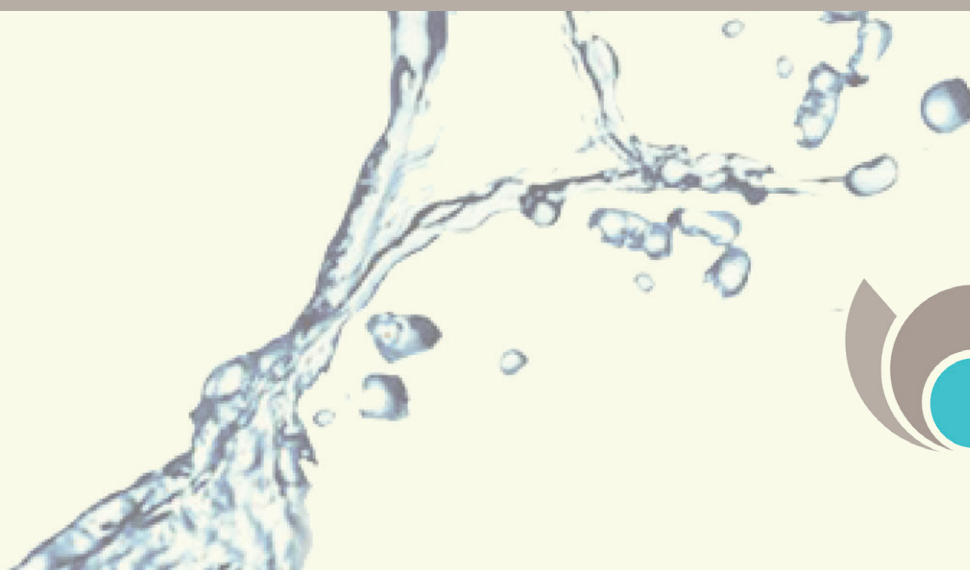




**EXTERNAL EVALUATION REPORT  
of the  
SCIENCE AND RESEARCH CENTRE KOPER**





# **EXTERNAL EVALUATION REPORT of the SCIENCE AND RESEARCH CENTRE KOPER**

External Evaluation Board:

Prof. Dr Stefania Giannini

Prof. Dr Matjaž Kuntner

Prof. Dr Birgit Sauer



ZNANSTVENO-RAZISKOVALNO SREDIŠČE KOPER  
CENTRO DI RICERCHE SCIENTIFICHE CAPODISTRIA  
SCIENCE AND RESEARCH CENTRE KOPER

Koper, March 2022

EXTERNAL EVALUATION REPORT OF THE SCIENCE AND RESEARCH CENTRE KOPER

Authors: Prof. Dr Stefania Giannini, Prof. Dr Matjaž Kuntner, Prof. Dr Birgit Sauer

Technical editor: Alenka Obid

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Address: Garibaldijeva 1, 6000 Koper, Slovenija

tel: +386 5 663-77-00, e-mail: [info@zrs-kp.si](mailto:info@zrs-kp.si)

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# A REPORT SUMMARY OF EXTERNAL EVALUATION PERFORMED AT THE SCIENCE AND RESEARCH CENTRE KOPER

An international external evaluation board (hereinafter: EEB) was established to perform an external evaluation of the Science and Research Centre Koper (hereinafter: ZRS Koper). The board comprised Professor Dr Stefania Giannini, Professor Dr Matjaž Kuntner and Professor Dr Birgit Sauer. The EEB members performed the external evaluation both by being physically present at the ZRS Koper premises and by employing a hybrid method (online). The evaluation was performed in the period between 25 and 28 January 2022.

In the period between January and March 2022, the EEB prepared the External Evaluation Report, which was then presented to the Director and the Scientific Council of ZRS Koper. The report includes an evaluation of the ZRS Koper as a whole and evaluations of individual research units (institutes).

The EEB is acquainted with the relatively recent and unique history of ZRS Koper and recognises the high relevance of its research content and achievements in the international and domestic arena. Furthermore, the EEB sees the diverse and interdisciplinary character, structure and size of the ZRS Koper as a marked advantage, strength and potential for future development. The Centre for Project Management provides substantial support with obtaining and managing international grants. The EEB specifically pointed out the extraordinary efficacy of the institutes, despite their small size, and the great importance of the specific research programmes of individual institutes. In addition, the EEB emphasised the positive aspects of project financing for individual institutes, which motivates researchers to engage in the most cutting edge research topics, despite the fact that having only project financing as a source of funding can also be seen as a downside. According to the EEB, a unique advantage and potential for the fu-

ture development of ZRS Koper is its foreign staff (20%). The members of the board recommend that the centre highlights this fact and takes full advantage of it both on the local and global levels.

It is estimated by the EEB that some of the institutes of ZRS Koper succeeded in taking up leading roles in their scientific fields. The members of the board particularly pointed out the Institute for Kinesiology Research and its impressive achievements which were possible due to international funding and funding from national schemes used to buy state-of-the-art equipment. The Institute for Social Studies, which is known internationally for its publications and human resources, including the employment of young researchers, was another to receive a special mention by the EEB due to its remarkable achievements in the field of migration and integration. The EEB expressed their enthusiasm and praised the excellence of the PhD students (young researchers) at ZRS Koper.

