

# Regional meeting of journal editors: Struggling of small publishers to survive

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## Abstract

At the end of May 2024, a traditional regional meeting of editors of small scientific journals in engineering disciplines was held at the Faculty of Mechanical Engineering in Belgrade. This year the meeting gathered about 20 editors who discussed novelties, good practices as well as problems in academic publishing. The primary aim of these journals was to support the local scientific community and industry by providing a platform for presenting scientific advances, connecting research and practice, and assisting young scientists in publishing their research results. However, with the widespread adoption of measuring scientific performance by publication and citation statistics, the scientists lost interest in these journals as underrated in researcher evaluation systems. Thus, low quality of received as well as revised manuscripts, low response rates of reviewers, and, consequently, long processing times and high rejection rates are some of the main problems mentioned at the meeting. All these issues are usually managed by editorial offices, which often have neither technical nor human resources for such endeavors. Still, the conclusion of the meeting was that the benefits of small independent scientific journals are significant and worth efforts particularly for providing an alternative to the profit-oriented publishing and promoting societally relevant research and value-based scientific assessments.

**Keywords:** scientific publishing; bibliometric indicators; publication pressure; scientific output; market power; engineering disciplines

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BOOK AND EVENT REVIEW

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It has been over a decade that editors of regional journals in engineering disciplines meet and discuss common problems faced in the ever-changing landscape of academic publishing. Initiated in 2013 by Profs. Vincenc Butala and Borut Buchmeister and organized by Profs. Milan Kljajin and Pero Raos at the Mechanical Engineering Faculty in Slavonski Brod in Croatia as a friendly meeting of several regional editors it has grown over the years to gather editors of about 20 scientific journals published in Slovenia, Croatia and Serbia. This year, the meeting was organized by Prof. Boško Rašuo at the Faculty of Mechanical Engineering in Belgrade on May 24 (Figure 1). It gathered 17 editors who presented 15 journals:

1. Goran Šimunović, Vice Editor and Đorđe Vukelić, Editorial Board Member, **Tehnički Vjesnik-Technical Gazette** (ISSN 1330-3651, Publisher: Mechanical Engineering Faculty in Slavonski Brod, University of Slavonski Brod, Croatia)
2. Borut Buchmeister, Editor-in-Chief, **International Journal of Simulation Modelling** (ISSN: 1726-4529, Publisher: DAAAM International Vienna, Austria) and Editorial Board Member, **Advances in Production Engineering & Management** (ISSN: 1854-6250, Publisher: University of Maribor, Faculty of Mechanical Engineering, Slovenia)
3. Milan Kljajin, Editor-in-Chief, **Tehnički glasnik - Technical Journal** (ISSN: 1846-6168, Publisher: University North, Croatia)
4. Miladin Stefanović, Managing Editor, **International Journal for Quality Research** (ISSN: 1800-6450, Publishers: Center for Quality, University of Kragujevac, Serbia; Center for Quality, University of Montenegro, Montenegro; International Association for Quality and Quality of Life Research, Serbia)
5. Rodoljub Simović, Editor-in-Chief, **Nuclear Technology & Radiation Protection Journal** (ISSN: 1451-3994; Publisher: VINČA Institute of Nuclear Sciences, University of Belgrade, Serbia)
6. Slobodan Mitrović, Editor-in-Chief, **Tribology in Industry** (ISSN: 0354-8996; Publisher: University of Kragujevac, Faculty of Engineering, Serbia)

