SLODRE
SLOVENSKO DRUŠTVO RAZISKOVALCEV NA PODROČJU EDUKACIJE

FACULTY OF EDUCATION IN UŽICE
UNIVERSITY OF KRAGUJEVAC

22nd International Scientific and Professional Conference

Diversity and Competences in Society 5.0: Challenges and Opportunities in Education



November 27th 2026 | UP PEF
(Cankarjeva 5, 6000 Koper)

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PROGRAMME

TIME	PROGRAMME	VENUE
8:00–9:00	Registration	Lobby of the UP PEF Annex
9:00–9:15	**Opening of the Scientific Conference and Welcome Addresses**	P 11
9:15–9:30	Prof. dr. Mara Cotič • Presentation of the research programme group "*Digital Transformation of Deficit Occupations for Society 5.0 (Industry 4.0) P5-0433*"	P11
9:30–10:00	**Plenary Lecture I** Assoc. Prof. Dr. Mirela Sertič Perić • *Teaching Sustainable Development for Society 5.0: From Misconceptions to Interdisciplinary Learning*	P11
10:00–10:30	**Plenary Lecture II** Prof. Dr. Tomaž Grušovnik • *Critical Thinking Between Competence and Epistemic Attitude*	P11
10:30–11:00	Coffee Break	P9
11:00–13:00	**Parallel Sessions I and II**	P4 and P5
13:00–14:30	Project Presentations	P9
	Lunch Break	Student dormitory canteen
14:30–16:30	**Parallel Sessions III and IV**	P4 and P5
16:30	Closing Remarks	P4

USEFUL INFORMATION

SESSION I (Room P4)

11:00–13:00	**SESSION CHAIR:** **dr. Barbara Horvat, dr. Petra Furlan**	**ROOM P4**
TIME	**TITLE OF THE PRESENTATION**	**PRESENTER(S)**
11:00–11:20	The Role of the University and Higher Education Teachers in Contemporary Society	Maja Mezgec
11:20–11:40	Depicting the Role of Teachers in the Context of Education 5.0 and 6.0	Dejan Hozjan
11:40–12:00	The Relationship Between Digital Skills, Curriculum Contribution, and Students' Perceived Employability in Society 5.0	Marina Semiz and Vesna Ružičić
12:00–12:20	Text Production as a Challenge for Reading Literacy among First-Year Secondary School Students	Katarina Grosek, Simona Pulko and Joca Zurc
12:20–12:40	What Kind of Person Does Society 5.0 Need? Maria Montessori's Perspective on the Development of Future Competencies	Edvarda Šteblaj
12:40–13:00	Inclusive Education in Primary School: A Case Study of a Pupil with Cerebral Palsy	Janja Plazar and Julija Lubej

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SESSION II (Room P5)

11:00–13:00	**SESSION CHAIR:** **Dott. Ric. Anja Pirih, dr. Nataša Dolenc**	**ROOM P5**
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11:00–11:20	Children's Participation in Kindergarten as a Foundation for Transversal Competences	Blaž Ukmar
11:20–11:40	Relationship Between Fear of Missing Out and Self-Regulated Social Media Use During Studying in Slovenian Secondary Students	Maruša Mesarič and Andreja Kozmus
11:40–12:00	Social-emotional learning in the PUM-O+ program: the "My Strengths" model and its observed effects on participants in the context of Society 5.0	Natalija Žalec and Barbara Kotnik
12:00–12:20	Psychometric properties of the Slovenian version of the Adolescent Measure of Empathy and Sympathy	Petra Dolenc and Nika Reja
12:20–12:40	Employees' attitudes in education towards domestic violence in Carinthian region	Jovita Pogorevc Merčnik
12:40–13:00	Recognizing Emotional Exhaustion and Its Predictors in Teachers' Work	Mateja Pšunder and Andreja Kozmus

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SESSION III (Room P4)

14:30–16:30	**SESSION CHAIR:** **dr. Petra Furlan, dr. Nataša Dolenc**	**ROOM P4**
TIME	**TITLE OF THE PRESENTATION**	**PRESENTER(S)**
14:30–14:50	Self-Assessment of Sustainability Competences among Students of Teacher Education Programmes at the University of Primorska	Tina Štemberger and Marina Volk
14:50–15:10	Learning About Large Carnivores as an Opportunity to Develop a Sustainable Relationship with Nature in Early Childhood Education	Tereza Kresevič Ivančić
15:10–15:30	Knowledge and Attitudes of Prospective Primary School Teachers towards the Issue of Plastic Waste	Nataša Dolenc and Nives Kovač
15:30–15:50	Outdoor Learning and Competence Development in Primary Education: Evidence from Istrian Headteachers	Bojan Burić, Irena Kiss and Nataša Dolenc
15:50–16:10	The Relationship Between Slovenian Language Achievement and Mathematical Problem Solving Among Primary School Students	Mara Cotič, Daniel Doz and Darjo Felda
16:10–16:30	Motivations and Barriers to Physical Activity among Students of the Faculty of Education at the University of Primorska	Tadeja Volmut and Neja Kovač

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SESSION IV (Room P5)

14:30–16:30	**SESSION CHAIR:** **dr. Barbara Baloh, dr. Barbara Kopačin**	**ROOM P5**
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14:30–14:50	Embodied Learning in Art History: Retention, Embodied Traces, and Knowledge Transfer	Vid Lenard
14:50–15:10	Self-Regulated Learning and the Frequency of Generative Artificial Intelligence Use Among University Students	Sonja Čotar Konrad and Alja Polanec
15:10–15:30	Pre-Service Preschool Teachers' Attitudes Toward Microsoft Teams Assignments in Performance-Based Music Coursework	Maja Sokolović Ignjačević
15:30–15:50	EFL Teachers' Perceptions of Gamification for Student Engagement and Classroom Practice in English Language Teaching	Tamara M. Bradonjić
15:50–16:10	The Role of Digital Media in Shaping Young People's Intercultural Sensitivity: A Theoretical Framework and Didactic Implications	Julija Petan

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Plenary lecture I

Teaching sustainable development for Society 5.0: From misconceptions to interdisciplinary learning

Assoc. Prof. Dr. Mirela Sertić Perić,

University of Zagreb, Faculty of Science

Sustainable development is increasingly recognized as an essential component of contemporary education, yet the concept is often understood narrowly, particularly as being synonymous with environmental protection, recycling, or climate change. Developing a comprehensive understanding of sustainable development from an early age is therefore essential for enabling learners to recognize the interconnected environmental, social, and economic dimensions of sustainability and to critically engage with complex challenges. This keynote will explore how interdisciplinary, collaborative, and experiential learning can contribute to developing such understanding, drawing on examples from teaching at the University of Zagreb, Faculty of Science. Particular attention will be given to courses such as Urban Ecology and Sustainable Development in Science Education, where students from different disciplinary backgrounds, including biology and chemistry, environmental sciences, and architecture work collaboratively on real-world sustainability challenges through student projects. These examples illustrate how diverse learning environments and the integration of different disciplinary perspectives can foster critical thinking, collaboration, systems thinking, and other competencies needed for responsible and creative action in Society 5.0.

