

**Learning as a PostDoc from Lotfi A. Zadeh in Berkeley,
and awarding a Doctorate honoris causa of
the Johannes Kepler University Linz a quarter of a century later**

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First personal meeting

My first meeting with Professor Zadeh took place in March 1978 at the occasion of the Fourth European Meeting on Cybernetics and Systems Research (EMCSR). This conference was organized by Professors Robert Trapp (Vienna) and Franz Pichler (Linz) and held at my home university, the Johannes Kepler University Linz, and Lotfi Zadeh was delivering a plenary lecture. I still remember that after his talk we sat together in the old cafeteria of our campus and that I showed him a preprint of my paper on fuzzy sigma-algebras.

Preparations for a research stay at Berkeley

Shortly thereafter, I wrote a letter to Professor Zadeh announcing another preprint of our paper on fuzzy probability measures, and at the end of this letter I wrote: „... *I would be very interested to have some opportunity to discuss with you and to learn from you, and so I would like to [...] come to the United States and to spend some time (as long as possible) with you at the University of California ...*“

Within a month, Lotfi Zadeh replied „... *It will be a great pleasure for me to have you as a visitor at Berkeley. [...] I am exploring the possibility of finding office space for you in Mathematics ...*

And a week later he added „... *Just a quick note to let you know that office space for you will be available. You will receive shortly an official letter to this effect ...*“

This official letter, dated July 3, 1978, was signed by Professor Manuel Blum, Associate Chairperson of Computer Science at UCB, and it contained the following key sentences: „... *On behalf of the Computer Science Division, I am happy to extend to you an invitation to spend the academic year 78-79 (September 1978 through June 1979) at Berkeley to pursue research among our faculty. Your visit will be co-sponsored with the Department of Mathematics, who will provide you with office space ...*“

Because of my teaching obligations at home, I only could leave for Berkeley in February 1979 and stay until July 1979. During the rest of 1978 I was busy to prepare myself and to apply for grants – luckily enough I received a generous grant from the Max Kade Foundation (New York) and a Fulbright travel grant.

Five exciting months at UCB

On February 11, 1979, Professor Zadeh himself picked me up at the San Francisco Airport and took me to the Shattuck Hotel in downtown Berkeley where I planned to live for the first weeks – finally I stayed there all the time.

The five months at Berkeley were some of the most fruitful in my career – in this stimulating atmosphere I did a lot of research which laid the ground for my Habilitation I was able to pass two years later. I was in close and permanent touch with Professor Zadeh and his international PhD students at that time: Piero Bonissone, Christian Freksa, Ramon Lopez de Mantaras, and Richard Tong. I enjoyed to listen to the talks of eminent mathematicians and computer scientists who visited UCB in this period.

Professor Zadeh arranged for me colloquium talks at UCB, Stanford, Indiana University, Iona College and University of Delaware. On these and other occasions I met a number of people from the fuzzy community (some of them for the first time): Patrick Suppes, Dan Ralescu, Azriel Rosenfeld, Ronald Yager, Hung Nguyen, and Henri Prade, to name just a few.

Summing up, I returned home with many very positive impressions and memories and with a lot of ideas for future work.

Honorary doctorate of the Johannes Kepler University

Roughly a quarter of a century later, on January 8, 2003, the Johannes Kepler University awarded a Honorary Doctorate to Professor Zadeh, in recognition of his outstanding contributions to two major fields of modern science: system theory and fuzzy logic. Being the chairman of the Academic Senate of our university at that time, I had the extraordinary honor of delivering the laudatio for Professor Zadeh at this occasion. In this laudation, I mentioned some of the most important contributions of Lotfi A. Zadeh to system theory and fuzzy set theory, which culminated in the incredible success of fuzzy logic and fuzzy control in Japan around 1990: “... *By the end of the eighties, it was virtually impossible to sell washing mashines, vacuum cleaners or cameras in Japan without the label “fuzzy”, a word every Japanese child knew and which made it to the ‘word of the year’ in Japan in 1990 ...*”

At the end of the ceremony, I had the privilege of handing over to Lotfi A. Zadeh the official certificate of a Doctor Honoris Causa of the Johannes Kepler University Linz, accompanied by our Dean Prof. Richard Hagelauer and our Rector Prof. Rudolf G. Ardelt.

Photographs



E.P. Klement congratulating Prof. L. A. Zadeh and handing over the certificate of the Honorary Doctorate to him (Jan 8, 2003)



Prof. Franz Pichler (JKU), L.A. Zadeh (UCB), Heinz Zemanek (TU Vienna), and
E.P. Klement (Jan 8, 2003)