

**Zeitschrift:** L'Enseignement Mathématique  
**Herausgeber:** Commission Internationale de l'Enseignement Mathématique  
**Band:** 66 (2020)  
**Heft:** 3-4

**Rubrik:** Commission internationale de l'enseignement mathématique

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COMMISSION INTERNATIONALE  
DE L'ENSEIGNEMENT MATHÉMATIQUE  
(THE INTERNATIONAL COMMISSION  
ON MATHEMATICAL INSTRUCTION)

**Once upon a time ...**  
**Historical vignettes from the Archives of ICMI:**  
**A dilemma related to the ICMI Terms of reference**

Bernard R. HODGSON\*

I was recently approached by the ICMI Secretary-General, Abraham Arcavi, concerning an element of biographical information about the Italian mathematician, teacher and mathematics educator Emma Castelnuovo (1913–2014), after whom one of the ICMI Awards is named.

On the highly trustworthy website *MacTutor History of Mathematics Archive*, one can read that

The international role of Emma was acknowledged by her appointment as a 'member at large' in the Executive Committee of ICMI from 1975 to 1978. [1]

However, this statement is in conflict with the list of the members of the past ICMI Executive Committees as found on the ICMI website [2], where the name of Emma Castelnuovo does not appear. The ICMI SG was wondering how to deal with those two contradictory pieces of information. Was there an accidental omission on the ICMI website?

The resolution of this discordance relies on the examination of the various versions of the Terms of reference adopted for ICMI over the years, since its rebirth in the early 1950s as a commission of the then newly established International Mathematical Union. (As a matter of fact, this mid-20th century episode was also a rebirth for IMU itself, as the Union is celebrating this year its centennial, on the basis of the foundation in 1920 of the now so-called 'Old IMU'. See [3] for more information.)

The ICMI Terms of reference have been through seven versions: 1954, 1960, 1982, 1986, 2002, 2007 and 2009 [4]. The variations from one version to the other are at times important and dealing with essential issues, and at other times rather minor. Still they tell a lot about the evolution of ICMI as a commission of IMU. I wish in this vignette to concentrate on one (double) aspect of these Terms: the notion of *membership in ICMI and that of membership in its Executive Committee*.

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At the very first General Assembly of IMU, held in Rome in 1952, it was formally decided that the members of the Union would be countries [3, p. 98] (and not individuals), keeping in spirit with the practice of the IMU from the aftermath of WWI. The notion of 'ICMI membership' was addressed in the first version of the Terms of reference for ICMI adopted two years later, as part of the resolutions of the second IMU General Assembly held in The Hague in 1954.

#### 8. Resolution on the Commission for Mathematical Instruction.

*Resolved:* That the terms of reference and the constitution of the *International Commission on Mathematical Instruction* be clarified and determined as follows:

a) The Commission shall consist of ten members-at-large elected by the General Assembly on nomination of the President of IMU, and of two national delegates named by each of the National Committees for Mathematics as specified below;

b) The officers of the Commission shall consist of a President, a Secretary and two Vice-Presidents. The President shall be elected by the General Assembly on the nomination of the President of the IMU from the membership at large of the Commission;

c) The Executive Committee of the Commission shall consist of the Officers of the Commission together with three additional members elected by the membership of the Commission;

d) During his life-time Professor Fehr (Geneva) shall remain Honorary President of the Commission in recognition of his longtime interest in the cause of Mathematical education and his devoted services to it;

e) In all other respects the Commission shall make its own decisions as to its internal organization and rules of procedure;

FIGURE 1

First version of the ICMI Terms of reference (1954) – Items a) to e).  
*Internationale Mathematische Nachrichten* 35/36 (November 1954) p. 12. (Source: IMU Archive)

The Figure 1 shows clauses a) to e) of these Terms (from a total of nine). The point to be stressed with respect to the Castelnuovo dilemma is under item a), where it is indicated the Commission (i.e., ICMI itself) consists of individuals, ten of whom, called 'members-at-large', are elected by the IMU General Assembly on nomination of the IMU President, to which are added two delegates per each country member of IMU. Also of interest is clause b), concerning the election by the IMU General Assembly of the ICMI President from the membership-at-large, as well as clause c), defining the Executive Committee of ICMI. A point to be noted is that the members-at-large of ICMI are not de facto members of the ICMI EC.

This state of affairs remained essentially unchanged up to the early 1980s – except for clause d), which was removed following the passing in November 1954 of ICMI founding Secretary-General, Henri Fehr. It is only with the 1982 revision of ICMI Terms of reference that the notion of member-at-large of ICMI disappeared from the Terms, the composition of the Commission then being made of the members of the Executive Committee plus one delegate from each IMU member country.

