

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

Wagner C., van Dun P.L.S.¹

¹ Head of Research of Osteopathy, Department Clinical Medicine and Biotechnology, Danube University Krems (Austria)
President of CORPP (Commission for Osteopathic Research, Practice and Promotion, vzw)

Research Questions

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?

Methodology

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 **health care**?
- ✓ 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?

Results by Literature

- ✓ **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 system of diagnosis and treatment
- ✓ 55% describe osteopathy as a causative / non-symptomatic treatment

Results by Websites

Definition of Osteopathy

- ✓ 31% describe osteopathy as 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

Results by Websites

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**

Results by Websites

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

Results by Websites

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

Results by Websites

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

Results by Websites

Goals

- ✓ 52% set the promotion and awareness of osteopathy among the public as goal
- ✓ 48% pursue the goal of political recognition as an independant 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!

