

A PERSONAL INVITATION, by Slobodan Djordjević

Talk at the Closing Session of the Ninth UDM Conference, 6 September 2012 (inclusive of a few details that were forgotten on the day)

Good afternoon,

Over the last few days I've had a pleasure of talking to many of you. For those whom I missed, my name is Slobodan Djordjević and I work for the company called University of Exeter. I am here to announce the conference that will be organized as one of the dissemination events of the CORFU project mentioned several times at this UDM.

Last night I was watching US Open Tennis Championship and I was glancing through the slides that I used for talks like this recently. I realized that they were far too serious and boring – objectives, deadlines, committees, photos of the Queen visiting our lovely campus etc. – and I decided to make this presentation a bit more personal. So I am going to tell you how this UDM conference is linked to the one that I'd like to invite you to, and how my personal private life has been mixed with my professional career. This is the story of four Bs: *Belgrade, Birthdays, Brothers* and *Brussels*.

The beautiful *Belgrade* skyline on the cover of UDM proceedings, the stuff you've been carrying around your neck for the past three days and the whole visual identity of this conference have been designed by my good friend and colleague **Dejan Vlaškalić**, sitting over there (applause). It was his *birthday* on the day when UDM started and I'm ashamed to admit that I was too busy to remember that. Incidentally, Dejan was the best man at my wedding. Speaking of which, my wife and I first met – and almost immediately fell in love with each other – at the *birthday* party of **Zoran Ikodinović**. Being grateful to him for providing this opportunity – although it was not a setup, but just a big party – we sometimes tell him that he is like our *brother*. Now, Zoran has an elder *brother* who lives in *Brussels* and at some point Zoran decided to join his *brother* so he also lived in Brussels for a number of years. This concludes our first circle of four Bs.

The CORFU project had a kick-off meeting in Exeter in April 2010. On Day 1 the volcano struck in Iceland, all flights from UK got suspended for a couple of weeks, and forty people who came from all over Europe and Asia were not able to fly back home. They were catching ferries to Spain and France and then taking very long trips by train or car. One of them – **Ole Mark**, sitting over there – got seriously ill on the way to Denmark and ended up in emergency hospital in *Brussels*. Ole claims that he speaks French, but I doubt that, so I started looking for people I know who live in Brussels to ask them to go to that hospital, bring some fresh fruit or whatever to Ole and help him in communication with Belgian doctors. Previously mentioned Zoran was a logical choice and his mobile phone was on, but it turned out that on that day he was elsewhere. He said he would happily go to the hospital had he been there. Then I asked

him to tell his *brother* to do that, but he said: oh no, he is not that type of person who would go to visit *brother's* friend's friend. Then, I called another colleague **Zoran Vojinović** who lives in Delft but he knew no one in Brussels, however he himself was prepared to go and visit Ole, which he did the next day (this was all happening in the evening hours). Anyway, after a few more failures I finally talked to **Philippe Gourbesville** who had just managed to get back from Exeter to Nice after a lot of driving. Philippe suggested that we call the late Jackie Peters, whom I remembered from the Dubrovnik conference and who lived in Brussels at that time. Jackie – being a nice guy as he was – finished quickly his dinner and went to the hospital straightaway, spoke to the doctors and had a chat with Ole whom he had known, so the poor guy felt less miserable. Afterwards I called Ole's wife to tell her that he was well looked after so she got less worried and then I called Philippe again to say what happened. Which was when I got really surprised – Philippe said: “No problem, I have to take care of my little *brother*.” What? “Our *birthdays* are one week apart, it's very important if two people are to be good friends, I'm one week older than him so he's my little *brother*.” Okay, I thought, Philippe is talking nonsense and astrology – we are engineers and numbers should have physical meaning. However, it turned out that Philippe was right, as I was about to realize.

This summer I went on a family holiday to Portugal, which I combined with visiting **Jorge Leandro**, sitting over there. In Coimbra, we looked at his dual drainage experiments, checked some bugs in the SIPSON code, visited the famous baroque library and he took us to listen to some wonderful fado music. Then we went to a beach resort, where my family all got so relaxed that they completely forgot about my *birthday* that happened to be in that period. No present, not even a hug, few days later they got angry on me that I hadn't told them so we didn't celebrate it properly. I neither heard from my *brother* who usually calls me on that day. Anyway, the only two people who did remember and sent a text were my great friend and colleague **Dragan Savić** who unfortunately couldn't be here today, and **Dušan Prodanović**. Those of you who know Dragan would say: ah, he is so well organized, he's got birthdays of his friends on his smart phone. Dušan is also well organized – as this conference illustrates – but he didn't need a reminder because his and my *birthdays* are only one day apart, which makes it easy to remember. More precisely, age difference between us is one year plus one day. I will let you keep guessing who the elder *brother* is and who is the little *brother* (though none of us is really little). Having in mind Philippe's claim that a nice round age difference between two friends is important for them to be like *brothers* – and since this UDM conference was bound to be such a success – the decision has been made that UDM and the CORFU conferences are shifted for exactly one year and one day. The UDM has been held 4-6 September 2012, add one year and one day to those dates and you get 5-7 September 2013, which is when the **International Conference on Flood Resilience, Experiences in Asia and Europe** will be held in Exeter and you are all kindly invited to attend.