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7. Hrvoje Kozmar, Editor-in-Chief, **Transactions of Fadena** (ISSN: 1333-1124, Publisher: Faculty of Mechanical Engineering and Naval Architecture, University of Zagreb, Croatia)
8. Vukman Bakić, Editor-in-Chief, Marina Jovanović, Editor and Branka GvozdenacUrošević, Subject Editor, **Thermal Science** (ISSN: 2334-7163, Publisher: VINČA Institute of Nuclear Sciences, University of Belgrade, Serbia)
9. Bojana Obradović, Editor-in-Chief, **Hemijska Industrija** (ISSN: 2217-7426, Publisher: Association of Chemical Engineers of Serbia, Serbia)
10. Uglješa Marjanović, Editor-in-Chief, **International Journal of Industrial Engineering and Management** (ISSN: 2217-2661, Publisher: University of Novi Sad, Faculty of Technical Sciences, Serbia)
11. Kristina Marković, Editor-in-Chief, **Engineering Review** (ISSN: 1330-9587, Publishers: Faculty of Engineering and the Faculty of Civil Engineering, University of Rijeka, Croatia)
12. Dragan Marinković, Editor-in-Chief, **Facta Universitatis, Series: Mechanical Engineering** (ISSN: 0354-2025, Publisher: University of Niš, Serbia)
13. Božidar Jovanović, Deputy Editor-in-Chief, **Theoretical and Applied Mechanics** (ISSN: 1450-5584, Publishers: Mathematical Institute SANU and Serbian Society of Mechanics, Serbia)
14. Boško Rašuo, Editor, **FME Transactions** (ISSN: 1451-2092, Publisher: University of Belgrade, Faculty of Mechanical Engineering, Serbia).



Figure 1. Group photo of participants at the meeting held at the Faculty of Mechanical Engineering in Belgrade, May 24, 2024

The meeting was opened by Prof. Vladimir Popović, Dean of the Faculty of Mechanical Engineering, who welcomed the participants and stressed the importance of the local academic publishing for researchers and scientific development in each of the countries in the region emphasizing the need and benefits of collaboration in this area. Next, a brief welcome and introduction was given by Prof. Boško Rašuo, host of the meeting, after which the participating editors presented their journals and exchanged experiences and good practices in journal management, but also discussed challenges that they face in this process. Most of the journals are published by local universities and professional associations and are ranked in Q3 or Q4 category in the SCIE list or are in the ESCI list in Web of Science Core Collection™. These journals were founded with the aim of supporting local researchers and professionals as well as universities, providing opportunities to showcase domestic scientific and industrial advances. Also, no less important is the role in education of students and young scientists offering them a platform to present their research results often in the national language. However, with the adopted practices to measure scientific contributions by publication and citation statistics, scientists are pushed towards highly ranked international journals mostly owned by a handful of large publishing companies [1,2]. Thus, small academic publishers and journals are in a position to compete with large businesses in an only apparently objective evaluation system. It is then expected that most of the editors in the meeting pointed out the problem of receiving low quality manuscripts and/or low number of manuscripts resulting in high rejection rates. Furthermore, a general problem of finding good quality reviewers [3] is even more evident in small national journals, which are largely regarded both by potential authors and reviewers, as marginally relevant for their careers. And this manner is seen in all phases of manuscript processing. Editors are putting substantial efforts in securing comprehensive evaluation of the received manuscripts, a number of times followed with the lack of response of authors or insufficiently revised papers. Plagiarism and self-

plagiarism are also frequent instances in submitted manuscripts as well as simultaneous submission to some other journals. This situation inevitably leads to prolonged processing times further damaging the journal reputation. Long waiting times and not clear requirements for a journal to be included in the SCIE or the ESCI list were also mentioned at the meeting. A special concern was provoked by the reported application of artificial intelligence in publishing activities. This process started with ChatGPT (Chat Generative Pre-trained Transformer), a chatbot developed by OpenAI and launched on November 30, 2022. Based on a large language model, it enables users to refine and steer a conversation towards a desired length, format, style, level of detail, and language [4]. It was agreed at the meeting to continue to permanently monitor, support, and implement all positive recommendations proposed by the scientific publishing community of the world but will this be yet another challenge for editors of small journals is to be seen.

