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## Cochran-Hansen Prize – Memories from the Beginning

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The Cochran-Hansen Prize of the IASS is awarded every two years for the best paper on survey research methods submitted by a young statistician from a developing or transition country. The history of the prize goes back to 1999, and 14 persons have received the prize so far (<http://isi-iass.org/home/cochran-hansen-prize>).

Estonia became re-independent in 1991. Before that, during Soviet power, no survey statistics nor official statistics, neither in theory nor in practice, was dealt with. Gradually, this area started to develop. **Imbi Traat** in Tartu University started courses in survey sampling in 1993. Baltic-Nordic network in survey statistics (<https://wiki.helsinki.fi/display/BNU/Home>), initiated by **Gunnar Kuldorff** from Umeå University, helped a lot in a rapid development of the new area. Students had a great interest in a newly launched subject that had practical applications, requiring specialised statisticians. They wrote good Bachelor and Master theses, and as soon as the information about Cochran-Hansen prize arrived to Tartu University, we were ready to apply for it. Estonia was classified as transition country that time.

In fact, the information about the prize came to us from the Tallinn University, where **Enel Pungas** was the one of the two first receivers of the Cochran-Hansen prize in 1999. She was a master student in demography that time. She submitted her study on the data collection aspects and effects in the Estonian Family and Fertility Survey 1997. Enel received the award – participation in the IASS Summer Courses in Jyväskylä, and possibility to buy scientific literature. Now she works in the Ministry of the Interior as head of the Population Facts Department. She is thankful for those possibilities and recognition in her young days.

The two students of Imbi Traat who received the prize tell their memories below.

**Kristiina:** I was awarded the Cochran-Hansen prize in 2001 for the paper “On the order sampling design” which was based on my Bachelor thesis. I presented the study in the meeting of the International Statistical Institute in Seoul, South Korea. In conjunction with the meeting, I had the possibility to attend two courses on topics in survey sampling which I appreciated a lot. Also, this was my first journey to such a faraway country with a culture so different from my own. I still remember a breath-taking concert with Korean dance and music, the food (first time to eat with chopsticks!), the city (an amazing mix of modernity and tradition). And my first ever jetlag... After 2001, I continued my studies in mathematical statistics at MSc level. In 2010 I earned a PhD in Medicine (public health science / epidemiology) from Karolinska Institutet in Stockholm, Sweden.

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Currently I am working as researcher at Stockholm University, among other projects I am involved in a large national longitudinal survey on work environment and well-being.

**Maiki:** I received Cochran-Hansen prize in 2005 for my research paper “Variance and its estimator for a practical self-weighting two-phase design”. The research for this paper I carried out at Statistics Estonia as a part of my bachelor studies, based on a real-life problem in the Estonian Labour Force survey. My supervisor for this work was Imbi Traat, at the time an associate professor at Tartu University. She was the one who brought my attention to the IASS competition for young survey statisticians. I am very grateful for her believing in me and encouraging me to apply.

My prize included a plane ticket to Sydney to attend the 55<sup>th</sup> WSC (then called Session) of the ISI in April 2005. In addition, I was given the possibility to attend two short courses given adjacent to the congress, and was as well awarded a check to buy books of my choice. As a result, I became the owner of a copy of the famous “yellow book” by Särndal, Swensson and Wretman.

Even so many years later, still working in Statistics Estonia, now working more with people as Head of the Development Department, I remember very well that journey, the 33 hours one-way trips and the event itself. It was my first plane trip, my first visit to Australia, my first ISI experience, and my first presentation to so large an audience. What I remember of Sydney was the permanently cloudless sky, the very friendly local people, and the beautiful nature. For a young person without international conference experience, this ISI congress was overwhelming: so many people and so many sessions to choose from, and not to mention presenting my contribution in front of a large, highly knowledgeable audience. I was very grateful to the attendees who had supportive and encouraging comments on my work and presentation. I am also glad that I made some memorable contacts at the congress and stayed in contact with some of them even after the event. All in all, it was a very inspiring experience, and I am very grateful to IASS for this opportunity.