It is worth stressing that it is only with the 2002 revision of ICMI Terms of reference that the membership of ICMI was redefined so to align with that of IMU, namely that ICMI members are countries, and not individuals. It is also on that occasion that the notion of 'ICMI General Assembly' was introduced within the Terms, the composition of this ICMI GA being based on item a) of the 1982 Terms. But it must be stressed that ICMI GAs, even though not formally mentioned in the Terms, had been regularly held for a long while, in particular on the occasion of the ICME congresses.

A lot could be added about other aspects in the evolution of the ICMI Terms of reference, but these would be topics for other vignettes ...

**TERMS OF REFERENCE  
OF THE INTERNATIONAL COMMISSION ON MATHEMATICAL INSTRUCTION**

(Accepted in August, 1982 by the General Assembly of IMU)

- (a) The Commission shall consist of
  - (1) the members of an Executive Committee as specified in (b) below, elected by IMU, and
  - (2) one national delegate from each member nation as specified in (d) below,
- (b) The Executive Committee consists of four officers, namely, President, two Vice Presidents, and Secretary, and of three further members. Furthermore, the outgoing President of ICMI, the President and the Secretary of IMU, and the representative of IMU at CTS (ICSU) are members ex-officio of the E.C.
- (c) In all other respects the Commission shall make its own decisions as to its internal organization and rules of procedure.

FIGURE 2

Third version of the ICMI terms of reference (1982) — Items (a) to (c).  
*ICMI Bulletin* 13 (February 1983), p. 5. (Source: IMU Archive)

Back now to the confusion at the origin of the present paper: what about Emma Castelnuovo in all this? She was indeed elected by the 1974 IMU GA to serve as a member-at-large of ICMI (in the sense defined above) during the term of the 1975-1978 Executive Committee with Shokichi Iyanaga as President. But she did not serve as a member (nor a 'member-at-large') in the ICMI EC, in spite of what is mentioned in [1]. Her presence among the members-at-large of ICMI is mentioned for instance in a report on the election held at the 1974 IMU GA and published in the *ICMI Bulletin* [5]. Among the ten members-at-large there listed, four became members of the 1975-1978 EC: Edward Begle, Bent Christiansen, Shokichi Iyanaga and Lev Kudryatsev. For a full list of the 'members of ICMI' as of 1975, see [6].

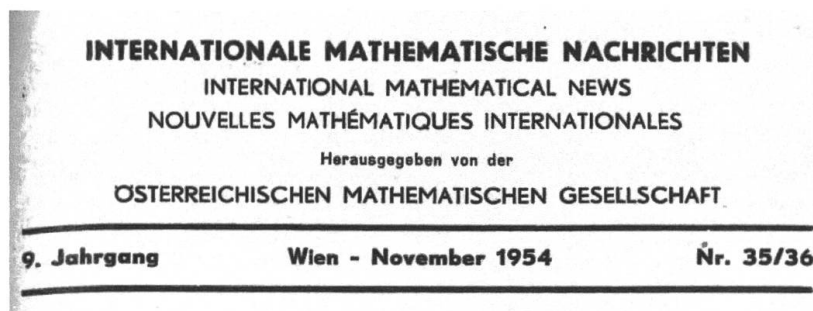


FIGURE 3

*Internationale Mathematische Nachrichten* 35/36 (November 1954), p. 1. (Source: IMU Archive)

I conclude this vignette with a word on the links between IMU and the journal *Internationale Mathematische Nachrichten* (IMN), the source of the figure above showing an excerpt from the 1954 ICMI Terms of reference. Established in 1947 by the Austrian Mathematical Society (originally called 'Mathematical Society in Vienna', the name under which the first four issues of the journal were published), IMN has served for a long period as the main channel of communication for matters pertaining to mathematics as seen from an international perspective. It serves in particular today as a most precious source of information in relation to the creation of IMU after WW2

and about the first two decades of existence of the Union [3, p. 74]. It is only in 1971 that IMU started the publication of a regular bulletin on its own [3, p. 178]. All the IMN issues containing information related to the Union are readily accessible under the *IMU Bulletin* page on the IMU website.

## References

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- [2] Past ICMI Executive Committees. International Commission on Mathematical Instruction (ICMI). [[mathunion.org/icmi/organisation/icmi-executive-committee/past-icmi-executive-committees](http://mathunion.org/icmi/organisation/icmi-executive-committee/past-icmi-executive-committees)] (Accessed on October 14, 2020)]
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- [5] Elections at the IMU General Assembly, 1974. *ICMI Bulletin* **4** (November 1974) p. 1.
- [6] List of members of ICMI. *ICMI Bulletin* **5** (April 1975) p. 7–13.