

How Can We in CSI Get More Benefit from our IFIP Links?

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IFIP Congresses

I had attended several **Spring Joint Computer Conferences in the USA** in the 1960s, but my first IFIP Congress was in 1971 at Ljubljana, where there were just handful of Indians (the others I remember were Dr. S. Ramani (then at NCST), Dr. M. V. Pitke (of TIFR/CDOT), and the Managing Director of Hindustan Teleprinters). I realised there that IFIP meetings took place at three levels, that of the inner group, of organisers and committee-men, that of the well-known speakers, and the rest. This Congress with over 2000 attending, was to me far less useful than the Jerusalem Conference on Information Technology held a week earlier with only 200 (60 foreign participants).

It was impossible to attend even a third of the sessions at **IFIP71**, and it was soon clear that most of the speakers really intended to read their papers, making it virtually certain that the communication would be minimal. Only the Americans had thought out the presentation angle and brought full Sets of OH transparencies. It also became clear that in an international organisation like IFIP, protocol demanded that even plenary session time be allocated diplomatically, which tended to lower the effectiveness of sessions.

To make up for this, the local organising committee did a very fine job on hospitality, and at the very large evening gatherings one could meet people from many parts of the world and create useful links.

The 1974 Congress at Stockholm was much more interesting; by then I knew some of the insiders and got to meet more interesting people. I attended fewer sessions and spent more time in the lobbies.

My conclusion is that an *IFIP Congress should never be attended for the first time, by an outsider*. It then becomes only a tourist outing. The travel money would be much better spent on purchasing copies of the Proceedings.

IFIP TC-8

I have been keeping in close touch with **TC-8** since 1979, even though I am no longer CSI's official nominee to TC-8. One of the nice things about TCs is that one can remain a friend on the mailing list. Most of the really active TC members are in Europe where they meet each other several times a year. We cannot hope to enter this charmed circle. (Until our P&T permit a Telenet node in India, even the most favoured IIT Professors cannot leave or receive messages on BITNET or EDUNET.) How then can we get some benefit from IFIP TCs for CSI, for Informatics in India? The members of the Technical Committees tend to stay for a decade or more, they are usually professors or others involved in R&D work in the subject. Consequently if one gets them to speak professionally to an Indian audience, something is gained.

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One example of how TC-8 was used constructively by a country was in 1974 in Australia, where a meeting of TC-8 was scheduled in Sydney. Simultaneously the ACS organised a 3-day Workshop on **Information Systems**. There were about 150 paying participants. By judicious hudgetting, the ACS could make a contribution to the travel and cover the hotel costs of all the TC-8 members, plus pay an adequate fee to all the invited speakers. I would definitely suggest this is the best mode of "hosting" an IFIP gathering and learning something at the same time. It is not necessary that all the speakers be currently members of the TC concerned. If they are any good, they would be known personally anyway. Further more, full reimbursement of travel costs is also not essential, though it is desirable.

There were many discussions on holding a meeting on '**Informatics in Developing Countries**' while I was in TC-8, but neither could TC-8 underwrite the cost, nor were there enough LDC members in TC-8 to take it up seriously. (Since I left TC-8, such a meeting has twice been scheduled in India, but not yet held!).

The more fundamental question is, of course, WHY hold this meeting? Who will benefit? Unless the Indian informatics industry has products to sell to other LDC participants (or to whoever attends the meeting) there would be little economic gain in return for all the effort put in. We have already said that relatively little substantive is learnt at such 'international' gatherings. With luck a few useful contacts are made, a few new friends. I would suggest that a very hard-headed cost-benefit analysis be made before any such meetings are in fact held. I believe India is now long past the stage of growth where silk-sari-clad hostesses must shower gifts on the foreign participants and we take them to see the Taj Mahal, in order to make them feel that the Organising Committee was doing its work. The purpose should not be to warm our hearts and to give "them" a nice holiday, hut rather to enable a cross section (if Indian teachers and practitioners of informatics to learn from (a few selected?) overseas specialists and / or to enable Indian industry to develop its potential markets.

Note: Prof. J. G. Krishnayya, as CSI Representative on TC-9, attended the **TC-9** Meeting held at the Systems Research Institute, Warsaw (Poland) – June 4-5, 2005. Again with three exceptions, all the participants were European. There were three US-based persons there, one an important organisation-man (President of the IEEE Computers Society) with good insights, one an informatics historian, and the last a Nigerian professor, head of the WG 9.4 (Informatics in Developing Countries). None of the insights expressed above need be changed as a result of this visit to Warsaw.