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Plenary lecture II

Critical Thinking Between Competence and Epistemic Attitude

Prof. Dr. Tomaž Grušovnik,

University of Primorska, Faculty of Education

The lecture draws on four conceptions of critical thinking presented in the entry prepared for the third volume of the Pedagogical Lexicon: the logical-analytical, epistemic-virtue, critical-theoretical, and phenomenological-hermeneutic conceptions. Against this background, the understanding of critical thinking primarily as a competence or a set of practical skills will be critically examined. Such an understanding is linked to a broader conception of education as the acquisition of competences, which may overlook its humanistic and existential dimensions. Critical thinking will therefore be explored as an epistemic attitude and a way of orienting oneself in the world. This involves not only the ability to evaluate reasons and arguments, but also the cultivation of intellectual character, reflection on social presuppositions, and critical examination of one's own ways of thinking. From this perspective, thinking and knowing are not merely tools for solving problems; rather, they are fundamental modes of human existence in the world.

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The Role of the University and Higher Education Teachers in Contemporary Society

Maja Mezgec, University of Primorska, Faculty of Education

The aim of the paper is to analyse the multidimensional role of the university in contemporary society and to examine the challenges it faces. As an institution, the university has a long history; however, its role in modern society is continuously evolving. In the past, its primary function was the education of elites and the preservation of cultural heritage, whereas today it is expected to fulfil a much broader role, including innovation, social engagement, and contribution to economic development. TheHumboldtian model of the university, long regarded as a reference model, emphasizes the unity of research and teaching as well as the autonomy of the academic sphere. This ideal still shapes the understanding of the university today, although in practice it is increasingly confronted with new demands. The paper addresses the transformation of the university from a traditional center of knowledge into a dynamic actor within a globalised and digitalised environment, where it is expected to operate as an inclusive institution. This is also reflected in the shift from elite education to the massification of higher education. In addition to their educational mission, contemporary universities operate within the framework of a ‘third mission,’ which encompasses education, research, and engagement with society. The concluding section presents a synthesis that links the previously discussed structural, organizational, and value-based changes in the modern university with their implications for the academic profession. The profession of higher education teacher is becoming increasingly complex, and expectations are rising in all three fundamental areas of academic work: teaching, research, and the transfer of knowledge to society.

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Depicting the Role of Teachers in the Context of Education 5.0 and 6.0

Dejan Hozjan, University of Primorska, Faculty of Education

In the last decade, the educational process has been closely linked to digital transformation, which has a significant impact on the understanding of the learning process, the integration of digital technology and the role of teachers. The concepts of Education 5.0 and 6.0 represent a theoretical starting point for understanding the digitalization of the educational process. The concept of Education 5.0 is based on the partial integration of digital technology into the educational process. Digital technology is included as a supplement to the teacher's work. However, it has been shown that such integration often leads to technological determinism and forgetting the broader social, ethical and pedagogical context of digitalization. As a response to the shortcomings of the concept of Education 5.0, the concept of Education 6.0 has emerged in recent years. This emphasizes the symbiotic relationship between the teacher, the student and digital technology. Since Education 6.0 is still in its infancy, the role of the teacher and his or her competencies in the future remains an open question. The purpose of the paper is to analyze the changing role of teachers in the transition from the concept of Education 5.0 to Education 6.0 and to create a comprehensive conceptual model of competencies required by each concept. The findings of the paper are based on a theoretical conceptual analysis of the literature, identification of conceptual gaps and the creation of a three-phase conceptualmodel of the competency framework. The conceptual model shows the phases of changing the teacher's role, namely: user of digital technology, administrator of knowledge and administrator of a comprehensive learning environment. Competencies associated with each teacher's role are interconnected and built upon,which makes it easier to understand its use. The paper provides a basis for designing future educational policies, developing teacher training programs and changing pedagogical practice.

BACK TO THE PROGRAMME

The Relationship Between Digital Skills, Curriculum Contribution, and Students' Perceived Employability in Society 5.0

Marina Semiz, University of Kragujevac, Faculty of Education in Užice

Vesna Ružičić, University of Kragujevac, Faculty of Technical Sciences in Čačak

In the context of increasing diversity and the competencies required for Society 5.0, growing attention is being paid to the impact of digital skills and curriculum contribution on students' perceived employability, as key factors in the successful transition from higher education to the labor market. This study draws on three theoretical frameworks: the DigComp 2.2 framework, career construction theory, and social capital theory in the digital age. The study aimed to examine the relationships between digital skills, the contribution of the curriculum, and students' perceived employability, as well as to identify the key predictors of perceived employability. A correlational research design and a quantitative approach were used, and the data were analyzed using multiple linear regression. Data were collected using three purpose-built scales assessing the level of digital skills, the contribution of the curriculum to the development of employability-related competencies, and perceived employability. The sample consisted of 181 students from the University of Kragujevac, Serbia, during the 2025/26 academic year. The results show that the predictive model is statistically significant ($F(9,171) = 6.037$, $p < 0.001$) and explains 28% of the variance in students' perceived employability. The most significant predictors were curriculum contribution and communication-related digital skills, while the overall level of digital skills showed a modest positive effect. The results emphasize the need to strategically design curricula that integrate key digital skills and prepare students for a dynamic labor market. Future research should explore additional predictors to explain perceived employability better.

