

IAPRI in the 1970s and '80s

In the second of our articles celebrating IAPRI's 50th anniversary and summarizing the association's history, we jump back to its origins as an organization with a compact, largely European membership.

The growth and development of IAPRI, from its creation 50 years ago in 1971, in many ways reflects wider shifts in the world of packaging, packaging research and education.

To begin with, why set up an organization of this kind in the first place? Arguably, international co-operation in other areas such as trade and safety had, throughout the 1960s, filtered down to the specifics of packaging standards, as well as the research and testing that made such standards possible.

Like many complex and diverse systems, IAPRI started its evolutionary process in a very simple form. In fact, the first international symposium to attract a handful of future IAPRI founder members was held over a decade earlier in 1960, hosted by Pira in the UK. Follow-up events, including one in Copenhagen in 1970, paved the way for the formal establishment of IAPRI the following year.

Rudolph Heiss of the Fraunhofer Institute (IVV) in Freising, Germany, became the first President with Frank Paine of Pira as Secretary General (SG). While Heiss was succeeded as President by Yngve Dagele of Sweden in 1976, Paine remained SG until 1992.

Small, friendly settings

Ten years ago, on the occasion of IAPRI's 40th anniversary, we spoke to Dagele. As he said then: "There were just four or five members for the first four years or so. Then it developed, mostly at first with other European institutes." Later, more US organizations became members. "But it was a slow process."

Nonetheless, it was clear from the outset that this compact membership was only the tip of a much larger iceberg. Just one year after IAPRI was formed, its first Conference attracted no fewer than 300 delegates.

Meanwhile, the symposium format, exclusively for members, remained of necessity a very intimate affair, as former President Kees Sonneveld recalled. The participants in the 1984 Symposium in Vienna all fitted round a single, large table. "This was very cosy, and it highlights the fact that these were small but high-content-level gatherings," he said.

Despite the high caliber of the scientific presentations, they were far from being stuffy academic sessions, as Dagele explained. "For me, the Symposia were more engaging events, shared with people with similar interests and facing similar challenges," he said. "We all became good friends."

During the 1970s and '80s – in fact, for the first 34 years of IAPRI's existence – the membership's independence from consumer brand-owners and suppliers of equipment and materials was vigorously maintained. "We were mostly independent research institutes, and we were serious about not allowing





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access to any commercial interests,” said Dagele. “Some members in particular were adamant about this. “But then, over time, the institutes themselves have become more commercial. Things have moved on.”

That movement was already identifiable back at IAPRI’s 1985 Michigan State University (MSU) event, as Paine pointed out. “For the first time, it combined the Symposium and Conference, so it was fully open to different commercial bodies.”

There were developments in other areas, too. By 1984, IAPRI boasted around 25 members, and by the time Dagele stepped down, to be replaced by Michel Veaux as President in 1992, that number had risen to 42, representing 27 different countries.

An evolving landscape

Further changes began to take place in the mid-1980s, notably the formation of Working Groups (WGs) in areas of special interest. The first of these was the Dangerous Goods WG. The Packaging and the Environment (later Sustainable Packaging) WG was created in 1991, and others followed.

More generally, the research concerns of IAPRI members expanded to cover a wider range, as Paine explained when we spoke to him in 2011. For a long time, the main focus was on unit packs for transit. “Most people reached the stage where they’d got the unit pack right, but they needed to put more effort into equipment and primary packaging,” he said. “More work started to be done on wider packaging systems.”

Some challenges appear as difficult to grapple with today as they did back in the 1970s. “For example, early on, we started looking at lifecycle analysis (LCA),” said Dagele. “But LCA studies turned out to be a very complex and difficult methodology to establish. I think those challenges have still not been resolved.” Some might say that even today, a decade on, they remain largely unresolved.

Two further areas of evolutionary interest merit at least a mention. The first of these is the relationship between IAPRI and the Wiley professional journal *Packaging Technology and Science* (PTS). When the publication was established in 1988, IAPRI members were among its most ardent champions. It is no coincidence that Paine, as well as being SG of IAPRI, was the journal’s first editor.

