Exploring European Osteopathic Identity: an Analysis of the Professional Websites of European Osteopathic Organizations

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Aim of the study
To explore the current status of osteopathic identity in Europe
Research Questions

Main research question

How do the European national professional unions & registers (PURs) and the international osteopathic organizations (IOs) currently present osteopathy?
Research Questions

Further research questions

- How is osteopathy developing in Europe, how is osteopathy defined – does osteopathy enjoy a separate identity?
- Is osteopathy in Europe able to perceive itself as an independent form of medicine?
Study design

Systematic, historical and comparative analysis:

✓ of the literature
✓ of websites of 29 PURs (from 19 countries) and 3 IOs (EFO, FORE, WOHO)

✓ last update march 2009
Methodology

Analysis of the literature

Background research questions:

✓ What does the concept identity mean for a profession?

✓ When do we speak of an identity crisis of a profession?

✓ How is a profession defined, and when do we speak of professionalization?

✓ What is the identity of osteopathy?
Methodology

Analysis of the websites

✓ What is the definition of osteopathy?
✓ What do osteopaths do – how do they define themselves?
✓ What is the role of osteopathy in healthcare?
✓ What is the role of osteopathy in society?
✓ What is the current status of the legal recognition of osteopathy as a profession?
✓ What forms of training and academic degrees currently exist for osteopathy or are goals set for the future?
## Methodology

### Analysis of the websites

- ✓ Is there a defined **professional profile or code of practice**?
- ✓ Is there a formulated **ethical or deontological code**?
- ✓ Is there a **public list of osteopaths**?
- ✓ What is stated in the statutes of the PURs and of the IOs – what are the **admission criteria** for members and what **goals** are being pursued?
- ✓ Are there any **special features** of the content or presentation of the website?
Identity refers to a state of unity, continuity and coherence and underlies autonomy in thought and action.

Identity is inconceivable without the setting of boundaries and the formation of oppositions.

There exist identity-constituting features of osteopathy that, in combining them, make up its distinct identity.
Results by Literature

Discussed criteria for an (academic) profession:

- Academic level
- Special expertise/scientific knowledge
- Code of ethics
- Non-profit
- Competence of monopoly
- Autonomy of action
- Self-control through professional associations
- Social function
- State recognition
- Collective value orientation
- Core task / defined scope of practice
Results by Websites

Definition of Osteopathy

97% of the PURs provide a description instead of a short and incisive definition

- 83% describe the osteopathic principles
- 69% characterize osteopathy as manual in practice
- 66% describe osteopathy as a system of diagnosis and treatment
- 55% describe osteopathy as a causative / non-symptomatic treatment
Definition of Osteopathy

- 31% describe osteopathy as a form of medicine or medical in character

  in contrast

- 31% describe osteopathy as a therapeutic method / treatment method (no diagnosis mentioned)

- 21% mention the "osteopathic touch"

- 17% mention the somatic / osteopathic dysfunction
Results by Websites

Definition of Osteopath

- 69% prefer the term osteopath
- No PUR uses the term osteopathic physician or primary health care practitioner
- Only FORE uses both terms: primary health care practitioner and osteopath
- 17% relate the term osteopath to a diploma and/or the “DO”-title
Role in health care

- 24% of PURs and FORE present osteopathy as first-line-medical care
- 24% present osteopathy as complementary to regular medicine
- 45% of PURs describe osteopathy as curative and preventive, 48% show only the curative role
Political recognition of osteopathy

Type of recognition varies, not all PURs give information:

- 7% state full recognition (title protected)
- 7% state recognition as non-conventional medicine
- 3% state recognition as profession, but title not protected
- 7% state recognition as specification for other health professionals
- 24% state no recognition at all
Scholarship and academic level

- Variation in length and requirements on the part-time and full-time training in the different European countries

- All degrees are endeavoured: DO, Bachelor’s and Master’s

- FORE considers the Master’s degree as appropriate

- EFO: BAC/A level, min. 5 years
Results by Websites

Code of practice
- 10% of PURs state a code of practice on their website
- Only FORE provides information in form of documents for downloading

Code of ethics / deontology
- 17% of PURs allow free downloading
List of osteopaths

- Not always called list of osteopaths, also called list of therapists (3% of PURs)
- 7% distinguish between prior occupations
- Titles (DO, BSc, MSc, PhD) are sometimes listed, sometimes titles are unfamiliar
Goals

- 52% set the promotion and awareness of osteopathy among the public as goal
- 48% pursue the goal of political recognition as an independent profession
- 31% promote the “DO” title or osteopathic training at a university with an academic degree

Admission criteria

- 59% require the “DO” title or an academic degree for full membership, and 17% require exclusive activity as an osteopath
Results by Websites

Special features of content

- The websites differ considerably in their form of presenting osteopathy.
- Only a few PURs explain the distinctiveness of osteopathy from other health professions.
Conclusions

- Significant intraprofessional differences exist in the presentation of osteopathy among the PURs and IOs.
- The existence of these differences conflicts with the idea of a collective identity.
- The criteria for becoming an academic profession are currently not sufficiently met.
- Osteopathy is undergoing an identity-crisis in Europe.
Proposals

- A common Professional Profile (Scope of practice) for Europe
- A common educational program with academic level
- The vocational group must commonly decide for its direction as form of medicine or form of therapy
- Common orientation of professional values
Osteopathic Identity?

Thank you for your kind attention!