



Remembering Claudio: a note from his friends at Universities of Naples and Catanzaro

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At the University of Naples, the research group on information systems and organizational studies developed a strong relationship with Claudio Ciborra throughout the years, having the chance of benefiting from his insights and ideas to promote the study of the discipline and establishing sound reference models for new generations of researchers.

Starting from personal relationships rooted in the 80s (Claudio had been teaching in southern Italy at the beginning of his academic career), we enjoyed a proximity to Claudio's academic endeavours, which strengthened during the time.

As a consequence of such mutual interest, back in 1999, Claudio's dream of bringing the major European Conference on Information Systems to Italy for the first time started to assume a real contour when the decision was made to host the 11th ECIS (2003) at the University of Naples.

Organising such a prominent event in the academic calendar was indeed a major challenge, but also, as was clear from its preliminary rounds, an exciting opportunity to get in touch with outstanding academics and fresh ideas. And as such that chance had been conceived by Claudio as well.

For sure Claudio loved the location for a variety of reasons: a true cosmopolitan and mediterranean in nature as he was, he found inspiration and joy of life in countless journeys towards the south. But also because he managed to feel at home there, feeling a sense of recognition of his groundbreaking ideas. To use Claudio's own words, his link with Naples managed to 'precipitate the turning of an ephemeral contact into a relationship that looks and feels like a long acquaintance'.

The ECIS project gradually assumed the traits of an emerging reality in the years between 1999 and 2003, when several meetings with him took place in various locations, to unfold hot topics deserving a track at the conference, always in an effort, under his constant eye on the matter, to strike a balance between academic rigour and the attractive novelties of the outside world.

ECIS 2003 was a memorable conference, addressing the need to explore the limitations of existing managerial and technical approaches and models, to establish new alliances with other social sciences, looking at the specificity of emerging technologies in a new light.

It was really a manifesto of Claudio's attitude and meanings towards the discipline, answering his invitation to refocus the managerial agenda, drawing on new contributions emerging from the social sciences, such as theories of globalization and the risk society, allied to those from business and management.

In his vision, the conference represented a milestone and a challenge for the IS field, called to develop new paradigms to inspire fresh research directions, where cultural and human issues have a primary role, adapted to the current challenges of developing and using information and communication technologies in the changing world, squeezed by revolutionary and unprecedented forces and trends affecting organizations and institutions in which information technology is introduced: globalization;

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the bridging of time and distance; the increasing risks of complex information infrastructures; and the growing interdependence of business processes across the boundaries of firms and markets.

In the light of such ongoing activities, some research students from University of Naples also managed to appreciate his lectures and suggestions at LSE, the academic setting that Claudio had felt in the meantime as more stimulating and rewarding for his multifaceted intellect, as they were enrolled as ADMIS Master students or visiting scholars.

As a consequence of such contacts, the idea that the new research agenda should then be the basis for changed educational content and approaches started to take place, once again with Claudio's support.

Together with a leading local business school (Stoa, created in the 1980s in a joint venture with MIT), the University of Naples managed to offer to graduate students a course in Management of Information Systems, which acknowledged Claudio's inspiring vision of information systems as social systems to be studied under an emergent perspective.

Along with benefiting from lectures given by LSE staff, Claudio himself was the admired speaker on a panel on

the management of risk, shortly before his illness, in July 2004. It goes without saying how much he managed to captivate the attention of the young masters class, excited to see in action such a brilliant scientist and powerful communicator.

As many have been saying in the weeks following his untimely death, Claudio had a most inventive way of exploring new avenues of thought in the IS and organizational studies fields.

He was renowned for opening up new streams of research, coining words, concepts, theoretical frameworks and empirical approaches to understand the world, and then really deploying them in his research: such ideas have already shown their consistency and usefulness.

Furthermore, he added to his scientific results a light human touch, always mixed up with brilliant conversations and a deep sense of irony.

Indeed, his remarkable energy and intellect is a great loss to those of us who constitute the scientific community involved in the study of organization and information systems. The Italian community will sorely miss his talent and his contribution to the advancement of knowledge of our discipline.

About the authors

Riccardo Mercurio is Professor of Organizational Theory at University of Naples Federico II. He holds an MBA from IMD, Switzerland (1975). He carried out research work at University of York and University of Cambridge. Since 1981 he has been scientific director of Cesit, Napoli. In 2003, he was Conference chair of the European Conference on Information Systems. In 1999, he was member of the National committee devoted to develop the general transportation plan. Since 2003 has been CEO of Napolipark.

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