Secondly, IAPRI has consistently put its weight behind support for packaging education, just as much as for research. “When I started in packaging back in 1954, packaging science wasn’t on the university agenda at all,” Dagele told us. “People would have laughed at the idea. Things began to change, but it took a good while for it to be treated as a serious subject.”

To see how much has changed, it is enough to count up just how many university packaging schools and departments are among current IAPRI members.

Perspectives on IAPRI: the 1990s

A half-century on from the official founding of IAPRI in 1971, we look at one of the critical decades for the association, when the membership nearly trebled, the geographical footprint began a decisive shift, and communication at Board and membership levels underwent important changes.

This year marks 50 years of IAPRI's official existence, even if informal links and some joint events between institutes began before 1971. By a happy coincidence, this year has also seen a fresh round of communications between former Secretary General (SG) Frans Lox (see sidebar) and the current SG and newsletter editor.

This makes it doubly appropriate to start our series of articles celebrating the changing face of IAPRI over its lifetime with a look at the central decade of the 1990s. This was the period when Lox served as SG under two Presidents and when many of the most significant changes began to shape the organization.

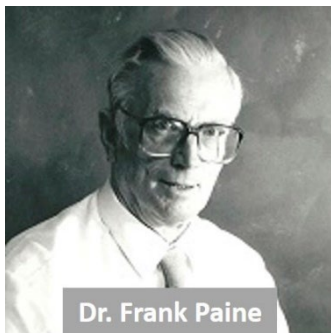
The most obvious change over this period was in the size of the membership. "When I took over the secretariat, IAPRI had 17 members," Lox recalls. "During my term as SG, that number rose to 47." Board meetings, he remembers were typically dominated by discussions regarding the acceptance of new members.

Lox joined the Board in 1990, while Frank Paine of Pira International was still SG, and then took over from Paine as SG in 1992. At that time, Michel Veaux, director of France's Laboratoire National d'Essais (LNE), was President. Veaux and Lox visited several prospective member institutes together, he remembers.

"Unfortunately, Michel became seriously ill, and had to retire as President in 1994," says Lox. "On the occasion of the Helsinki Symposium [in 1994], the new President Anders Söras was elected by the General Assembly."

There were further changes in the second half of the decade, some of them with particular resonance in this year which has seen remote and virtual meetings taking such a prominent role. "Under the guidance of Söras, we introduced Board meetings by telephone," Lox points out. "Only the President and the SG actually met up [face-to-face]. It was great to hear the board-members in Australia and Brazil, for instance, all at the same time; a rather new and efficient procedure at that time."

The evolution and growth in membership in turn had an impact on where the annual IAPRI events took place. Up to early 2020, current members had been used to travelling the world over for Conferences and Symposia, but that was not always the case.



Lox's first exposure to an IAPRI event was the 1986 Symposium, which was held in Oslo, Norway. He organized the 1988 Symposium at his own University in Ghent, Belgium. But the drift towards non-European destinations during the 1990s was unmistakable. Events were held in St Gallen, Switzerland (1990 Symposium), but subsequently in - for example - Sao Paulo, Brazil (1993 Conference), Melbourne, Australia (1997 Conference), Rochester, US (1998 Symposium), Singapore (1999 Conference) and San José, US (2000 Symposium), as well as at other European institutes.

While the detail of research has, in most cases, moved on to very new terrain, the broad themes around papers presented at IAPRI events are still recognizable. “The key subjects treated by members during the symposia were: optimization of test procedures, migration phenomena in plastic packaging materials, new materials, temperature-indication on packaging, lifecycle analysis and the optimization of marketing and design in packaging,” Lox recalls.

Clearly, the way the association exchanged and compiled information internally and presented itself to the outside world has also changed out of all recognition. Paine had introduced regularly updated versions of the IAPRI Handbook, which provided basic member data.