On the other hand, the EEB sees as the most significant shortcoming of ZRS Koper the dispersion and lack of infrastructure and the inadequacy of its premises (particularly the state of the laboratories at the Institute for Oliveculture). Another disadvantage according to the EEB is the lack of stable funding which, as a consequence, does not make it possible to employ a critical mass of staff at ZRS Koper as a whole and in particular at some institutes. To this end, the EEB recommends that measures should be taken to finance more sustainable employment. Furthermore, the EEB recommends that a stronger link between the ZRS Koper and university programmes should be established, and that multi- and transdisciplinary cooperation within the centre should be strengthened with the aim to create and use the synergies and increase agility.

### **Recommendations of the EEB for improving research quality and increase the international visibility of ZRS Koper:**

1. Strengthening multi- and transdisciplinary cooperation within the centre to create and use synergies. This could mean merging institutes if a critical mass of staff is not achieved. The agility within and between institutes could also be used as a methodology to achieve the efficient implementation of such synergies.
2. The humanities and social sciences should jointly identify the burning questions in society, politics and culture that need to be addressed in the coming years, and aim to develop a common, but diverse research programme and research projects.
3. Provide new forms of internal funding opportunities for young researchers.
4. For those institutes that lack a stable (i.e. programme) funding, the EEB proposes that ZRS Koper considers a new employment strategy or a reorganisation of the institutes to connect their teams with existing research programmes in Slovenia.
5. More international exchanges of personnel and international training for the next generation of scientists are needed.
6. In order to achieve excellence in science and in the training of future researchers, the EEB recommends that ZRS Koper continues talks with the Government of the Republic of Slovenia and other decision-makers to ensure financing for new premises.

### **Evaluation of individual research units at the ZRS Koper:**

The EEB evaluated individual institutes considering their past achievements, successes and plans for the future. The evaluation was awarded to individual units. Moreover, the EEB made concrete proposals and criticisms regarding past achievements and future plans of the institutes.

Considering the assessments of scientific excellence of the individual research units and their heads over the last five years based on documented scientific achievements, the transfer of knowledge and their role in the training of future researchers, the EEB recognised high international visibility and a very sound scientific quality in the following units: the Institute for Kinesiology Research, the Mediterranean Institute for Environmental Studies, the Institute for Philosophical Studies, the Institute for Historical Studies and the Institute for Social Studies.

The EEB assessed the importance of the Institute for Oliveculture (and its laboratory), the Institute for Linguistic Studies and the Law Institute as significant and above-average both on national and international levels.

With regard to the evaluation of eligibility of future plans (actions) aimed at achieving scientific excellence, with the purpose to become one of the leading groups of the world, the EEB recognised the excellence of the Institute for Kinesiology Research and the Institute for Philosophical Studies (recognition of unique innovation of the research programme and a sound fit between the institutes' plans and the ZRS Koper's strategy).

The EEB estimates that the Institute for Social studies has a very good research plan, which shows potential to become the leading plan in this field and fits well with the ZRS Koper's strategy.

With regard to the Institute for Oliveculture, the Institute for Historical Studies and the Institute for Linguistic Studies, the EEB recognises their good research plan, which has the potential to contribute greatly to the field and are moderately in line with the ZRS Koper's strategy.

The EEB assesses that the Mediterranean Institute for Environmental Studies and the Law Institute have solid research plans, which are less innovative and only moderately in line with the ZRS Koper's strategy.

# POVZETEK POROČILA ZUNANJE EVALVACIJE ZRS KOPER

Za postopek zunanje evalvacije ZRS Koper je bila ustanovljena mednarodna komisija za zunanjo evalvacijo, v nadaljevanju EEB, ki jo sestavljajo profesorica dr. Stefania Giannini, profesor dr. Matjaž Kuntner in profesorica dr. Birgit Sauer. Zunanja evalvacija je potekala tako v fizični (s fizično udeležbo zunanjih evalvatorjev na ZRS Koper) kot tudi v hibridni obliki (on-line) v med 25. in 28. januarjem 2022.

EEB je v času med januarjem in marcem 2022 pripravila *Poročilo zunanje evalvacije*, ki je bilo predstavljeno direktorju in Znanstvenemu svetu ZRS Koper. Poročilo vsebuje tako evalvacijsko oceno za ZRS Koper kot celoto kot tudi oceno za vsako posamezno raziskovalno enoto (inštitut).

EEB seznanjen z zgodovino ZRS Koper, ki je edinstvena in relativno mlada, pripoznava visoko mednarodno in domačo relevantnost raziskovalnih vsebin in dosežkov ZRS Koper. V pestrem, interdisciplinarnem značaju, sestavi in velikosti ZRS Koper, prepoznava izrazito prednost, moč in potencial za nadaljni razvoj. Center za projektno vodenje zagotavlja močno podporo pri pridobivanju in upravljanju mednarodnih nepovratnih sredstev. EEB posebej izpostavi izredno učinkovitost majhnosti inštitutov in izjemen pomen specifičnosti raziskovanja posameznih inštitutov. Ob tem izpostavi pozitiven vidik projektnega financiranja inštitutov, saj le-to posledično raziskovalce/ke motivira, da se ukvarjajo z najsodobnejšimi raziskovalnimi temami – čeprav ima zgolj projektno financiranje to tudi temno plat. V navzočnosti tujih kadrov (20 %), ki so zaposleni na ZRS Koper vidi izjemen prednost in potencial za nadaljni razvoj in priporoča, da le-to ZRS Koper poudarja in "unovči" tako na globalni ravni, kot tudi v lokalnem okolju.

