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The very first studies in multicriteria analysis appeared in the sixties and they rapidly spread all over the world, involving more and more researchers and practitioners. After a very short time, a number of results of primary importance were obtained, and new extremely valuable paths of research were opened up.

As the most interesting of these studies were spread up, the methods and problems of multicriteria analysis began to attract more and more attention from ever-widening range of fields. Specialist groups and scientific societies of international experts were formed (for example EURO Working Group on Multicriteria Decision Aid, Special Interest Group on MCDM, International Society on Multiple Criteria Decision Making). These groups have continued to meet regularly, producing a large mass of results, interesting from methodological and operational points of view.

The most significant example in this sense is represented by the EURO Working Group on Multicriteria Decision Aid, which, under the guide of Bernard Roy organized regularly, twice a year, meetings for more than 25 years (the 50th meeting that reported the goal of 25 years of fruitful activity was held in Cerisy last September).

Since the first years of activity in the field of multicriteria analysis a group of well known European and North American scientists (the "fathers": B. Roy, Ph Vincke, S. Zionts, Ö) and a number of young researchers (the "pioneers": E. Jacquert-Lagrèze, J. Spronk, J. Fichet, G. Colson, D. Bouyssou, A. Ostanello, B. Matarazzo, Ö) perceived the opportunity to ensure the continuity and the empowerment of their work in these studies, involving also people from the technical and the professional world. With the purpose of promoting the diffusion of the potentialities of the multicriteria approach as valuable supporting instruments in decision-making, they decided to organize, gradually, an International Summer School on Multicriteria Decision Aid: Methods, Applications and Software.

This was the first idea to launch an advanced course in multicriteria analysis, in the form of an international Summer School each two years. This idea was enthusiastically received from the whole community of people involved in this field, with the following main objectives:

- to give a complete and up-to-date picture of multiple criteria problems, methods and software;
- to spread results of the most recent methodological and practical research;
- to encourage contacts and friendliness and to promote scientific cooperation between researchers from different countries and of different education and background;
- to create an important occasion to ensure that new people could enter in the world of multicriteria analysis, since the improvement of the quality of a research field is strongly linked to contributions of young people;
- to promote the implementation of multicriteria approach in real-life decision problems;
- to give each participant the opportunity to fruitfully discuss real specific problems, to the great advantage of the experts and of the scientists, in order to improve their future cooperation;
- to organize small group of participants for case study discussions, in order to really understand how to rightly implement the methods and techniques suggested, to evaluate the available software, and to critically compare them and to discuss about their validation.

In order to achieve as close as possible these objectives, the first and other Summer Schools were organized as residential courses, to render as easy as possible the contacts between teachers and participants, to create numerous opportunities for useful informal debates in a friendly atmosphere (for example, I remember the very stimulating discussions at the "swimming pool class room" during the first Summer School). All participants showed enormous interest to the School, working continuously, with enthusiasm and attending all the lectures; often, they also asked the organizers to arrange for "supplementary sessions" in order to discuss further specific aspects, establishing a real and immediate "family" atmosphere, the same hoped by the organizers. The first School took place in 1983, in Acireale-Catania, Sicily (Italy) and was organised by B. Matarazzo, with the help of J. Spronk. It was attended by almost 40 participants from industry, universities and research institutions from different countries. The teaching staff consisted of 25 instructors and their lectures were later collected in the book "Multiple Criteria Decision Methods and Application" (Fandel and Spronk, eds.), Springer-Verlag, 1985.

At the end of this course, both speakers and participants expressed their desire for a periodic repetition of the initiative. Effectively, the second school took place in 1985, in Namur (Belgium). In 1986, a "permanent committee" was set up in order to contact potential organisers of Schools, help them to define the program and to obtain some funds and ensure the continuity of this activity. The following Schools were organised in 1988 in Lisbon (Portugal), in 1991 in Québec City (Canada), in 1994 in Chania (Crete) and in 1997 in Turku (Finland).

The next Summer School will be organized in Acireale-Catania again, June 26th July 7th, by B. Matarazzo and S. Greco, as a residential course in the same hotel, situated in a small bay of the Ionian sea, where the first one was hold (come back to the origin!). A lot of the "fathers" and "pioneers" of multicriteria analysis accepted the invitation to have lectures during the "First Summer School of the new millenium". But also some well known researchers of the "new generation" will teach important subjects. The philosophy and the main objectives of this new Summer School are the same. But, of course, there is a long and consolidated successful tradition behind it, that can guarantee the scientific and the quality level of the next edition. In this sense, among the many strength points of the Summer School, I like to remember the following two: the very well founded relationships of friendliness and scientific cooperation among the organizers and the lecturers, and the quality guaranteed by the control of an International Committee. I hope that these specific features could in a short time give the possibility of a formal recognition of our Summer Schools within the credit system of the new organization of the European universities.

I believe that a lot of the participants of the next Summer School will be able to reach the same success achieved by people that attended the previous editions and that in a few years these "young boys" of multicriteria, speaking one another and to "new generations" of researchers and practitioners, will always remember this Summer School saying: me too attended that, when I met my colleague (now a well known scientist) at those times participant Ö

Finally, I would like to propose some reflections about motivations for participation to the next Summer School.

Thus, what are the reasons of a summer school at the beginning of the new millenium?

I think that there are some reasons which are common to each summer school but that have in this moment a special flavor. I suggest only two examples in this sense:

1. new theories and methodologies and new results are continuously proposed and therefore a summer school should take into account these advances. With respect to this summer school, this means some time dedicated to some emerging themes like robustness analysis and rough set analysis and some more time and a new approach dedicated to some other themes, always considered in the previous summer schools, but now approached in a new perspective: this is the case of fuzzy sets
2. many applications are continuously performed and new domains are explored with the methodologies of multicriteria analysis with very successful results. Each summer school should transmit the main ideas and concepts on which these applications are based. With respect to this summer school, this aspect will be considered by devoting regular sessions during the whole school to several case studies analysis.

I think, however, that for this summer school, which is the first of the new millennium, there are some more specific reasons. I think that we are living a revolution which shall modify our way of life. I refer to new technologies and the new economy, to internet and to the information technology. Thus, we need to rethink the basis of multicriteria analysis taking into account these deep modifications of our society. Of course, this reflection is at the very beginning, perhaps it would be better to say that it should be begun. Therefore, you cannot find some specific lectures in the summer school about these evolution of our society. However, we are sure that none of the teachers of the Summer School in their lectures shall prescind from these themes. Several times, each lecturer, motivated by some questions of the students, could propose his/her first ideas on the subject. Moreover, we are sure that starting form this Summer School probably many teachers and surely all the participants shall start their reflections about these new themes which will become basic subject in next summer schools. Within some years, multicriteria analysis will have tools and methodologies to deal with the nowadays modifications of our society and I hope that some of these will be originated by discussions during the next Summer School. In this sense this school is not only the first of the new millennium but overall the first of a new era.

To conclude, I would say to all the young researchers in multicriteria decision analysis wishing to be the pioneers of this new era: "The gold rush is starting from the next summer school in Acireale-Catania. You cannot miss this occasion!"