

# EUNIS Congress' 21st Birthday - A Historical Perspective on its Proceedings

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## 1. Summary

Established in 1993, the EUNIS organisation is Europe's equivalent to the United States of America's EDUCAUSE and Australasia's CAUDIT organizations. Its objective is "to contribute to the development of high quality information systems" by "bringing together those who are responsible for the management, development and the policy for Information Technology in Higher Education in Europe". EUNIS has adopted a number of approaches to achieving its objective, one being its well-established annual Congress alongside, for example, specialist Task Forces, the recently established EUNIS Research and Analysis Initiative (ERAI) and its e-Journal, the EUNIS Journal of Higher Education IT (EJHEIT) launched in quarter four of 2014.

2015 marks the 21st year of the EUNIS Congress, affording a timely opportunity to reflect on the range of issues addressed and to provide biographical summaries of topics presented, based on details extracted from available Congress programmes and other historical information sources.

The actual and projected work of the ERAI, through EJHEIT and the Congress, in analysis and dissemination of synopses of contributors' presentations is outlined. Complementing this information are some general findings from analysis of the accumulated abstract summaries from around 2000 authors from 41 countries provide over 1200 papers since the beginning of this century.

The contexts of "continuing professional development" (CPD) and of "what makes a good Chief Information Officer (CIO)" are qualitatively explored through an analysis of the available data. EUNIS' objective has a focus on senior IT professionals; on communications and social networking. Gartner research (2010) suggests "achievement through, by and with people"; "collaborative working"; "ability to inspire people both inside and outside their organization" as some key success factors for a successful CIO. "Focusing on leadership and people skills - the 'soft' things ... is in fact the biggest determinate of their success, or failure." This statement, whilst set in an organizational context has wider relevance with EUNIS' various initiatives playing an important role.

## 2. BACKGROUND

Sharing experiences and collaborative ventures are well established methods for the development and sharing of knowledge, for example, as a component of CPD. EUNIS, the European University Information Systems Organization, is a prominent pan-European forum whose aims incorporate "encouraging those with responsibility for higher education information systems (HEIS) in higher education (HE) and research establishments (REs) to exchange information, pursue co-operation and undertake debates around issues of common interest". EUNIS also seeks to establish European-level relationships with those organizations and organizational units responsible for information systems in HEs and REs at both country and European level. These aims support CPD in several ways including awareness raising at a pan-European level, peer-to-peer networking and through opportunities for collaborative working. In the absence of textual analysis of either abstracts or full papers it is assumed that Congress presentations need not focus specifically on the topic of CPD in order to be relevant to CPD; for example, technical content papers can contribute to CPD by increasing a delegate's knowledge in the specific technical domain or by creating a collaborative opportunity.

Since its inception, in 1993, EUNIS has developed into a comprehensive forum for information acquisition and exchange as well as having the capacity to undertake relevant research projects of

interest to its constituency. For example, the organization now executes its aims and objectives through Task Forces, the EUNIS Research and Analysis Initiative (ERAI), Awards to recognize excellence in various aspects of its interests, and events, the most notable being the annual Congress now in its 21<sup>st</sup> year. Its Rectors' Conference has an outreach targeted at senior management who are strategists and "top table" decision makers; to quote from its web page: "*the sessions will have a strategic rather than technical focus*". This venture reinforces the extent to which EUNIS strives to integrate senior IT and other "top table" influential figures through its work. Such undertakings afford excellent pan-institutional and pan-country opportunities for senior executive networking, collaboration and strategy-related dialogues.

Each facet of EUNIS' work, combined with its outreach and professional association with other like-minded organizations, benefits from the recently developed e-Journal, the European Journal of Higher Education IT (EJHEIT) and the ERAI web service, as further collaboration and dissemination vehicles whose content should appeal not only to a general HE IT readership but also to those interested in their personal development through reading relevant contemporary IT literature.

Through ERAI, work has commenced on digesting information on the historical detail of Congress activities in an effort to extract general trends and, possibly, also to inform further research topics.

Whilst EUNIS offers much in terms of CPD opportunities to various levels of staff seniority, nevertheless the focus of the paper is principally on roles with a managerial responsibility. The term CIO is used in a broad sense to refer to the "C-suite" or "C-level" of management within an IT organization; it may encompass terms like CEO, CTO and Director and is broadly defined by the "SFIA Level 7 description set strategy, inspire, mobilize" which may incorporate staff in the layer below Director in large Universities and large IT departments e.g. Assistant Director or Head of Team/Unit.