EEB ocenjuje, da je nekaterim inštitutom ZRS uspelo pridobiti vodilne vloge na svojih znanstvenih področjih. Predvsem izpostavi Inštitut za kineziološke raziskave, ki ima impresivne dosežke tako z mednarodnim fi-

nanciranjem kot tudi s pridobivanjem financiranja iz nacionalnih shem, kar je omogočilo nakup opreme tega Centra, ki je enaka svetovnim trendom. Prav tako izpostavi izjemnost dosežkov Inštituta za družbene študije, ki je vodilni na področju migracij in integracije ter je mednarodno priznan po svojih publikacijah in človeških virih, ki vključujejo zaposlovanje mladih raziskovalcev. EEB je izrazil navdušenje in izjemnost doktorskih študentov/tk (MR-jev) ZRS Koper.

EEB opozarja na razpršenost in umanjkanje infrastrukture in neustreznost prostorov (predvsem problematika laboratorijskih prostorov Inštituta za oljkarstvo) v čemer vidi največjo pomankljivost ZRS Koper. Prav tako v umanjkanju stabilnega deleža financiranja vidi posledično umanjkanje kritične mase ZRS Koper kot celote predvsem nekaterih inštitutov in priporoča ukrep v smeri financiranja trajnejših delovnih mest. EEB priporoča močnejšo povezanost ZRS z univerzitetnimi program in krepitev multi- in transdisciplinarnega sodelovanja znotraj ZRS za ustvarjanje in uporabo sinergij ter povečanje njene agilnosti.

## **Priporočila EEB za izboljšanje kakovosti raziskav in večjo mednarodno prepoznavnost ZRS Koper:**

1. Okrepiti multi- in transdisciplinarno sodelovanje znotraj ZRS za ustvarjanje in uporabo sinergij. Ta sodelovanja bi lahko vodila tudi do združevanj inštitutov v primerih pomanjkanja kritične mase osebja. Agilnost znotraj in med inštituti bi se lahko izvajala tudi kot metodologija za učinkovito izvajanje takšnih sinergij.

2. Humanistične in družboslovne vede naj skupaj identificirajo »vroča vprašanja« v družbi, politiki in kulturi, na katere bi se morali osredotočiti v naslednjih letih, ter si prizadevajo razviti skupen, a raznolik raziskovalni program in raziskovalni projekt.



3. Omogočiti nove oblike možnosti notranjega financiranja za mlajše raziskovalce.

4. Za tiste inštitute, ki nimajo stabilnega (t.j. programskega) financiranja, EEB predlaga, da ZRS razmisli o novi strategiji zaposlovanja ali o reorganizaciji teh inštitutov, da bi te ekipe povezali z obstoječim raziskovalnimi programi v Sloveniji.

5. Še več mednarodnih izmenjav osebja in mednarodno usposabljanje naslednje generacije znanstvenikov/ic.

6. Za doseganje odličnosti v znanosti in pri usposabljanju bodočih raziskovalcev/k EEB priporoča ZRS, naj si še naprej prizadeva in se pogovarja z vlado RS in pristojnimi odločevalci za vzpostavitev in financiranje sodobnih prostorov.

#### **Evalvacija posameznih raziskovalnih enot na ZRS Koper:**

EEB je podal oceno za posamezne institute glede na njihove pretekle dosežke, uspešnost in načrte za prihodnost ter podal oceno za vsako enoto posebej. EEB je podal tudi konkretne predloge ali kritike preteklih dosežkov in prihodnjih načrtov inštitutov.

Glede ocene znanstvene odličnosti posameznih raziskovalnih enot in njihovih vodij v zadnjih 5-ih letih na podlagi njihovih dokumentiranih znanstvenih dosežkov, prenosa znanja in vloge pri usposabljanju bodočih raziskovalcev, je EEB pripoznal zelo visoko mednarodno prepoznavnost in zelo dobro

znanstveno kakovost: Inštitutu za kineziološke raziskave, Mediteranskemu inštitutu za okoljske študije, Inštitutu za filozofske študije, Inštitutu za zgodovinske študije in Inštitutu za družboslovje.

EEB ocenjuje pomen Inštituta za oljkarstvo (in laboratorija), Inštituta za jezikoslovje in Pravnega inštituta kot pomemben in nadpovprečen tako na nacionalni kot tudi mednarodni ravni.

Glede ocene ustreznosti prihodnjih načrtov (akcij) z vidika doseganja ravni znanstvene odličnosti z namenom, da se ZRS Koper uvrsti med vodilne skupine po vsem svetu, je EEB prepoznal odličnost Inštituta za kineziološke raziskave in Inštituta za filozofske študije (pripoznanje edinstvene inovativnosti raziskovalnega programa in dobro ujemanje njihovih načrtov s strategijo ZRS Koper).

EEB ocenjuje, da ima Inštitut za družbene študije zelo dober raziskovalni načrt, ki kaže potencial, da postane vodilni na tem področju in se dobro ujema s strategijo ZRS Koper.

