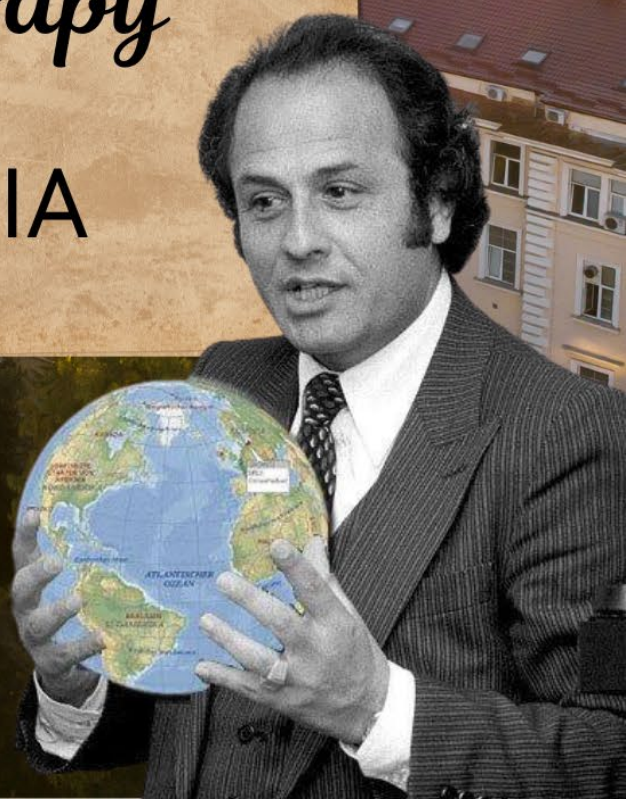


History of
Positive
Psychotherapy
in
BULGARIA



*Section: PPT History***HISTORY OF POSITIVE PSYCHOTHERAPY IN BULGARIA³****The beginning of Positive Psychotherapy in Bulgaria
through the memories of the first participants**

A special breed of frog lived in Japan. They caught it and put it in a box with mirrored walls. The frog saw its reflection everywhere and was scared. From the strong tension, it began to secrete a secretion on its skin, similar to sweat. They picked it and boiled it over low heat, stirring with a willow stick. Thus, from time immemorial, a healing ointment was born...

(or how psychotherapeutic effort is medicine in the exact dose for the patient and the therapist... from the lessons of Nosrat Peseschkian)

Fueled by such wisdom and numerous Eastern parables-metaphors, the activity of POSITIVE PSYCHOTHERAPY began in BULGARIA in June 1992 with a seminar in the Psychiatric University Hospital in Varna for clinical psychologists and nurses, conducted by Dr. Arno Remmers in cooperation with the colleagues, that started after his first journey to Bulgaria in September 1991, when he met Prof. Ivanka Boncheva for the first time and decided to cooperate in psychotherapeutic field. From April 1992, he lived in Bulgaria, where he learned the language, prepared the first seminars, and invited Dr. Peseschkian to give his first lectures in Sofia and Varna.

“In Sofia, at the Military Medical Academy (MMA) (October 1992) - it was the time when representatives of various psychotherapeutic modalities came to our country. Colleagues - psychologists, psychiatrists, doctors, and other helping professions - we were seeking our paradigm. That’s how I (Boryana Chalakova) ended up in the autumn of the aforementioned year at the invitation of like-minded people with whom we founded BAP (Bulgarian Association of Psychotherapy and Psychological Consulting at the time) in the large auditorium of the Military Medical Academy. There were about 150 of



Picture 1. Boryana Chalakova and Prof. Ivanka Boncheva

³ The working group “History of PPT” of the WAPP Publications Committee began work on writing the history of PPT in different countries. We invite colleagues to study and describe the history of the development of the method in their national communities and share their transcultural experiences with other colleagues, inspiring them to develop the method in new countries. Contact working group at publication-committee@positum.org

us. Nosrat Peseschkian himself appeared before us, smiling, charming, and captivating. He spoke in German! He got in touch with us, created a sociometric cross-section of the audience, and ... we all vibrated to one frequency – the magic of the East meeting the West, the magic of psychotherapy that knows no boundaries. I think that was the moment when I fell in love with Positive Psychotherapy, which I knew nothing about at the time. I was filled with inspiration and said to myself: “If this method, presented by a magician of influence, can captivate such venerable colleagues, what is left for a therapeutic group or a human individual?”