All these issues are usually managed by editorial offices, which often have neither technical nor human resources for such endeavors. In specific, the majority of the presented journals are nonprofit and financially supported by the national ministries of science to a limited extent mostly not sufficient for engaging professional editorship and management. The editors that participated in the meeting are academics, typically working on a voluntary basis striving to raise the quality of journals by investing their own efforts, reputation, and networks. However, in the battle with large corporate publishers offering to authors a plethora of journals with high impact factors and quick assessment of their manuscripts, which are also more valued by the science policy makers, such endeavors of small journals are generally ineffective. Still, several strategies for tackling this status problem were mentioned at the meeting, one of them being establishment of a platform consisting of several journals with different access options and article processing charges to attract a larger number of authors. Also all of the journals are constantly receiving offers to be bought by variety of other publishers. However, further destiny of the sold journal is not known with a good chance to be neglected or closed down, which was a point commented at the meeting. Active involvement of international editorial board members is generally seen as highly beneficial with the prospect of attracting more international authors. However, such activities are scarce as internationally leading scientists are usually involved in management of other, better ranked journals and this board usually serves to increase the journal reputation without real contributions of the members.

Thus, in this situation the logical question to pose is why small scientific journals should be kept at all. Yet, this group of mostly overworked but enthusiastic editors answer that the benefits of such journals are still substantial and worth the efforts. Along with providing a direct connection to the local scientific, professional, and academic communities as their initial aim, these journals offer possibilities to researchers to publish studies not necessarily related to topics promoted by major publishing industry players. In specific, as recently noted by Neff [1], publication metrics systematically affect the scientific research priorities, but they are not connected to the societal knowledge needs, but rather to the profit model of the scientific publishing industry. Thus, translational and practically oriented research, studies related to local problems or devising engineering solutions for advancements in existing production processes often require long times, multidisciplinary efforts and substantial resources, while not being attractive for publication in leading international journals [1,5-7]. Small scientific journals supported by academic institutions offer an alternative to the profit-oriented publishing providing greater flexibility towards different topics and problems addressed and appreciating the relevance of the research in the scientific as well as broader societal contexts. Meetings of regional editors of small journals such as the one held in Belgrade in May 2024, hold the power of not only supporting each other but of affecting the local policies and promoting value-based scientific assessments. We hope that the tradition of holding these meetings will continue with increasing in the number of participants and strengthening the position of small independent scientific journals.

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# Regionalni sastanak urednika naučnih časopisa: naponi malih izdavača da se održe

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## Izvod

Krajem maja 2024. godine na Mašinskom fakultetu u Beogradu održan je tradicionalni regionalni skup urednika malih naučnih časopisa iz inženjerskih disciplina. Ove godine skup je okupio oko 20 urednika koji su razgovarali o novinama, dobrim praksama, kao i problemima u akademskom izdavaštvu. Primarni cilj ovih časopisa bio je da podrže lokalnu naučnu zajednicu i industriju pružanjem platforme za predstavljanje naučnih dostignuća, povezivanje istraživanja i prakse i pomoć mladim naučnicima u objavljivanju rezultata svojih istraživanja. Međutim, sa usvajanjem široko rasprostranjenog merenja naučnog učinka putem statistike objavljivanja i broja citata, naučnici u regionu su izgubili interesovanje za ove časopise kao potcenjene u sistemima evaluacije istraživača. Dakle, loš kvalitet primljenih, kao i revidiranih rukopisa, niske stope odgovora recenzenata i, shodno tome, dugo vreme obrade i visoke stope odbijanja radova su neki od glavnih problema pomenutih na sastanku. Sve ove časopise najčešće vode redakcije koje često nemaju ni tehničke ni ljudske resurse za takve poduhvate. Ipak, na sastanku je zaključeno da su prednosti ovakvih malih nezavisnih naučnih časopisa značajne i vredne truda, posebno u pružanju alternative profitno orijentisanom izdavaštvu, kao i promovisanju društveno relevantnih istraživanja i procene naučnih doprinosa zasnovane na vrednostima.