BACK TO THE PROGRAMME

Text Production as a Challenge for Reading Literacy among First-Year Secondary School Students

Katarina Grosek, **Simona Pulko** and **Joca Zurc,** University of Maribor, Faculty of Arts

Reading literacy is a key factor in academic achievement, as it is closely connected to text comprehension, the expression of ideas, and critical thinking. For students to achieve comprehensive reading literacy, reading texts alone is not sufficient; it is equally important to develop the ability to produce texts, as this enables a deeper understanding and application of knowledge in various contexts. Writing involves complex processes such as planning, appropriate verbal expression, and careful revision, in which teachers, parents, and highquality feedback play a crucial role in encouraging the improvement of writing competencies. Various digital resources also play an important role in this process, as they help students create texts and improve their writing abilities. We conducted a mixed methods research. In the qualitative part of the study, 358 students aged 15 participated, while within the quantitative part we conducted interviews with five teachers from secondary schools in Maribor. The results showed that students often have difficulties with spelling, grammar, and writing style, which teachers mainly attribute to students' lack of motivation to read and lack of interest for practicing. The results of the survey also showed that students are not motivated to read. The findings of the study reveal that students still have the most difficulty with tasks that involve text production, which indicates the need to develop effective strategies for improving writing abilities. Teachers and parents could achieve progress only when adolescents feel supported in their learning, either through regular feedback or through greater motivation for learning and writing.

BACK TO THE PROGRAMME

What Kind of Person Does Society 5.0 Need?

Maria Montessori's Perspective on the Development of Future Competencies

Edvarda Šteblaj, Vzgojno-izobraževalni zavod Montessori

Society 5.0 raises the question of which competencies people will need for responsible and creative living in the future. This paper is based on the assumption that competencies cannot be understood separately from holistic human development. Drawing on Maria Montessori's developmental perspective, the paper discusses how universal human tendencies, the four planes of development, meaningful work, social organisation and the role of the adult create the conditions for the formation of personality, from which the competencies recognised as essential in contemporary society gradually emerge. The paper argues that many of the competencies associated with Society 5.0 are not primarily the result of planned education but emerge as a natural consequence of holistic human development. Maria Montessori's developmental perspective therefore continues to offer an important contribution to contemporary discussions on education for the future.

BACK TO THE PROGRAMME

Inclusive Education in Primary School: A Case Study of a Pupil with Cerebral Palsy

Janja Plazar, University of Primorska, Faculty of Education

Julija Lubej, Griže Primary School

Inclusive education in contemporary schools raises important questions regarding the provision of appropriate conditions for the learning and participation of pupils with special educational needs in mainstream educational settings. This paper focuses on the case of a pupil with cerebral palsy enrolled in the second grade of a mainstream primary school and examines the factors influencing her everyday participation in classroom activities. The aim of the study was to explore how stakeholders involved in the pupil's educational and rehabilitation process describe pedagogical adaptations, the use of augmentative and alternative communication, the pupil's social inclusion, interprofessional collaboration, and the supportive and limiting factors affecting inclusion.

The study employed a qualitative research approach and was designed as a case study. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews with twelve participants involved in the pupil's educational and rehabilitation process, including teachers, special education support providers, a teaching assistant, parents, and external professionals. The data were analysed using qualitative content analysis.

The findings indicate that the key factors supporting inclusion include positive attitudes of educational professionals, effective collaboration between the school, parents, and external specialists, appropriate pedagogical adaptations, and the use of augmentative and alternative communication. An important role is also played by the teaching assistant, who facilitates the pupil's active participation in the learning process. Participants identified the time-consuming nature of instructional individualisation, increased teacher workload, and limited access to modern assistive technologies as major challenges.

The findings provide an example of good practice in the inclusion of a pupil with cerebral palsy in a mainstream primary school and contribute to a better understanding of the factors influencing successful inclusive education. They also highlight the importance of coordinated collaboration among all stakeholders involved in the educational and rehabilitation process.

BACK TO THE PROGRAMME

Children's Participation in Kindergarten as a Foundation for Transversal Competences

Blaž Ukmar, Sežana Kindergarten

The article discusses children's participation in kindergarten as a principle and pedagogical orientation that supports the development of transversal competences in early childhood. It is based on the understanding that competences such as social and communication skills, creativity, self-regulation and metacognitive abilities do not develop separately, but through the interplay of activities, relationships and experiences that children co-construct. Participation is presented as a process in which the child influences the course of learning, expresses ideas and enters into meaningful interactions with peers and adults.

Participation understood in this way goes beyond mere involvement and requires thoughtful professional practice on the part of the teacher. The teacher's role is understood as multifaceted: as an observer who recognises children's initiatives, as an interpreter who gives them professional meaning, and as a co-creator who opens space for children's participation. An important factor is also the learning environment, including the organisation of space, the accessibility of open-ended materials and sufficient time for sustained play. Based on a practical example from a group of children aged 3–4 years, the article demonstrates how reflective and participation-oriented practice can create conditions for the holistic development of the child as an active co-creator of their own learning.

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Relationship Between Fear of Missing Out and Self-Regulated Social Media Use During Studying in Slovenian Secondary Students

Maruša Mesarič, Ptuj Kindergarten

Andreja Kozmus, University of Maribor, Faculty of Arts

In modern society, where digital connectivity significantly shapes the daily lives of young people, the question arises of how to strike a balance between constant engagement with digital streams and a high-quality learning process. This paper examines the phenomenon of fear of missing out (FOMO) in the context of the ubiquitous use of social media among high school students and its connection to their learning habits. Social media enables young people to connect with one another, but excessive use can lead to negative consequences, such as feelings of exclusion that arise when an individual cannot access the internet and therefore feels they are missing out on events. These feelings can manifest as cognitive interruptions during learning and, consequently, lower academic achievement. In this paper,we present the time spent on social media and the prevalence of FOMO among Slovenian high school students (N = 891) and demonstrate its association with self-regulation of social media use during studying. The results show that high school students typically spend between 2.5 and 5.5 hours per day on social media, primarily for entertainment and to maintain social connections. On average, they report low levels of FOMO, though longer daily use of social media is associated with higher levels of FOMO. High school students with higher levels of FOMO more frequently report attention problems, procrastination, and social media use while studying, indicating a link between FOMO and poorer selfregulation skills of socialmedia use during studying. The findings contribute to a better understanding of the relationship between digital environments and learning among young people and provide a basis for developing pedagogical approaches that promote the responsible use of technology and effective learning in a digital society.

