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IEDC Alumni Success Story

DANIJEL LEVIČAR: » MANY PEOPLE ARE AFRAID OF FLYING BUT AT THE END IT IS THE SAFEST WAY TO TRAVEL. IN THE SAME WAY NUCLEAR IS THE SAFEST WAY OF PRODUCING ELECTRICITY.«

Interviewed by Vera Pasyukova

Photos provided by Danijel Levičar

What are you doing these days? How has been business going and what was 2020 like and how do you see things develop in upcoming few years?

Well, it has been a dramatic year for us all and in general, I too am betting short on the Coronavirus epidemic and hoping it loosens its grip on our lives. It has been a rollercoaster year. Both personally and professionally. The pandemic proved to be quite a challenge at work, especially since it has been lasting for over a year now. Endless videoconferences, organising work from home for bigger groups of employees, intricate arrangements for

teams in power plants and control rooms. The nature of critical infrastructure and electricity production requires continuous operation and 24/7 teams on site. So, special attention was devoted to protecting the health of our colleagues and security of supply.

At the time of this interview our largest production unit, Nuclear power plant Krško, is in outage. During this 35-day-long process, fresh fuel will be inserted into the core and several safety upgrades will be performed. All in all, up to 2000 personnel will be working daily at the site at the same time. This in itself is quite a challenge in these conditions. When finished, the power plant

will be polished and ready for another 18-month cycle. On the other hand, when talking to colleagues working from home, I noticed that many are experiencing higher than normal levels of stress. Lack of face-to-face communication, organising work and managing children's educational process require additional flexibility and understanding.

In 2012 you joined the Executive MBA program at



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IEDC. Your background was a bit unusual. At that time you were working for the International Atomic Energy Agency and previously for the European Commission. Your first degree is in physics. Would you recall why did you decide to pursue the MBA degree at that time? Why did you think it would have been useful for you?

My professional path might look a bit unusual but judging from my perspective it followed the path across the energy landscape that took me to my current destination. After the MBA graduation it took several more turns before I settled at GEN energija – the place I feel as my home ground.

Energy business has two opposing faces. It has a regulated and a deregulated part. While the production and energy prices are being set freely at the energy markets, the flow of energy through the wires is a precisely regulated and supervised business. Electricity is essential for the functioning of practically all aspects of society, that is why it has become of strategic importance for today's modern world. Therefore, to make soundest possible business decisions, I find it necessary to

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understand this duality and the technical background behind it. This served as guidance when choosing my education and career.

The IEDC MBA programme fitted perfectly in that plan as it gave me understanding of financial tools, market and broadened my managerial skills. Besides the knowledge I

preventatively, for a short period of time. Where do you see the future of the energy supply sector? Is technology developing fast enough to satisfy our energy needs? Is it fusion that is the future? What about the electricity grids and issues of energy losses and development of superconductors, etc?



have had, it was an opportunity to meet and get to know many exciting, smart and out-of-the box thinking people from all walks of life. With many of them I am still in contact with.

A question to you as a physicist and someone working for years in energy sector, including serving as an engineer in a nuclear plant in Krško at some point. Which energy sources nowadays are the greenest and most sustainable? How safe are nuclear plants? We've witnessed a few disasters in other parts of the world in recent years, and a recent earthquake in Petrinja nearby in December, for instance, had Krško plant to shut down

Where is it all going?

World megatrends – electrification, decarbonisation, and digitalisation – are leading the way for future infrastructure development. Electrification of mobility, heating, cooling, and other new technologies are setting the trend for doubling today's electricity consumption by 2050. The future energy systems therefore need to ensure high reliability, accessibility and inevitably will have to be clean at the same time. I am a firm believer that a combination of nuclear and renewable sources is the right solution for the future energy systems.

Technological development of

our society will always require clean energy. It is also a physical fact that energy production will always require effort and will therefore never be too cheap to measure. The truth is embodied in the famous Einstein's equation $E=mc^2$. Nevertheless, it is in our DNA to pursue the dream of technological advancement. The nature itself is showing us that the Sun is this limitless source, with the ITER Project being proof of this concept. Humanity and science are pursuing to develop and control fusion for energy purposes. This is certainly the ultimate energy source as we see it from today's state of the art technology.

Currently we can harness nuclear energy through the process of fission. Today it is the most efficient way of producing vast quantities of electricity from an extremely energy-dense source – therefore using little material on a very limited space, without GHG emissions and preserving clean air and biodiversity. Concerning safety of nuclear it is like airplane travel. Many people are afraid of flying but at the end it is the safest way to travel. In the same way nuclear is the safest way of producing electricity. Putting all the dimensions together, nuclear energy is CO2 free, extremely reliable and abundant.

