

## Letter from the President

Dear colleagues,

many of you will have received an email in which the following issues are discussed (if you haven't, please contact us at [info@esmtb.org](mailto:info@esmtb.org)). However, since these issues are central to the work we have been doing, please let me restate the concepts and maybe enlarge a little bit in this issue of the Communications.

We are, I believe, at a turning point in the life of our Society. Biomathematics, theoretical biology, and theoretical (bio)medicine are assuming an ever increasing role in current scientific research and its application to societal issues. Besides the Society's traditional research themes (such as population dynamics or physiological modeling or stochastic processes in genetics), new developments are appearing at an ever faster pace: think of mathematical neuroscience, modeling for systems biology, or model-supported cardiac and orthopedic surgery. Time-honored pencil-and-paper, definition-theorem-proof approaches are being massively supplemented (not supplanted) by simulation and stochastic computation.

Our Society has the ambitious goal of representing this variety of endeavors, of competences and individual efforts in the European scene, which is where most of us naturally find ourselves operating. "Representing", however, is a big word. What is, really, the role of the Society? And how can we fulfill that role?

The main usefulness of a free professional association such as ours could be that it provides a forum to exchange opinions on the technical aspects of our work, as well as on the social and political issues that affect this work.

The technical exchange is well exemplified by ECMTB, our bi-annual conference. It is a good conference, in fact the reference event for mathematical biology in Europe, and is widely attended by researchers from all over the world, no problem there. Indeed, you are cordially invited to join us in ECMTB2020-Heidelberg in August/September 2020, where Anna Marciniak-Czochra will host us at the

Mathematikon in a joint ESMTB-SMB event. We hope it will be even nicer than the already very nice ECMTB2018, when Maíra Aguiar hosted us at the Faculdade de Ciências of Lisbon University. Also, you may appreciate being notified of the upcoming workshops and summer schools our Society supports: if this is the case, send us an email and we will make sure you are on our mailing list. There are also other technical issues, which we have had as yet no time to address as they would deserve, for instance the formation of specific interest groups within ESMTB or the publication of white papers on particular topics of current interest.

The social and political issues are less clearly defined, but no less important.

One example is finding funds for our laboratories and departments. ESMTB is directly participating, for the first time, in a EU-funded call, with a COST proposal for a training network on cancer modeling. The funding that the Society would receive is not large, but the point is that we begin to be active in the fostering and facilitation of consortia formation to obtain research grants. The idea here is that ESMTB helps generating opportunities for the members and lends its credibility, as an established supra-national organization, to consortia aiming at European funding.

A second quite relevant socio-political issue is publishing research articles. We, as a professional association, must consider societal changes such as widespread and cost-effective Open Access, available without the imposition of de-facto limitations due to lack of resources in developing countries or niche scientific domains; such as the replacement of the traditional modality of reading (few) established journals front-to-back with the ad-hoc acquisition via Internet of the publications immediately relevant to the problem at hand, irrespective of the source; or such as the need for establishing qualitative standards for rigor and novelty in the current market-driven proliferation of titles and Editorial Boards, and explosive increase in published material.

Another important issue is the cross-

compatibility, exchange and improvement of post-graduate training in mathematical methods applied to biology and medicine: the interaction of mathematical and biological colleagues is better than in the past, but not quite as painless as we would hope; the recognition of interdisciplinary specialties is sorely lacking in the Universities of several European countries; the exchange of doctoral students could be greatly enhanced, with vast improvements in cross-fertilization among research units.

It is very likely that you have discussed these and other problems with your colleagues, and the point of the Society is to bring that discussion more effectively to a wider circle of researchers. To do that, our first priority in the past several months was the need to get reorganized: new banking, new member management software, new webpage, new legal address and updated administrative paperwork with the Authorities. And a new logo to top it off (do you like the range from continuous to discrete, going from the body to the wings of the butterfly? the dynamics in the shade?). We did a very substantial amount of work, of which our treasurer Bob Planqué carried the heaviest load.

Now, however, it is high time to go back from organizing the administrative machinery, and talk with you and with your colleagues (please feel free to diffuse this message to any of your colleagues who might be interested).

It would be interesting to see greater participation, both in terms of more new members, in terms of increasing the scientific diversity of the members, and in terms of improving the experience of involvement in Society activities of the existing members. Joining the Society now is rather painless: it is sufficient to go to [www.esmtb.org](http://www.esmtb.org) → membership → application. Given the delay that has been necessary to effect all of the changes mentioned above, all who join or have already joined for 2019 will have a free membership renewal for 2020, valid for the several benefits including participation to ECMTB2020 Heidelberg at a discount.

But, why joining? What can ESMTB offer prospective members? We feel that the most

important reason to join ESMTB is not the discounts on the registration for ECMTB and the many workshops, or the free electronic copy of JoMB. The main reason is to make a difference with our voice and our opinion in shaping the course that our professional association will follow, both scientifically and organizationally. The registration fee helps ESMTB recognize worthy students (through the prizes we offer and the workshops and schools we support) and spread the idea that theoretical biology and biomathematics are alive, well and relevant. With your participation in the General Assembly (G.A.) and by writing in the Newsletter and Communications you will expose inefficiencies, contradictions, wishful thinking and blind conservatism (please remember that soon after the 2020 G.A. all members will vote for the next Board). With your participation in the organization of the ESMTB seminars, workshops, summer schools and minisymposia you will push onto the stage the science you care about. And, best of all, you will meet other like-minded individuals all across Europe, old and young.

Please consider participating in those ESMTB initiatives that are relevant for you and your team. You may ask questions from or make proposals to any one of the current Board members, just write them an email: Susanne and Sílvia for communications and outreach, Luděk for student initiatives, Anna for Heidelberg2020, Sílvia for the newsletter, Toby for prizes and European policies and funding. If you want money, just ask Bob. If anything else comes to your mind, write Ellen, Maíra or myself.

Hope to hear from you,

Andrea De Gaetano  
President of ESMTB