For example, Hein (2013) in his work on characteristics of successful Chief Information Officers (CIOs) identifies the need for:

- i. Constant "learning and growing", citing Burns who states "... top leadership expects the CIO to stay ahead of trends, and that type of info is not always available in a course or training program. In other words, you must make up your own course, *look around you and be aware of emerging trends*"
- ii. Being masters of *network and relationship building*.

Quoting Ibarra and Hunter (2007), "Leaders must find new ways of defining themselves and develop new relationships to anchor and feed their emerging personas. They must also accept that networking is one of the most important requirements of their new leadership roles and continue to allocate enough time and effort to see it pay off". The opportunity afforded by congresses and similar events contributes to the networking aspect of a manager's role. The HE IT sector benefits from a mature history of development opportunities; courses, conferences, peer organizations and domain-specific literature. The opportunities for HE sector senior IT management are, in part, facilitated through various EUNIS activities; the Congress is an annual opportunity for networking, learning and growing, being informed of trends and building or strengthening relationships.

### 3. AVAILABLE HISTORICAL DATA

The unavailability of a Congress data archive necessitated scavenging suitable content from those sources known to exist. Unfortunately a complete set of data has not been attainable however significant effort has resulted in an informative basis from which to mine relevant information. The dataset is principally established from paper references where paper title, keywords, associated conference theme, author(s) and country data has been extracted from official websites and other digital sources for each year of the Congress. Regrettably, some Congress web sites have been lost, thus requiring internet information excavation to find the required data. In most cases this secondary scavenge was facilitated by the "Web Archive" tool. There remains missing information,

especially digital versions of papers. As part of a data cleaning stage, corporate presentations have been omitted as far as is practical though some instances may have slipped through due to the absence of precise identification data. Also difficulty to differentiate between a full paper submission and an abstract may have led to the inclusion of some “abstract only” details. Initial investigative work, as presented in the paper, does not attempt “deep” text analysis; its interest is in extracting, first, some Congress biographical overviews, then attempt to associate topics, possibly using keywords alongside paper titles, to the broad EUNIS objectives especially associated with CIO and senior management CPD opportunities. *Most detail is available for years 1997 to date.*

#### 4. CONGRESS BIOGRAPHICAL OVERVIEW

Since 1995 annual Congresses have taken place, in late June, involving 15 hosting countries, 5 on two occasions. Grenoble and Manchester have hosted the event each time it returned to their host country; in 1997 and 2007 (France) and 1996 and 2005 (UK). In 2014 EUNIS delegates visited Umeå, Sweden, the most northerly venue; in 2002 the host city Porto was the most westerly and southerly with Tartu (2006) being the most easterly. In its 21-year history delegates from 21 countries have presented papers with almost 1200 papers provided involving 2500 authors. The distribution of frequency of contributions by authors, as would be expected, is highly positively skewed; 80 percent of papers are by authors who have contributed once over the history of the Congress; 18% of authors have contributed 2 to 5 papers, with 1% contributing 6 to 9 and a further 1% contributing 10 or more. On average, ignoring 1997 when a “small” event was held, an average of 63 contributed papers have been presented, with 2007 (Grenoble, France) seeing the largest contribution of 105. 41 countries have been represented, including Australia and the United States of America as the most “far flung”. Attendance levels have varied with an average attendance of 270 and the 2001 event in Berlin, with over 470 delegates was the largest to date. Typically 25-30 nationalities attend each year. In 1996 the EUNIS organization decided to host alternating “small” and “large” events. That year’s Congress was “small” (100 delegates and a 2-day event); the idea was subsequently abandoned.

#### 5. GENERAL OVERVIEW OF CONGRESS PAPERS

The Congress affords CPD opportunity irrespective of the delegate’s position within an organizational structure. Two broad modalities of CPD may be considered; *institutional* and *individual*, however here the distinctions are blurred as this review does not seek to identify the reasons associated with Congress attendance. The key tenet is that attendance contributes to CPD by affording learning whether in terms of “keeping up-to-date”, “sharing experiences and ideas”, “gap filling in terms of personal learning needs” or “continuing to develop” (keeping pace). Decisions to attend a Congress are assumed to align with these CPD-related strands. It is further assumed that Congress Organizing Committees seek to establish a content spectrum to meet the CPD and general interest needs of its attendees, whether as an individual or as a part of a wider institutional need or programme.

Each Congress has an associated set of Tracks around which invited papers are sought. For each Track a “Track expert” and the Programme Committee evaluate the submissions in order to select the most appropriate contributions; a peer review process. The Congress’ content is influenced by the choice of Track themes, these in turn being identified to reflect current issues known to be of particular strategic and operational interest to the EUNIS community. In analyzing available Congress programmes, two significant constraints are identified, namely:

- i. A full set of programme detail is unavailable for the 21 years of the Congress’ life
- ii. Analysis, as provided in the paper, is of a general qualitative type.