*“If you give a man a fish, you feed him once.
If you teach him to fish, he can feed himself for a lifetime.”*

Some time passed, the emotions calmed down (areas Body/Senses and Future/Fantasy) and gave way to the mind (area Activity/Achievement). I decided to become familiar with the structure of a method called Positive Psychotherapy. A few months later, I rejoined Arno Remmers’ group at the MMA, this time in a much smaller audience, with approximately 30 colleagues. Then, a hundred percent German, he said that we were the honor students who had passed the second grade, and now we had to work on mastering the theory of PPT. I saw a structurally stable building of the human psyche, the dynamics of intrapsychic conflicts, the capacities of the individual, and the hope of coping with traumatic events (and these were exactly what prevailed in our lives at that time). I was young and enthusiastic about working as a psychotherapist, and in this group, I decided that this was one of my professional paths in the field of psychotherapy. Subsequently, I have repeatedly presented the philosophy of PPT to my colleagues from the Bulgarian Association of Psychotherapists, so that they could see the meaningfulness of the method...

“He who works alone collects, he who works with others multiplies.”

The synchronicity of the processes had been triggered. When I went to the psychiatric ward of the Varna University Clinic “St. Marina” to share my meeting with Arno Remmers with Ivanka Boncheva, it turned out that he had already been to Varna in September 1991, and she knew him. Since 1991, the history of Positive Psychotherapy has continued in Varna – at the Medical University (then the Institute).

Nosrat Peseschkian turned out to be a good provocateur of our metaphorical thinking.

From the memories of Prof. Ivanka Boncheva:



Picture 2. Nosrat Peseschkian and Prof. Ivanka Boncheva

“An ordinary working day. The office phone rings. Prof. N from the nephrology clinic says, “Look, Boncheva, I have a German doctor here. He discusses psychotherapy, using parables and fairy tales to help patients. It seems that he is not for us. In psychiatry, you can probably understand each other better. ...” Prof. N sounded very helpless. A doctor from Germany offers a perspective, discussing somatic diseases and psychotherapy, while the Bulgarian doctor sees his place only in psychiatry.

The year was 1991, September. Thus began the first moment of the past 20 years (until

2012). The native psychiatry not only welcomed Dr. Arno Remmers with readiness, but also hospitably and openly allowed the first training modules to take place on the clinic's territory. With translation from German and step by step ...

What does one of our first group photos say? That we were young.... with eyes wide open to the new, the different... perhaps a little reserved, because deep inside us there was a sense of wonder, but also admiration.... often not understanding how common sense could be weak in the face of emotions and suffering.... carried away by tales... deeply impressed...

Thanks to the then head of the Department of Psychiatry and Medical Psychology, Prof. Dr. Stefan Todorov, psychiatry became the cradle of Positive Psychotherapy in Bulgaria. Systematic monthly trainings attracted new participants, including those from psychiatric services in neighboring cities, as well as aspiring psychologists, educators, and other healthcare specialists. The new and the unknown attracted. The mystery of a theory provoked a thirst for knowledge."



Picture 3. Group photo

Dr. Arno Remmers recalls this period:



Picture 4. Dr. Arno Remmers

"The first contacts were made at the University Hospital in Varna in September 1991, and, due to the language barrier, I was transferred to the German-speaking clinical psychologist, Ivanka Boncheva, at the Department of Psychiatry, the outpatient psychiatric clinic. This meeting became another turning point in my professional career - the need for psychotherapy, the curiosity for psychic connections, and the unknown freedom for development were enormous. Shortly after that, we gave up our jobs in Germany and moved to Bulgaria in April 1992, to Varna. Two months later, we relocated to the village of Vinitsa, near Varna, to experience the local culture and work in the city. In June 1992, I conducted the first psychotherapeutic seminars for psychologists and nurses at the clinic, learned the language, then developed a curriculum for integrative psychotherapy based on psychodynamic and transcultural positive psychotherapy according to

Nosrat Peseschkian, in cooperation with my colleagues from clinical psychology, and later invited other lecturers from Germany and Russia. Finally, I was able to work at the university clinic and give lectures on psychotherapy and psychosomatics. Following the era of the Soviet Union and the therapies developed by Ivan P. Pavlov (1849-1936), there was a significant need for new methods.

