Minutes of the 2019 SIRA Annual Conference

Date: Friday November 22, 2019, 14:15-16:15

Place: University of Bern, Main Building, room 304

Participants:

Eric Dubuis, board member, voting representative for BFH
Thibault Estier, voting representative for UniL
Paolo Favaro, substitute for Torsten Braun, UniBE (no vote until the proposed change of the statutes concerning voting rights is approved)
Martin Glinz, voting representative for UZH, president
Philippe Cudré-Mauroux, voting representative for UniFR
Matthias Hauswirth, voting representative for USI, board member
Peter Kropf, voting representative for UniNE
James Larus, voting representative for EPFL, board member
Christian Tschudin, voting representative for UniBAS
Manfred Vogel, voting representative for FHNW

Excused: Giovanna Di Marzo Serugendo (UniGE), Siegfried Handschuh (UniSG), Reinhard Jung (UniSG), Sandro Pedrazzini (SUPSI), Ulrich Reimer (FHO), Olaf Stern (ZHAW)

No reaction to invitation: David Basin (ETHZ), Hansjörg Diethelm (HSLU) Pierre Kuonen (HES-SO)

Keeper of minutes: Eric Dubuis

Agenda
1. Welcome
2. Report on activities, communications
3. Change of SIRA Statutes
4. SIRA fees 2020
5. Investment of SIRA assets
6. Approvals (financial report of 2018, discharge of the board, budget 2020)
7. Date for 2020 conference
8. Future directions for SIRA
9. AOB

1. Welcome and setup

Due to a train breakdown between Zurich and Bern, the president arrives late. The meeting starts at 14:35.

The president welcomes the participants and states who has voting rights. Eric Dubuis agrees to keep the minutes.

Decision: The minutes of the 2018 Annual Conference are approved (unanimously). The agenda and the minute keeper are approved (unanimously).

2. Report on activities, communications

SIRA Board
- Reinhard Jung, currently treasurer of SIRA, steps down from the SIRA board as of today
- Siegfried Handschuh is the new SIRA treasurer
- Next year, the term of office of all board members and of the president ends
- Elections will be held at next SIRA conference in fall 2020.

SIRA events
- The SIRA event planned for 2019 did not happen: the people who had committed to organize this event, eventually had no time for doing it
- SIRA plans an event on Data Science next fall
- Siegfried Handschuh has the lead
- Maybe we organize this jointly with the Swiss Digital Summit of SI.

SIRA web site
- SIRA website has been refurbished: https://sira.swissinformatics.org
- Based on Word Press, currently maintained by the president
- Can be visited from the SI web site: https://swissinformatics.org/de/organe/sections/sira/
- There is a question about the maintenance of the SIRA membership database. The president replies: SIRA representatives receive the list once a year; representatives update the list; web site then will be updated (and the representatives receive the bill).

Informatics Europe
- Informatics Europe (association of Informatics departments of European universities (i.e., the European analogue to SIRA) seeks collaboration with national societies
- Martin Glinz attended the IE annual conference and keeps contact.

Student statistics
- No progress so far.

State of SI
- Conflicts and quarreling in the board have reached an alarming level. Internal fights consume considerable energy and hamper the proper functioning of the board. The position of treasurer has been vacant for more than half a year.
- The ECDL business is at stake.
  Background: ECDL (http://ecdl.org/about-ecdl/) is a testing and certification program for computing literacy skills; ECDL originally stood for European Computer Driver's License. SI is holding the ECDL license for Switzerland and Liechtenstein from the ECDL Foundation. SI has granted a sub-license to an operating company in Switzerland. The contract with the current operating company was terminated by SI, expiring by December 31, 2019, because SI was no longer satisfied with the behavior of the operating company. In the past two years, SI has evaluated various options how to run the ECDL business in the future and has eventually decided to found an operating company which is 100% owned by ECDL-SI[1] and grant the ECDL sub-license to this company. There is open dissent in the SI board whether this was the right move, or a different solution should be implemented. The ECDL Foundation has warned SI that they could revoke the ECDL license from SI if SI should fail to establish an operating company which takes over the business as of January 1, 2020 in a well-organized and orderly fashion. If

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[1] ECDL-SI is a formally independent association which is 100% controlled by SI and has been tasked by SI to run all ECDL-related business on behalf of SI. This separation had been introduced mainly for tax and risk reduction purposes.

SI fails to run the ECDL business in Switzerland properly, the financial survival of SI is at stake, because the license revenues constitute a significant part of the income of SI.

