



The crew-members of the future

Today's society is immersed in a process of automatisisation of tasks which were traditionally assigned to human beings. This automatisisation affects all stages of the process, from theory to design and construction. Perhaps the diversity of the fields which it takes in is so great because of the transversal nature of automatisisation, allowing its application in all of these fields. In any case, the degree of maturity attained at present in this discipline is great indeed. Furthermore, its potential for development is apparently endless. There are also economic motives which drive and promote this process. One of the most strategically important activities in business production is undoubtedly the development of technology, since this improves the efficiency of companies and lowers their costs.

Perhaps the continuous development of research into artificial intelligence and other parallel fields will allow us to come ever closer to the visions proposed by science fiction. For technological and economic reasons, some people think that the future may arrive at any moment, while some others think that it is already here. People talk about the smaller crews of the ships of the future but there already exist ships that cross the oceans operated by only six crew members. What will the ship of the future be like? Of course, everything would seem to point to the fact that it will be totally automated, but how many crew members will it have?

I recently read a manual from a course in Oxford which referred to the future of life on board ship. Its author, probably with some irony, made it clear how the ship of the future would be manned:

The crew was made up of just two members. A captain and a dog. The captain's work was to feed the dog (one might add, to formalise all the paperwork on commercial aspects, safety and quality). The dog's work was to bite the captain whenever he touched any piece of machinery.

The ways in which science can alter the relation between capital and work, as we know them today, would seem to have no limits. Everything is possible, the problem is when? It is very difficult to predict when automisation will reach the point where a man will be able to share his work with his most faithful friend. Whatever the case, the range of possibilities is enormous and means constantly taking on new challenges. In this sense, the scientific community is constantly responding to these challenges, developing lines of research in different spatial and sectorial areas.

The first organisation that should be mentioned in this context is, of course, the Institute of Electrical and Electronic Engineers (IEEE), an organisation present in some 170 countries, dedicated to theoretical and empirical advances in electrical, electronic and information engineering.

A secondly organisation that plays an immensely important role is the Ocean Engineering Society (OES), which helps to achieve the aims of the IEEE in the maritime environment, collaborating in advances in the theory, practice and accessibility of oceanographic engineering. This society currently includes an emerging and highly promising group of researchers from the Spanish Chapter of the OES.

In this context, Spanish researchers in the area of "Automisation in the Marine Sector" and others belonging to the Spanish division of the OES have contributed decisively to the elaboration of the present issue of our review.

The Journal of Maritime Research, always with the aim of contributing to the advancement, development and diffusion of research in the maritime sector thus embarks on a new adventure with the present special issue on "Naval Automisation", We hope to continue to constitute a meeting point to discuss the maritime sector from a multidisciplinary viewpoint. We believe that, on this first voyage, the aims have been achieved thanks mainly to the illusion and hard work of all of those involved in it.

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Editor