Colleagues enthusiastically attended the seminars to learn about psychodynamic, family therapy, existential, and humanistic therapies and principles and to apply them to themselves and their patients.”



Picture 5. The First Seminar on PPT in Bulgaria 15-19 June 1992 Psychiatric Clinic, Varna

Prof. Boncheva wrote:

“After Arno Remmers became a Varna resident, for three years as a true pioneer, or rather as a revolutionary, he worked tirelessly, already in Bulgarian, to ensure that psychotherapeutic knowledge reached other cities: Dobrich, Shumen, Ruse, Veliko Tarnovo, and of course - Sofia. It became possible to hold the first national conference with the participation of the author of positive psychotherapy himself, Prof. Dr. Nosrat Peseschkian. Thus, 1993 became the birth date of the Society for Positive Psychotherapy in Bulgaria (SPPB).

The founders included psychiatrists, many psychologists, teachers, and social workers. Enthusiasts who, supported by Dr. Remmers, had not only taken the path through the depths of psychotherapy, but also that of private self-initiative. We had become a professional association. This sounded strange in those years. An NGO that, over the years, had to search for its essence and boundaries. An initiative within the framework of a free market for knowledge and practical skills, called the Society of Positive Psychotherapy, in Bulgaria. We needed to join, connect, and stay together over the years if we wanted to exist. So strong was our desire to prove ourselves that we did not realize the difficulties we would face in becoming autonomous. It was easy while Dr. Remmers was in Varna. As a true father and a psychotherapist at that, at one wonderful moment, he spoke about separation after he realized that we were sufficiently differentiated. That is, he returned to Germany, and we, the first trainers, among whom were Boryana Chalakova and Gergana Momova. Tsvetanka Marinova, Snezhana Ilieva, and I continued our work independently. It's one thing to listen with rapture to Dr. Remmers' good Bulgarian, to discover new and new aspects of the subject, to gain your insight, it's a whole different thing when you stand among your colleagues and start from A, B of positive psychotherapy, already knowing that you have to get to Z.

A stage of separation and new connection has begun. Our participation in international forums on Positive Psychotherapy has begun, with training in Wiesbaden, congresses in Vienna, and further training in PPT. They brought mostly the pleasure of experiencing once again the unique radiance of Prof. Nosrat Peseschkian, to hear yet another new wisdom, to see the visible in a new light, and to be enlightened by a new insight. The exchange of experiences with colleagues from other countries, discussions, and scientific reports, all intertwined with friendly conversations in the comfort of the large Peseschkian family.

Our conferences began in 1996. They have always brought the atmosphere of connection with Dr. Remmers. He is invariably the main lecturer. And always in Bulgarian! And always smiling and well-intentioned towards us! Such a devoted father is a dream of every child. A father who, to this day, brings world-class scientific innovations to Bulgarian positive psychotherapists and stimulates our national development.”



Picture 6. October 1992: Nossrat Peseschkian in Varna, Bulgaria



Picture 7. October 1992: The First Seminar on PPT in Sofia with Nossrat Peseschkian

Dr. Arno Remmers says the following about these times:

“The participants in the first training program for doctors, psychologists and pedagogues took a final exam in 1995 in front of professors from the University clinic - Prof. Todorov, the director of the psychiatric university clinic as the psychiatrist, Ivanka Boncheva as clinical psychologist at the faculty, and Dr. Arno Remmers as psychotherapist and lecturer at the clinic. The following year, we held the first of what is now a regular Bulgarian scientific conference on positive and transcultural psychotherapy in Varna. In the meantime, I visited other universities in the country and created additional basic courses and training groups in psychotherapy in other cities. In 1993, a national professional association (BAPP) was already established, which took responsibility for the training programs, we jointly published the necessary textbooks, and from 1994 also the first editions of the magazine “Positum”, which I could now write and print in Bulgarian myself - after extensive correction by colleagues. The curriculum we published in “Positum” in 1994 was the first for basic and master courses with PPT in general, which became a model for other countries, such as Poland (since 1993) and Romania (since 1996). It also served as the model for the first ICPP curriculum in 1999. And we published the books, with the financiers half from Nossrat Pesesdchian and half from me. And the secret of Bulgaria becoming such a strong country in the PPT is most likely to have Ivanka Boncheva and the SPPB society.