- What can / shall SIRA do?
  - Observe and keep out?
  - File a resolution to the SI board reminding them to behave like professionals?
  - Demand an extraordinary SI GA?
  - Bring this before the SI Ethics Committee?
  - Involve the SI Presidents' Conference?

The discussion is postponed and resumed after agenda item 8.

The president proposes to act, for example, with a formal motion. Christian Tschudin argues that just a motion is not sufficient. He suggests that SIRA demands that the SI board undergoes a mediation process and that SIRA should financially support this process.

Decision: The SIRA conference unanimously passes the following motion to the SI Board:

"SIRA is alarmed about the degree of dissent and quarreling in the SI board. As SIRA represents a major percentage of SI members, SIRA is seriously concerned about this situation. Hence, the SIRA Conference, which is the supreme authority of SIRA, has unanimously decided to urge the SI Board to undergo a mediation process with an external, professional mediator in order to improve the situation and help the SI Board to return to professional, constructive collaboration. To underline how strongly SIRA is concerned, SIRA will cover up to Fr. 2'000 of the cost of such a mediation."

3. Change of statutes

Together with the invitation, a proposal by the SIRA Board for changing the SIRA statutes has been distributed. The main reason for the change is the clarification of the voting rights. On the same occasion, the board also proposes some minor changes. The SIRA Conference discusses the proposed changes individually per changed article and decides as follows:

Decisions:

1.3	This text is intended to be gender-neutral. All terms referred to (president, person, member, etc.) refer to ~~both women and men~~all genders.

=> unanimously approved

5.3	a. Each informatics department has one vote at the SIRA Conference, to be held by the head of the department. The head of the department may appoint another SIRA member as the department's acting representative for all SIRA matters. ~~This representation should be effective for at least two years, and must be communicated to the SIRA Board no later than 7 days before a SIRA Conference is convened~~.
	b. If a department head or acting SIRA representative of a department cannot participate in a SIRA Conference, they may send another SIRA member from the department as a substitute to that SIRA Conference, and bestow the right to vote for the department temporarily on that member.
	c. The appointment of acting representatives or substitutes must be announced to the SIRA president prior to the beginning of the SIRA Conference.
	d. Members of the SIRA Board (including the president) who are not representing their departments as heads, acting representatives or substitutes have a vote in the SIRA Conference ex officio.
	e. Except for the cases mentioned in Article 5.3 a. and 5.3 b., any transfer of voting rights in the SIRA Conference is explicitly forbidden.
(...)	
~~5.7~~	~~Transfer of voting rights in the SIRA Conference is expressly forbidden.~~

=> unanimously approved

Remark: From this point on, Paolo Favaro, who participates as a substitute for UniBE, has the right to vote for UniBE.

> 5.~~8~~7 In lieu of a physical meeting of the SIRA Conference, the SIRA Board may request a decision by letter or suitable electronic means from the ~~heads of the informatics departments~~SIRA members who have a vote in the SIRA Conference. In this case, at least 30 days must fall between the delivery of voting materials and the deadline for submitting ballots.

Several attendees deem the period of at least 30 days to be too long.

=> Unanimous decision to change "at least 30 days" to "at least 10 days". With this change, the proposed change is unanimously approved.

> 6.1 The SIRA Board consists of the president and 2 to 5[1] further SIRA members. Their term of office is two years. The president may be re-elected for at most one additional term.
>
> 6.2 The SIRA Board directs SIRA and represents it to the public. The Board carries out the decisions of the SIRA Conference and is responsible to it for carrying out SIRA business. The Board determines the date on which member lists are due, according to ~~point~~Article 3.2. It shall decide on all matters that are not expressly the responsibility of the SIRA Conference.
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> ~~[1]Changed from 4 to 5 by decision of the SIRA Conference of 2017-12-04~~

Merely syntactic changes => unanimously approved

=> The president will create a release of the changed statutes and publish it on the SIRA website.

4. SIRA fees 2020

- SIRA board proposes not to change the SIRA membership fees for 2020.
- Current fees: 120 CHF flat per active professor of the active departments. (CHF 36 to SIRA, CHF 50 to SI, CHF 14 to joint SI-SIRA R&E fund, CHF 20 flat fee for SIG membership). For emeriti, the SIRA membership is free, while SIRA pays CHF 40 per emeritus to SI for their SI membership.
- Might result in s slight loss in 2020, but we have over 200 kCHF in assets.

Decision: The fees for 2020 are approved unanimously.

