

EDITORIAL: ENGINEERING EDUCATION AND SOCIETY

The topicality of social and cultural contextualization of engineering education may be expressed in terms of a “never-ending story” with an indication that fields of interest in this subject theme are growing and make room for diversity of approaches, often based on fruitful combination of scientific inclinations and methodological choices with personal experiences. Consequently, traditionally somewhat more emphasized frameworks which covered social themes for engineers mostly in terms of basic micro-economic and organizational knowledge necessary to successfully meet the needs of a world of industry have been supplemented with new aims and values often inspired by rich adoption and by parallel professionally contextualized remaking of theoretical advances in social sciences and humanities: sociology, cultural studies, history, philosophy, social ecology etc.

This is partly because socio-technological present did not dismiss the issues of relationship between technology and society, rather it put them forward even more directly and often fatefully. In a rapidly advancing, globalizing and technologically framed world engineers still find their professional practice and consequences of their work may contribute to shaping of particular society, while, simultaneously, being themselves mediated by social factors. Certain claims to be found in some recent and quite abundant literature, may and must be dismissed. This particularly refers to longstanding position of engineering neutrality and absence of interest with regard to issues of power, inequality, injustice, as well as gender, race, class and other kinds of discrimination as embedded in technical solutions. Neutrality is paralleled, and often excused by sense of powerlessness to change the state of affairs. But in order to change the state of affairs it is necessary firstly to change ourselves. Together, both kinds of change are supposed to be realised through the opening of engineering education at all levels toward more complex questioning of its social role and character.

While there is globally wide multitude of articles on social contextualization of engineering education, this is the first such thematic issue in a Croatian, interdisciplinary oriented scientific journal. Selected articles reflect different ways in which the authors interpreted and conceived the approach suggested in the call for papers announced one year ago. In the call for papers, I have endeavoured to shape the theme as much as possible in general terms, making room for contributions that stem from theoretical and empirical evaluations of personal experiences in

engineering education practice. Now, we present a number of received articles – some of them resulted from empirical scientific research, while some are more theoretical in nature. Their focus stretches from individual case studies and surveys to theoretical reflection of social issues in engineering and education in general. Their quality and relevance is to be considered by our readers, through discussions to be established in the near future and through further research.

Cordially,

Zagreb, 26th April 2014

Guest editor
Prof. Nikša Dubreta