

19th International Congress on Personal Construct Psychology Boston Ma.

I recently had the great pleasure of attending the International congress in Boston Massachusetts in July 2011. the first thing to say is how much I loved Boston and the Back Bay area round Trinity church. Boston is one of the, if not the, nicest city's I've had the pleasure of going to too. I loved the place, the atmosphere and the experience.

That out of the way what about the conference itself? To misquote that great philosopher of the 25<sup>th</sup> century (Bones) "it's PCT Jim, but not as we know it!".

In many ways the congress reflected the wider US application and approach to PCT (i.e. anything goes). Many of the presenters (including some of the keynote addresses) were not PCT, being social constructionist and radical constructivism, dialogical self and an extremely emotionally powerful session on the Virginia Tech shootings.

Whilst some of these were among my personal highlights of the congress others were poorly presented by people who didn't understand PCT and had just found a model they liked and came to patronise and speak down to us! (but that was just that one I had the misfortune to attend and as it was the only negative in my conference I'll get off my soapbox now!).

Fairly obviously the congress was overshadowed by the loss of Fay and Miller and there were a couple of sessions devoted to their contribution to the theory.

Some of my highlights included Kristian Weihs' unbridled enthusiasm for his research into Kelly and the Saybrook conference (which was only matched by Harry Procter's for the forgotten 19 century philosopher Charles Peirce). The workshops (and keynote) by the Dialogical Self institute (Hubert Hermanns et. al.) were all extremely interesting and offered some new tools to explore peoples perceptions of leadership and I can't wait to try Ton Voogt's approach. I also enjoyed Michael Bamberg's plenary session.

One of the downsides of going to workshops is that it limits the number of papers you can go to. But as a practitioner I always find the workshops informative, interesting and useful and in many ways this congress was no exception.

One of the most important elements of any conference or congress is the social side, unfortunately the venue didn't really facilitate this too well. The hotel had no bar or real focal point (even on the congress suite there was only a small "patio" for meetings and access was limited outside conference hours), the meals were buffet style and in the evenings we were left to our own devices. Don't get me wrong the hotel was very good and the staff pleasant – there was just nowhere to congregate, chat and get to know other attendees. We did still manage some socializing, mainly in small groups, and I did enjoy at least one evening meal with five people and four different nationalities.

The congress Gala Dinner (or more accurately buffet) was held in a stunning hotel converted from a prison! (some might say appropriate). We had access to a couple of rooms, self contained bar and balcony on the fourth floor (I think –it was high up and nose bleed territory anyway overlooking the central seven or eight storey open space! Again though the venue wasn't conducive to socializing with the rooms the buffet rather small and limited seating, even on the balcony (where I spent most of the evening).

Even with (or should that be despite) the limited social side I met some nice people, got to know a little better others. The Calgary group impressed and there was a good mix of nationalities represented; I was slightly surprised at the relative lack of Americans attending and thought there might have been more considering; and whilst on paper it looked like there was a lot at the conference many were down as second, third or even fourth authors and didn't actually go (e.g. Trevor Butt and his sick cat were missed) and there appeared to be almost as many Europeans as Americans.

Did I enjoy the conference – overall yes, would I go back to Boston – tomorrow!