*Ključnereči:* naučno izdavaštvo; bibliometrijski indikatori; pritisak da se publikuje; naučni rezultati; tržišna moć; inženjerske discipline

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Već više od jedne decenije urednici regionalnih časopisa u inženjerskim disciplinama se sastaju i diskutuju o zajedničkim problemima sa kojima se suočavaju u stalno promenljivom okruženju akademskog izdavaštva. Prvi sastanak su na inisijativu profesora Vincenca Butale i Boruta Buhmajstera (Borut Buchmeister) organizovali prof. Milan Kljajin i prof. Pero Raos na Mašinskom fakultetu u Slavonskom Brodu u Hrvatskoj 2013. godine, kao prijateljski susret nekoliko regionalnih urednika. Sastanak je zatim tokom godina narastao i okupio urednike oko 20 naučnih časopisa koji se izdaju u Sloveniji, Hrvatskoj i Srbiji. Ove godine skup je organizovao prof. Boško Rašuo na Mašinskom fakultetu u Beogradu 24. maja i okupio je 17 urednika (Slika 1) koji su predstavili 15 časopisa:

1. Goran Šimunović, zamenik urednika, i Đorđe Vukelić, član Uređivačkog odbora, **Tehnički Vjesnik-Technical Gazette** (ISSN 1330-3651, izdavač: Strojarski fakultet u Slavonskom Brodu, Sveučilište u Slavonskom Brodu, Hrvatska),
2. Borut Buhmajster (Borut Buchmeister), glavni i odgovorni urednik, **International Journal of Simulation Modelling** (ISSN: 1726-4529, izdavač: "DAAAM International Vienna", Austrija) i član Uređivačkog odbora, **Advances in Production Engineering & Management** (ISSN: 1854-6250, izdavač: Univerzitet u Mariboru, Mašinski fakultet, Slovenija)
3. Milan Kljajin, glavni i odgovorni urednik, **Tehnički glasnik - Technical Journal** (ISSN: 1846-6168, izdavač: Sveučilište Sjever, Hrvatska)
4. Miladin Stefanović, izvršni urednik, **International Journal for Quality Research** (ISSN: 1800-6450, izdavači: Centar za kvalitet Fakulteta inženjerskih nauka, Univerzitet u Kragujevcu, Srbija; Centar za kvalitet Mašinskog fakulteta, Univerzitet Crne Gore, Crna Gora; Međunarodno udruženje za istraživanje kvaliteta i kvaliteta života, Srbija)
5. Rodoljub Simović, glavni i odgovorni urednik, **Nuclear Technology & Radiation Protection Journal** (ISSN: 1451-3994; izdavač: Institut za nuklearne nauke "Vinča", Univerzitet u Beogradu, Srbija)
6. Slobodan Mitrović, glavni i odgovorni urednik, **Tribology in Industry** (ISSN: 0354-8996; izdavač: Univerzitet u Kragujevcu, Fakultet inženjerskih nauka, Srbija)

7. Hrvoje Kozmar, glavni i odgovorni urednik, **Transactions of Fadena** (ISSN: 1333-1124, izdavač: Fakultet strojarstva i brodogradnje, Sveučilište u Zagrebu, Hrvatska)
8. Vukman Bakić, glavni i odgovorni urednik, Marina Jovanović, urednica, i Branka Gvozdenac Urošević, područna urednica, **Thermal Science** (ISSN: 2334-7163, izdavač: Institut za nuklearne nauke "Vinča", Univerzitet u Beogradu, Srbija)
9. Bojana Obradović, glavna i odgovorna urednica, **Hemijska Industrija** (ISSN: 2217-7426, izdavač: Savez hemijskih inženjera Srbije, Srbija)
10. Uglješa Marjanović, glavni i odgovorni urednik, **International Journal of Industrial Engineering and Management** (ISSN: 2217-2661, izdavač: Univerzitet u Novom Sadu, Fakultet tehničkih nauka, Srbija)
11. Kristina Marković, glavna i odgovorna urednica, **Engineering Review** (ISSN: 1330-9587, izdavači: Sveučilište u Rijeci, Građevinski fakultet i Tehnički fakultet, Hrvatska)
12. Dragan Marinković, glavni i odgovorni urednik, **Facta Universitatis, Series: Mechanical Engineering** (ISSN: 0354-2025, izdavač: Univerzitet u Nišu, Srbija)
13. Božidar Jovanović, zamenik glavnog i odgovornog urednika, **Theoretical and Applied Mechanics** (ISSN: 1450-5584, izdavači: Matematički institut SANU i Srpsko društvo za mehaniku, Srbija)
14. Boško Rašuo, glavni urednik, **FME Transactions** (ISSN: 1451-2092, izdavač: Univerzitet u Beogradu, Mašinski Fakultet, Srbija).



