

A Tribute to Jacques Berleur

By David Kreps (Chair, TC9)

It is with great sadness that I report the passing of Jacques Berleur, who made significant contributions to understanding of the impacts of technology on society.

Jacques Berleur (b.1938, d.2020), was born in Namur (Belgium) on July 22, 1938. He received a 'Civil Engineer' diploma from the Catholic University of Louvain (Belgium). In November 1961, he joined the Society of Jesus. At Fourvière in Lyon (France), Jacques followed the theology programme and was ordained a priest on July 26, 1971. He took up his post as Professor of meta-informatics, philosophy and religious sciences at the Facultés Universitaires Notre Dame de la Paix (FUNDP), the Catholic University in Namur. He worked there from 1972 to 2003, focusing on the subject of Computing and Society. He held the post of Rector of the FUNDP for a nine-year period from 1984 to 1993. Jacques died on April 26, 2020, at the age of 81, at the Résidence 'Les Lauriers' in Namur.



Jacques Berleur lived the busy life of an academic, teaching widely and publishing more than 200 papers, and was co-Director of the *Cellule Interfacultaire de Technology Assessment*. He became intensively involved with IFIP in the 1970s, and continued that engagement until his retirement for the rest of his life. To recognise his work, he received the IFIP Outstanding Service Award (1988) and the IFIP Silver Core (1992). He was a fervent champion of WG9.2 on Social Accountability and Computing, created in 1977, and was Chair of the working group from 1990 to 1996. He was very involved in the working group's early conferences, and their ground-breaking early proceedings, co-creating the notion of Information Society 'landscapes'. He established the Namur Award "for contributing to the international awareness of the social implications of technology," which was first awarded to Joseph Weizenbaum (many other noteworthy recipients followed in the same tradition). He was particularly keen on IFIP's TC9 series of conferences on Human Choice and Computing. He was Editor of the Proceedings for HCC4, *Information Technology Assessment*, held in Dublin in 1990. He contributed a paper to HCC5, *Computers and Networks in the Age of Globalization*, in Switzerland in 1998, championing the issues and concerns of WG9.2. Alongside his work with WG9.2, he was Belgian National Representative on TC9 for a period. He became Chair of TC9 from 1999 to 2004. In this role, he oversaw HCC6 *Issues of Choice and Quality of Life in the Information Society*, as part of the World Computer Congress in 2002, held in Montreal, Canada, with proceedings co-edited by himself and Klaus Brunnstein (TC9 Chair, 1990-1995). He was equally a keen attendee at the IFIP World Computer Congresses.

Jacques put much energy into promoting ethics discussions in professional societies. As a result, one of the abiding interests of TC9 on ICT and Society has been the attention paid to the need for an ethical approach to the work of ICT professionals. In 1988, Harold Sackman (TC9 Chair 1984-1989 and co-editor of the HCC1 proceedings) began an initiative to push forward the notion of an IFIP Code of Ethics. WG9.2 was the obvious home for such an

endeavour. Much discussion took place on how it might evolve at the regular WG9.2 working group meetings, which Jacques often hosted in the premises of the university at Namur. A Task Group (1992-1994) was set up by the IFIP General Assembly in Toledo, Spain (September 1992) after IFIP's 12th World Computer Congress, where debates took place about setting up a 'single' IFIP Code of Ethics. A Special Interest Group on Framework on Ethics of Computing (SIG9.2.2) was created by Jacques Berleur and the then TC9 Chair, Klaus Brunnstein. The IFIP Ethics Task Group completed its immediate task in 1996 through the publication of the results of an in-depth analysis of nearly 30 codes of ethics/conduct, *Ethics of Computing: Codes, Spaces for Discussion and Law* (1996). Twenty-one of the codes pertained to IFIP national societies, representing twelve countries.

The work of SIG9.2.2 on ethics in computing, nevertheless, continued, with a range of other publications. They included the *Criteria and Procedures for Developing Codes of Ethics or of Conduct* in 2004. These criteria were used in the creation of the Code of Ethics adopted in 2018 by the ACM, in a three-year process led by SIG9.2.2's current Chair, Don Gotterbarn (2018-). Led by David Kreps, current TC9 Chair (2018-), a new IFIP Ethics Task and Finish Group was created at the IFIP GA in Kiev (Ukraine) in 2019. The group involves Don Gotterbarn, IP3 Chair - Moira de Roche, and Member Societies Assembly representative - Margaret Havey. The group is finally nearing the completion of this project, with the final draft IFIP Code of Ethics due to be presented to the 2020 IFIP General Assembly.

While this tribute recalls the many details of Jacques' career and his involvement with IFIP, he is especially remembered fondly by many of those whose engagement with IFIP began under his direction and with his encouragement. His publications, his international engagement – especially in Latin America and South Africa – and his untiring dedication to computing social accountability and ethical conduct in the field of computing, will not be forgotten. He truly made a difference.

His work was especially remembered on his retirement from the university and his stepping down from his more pro-active involvement in the working group and task force with which he had been most engaged. The WG9.2 conference on 'Information Society: Governance Ethics and Social Consequences' was held at Namur, on 22-23 May 2006. The conference proceedings were published by Springer in 2007 with the title: *The information society: innovation, legitimacy, ethics and democracy: in honor of Professor Jacques Berleur*. They were edited by Philippe Goujon, Sylvian Lavelle, Penny Duquenoy, Kai Kimppa (current TC9 Vice-Chair), and Véronique Laurent. The volume included contributions from Klaus Brunnstein (TC9 Chair 1990-1995), Chrisanthi Avgerou (TC9 Chair 2005-2010), Diane Whitehouse (TC9 Chair 2014-2017), and Jacques Berleur himself. A closing article by Penny Duquenoy (current TC9 Secretary) culminated with this paragraph:

“It is a testament to the work of Jacques Berleur that such a diverse, informed, insightful and intellectually stimulating body of knowledge has been brought together following an event in honour of his work. For those who have known him as a member of WG9.2 and as Chair of SIG 9.2.2 this is not surprising, it is no more than he deserves for his tireless input, commitment “to the cause”, uniqueness, humour, warmth and last but not at all least - hospitality. On behalf of the members of WG 9.2 and myself personally: Thank you Jacques, it has been a pleasure to work with you.”

These sentiments, indeed, would seem to sum up the feelings of those who worked with Jacques in IFIP over his more than 40 years of involvement in the federation.

It is clear from his [obituary](#) published by the University of Namur that Jacques' work with IFIP touched on just one small slice of his decades-long societal and social engagement and commitment.

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