

LAUDATIO

In honor of Professor **Ricardo Antonio Garcia Mira**,
University of La Coruña, Spain, on the occasion of granting the
Doctor Honoris Causa honorary title of Alexandru Ioan Cuza
University.

December 6th 2018

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Laudatio

In honor of Professor Ricardo Antonio Garcia Mira from the University of La Coruña, Spain.

What distinguishes Mr. Ricardo Antonio Garcia Mira, professor at the University of La Coruña and deputy in the Spanish Parliament (Cortes Generales) from other foreign psychologists with whom the Faculty of Psychology and Education Sciences from Alexandru Ioan Cuza University has collaborated since 1990 until today is, undoubtedly, his applicative vocation. Professor Garcia Mira is an expert in applied psychology, proposing, in most of his empirical approaches, to use the methods and results of scientific psychology to solve practical problems. Therefore, the applicative approach is in itself a scientific one, anchored in the scientist-practitioner paradigm, not an incremental one, derived only from practical experience.

Romanian psychology has had a lot to recoup on the theoretical aspects, therefore, our Faculty established, in the past, cordial relations with the brightest theoreticians, such as Serge Moscovici and Willem Doise or, when it comes to pedagogues, Gilbert de Lansheere. Now, at this ceremony, we

want to celebrate and collaborate with one of the most important applied psychology specialists in Europe.

Professor Ricardo Antonio Garcia Mira undertook psychology courses at the University of Santiago de Compostella between 1979 and 1984, and in 1994 he defended his PhD thesis, entitled "Urban Environmental Perception," at the same university, with the honor Cum Laude. From the following year he worked as an associate professor at the University of La Coruña and in 2012 he became *Catedratico de universidad*, the supreme position in the Spanish academic sphere.

The contributions that have brought him recognition are in the fields of applied research as well as the implementation of solutions identified through research. Professor Garcia Mira is a social psychologist, but one who is interested in the possibilities of optimizing relationships among people and their physical environment, whether natural or built. Some important themes are, for example, the predictive models of pro-environmental behavior, the environmental concern and pro-environmental attitudes, sustainable (local) development, social perception of environmental hazards or the assessment of the psychosocial impact of the Prestige disaster.

It is worth discussing the latter topic. The Prestige oil tanker suffered a very serious accident in November 2002, 46 km from Finisterra's Cape in the N-W of Spain. Over 60,000

metric tons of oil were spilled into the ocean, polluting more than 1300 km of the Galician and Cantabric coasts. No technological disaster has triggered more public concern, greater political impact and more press coverage in European history. People were appalled by the severity of the environmental and ecological consequences and by the initial negligence in managing the crisis.

Professor Garcia Mira was then one of the scientists who was noted for his ecological awareness and diligence in examining the relationship between the severely affected natural environment and the human communities. He studied the perceptions and assessments of the impact of the disaster, the attitudes towards the authorities, the attributions of responsibility, the optimism of the population regarding the capacity of the environmental regeneration, etc. In other words, he performed a complex radiography of the critical situation and, based on it, he formulated numerous suggestions for intervention in various scientific articles as well as in numerous public statements.

Sustainability is one of the pillars of Professor Garcia Mira's scientific work. It points to the maintenance of a balance related to economic and social change. Sustainable development, examined by Professor Garcia Mira from many points of view, assumes that the exploitation of resources, the volume and the direction of investment, the orientation of

economic progress and the institutional changes are all in harmony and may enhance the potential for positive evolution of society. In essence, the idea of sustainability was born as a component of corporate ethics, as a response to public discontent over the immense long-term damage (especially to the natural environment) due to the focus on short term profits. Professor Garcia Mira has taken a stand in many texts (some of them book-sized) against those practices that lead to environmental degradation, climate change and overconsumption, arguing for sustainable development.

Undoubtedly, Professor Garcia Mira's vocation of an applied psychologist is best reflected by his participation in many intervention projects. In the context of European projects, his activity is remarkable, probably unique compared to that of many other scholars. Professor Garcia Mira was the coordinator of the European FP7 GLAMURS project "Green Lifestyles, Alternative Models and Upscaling Regional Sustainability" for 2014-2016 (involving 11 universities with funds consisting of 4,995,000 euros and 850,000 euros for the University of La Coruña). He also acted as coordinator of the European project FP7 LOCAW "Low Carbon at Work: Modeling Agents and Organizations to Transition to a Low Carbon Europe" for 2011-2013 (involving 7 universities and 6 organizations) and was a partner in the European Transitional Social Innovation Theory project between 2014-2017 (with a total grant of € 4,939,000

and € 271,000 going to the University of La Coruña). In recent months, his collaboration has been confirmed for two other European projects, this time in the generous and stimulating framework of Horizon 2020: "Connecting Nature. Bringing cities to life, bringing life to cities" that brings together 29 partners from 16 countries and, on the other hand, "Energy transitions and social innovation".

