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AFTERWORD

Thinking together in Stuttgart

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I remember thinking, '*It is so nice to think together*'. I was sitting in a lecture hall high in the sky, listening to and thinking alongside colleagues, most of whom I did not know up until then (most participants, if not all, depicted in Figure 1). I recall the mysterious lift that took us the seven storeys high, with small huddles of scientists trying to locate the correct button, often still exiting on the wrong floor. I tried to remember the joke that started with '*How many academics does it take to operate a lift*'?

These friendly, bright people—who, I might add, ultimately always managed to successfully navigate the building—were at the University of Stuttgart to discuss

the role of system dynamics in '*Managing Sustainability*', which was the theme of the 2023 European System Dynamics Workshop (EuSDW). This led to discussions on, for example, supporting environmental justice or the need for system change to combat climate change (Figure 2). I remember one remark vividly: '*They want to distract you, while we should be thinking about important things*'. We discussed the sustainability issues we all want to see resolved.

I was welcomed to the EuSDW for the first time. It is interesting to be invited to a group that you did not know existed. This 10th edition of the EuSDW took place on the



FIGURE 1 Group picture of the 10th European System Dynamics Workshop. Source: Image by DITF. All photographs are available in colour online. [Colour figure can be viewed at [wileyonlinelibrary.com](https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com)]

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FIGURE 2 'System change not climate change'. Source: Image by David Lane and available in colour online. [Colour figure can be viewed at [wileyonlinelibrary.com](https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1002/tes.3097)]



FIGURE 3 Group discussion. Source: Image by Ilona Burk. All photographs are available in colour online. [Colour figure can be viewed at [wileyonlinelibrary.com](https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1002/tes.3097)]

seventh floor of the tall, grey K II building of the University of Stuttgart, Germany, on 1 and 2 June 2023, and the contents of the issue preceding this afterword were derived from the papers presented at the workshop. These papers offer insight on topics such as sustainability transitions, environmental policy and climate-neutral energy systems, all through the lens of systems research. The papers in this issue demonstrate the various ways in which system dynamics can contribute to understanding and resolving the breadth of sustainability issues we face today.

It can be exhilarating to spend time with other system thinkers who, in some ways, think alike—people who, for example, like to ask: 'Why do we make models'? and 'What is the system'? I learned that one of the goals of the EuSDW series is to bring together the European scholars who sometimes work in isolation from each other. Another aim is to encourage peer mentoring beyond the separate European institutions. Indeed, the people who attended the workshop did that to exchange ideas, to learn from each other, to get to know one another

(better) and to collectively promote the field of SD while building European cohesion. Personally, I am impressed by the diversity of the attendants in terms of affiliations and seniority levels, as well as the welcoming character of the workshop to newcomers like me. It has been a gift to have had the opportunity to think with such a group of researchers for a few days.

The invitation-based procedure of the EuSDW series has been instrumental in facilitating peer mentoring and fostering discussion. Dependent on the theme, invitations are sent out for researchers to present their work, followed by invitations to discussants and other attendees. The aim here is to invite a range of participants, resulting in a relatively diverse group of researchers with differences in experience, affiliations and backgrounds. Well in advance of the workshop, the draft papers are circulated to all participants. At the 2-day workshop itself, papers are presented with ample time and attention for discussion. The discussions and the discussant notes help sharpen thoughts, and the fact that most of the presentations have been written into papers in this issue is a testament to the format's effectiveness. However, I would not want to discount other driving forces, such as the abundance of the Stuttgart cuisine, group walking tours (see also Figure 3; Lane et al., 2024) or our meeting place on the seventh floor, in the clouds, where we apparently do our best collective thinking.

To close this afterword, I want to thank the organising committee and hosts, including Andreas Größler and Meike Tilebein, and also acknowledge David Lane for his continued support of the European System Dynamics Workshop series. I am curious to learn what we will think about in the future—together.

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