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Social-emotional learning in the PUM-O+ program: the "My Strengths" model and its observed effects on participants in the context of Society 5.0

Natalija Žalec, Slovenian Institute for Adult Education

Barbara Kotnik, Zavod Za vas živim

Society 5.0 emphasizes the importance of technological development while also highlighting the need to strengthen human capabilities such as collaboration, empathy, self-regulation, critical thinking, and responsibility. These social-emotional skills are particularly important for young adults facing the challenges of transitioning to society, i.e. education, employment, and independent living. In addressing the challenges of Society 5.0, this paper presents social-emotional learning within the Project-Based Learning for Young Adults Plus (PUM-O+) program and the My Strengths model, which is based on the concept of co-vitality. The key elements of the "My Strengths" model and how it is applied in the daily practice of PUM-O+ are described. Based on systematic observations by mentors and reflections by participants, which take place alongside lessons and Personal Learning Plans (PLP)s, we present the observed effects of implementing selected social-emotional learning strategies. Progress has been observed in expressing opinions, collaboration, recognizing emotions, self-regulation, assertiveness, prosocial behavior, and engaged living. The findings confirm the importance of the systematic development of social-emotional skills in young adults and their role in more successful integration into society and the co-creation of Society 5.0.

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Psychometric properties of the Slovenian version of the Adolescent Measure of Empathy and Sympathy

Petra Dolenc and **Nika Reja,** University of Primorska, Faculty of Education

Empathy, defined as a key socio-cognitive ability, involves perceiving and understanding others' emotional states. Within educational settings, it represents a significant socio-emotional competence that promotes the development of high-quality interpersonal relationships, fosters prosocial behavior, and supports the holistic development of students. The systematic study of empathy and its effects in the learning environment requires the use of valid and reliable measurement instruments, which are currently lacking in the Slovenian context. This study aimed to examine the psychometric properties of the Slovenian Adolescent Measure of Empathy and Sympathy (AMES-SL). A sample of 251 Slovenian secondary school students aged 14 to 19 years (M = 16.82; SD = 1.08) completed the AMES-SL scale. Confirmatory factor analysis supported the proposed factor structure of the instrument, which comprises three dimensions: cognitive empathy, affective empathy, and sympathy. Measurement invariance across gender and age was also confirmed, further supporting the applicability of the scale across different adolescent groups. The scale demonstrated good internal consistency. Girls and older adolescents exhibited higher levels of empathy across all domains compared to boys and younger adolescents. The findings indicate that the AMES-SL is a valid and reliable instrument for assessing empathy in adolescents. Its application may support the development of school-based interventions aimed at fostering empathy and sympathy, thereby enhancing prosocial behavior and emotional competence.

BACK TO THE PROGRAMME

Employees' attitudes in education towards domestic violence in Carinthian region

Jovita Pogorevc Merčnik, University of Primorska, Faculty of Education

Timely recognition that a child is a victim of domestic violence allows us to provide help and support and to protect a child from further experiencing violence. The consequences of domestic violence can also manifest in school environment, which is why it is important for professional workers in education to understand the dynamics of domestic violence.
In order to assess the knowledge of the dynamics of domestic violence among professional workers in education (kindergarten teachers, teacher assistants, and teachers in primary and secondary schools), a study was conducted, focused on Carinthia region. The study was conducted on a sample of 108 respondents. For the purpose of data collection, a survey was conducted among them, which was created in the online questionnaire 1ka. The data were processed using the Jamovi statistical data analysis program at the level of descriptive and inferential statistics, using the chi-square test.
The results of the research show that employees in education are familiar with the dynamics of domestic violence. They stated that physical and economic forms of violence in the family occur occasionally, while psychological forms occur often. Regarding stalking, they report that it occurs rarely and that victims of domestic violence are more often women and children, while the perpetrators are men. Employees in education also indicate that the presence of alcohol and illegal drugs among perpetrators of violence occurs frequently or very frequently. They also agree that victims of domestic violence face difficulties in finding suitable employment and deal with educational helplessness.

BACK TO THE PROGRAMME

Recognizing Emotional Exhaustion and Its Predictors in Teachers' Work

Mateja Pšunder and **Andreja Kozmus,** University of Maribor, Faculty of Arts

Recently, the problem of teacher shortages has been widely highlighted; at the same time, teachers who remain in the teaching profession often report feeling overworked and stressed. Exposure to prolonged stress can lead to emotional exhaustion, which is one of the key indicators of burnout. The consequences of long-term and escalating stress are reflected not only in the quality of work performed but also in the general well-being of teachers, more frequent health problems, sick leaves, and even in individuals leaving the teaching profession. Based on these findings, we researched how Slovenian teachers perceive emotional exhaustion and which factors best predict their emotional exhaustion. A total of 870 teachers from elementary and secondary schools in Slovenia participated in the online survey. The results showed that teachers experience a moderate level of emotional exhaustion and that differences in the experience of emotional exhaustion are evident among individual groups of teachers. When teachers' personal characteristics are included in the model, gender emerges as a key predictor of teachers' emotional exhaustion. When characteristics of the school where they teach are included in the model, the level of the school emerges as a significant predictor. When specific areas of work are additionally included, emotional exhaustion statistically significantly predicts most of these areas. Based on the results, we offered several practical guidelines for teaching practice.

BACK TO THE PROGRAMME

Self-Assessment of Sustainability Competences among Students of Teacher Education Programmes at the University of Primorska

Tina Štemberger and **Marina Volk,** University of Primorska, Faculty of Education

Sustainability competence refers to a broad set of knowledge, skills, values, and attitudes that help individuals understand and respond responsibly to the complex challenges of sustainable development. In recent years, increasing attention has been devoted to how future teachers perceive and evaluate their own sustainability competences, particularly in relation to educational quality, professional expectations, and the wider social role of educators. As part of the project Renewal of Teacher Education Study Programmes (PŠP NOO), a study was carried out to explore how students enrolled in teacher education programmes assess their sustainability competences.

The study involved 367 students from teacher education programmes at the University of Primorska. Data were collected using a questionnaire consisting of 15 statements related to sustainability competence, evaluated on a five-point Likert scale. Exploratory factor analysis identified three main dimensions of sustainability competences: (i) prosocial and sustainability-oriented attitudes, (ii) perceived gender equality, and (iii) ethical consumer behaviour. The results showed that students assessed their prosocial and sustainability-oriented attitudes most positively, followed by ethical consumer behaviour, whereas lower ratings were observed in the area of perceived gender equality. In addition, no statistically significant differences were found in students' self-assessment of sustainability competences according to their level or year of study.