Slika 1. Fotografija učesnika sastanka održanog na Mašinskom fakultetu u Beogradu 24. maja 2024. godine

Skup je otvorio prof. Vladimir Popović, dekan Mašinskog fakulteta, koji je pozeleo dobrodošlicu učesnicima i istakao značaj domaćeg akademskog izdavaštva za istraživače i naučni razvoj u svakoj od zemalja u regionu, pri čemu je naglasio potrebu i koristi od saradnje u ovoj oblasti. Nakon toga, prisutnima se kratko obratio prof. Boško Rašuo, domaćin skupa, a zatim su urednici predstavili svoje časopise i razmenili iskustva i dobre prakse u vođenju časopisa, ali i razgovarali o izazovima sa kojima se dnevno suočavaju. Većinu časopisa izdaju lokalni univerziteti i profesionalna udruženja, a rangirani su u kategorijama "Q3" ili "Q4" na listi časopisa *Science Citation Index Expanded (SCIE)* ili su na listi *Emerging Sources Citation Index (ESCI)* u bazi podataka *Web of Science Core Collection™*. Ovi časopisi su osnovani sa ciljem da podrže lokalnu naučnu i stručnu zajednicu pružajući priliku za prikaz dostignuća u domaćoj nauci i industriji. Takođe, ne manje važna uloga ovih časopisa je i u obrazovanju studenata i mladih istraživača nudeći im platformu da prikažu svoje istraživačke rezultate, često na nacionalnom jeziku. Međutim, sa usvojenom praksom merenja naučnih doprinosa statističkim vrednovanjem bibliografskih podataka, naučnici su preusmereni ka visoko rangiranim međunarodnim časopisima koji su uglavnom u vlasništvu nekolicine velikih izdavačkih kompanija [1,2]. Tako su mali akademski izdavači i časopisi u poziciji da se takmiče sa velikim korporacijama u samo naizgled objektivnom sistemu evaluacije. Stoga nije neočekivano da je većina urednika na sastanku ukazala na problem dobijanja radova lošeg kvaliteta i/ili malog broja radova što dalje dovodi do velikog procenta odbijenih radova. Štaviše, opšti problem pronalaženja kvalitetnih recenzentata [3] još je očigledniji u malim nacionalnim časopisima, koje i potencijalni autori i recenzenti uglavnom smatraju marginalno relevantnim za svoju karijeru. I ovaj odnos prema časopisima se vidi u svim fazama obrade rukopisa. Urednici ulažu značajne napore da obezbede sveobuhvatnu evaluaciju i recenziju pristiglih rukopisa, da bi to

u ne malom broju slučajeva bilo praćeno izostankom odgovora autora ili neadekvatno revidiranim radovima. Plagijarizam i autoplagijarizam se takođe često pronalaze u podnetim rukopisima, kao i pojava da autori istovremeno šalju isti rad u više časopisa. Ova situacija neizbežno dovodi do produženog vremena obrade radova što dodatno šteti reputaciji časopisa. Na sastanku je bilo reči i o dugim vremenima čekanja i nejasnim zahtevima za uključivanje časopisa na *SCIE* ili *ESCI* listu. Određenu zabrinutost izazvala je i primena veštačke inteligencije u izdavačkoj delatnosti. Ovaj proces je započeo sa pojavom softverske aplikacije *ChatGPT (Chat Generative Pre-Trained Transformer)*, koju je razvila kompanija *OpenAI* 2022. godine. Ova aplikacija omogućava korisnicima da preciziraju i revidiraju tekst prema željenoj dužini, formatu, stilu, nivou detalja i jeziku [4]. Na sastanku je dogovoreno da se nastavi sa praćenjem, podrškom i primenom svih pozitivnih preporuka u ovoj oblasti koje predlaže svetska zajednica naučnog izdavaštva, ali da li će i to biti još jedan izazov za urednike malih časopisa, ostaje da se vidi.