But Lox took this resource one stage further. “I introduced into the IAPRI Handbook a visual overview of the research and testing profile of each IAPRI member,” he explains. “The specialties of each institute were visualized in two graphs.” As a result, he claims, the Handbook became a “marketing tool for each member. “It was also intended to optimize contacts, research and testing procedures between the members.”

The final 217-page IAPRI Handbook was printed in 1999. By then, of course, digital alternatives were available. Lox created the first IAPRI website, he says, during his time at the University of Brussels. This version of the website, which lasted only up to his retirement as SG in 2000, was the direct antecedent of today’s very different website and electronic newsletter.

Finally, he provides one other fascinating insight into the politics of packaging-related membership organizations during the 1990s. Alongside education, Lox rightly emphasizes the essential role played by packaging research among IAPRI members, characterizing it as a highly distinctive “glue” which binds them together.

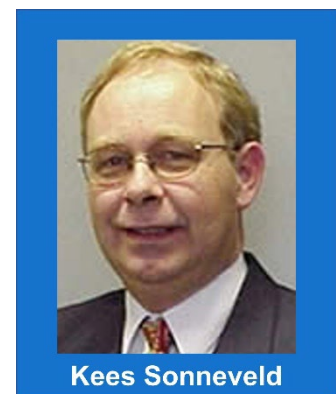
The same was true of the 1990s. But at that time, the separate co-existence of IAPRI and - in particular - the World Packaging Organization (WPO) could not always be taken for granted. Apparently, Paine warned repeatedly that the WPO’s eagerness at the time to collaborate with IAPRI could lead to a takeover and the possibility that “one of the [organizations] would disappear”, Lox remarks. But IAPRI remained independent then and remains so today, offering its highly specialized focus on packaging research and education to an ever-evolving international membership. And of course, today’s WPO and IAPRI are both highly valued affiliate member of each other’s organizations.

New growth and new priorities: IAPRI since 2000

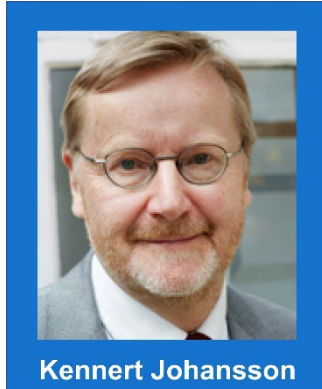
After Anders Soras, who was President from 1996 to 2004, Kees Sonneveld, based at Victoria University in Australia, took on the role, with Marie Rushton as Secretary General.

Changes at this point included the introduction of corporate membership. Previously, the ‘purist’ approach of the IAPRI founder members had steered a course away from the more commercial side of packaging research. But now there was increasingly recognition that much of the corporate sphere demonstrated the same

quality and rigor in its research as the independent institutes and university departments did in theirs. Nestlé Packaging Research joined as the first of this new membership category in 2005.



Thomas Goedecke of BAM, Germany, became President in 2009, with Marie Rushton remaining as Secretary General. By the following year, IAPRI membership had reached 76, including associate and new corporate members.



In 2011, in an article celebrating the association's 40th anniversary, Board Member Kennert Johansson of Innventia (now part of RISE), Sweden, outlined the broadening of research themes over the years.

In the case of his own institute, this had meant moving from a primary focus on testing transport packaging to wider materials testing and development. "Then, the last 15 years or so saw sustainability and consumer questions growing in significance."



Another former Board member, in this case still actively involved in IAPRI, Renee Wever of Linköping University recalls his first IAPRI event in Tokyo in 2006. "Most papers were, as I recall, on the technical side: packaging dynamics, materials science, and so on." As Johansson did back in 2011, Wever recognizes the indispensable and central position that these research areas enjoy, but like him, he notes a shift to include other important themes.

"Over the years we've seen a growth around more human-centered subjects such as pack design methodology, ergonomics and marketing," he says.



