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Preface

“You see, I have a lot of special knowledge which I apply to the problem, and which facilitates matters wonderfully,” says Sherlock Holmes to Dr. Watson in *A Study in Scarlet* by Arthur Conan Doyle. The *knowledge* exploited to tackle difficult problems is probably the main theme of the papers selected for this fifth edition of the International Workshop on Hybrid Metaheuristics. Indeed, in most of the papers a specific combination of metaheuristics and other solving techniques is presented for tackling a particular relevant constrained optimization problem, such as fiber optic networks, timetabling and freight train scheduling problems. The quest for solvers which can successfully and efficiently handle *relevant problems* is the main motivation for research in metaheuristics: it is important to keep this in mind so as to clearly state our research goals and methodology. The question arises as to what is the definition of *relevant problems* and a possible answer is that any useful and even just interesting or funny problem can be considered as scientifically relevant.

The research goal of solving relevant problems does not require practitioners to assemble some software code and, with a little faith in alchemy, hope that the outcome is a reasonably good solution. On the contrary, this research must be grounded on a scientific method and on technological skills. That is why it is so important to support the assessment of an algorithm’s performance with a sound methodology. This requires studying theoretical models for describing properties of the hybrid metaheuristics, and to be open to other communities and to compare our achievements with theirs.

We would like this to be the view of the participants of the International Workshop on Hybrid Metaheuristics combined with tangible improvements in producing scientifically grounded results. The selection of papers should be useful to researchers both in finding new ideas and for implementing efficient solutions.

As in previous editions of this workshop, special care was taken in the reviewing process: out of 33 submissions received, 14 papers were selected on the basis of the reviews by the Program Committee members and evaluations by the Program Chairs. The review process was systematic and intended for providing authors with constructive suggestions for improvements. Our special thanks go to the Program Committee members for their devoted efforts.

An agenda for future research in hybrid metaheuristics could focus on three objectives: (a) the field should become more rigorous, (b) results need to be compared with those produced by other techniques, (c) new application areas should be explored. Rigour is important to earn the acceptance of our colleagues in related communities. The comparison with related fields is valuable in assessing the effectiveness of hybrid techniques and in developing improved hybrid algorithms. New application areas can provide us with exciting new problems

that have both stochastic and online elements, which arise both in simulation and data mining. In other words, “*a lot of special knowledge ... which facilitates matters wonderfully.*”

August 2008

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