Besides these, there are two more European projects of lesser importance, from which the University of La Coruña had a great deal to gain from. In addition, we have the responsibility to mention the 21 national projects he has coordinated, with funding ranging from 4,000 to 81,000 Euros.

Not only has Professor Garcia Mira done and coordinated many projects, but he has worked on numerous occasions as a project evaluator, contributing to decisions on the allocation of funds. For example, he evaluated projects for the Spanish Evaluation and Prospecting Agency, the Catalan Agency for the Management of University Grants and Research Projects, the Dutch Association for Research in Social Sciences and the Italian Government's Research Department.

Undoubtedly, the value of a researcher is not measured solely by the funding he has attracted for the organization he is a part of; this would be too simple. But perhaps the efficiency of a specialist in applied psychology can be estimated in this

manner. The social interventions preceded by these projects required money, as any scientifically-based social intervention does.

From this point of view, it is understandable that a community that can invest in social interventions is more advanced, more harmonious and more attractive than one that does not make such investments. Equally, we can deduce that an applied researcher who has attracted consistent funding has produced more social benefits than one that has received fewer funds.

Professor Garcia Mira has been involved in social transformation, from activism in various nature conservation organizations, to his acceptance of public positions that allow such formal involvement.

For example, he has always had very good collaboration with the Ministry of Education and Science of Spain as well as with the Government of Galicia and has served as a member of the latter's Research and Development Committee. At the same time, he collaborated with private organizations concerned with the state of the natural environment - for example, Repsol Petroleum.

However, his desire to transform the reality according to his personal and social ideals is best seen in his candidacy and then in his position as a deputy in the Spanish Parliament.

There, he holds the position of spokesperson for the Commission on Climate Change and Ecological Transformation. We must see the position of deputy in the National Assembly as the expression of his need to serve the community but also as an additional possibility to apply the principles of psychology, especially those of environmental psychology.

Of course, the contributions of a researcher are currently counted in the number of articles published in the most prestigious journals. Professor Garcia Mira has published more than 100 papers, most of which are research reports on environmental assessment, environmental attitudes or some methodological issues. The scientific journals in which his papers were published are the most influential in his area of expertise: *Environment and Behavior*, *Sustainability*, *European Review of Applied Psychology*, *Energy Research and Social Science*, *Journal of Environmental Psychology*, *Journal of Applied Psychology*, etc.

Professor Ricardo Garcia Mira is among those researchers who prefer to present their ideas and empirical results through articles published only after they have been evaluated by other researchers in the same field. He does not necessarily believe in communicating scientific ideas through books. However, he is the author or the editor of more than 10 volumes, some of them published by prestigious publishing houses. For example, "Culture, environmental action, and sustainability" was

published by Hogrefe Publishing House in 2003, and "Housing, Space and Quality of Life" by Ashgate Publishing House in 2005. The books, either on paper or in electronic format, handbooks or simple volumes that deepen a field, remain valuable tools for transmitting ideas that can offer distinction and influence on any researcher.

For any member of the modern scientific community, reviewing articles for important journals in his field is one of the most important ways to serve this domain. Professor Garcia Mira is the European editor of the *Journal of Architectural and Planning Research* and a member of the editorial board for the *Journal of Environmental Psychology*, *Psychology*, and *Administración & Ciudadanía*. In equal measure, he is often asked to evaluate articles for the *International Journal of Psychology*, the *European Journal of Social Psychology*, the *Journal of Risk Analysis*, the *European Psychologist*, *Environment and Behavior* and the *European Review of Applied Psychology*.

We did not find a text in the vast list of Professor Ricardo Garcia Mira's publications that he had authored himself exclusively. Furthermore, he has spent more time working on collaborative projects than individual ones, as it is recommended today to any researcher, but for the most part, he does not have individual projects. The exception, obviously, is his doctoral thesis, published in 1995 at the publishing house

from the University of Santiago de Compostella, under the title "Perception of the City". Thereby, all his articles, all his books, all his research, generated by his work in different projects, are co-authored with other researchers.