Together with Bulgarian colleagues, we initiated several infrastructure projects in Bulgaria, including courses for teachers and school principals to support their work during those challenging years, when salaries and school heating were not paid for months, and the previous management structures had collapsed. We founded a “school for parents”, I gave lessons in psychology for conflict resolution at the Dobrich Language School, In Varna, I was invited in 1992 to give lectures at the Naval Academy (theme “Crisis”), at the Institute for Teacher Qualification for courses with pedagogues and school principals from 1993, and in 1994 to build a drug counseling center. Many colleagues actively participated, which was great! , as well as in the health management course. Surprisingly, the idea of an exchange program quickly evolved into a project for the country's development.

From 1992 onwards, I also led courses in Plovdiv (Prof. Rogolev invited me after I presented the Balance Model at a psychiatric conference there in October 1992). To these were added the courses in Pleven (rehabilitation clinic and psychiatry, basic course), Ruse (psychiatric clinic, basic and master's course), Stara Zagora (medical clinic, basic and master's course), Sofia VVMI (basic courses), Shumen (pedagogical university, basic course for teachers), Blagoevgrad (pedagogical university, basic course for teachers), Dobrich (preventive projects in a youth center, school for parents, language school, psychology lessons in 9th and 10th grade with PPT) in the period from 1992 to 1995. During these three years, over 100 courses were conducted by me in the country, and after a year and a half without a translator, when, in Stara Zagora, the translator said that he did not have time and believed that I could do it myself...”

Prof. Boncheva summarized:

“The Positive is now understood appropriately – as the Whole. There is no longer that mocking attitude: “Well, what is this positive? Is there such a thing as negative psychotherapy?!” Now, not only colleagues, but also users of the SPPB's services and clients, recognize the seriousness of the method. The foundations of positive psychotherapy – Positum, Transcultural approach, and Psychodynamic approach - have become intertwined in the life philosophy of many Bulgarians. “

In its 32 years, the SPPB has also contributed to the scientific development of the method. The PPT toolkit has been enriched with a large number of Bulgarian tales, language pictures, examples, metaphors, and proverbs. Notably, the therapeutic unity of positive, conversational, and short-term psychotherapy, combined with psychodrama and Jungian psychotherapy, has been established in the psychotherapeutic practice of our country. Since 1994, we have been publishing our magazine, "Positum," for three to four consecutive years. Following the discontinuation of its publication, articles on Positive Psychotherapy have become more frequent in domestic and international magazines. The theoretical framework and toolkit of positive and transcultural psychotherapy are woven into several diploma theses, doctoral dissertations, and habilitation works.

The country's difficult economic conditions forced some of us to consider living in other countries. This did not break their connection with the SPPB, as well as the use of the method of positive psychotherapy in their new workplace. Some of our colleagues live and work in Canada, Malta, Switzerland, the Netherlands, the UK, and other countries.

The participation of Positive Psychotherapists in national projects has demonstrated that the method is not only significant for the therapy of individuals with mental health issues and those in need of support, but also successfully serves in the fields of education, prevention, and social work. Here we should mention several-year projects such as:

- Program for the prevention of child aggression in early school age;
- Student Service of Psychological Support and Psychotherapy;
- Program for Rapid Qualitative Risk Assessment in Adolescence and Risk Intervention;

Jointly with the Bulgarian Society of Psychodrama and Group Therapy:

- Mediation - a way to peacefully resolve conflicts in the school community;
- Deviant manifestations in adolescence and intervention

Patients and clients in Bulgaria are aware of and actively seek out practitioners who practice positive psychotherapy. PT-practice "Positum", Varna, the PPT Institute in Sofia, and psychotherapy studios in Veliko Tarnovo, Sofia, Blagoevgrad, Targovishte, Shumen, Plovdiv, and other locations have established a strong presence.

