EURO faces 40

An inside look at the past, present and future of the Association of European Operational Research Societies.

Established in 1975, EURO (Association of European Operational Research Societies) continues to promote operational research internationally and support its member societies. EURO was the first regional grouping of IFORS (International Federation of Operational Research) and founded because it was considered that more could be done to improve communication and cooperation on a European level. At that time, a number of established national operational research societies across Europe supported the formalization of a regional grouping, and the draft agreement was signed by representatives from Belgium, Denmark, Finland, Germany, Great Britain, Greece, Ireland, Netherlands, Sweden and Switzerland. Today, EURO has 30 national society members including a small number outside of the European Union.

By Gerhard Wäscher and Sarah Fores
From the beginning, founding members agreed that EURO should establish a journal, the *European Journal of Operational Research (EJOR)*. The first volume was published in 1977 and consisted of six issues published bimonthly and totaling 420 pages. Its reputation and quality have continued to grow. Today, the annual volume of *EJOR* is approximately 6,000 pages spread over 24 issues. The journal consistently has a high impact factor and is ranked among the top O.R. journals internationally. In 2011, EURO established three new journals — *EURO Journal on Transportation and Logistics*, *EURO Journal on Computational Optimization* and *EURO Journal on Decision Processes* — which would complement *EJOR* and focus on more specialized areas of operational research.

In July 2012, EURO agreed to set up a series of advanced tutorials to be a useful resource on particular topic areas within operational research, and which would benefit new research students or individuals who wish to find out more about a particular specialism. Although still in its early stages, the idea is strongly supported and will be a unique opportunity for specialists to contribute to an international project, which will be of importance to future generations.

As noted above, communication was particularly difficult in the mid-1970s, but with advances in technology it is now much easier for individuals and groups to successfully set up different ways of collaborating and making announcements. Up until 10 years ago, EURO edited and distributed, by post, a paper-based bulletin. Since March 2013 EURO has, instead, distributed an electronic newsletter, approximately monthly, to more than 22,000 registered subscribers both within and outside the EURO region. The EURO website (http://www.euro-online.org/) contains information on current activities and also includes a forum on which announcements such as job opportunities and publications can be posted. EURO also has a Twitter account (EUREntine_News) and maintains a LinkedIn interest group.

**EURO Conferences**

The first EURO conference was held in Brussels in January 1975 and attracted around 500 participants. Following its success, a second conference was held in Stockholm in 1976. In 1977, EURO co-sponsored the TIMS (Institute of Management Science) XIII international meeting, held in Athens, Greece. The IFORS triennial conference was held in 1978 and thereafter EURO conferences have been arranged for the interim two years between IFORS conferences. The EURO conferences are normally held in early July.

The conferences attract exceptional plenary, semi-plenary and tutorial speakers, and the parallel sessions are now organized by streams. Stream organizers have been very successful in attracting participants, and the format allows more cohesion within the diverse range of topics covered by the whole conference.

In 2007, conference participation exceeded 2,000. At the most recent joint conference with INFORMS, held in Rome in July 2012, the number of attendees exceeded 3,500. As one of the initial instruments of EURO, conferences and their growth in participation demonstrates the benefits this regional grouping can bring.

In addition to the main conferences, EURO "mini conferences" were initiated in 1984 with...
the objective of assembling a limited number of specialists around a specific theme. To date, 30 successful EURO mini conferences have been held with two planned for 2014— one on “Optimization in the Natural Sciences” and another on “Improving Healthcare.” A 2015 mini conference on “Stochastic Programming and Energy Applications” is also planned.

**Working Groups & Awards**
EURO working groups are successful instruments as these allow collaborative work to be carried out in both established and new topics within operational research. There are currently 30 working groups, and each operates in the most appropriate way for them. For example, they organize sessions in conferences, publish feature issues in leading operational research journals and organize conferences or seminars. A major reason for their success lies with the EURO working group coordinators and their personal effort to motivate and organize the activities of their respective groups.

EURO offers a number of awards that are usually presented at EURO conferences. The EURO Gold Medal is the highest distinction within operational research in Europe and was awarded for the first time to Hans-Jürgen Zimmermann in 1985. EURO also presents a Distinguished Service Medal Award in recognition of service to the Association of European Operational Research Societies (EURO) and to the profession of operational Research. Submissions are invited for the EURO Doctoral Dissertation Award and EURO Excellence in Practice Award. The latter is currently sponsored by IBM.

For both of these awards a jury selects finalists who present their work in a special session at a EURO conference, and the winners are announced at the closing session. The most recent annual EURO awards, presented for the first time in 2012, are for the best papers published by *EJOR*. The best survey paper, best application paper and best theory/methodology paper are selected by a jury, and the winners are formally announced at the closing session of either a EURO or IFORS conference.

**Education Initiatives**
Education and the promotion of young researchers is an important area of interest for EURO and one in which it can both support the needs of member societies and share best practices. In 1984, EURO organized the first Summer Institute in Brussels, on Location Theory. The Summer Institutes, and subsequently Winter Institutes, are aimed at early stage researchers and considered an important instrument in motivating and educating future generations of operational researchers. Bids, focused on a particular subject, are requested from national societies. Around 25 early stage researchers meet for about two weeks and discuss an unpublished paper with a small number of specially invited senior experts in the field.

The 30th and 31st Summer Institutes, on “O.R. in Agriculture and Agrifood Industry” and on “Operational Research Applied to Health in a Modern World,” are planned for later this year. Also, a Summer Institute to be held in Hungary in June 2015 on “Online Optimization” was recently approved.

The EURO Ph.D. Schools, an initiative proposed and approved in 2012, is an instrument established to encourage the organization of postgraduate education initiatives for Ph.D. students under a school format. The first EURO Ph.D. School on Multicriteria Decision Making with Mathematical Programming was successfully held in February 2014, and it is anticipated that this will be a further important initiative, which will benefit early stage researchers.

**Continued Success**
EURO maintains links with IFORS and other O.R. organizations including INFORMS and ALIO (South America). It also continues to set up collaborations with other regional partners such as with China. These wider collaborations are vital in ensuring that EURO's mission of promoting operational research is prioritized.

As EURO approaches its 40th anniversary it clearly remains successful and continues to adapt to address the needs of its members and the wider O.R. community. With only a small team of individuals who run the day-to-day operations, its success is attributed to the continued commitment and enthusiasm of individual members, national society members and a dedicated executive committee and support team.