Sve ove probleme najčešće rešavaju redakcije, koje često nemaju ni tehničke ni ljudske resurse za takve zadatke. Naime, većina predstavljenih časopisa je neprofitna sa određenom finansijskom podrškom nacionalnih ministarstava nauke koja je uglavnom nedovoljna za angažovanje profesionalnog uredništva i menadžmenta. Urednici koji su učestvovali na sastanku su profesori i naučnici, koji pretežno rade na dobrovoljnoj bazi nastojeći da podignu kvalitet časopisa sopstvenim trudom, reputacijom i kontaktima. Međutim, u borbi sa velikim korporativnim izdavačima koji autorima nude pleajdu časopisa sa velikim faktorima uticajnosti (engl. *impact factor*) i brzim procesiranjem rukopisa, a koje i regulatorna tela za vrednovanje naučnoistraživačkog rada više cene, ovakvi poduhvati malih časopisa su generalno nedelotvorni. Ipak, na sastanku je pomenuto nekoliko strategija za rešavanje ovog problema statusa časopisa, a jedna od njih je uspostavljanje platforme od više časopisa sa različitim opcijama pristupa i naknadama za troškove štampe radi privlačenja većeg broja autora. Takođe, svi časopisi stalno dobijaju ponude raznih drugih izdavača za akviziciju. Međutim, na sastanku je komentarisano da dalja sudbina prodatog časopisa nije sigurna uz dobre izgleda da bude zapostavljen ili ugašen. Jedan od korisnih predloga je i aktivno uključivanje članova međunarodnih uređivačkih odbora u vođenje časopisa što može da privuče više autora iz inostranstva. Međutim, takvi slučajevi su retki jer su vodeći međunarodni naučnici obično uključeni u uređivanje drugih, bolje rangiranih časopisa tako da ovi odbori obično služe za povećanje reputacije časopisa bez stvarnog doprinosa članova.

Stoga, u prikazanoj situaciji logično se postavlja pitanje da li su mali naučni časopisi uopšte potrebni. Međutim, ova grupa uglavnom preopterećenih, ali optimističnih urednika entuzijasta odgovara da su koristi od ovih časopisa i dalje značajne i vredne truda. Uz njihov primarni cilj, odnosno pružanje direktne veze sa lokalnom naučnom, stručnom i akademskom zajednicom, ovi časopisi istraživačima nude i mogućnost da objavljuju studije koje nisu nužno povezane sa temama koje promovišu glavni igrači u izdavačkoj industriji. Preciznije, kao što je nedavno primetio Nef [1], primena bibliometrije u vrednovanju časopisa, naučnika i institucija sistematski utiče na prioritete naučnog istraživanja, ali nije povezana sa društvenim potrebama za određenim znanjima, već radije sa modelom profitabilnosti naučno-izdavačke industrije. Tako na primer, translaciona i praktično orijentisana istraživanja, studije koje se bave lokalnim problemima ili iznalaženjem inženjerskih rešenja za unapređenje već postojećih proizvodnih procesa često zahtevaju duže vreme i multidisciplinarnu pristupe uz ulaganje značajnih resursa. Međutim, ova istraživanja koja imaju veliki praktični značaj, najčešće nisu atraktivna za objavljivanje u vodećim međunarodnim časopisima [1,5-7]. Mali naučni časopisi koje podržavaju akademske institucije nude alternativu izdavaštvu orijentisanom na profit, obezbeđujući veću fleksibilnost prema različitim temama i problemima i uvažavajući relevantnost istraživanja, kako u naučnom, tako i u širem društvenom kontekstu. Sastanci regionalnih urednika malih časopisa poput ovog održanog u Beogradu u maju 2024. g. ne samo da obezbeđuju međusobnu podršku, već mogu da utiču i na lokalnu regulativu promovišući evaluaciju naučnih doprinosa zasnovanu na vrednostima. Nadamo se da će se tradicija održavanja ovih skupova nastaviti uz povećanje broja učesnika i jačanje pozicije malih nezavisnih naučnih časopisa.