Inštitutu za oljkarstvo, Inštitutu za zgodovinske študije in Inštitutu za jezikoslovje EEB priznava, da imajo dober raziskovalni načrt, z možnostjo pomembnega prispevka na tem področju in zmerno skladnostjo s strategijo ZRS Koper.

EEB ocenjuje, da imata Mediteranski inštitut za okoljske študije in Pravni inštitut soliden raziskovalni načrt, vendar manj inovativen in zmerno skladen s strategijo ZRS Koper.

# EVALUATORS

**Prof. Dr Stefania Giannini** was appointed UNESCO Assistant Director-General for Education in May 2018, thus becoming the top UN official in the field. She provides strategic vision and leadership in coordinating and monitoring the implementation of the Education 2030 Agenda, included in Sustainable Development Goal 4. Dr Giannini has an academic background in the humanities and has served as Rector of the University for Foreigners of Perugia (2004–2012) as one of the first and youngest women to hold this position in Italy. As Senator of the Republic of Italy (2013–2018) and Minister of Education, Universities and Research (2014–2016), she developed and implemented a structural reform of the Italian education system, focused on social inclusion and cultural awareness. In addition, she was advisor to the European Commissioner for Research and Innovation with whom she worked closely.



**Prof. Dr Matjaž Kuntner** Kuntner is a Slovenian biologist and researcher holding academic titles in Europe, the USA and China. Matjaž Kuntner is the former director of the National Institute of Biology of Slovenia (2018–2020), where he still works as a scientist. He is also employed at the Jovan Hadži Institute of Biology of the Research Centre of the Slovenian Academy of Sciences and Arts, where he was head of the institute between 2008 and 2017. Among others, his research and academic titles include



Research Associate at the Smithsonian Institution in the USA, Associate Professor at the University in Ljubljana, and Visiting Professor at the Hubei University in China. His research activities are centred on systematic and evolutionary biology, as well as genomics, ecology, nature conservation and science of materials. Prof. Kuntner is a Fulbright alumnus.

**Prof. Dr Birgit Sauer** Birgit Sauer is a political scientist studying gender and politics, political representation, feminist theory and democracy. Between 2014 and 2017, she was Chair of the Research Platform Gender and Agency at the University of Vienna, and from 2008 she was the Spokesperson of the Research Area Gender and Transformation at the Faculty of Social Sciences at the University of Vienna. Since 2015, she has been member of the Mobile Cultures and Societies Research Platform. From 2011 to 2016, she was the Head of the Doctoral Studies Programme at the Faculty of Social Sciences, and from 2016 to 2018 she was the Vice-Head of the programme. Since 2018, she has been the Vice-Dean. In the period between 2012 and 2018, she was member of the Executive Committee of the European Consortium for Political Research.



# EVALVATORJI

**Prof. dr. Stefania Giannini** je bila maja 2018 imenovana za pomočnico Unescovega generalnega direktorja za izobraževanje in tako postala najvišja uradnica ZN na tem področju. Na tem položaju zagotavlja strateško vizijo in vodstvo pri usklajevanju in spremljanju izvajanja Agende Izobraževanje 2030, ki je vključena v Cilj trajnostnega razvoja 4. Z akademsko izobrazbo s področja humanistike je dr. Giannini opravljala funkcijo rektorice Univerze za tujce v Perugi (2004–2012) in je bila ena prvih in najmlajših žensk na tem položaju v Italiji. Kot senatorka Republike Italije (2013–2018) in ministrica za izobraževanje, univerze in raziskave (2014–2016) je razvila in izvedla strukturno reformo italijanskega izobraževalnega sistema, osredotočeno na socialno vključenost in kulturno ozaveščenost. Kot svetovalka je tesno sodelovala z evropsko komisarko za raziskave in inovacije.

**Prof. dr. Matjaž Kuntner** je slovenski biolog in raziskovalec z akademskimi nazivi v Evropi, ZDA in na Kitajskem. Matjaž Kuntner je nekdanji direktor Nacionalnega inštituta za biologijo Slovenije (2018–2020), kjer še naprej deluje kot znanstvenik. Prav tako je zaposlen na Inštitutu za biologijo Jovana Hadžija ZRC SAZU, kjer je bil predstojnik med letoma 2008 in 2017. Njegovi drugi raziskovalni in akademski nazivi so na Smithsonian Institution, ZDA (raziskovalni sodelavec), pri Univerzi v Ljubljani, Slovenija (izredni profesor) in na Univerzi Hubei, Kitajska (gostujoči profesor). Njegove raziskovalne dejavnosti se osredotočajo na sistematično in evolucijsko biologijo, zajemajo pa tudi znanosti genomike, ekologije, ohranjanja narave in nanoznanosti o materialih. Prof. Kuntner je Fulbrightov alumnus.

**Prof. dr. Birgit Sauer** je politologinja, ki preučuje spol in politiko, politično zastopnost, feministično teorijo in demokracijo. Od leta 2014 do 2017 je bila predsednica Raziskovalne platforme za spol in agencijo na Univerzi na Dunaju, od leta 2008 pa je bila predstavnic raziskovalnega področja Gender and Transformation na Fakulteti za družbene vede na Univerzi na Dunaju. Od leta 2015 je članica Raziskovalne platforme Mobile Cultures and Societies. Od 2011 do 2016 je bila vodja programa doktorskega študija na Fakulteti za družbene vede; od 2016 do 2018 je bila pod-vodja programa; od leta 2018 opravlja funkcijo prodekanice. Od 2012 do 2018 je bila članica izvršnega odbora Evropskega konzorcija za politične raziskave.

