

HEALING:  
Developing a Multidisciplinary Diploma on Art Therapy in Health Education

Staff Workshop Report  
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**Monday – Thursday Brescia – Italy**  
**Friday Trieste – Italy**



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## Training description

The five-day workshop was held at the University of Brescia (four days) and at the Ex-Ospedale Psichiatrico San Giovanni, Trieste in July 2022 under the direction of Prof. Giovanni Mirabella. Eight representatives from the Universities of Jordan and Tunisia participated in the workshop. Unfortunately, many people could not come from Jordan and Tunisia because they had a problem with their visas. Scholars came from different educational backgrounds (arts, medicine, neuroscience, computer science). Thus, the meeting was characterized by a synergy of various visions and thinking. As a result, there has been a fruitful and enriching cross-fertilization between different researches.

The workshop was divided into two sections. The first one was held in Brescia and consisted of lectures on key neuroscience topics and visits to neuroscience laboratories. The first three days were dedicated to state-of-the-art lectures covering different aspects of the following main topics:

1. Decision making, motor control, Parkinson Diseases and Shizophrenia
2. The interplay between emotional stimuli affects motor control.
3. The embodied theory of language.

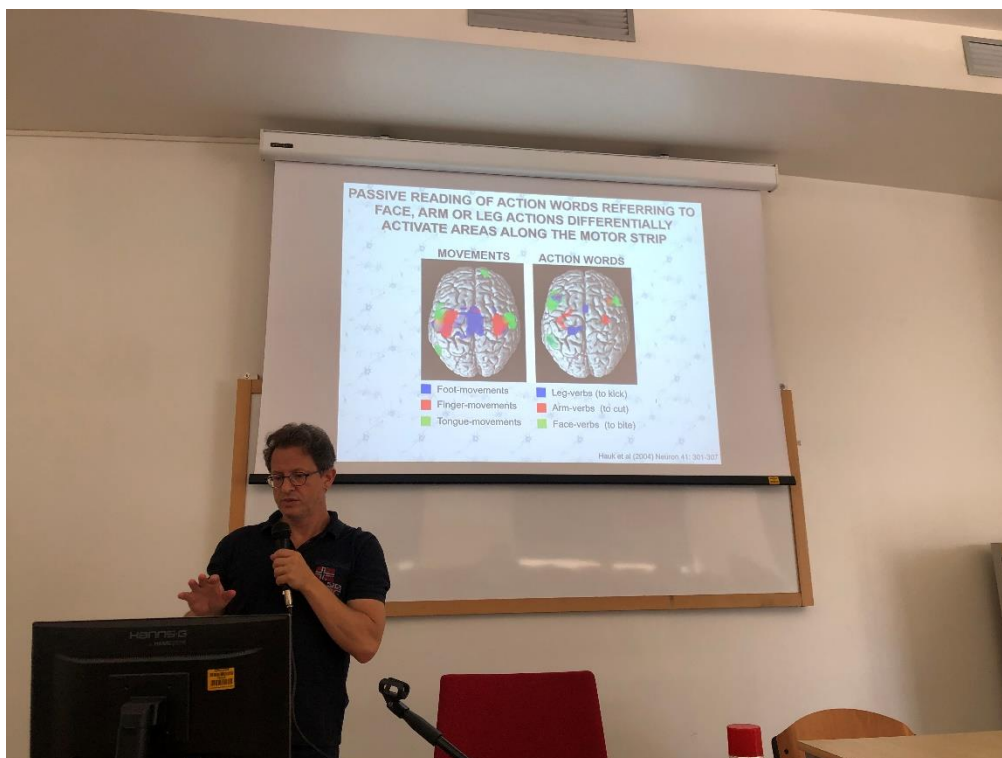
All these topics are of fundamental importance for building the basic knowledge of art therapy students. The first half of the fourth day was spent visiting two very productive and modern laboratories at the University of Brescia, i.e., the Lab of Sport and Science and the Lab of Neurophysiology. The second half of the day was dedicated to the transfer from Brescia to Trieste, where the second part of the workshop took place.

In Trieste, we had a guided tour of a very significant location, i.e., the ex-Psychiatric Hospital of the Province of Trieste, where a significant movement for reforming mental health care took place in Italy during the 1960s and 1970s. The revolution is named after Franco Basaglia, the Italian psychiatrist leading this transformation. This is particularly relevant for art therapy because such a tool has a key relevance in Franco Basaglia's ideas for treating psychiatric diseases in contrast with outdated and oppressive treatment methods used until that time. Basaglia believed in a holistic approach to mental health care, emphasizing the importance of addressing an individual's emotional, psychological, and social aspects. Therefore art therapy was integrated into the community-based mental health services that replaced the large psychiatric hospitals. These services aimed to foster an environment where patients were encouraged to express themselves freely and creatively. Art therapy sessions were conducted in group settings, providing opportunities for social interaction and mutual support among patients. The impact of the Basaglia revolution was not limited to Italy; it also inspired mental health reform movements around the world. The deinstitutionalization movement and the shift towards community-based care have influenced mental

health policies in many countries, promoting more compassionate and patient-centric approaches to psychiatric treatment.

