

Weronika Kałwak¹

Institute of Psychology, Jagiellonian University

<https://orcid.org/0000-0001-9446-2828>

Report from 18th European Congress of Psychology (Brighton, 3–6 July 2023)

The 18th European Congress of Psychology (18th ECP) took place in the seaside Brighton, south of England, on 3–6 July 2023 under the theme “Psychology: Uniting communities for a sustainable world”. The congress was attended by 1,100 delegates from seventy European and non-European countries. Among conference participants there were numerous representatives of national psychological societies (including the organizer: British Psychological Society), as well as representatives of the American Psychological Association (APA), European Federation of Psychologists’ Associations (EFPA, co-organizer of the congress) and international organizations working for global social and environmental challenges, such as the United Nations and the Global Psychology Alliance. These organizations had a special contribution to this year congress which was devoted to the necessity of joint action and to the chances arising from the unity in the community of psychologists, researchers, practitioners, and psychology teachers in the face of the crises currently experienced in the world: the coronavirus pandemic, the economic crisis, the degradation of the natural environment, and ongoing wars. During the conference, solidarity with the psychological environment and all the citizens of Ukraine torn by war was particularly emphasized. The conference opened with a moving performance by the local Brighton Gay Men’s Chorus. The performance was an expression of the famous inclusiveness and tolerance in the city of Brighton, which is the unwritten capital of the LGBT+ community in England. At the same time, it resonated with the topic of the conference by reminding that marginalized and oppressed groups, including sexual minorities, are more severely affected by global and local crises.

The conference consisted of over 200 sessions of oral and poster presentations, symposiums, discussions, and plenary lectures, arranged in more than 20 thematic streams. Some themes were related to traditional psychological sub-disciplines, such as psychology of education and development, clinical psychology, counseling and coaching, forensic psychology, etc. Others themes suggested

¹ Correspondence address: veronika.kalwak@uj.edu.pl.

psychology's commitment to important social and environmental challenges, such as psychological responses to the pandemic, poverty and inequality, climate change and sustainable development. Due to the huge number of presentations arranged in parallel sessions, it was impossible for one person to familiarize with the entire scientific program – therefore, the report focuses on one of the most important motives of the congress: psychology of climate change and sustainable development.

One of the conference's opening keynote lectures was delivered by Serdar Degirmencioglu, PhD, a community psychologist and activist for children's rights from Turkey, currently a visiting researcher at Goethe University in Frankfurt. Serdar Degirmencioglu is an academic in exile due to being revoked the title of professor and left jobless in his home country because of his political commitment to the defense of human rights. The lecture focused on community psychology as a tool of building collective commitment to mitigation of further anthropogenic climate change. Moreover, this should not be based only on a pro-environmental change of our everyday habits, but above all it should be a joint effort to introduce appropriate systemic, infrastructural, and political changes. The speaker presented calculations which reveal that military activity has the largest share in greenhouse gas emissions. The greatest emitter is the USA army, but also in the European Union military emissions are high and have been increasing in recent years, despite the strong international narrative about the need to reduce them. At the background, there is the increased arming of European countries in the context of the war in Ukraine. In his opinion, universal demilitarization and making every effort to return to and to maintain peace would be the greatest contribution to environmental protection. Another keynote lecture, by Tiago Pereira, PhD, a representative of the Portuguese Psychological Society, was complementary to his claims. Tiago Pereira presented the Portuguese national program of implementing psychological tools to fight poverty, while stopping poverty would determine global sustainability. The research and intervention program addresses people of all ages and entire families affected by and being at risk of poverty (inter alia, the period of pregnancy and the first two years of life is recognized as the most important in preventing the psychological and cognitive effects of poverty). The lecturer pointed out that in social programs aimed at stopping poverty, it is not enough to provide knowledge and skills useful on the labour market – it also requires direct support in applying these skills in strongly competitive market. He familiarized the audience with the phenomenon of tunnel thinking, characteristic of a situation of poverty, which often prevents a person from changing their own situation (as a consequence, external support is necessary, including material support, which also brings psychological benefits).

On the second day of the conference, a panel discussion was held on the role of psychology in finding solutions to the climate crisis, with the participation of Irina Feygina, PhD (USA), Prof. Ricardo Antonio Garcia Mira (Spain) and Prof. Peter Newell (UK), led by Bjorn Ekelund, PhD (Norway). A short presentation before the discussion presented the functions of psychology as divided into two tasks we have in the climate crisis: adaptation to climate change and mitigation of climate change (preventing further changes and degradation of the natural

environment). Adaptation is based primarily on recognizing the negative impact of the climate crisis on psychological functioning, mental health and human well-being, and responding to this threat through prevention and psychological support. Involvement in mitigation, in turn, means for psychology a reflection on how knowledge about human behavior can help shape mass pro-environmental behavior. Irina Feygina proposed that a change in common norms of behaviour could be the most effective in this case (she illustrated this with the example of spreading popularity of solar panels in some housing areas on the way of copying the behaviour of neighbors).

Apart from the plenary events, there were also several sessions of oral presentation and symposiums on the topic of climate change – most of the speakers presented the results of empirical research on psychological and socio-demographic characteristics that foster awareness of climate change and pro-environmental behaviour (e.g. higher level of education and socioeconomic status, personality characteristics that favour cooperation rather than competition, experience of climate anxiety etc.).

During the conference, there was a strike by the scientific and teaching staff of the University of Brighton, due to the tense economic situation of British state universities, dismissals, and delays in the payment of salaries.

The next 19th European Congress of Psychology “Transforming Psychological Science: the 2030 agenda” takes place in Paphos (Cyprus), 1–4 July 2025. It will address the transformations in empirical psychology that are necessary for the discipline to face such challenges of the contemporary world as climate crisis and mental health crisis.