# INTRODUCTION

Following an internal evaluation in 2019 and 2020, ZRS Koper initiated an external evaluation by a team of independent, national and international experts. With this in mind, an External Evaluation Board (hereafter abbreviated as EEB) was formed in 2021 to consist of Professor Stefania Giannini, Professor Matjaž Kuntner, and Professor Birgit Sauer.

Prof. Dr. Stefania Giannini was appointed UNESCO Assistant Director-General for Education in May 2018, becoming the top UN official in the field. In this position, she provides strategic vision and leadership in coordinating and monitoring the implementation of the Education 2030 Agenda, encompassed within Sustainable Development Goal 4. With an academic background in the humanities, Dr. Giannini has served as Rector of the University for Foreigners of Perugia (2004–2012), having been one of the first and youngest women to hold this position in Italy. As a Senator of the Republic of Italy (2013–2018) and Minister of Education, Universities and Research (2014–2016), she developed and implemented a structural reform of the Italian education system centered on social inclusion and cultural awareness. She has also been closely involved in an advisory capacity with the European Commissioner for Research and Innovation.

Prof. Dr. Birgit Sauer is a political scientist studying gender and politics, political representation, feminist theory of states, and democracy. From 2014 to 2017 Birgit Sauer was Chair of the Research Platform Gender and Agency at the University of Vienna and since 2008 she has acted as spokesperson for the Research Area Gender and Transformation at the Faculty of Social Sciences at the University of Vienna. Since 2015 she has been a member of the Research Platform Mobile Cultures and Societies. From 2011 to 2016 she was

Head of the Doctoral Studies Programme at the Faculty of Social Sciences; from 2016 to 2018 she was Vice Head of the Programme; since 2018 she has acted as its Vice Dean. From 2012 to 2018 she was a member of the Executive Committee of the European Consortium for Political Research.

Prof. Dr. Matjaž Kuntner is a Slovenian biologist and principal investigator with academic titles in Europe, the USA, and China. Matjaž Kuntner is the former director of the National Institute of Biology in Slovenia (2018–2020), where he continues to work as a senior scientist. His other Slovenian post is at the Jovan Hadži Institute of Biology, ZRC SAZU, also in Slovenia, where he acted as Head between 2008 and 2017. His other research and academic titles are at the Smithsonian Institution, USA (Research Associate), at the University of Ljubljana, Slovenia (Associate Professor), and at Hubei University, China (Visiting Professor). His research activities focus on systematic and evolutionary biology, but also span the sciences of genomics, ecology, nature conservation, and materials science. Prof. Kuntner is a Fulbright alumnus.

Due to obvious considerations imposed by the pandemic, the EEB was unable to meet in 2021 as originally planned, but then met on the first available dates between January 25 and 28 2022. The on-site visit of the EEB in Koper was attended by two of the three EEB members (Kuntner and Sauer) with the third (Giannini) being present online. The main objectives of this report, drafted on January 29–31, 2022 and subsequently amended throughout February and March 2022, are to provide the director and the Scientific Council of ZRS Koper with a written evaluation report for the institute as a whole, and separately for each individual research unit.

# THE CHRONOLOGY OF THE EXTERNAL EVALUATION

Prior to the evaluation, ZRS Koper leadership provided the EEB with the following documents: The Decision Establishing the Science and Research Centre Koper Public Research Institute, signed on November 24, 2016 by the Prime Minister Dr. Miroslav Cerar on behalf of the Government of the Republic of Slovenia; The Statutes of the Science and Research Centre Koper as endorsed on April 23, 2021 by Tomaž Može, the president of the Management Board of ZRS Koper; The Code of Ethics of the Science and Research Centre Koper as endorsed on November 10, 2020 by Dr. Mateja Sedmak, the president of the Scientific Council of ZRS Koper; The Gender Equality Plan of the Science and Research Centre Koper; and The Report on the Internal Evaluation of the Science and Research Centre Koper as presented in 2019/20 by the following ZRS members Drs. Rado Pišot, Mateja Sedmak, Rok Svetlič, Boštjan Šimunič, and Polona Matekovič. The latter document outlined the further steps for ZRS leadership that would call for an external evaluation.

The members of the EEB have met online prior to the on-site visit and formulated the work plan that would involve four partial days of person-to-person meetings with the staff of ZRS Koper. On January 25, 2022, EEB members Kuntner and Sauer met informally with two lead ZRS staff members, Drs. Tilen Glavina (Deputy Director of ZRS) and Egon Pelikan (Head of the Scientific Council ZRS). These initial discussions were followed by three full days of interaction of the EEB on ZRS premises (January 26–28, 2022) attended in person by EEB members Kuntner and Sauer, with the third EEB member Giannini having been present online on Day 1.

Day 1 of the on-site meetings started with a welcome address by ZRS Director Dr. Rado Pišot and Council President Pelikan. On behalf of the EEB, Kuntner provided the introduction to the evaluation process and its agenda.