Despite the obvious perception issues that nuclear faces, recently a major breakthrough has happened policy-wise. The European Commission's research and policy making institution (Joint research centre – JRC) analysed the environmental impact of nuclear



and declared it a sustainable green source. This decision has an ability to transform the role and perception of nuclear and put it at the core of our future energy systems.

Back to management topics, being a COO in GEN energija, what are the major issues you find hard/easy to deal with? Would you agree that the COO role can be compared to a triage doctor – constantly fixing and identifying issues, preventing them from becoming major issues? What would you say are the most important qualities for a COO?

A fellow IEDC alumnus once

told me the best management is supposed to be “bored” – to have time to spare. I am not quite there yet. Operational activities and related decisions require my full-time presence. Being the younger member of the management board, among my responsibilities as the COO, is also the long-term development of the group. Krško 2, a new Nuclear

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power plant (JEK2) and other projects, related to green transformation, are at the core of my work. Working on JEK2 is exceptionally challenging, but also rewarding.

My attention is also devoted to business culture management. Our group consists of different subsidiaries with different business models and cultures, but in the end it all comes down

Be careful what you wish for... your dreams might come true. I believe that mine have. I have a loving wife and two children on their way to adulthood. Living in a green environment in close proximity to my work. Besides my professional activity this is where I search for my purpose, where I find harmony: family, work, nature ...

You used to live in

work abroad and why?

I have spent 7 years abroad. Both Luxembourg and Vienna are great places to live with highest living standard you can imagine. I had an opportunity to meet, work and live with people from all around the world. That was an exceptional experience I will cherish for life. Because of the aspirations back home I have never doubted my next steps. It all came naturally including moving back home. The hardest part were the relations with colleagues and friends that I have built through the years and knowing that because of the physical distance it will all change. Eventually for the best.

Would I recommend my children to study, work abroad? They are probably unintentionally being programmed to follow my steps :) But it is up to them to decide.

Last but not least, do you still keep in touch with your IEDC classmates? Do you manage to get together (*not taking corona



Visiting Krško NPP with GEN stakeholders

to the same lifeblood running through our veins – electricity. NEK has a distinct and stable safety culture while at GEN- I flexible and adaptational culture enables successful functioning in an everchanging daily market environment. Mixing these different cultures would be very undesirable. Understanding and managing different cultures is an important quality of a COO in a group like GEN.

Behind a fulfilled person there is usually a strong support system, i.e. family and friends. How do/did you manage so far to manage it all? Quoting a very famous musician: "You can't always get what you want...", can you?

Luxemburg and in Austria. Now, looking back at that experience, would you say you miss it and why/why not? Would you wish for your children to go study/



Testing electric vehicles

times into account)? **Best memories/moments from your time in Bled that you would always remember?**

I manage to keep in touch with several classmates. I had an opportunity to visit some

abroad. We also organise a yearly dinner party.

Extracurricular activities and spending time with classmates were a treat of its own. Besides interesting lectures, getting to know these wonderful people

was the other 50% of the MBA experience.

MEET DANIJEL IN PERSON

My usual working morning looks like this these days... gazing at the sunrise before breakfast.



My favorite free time activity is...



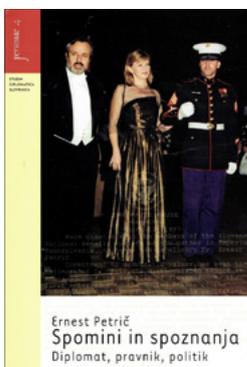
EMBA 2012

Danijel Levičar
COO of GEN energija d.o.o.

If I had an opportunity to pursue an alternative career, I would have become a... psychologist, maybe! I have always had a keen interest in human psyche and crowd psychology. Besides, knowledge of this subject has proved to be very useful in management as well.

An advice I would give to my children is... find a mission or purpose in your life. It makes life much more interesting and meaningful.

Last books I've read were...



an inspiration to every forward-looking person.

«Spomini in spoznanja» (Memories and insights) by Ernest Petrič. I especially enjoyed the chapter explaining his work with Stane Kavčič, who is



rise by 15 points. Leaving us old folks somewhat mentally challenged :).

»Ten Global Trends Every Smart Person Should Know: And Many Others You Will Find Interesting« by Ronald Bailey (Author), Marian L. Tupy is a homage to humanity, interestingly explained with numbers and world trends. I especially enjoyed the explanation how every new generation is smarter. The average IQ in 60 years will