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Learning About Large Carnivores as an Opportunity to Develop a Sustainable Relationship with Nature in Early Childhood Education

Tereza Kresevič Ivančić, Primary school Anton Žnidaršič

This paper presents examples of good practice in introducing early science education through the pedagogical concept of experiential learning in the preschool period. It focuses on learning about the protected large carnivores of the Snežnik forests (the brown bear, Eurasian lynx, and wolf) with the aim of fostering a sustainable relationship with the natural environment and reducing prejudice and fear. The evaluation of the activities is based on a non-experimental study that examined the impact of planned science-related content on children's knowledge and attitudes. The results indicate that direct experiences, the use of authentic materials, and active exploration are key factors in developing more enduring scientific knowledge, understanding the ecological role of predators, and fostering environmental responsibility from early childhood onward.

BACK TO THE PROGRAMME

Knowledge and Attitudes of Prospective Primary School Teachers towards the Issue of Plastic Waste

Nataša Dolenc and **Nives Kovač,** University of Primorska, Faculty of Education

Plastic pollution is recognised as one of the most pressing environmental challenges of contemporary society. Owing to its widespread use, persistence in the environment, and detrimental effects on ecosystems, plastic has become a major contributor to environmental degradation. In this context, education plays a vital role in fostering environmental literacy and promoting responsible attitudes towards the environment. Prospective primary school teachers hold particular importance in this process, as their knowledge, attitudes, and practices may significantly influence the development of pupils' environmental values and behaviours. The aim of the study was to examine the opinions, attitudes, and perceived awareness of pre-service teachers regarding plastic pollution, as well as their views on the importance of addressing this issue in education. Data were collected through a questionnaire consisting of 19 items. The sample comprised 77 students enrolled in the Primary Education study programme. The questionnaire addressed participants' understanding of plastic waste-related issues, their perceptions of the environmental impacts of plastic pollution, and their attitudes towards reducing plastic use and integrating this topic into classroom teaching. The results indicate that prospective teachers recognise plastic pollution as an important environmental issue. However, their knowledge of microplastics, nanoplastics, and sources of pollution remains relatively limited, while their environmentally responsible behaviour is mostly reflected in basic everyday practices. The findings highlight the need for greater integration of these topics into teacher education and for the further development of didactic approaches to addressing environmental challenges in primary school.

BACK TO THE PROGRAMME

Outdoor Learning and Competence Development in Primary Education: Evidence from Istrian Headteachers

Bojan Burić, Irena Kiss, Juraj Dobrila University of Pula, Faculty of Educational Sciences, and **Nataša Dolenc,** University of Primorska, Faculty of Education

Outdoor learning is an effective pedagogical approach that supports experiential learning, enhances cognitive and social development, and connects learning to real-life situations. It fosters active engagement, inquiry, and authentic problem-solving, while promoting key competencies aligned with the demands of Society 5.0, such as critical thinking, collaboration, adaptability, and responsible decision-making. The study aimed to identify the underlying dimensions of the experiences and opinions of primary school headteachers in Istria, Croatia, regarding the role and impact of outdoor learning. The research was conducted on a sample of 38 headteachers (83% of the total number of headteachers in Istria). Factor analysis identified four key factors describing headteachers' perceptions. The most prominent factor relates to learning and development through experience, highlighting the development of social skills, problem-solving, the application of knowledge in new situations and increased pupil motivation. The second factor encompasses responsibility and self-discipline, including responsible behaviour, attention to safety and communication with teachers. The third component highlights participation and autonomy, including pupils' roles in choosing activities and destinations. The fourth factor is associated with appropriate and safe behaviour, underscoring the importance of adhering to rules and fulfilling obligations in a timely manner. The results of the Spearman correlation analysis revealed statistically significant positive associations between the development of social skills and problem-solving abilities, as well as between knowledge application, learning motivation, and problem-solving. These findings indicate that pupils' cognitive and social competences are interrelated and that active participation in outdoor learning contributes to their holistic development. The results demonstrate that headteachers recognise outdoor learning as an important form of educational practice that contributes to the holistic development of pupils. In addition to knowledge acquisition, emphasis is placed on responsibility, active participation and the development of social and personal competencies, which positions this pedagogical approach highly within contemporary education.

BACK TO THE PROGRAMME

The Relationship Between Slovenian Language Achievement and Mathematical Problem Solving Among Primary School Students

Mara Cotič, Daniel Doz and **Darjo Felda,** University of Primorska, Faculty of Education

This paper examines the relationship between achievement in the Slovenian language and mathematical problem solving among third-grade primary school students. The study is grounded in contemporary research highlighting the close connection between linguistic and mathematical processes in learning and emphasizing the importance of understanding mathematical language for successful problem solving. The aim of the study was to determine whether statistically significant differences in mathematical problem-solving performance exist according to students' achievement in the Slovenian language. The sample consisted of 88 third-grade primary school students. At the end of the school year, the students completed a mathematics test covering arithmetic, geometry and measurement, and logic with sets across three levels of knowledge based on Gagné's taxonomy. Final grades in the Slovenian language were used as the independent variable, while scores on the mathematics test served as the dependent variable. Data were analyzed using analysis of variance (ANOVA). The results revealed statistically significant differences among groups of students with different grades in the Slovenian language. Students with higher grades achieved better results across all mathematical content areas and at all levels of task complexity. The largest differences were observed in more demanding mathematical problems. The findings indicate a significant relationship between achievement in the Slovenian language and mathematical problem-solving performance. The study contributes to a better understanding of the interconnectedness of linguistic and mathematical competencies in the early years of primary education and highlights the importance of fostering students' overall learning capacities through an integrated educational approach.