Co-authoring is one of the most frequent form of generating scientific knowledge and publishing in this area. Professor Garcia Mira surely does not conceive scientific research other than what is accomplished in collaboration. The participation in research teams significantly amplifies the productivity of the researcher, the quality and quantity of the manuscripts (actually, from the group in which one is working) and also enhances the satisfaction of scientific work. At the same time, we must not forget that a successful author/co-author, like Professor Garcia Mira, is a champion when it comes to group loyalty as well as accomplished commitments concerning his own research tasks, as part of the shared project. Success does not mean only one person's contribution but also the coordination of research efforts in the discharge of their responsibilities.

Professor Ricardo Garcia Mira seems to have a real knack for working with other researchers, who also have expertise in other areas than Psychology, for a shared purpose. He had the initiative of gathering a research team in his very first year as a teacher. Grupo de Investigación Persona-Ambiente was founded in 1995, having in its componse young psychology

researchers from La Coruña University but also senior researchers, specialists in psychology, methodology, geography, architecture, economy, pedagogy from the same university, including from Santiago de Compostella University and Vigo University. This research group got involved in applied research in communities from psychology and environmental psychology; it got financed from public and private institutions and worked in collaboration with many research groups and institutes from Spain and Europe. As we can see from its publications, the group's fundamental themes are sustainability, social communication, ecological education and social representation on community problems. We praise here the research group activity conducted by Professor Ricardo Garcia Mira, because, in a way, the title we award today also belongs to the research team enhanced by the ideal of applying psychology on behalf of the community.

But the whole career of Professor Garcia Mira is not only related to the collaboration with the researchers from the same university and the nearby universities; it is also amplified and fulfilled through international collaborations. The fundamental frame for the participations in the international events of this profession and domain was IAPS - International Association of People-Environment Studies. IAPS is a worldwide forum of researchers interested in the relationship among individuals and natural or artificially built environments, such as psychologists,

geographers, biologists, education experts, agronomists, architects, economists, urban planners, engineers etc. However, many of the themes discussed in IAPS conferences (which take place once every two years) mirror, without a doubt, concerns regarding environmental psychology: the significance of built spaces, attachment theories concerning spaces, place identity, the perception of natural disasters, urban and landscape design, space cognition, building evaluation, territoriality, crowd and privacy etc. Professor Garcia Mina got close, during the '90s, to this international professional association and ended up editing its quarterly publication, the *IAPS Bulletin*. In 2004, the organization of the IAPS conference, from La Coruña University, which gathered 400 participants, was a real success. Between 2014 and 2018, Professor Garcia acted as president of this prestigious association, which gathers researchers from various parts of the world – from Pakistan to Chile and from Russia to South Africa and Australia. This choice was, of course, the acknowledgment of Professor Garcia's merits and a materialization of the popularity and appreciation amongst his professional fellows.

His view on the importance of the connections among researchers concerning research efficacy determined Professor Ricardo Garcia Mira to visit more universities and establish relations with many researchers from the field of environmental psychology. Thus, he was an invited researcher and professor at

the University of Surrey, the University of Mexico City, the University of Bath, University of Groningen, University of Tallin, University of Fortalezza, University “La Sapienza” of Rome, University of Texas, University “Rene Descartes” from Paris, and the list goes on, setting out a path of shared knowledge and solidarity among the researchers who have similar concerns. On this path, there are also two Romanian universities, West University of Timișoara and Alexandru Ioan Cuza University (of) from Iași. In these two prestigious academic centers, starting with 2004, Professor Ricardo Garcia Mira initiated collaboration with local researchers and made several friends. Most importantly, he argues for his field, for its empirical richness and applied character. Therefore, at this present moment, of all the Romanian universities, only those from Iași and Timișoara teach environmental psychology classes.

Today, we express our grateful feelings toward Professor Garcia Mira, for the contributions he has made on developing the field of environmental psychology in Romania. We express our admiration for all his work and for the vocation of scientific collaborations, for the applied approach and preference for interventional projects, for being an ambassador of his own research domain. We have the honorable duty to award Professor Ricardo Antonio Garcia Mira the title of Doctor Honoris Causa of Alexandru Ioan Cuza University of Iași.

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Iași, December 6th 2018