



Newsletter

european society for cognitive psychology

Number 4, April 1987

Haren, April 28th, 1987.

Dear Colleagues,

This will be a busy summer for most of us with the usual quota of deadlines to be met, conference papers to be prepared, final examinations to be marked, etc., etc. For our Society this summer will also be a busy one with our first Summer School being held in Munich in June and our 2nd Conference taking place in Madrid in September. Fortunately I am able to report that plans for both are moving smoothly apace.

In total 70 applications were received for the Summer School. Since we can unfortunately only offer places to 40 young scientists a process of selection had to take place. We did our best to be fair in relation to background, country (16 countries being represented) and experience but obviously a large number of people will have been disappointed with our decisions. We regret this and hope that we will be able to offer more such opportunities in the future.

While there are many negative aspects in being involved in the running of any society there are of course also some perks! I have just spent a few days in Madrid - working of course. If you have been swithering about whether to attend our Conference I can assure you that it is a city well worth visiting: the museums are wonderful, the bars lively, the people friendly and helpful, and the food, particularly the seafood, delicious.

No conference can be successful, however, if the scientific programme is dull and uninteresting. In this respect we are once again fortunate - abstracts of a high standard have been pouring in and we can anticipate an exciting and stimulating meeting. In other words: you must come!

If you have not yet been in touch with Maria Victoria or have lost the form she sent you, use the new one provided and return it immediately. Further particulars about the Conference will be found further on in the Newsletter.

There is only one rather more negative note I have to sound. In all our planning for the Conference it has always been understood that this meeting is for our own members. Plans for increased membership, larger conferences, contributions, etc. are of course all important issues which will have to be decided at the Business Meeting. Until such decisions are made, however, we have just gone ahead and planned a meeting for our 160 members. It was therefore rather a surprise to start getting abstracts written by a large number of authors - with often only the last name in the list being one of our members. Unfortunately we can not at the present time invite non-members - there just is not room for them. If we do find a few places are still available we will certainly let second authors know but until this becomes clearer we must work on the principle of members only. The interest shown by others is, however, very promising for the future.

Looking forward to meeting you in Madrid,

Yours sincerely,

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THE STUDY OF COGNITIVE PSYCHOLOGY IN EUROPE

Cognitive Psychology in the Federal Republic of Germany

Julia Schölkopf and Stefan Strohschneider

Cognitive Psychology has a long tradition in German psychological experimental work and theory. But it is only for the last one or two decades that we have been using the term 'cognitive' to label what has formerly been the "Psychology of Thinking" - but in this label also encompasses many other fields of research.

Historically, the West-German Cognitive Psychology is still heavily influenced by the concepts and ideas of the "Age of Schools". One of the early highlights of this epoche was certainly the Würzburger Schule. Its development of the method of controlled introspection, its conceptualization of rules that unlie the thinking process and last but not least its division of goals in sub- and part-goals are of interest even for the latest cognitive theories.

Another outstanding example is the heritage of "Gestaltpsychology" with its emphasis on the role of perception, functional fixation, and insight in thinking - ideas that are still in the focus of scientific discussion.

A current (but still incomplete) survey of Cognitive Science activities in the Federal Republic of Germany shows the diversity of what has grown out of these roots. The survey lists 84 institutions with approximately 320 scientists conducting research in one area of Cognitive Science or another.

A closer analysis yields the major interest-areas of West-German 'Cognitivists'. We have tried to group the research activities of the 84 surveyed organisations under some keywords, relevant to Cognitive Psychology. They are ranked as follows:

1. Research in Cognitive Psychophysiology. Sensory-motor systems. Neurophysiology, and Motor Processes.
2. The Psychology of Language and Speech; cognitive, linguistic, and theoretical aspects of speech and speaking, also phonetics and other related areas.
3. Research in Artificial Intelligence in a narrower sense; modelling of human intelligence, expert systems, intelligent tutoring systems and research on computational syntax.
4. Knowledge Representation and Memory Theory: research on all aspects of memory, knowledge acquisition, knowledge processing and storing, "Mental Models"-research.
5. Research in Problem Solving and what can be labeled "higher cognitive processes"; the Psychology of Thinking, control of the cognitive system, complex Problem Solving, research on consciousness and self-reflection.
6. Work on Cognitive Ergonomics. Human-Computer Interaction, and tutoring and training people in dealing with modern technologies.
7. Theoretically oriented research using the concepts and theories of Cognitive Psychology as an integrative framework. Work on the cognitive aspects of emotion, stress, social interaction, intelligence, etc.
8. Philosophical and methodological issues in Cognitive Science, that is, working on the philosophical groundwork of Cognitive Science and diverse research activities on developing new methods for Cognitive Psychology.
9. Cognitive Processes in Higher Animals. This seems to be somewhat of a "borderline case" in Cognitive Science; with only few researchers in West-Germany.
10. Cognitive aspects of judgment and decision-making.

Interestingly, the "top-notch" research-areas in this list seem to be AI and AI-related questions. Research belonging to Cognitive Psychology in a narrow 'psychological' sense is trailing. We feel that this is not an indicator for Cognitive Psychology's being only of secondary importance. On the contrary, the interest in psychological ideas of cognitive functioning is high and we think we can take this as evidence that Cognitive Psychology in West-Germany has in fact become a central reservoir for ideas, concepts and theories other sciences rely on. This is especially true for all fields connected to AI.

On the institutional level, most of this research in the FRG is done at universities, mainly at Psychological Departments, Linguistic Departments, Departments of Computer Science, and at University Hospitals. Besides these academic institutions there are several privately as well as federally financed Cognitive Science Research Institutes.

It is always difficult to foresee future developments in science but it seems to us that there is a trend towards the research on knowledge acquisition, knowledge representation, and higher cognitive processes that govern the processing and use of knowledge. The Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft, the largest West-German research sponsoring agency has recently established a major research program under the heading "The Psychology of Knowledge" and the first results should be published in 1987/88.

These recent developments can be taken as indicators that West-German Cognitive Psychology becomes more and more concerned with the integrative functions of cognition that it is moving towards a higher-level understanding of the human cognitive system.

FORTHCOMING EVENTS

Workshop on Knowledge Representation and Information Processing (WORP)
in honour of the 60th Birthday of Friedhart Klix

Berlin, G.D.R., 24-28 June 1987

Organized by J. HOFFMANN (Berlin) on behalf of the Department of Psychology of the Central Institute of Cybernetics and Information Processing of the Academy of Sciences, in collaboration with the Department of Psychology at Humboldt University, Berlin.

Preliminary topics:

- Visual classification and memory organization
- Knowledge representation, reasoning, and text processing
- Problem solving and knowledge representation
- Cognitive control of motor behavior
- Mathematical modelling and computer simulation.

Further information can be obtained from:

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256 Spring

320 Belbin + V. King