Dear ISPS members,

On behalf of the new Executive Committee I would like to thank you all for your confidence in electing us to further develop the rich philosophy of ISPS. The foundations for a strong organisation of ISPS have already been laid down by the previous EC members, and we want to thank in particular Brian Martindale and Jan Olav Johannessen for the immense work they have already done as Chairs of previous ISPS ECs. We feel encouraged by their work and will try to continue in the same direction. It is a real honour for me that the EC elected me as their new Chair and I am happy to take on this task. Right from the start of the new EC I felt a freedom to speak, a respect for different opinions and great friendship. I am convinced that with each other’s help we can continue to work in this spirit to face the many challenges that await us.

The central theme of the Rotterdam conference ‘the healing power of human reconnection’ goes to the heart of ISPS. Therefore, a constructive ‘trialogue’ between professionals, people with lived experiences and family members is essential. As Chair I want to make sure that this trialogue can happen in a positive atmosphere with respect for everyone’s opinion and without demonizing anyone. Although people with psychotic experiences and their family members have often felt abandoned and hurt by an approach due to a failing psychiatry, I think it is important that professionals can continue to make their knowledge available for a better approach to psychosis. With the support of the whole EC I would like to develop some of the many points that were mentioned during the Rotterdam conference further.

First of all, we realised that it is important not only to include the most fragile people with a migration background but anyone who feels alienation from himself and from the world around him. There is no difference between ‘them and us’, we have all to cherish the stranger into ourselves. Secondly, the role of family members cannot be emphasized enough. Families can help to understand psychosis and I am very happy that Jen Kilyon has joined the ISPS International EC as the first family member to build further on the inclusion of families into our organization. Thirdly, we learned during the parallel sessions of the conference of the huge importance of nurses, the special possibilities that art therapies can offer and the particular strength of small-scale, accessible initiatives. In the next period we wish to bring more attention to these forms of professional expertise. I hope that ISPS can create a climate where professionals can use their scientific background and can develop further (in the permanent trialogue mentioned previously) their psychotherapeutic skills for human and qualitative therapy, that is available for all people in the world who need it. In this way I think that ISPS has also political ambitions to improve the system and to expend the dialogue with French speaking countries and with other continents like Africa, South America and Asia.

Hope is the most vital engine for treatment. I hope that ISPS will grow further into a very large worldwide organization where people work together for a better future for those people who suffer from psychosis and for their families.

Professional activities:
I am a Belgian psychiatrist, psychotherapist (since 1987) and psychoanalyst linked as full member to the Belgian School for Psychoanalysis since 2000. From 1987-2018 I was the head psychiatrist for an inpatient ward for young adults with psychosis at the University Psychiatric Hospital of Leuven in Belgium. Confronted with special concerns for those young people and inspired by the work of Jan Olav Johannessen and of Brian Martindale, I started with my co-workers an Early Intervention Service in the community of Leuven in 2009. At this moment I am still working in this outpatient service following the ideas of ISPS and of the International Early psychosis Association (IEPA). In my private practice where I am working as a psychoanalyst I have the great opportunity to explore the inner world of those people who suffer and thanks to the intimate journey with each other we can both grow to something new. This intensive, fragile but always surprising work supports me a lot for my organizational work because I am convinced that the therapeutic relationship is the most powerful element that we can count on in our meeting with people with psychosis.

I have attended almost all the international conferences of ISPS, since 1987, presenting many papers. Because the conferences taught me so much I am very grateful to ISPS and this gratitude was the motivating factor to become a more active worker for the ISPS organisation. As a founding member of the ISPS network Low Lands in 2002 and a member of the local ISPS board, I worked many years together with Jan Leyten and Margreet De Pater to communicate the valuable ideas of ISPS in the professional field in The Netherlands and in Belgium, by organizing conferences in our own region. The organization of the 2019 International ISPS conference in Rotterdam, together with a marvellous team, was an enriching experience for me. From 2017 I became a member of the ISPS EC, where one of my aims was to develop an ISPS network for nurses. During my EC membership I also took up the bridge function between the EC and the ISPS bookseries to support Anna Lavis and Andrew Shepherd in their beautiful creations for the series.

Although I am well aware that medication can play a role in alleviating overly severe symptoms of psychosis, I feel indignant that in current psychiatry this medication is overvalued. Stimulated by this indignation I gave several lectures in my country promoting psychotherapy for psychosis for professionals, for people with lived experiences and for family members. These lectures, which always became a dialogue with the audience, created an impulse to write several chapters in books about psychotherapy for psychosis in Dutch. As an active member of the psychotherapeutic section of the Flemish Society of Psychiatry I promote psychotherapy in psychiatry in general in Belgium. Because of my passion for music, dance and theatre, I have a particular link with LUCA School of Arts in Leuven. There I have an educational and a supervision role for trainees in music therapy. This experience brought me the insight that artstherapies have an immense power beyond the spoken word. I hope to develop this further during my future work.

All these projects were made possible thanks to the basic trust and the stimulation given to me by my both of my parents, who recently died, and thanks to the always lively support of my husband who is also working in the medical field as a general practitioner. He recognizes the strength of families like no other. Together we have three beautiful children who left home to realize their own projects and who gave us three grandchildren, the joy of our lives.

Ludi Van Bouwel

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