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Editorial: Operational Research – Making an Impact

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Introduction

The origins of Operational Research are well known. OR developed – in particular in the UK - in the early 1940s as an area in which science was applied and new research inspired by real-world challenges, primarily in military analysis and in industrial production. As OR developed, a community of academic OR scholars became established alongside OR practitioners and this has led quite naturally to the situation that, over time, much of the OR academic literature is inspired by theoretical development rather than by immediate application.

Practical challenges, however, are a constant source of renewal to OR, and the problems thrown up by government and business are ever changing. The UK Operational Research Society serves both the professional and academic communities, bringing these together and ensuring their continuing interaction. A particularly successful initiative in recent years has been the introduction of “Making an Impact” events within the OR Society conference programme which provides a number of different mechanisms to exchange information and to build collaborations.

OR academics are innately comfortable with “Making an Impact” and this put the discipline in a strong position when the UK Government advanced a wider agenda for academic research, taking into account the quality of impact beyond the academic community. This was first formally assessed as part of the 2014 UK Research Excellence Framework, in which the OR academic community demonstrated the extent of its impact through the contribution of a substantial number of impact cases. This approach has received a lot of attention and undoubtedly variants will be applied elsewhere, with corresponding impacts on university funding and opportunities to highlight the benefits of OR research.

When we organised the EURO2015 conference in Glasgow it seemed very natural to celebrate the link of academic research with OR practice and to highlight the way top class research can be intrinsically connected with making an impact in practice. This built on existing initiatives such as the ROADEF/EURO Modelling Challenge, jointly sponsored by the French OR Society ROADEF together with EURO and, for the first time, introduced a wider stream of activities dedicated to stimulating practitioner-academic engagement to the conference programme, highlighting new challenges, demonstrating cases of successful collaboration and practitioner mentorship, all supporting “Making an Impact”. In addition, a number of plenary and keynote presentations provided fascinating insights into challenges from OR practice and highlighted new challenges emerging from industry and public policy.

This special issue of EJOR brings together a collection of papers that illustrate the way that Operational Research continues to develop excellent research with a strong linkage to real world challenges.

The special issue is organised into clusters of papers, firstly a selection of keynote papers presented at the conference, and thereafter sections which focus on:

- OR in Health Services and Humanitarian Projects

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