

Women in Numbers Europe 2

26 – 30 September 2016, @Snellius

The Women in Numbers Europe 2 (WIN-E2) workshop brought together 40 established women researchers, young faculty, and advanced graduate students for research collaboration and mentorship. Unlike a typical mathematics conference, the main activity of the workshop was small-group research projects which have the potential to lead to ongoing collaboration between the participants. Each group had two leaders drawn from the participating senior mathematicians. Before participants arrived, they had been in contact with their group leaders, who suggested research projects and provided background reading and references. The goals of this workshop were: to highlight research activities of women in number theory, to increase the participation of women in research activities in number theory, to train young female researchers in number theory and related fields, and to build a research network of potential collaborators in number theory and related fields.

The WIN-E2 conference aimed to allow young women in number theory from more countries, and Turkey in particular, to benefit from the multiple advantages of this type of conference. There were 10 Turkish participants. The workshop had 6 groups, consisting of 2 co-leaders and 4-5 other participants. We took great care when forming the groups to take into account each person's background and preferred topics and also to ensure that each group had a variety of people at different career stages, ranging from PhD to professor. We also made sure that people got to work with women they had not worked with before and would not easily encounter otherwise, for example people from a different country or even continent! The variety of topics was sufficiently broad for each of the researchers, who came from all over Europe and Turkey and also from Brazil, Australia, Canada and the U.S., to find a group where they felt comfortable enough with the general background to address the topic.

The vast majority of the time at the workshop was spent working on the group projects but we also had five talks from young participants about their research. On the final day, we had a talk about a specific example of the impact of research done at WIN(E) conferences in the field of construction of CM curves. We also had short talks by the junior participants of all project groups describing the project they were working on, the progress they had made, and the future directions for their collaboration. Several groups had already produced some initial results after five days of intense group work! This demonstrates the time and care the group leaders had taken to design suitable projects, and also the very high standard of the participants. The project groups will continue their collaborations over email and Skype (or similar), with the aim of producing a joint research article in the 6-8 month period following the conference.

The joint research program is not the only advantage of the WIN(E) conferences; another non-negligible aspect is the stimulus they provide in the career of young women researchers. This stimulus takes a multitude of forms. First of all, many of the women attending the WIN-E2 conference were practically alone in their role as female researchers at their home universities, especially those from smaller departments or from colleges more oriented towards teaching. For these young women, it was inspiring to realize how many others like them are scattered around the world, and also to meet the more established researchers that could act as role models – professors with fully-edged, successful research careers – that many of the younger women had never encountered.

The social and working atmosphere of the conference were also very different from those that reign in mathematics conferences in general. Even when these are mixed, they are predominantly masculine; while this does not in itself represent any disadvantage for women, nevertheless the grouping of women sharing similar experiences at WIN-E2 made for a much more intimate atmosphere during which all sorts of professional and personal problems could be raised and discussed together. Open discussions on the difficulties of women in mathematics research are generally confined to organized panels, whereas at WIN-E2 informal conversation helped many of the participants to express their difficulties and doubts and receive sympathy and advice on an individual basis. We also organised two panel discussions during one dinner and one coffee break - the first on the WIN(E) network and careers in mathematics in different countries in academia and industry, and the second specific to the job situation for women mathematicians in Turkey.

Organizers

Irene Bouw, Ulm, Germany
Rachel Newton, Reading, United Kingdom
Ekin Özman, Istanbul, Turkey