

11th Congress of the Swiss Association of Traffic Psychology Traffic Psychology in Switzerland and Europe – Past, Present, Future

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## **"Opportunities and Obstacles for Traffic Psychology in Europe"**

If you are working as a scientific traffic psychologist, i.e. at university or in another research institute, then the professional profile and activity of the traffic psychologist is probably relatively clearly defined. When traffic psychologists are active in the field of driving ability diagnostics, then that is also clearly outlined and structured in quite a number of European countries. We can therefore say, that in these fields of work more or less good framework conditions are in place for the job of traffic psychologist.

But what about these framework conditions when one works as a traffic psychologist at a ministry? How does the profile change from scientist or diagnostician to an "applied traffic psychologist" who gives advice and assistance to his ministry and minister.

These are the questions that the author of the lecture on opportunities and obstacles in traffic psychology in Europe is examining. Based on his vast experience as advisor for the Flemish Ministry of Mobility and Public Works (Belgium), examples from daily work are used to illustrate how important it would be for a sustainable road safety policy to resort to "evidence based" traffic psychological material, i.e. knowledge and experience of traffic psychologists.

Two approaches are investigated to explain why this has been done insufficiently so far. Firstly, it is examined why nowadays, it happens so rarely that traffic psychologists are involved in traffic policy decision-making processes and whether we, traffic psychologists, have so far not succeeded in making our undoubtedly available relevant basic knowledge attractive and accessible to the target group in politics and ministry.

On the other hand, a more fundamental communication problem is discussed, which may be responsible for the reason why policy makers can only have limited confidence in traffic psychologists:

What if today's political decision makers simply do not know that there is such a thing as traffic psychologist? Or what if they knew about their existence, but simply do not acknowledge the problem (of "traffic unsafety")? Why consult a traffic psychologist, if there is no problem??!? And what if a politically responsible official of a city, municipality, cabinet or ministry, etc. would listen to the traffic psychologist, but then turn away quickly, because at first sight, the implementation seems too difficult, too expensive or simply impossible?

Reality or not? Theoretical and practical approaches from the health promotion could in any case contribute to promote traffic psychology in Europe.

**Key words: European road safety policy , traffic psychology, evidence-based accident countermeasures, health promotion, preventive behaviour change, capacity building**

