

## Preface

*When I took office, only high energy physicists had ever heard of what is called the Worldwide Web. . . . Now even my cat has its own page.*

These words are attributed to United States President Bill Clinton announcing the Next Generation Internet initiative in 1996. This quote illustrates the exceptionally rapid development of Internet and the Web. The Internet became visible to the general public in the early 1990s. By the beginning of the 21st century, approximately 360 million people around the world were estimated to have Internet access<sup>1</sup>. The new technology has revolutionized human communication, and many of us find it increasingly difficult to remember how we ever coped without it.

During its triumphant procession through society, in the mid 1990s, the Web entered the field of survey methodology. It here presented itself primarily as a new and exciting mode of data collection (although the Internet technology is actually present in the whole survey process, especially as a platform for communication among the researchers working on a survey project and for disseminating results). Among those who early realized the significance of the new method was a group of researchers at the University of Ljubljana (Slovenia). In 1998, they started building a web portal on web survey methodology, [www.websm.org](http://www.websm.org). During 2003–2005, the European Union Fifth Framework program sponsored a research network, which led to further improvements of the portal. In addition to University of Ljubljana, this network consisted of ZUMA and the University of Mannheim (Germany), University of Bergamo (Italy) and Linköping University (Sweden). The idea to have a special issue of JOS on web surveys was one of the initiatives that came out of this research network. We, the editorial committee, wish to express our gratitude to JOS, and to all contributing authors, for making the special issue a reality.

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<sup>1</sup> "Internet." Encyclopædia Britannica. 2006. Encyclopædia Britannica Online. 4 Apr. 2006 <<http://search.eb.com/eb/article-9001458>>