Director Pišot provided a formal introduction to ZRS Koper briefly recapping its history, outlining its organization, staff statistics, and budget. The EEB acknowledged these main points: The history of ZRS dates back to 1994 when it was part of a new university established by the Government, the University of Primorska (UP). Due to diverging views about the future of these entities dating back to 2003, ZRS and the University of Primorska moved towards a formal breakup in 2016 when ZRS Koper became an independent public research institution as recognized by legislation of

the Republic of Slovenia. ZRS became one of only two interdisciplinary research institutions in Slovenia that span natural and social sciences and the humanities (the other being ZRC SAZU in Ljubljana). ZRS is the only interdisciplinary research institutions outside the nation's capital. ZRS is an affiliated member of EMUNI, the Euro-Mediterranean University. Today, ZRS consists of eight departments which are termed Institutes, and several infrastructural units termed Centres; these provide support to several institutes. ZRS has 103 employees, of which 75 are researchers and 18 are technicians, the others being administrators. Most employees are Slovenian nationals, but 15 staff members are foreigners. Monetary support for ZRS currently amounts to 79.6 full time equivalents (FTE). These funds come in the form of stable financing which consists of installation resources ("ustanovitelska sredstva"), an infrastructural programme (2.1 FTE), and seven research programmes (i.e. long term basic financing of research groups), and competitive financing, which encompasses 12 basic and two applied research projects financed by the Slovenian Research Agency (ARRS), two postdoctoral ARRS grants, six doctoral student grants within the ARRS "Young Researcher" scheme, 14 bilateral grants supported by ARRS and selected foreign agencies, and finally, 20 ongoing grants funded by either the EU or foreign sources. No fewer than 23 grants are currently pending evaluation and decision. These amounted to 4.2 million euros in revenue in 2021. Director Pišot provided a graph of how the revenue of ZRS has nearly doubled between 2016 and 2021. This is an impressive rise in third party-funding revenue. Director Pišot then outlined statistics regarding the scientific output of ZRS Koper. Director Pišot emphasized a dire need for more and better premises as all premises with the exception of the main building on Garibaldijeva 1 in Koper, which is owned by the institution, are being rented. The EEB was also presented with the key activities for promotion and science communication ongoing at ZRS, which includes a children's magazine called Svetilnik, and the in-house scientific publishing unit Annales.

What followed were presentations of the institutes that form ZRS Koper by the institutes' heads or their representatives. The Institute for Oliveculture was presented by Dr. Vasilij Valenčič on behalf of its head Dr. Maja Podgornik. The Institute for Kinesiology Research was presented by its head, Dr. Boštjan Šimunič. The Institute for Linguistic Studies was presented by Dr. Irina Moira Cavaion, who was there in place of its head

12 Dr. Vesna Mikolič. The Institute for Historical Studies was presented by its head Dr. Egon Pelikan. The Institute for Social Studies was presented by its head, Dr. Mateja Sedmak. The Institute for Philosophical Studies was presented by its head, Dr. Lenart Škof. The Law Institute was presented by its head, Dr. Rok Svetlič. Finally, the Mediterranean Institute for Environmental Studies was presented by its head, Dr. Boris Kryštufek. These presentations were followed by questions and comments by the EEB who have also examined the bibliographies of these research groups (output of the Slovenian portal SICRIS for the preceding 5 years' bibliographical output).

The afternoon session of Day 1 saw a meeting and discussion of the EEB with the ZRS Scientific Council (hereafter SC) represented by its President Dr. Egon Pelikan, its vice-president Dr. Mateja Sedmak, Dr. Nadja Furlan Štante, Dr. Boštjan Šimunič, Dr. Boris Kryštufek, Dr. Rok Svetlič, and Peter Čerče, as well as ZRS Director Pišot. This was followed by a meeting and discussion of the EEB with the ZRS Management Board (hereafter MB). In the absence of its President Dr. Tomaž Može, the MB was represented by its Vice-President Dr. Tilen Glavina, representative of ZRS Koper, Dr. Bojan Mevlja, representative of the founder (Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Food of the Government of the Republic of Slovenia), Dr. Jadran Lenarčič, representative of the founder (Ministry of Education, Science and Sports of the Government of the Republic of Slovenia), and Dr. Mladen Gasparini, representative of users, nominated by the Institute's SC. The meeting was likewise attended by ZRS Director Pišot.

Day 1 was concluded with an internal meeting of the EEB to outline the key findings of the first day, and to discuss the preparation of this report. The evening saw an informal meeting of the EEB with the Director and the SC.

Day 2 was devoted to on-site visits by Kuntner and Sauer representing the EEB of the infrastructural units of ZRS scattered over the Slovenian coastal townships of Izola and Koper. It started with a visit of the Laboratory of the Institute for Oliveculture in Izola where Drs. Valenčič, Milena Bučar-Miklavčič, and Bojan Butinar

presented the scientific equipment in the laboratories, and outlined their key activities. The EEB returned to Koper to visit the Laboratory of the Institute for Kinesiology Research where Drs. Pišot and Uroš Marušič presented the key elements and equipment used by the research activities there, and outlined the main ongoing projects of the research team. Dr. Pišot also presented the role and activities of the Mediterranean Health Centre. The visit continued in ZRS's Centre for Venetian History and Cultural Heritage during which Dr. Glavina provided a tour of the Palazzo Tiepolo Gravisi, a Venetian palace in Koper that is being renovated to house the future offices and archives of this center. Back at the ZRS library, the presentations of the infrastructural centers continued with the outlines of the Public Opinion Research Centre by Dr. Maja Zadel, the Centre for IT and Infrastructural Support to Research by Peter Čerče, the Centre for Mediterranean Cultures by Dr. Valenčič, the Centre for Cooperation with China by Dr. Helena Motoh, the Centre for Project Management by Matej Milošević, and of the role and activities of Annales ZRS, the Scientific Publishing House of ZRS Koper by Alenka Obid.