The constantly increasing number of psychotherapy clients has created a new training system – that of improving the therapeutic skills of systematically working psychotherapists.

Development prospects:

- 1/ from breadth to depth
- 2/ from consolidation inward to expansion outward

We have something to boast about: Until 2003, a world congress on positive psychotherapy was held on the eve of our 10th anniversary – Varna, Golden Sands, 2003. Additionally, we have hosted nine national conferences, all in the heart of Bulgaria – Veliko Tarnovo. After that, a national conference with international lecturers and a PPT Workshop alternate every year.

Now, systematic courses and training seminars are held in eight cities of Bulgaria, attracting participants from different parts of the country at both the basic and master's levels. The trainers' group already has 17 colleagues, of whom 10 are master trainers. According to WAPP data, since 2009, there have been 181 certified positive consultants and 58 positive psychotherapists. Seven of the trainers hold a certificate from EAP, along with other fellow therapists. For a small country like Bulgaria, this is a solid achievement.

Stay tuned for a continuation of our story.

To be continued...

Timeline development Bulgaria 1991 - 2003

1991 Conference in Greece:	First personal contact of Nossrat Peseschkian with a colleague from WWMU, Sofia
1991, September:	A two-week journey of Arno Remmers through Bulgaria, Varna - Pleven - Sofia - Blagoevgrad, and the first meeting with Ivanka Boncheva. December: Second visit to Bulgaria, with a decision to move there for an exchange project in psychotherapy.
1992 April:	A. Remmers, along with his wife, Waltraud, moves to Varna, later relocating to Vinitsa, where he begins working with clinical psychologists and psychiatrists in the psychiatric dispensary.
1992, 15.-19. June:	First seminar about positive psychotherapy with clinical psychologists and
1992	Translation of Nossrat Peseschkian's books and materials of PPT starts with Ivanka Boncheva (The Merchant and the Parrot), Veselin Vasiliev (Positive Family Therapy),
1992, 27. Sept. 2, October:	First basic seminar with Nossrat Peseschkian and Arno Remmers in Sofia, Military Hospital WWMU, and lectures in Varna
1992 October:	First Conference on Psychiatry in Plovdiv with a short lecture by A. Remmers about the balance mode
1992	Lecture about "Coping with Crisis" in Marine School Varna
1992 - 1995, Varna:	Basic and Master courses. Specialized courses (from 28.10.1992 - 1994 Pedagogos, school directors, drug addiction center, family therapy), clinical psychology lectures for medical doctors in psychosomatic, Curriculum Health Management in Technical University (Ivanka Boncheva, Arno Remmers), Military Hospital seminar and cooperation (Lazar Uzunov, Arno Remmers)
1992 - 1993 Plovdiv:	2 Basic courses
1993 Pleven:	Basic courses, Management for School Directors
1993 - 1995 Stara Zagora:	Basic and Master courses
1992 - 1994 Sofia:	Basic courses and specialized courses for transport psychologists
1993 - 1995 Dobric:	Basic courses, special seminars, pedagogy, and health prevention projects
1993 - 1995 Russe, Psychiatric Dispanser:	Basic and Master courses
1994 - 1995 Varna:	Training for Trainers Courses
1995 Blagoevgrad:	Jugosapad University, Basic Course
1995	Exam of the first group of Positive Psychotherapists in the Psychiatric University Hospital with Prof. Stefan Todorov, Dr. Ivanka Boncheva, and Arno Remmers
1994 - 1996	Translation of the books „33+1 forms of Partnership“, „Method of Positive Psychotherapy“, Tom 1,
1996	First National Conference on Positive Psychotherapy in Varna, Psychiatr. Univ. Hospital
1997	First World Conference on PPT in Moscow and St. Petersburg, Bulgarian participants
1998, 21-22 February:	Second National Conference on PPT in Varna
2000	Training for Trainers and the Second World Conference on PPT with groups of Bulgarian participants
2003	Third World Conference for Positive Psychotherapy in Varna, Golden Beach

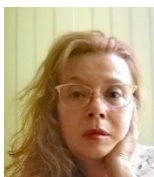
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Alongside memories of Prof. Ivanka Boncheva