

## **20th Intensive Course in Sport and Exercise Psychology hosted in Trikala, Greece**

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During the last week of January (25-29) 40 students from 22 different countries and 8 different universities traveled to Trikala, Greece to take part in a one of a kind educational experience. 20 years after the first Intensive Course (IC) of the European Masters in Sport and Exercise Psychology took place in Leuven, Belgium, Dr. Papaioannou and his colleagues at the University of Thessaly's School of Physical Education and Sport Science organised an exceptional course by bringing together some of the top researchers and practitioners of Sport and Exercise Psychology in Europe. The result was a wide variety of topics being presented and discussed throughout the week. This provided a forum for the group of young experts within the field to ask questions and initiate discussions creating an intellectually stimulating experience for both students and professors.

The week began with lectures on behavioural change techniques, presented by Dr. Mary Hassandra, and social & emotional learning in physical activity, presented by Dr. Taru Lintunen. Both lectures presented research being conducted at the University of Jyväskylä, Finland. Other topics discussed during the week included several newer research areas, such as coach stress and its relevance to performance (Dr. Chroni; Hedmark University College, Norway) and addiction to exercise as a side effect of sport/exercise (Nadia Walter; Leipzig University, Germany). The week also included lectures on prediction, prevention and rehabilitative psychology of sport injury (Dr. Johnson; Halmstad University, Sweden), how sport psychology can be used in talent development (Dr. Elbe; University of Copenhagen, Denmark), the development of life skills through physical education and sport (Dr. Goudas, University of Thessaly, Greece), and many more relevant research topics currently being explored within the domain of sport and exercise psychology. The final component of the IC featured a discussion on applied practice which was led by Dr. Hutter (VU University, Netherlands) and Dr. Meganck (University of Leuven, Belgium). The discussion was based around their experiences and insights of working with athletes as sport psychology consultants. Their shared experiences were invaluable to those just beginning their careers in applied sport and exercise psychology work. Each of the lectures was designed in a way that the guest lecturers would not only present their research topics and findings, but also end with open-ended questions. These questions lead to many fruitful discussions, with ideas and further questions being explored related to the contents of the lectures.

In addition to the lectures, the intensive course program also included events outside the classroom, both official and unofficial. The official events, organized by the University of Thessaly staff, consisted of a Greek cultural night on Tuesday evening and a trip to Meteora, one of the largest and most important complexes of the Eastern Orthodox monasteries, on Wednesday morning. The Greek cultural night began with a town hall meeting at which two major projects, which include the involvement of the University of Thessaly as well as the municipality of Trikala, were presented to students and any community members who wished to attend. This was followed by an evening of traditional Greek food, music, and dance which was enjoyed by both students and professors. This experience allowed students and professors to meet in an informal setting and develop bonds outside the classroom. The following day, all participants of the IC were up bright and early for the trip to Meteora. All those on trip were in awe how the monasteries were built on top of sandstone rock pillars. The laid back ambiance of the location, combined with the nice weather resulted in both students and professors being able to share experiences in a quieter informal setting. Throughout the

week unofficial events took place during most times when students were not in a classroom. Lunches and dinners were often shared together, and many friendships and memories were made throughout the week.

The intensive course helped show that the future of sport and exercise psychology in Europe is in good hands moving forward. The relationships forged during this week, both through educational and non-educational experience, will only grow stronger as all participants look to learn from each other moving forward. The result of this course was an extremely stimulating and rewarding experience which we are all grateful to have been a part of. Needless to say, all those involved in the organisation of this course should be applauded for a fantastic job done in regards to the organizational aspects involved in hosting such a course. Lastly, a thank you to all professors who attended the intensive course and providing all students with an exceptional learning experience. To prospective students who are considering attending the course in the future, we cannot recommend the experience enough and encourage all to jump at the opportunity if presented to you.