## First Day -BRESCIA

The lectures of the first day focused on a) decision making, i.e., the cognitive processes of choosing a course of action or response among various alternatives based on available information, preferences, and goals, and on motor control, i.e., the process by which the brain coordinates and regulates the movements of muscles and limbs to perform purposeful actions; b) Parkinson's disease, i.e., a neurological disease where decision making and motor control are impaired. A lecture on schizophrenia was held on the second day.



## Second Day -BRESCIA

The lectures of the second days focused on an hot topic, i.e., the interplay between emotional stimuli, decision making and motor control. Items laden with affective significance are crucial in decision-making. However, how they influence behavioral responses is still controversial. While some authors propose that emotional stimuli trigger automatic reflex-like behaviors, others suggest that such behaviors are only prompted when relevant to people's goals or result from rapid and implicit value-based decisions. Clarifying this issue is crucial to understanding pathologies characterized by alterations in interpersonal relationships.

### Third Day -BRESCIA

The lectures of the third day focused on the embodied theory of language. Such a theoretical framework that posits that language and cognition are grounded in the sensory and motor experiences of the human body. It suggests that our understanding of language and the meanings of words and phrases are deeply connected to our bodily experiences, actions, and interactions with the environment.



### Fourth Day -BRESCIA

Two labs were visited in the morning:

- 1. Neuromechanics and Motor Control Laboratory.** This visit aimed at demonstrating the potentialities of systems and techniques to identify the activity of populations of spinal motor neurons during voluntary movements in humans from multichannel electromyographic (EMG) signals. Such innovative methodologies seek to provide a deeper understanding of the neural control of human movement.



2. **Neurophysiology Laboratory.** This visit aimed at showing a state-of-the-art eye-tracking system, which can be used in conjunction with a system for presenting stereoscopic stimuli. This equipment makes it possible to measure many physiological parameters of eye movements (e.g., speed, acceleration, amplitude, and vergence) in conditions very similar to real life. Participants had the opportunity to experience this equipment first-hand by playing the experimental subject/researcher role during short recording sessions.



## Fifth Day - TRIESTE

We visited the place where the Basaglia model for reforming mental health care was realized for the first time. In the morning, we were guided through the most significant places of this park, reflecting on the pillars of these new ideas about treating mental health diseases. We visited a permanent exhibition called "The Images of Denunciation" in the morning. This consisted of two photographic reportages which opened up the public debate on asylums by showing that mental health care in Italy (and in many other countries) was characterized by the widespread use of large psychiatric hospitals that were often overcrowded, dehumanizing, and used outdated and oppressive treatment methods, such as seclusion, restraints, and electroconvulsive therapy (ECT). In the afternoon, we were guided through the artworks done by the community of psychiatric patients in the past 40 years. Art therapy is essential to Basaglia's mental health treatment, and his thought still influences modern psychiatric practices. Integrating art therapy into the Basaglia-inspired mental health services exemplified the humanistic and person-centered approach of the movement. By valuing creativity, self-expression, and shared experiences, Basaglia's ideas contributed to a more inclusive and compassionate mental health care model that recognized each individual's uniqueness and dignity. First, we walked around the murals at San Giovanni. Starting with Basaglia's workshops in the 1970s, the park became populated with murals and graffiti outside the walls of the former psychiatric hospital expressing the meaning of the new approach to mental health: "freedom is therapeutic", "obeying is no longer a virtue", "truth is revolutionary". Second, we visited the laboratory of Visual Arts, a laboratory for textile works where recycling of old materials is carried on, and the headquarters of Radio Fragola. These are all examples of mental care as emancipation and not as strictly therapeutic practice.





## **Annexes**

### Agenda

<https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1HZj8Cs98dgOAHUBPS-gPEyL5AZL6BPY>

### Attendance sheet

[https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/17S\\_XcAQRKXjrVgvly3\\_yM73MKsL5DUvi](https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/17S_XcAQRKXjrVgvly3_yM73MKsL5DUvi)

### Photos

[https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1KQW0LNg5h8V2aoyTWGBx0Waf\\_XzgC3tU](https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1KQW0LNg5h8V2aoyTWGBx0Waf_XzgC3tU)

### Certificates

<https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1kMYAFUA9AjYqF0JXVPazX7FvoaRGnzCG>