the moment. At the Existential Academy of Istanbul itself, 11 specialists in E.T. work in the fields of psychotherapy and training. Other than our group, there are at least two more smaller groups, and independent practitioners which provide shorter trainings and counselling services.

In many countries the existential approach is a minority one, is this the same in your own country? If so, what do you believe existential therapists fail in and what could they do to reverse this situation? If not, what do you think the reasons are?

Existential approach is a minority one in Turkey as well. I think this is so, because existential approach is new in the Turkish psychotherapy landscape as a well-established approach. As I mentioned before, there have always been individual practitioners, who prepared the path to recent growth. However, I think, in order for an approach to be a major player in the field, it needs well structured and well managed establishments, and institutions. There's indeed great

interest in existential approach in Turkey. As set in our example, with the establishment of Existential Academy of Istanbul and Turkish Association for Existential Psychotherapies, 133 practitioners took the training and now we have at least 15 specialists in existential psychotherapy. And this happened just in 6 years. So, to summarise my answer, it is about structures and institutions.

### What problems does an Existential Therapist face as to the social conflicts existing in their respective countries?

I am aware that my answer to this question would carry a lot of assumptions within itself, but that's quite expected, since I am a side in this discussion (of what each approach could offer in the face of social conflicts experienced by Turkish people). I think the baseline for social issues in Turkey is that the external/social reality is too strong for individuals. This seems to leave just a little space for authenticity and ownership. Many people criticise existential approach for being too individualistic, and that living in line with existential principles is simple impossible in Turkey. I strongly disagree.

### Which are these conflicts and how do they affect the lives of those who visit your office?

It is almost impossible to talk about a monolithic "Turkish" culture or social structure, as it varies from region to region, from city to city, from neighbourhood to neighbourhood, from one ethnic, cultural, social group to the other. Yet, no matter which region, city or group an individual belongs to, common ground that many people suffer is being lost in the demands of the "other", or in Heideggerian terms, in the demands of "Das Man". I think existential therapy offers the perfect place to breathe, consider, reflect and for creating one's own life without ignoring social determinants, with full ownership.

### What are the basic ideas of Existentialism that you take into account in your professional practice?

As you could guess, I am quite influenced by the concepts of authenticity and ownership (Eigentlichkeit), and the philosophical and therapeutic discussion around them. In addition to that, meaning has a central place in my thinking and practice. Other than that, I find the Four-World theory quite useful in figuring out where to go next. And of course, phenomenological practice shapes my practice immensely.

### Who is the author that influenced you the most and why?

From the philosophical side, I am quite influenced by Kierkegaard (for his emphasis on polarities, anxiety and despair), Nietzsche (for his emphasis on development in a very novel way), Husserl (for getting the phenomenological practice right), Heidegger (for his phenomenological exploration of human existence, and ideas of Dasein and Eigentlichkeit), Buber (for his relational philosophy), and Sartre (for his emphasis on the Other). From more contemporary (or 20th century practitioners) I draw on Emmy van Deurzen (for her clarity and integration of philosophy into practice), R.D. Laing (for his emphasis on the psychotic core we all have), Viktor Frankl (for his theory on meaning) and Robert Stolorow (for his integration of psychoanalysis and existential approach, as well as his ideas on affective trauma and their effect on development) quite a lot.

### What would you say to students of Psychology who choose to be therapists?

Well, just enjoy the path! It takes immersing oneself into as many experiences as one can do. Living life to the fullest, and reflecting on it (when we could, and we couldn't live it to the fullest) is the best preparation. And of course, I wish them lots of patience.

What future do you see for the ET in your country and in the global context?

I believe ET is gaining prominence both in Turkey and globally. I think in less than a decade, ET will be one of the major approaches that comes up to one's mind when one decides in which approach to be trained in. Globally we go through some "strange" or rather unheimlich times, so ET could prove itself to be a beacon for those, who are interested in.

What are your expectations regarding the Second World Congress?

The First World Congress was a turning point for ET, as many parties in the field could gather. My main expectation regarding the Second World Congress is the enlargement of global collaborations (and of course seeing colleagues I know, meeting new ones, and having fun as I'm being inspired by the brilliance of the work that would be presented).