BACK TO THE PROGRAMME

Motivations and Barriers to Physical Activity among Students of the Faculty of Education at the University of Primorska

Tadeja Volmut and **Neja Kovač,** University of Primorska, Faculty of Education

The aim of this study was to assess the physical activity of students at the Faculty of Education, University of Primorska, within the context of Society 5.0, which emphasizes health and well-being as key competencies, and to identify their main motivations, barriers, and perceived faculty support. In June 2025, 186 students completed an online questionnaire via the 1KA platform. The questionnaire assessed physical activity, preferred activities, motivations, barriers, and perceived faculty support. Data were analysed using descriptive statistics. Most students were physically active three times per week on average, accumulating 302.9 minutes of moderate-to-vigorous physical activity weekly. Overall, 71.9% met the World Health Organization recommendations, whereas 28.1% did not, and 3.8% were completely inactive. Students reported an average of six hours of sedentary behaviour daily, including four hours of screen time. Running, hiking, strength training, cycling, and walking were the most common activities. The main motivations were maintaining health, enjoyment of physical activity, improving mood, and physical fitness, whereas social and competitive motives were less important. The main barriers were lack of time, fatigue, stress, financial costs, an unstructured routine, and lack of motivation. Students perceived faculty support as moderate, rating access to outdoor areas and sports facilities highest and the promotion of physical activity during studies lowest. The findings highlight the need for multicomponent interventions combining timetable adjustments, better access to physical activity programmes, and a supportive study environment to reduce sedentary behaviour and increase the proportion of students meeting physical activity recommendations.

BACK TO THE PROGRAMME

Embodied Learning in Art History: Retention, Embodied Traces, and Knowledge Transfer

Vid Lenard, University of Primorska, Faculty of Education

This study investigates the role of embodied metaphorical creativity in art history education, focusing on meaning-making, knowledge retention, and the transfer of analytical skills. The research was conducted within the undergraduate Visual Arts and Design programme at the University of Primorska. Twenty-two first-year students participated in an embodied learning intervention, while nineteen completed a delayed retention test.

Drawing on theories of embodied cognition, experiential learning, and embodied metaphorical creativity, the study integrated creative movement into the teaching of Northern Renaissance art, focusing on Jan van Eyck's Arnolfini Portrait and the Limbourg Brothers' Très Riches Heures (July). A qualitative descriptive-interpretative approach was employed. Data were collected through video recordings, written responses, reflective questionnaires, and a delayed retention test administered fourteen days after the intervention. Rogier van der Weyden's Descent from the Cross served as an immediate transfer task, while Hieronymus Bosch's Garden of Earthly Delights was used to examine delayed transfer.

The findings suggest that embodied learning can support perception, memory, and interpretative engagement with artworks. Students frequently connected bodily sensations such as weight, rhythm, flow, and spatial restriction with artistic meaning. The results also revealed the emergence of an embodied trace, whereby elements of bodily experience remained present in students' recollections two weeks after the intervention. Transfer proved more demanding than retention, as only some students successfully applied formal, iconographic, and iconological categories to unfamiliar artworks.

The study indicates that embodied metaphorical creativity offers a valuable pedagogical framework for fostering meaning-making in art history education. However, embodied understanding alone does not ensure analytical transfer and should be supported by explicit reflection and art-historical conceptualisation.

BACK TO THE PROGRAMME

Self-Regulated Learning and the Frequency of Generative Artificial Intelligence Use Among University Students

Sonja Čotar Konrad, University of Primorska, Faculty of Education

Alja Polanec, University of Maribor, Faculty of Arts

In this study, we examined the frequency of generative artificial intelligence (Gen-AI) use and its relationship with components of self-regulated learning among university students. The sample consisted of 436 students, and the data were collected using measurement instruments that included selected components of self-regulated learning. The results show that students most frequently use Gen-AI tools as a learning aid, primarily to understand more challenging course content and to complete academic assignments more effectively, while they use them less frequently for more demanding academic tasks, such as data analysis and citing sources. We also found that there is a statistically significant positive correlation between the frequency of Gen-AI use for learning and test anxiety, as well as a statistically significant positive correlation between the frequency of Gen-AI use for learning and metacognition.

BACK TO THE PROGRAMME

Pre-Service Preschool Teachers' Attitudes Toward Microsoft Teams Assignments in Performance-Based Music Coursework

Maja Sokolović Ignjačević, University of Belgrade, Faculty of Education

The purpose of this study was to investigate the attitudes of pre-service preschool teachers towards the use of ICT in a music teaching methodology course, with a special emphasis on Microsoft Teams Assignments as a method of completing pre-exam coursework related to performing children's songs with self-accompaniment on the piano. The specific aims were to explore: (1) students' preferred way of completing piano-related tasks and their evaluation of the usefulness of Microsoft Teams Assignments, (2) benefits and challenges of submitting recordings via Microsoft Teams, (3) importance of teacher feedback on submitted recordings, (4) students' self-assessment of independent song preparation ability, confidence in accompanying songs on the piano and their intention to use such accompaniment in their future pedagogical practice, and (5) whether these evaluations and self-assesments differed according to students' academic achievement in music-related courses. A questionnaire-based study employing both quantitative and qualitative data collection was conducted. The instrument included closed-ended questions, rating scales, and open-ended questions to gather numerical indicators and descriptive student comments about their experience with the digital submission of piano performance-related activities. The sample was composed of 40 students who were enrolled in the course of Music Teaching Methodology. Results showed that students generally preferred the online submission of recorded performances, perceived the online format as reducing performance anxiety, had acknowledged opportunities for repeated practice and reflection, and appreciated teacher feedback, with little variation by achievement level, although students with higher achievement levels reported more confidence in their ability to prepare songs independently. The study may contribute to a better understanding of pre-service preschool teachers' attitudes toward the role of digital tools in supporting practical music learning. It may also provide pedagogical insights on the integration of ICT inmusic teaching methodology courses, especially in regard to student autonomy, assessment and feedback.