Day 2 formally ended with a discussion of graduate student life at ZRS Koper with EEB members Kuntner and Sauer who met in hybrid with ZRS's seven doctoral students. These students work on a daily basis at ZRS where they are mentored by ZRS staff and are enrolled in doctoral studies at universities in Ljubljana, Maribor, and TU Berlin. The evening of Day 2 saw informal discussions with the EEB's Kuntner and Director Pišot along with his advisers Dr. Glavina and Dr. Furlan Štante.

Day 3 was devoted in part to drafting this report by the EEB's Kuntner and Sauer, and this was followed by a hybrid meeting to present and discuss the major points of emphasis of this report with Director Pišot and the SC. The conclusion of the onsite visit by the EEB of ZRS Koper was during an informal discussion of the future directions of the institution by EEB member Kuntner with ZRS Director Pišot and his two advisers Dr. Glavina and Dr. Furlan Štante.



# A WRITTEN EVALUATION OF ZRS KOPER AS A WHOLE

**Below, the EEB provides a written evaluation of ZRS Koper as a whole, including the following major points:**

- Relevance of research topics at ZRS Koper;
- Excellence of research achievements at ZRS Koper;
- Identification of comparative strengths and weaknesses of research at ZRS Koper;
- Adequacy of research infrastructure (including the centers).

## 1. Relevance of the research topics at ZRS Koper and their alignment with local and world trends, comparative strengths and weaknesses of research achievements, instrumentation and methodologies; research topics, instrumentation and methodologies currently lacking at ZRS but should be considered in future plans.

The EEB is familiar with the unique and relatively recent history of ZRS. Initially, ZRS was a founding member of the newly established university (University of Primorska in Koper), but the last five years have seen the development of ZRS and its steering away from the university programmes, which EEB sees as a logical consequence of the formal breakup of these two entities in 2017. With the breakup, ZRS “inherited” certain research groups whose histories are intertwined with the specific needs of the local community, as well as others that were uniquely conceived at ZRS when it was still part of the university. Therefore, in 2017 with the formalization of ZRS as an independent public research entity in Slovenia, these research groups became formal departments within ZRS, termed Institutes. Although the history of ZRS in fact dates back to 1994, its independent history is, in fact, very recent.

The EEB deems the research topics at ZRS to be relevant. ZRS nurtures a mixture of locally and globally relevant research topics, however, most if not all are aligned with the recognized global scientific trends. For example, research that is globally relevant relates to the environment, biodiversity, human health, philosophy, gender issues, migrations, East Asian cultural studies, studies of law and religion, and history. Other research topics are relevant in the Mediterranean re-

gion, such as e.g., olive and fruit culture and quality control, and linguistic issues in the Northern Adriatic. This seems to be a well-conceived selection of research topics that balances the local need for scholarship and services with the currently available human resources.

That said, certain research topics lack sufficient and modern instrumentation or methodologies which should be added to the future plans of ZRS. As an example, environmental and biodiversity research lacks the molecular tools and equipment which are standard in the study of biodiversity. This has recently evolved to include topics such as genomics and environmental DNA utility that ought to be considered in the future development of the natural sciences at ZRS Koper. This suggestion is further elaborated upon under Section B of this report.

Overall, the scientific output of the research groups of ZRS Koper, as judged by their bibliographies, is on par with international standards, with the natural sciences publishing primarily in peer reviewed journals, and social sciences and humanities publishing both peer reviewed journal articles and monographs. The strengths and weaknesses of the output of specific institutes are further considered under Section B of this report.



## 2. Organizational advantages and weaknesses of ZRS Koper. Are research activities appropriately organized at the research unit level?

### The EEB recognizes numerous strengths of ZRS:

The EEB views a broad range of sciences and research backgrounds as ZRS's strength. This is because such broad research groups have the potential to form interdisciplinary teams intended to solve complex contemporary societal and environmental problems.

The size of the center is appropriate and allows for growth. With roughly 100 staff members, the size of ZRS Koper appears to be in the sweet spot with regard to the size of the human potential. This small to medium size of the institution allows ZRS to be adaptable in the ever-changing research ecosystem of a small country such as Slovenia.

The individual departments, i.e. ZRS's Institutes, do not conform to classical departments of more traditional research institutions. The EEB views this non-conformity as a strength.

Although the small size of individual institutes could be seen as lacking critical mass, the relatively small size of most of the Institutes indicates that they are still in an early evolutionary stage. As such, their size may or may not grow depending on the trends in each of their scientific fields, depending on the needs of the public service they offer, or depending on the human capital available in the coming years. Therefore, the small size of institutes can be seen as ZRS's strength.

The fact that these Institutes are project funded can also be seen as a strength because it forces researchers to pursue cutting edge research topics – while this also has a flip-side (see below).