Back to my *birthday* – I was the second child in the family and when I was born my maternal grandmother retired so that she could look after me. She was a primary school teacher and in the class that she taught during the last four years of her career there was a kid by the name of **Miodrag-Miša Jovanović**, sitting over there. He went on to teach me at the University of

Belgrade, became the godfather to one of my sons and – most importantly – after I completed my military service we started playing tennis. That was a very important moment for that sport globally, though more because that year **Novak Djoković** was born. For fifteen years, every Wednesday at 7AM, weather permitting Miša and I were crossing the racquets in the Kalimegdan fortress. We only stopped doing that when I moved to Exeter, which was a loss for Serbian tennis, but around that time Novak turned pro. By the way, he is the only guy in this story who is not my colleague as engineer, but only as a player.

Since I moved to UK, I mostly worked with **Dragan** and my colleagues at Exeter but I've also worked with some other fine people who became my good friends, most notably the two Adrians from Sheffield. **Adrian Saul** attended this UDM but had to leave earlier. At the ICUD conference in Edinburgh in 2008 he gave a keynote lecture about the history of that conference series by showing photos of colleagues, so in a way I'm now recycling the concept of that lecture. The Edinburgh event was important for my work because CORFU project was conceived there when **Ole** and I went to the pub during one boring session. Edinburgh was also important for me personally because when my *brother* and I were teenagers our mother spent a year there working on her PhD, so our cooking skills improved dramatically in that period. Around the time of Edinburgh conference, **Adrian Cashman** emigrated from Sheffield to the Caribbean – not a tough decision to make – so now when I want to congratulate him his *birthday* in person I need to fly to Barbados. That's difficult and I've done that only once so far, but I'll make an effort to do that again. In the UK I also continued to work with **Čedo Maksimović**. How to describe him in the context of *brothers*? Perhaps best as *The Big Brother*, because he is everywhere. When Čedo moved to UK he worked with **David Butler** and they together organized one of the UDMs in London. Meanwhile, David moved to Exeter and now he and I and our team there – **Albert Chen**, sitting over there and the others – are organizing this conference on flood resilience, so these strange connections are endless. Where is *Brussels* again in this story? Well, CORFU project is funded by the European Commission FP7, so Brussels is where I've been going to negotiate the contract and report the outcomes.

The final link between the UDM and the Conference on Flood Resilience that I would like to make here is by mentioning two people who both died young and were very dear to me.

Miodrag-Miša Radojković (1945-1989) was Co-Chairman of the first UDM back in 1986, and my mentor. I had a privilege and pleasure to learn from him the principles of computational hydraulics, the consistency in getting to the bottom of every problem, that one needs to be critical of one's self and of the others, and how scientific papers should be written and presented. Miša was the single person who influenced my career the most.

Erik Pasche (1955-2010) was co-founder of the CORFU project and also somebody from whom – over only a few years – I learned a lot. About engineering, how to be hard working yet funny and kind, and how to choose and enjoy a good drink and dinner. At this UDM we heard about *Dance 4 Water*, at the flood resilience conference next year we'll have *Play 4 Erik* – one evening some nice music will be performed as a memorial of him.

I need to tell you that if I was to give a talk like this in the UK, half-way through the list of my “brothers” I would be accused of the *lack of gender balance* and I would have to sprinkle this list with a few “sisters”. I haven’t done that here because ladies are not meant to be asked about their age, so I’m not able to fit them into my story based on *birthdays* and *brothers*. But I certainly wouldn’t have difficulties to identify my dear gentler-sex colleagues with regard to other two *Bs* and the two conferences. Starting from the UDM Organizing Committee – in *Belgrade*, **Jasna Plavšić** and I did some experiments together and she helped me with my PhD. **Ana Delečić** and I were teaching together and one of our students seriously asked me if I was her lover! Which I was not. Neither at that time, nor later. **Zorica Todorović** and I played and sang together on several UDMs, hopefully we do it again. **Nataša Manojlović** and **Jelena Batica** – both present at this conference – were my students in *Belgrade*. Now they live in Germany and in France and we work together on the *Brussels*-funded CORFU. And I am probably the only professor of engineering in Exeter whose PhD students include the same number of boys and *girls*: **Si’ao Sun** and **Jeanne-Rose René**, sitting over there and **Rebecca Austin** and **Miriam García**. But again, I’m not prepared to say anything about their *birthdays*.

I enjoyed this conference very much, but I’m pleased that it’s coming to an end and we’re going to disperse tomorrow because then I will have time to go to town and buy a present for my mother whose *birthday* is this Saturday, so my work will not disturb my private life again. They say that work and private life should be kept separate, but that’s impossible.

In conclusion, there is indeed something about *brothers* and *birthdays*. Is there anything about *Belgrade* and *Brussels* and will this story help Serbia join the European Union? Probably not.

With an apology to all whom I didn’t have time to mention here, this is *a personal invitation* to the **International Conference on Flood Resilience – Experiences in Asia and Europe**, that will be held **5-7 September 2013 in Exeter** in the United Kingdom. The aim of this event is to gather professionals to present and discuss the latest research advances and practices in the development and implementation of resilience measures and flood management plans. The focus on cities in Asia and Europe is motivated by the approach applied in the CORFU project that investigates differences in flooding problems and solutions in case studies in these two continents. Shortly you will be e-mailed a proper invitation with further details. Perhaps the one you need to know now is the deadline for abstracts submission, which is around Christmas. Please think about contributing to this event and forward the information to those who may be interested.

Thank you 😊