



DM=60 – A Surprise Conference

On 1 May 2013, a prominent Slovenian mathematician Dragan Marušič turned 60. His former students and colleagues decided to mark this event in a way that scientists know best: by organising a special scientific conference and publishing a *Festschrift*, in honour of Dragan. Following the tradition of similar scientific festivities, and in order to reduce costs, the conference was organised by invitation only. A list of speakers was very carefully hand-picked from eminent mathematicians, Dragan's long-time collaborators and his students. Not all were able to attend, but there was a twist in the organisation that makes DM=60 unique. The conference was a surprise conference. In 2013 the University of Primorska's FAMNIT organised 14 international conferences, and Dragan was led to believe that his 60th birthday would be commemorated later that year at the annual summer school at Rogla.

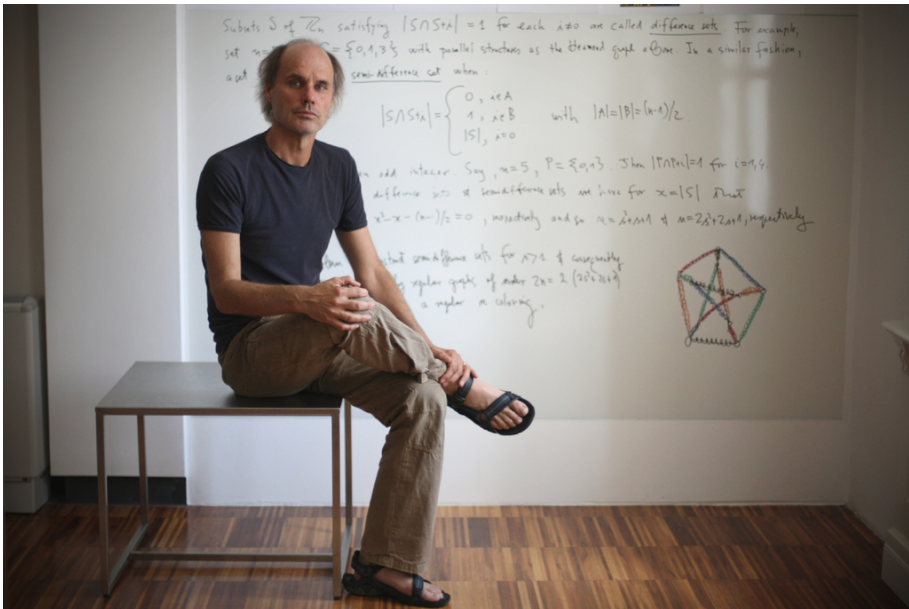


Figure 1: Professor Dragan Marušič with his favorite CFSG-free proof that S_5 and A_5 are the only simple primitive groups of degree $2p$

I will never forget the expression on Dragan's face when he entered the big lecture room that morning, on his birthday. The auditorium that was supposed to be empty (due to a national holiday) was full of mathematicians. The conference started promptly and ran for three days. What a joy for Mathematics! Students were able to meet first class mathematicians, and colleagues were able to work with each other on various unsolved problems, and discuss future projects together. All the lectures at the conference touched upon the work that Dragan has done in the past, and the influence he has had on his colleagues and students for years. Reprints of Dragan's published papers were bound into a volume and



Figure 2: The DM-60 conference photo, with signatures of the speakers

presented to him, together with the signatures of all invited speakers. (See Figure 2.) This volume comprises a remarkable 1729 pages of original mathematics – about a page for every week of Dragan’s life after his PhD! (See Figure 3.)

Dragan is Rector of the University of Primorska, which is based in the city of Koper, on the Adriatic coast. Currently among its students of mathematics about one third are from abroad. And although the University of Primorska is ten times smaller than the University of Ljubljana, it attracted four times as many new mathematics PhD students in 2014. These things highlight Dragan’s successful leadership of this young University.

It has also been very interesting to watch the unfolding of the career of Professor Dragan Marušič. His talents were clearly visible already in high school, but it took a long time before his work was recognised as mainstream. He submitted his first paper as an undergraduate, and completed a very good PhD at the University of Reading, UK, under the guidance of the legendary Crispin Nash-Williams. But this was not sufficient to get him position in the main Mathematics department in Slovenia. As a free thinker, a follower of Grateful Dead, an anti-nuclear activist, and long-haired vegetarian, Dragan did not fit the traditional mould of Slovenian society. Even after returning home from the USA, where he began his postdoctoral academic career, the doors to the Mathematics department in Ljubljana remained closed for Dragan. What a waste for Slovenian mathematics!

Dragan had started dreaming about democracy and the University of Primorska a long time earlier, and at the first free elections in Slovenia, he ran as a candidate for parliament, for the opposition alliance DEMOS. Creating the University of Primorska was his the main subject on his agenda. (See Figure 4.) Although he won in his district, the votes

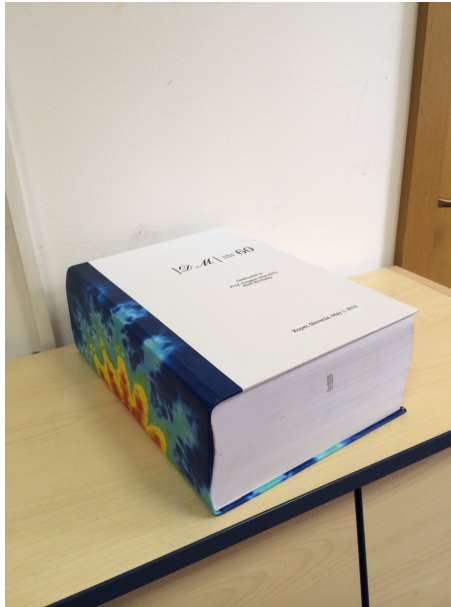


Figure 3: *Collection of the 1729 pages of original mathematics produced by Dragan Marušič over a 30 year period*

he gained helped a politician who was higher in the party list to enter the parliament. But his campaign to create a new university was taken up and realised by others who were less passionate about it but in a better position politically to succeed.

Dragan is the third rector of the University, but the first critical intellectual to hold this position. (The previous two rectors were government ministers before wearing their University insignia.) His primary goal is to promote and ensure the quality and visibility of his University. He will not compromise his integrity, and has no fear of exposing corruption among officials. Sadly, a lot of people in Slovenia are envious of Dragan's scientific achievements and the flourishing of mathematics at the University of Primorska under his leadership. A few months after the conference took place, an anonymous pamphlet was distributed to the media, ministries, and prosecutors, claiming that the DM=60 conference never took place, and that Dragan spent public money on his own birthday party. I am glad that this special volume gives proof of the quality of the DM=60 conference, and that its funding was well-spent.

Tomaž Pisanski



Figure 4: *Poster of Dragan Marušič running for the Slovenian Parliament in 1990 – including a slogan about creating the University of Primorska*