

The responsibility of academia, and each of us

Sigbritt Karlsson, 2022-02-28

What strikes me when the terrible images of the war in Ukraine wash over us is the suffering, the injustice and David's tireless struggle against Goliath.

But it is also the closeness, ordinariness and simultaneity. And the two faces of technology.

It is technology that allows us to receive news reporting in real time and it is technology that enables us to track fake recordings made well in advance. But it is also technology that makes it possible to kill from a distance with the aid of missiles, while also keeping an entire people in ignorance through the distorted and falsified recording of history.

In Ukraine, we have seen at least three such examples of technology in use, and as an individual and a president of one of Europe's many technical universities, it scares me. On the other hand, technology also enables sanctions, resistance and rapid assistance. It brings hope.

How technology is used is of course determined by goals, purpose and needs, among other things. But behind all the technology there is a user –also a human being – and with that role comes responsibility. As I see it, in these times of keystrokes we all have an obligation to equip ourselves with knowledge and facts.

It is clear as day how important researched and verified knowledge is. Equally important is free and inherently limitless research. Like food and water, there is a risk of it becoming a scarce resource in times of war and under the rule of dictatorships. Academia has a crucial role in supporting a free and open society.

It is everyone's responsibility to stand up for these values. Especially when researchers, students and our fellow human beings in Ukraine are unable to.

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Sigbritt Karlsson writes about KTH's role in society and discusses both current and future education and research. She blogs every second week during school terms.

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