Editorial Preface

Kai Jakobs, Editor in chief

Summer (the time of this writing) normally is the time of the year when life slows down a bit. Many are on holiday, and most of those who aren’t away physically are in some sort of holiday mode, nonetheless. After all, (beer) gardens are luring, barbecues need to be prepared, and these days you could go sunbathing even here in Germany if you were so inclined.

For some not entirely unwelcome reasons, this is not quite the case this year for yours truly. One of these reasons is described later in this issue (the NO-ReST project). Apparently, my complaints (in JITSR #1/2) about the lack of standards-related topics in the current European R&D Framework Programme were heard by someone high up in the European Commission (I cannot find any other explanation) – they are now funding two projects on IT standards research (in the ‘Information Society Technologies’ programme), and another one is about to commence (in the ‘Policy Orientated Research’ programme). In addition, several more projects are looking at interoperability issues from other angles.

While the above is still little more than a drop in the ocean, it is definitely a start. And all the more remarkable, as it appears that these days projects with a short-term, technical outcome are preferred over those with a more long-term, strategic orientation. Let’s be grateful.

Yet, prior to doing research, you would normally need some form of education (not necessarily formal education). Typically, providing the formal part of said education is the responsibility of universities. Yet, at least in Europe, they seem to be in a state of entrenched ignorance as far as standards are concerned. For example, engineering students’ only encounter with standards will typically be in a course were the crucial technical characteristics of important standards in the field are discussed. As a result, these students will know all the nuts and bolts of these standards. Our students, for instance, will be on first-name terms with, say, octets 7-10 of some obscure communication protocol header. But that doesn’t really equip them for a job where they may have to decide whether to go for a new proprietary system or opt for an open, standards-based platform; or, whether the company should join a standards initiative or even start their own, and why. Without an adequate grasp of what standards are, how they emerge, which purposes they serve, which impact they (or their absence) may have and how to put them to good use, the next generations of European engineers and, particularly, managers will not be adequately equipped for their jobs. Standards education really is an area where improvements of the current situation are desperately needed.

While we’re at it – a recent survey (certainly not exhaustive, but nonetheless ...) produced some interesting, yet sobering results in terms of both quantity and content of standards education at European universities¹. An overall response rate of 2.3% tells you something about the importance
assigned to this topic. On top of this, the
survey revealed a frustrating level of igno-
rance about the subject. Somewhat surpris-
ingly, engineering schools responded better
than business schools, most of which simply
seem to ignore the subject. I would be
interested in the state of affairs in the social
sciences.

Part of the problem, quite possibly
even its origin, is the fact that standards
research is not exactly a high-profile topic,
and it is certainly a very arcane one for
most. “I’m doing standards research” in
response to a question on what exactly I am
doing at the very least requires additional
explanations – “I’m with a computer sci-
ence department” doesn’t. Add to this the
problems associated with multi-disciplinary
research in general2 (more difficult to get
funding, lack of proper publication outlets,
etc.) and you will get a reasonably good idea
of why there are so few standards re-
searchers out there. And, of course, the
research done at a university has repercus-
sions on the subjects taught (at least at the
postgraduate level). My – not really edu-
cated – guess would be that the grand total
of students worldwide who are working on
standards-related theses is in the low three-
figure range.

The grant programme recently
launched by the European Commission for
theses relating to standards and
standardisation is a (small) step in the right
direction. Let’s hope this will grow and
become a constant feature. Also, SUN
have become active in this area, aiming at an
improved standards education at various
levels (not just limited to universities). The
above-mentioned survey was an initial step.
There may be hope after all.

Anyway, I very much welcome sug-
gestions on how to improve this situation in
tertiary education, preferably complete with
links to funding institutions. And if someone
wants to do a special issue on this topic – be
my guest.

Over to the papers. This issue sees a
first – an invited paper. It was originally
presented at a high-level conference at this
year’s Hanover Fair. ‘Lessons from the
Past: Public Standardization in the Spot-
light,’ by Ulrich Blum, offers a view back
from the year 2020. In particular, it looks at
effects of the reform of the global public
standardisation system in 2008, and how the
new concept of the ‘GlobalNorm’ evolved.

In a way, the subsequent paper, ‘De-
veloping Country Perspectives on Software:
Intellectual Property and Open Source – A
Case Study of Microsoft and Linux in China,’
by Xiaobai Shen, is related to the above.
Comparably new players, like India and
particularly China, will have a tremendous
effect on the ‘traditional’ views of IPR and
standards. The paper discusses the inter-
play between technology strategy and IPR
protection for China, and discusses the policy
implications for China and other developing
countries.

‘Should Buyers Try to Shape IT Mar-
kets Through Non-Market (Collective)
Action? Antecedents of a Transaction Cost
Theory of Network Effects’ is the question
Kai Reimers and Mingzhi Li address in their
paper. Based on a transaction cost theoretic
model of network effects, they assess the
chances of users to influence, through col-
lective action, the range of technological
choices available on the market. They con-
clude that a type of collective user action is
called for, which is very different from those
that exist today in the form of user groups.

The one position paper was written by
John Hurd and Jim Isaak, and is entitled ‘IT
Standardization: The Billion Dollar Strat-
egy.’ The authors argue that standards can
expand markets throughout their life cycle,
with an overall impact to be measured in
billions of dollars.
Then, we have two project descriptions. Both projects commenced only fairly recently, and both are funded by the European Commission under their 6th Framework Programme. Bart Brusse’s paper describes the CoPRAS project (Co-operation Platform for Research and Standards), which aims at improving the interface between ICT research and standardisation. The NO-ReST project (Networked Organisations – Research into Standards and Standardisation) is investigating the applicability and dynamics of standards, and aims to develop tools for the assessment of their performance and of the impact they may have.

There have also been a couple of interesting events worth reporting about. These include the Standards Edge conference (initiated by SUN); the conference on ‘Standards and Public Policy,’ hosted by the Federal Reserve Bank of Chicago; and the 9th EURAS Workshop (the European Academy for Standardisation), which was hosted by AFNOR (the French SDO).

Last but not least, the book based on the presentations at the Standards Edge conference is reviewed as well.

**Endnotes**

1 If you are interested in more details, a paper summarising the survey’s major findings may be found in the proceedings of the 9th EURAS Workshop. Let me know if you want to purchase a copy.

2 See [www.supra.ed.ac.uk/Publications/FINAL REPORT.pdf](http://www.supra.ed.ac.uk/Publications/FINAL REPORT.pdf) for a report on this problem.