Based on analysis of over 120 unique Congress Tracks an arbitrary taxonomy of 10 major topic areas emerge with “co-operation and management” and “e-learning and mobility” themes dominating; see [%] values given in Table 1. The significant position of “infrastructure and security” as third in popularity may reflect the level of technical contributions, hence also the heterogeneity of the range of Congress topics and of attendees; strategists, managers and technical support. The “Best Paper” Award, presented since 2002, is broadly speaking dominated by papers focusing on software-centric initiatives with one award granted to work on transformational initiatives that improved the customer focus of a central IT department (Sunikka, 2013). Association between the Award and

Congress themes indicate corporate IT, information management and mobility to feature most. Since its introduction, in 1998, the Dørup E-learning Award has been presented annually, with the

Theme	Popularity
Development	[2%]
New and Emerging Technologies	[3%]
Information Management, Corporate IT and BI	[10%] (14%)
Web and Social Media	[5%] (3%)
e-science	[6%]
E-Universities	[6%]
Libraries	[6%] (7%)
Infrastructure and Security	[19%] (17%)
Co-operation and Management	[21%] (23%)
E-learning and Mobility	[24%] (27%)

**Table 1: Taxonomy of Congress Themes**

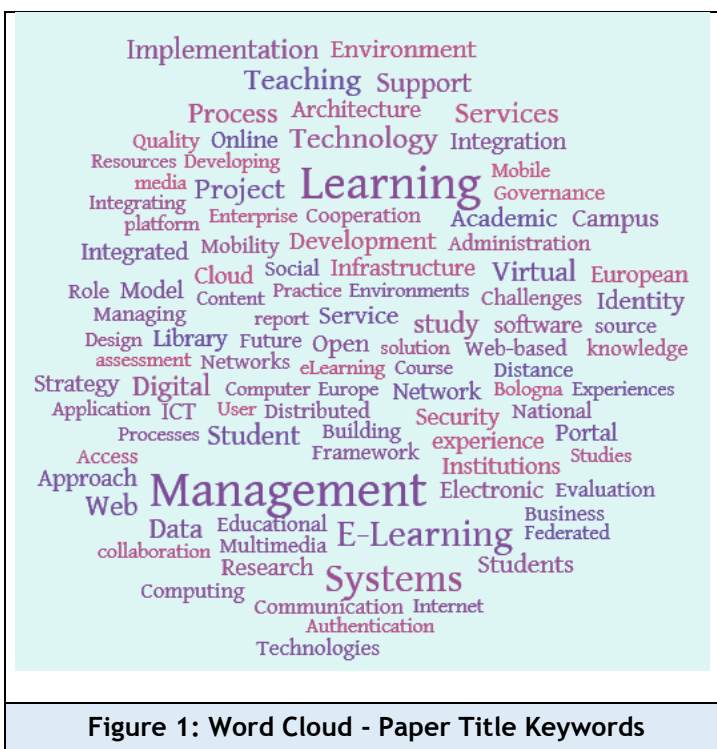
exception of two years. This award acknowledges “outstanding and innovative application of information technology (IT) in an educational setting” with the majority of successful submissions associated with innovative software solutions across a number of the themes listed in Table 1. An alternative view of the themes is obtained by examining the volume of submitted papers. With reference to the (%) figures shown in Table 1, the volume of submissions is broadly in line with the popularity of the themes as is to be expected given that the calculations are based on the total paper count of over 1200 whereas the theme-based figures are based on a total of almost 120. A

visual appreciation of the range of key words used in paper titles is illustrated using a word cloud as shown in Figure 1. In addition to the removal of non-significant words others that do not aid clustering with the focus on CPD were extracted e.g. university, higher, information and derivatives.

As anticipated, the dominant words demonstrate a strong association with the major tenets of EUNIS’ activities; teaching, learning and e-learning, and management. Those attendees with a specific interest in CPD obtain a comprehensive topics palette from which to select relevant papers.