As Johansson also pointed out in his discussion, peer-reviewed papers were introduced for the first time at the 2011 Berlin Symposium. They have been a key feature of IAPRI events ever since. "Peer review in its broadest sense and academic excellence were at the heart of the original organization – and remain so today," he wrote.

Another innovation from this period which has stood the test of time is the IAPRI exchange scholarship, generously sponsored over the years by corporate member PepsiCo. The opening of the applications process for the 2022-3 scholarship was announced earlier this month, offering a major opportunity for a graduate researcher from one IAPRI member institute to further develop their chosen project at another.

While several Working Groups (WGs) were already well-established by the years after 2000, new additions to the list have always reflected evolving areas of interest among members. The Packaging & Consumers WG, one of the more recent, is among those to have yielded joint research, over the years, as Wever (who has helped to run the group) explains. Bringing this process up to date, a reappraisal by the Board has now led to a redesignation of WGs as Communities of Practice (CoPs). This is not to diminish the importance and relevance of their role in any way, but more closely reflects the reality of how they operate, as current Secretary General Ed Church explains.

“IAPRI CoPs are groups of individuals within the membership who share a common interest, concern, or a set of problems in a particular area of packaging, and who come together (face-to-face or in a virtual environment) to fulfil both individual and community goals,” he says.



Edward Church

As Church makes clear, anyone from an IAPRI member organisation can join a CoP. As well as Packaging & Consumers, the list of current CoPs reads as follows: Distribution Packaging; Sustainable Packaging; and Active & Intelligent Packaging. A new Packaging Education CoP is under development. “There is a strong emphasis within IAPRI on building up their effectiveness,” he adds.

Meanwhile, the term ‘Working Group’ is now being applied instead to smaller, more focused groups appointed by the Board to address specific objectives or challenges. The first of these is the Social Media Strategy Development WG. As Church states: “Social media is of critical importance, especially for the younger and upcoming generation of members.”

A second WG is currently being created with the objective of developing strategies for better dissemination of IAPRI members’ scientific research.

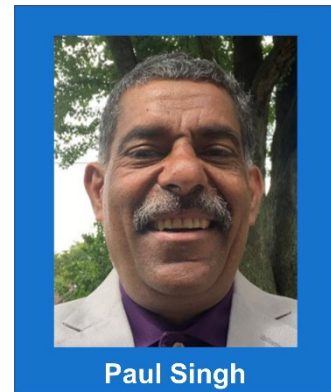
According to Corporate Board Member Paul Singh of Packaging Forensics Associates, there have been broader changes, too, which have affected the membership profile and some of the priorities within IAPRI. “The addition of many members from Asia has expanded the association’s global nature,” he says.

Other specific changes have had smaller but no less tangible effects. “When those serving on the Board were no longer restricted to managers or department heads, this opened Board positions to others at the member institutions,” says Singh.

But despite its greater size, diversity and global reach, and through all of the disruption and troubled times of the past two years, the welcome and support offered by IAPRI members has not diminished.

Reminiscing about his first Conference in Tokyo, Wever says: “I see many of the faces from 2006 still around.” He adds: “All of us are very welcoming to new packaging researchers, whether from new member organizations or early-career.”

Regarding IAPRI’s role, Wever again takes us back to his reasons for attending the Japan Conference. “I had realized that, for anyone studying packaging academically, IAPRI is the place to be,” he says.



Paul Singh



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The aims of IAPRI; to establish and advance professional and personal relations, share information and obtain peer review with respect to methodology, analysis, and potential outcomes at early stages of research projects, and contribute to the academic recognition of education programs on packaging have continued on since the beginning. They are enabled by publication of a newsletter, Communities of Practice information transfer and the IAPRI website. But number one is the networking opportunity offered by IAPRI world and member conferences, that also provides an interaction with publishers to facilitate the recognition and publishing of the scientific and scholarly work presented.

Jay Singh, IAPRI's current President says, "It has been a dynamically changing fifty years since the beginnings of official formation of IAPRI, but what brought together just a few institutes and a university is still as true today as it was in 1971."