

## Marko Petrič

Slovenians are known as the nation that is not mobile: with some exceptions, we do not want to move from our hometowns or villages to some other Slovenian towns and for sure



not to other countries. With this respect, I am almost a typical Slovenian. A slight deviation from this rule is in the fact that I have changed several places to live, but ended in our capital Ljubljana, which is my place of birth (18<sup>th</sup> September 1962). But, I am more than

a typical Slovenian with my academic career, which has been completely realised at University of Ljubljana. At University of Ljubljana, I finished my BSc

and MSc studies in chemistry, and my PhD (1994) was also in chemistry, but already with the flavour of wood protection. The title of the thesis was “Synthesis, Characterisation and Biological Activity of Copper Carboxylates of Higher Fatty Acids and Their Derivatives”. During my



MSc studies, I started to work as a junior researcher at the Department

of Technical Ceramics at the internationally known “Jožef Stefan” Institute in Ljubljana. It was interesting, but predominantly due to lack of chemistry at my work, I was searching for something else, and once I came to Prof. Dr. Franc Pohleven, a well known and established

member of IRG/WP. In spite of relatively poor infrastructure in the laboratories of the Department of Wood Science and Technology, just because of his active and great personality, I immediately accepted to start to work in his group. So, I am still here – at Biotechnical Faculty, now with the title of full professor. I have been not sorry for my decision to work here and with wood not for a single moment!



As evident from the title of my PhD thesis, my first research area was investigation of copper carboxylates for protection of wood. Another good thing happened to me at that time: my first PhD student was Miha Humar, nowadays Prof. Dr., and also an established member of IRG/WP. His PhD thesis was the continuation of my PhD investigations and he has remained at this topic very successfully all till today, of course in addition to his many other research interests. Predominantly his investigations – with my slight assistance – resulted in internationally patented wood protection formulation on the basis of copper

carboxylates and ethanolamine. This is a great chromium free preservative with an excellent performance and I feel proud of it, because it is the result of numerous and intensive investigations of my colleagues at the Department of Wood Science & Technology with the initial origin in my PhD thesis. Later, I changed the research group and



switched to the area of wood surface coatings, and I am still leading the laboratory for surface finishing of wood. My current research interests are therefore wood coatings for interior and exterior and their interactions with various substrates (wood, modified wood, densified wood). In the last 10-5 years I have given a lot of attention to

environmental issues, related to the biorafinery concept – to liquefaction of wood and preparation of new wood coatings on the basis of liquefied wood. Most lately I have worked also on applications of nanomaterials in wood coatings and for treatment of wood. My



research activities are so nowadays still related to my real first research love of my life –

protection of wood. It is true, that by majority with respect to abiotic degradation factors (influence of weathering on various systems of coated wood and/or other lignocellulosic materials), but my and my co-workers' investigations are still quite frequently related to the core focus of IRG/WP – protection against biotic causes of wood decay.



I am very satisfied with my work – I guess I am one of those lucky ones who do not work (only) for money, but they feel their professional work as a hobby. Professorship at University of Ljubljana offers me the right balance between the research work and



pedagogic activities with students, which is another very important inspiration for me. Work at University brought me also plenty of various administrative and leadership functions. Just to mention, I was for six years, from the 1st October 2004 until the 1st October 2010 the vice-dean for the field of Wood Science & Technology at our Faculty

(what is the official name for the “Department Head”). Currently, I am for the 4th year Chairman of the University's Committee for Appointment to the Titles of University Teacher, Researcher and Associate at the University of Ljubljana. This is a challenging and responsible function at our University of Ljubljana, with around 5750 employees and more than 40800 students. It is taking a lot of my time I would maybe better spend on research and teaching. But, I like even this function, since it offers me contacts with people and insight into how such a large system as University of Ljubljana is, really works. In spite of relatively low salaries in academic sector in Slovenia – like I guess all around the globe – there is another great thing offered to me at the University: international contacts. Obviously, I am not really such a typical Slovenian, as mentioned at the beginning, since I really like to travel and make professional contacts with international researchers.



So, I have attended plenty of international seminar, congresses, conferences, etc. and spent some a bit longer visits. Among these, I would like to point out three visits, which impressed me and had by my opinion an important influence on my work and career. One is the visit(s) to Prof. Dr. Richard Murphy (and Prof. Dr. David Dickinson) at Imperial College in London, where I conducted TEM investigations of distribution of copper carboxylates in wood cell wall layers. The second one were the visits to the group of Dr. Milan Melnik at Slovak Technical University in Bratislava, where I learnt plenty of secrets about the synthesis of copper and other carboxylates. The third one was the research stay at Prof. Dr. Philippe Gerrardin (also a prominent IRG/WP member) at University Henry Poincare in Nancy, France (nowadays University of Lorraine), where I learned the secrets of surface chemistry,



wettability, and similar topics, related to surface finishing of wood. When mentioning international contacts, I do not want to forget to mention my participation in the European COST Action E2 “Wood durability”, led by prominent Prof. Dr. Hubert Willeitner from Germany, sometimes in the nineties of the 20<sup>th</sup> century: this was in fact my access to the international research society in the field of wood protection.

As said, I attended various international scientific conferences, but there is only one, where I feel meeting my true great friends and colleagues: annual meetings of the International

*Click on the thumbnails to enlarge*

Research Group for Wood Protection. I do not attend nowadays each annual meeting, but I try to come at least once in two or three years. The memories are great. My first IRG – as a guest - was in Helsingor, Denmark, and the first one as a member was in Guadeloupe (French Caribbean islands). It was an exotic welcome reception, outdoors, under the palms, at the swimming pool, with nice cocktails and – I will always remember – with a sincere personal welcome of the IRG president of that time – Dr. Anthony Bravery. I am also proud that the IRG friends showed their trust and elected me for the Leader of the Section 3 (Wood Protecting Chemicals), terminated in 2009.



What do I do at home and in my spare time? I start to work in my office very early, at around six o'clock in the morning (my wife says that this is not normal for a University professor!), and try to be at home between four and five in the afternoon. With such a working rhythm, some time remains me for necessary work at home and in the garden and for being together with my family. My children are grown up and are slowly leaving the family nest. My son (24) has just started to work as a financial mathematic in an insurance company (he says he is going to earn a lot of money and I say I am going to spend my future holidays on his yacht!) and my daughter (21) is in the fourth year of medicine studies. Sport is not my strong point, but I like to swim – holidays on the Croation coast are always great – and the other favourite is alpine skiing. And finally, my lack of sporting activities is compensated with every day biking to work and back home, also in winter.