## 6. C-Layer CONTEXT

Groysberg et al. (2011) reports upon research that sought to identify those abilities that aspiring executives should focus on developing as they decide on the direction of their career path, and on what skills current executives should hone as they aspire to the next tier of an organizational structure. An interesting synopsis is provided of the evolution of senior management in the IT sector, which may be summarized as illustrated in Table 2. Entries in italics are additional and intended to reflect the HE sector experience. In a recent British Computer Society (BCS) report on “What Digital Leaders want and need” (Runciman, 2015) the “people issues” were “broad ranging” in comparison to the “technology focus”, however a pertinent observation was that “the IT departments themselves were in danger of becoming the biggest blocker on effective organizational modernization”. The need to, for example, “having IT people properly involved in selling the organizational strategy and getting it over the line into delivery” illustrates the importance of understanding the business. Looking three to five years ahead the digital leaders cited “succession planning” and “performance management” as the two factors showing the greatest percentage increase since the conduct of the 2014 survey. These references whilst not specific to the HE



sector, but inclusive of public sector organizations convey some relevant factors that are likely to be paralleled in the sector and which are important to the EUNIS community. These comments suggest, or reinforce, the notions of institutional and individual CPD modalities. The institutional context concerning “understanding the business” and “selling the strategy” may be non-IT in nature and best delivered as part of a CPD programme that includes senior management as presenters. This research sets a reasonable context in which to examine EUNIS’ opportunities for HE sector staff who are about to enter or are already in senior management roles including the c-strata.

In the first author’s experience the “managerial attributes” transition over the past 45 years has been from technical management, through relationship management, to project, programme and risk management and onwards to IT strategy and governance, then towards an integrated “business, finance and information” strategic hybrid. The latter BCS research highlights IT strategy and planning (46%), business transformation and organizational efficiencies (44%) and security (54%) amongst its “top concerns” either now or over the incoming 3 to 5 year period.

Strickland (2011) in his research states “It is crucial for the CIOs to be aware of what is going on in the outside world and find ways to bring this knowledge into their organizations. Hence, part of the CIO role is to scan the external environment.” Specifically, an interview with a CIO from within the HE sector included the quote “One way to achieve that is to utilize the universities’ alliances, build on those networks and look for ways to learn from each other and get join up” when asked about “collaboration with others from the same sector”. Conferences provide a collaboration vehicle; their programmes contain the “fuel” for ideas, collaborative ventures and extension of peer networks. EUNIS provides an ideal European platform to support these activities through its Congresses.

Ibarra and Hunter (2006) outlined a taxonomy for networking; for example:

- *Operational*; those needs associated with “What should we be doing?”
- *Personal*; forming professional alliances with peers with common interests and goals
- *Strategic*; knowing direction and knowing contacts with ability to assist in achieving a goal.

Given the spectrum of papers presented at Congresses, from technical to strategy and policy; from local to country-level collaborative ventures; combined with the breadth of experience and expertise in the attendees the taxonomy outlined maps conveniently unto what EUNIS provides for

Era	Career Ceiling	Attributes	Background
1980s to mid-’90s	Director	Logical thinking, technical focus, attention to detail	Business analysis Accounting Academic/Researcher
Mid-late’90s	CIO	Knowledge of IT for competitive advantage Capable of relationship building between business leaders and IT <i>Project and Programme management</i>	Leadership capabilities Relationship management New technologies and application to business strategy <i>Business and Process change management</i>
Late’90s - Late ’00s	“hybrid” CIOs	Analytics, organizational design, Business infrastructure	<i>Information analytics</i> , IT strategy, business complexity, financial and risk management

**Table 2: Evolution of Senior IT Management Attributes and Backgrounds**

its membership. C-layer opportunities, whilst not exclusive to keynote addresses, sit comfortably alongside a balanced programme that caters for informal continuing professional development opportunities for CIOs as well as the lesser layers of institution’s organizational hierarchies.

## 7. ERAI - AN OVERVIEW

The recently established EUNIS Research and Analysis Initiative (ERAI) seeks to develop applied research activities whose output will answer the question “Where can a European Higher Education CIO or University leader find information about the use and trends of IT for the European Higher Education system?”. These questions and associated answers, drawn from known experts within the EUNIS community, will provide an excellent archive as well as a further CPD opportunity to those wishing to hone their technical writing skills or to have a further source of information at their disposal. Its principal forms of information dissemination include the EJHEIT, reports generated by EUNIS Task Forces and commissioned Case Studies. Early issues of the eJournal will concentrate on publishing Congress papers based around themes, however the intention is also to produce trends within themes incorporating relevant historical and contextual information by analyzing data from the 21 Congresses. Collaborative opportunities afforded through EUNIS to its member institutions result in the availability of, for example, the sharing of reports associated with fellow organizations e.g. the UK’s Joint Information Systems Committee (JISC) and the Universities and Colleges Information Systems Association (UCISA). A quick examination of EUNIS’ web site reinforces the extent to which “collaboration and sharing” of applied research is ongoing.

