



## **19th ENOTHE Annual Meeting 2013 – York, United Kingdom**

### **Hanneke van Bruggen Lecture Sarah Kantartzis**

#### **“The power of collective occupation and occupational therapy: supporting the social fabric in Europe today”**

Traditionally occupational therapy has focused on individuals, their occupations, and the effect of those occupations on each person. However, this primarily individualistic perspective is being challenged, both through exploration of the impact of social structures and institutions on occupation, but also through recognition of the essentially social and interdependent nature of peoples' occupation. Collective occupation, the occupation that emerges and takes place amongst and across groups, communities and even populations is beginning to be explored (Frogelberg & Frauworth, 2010; Ramugondon & Kronenberg, 2013), and is important not only because it reflects our experience of everyday life, but also because of its power. Collective occupation is public occupation, the site of public action, essential for the construction and maintenance of the social fabric. It can contribute to social cohesion, coherence and resilience, particularly important at this time of crisis in Europe. However, collective occupation can alternatively restrict, exclude and discriminate, while impoverished collective occupation implies that people are lacking a space for public action and participation.

Collective occupation will be introduced through details of a study that explored occupation in a Greek town. The various forms of occupation in this community will be discussed, from daily informal encounters, engagement in local organisations and associations, to community celebrations. These illustrate the nature of collective occupations, the conditions which contributed to their maintenance and the fundamental relationship of collective occupation to the social fabric. The possibilities as well as the threats afforded by the strong social fabric will be explored.

This will be followed by an exploration of how collective occupation can be part of our own lives, our practice and our education, with consideration of some current examples from throughout Europe, including on-line discussion forums, the ELSiTO group and ENOTHE itself.

In maintaining a focus on the individual we are at risk of ignoring both the essentially social nature of everyday life, but also the importance of collective occupation as a space where people act together. It is necessary that we recognise the important role that occupational therapy can have in developing and maintaining a strong social fabric through the power of collective occupation.