

## Internet Experiences: Sailboats in the Wind

Following Ashley Goldsworthy's and Dick Tanaka's letters [ ref. <http://www.ifip.or.at/mail/msg00185.html> ] in response to my mail about the 30<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of TC6 another note came from past president Pierre Bobillier:

Date: Mon, 28 Oct 2002 09:37:05 +0100  
From: Prof P-A Bobillier  
Subject: Re: [IFIP] TC 6 - A Sailboat in the Wind (contd.)

Dear Plamen,

I remember my first experience in computer connection between Switzerland and New-York. It is so long ago that I cannot indicate a real date. This was an heroic time! We gathered with a Zurich colleague in Bern (Radio Suisse in Bern was responsible for the international PTT lines) planning to establish a first computer connection with New-York and we had no experience at all with HW or SW to be used.

After some hours of trials and telephone calls with our colleagues in NY: we had to use a separate line for voice (and the cost at that time was 4.30 Swfr/minute), we "succeeded" to get a message from NY: "Hello Switzerland" and the connection was cut. No way to reconnect so that we returned home (respectively Zurich and Geneva). We got some days later the info that the transatlantic cable had been cut.

We repeated the trial about two weeks later, succeeded to exchange two or three messages and the line was cut. Believe it or not but the transatlantic cable had been cut again. Call this curse or any other name but this was extremely frustrating. At that time I thought that it would still take a long time before we could use such connections reliably. I am glad to see that I was wrong.

Best regards,  
Pierre

Pierre's message made me reminisce of my first experience with email and the Internet. It was in early 1989 for sure (perhaps end of 1988) that I was on email. This was made possible via the International Foundation for the Survival and Development of Humanity (IFSDH). The central offices were in Moscow and Washington D.C.; there were also offices in Sofia, Stockholm and Munich. The Foundation itself was constituted by high level political and public figures from the then USSR (Evgueni Velihov, Andrei Saharov,.... M. Gorbatchev was personally involved in some of the activities), the USA (Robert MacNamara, Father Ted Hesburgh, Susan Eisenhower, John Sculley,...) and other personalities of high international standing from a number of countries.

The (then) IFIP President and President of the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences, Academician Blagovest Sendov, was a member of the Board of Directors of IFSDH and was a co-chair of their Committee on Education along with John Sculley. When the Sofia IFSDH Office was opened I

became its Executive Director. We supported IFSDH activities in the areas of the environment, education and governance. All the international contacts, coordination and evaluation were carried out by email.

The IFSDH Board Members were given a Mac by John Sculley, the Apple CEO, and were interconnected by email as part of a project with a gateway known as sfmt (San Francisco-Moscow Teleport). Later, this evolved into a project associated with IGC (Institute for Global Communications) and APC (Association for Progressive Communications). Reliable contacts between East and West were then of primary importance and email was greatly encouraged by the Foundation.

The computer system was first installed in Blagovest's office as President of the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences and I operated it. I had Blago's agreement to go in his office at all times to send/receive emails. Soon, I was using it so much that I was sitting on his desk more than he was ☺ . We agreed to move it to my office for the sake of convenience.



**From l. to right:** P. Nedkov, R. McNamara, Rev. T. Hesburgh, J. Sculley and Amb. W. G. Miller in the Kremlin after an IFSDH meeting with Michail Gorbachev in January 1991

The IFSDH Committee on Education had considered some fantastic projects to bring literacy and knowledge to all parts of the world. One of these projects envisaged a system of satellites in Earth's orbit to beam educational information in the major world languages on various subjects at all levels. The idea was to have cheap receivers made and distributed so that children, teenagers and adults could receive education no matter where they are.

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In September 1989, I was appointed IFIP Contracts Officer. As such, I aimed to do as much IFIP business as possible via email. Recently, I checked the 1989, 1990 and 1991 IFIP Bulletins to see who was on email then. The first email addresses listed in an IFIP Bulletin were in the March 1989 issue. Only 5 GA members had ref. to an email ID:

- W. Brauer (DE)
- M. Tienari (FI)
- A. Alvarez (ES)
- K. Bauknecht (CH)
- D. Khakhar (SE)

In the March 1990 issue 5 more were added:

B. Sendov (BG)  
H. Funk (US)  
A. Verrijn-Stuart (individual member and PC Chair)  
+ the representatives of CLEI and IMIA

and in the October 1991 issue another 12 GA representatives were listed with an email:

A. Goldsworthy (AU)  
W. Grafendorfer (AT)  
B. Rován (CZ)  
D. Dolan (IE)  
M. Gottlieb (IL)  
M. Ozeki (JP)  
D. Wolbers (NL)  
A. Rolstadas (NO)  
C. Guy (ZA)  
F. Kamoun (TN)  
+ the representatives of IAPR and IJCAI

As to the IFIP TC Chairs: In the March 1989 Bulletin the Chairs of TC2, TC3, TC11 were listed with an email ID; in the March 1990 issue additionally the Chairs of TC8, TC9, TC12 and TC13 had an email ID. In the October 1991 Bulletin there were missing email IDs for the TC3, TC5 and TC7 Chairs.

IFIP's own web-site maintained by its Secretariat was established only in 1995 but very quickly expanded in content and in amount of traffic. A major redesign was carried out in 2001 and we invited everyone to "Plug in, capitalize on ideas and be inspired!" Since then, hundreds of thousands of individuals plugged in. During this past October alone, we have had 24,000 individual sessions registered at <http://www.ifip.org> !!

Please write to me if you have an interesting experience to share related to the first days of the Internet and IFIP (or covering national experiences). I will post your stories as a collection on the IFIP web site along with the TC6 30th Anniversary report and related material.

**P. Nedkov**

5 November 2002, Laxenburg