

“Ten minutes, no slides”

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Dear Valerie (Belton, President of EURO), dear Paolo (Toth, Chairman of the EDSM-2009 Jury), dear organizers and friends of EURO-2009!

My wife and I planned to drift slowly through Northern Germany on our way from Copenhagen to Bonn. A peaceful trip not disturbed by paperwork or the like was envisaged, but, on the day before our departure, some alarming instructions were received from Paolo: “As you know, many activities must be performed during the Opening Session, so we have only 15 minutes. First, Valerie will present the new Award, then I will introduce you as the winner, and you will conclude with a short talk (about ten minutes, no slides).” Answer: “Since no time at all was expected for even an ultra-short speech-of-thanks, “about ten minutes” is a generous offer. “No slides”, nothing to look at, words-words-words instead: well, it is not my usual style but ... “.

A peaceful afternoon in *Unkel*, a lovely little village on the eastern bank of the Rhine, once inhabited by former chancellors Konrad Adenauer and Willy Brandt; paper and pencil, copies of some of my earlier writings, and, above all, inspiration from the sweet waitress in “Gästehaus Korf” who repeatedly served glasses of chilled *Riesling*: these were the ingredients when an attempt to observe Paolo’s order eventually was made.

Steven Vajda, the first to be thanked ...

Most of you ought to be familiar with *An Annotated Timeline of Operations Research*, edited by Saul Gass and Arjang Assad, a delightful volume which appeared in 2005. The same team of editors have at present a companion volume in preparation. It is tentatively titled *Profiles in Operations Research* with the aim of presenting profiles of about 45 of the pioneers and leading scholars of our field.

I have contributed a chapter. Here are some excerpts:

“Known as the British father of linear programming, Steven Vajda was a mathematician, educator, mentor, one of mathematical programming’s true pioneers, and the person who introduced linear programming (LP) to both Europe and Asia.

Steven’s book, *Theory of Games and Linear Programming* (Vajda, 1956), also translated into German, French, Japanese, and Russian, was the first book to present a systematic and comprehensive account of matrix games and linear programming. It was also the first book on LP published outside the U.S.A. and the second one worldwide. To many in Europe and Asia, this text was the first introduction to a promising new area and a revelation of the fact that matrix games and LP were so intimately interrelated. It is therefore Steven who rightly should be credited for having spread the message to these two continents.”.

As to his more personal attributes of *mentor and friend* I quote:

“My life as an OR worker embarks from the early years (1958-64) during which I was affiliated with *Regnecentralen*, The Danish Institute of Computing Machinery, where, literally, Danish datalogy was born. The climate around the first digital computer in Denmark and its users was appealing in every conceivable respect. Even an OR division materialized. From conceptually simple scenario analyses we moved on via linear programming and were soon spellbound by the magic of the computationally intractable integers.

The prime influence of Steven’s second textbook, *Mathematical Programming* (Vajda, 1961), purchased for Regnecentralen's library, cannot be overrated in this context. It was instrumental when the above-mentioned OR division was created, and, *sans comparaison*, our key reference during these first years of development. Not only did it introduce the various families of optimization problems and the algorithmic tools employed for their solution, but also the scope and limitations of mathematical programming as a means for investigating managerial and other decision problems via prescriptive models.

These directions were further pursued in my Ph.D. work. The most important event of that period was a 1966 NATO Summer School held in Italy. An invited speaker was awaited with particular anticipation, a certain Professor S. Vajda whose visions and thought provoking viewpoints in general left a strong impression on all those present.”.

Considered as a whole, this Summer School was a most fortunate experience for a young Ph.D. student, supervised by a very stochastic professor whose ideas were difficult to follow. The then most pressing question “which road to take?” here found a conclusive answer.

Steven was thus the person who, indirectly via his writings and later directly, introduced me to OR. He was 91 years of age when we met again at a conference in Hungary. As a consequence of our talks on “what Torricelli actually did in 1645” I happened – strangely enough – to be the only person who ever has co-authored a paper with him. (Krarup and Vajda, 1997) came out two years after he passed away.

DAPS Society ... and EURO

Together with Staszek Walukiewicz, Professor of Poland, and Past Rector of the Warsaw Business School, I founded in 1978 the so-called *DAPS Society* as the formal framework for a series of European OR seminars. Aiming at the next generation, the DAPS Society can somehow be viewed as a forerunner of the EURO Summer Institutes which, at the initiative of Professor J.P. Brans, Past President of EURO, were launched in 1984.

