

EDITORIAL

ESTABLISHING YET ANOTHER STUDY OF FORESTRY IN CROATIA

It seems that history, just like fashion, repeats itself periodically. Every so often there are some “wise guys” with, as folks would say, “outlandish ideas” which are, without exception, highly questionable and almost always groundless. After the idea of establishing a new study of forestry was outlined in the journal of Glas Slavonije (Voice of Slavonia) (14 February 2019), Professor Joso Vukelić, PhD, wrote an article for the column Challenges and Confrontations (Forestry Journal 11-12/2006), in which he opposed the then unofficial idea by providing well argued facts. There is almost nothing to add to Professor Vukelić’s text, except that these days the said idea has become an official initiative of a local community and that the success or failure of the Bologna Process can now be viewed objectively given the time passed. Everything else would only be tiresome repetition, which we do not want, but what we would like here is to just hint at some issues and point to arguments in order to encourage you to look for and read the text by professor Vukelić, which is still highly topical.

For a start, the author focuses on the chaotic process of establishing similar studies with identical programmes outside the existing universities and former schools of higher education in the Republic of Croatia, a process which is still going on. The results achieved by the newly opened studies have not justified their establishment, so it is clear that their foundation was of an exclusively political nature. The most important issue that the author questions is the need and adequacy of launching a study of forestry in addition to the existing one at the Faculty of Forestry of the University in Zagreb. He lists the following facts:

- there are no conclusive insights on the success of the application of the Bologna Process (nor are there any today, either - it has met the expectations only partially);
- the Bologna Process is not adequately accompanied by other changes in the legislative-organisational sphere in the Croatian forestry;
- there are over 200 engineers (masters) of forestry registered at the Croatian Employment Service (currently with about 100 unemployed forestry engineers);
- interest in the study of classical forestry is declining;
- the competent ministry allocates less and less money to field training and overhead expenses at the existing faculty;

- there is a newly-built, modern and adequate facility which needs to be furnished with up-to-date equipment;
- there are five internationally recognized teaching polygons, international student exchange and highly educated young teachers, as well as 108 years (at the time of writing the article and 120 years now) of tradition of higher forestry education in Croatia - the fourth study to be launched at the University of Zagreb;
- there are enough graduate students, and maybe even too many for the needs of the profession.

The author continues by discussing the need of county governments to stimulate development, which in this case is mistakenly directed at solving local problems. He cites some concrete examples of education which has not fulfilled its purpose and expresses concern about the teaching staff with little pedagogical training and experience. Instead of expanding the university education of forestry, he proposes to focus on permanent education, which is a necessity today but its implementation is three times lower than in the EU. The crucial goal to aspire towards should be excellence; accordingly, both expert specialists and financial means should be geared towards reaching this goal. Regrettably, we have not learned anything and we are not prepared to analyze the negative sides of, for example, forestry education at the secondary school level, based precisely on the needs at the local communities rather than at the national level. Allowing for some specific aspects, the curricula should be almost uniform in all of some ten forestry schools in Croatia. Can we compare the quality of teaching in these schools (is quality at all possible considering the staff and the equipment) and the needs of the profession? Where is educational excellence which should be aspired to at this level as well?

Definitely, the initiative to establish another study of forestry should be discussed at the national level (but who is going to conduct the discussion when the current competent minister ignores the forestry profession)? There should be no political pressures and superficiality, and all debates should be free of private interests, including a hidden wish to “make some money on the side”.

Editorial Board