

europ physics news



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How Wide is Your Sky ?

Not a reference to your physical field of focus so much as the openness of your vision of physics and what you want to read — in practice, not just in principle. Theoretically, all physicists are conscious of the need to keep abreast of developments, not only in their own subject but across the whole field of physics. In reality, many — probably the majority — are so overwhelmed by the quantity of paper that passes across their desks and through their post bags, they do not know where to start. They finish by confiding everything that is not directly in their own field (and quite a lot that is) first to the pending basket, and then after a decent lapse of time, on to the next person on the circulation list.

If you have read this far, you are already exceptional, as this is something that you are not obliged to read for professional reasons. It is nevertheless germane to the practice of physics at a professional level.

Compression and Selection

Before there was a European Physical Society, it was not so easy to see what was happening in fields of physics, other than one's own. General interest journals gave a clue, but for many physicists, the horizon beyond their specialized field was a confused blur, peppered by the names of dozens of conferences, all clamouring for attention, with few standing out as being more significant than any other.

Another problem was gaining access to the information diffused at those conferences that did seem important. Proceedings came out months later, were tremendously voluminous and costly, and because of their very weight, totally inaccessible to any but the most dedicated reader.

Abstract journals have tried to fill the gap, and undoubtedly the quality of abstracts has changed materially over the years. It is not so long ago that a national society — another discipline it must be explained — concluded that the information to be obtained from abstracts was not significantly greater than that contained in the titles. This was at a time when scientists were afraid to write anything other than the scope of the paper they were reading, in case the participants of the conference would conclude that this was a paper they could miss. Both the independent compilation of abstracts by the specialist houses, and perhaps a little more confidence in the usefulness of actually listening to the presentation of papers, have brought about a significant change. Abstracts in physics do, in the main, transmit real information.

The problem of choice remained. A massive volume of abstracts is more resistible than a massive volume of proceedings, quite simply because the information is so dense. It is here that the EPS comes to the physicists' aid.

The Divisional structure of EPS is no arbitrary accident but was built up, with the Sections, over a number of years. It was based, partly of course on the traditional teaching divisions in the subject, but also on a considered assessment of what is going on in physics. Now the conferences organized by the Divisions and the Sections have developed to the point that they are rightly considered to be the lead conferences in European physics, culminating every three years in the review of Trends in Physics at the EPS General Conference, the next of which will be held in Istanbul 7-11 September, 1981.

Europhysics Conference Abstracts

So we have the abstracts and we have the selection, and these come together in the EPS *Europhysics Conference Abstracts Series*. The Series started a little ahead of its time, before the pattern of EPS Organized Conferences had reached its present refined state, and before conference organizers had become convinced of the value of integrating "their" conference into the general scheme. Publication was erratic and it was difficult to discern the rationale of the selection.

Now the Series has grown up, and EPS is able to announce that all EPS Conferences will be included in the Series — provided that the number of subscriptions goes back to the break-even level. We lost subscribers during the running-in period and EPS members are currently subsidizing the publication. They will not want to do this for ever, but the solution is simple. If members of EPS will insist that their own institutional library becomes a subscriber, we can quickly make the Series self-financing, to the advantage of members, conference organizers and participants, and all physicists who want to keep their horizons open with the minimum of strain.

The 1980 Series of ten volumes (see page 11) costs 250 Sw.Fr., which works out at about 14 cts a page. Regular subscribers pay a reduced rate, and for their personal use, Individual Ordinary Members may purchase the Series at 85 Sw.Fr.

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