The DAPS Society is still alive: its next meeting will be in August this year. This activity has thus spanned 31 years so far, a span of time which is only beaten by my engagement in EURO. I was not around on the famous day of 29th January 1975 when EURO was founded but the stage was entered a few months later when the first editorial board meeting of EJOR was held in Paris.

34 years so far with EURO! There have been golden moments along the way which now are among my fond memories, but also moments of blood, toil, tears, and sweat, notably around 1989-90. The situation is accounted for in (Krarup, 1995):

“*Money, money, money*: Enthusiasm, good will, and the dedication of many are important ingredients to run an association like EURO, but are not enough. With the surplus made at the EURO-K conferences as the only source of income, EURO was at one time financially vulnerable. To enable EURO to carry out a wider range of

activities in support of its objectives, different options for raising additional income were permanently on the agenda of several Executive Committee (EC) meetings. It appeared quite unrealistic to increase the fees for conferences or to levy a sufficiently large annual subscription on member societies. A third possibility was then to investigate whether EURO could benefit financially from the commercial value of EJOR, published by Elsevier.

EURO-EJOR-Elsevier relations were by far the most difficult issue dealt with during my presidency. After several iterations, an agreement between Elsevier and EURO, valid for ten years, was eventually signed in March 1990.”.

A female president of EURO?

EURO’s 20th anniversary was celebrated in conjunction with EURO XIV (Jerusalem, 1995). At the Closing Session, EURO’s founding father and first president, H.-J. Zimmermann, gave an account on the developments that eventually led to the establishment of our Association. Furthermore, the indefatigable *EURO-nist*, the originator of several EURO instruments and our fourth president, J.P. Brans, covered the intervening 20 years. The concluding talk of this presidential trilogy – ‘The Prospected Future’ - was delegated to me.

It happened that a good question was raised during the presidents’ luncheon at that meeting: when will EURO have a *female* president? A kind of an answer is provided in (Krarup, 1995):

“Once upon a time, I enjoyed two years of compulsory military service in a purely male environment. Five years were spent with semi-annual day-long meetings assembling men only at NATO’s Special Programme Panel for Systems Science. The large class rooms at the Technical University of Denmark were in 1956 flooded with up to 500 male students and 3 girls. 20-25 years ago, my department at University of Copenhagen had about 30% female students as opposed to nowadays where computer science mainly seems to attract male computer freaks. On the other hand, it offers some consolation that my medical doctor, my dentist, our local mayor, and my employer – well known as H.M. Queen Margaret II – do all belong to the opposite sex.

It is my firm conviction that the most stimulating working climate under almost all circumstances is achieved via sexually *mixed groups*. EURO is no exception in this respect. We have had a female secretary, several female vice presidents, and female organizers of various EURO events. It should not be overly difficult to identify a qualified, female president. Prediction: this will happen soon.”.

This prophecy has indeed come true. Before Valerie Belton took office, however, EURO was in the hands of Martine Labbé who, amongst others, published a EURO Newsletter three years ago (Labbé, 2006):

“I now would like to propose that EURO creates a new prize to be awarded for recognition of distinguished service to EURO and the profession. This kind of activity is indeed of paramount importance for the recognition of the OR field in Europe and, to my opinion, it is not enough and well appreciated. To create such a prize would be an important encouragement to all those who dedicate time and energy to the service mission.”.

This proposal was approved by the EURO Council at its Reykjavik-meeting in July 2006.

In closing ...

Steven and Martine made my day by paving the road towards this 6th July 2009 but I also wish to express my sincere gratitude to those who have deemed me worthy of this award and submitted a nomination to the Jury. The Jury itself should not be neglected either: thank you for having reached a unanimous decision.

Also a word of appreciation seems in place to all those with whom I have cooperated over the years. Most of us were somewhere in our late thirties by the time when EURO was founded. We were enthusiastic about the promotion of a new field; we worked hard but were rewarded by witnessing a EURO expanding its activities and growing in maturity. A happy side effect of these endeavours is the lasting friendships that evolved among many of us and often spread to include our families as well. No doubt, this is what will remain most precious to me when everything else is forgotten.

There is in this context a single personality whose name I cannot omit; a kind of a *primus inter pares* to whom I owe a lot: J. Pierre Brans, in whose footprints I literally have walked during our visits over 34 years to almost every corner of EURO.

“Ten minutes, no slides”: high time to close. Perhaps the last, and partially borrowed sentence can serve as summary + conclusion: *Ich bin kein Berliner, auch kein Bonner – aber vielleicht ein EURO-er!*

Acknowledgment

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Photos:

- 1) The yard of *Gästehaus Korf* in Unkel.



- 2) The moment when the *real* award was presented.