BACK TO THE PROGRAMME

EFL Teachers' Perceptions of Gamification for Student Engagement and Classroom Practice in English Language Teaching

Tamara M. Bradonjić, University of Kragujevac, Faculty of Education in Jagodina

Gamification refers to the use of game mechanics, dynamics, and design elements in non-game contexts, including education. Contemporary learners are often described as digital natives whose learning preferences, motivation, and expectations are shaped by their frequent interaction with digital technologies. Consequently, teachers are increasingly encouraged to adopt engaging and interactive pedagogical approaches that support meaningful learning experiences. Gamification has emerged as one such approach with the potential to enrich English language teaching by promoting student participation, collaboration, and classroom engagement. The aim of this descriptive study was to explore English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teachers' perceptions of the use of gamification in English language teaching and their reported experiences regarding its implementation in classroom practice. The study included 30 EFL teachers working in primary and secondary schools in Serbia. Data were collected through an adapted questionnaire comprising four thematic sections addressing teachers' perceptions of using gamification in teaching, the relevance of gamified activities for language learning, teachers' perceived competence in implementing gamification, and the use of gamification tools in the classroom. Descriptive statistics, including frequencies and percentages, were used to analyze the responses. The findings indicate predominantly positive perceptions of gamification among the participating teachers. The respondents generally perceived gamification as a useful and engaging pedagogical approach that may support student motivation, classroom participation, peer interaction, and active learning in English language classrooms. Teachers also reported positive experiences regarding the practical implementation of gamified activities and digital tools in their teaching practice. Although the findings are limited to the participating sample and cannot be generalized to the wider population of EFL teachers, they provide valuable insights into teachers' reported experiences with gamification and highlight its pedagogical potential in contemporary language teaching contexts.

BACK TO THE PROGRAMME

The Role of Digital Media in Shaping Young People's Intercultural Sensitivity: A Theoretical Framework and Didactic Implications

Julija Petan, University of Primorska, Faculty of Education (student)

Without appropriate pedagogical support, digital media can reinforce stereotypes among young people and limit their understanding of cultural diversity. Algorithmically driven media environments create so-called filter bubbles and echo chambers, which reduce exposure to different perspectives and position young people as passive recipients of media messages. At the same time, when accompanied by appropriate pedagogical guidance, digital media can provide opportunities for contact with cultures that young people may not encounter in their everyday lives, thereby fostering the development of intercultural sensitivity. Competencies such as intercultural sensitivity and critical media literacy are indispensable for the development of an inclusive society in the context of globalization and Society 5.0.

The scholarly article examines the role of digital media in shaping young people's attitudes toward cultural diversity, based on a review of relevant domestic and international literature. The theoretical framework is based on Bennett's Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity and a constructivist understanding of competencies. Particular attention is given to the distinction between passive media consumption and critical media literacy, as well as to the role of schools as corrective spaces in which appropriate didactic approaches promote critical understanding of media content and empathy toward culturally different others.

The paper introduces the KREA model (Critical Observation – Exploring the Bubble – Empathic Encounter – Active Creation), a theoretically grounded didactic framework for fostering intercultural sensitivity among students. The model is situated within future-oriented competence frameworks, such as DigComp and the Council of Europe's Reference Framework of Competences for Democratic Culture. It also provides a basis for further empirical investigation.

BACK TO THE PROGRAMME

PROJECT PRESENTATIONS

Digital Transformation of Shortage Occupations for Society 5.0 (Industry 4.0)

Contact: Prof. Dr Mara Cotič (mara.cotic@pef.upr.si)

The research programme focuses on the systematic investigation of labour market needs and societal challenges in the economic, social and cultural domains, with particular emphasis on the relationship between education and the development of the future workforce. Its primary objective is to identify short- and long-term workforce requirements and develop appropriate educational approaches based on relevant research, analyses and international examples of good practice. An analysis of the current situation indicates that educational solutions, particularly in Slovenia, are often fragmented and insufficiently grounded in actual societal needs and systematic research. The labour market faces short-term imbalances arising from a shortage of appropriately qualified personnel to address emerging challenges, as well as long-term structural shortages in occupations such as healthcare, nursing, tourism and education. These imbalances are partly attributable to a lack of reliable research, incomplete analyses and misinterpretations.

The programme therefore focuses on identifying long-term needs and challenges and developing the human resources required for emerging professions and occupations shaped by the society of the future. To this end, it systematically examines international examples of good practice and develops relevant learning content, supportive learning environments, and formal and non-formal educational approaches. Particular attention is devoted to aligning research into career opportunities with labour market needs, thereby enhancing the attractiveness of demanding occupations facing skills shortages and requiring intensive study and advanced knowledge. As the world, including Slovenia, transitions from the Third to the Fourth Industrial Revolution, the future workforce must be researched and developed systematically from the present day onwards. This entails creating supportive learning and working environments and highlighting the long-term prospects of emerging professions, while promoting individuals' occupational and life mobility. The programme's research findings will have both theoretical and applied value. It will also promote quality and strengthen cooperation among educational institutions, organisations, businesses, social partners and other relevant stakeholders across Europe.

BACK TO THE PROGRAMME

PROJECT PRESENTATIONS

My Languages, My Strength: Developing Language-Sensitive Teaching at All Levels of Education

Contact: Prof. Dr Silva Bratož (silva.bratoz@pef.upr.si)

The main aim of the project “My Languages, My Strength: Developing Language-Sensitive Teaching at All Levels of Education” (MOJEMOČ) is to examine practices for integrating languages at different levels of education, develop guidelines for the effective implementation of language-sensitive teaching at pre-school, school and university levels, and design a framework for the education and training of teachers, preschool educators and other professionals involved in the educational process.

To teach effectively in intercultural and linguistically diverse environments, teachers need to develop the knowledge, attitudes and skills required to create supportive learning environments that foster the development of communicative competences in the language of instruction and other languages, while promoting positive attitudes towards cultural and linguistic diversity in general.

Digital, multilingual and cross-sectoral early childhood education through school-university-business synergies - AGENTIVE

Contact: Asst. Prof. Dr Anja Pirih (anja.pirih@fhs.upr.si)

The aim of the Erasmus+ project AGENTIVE is to develop innovative approaches to multilingual education at the pre-primary level through close collaboration between schools, universities and businesses. The project will develop an open, modular digital platform offering freely accessible digital learning resources in multiple languages.

In this way, the project seeks, on the one hand, to contribute to establishing a participatory approach to language teaching at the pre-primary level and, on the other, to demonstrate how open digital platforms can become sustainable and participatory environments for teaching and learning in both higher education and early childhood education.

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PROJECT PRESENTATIONS

Environmental Education and Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) approach for Visually Impaired Pupils (VIP) in Kindergartens (GREENSEL4VIP)

Contact: Asst. Prof. Dr Nastja Cotič (nastja.cotic@pef.upr.si)

The project entitled Environmental Education and Social and Emotional Learning for Children with Visual Impairments will focus on a holistic approach to the inclusion of children with visual impairments in environmental education, with particular emphasis on developing their social and emotional skills. The project will involve the development of guidelines for preschool educators, training modules for educators, and modules for implementing activities with preschool children. In addition, the project will include the development of specialised teaching materials designed to facilitate a better understanding of environmental topics.