5. Investments of SIRA assets

- Estimate per end of 2019: more than 220 kCHF assets
- Zero interest rate; might become negative in the future
- We might want to invest some share of our assets in a better way.
- Not clear who would be entitled to do (SIRA board or SIRA conference)
- Motion (by the president): The SIRA Board shall be explicitly entitled to invest up to ten percent of the SIRA assets in instruments other than a standard bank account. Only investments with well-balanced chances and risks shall be considered and high-risk investments shall be avoided.
- Discussion: Some of the conference participants are rather skeptical about this idea. Others argue that the board should have the competence to invest as proposed.
  Decision: The motion is *rejected* (yes: 3; no: 5; abstention: 2).

6. Approvals

Financial report of 2018

	Budget 2018	Actual 2018
Income	CHF 8'160	CHF 10'346.00
Expenses ParlDigi SIRA event At discretion of the board	 CHF 6'000 CHF 1'000 CHF 1'000	 CHF 3'000.00[1] CHF 1'268.50 CHF 1'861.05
Surplus / Loss	CHF 160	CHF 6'129.55
Assets per December 31, 2018: CHF 219'398.78		

[1]Due to change of invoice period from 1 July – 30 June to 1 Jan – 31 Dec.

Decision: The report is unanimously approved.

Estimated outcome for 2019

Information only, no decision.

	Budget 2019	Estimate 2019
Income	CHF 12'000	CHF 11'014
Expenses ParlDigi SIRA event Other measures (at discretion of the board) Entitlement to give a loan to 3L Informatik AG At discretion of the board	 CHF 6'000 CHF 1'000 CHF 6'000 CHF 15'000 CHF 1'000	 CHF 6'000 0 0 0 1347
Surplus / Loss	CHF -17'000	CHF 3'667
Estimated assets per December 31, 2019: CHF 223'066		

The loan of up to CHF 15'000 that the board had been entitled to give to 3L Informatik AG, was not given, because eventually, 3L Informatik AG had enough funds to complete the development of the SI Professional and start marketing it. The entitlement will expire by the end of this year. The board did not finance other measures (as, for example, paying a webmaster).

Discharge of the Board

Christian Tschudin takes over from the president for the discussion and voting.

Decision: The board is discharged with 6 in favor, none against, and 4 abstentions (by board members).

Budget 2019

Income
- Membership fees   CHF   11'000

Expenses
- Membership in ParlDigi   CHF   6'000
- SIRA event 2019   CHF   1'000
- Other measures (at discretion of the board)   CHF   6'000
- Miscellaneous (at discretion of the board)   CHF   1'000

Surplus / deficit   CHF   -3'000

Depending on how much the board will spend from the allowance for other measures, the actual result will range between CHF -3'000 and CHF 3'000.

Decision: The budget is unanimously approved.

7. Date for the 2020 SIRA Conference

• The president proposes week 46 or week 47: week 46 is preferred
• Day of week & time of the day: Friday, 14-16 is preferred

Decision: The 2020 SIRA Conference will be held Friday 13 November 2020 14:15-16:15.

8. Future directions for SIRA

Summary of brainstorming of last year's SIRA conference and (partial) follow-up:

• Even SIRA is not very active => it's a kind of an insurance.
• Time resources are the limiting factor, as SIRA has no secretarial office.
• Gender issues: mentoring women scientists, raising awareness => no SIRA activities, except a pointer on the SIRA website to a Informatics Europe brochure on women in informatics: https://sira.swissinformatics.org/resources/
• Computer science obligatory in high schools => Philippe Cudré-Mauroux informs that it's now mandatory and that programs for informatics teachers are being implemented. Matthias Hauswirth informs about the situation in Ticino. More information: https://www3.unifr.ch/gyminf
• SIRA should request a seat in the steering board of the Coordination Office for Scientific Information (COSI) => Christian Tschudin, who had been appointed SIRA delegate for COSI matters last year, gives a brief status report. The P-5 steering committee, initiator of COSI, does no longer exist.; changed to "Delegation Open Science" (DelOS).The envisaged COSI steering board "evaporated". DelOS is a political body including service provider pressure groups. Governance in disarray; recently, SERI, SNSF, EPFL and ETHZ, have intervened, requesting a "Begleitgruppe" and a "Redaktionsgruppe". They also wish to restrict scope to "Open Research Data" (ORD). A "CIO for Swiss academic science services" is not envisaged: soft steering with limited money flow, managed by a political committee and federalist reflexes against such a central role. Consequence: the service providers rule and academic stakeholders have little to say.
Christian Tschudin currently hasn't any tangible recommendations. Anyway, the topic is becoming bigger than SIRA (including sciences, humanities etc.), so rector-level awareness needed in the universities.
• SIRA should have a local connection to Informatics Europe => established

9. Any other business

None.

The meeting is closed at 16:30.