Current ERAI activity has a focus on “supporting teaching and learning” (first issue of the journal in late 2014); management and cooperation, and the chief information officer (second issue of the journal in early 2015). Benchmarking methodologies and ongoing work at a national level in this area is a further active topic. As ERAI is in its infancy there is opportunity for the EUNIS community to advise and to shape its programme of activities. The contemporary nature of planned ERAI activities as well as the cross between Congress output and ERAI input to Congress programmes further facilitate and develop CPD services and resources.

## 8. TRENDS AND PLANS

First considering the data set upon which the paper is based, the type, completeness and range of variables available in the present dataset limits the analysis that can be achieved, especially in terms of a statistical investigation. For example, an author’s choice of keywords will be based on their interpretation of the paper’s content and may therefore vary from a reader’s interpretation. Furthermore, the extent to which a paper addresses each keyword may range from, say, “limited” to “in-depth”. Such constraints will understandably limit the analysis and also require to be factored into any interpretation of findings. Also, a superficial examination of keywords indicates considerable variability in the words used (Figure 1), suggesting this variable is inappropriate to employ in any detailed analysis. The absence of electronic forms of the full portfolio of papers presented at Congresses limits the extent to which a complementary form of textual analysis can be undertaken, which would further develop the superficial findings now being reported.

Secondly, ideally as part of ERAI’s work plan, is the need to consider complementary approaches to data acquisition and in a context of research that is considered invaluable to the EUNIS community. Typically, referring to the ERAI web pages, are opportunities to conduct focused surveys, to conduct Case Studies and to undertake interviews with expert persons in selected fields of research interest.

Returning to further investigations based on the Congress-related data some additional general trends are presented. As an elementary metric to assess the Congress participation rate, the ratio of “delegates to authors” is used, excluding those years for which the attendance data is unavailable. Clearly the metric does not accommodate other potential concomitant variables which may affect either delegate or author numbers or both, for example ease of travel to venue, overall cost to attend (as some European countries have significantly higher/lower cost of living rates than others) and “attendee institution’s” interest in theme as well as their financial circumstances. The metric indicates an overall gradual decline for the period 1997 to 2014 (n=13), from “8+ to 3+”. This decline represents a gradual increase in paper contributions relative to the overall attendance rate, which *may* be interpreted as “EUNIS is an event where formal delegate participation in paper presentation is actively encouraged” or it may be that “delegates view EUNIS Congresses as an ideal

forum in which to learn and socialize with persons holding similar interests”. Either interpretation is consistent with CPD aspirations as well as with other objectives a delegate may have.

Examining trends in author participation patterns, the “top 5” authors (those associated with 10 or more papers recorded during the period covered by the data) represent “the Czech Republic (2 authors each with 10 papers), France (1 author with 10 papers), the UK (2 authors, one with 11 and the other with 12) and Poland where one author is represented 13 times. Apart from each author’s specialist interests as indicated in keywords, little more can be stated about the papers contributed or whether there are factors associated with CPD or C-layer incorporated.

Returning to the “C-strata” focus and interpreting it as an interest in “leadership and management” contributions, the proportion of papers within this theme has been examined. The percentage of papers within the theme relative to all papers/themes varies from 15% to just over 40% and over the years there is a gradual upwards trend, though the year-on-year variation is possibly predicated on the specific range of topics sought by each year’s Congress Programme Committee. The “top” contributing country for the theme is the UK which has provided the majority of papers in the category for 53% of the Congress’ history, based on the 15-year period of records currently available. Spain (20%), Germany and Portugal (13%) have been the next most frequent “top” contributors. Interestingly, for the 15 years for which data is available, with the host country being the lead contributor for the theme one third of the time. Perhaps as has IT become more of a business enabler as opposed to a “technology issue or interest” one would expect such a trend. Runciman’s (2015) and Strickland’s (2011) research findings are interesting to reflect upon in this context.

## 9. CONCLUSIONS

The paper has sought to stimulate an interest in the development of EUNIS, first through a generalist review of its Congress presentations, and also by introducing the recently-established ERAI. With a specific interest in “continuing professional development” and “management and leadership” topics, the authors have attempted to identify aspects of EUNIS activities aligned to these topics. It is suggested, based on available data, that the EUNIS constituency is well served regarding a number of the attributes associated with CPD opportunities relevant to senior IT management and, furthermore, that these opportunities may be further matured through the conduct of focused applied research that will fall within the remit of the ERAI. Future Congresses are anticipated to continue to provide rich opportunities for the various activities within the sphere of interests associated with both CPD and management and leadership topics.

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## 12. AUTHORS' BIOGRAPHIES

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