Praxis of critical pedagogy. A microcredential for educators.

Contact: Asst. Karolina Babič, PhD (karolina.babic@upr.si)

As part of the project, we will develop a micro-credential in the field of critical pedagogy. Critical pedagogy, as a didactic approach, a theoretical framework and a form of social practice, addresses education in the context of existing social realities, with the aim of empowering teachers and learners to become active agents of social change. To achieve social transformation towards more just and inclusive societies, universities should therefore incorporate more critical pedagogy into their educational offerings.

The 1 ECTS micro-credential will provide teachers with theoretical foundations and practical teaching tools for integrating critical pedagogy into teaching and learning processes in higher education. Over a period of 14 months, the project will assess needs, develop and validate the curriculum for the micro-credential programme, collect open-access learning materials, pilot the programme with 30 participants, and produce recommendations for its implementation. The long-term objective of the project is to strengthen the integration of critical pedagogy into existing teaching practices and to establish networks that support further research and development in this field.

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PROJECT PRESENTATIONS

ImSTEAM – Immersive STEAM Education Academy

Contact: Asst. Prof. Dr Sanela Hudovernik (sanela.hudovernik@pef.upr.si)

The ImSTEAM project is an international Erasmus+ initiative under the Teacher Academies action, aimed at improving the quality of STEAM teaching and learning in European education. The project builds on findings from PISA studies, the European STEM Education Strategic Plan (2025), and reports by the European Commission and OECD, which highlight the growing gap between students' theoretical knowledge and their ability to apply it in real-life situations.

ImSTEAM addresses this challenge through immersive technologies (VR, AR and MR) and innovative pedagogical approaches that make abstract mathematical, scientific and technological concepts experiential, accessible and applicable. The project systematically aligns STEAM competences with the PISA 2025 framework, embeds them in authentic contexts and translates them into interactive, problem-based learning scenarios.

A central focus of the project is teacher training. ImSTEAM develops a comprehensive pedagogical framework and a modular professional development programme to strengthen teachers' digital, pedagogical and interdisciplinary competences in the use of immersive technologies in education. Particular emphasis is placed on inclusion, reducing socio-economic disparities, gender equality and supporting schools in regions with lower performance in international assessments.

The project will establish a European Academy for Immersive STEAM Education, develop open educational resources, a micro-credential system (Open Badges), PISA-aligned assessment tools and regional communities of practice. In doing so, it will contribute to the long-term sustainability of the teaching profession, the improvement of education policies and the enhanced competitiveness of the European education sector. The University of Primorska, Faculty of Education, participates as a project partner, actively contributing to the development of the pedagogical framework, the training of pre-service and in-service teachers, and the pilot implementation of innovative STEAM approaches in educational practice.

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PROJECT PRESENTATIONS

PUŠ: Growing Readers Together

Contact: Assoc. Prof. Dr Barbara Baloh (barbara.baloh@pef.upr.si)

The project brings together the fields of education and the arts in an interdisciplinary approach and strengthens the role of reading culture as a key driver of personal, educational and social development.

The project is led by the University of Primorska Faculty of Education (UP PEF) and the Public Library Srečko Vilhar Koper, Department for Young Readers, with the active involvement of students of Preschool Education and Primary Teacher Education programmes. It is based on the integration of theory and practice and on cooperation between educational and cultural institutions and the local community. Its main objective is to systematically develop the reading literacy of preschool children and pupils in the first three years of primary school, while also training future education professionals to plan and implement high-quality reading activities.

The project draws on findings from national and international research studies (PISA, PIRLS, PIAAC, the National Assessment of Knowledge (NPZ), and Books and Readers) and includes a wide range of activities, such as individualised reading activities, group activities in the library, storytelling events, thematic reading programmes, and family and intergenerational reading. A particular added value of the project lies in creating a supportive, accessible and stimulating reading environment, including for the youngest children and their families.

The project strengthens sustainable partnerships between the faculty, the library, kindergartens and schools, and contributes to the development of a community-based approach to reading culture as an important element of smart, inclusive and culturally vibrant cities.

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PROJECT PRESENTATIONS

PUŠ: Histri 4.0

Contact: Prof. Dr Martina Blečić Kavur (martina.blecic.kavur@upr.si)

The project enables students to acquire practical and creative competences in researching, digitally processing and promoting Istria's prehistoric archaeological heritage. It focuses on the use of modern digital technologies, the development of promotional strategies, and the preparation of an exhibition featuring contemporary artistic reinterpretations of archaeological heritage.

As part of the project, students became familiar with and use the University of Primorska's 2D and 3D digitisation equipment, digitise selected prehistoric artefacts and create databases. They also developed targeted promotional activities for different audiences, including content for social media and the project's virtual gallery. The final stage of the project focused on cooperation with the business sector, where students gained insight into the work of a graphic design studio and printing house and co-created an exhibition bringing together scientific research, artistic interpretation and sustainable cultural tourism.

The project promotes the independent use of digital tools, the development of creativity grounded in professional knowledge, and the strengthening of competences in project management and cultural heritage promotion.

BACK TO THE PROGRAMME

USEFUL INFORMATION

LOCATION:



- University of Primorska, Faculty of Education (Cankarjeva 5, 5000 Koper)

PARKING:

If you are unfamiliar with Koper, you can park at one of the following locations:

- Belveder multi-storey car park (Kopališko nabrežje 4, 6000 Koper);
- Koper Market car park (Pristaniška ulica, 6000 Koper);
- Sonce multi-storey car park (Ankaranska cesta 7, 6000 Koper).

ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS:

- e-mail: konferenca.pef@pef.upr.si

PROGRAMME AND ORGANISING COMMITTEE

- Assoc. Prof. Dr Nataša Dolenc (Chair of the Programme and Organising Committee)
- Assoc. Prof. Dr Barbara Baloh
- Assoc. Prof. Dr Barbara Kopačin
- Assoc. Prof. Dr Janja Plazar
- Asst. Prof. Dr Anja Pirih
- Asst. Prof. Dr Barbara Horvat
- Senior Lecturer Dr Petra Furlan
- MSc. Marijana Pregarac
- Elena Špindler

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