The management of ZRS is small but highly efficient and well involved in the reshaping of Slovenian science policies. The Director's voice in the coordination with Slovenian independent research institutions (KOsRIS) is constructive and appreciated.

Among the 75 researchers at ZRS, 15 are foreign. This ratio of 20% foreign staff is an asset that ZRS should capitalize on globally, and emphasize domestically.

The Centre for Project Management provides strong support in acquiring and managing international grants and is therefore one of ZRS's strengths.

Some of the Institutes at ZRS have managed to acquire leading roles in their scientific fields. Notably, the *Institute for Kinesiology Research* has an impressive track record of external funding that has allowed for the acquisition of equipment for that Center which is on par with global trends. The Institute of Social Stud-

ies is a recognized leader in their field of migration and integration and is well recognized internationally for their publication record and their human resources, which includes recruitment of young researchers.

The EEB was impressed by the enthusiasm of the doctoral students working at the different Institutes of ZRS, and who are enrolled at universities in Ljubljana, Maribor, and TU Berlin. This enthusiasm and the students' perceived competence clearly point towards a productive and relaxed atmosphere at ZRS, an important component of mentoring.

### The EEB feels the need to emphasize certain weaknesses of ZRS:

The most acute weakness of ZRS perceived as by the EEB is the dispersion of the infrastructure and the inadequacy of the premises where research at ZRS is being done. While this obviously stems from the recent severance from the University, it needs urgent attention on the part of decision-makers in Slovenia, i.e., the Ministry of Education, Science and Sports, or by other Government ministries. Ideally, ZRS should operate within one large modern building at a coastal location that would allow for most departments to converge and interact, which would also facilitate the acquisition and maintenance of modern scientific equipment. ZRS should present a strong case to the Republic of Slovenia to initiate funding for such a new infrastructure. EU cohesion or other funds can be utilized for this project, but Government support is critical.

Although, as mentioned above, the relatively small size of the institution and its research units can be viewed as a potential strength, the flip side of this coin must also be considered. The lack of critical mass of ZRS as a whole, but particularly of some of the Institutes, is a potential liability. Notably, the *Mediterranean Institute for Environmental Studies*, and the *Law Institute* are two research groups that mostly build on the scientific output of one or two senior scientists. More effort should be directed at recruiting emerging or established scientists who would take over these groups.

Some Institutes at ZRS lack stable financing by not leading or being part of the research programme scheme of the national agency ARRS. This allows them far less stability in day-to-day work, and precludes them from obtaining direct funding for Young Researchers, which is an important scheme for financing doctoral students.

Another weakness for some Institutes that relates to the issue outlined above, are the only temporary contracts, the extension of which depends on the acquisition of research funds. While this makes the Institutes strong in research, the situation risks draining staff and preventing young scientists from being hired on



a long-term basis. The EEB recommends working toward funding more permanent positions.

Although the Institutes at ZRS do cooperate in research amongst themselves, the EEB views these synergies as too weak. The EEB recommends ZRS identify a handful of critical topics that require interdisciplinary research in the region, then plan how to tackle these issues through enhanced cooperation among the Institutes.

One potential weakness is the lack of affiliation of ZRS with university programmes. While we understand the lack of synergies in Koper's higher education is due to recent historical circumstances, we do encourage the leadership to consider their options. The link to EMU-NI may not be sufficient, considering that none of the seven current doctoral students are enrolled at that international university.

A more structured relationship of ZRS with (partly already existing) international networks should be developed both in terms of joint research programs and mobility of PhD students and researchers.

A relative weakness detected is the modest funding for the infrastructural programme through the ARRS scheme—a mere 2.1 FTE—, which precludes hiring sufficient staff to provide solid IT support, as well as support for operating sophisticated pieces of research equipment.

### 3. What policy measures are suggested in order to improve the quality of research at ZRS Koper to increase worldwide recognition?

The EEB recommends strengthening multi- and trans-disciplinary cooperation within ZRS to create and use synergies. This may also lead to institute mergers in cases where there are not enough staff members (see below). Agility, within and between institutes, could be also implemented as the methodology to effectively put such synergies in practice.

The EEB suggests the humanities and social sciences jointly identify “hot issues” in society, politics and culture which should be focused upon in the next years and develop a joint but diverse research agenda and research program.

Considering the changes in the Slovenian research ecosystem, particularly the new stable financing of research by the Ministry/Agency given the new science law adopted in early 2022, the EEB recommends ZRS enable new forms of internal funding opportunities for junior researchers (perhaps following the tenure-track model).

For those Institutes that lack stable (i.e., programme) financing, the EEB suggests that ZRS consider either a novel recruitment strategy or a reorganization of those Institutes with the aim to link these teams with an existing research program in Slovenia.

The EEB recommends even more international staff exchanges, and international training of the next generation of scientists.

In order to pursue excellence in science and in training future researchers, the EEB recommends ZRS pursue an agenda towards the Government, requesting the political will to establish and finance modern premises. These would allow the solid technological and scientific equipment of the institute to facilitate scientific breakthroughs. This is particularly important for the natural sciences that are currently understaffed and underequipped.



#### 4. Assess the impact of ZRS Koper in the (local) society with an emphasis on the economic, social and cultural research achievements and their impact on society and the transfer of knowledge and training of young researchers.

The impact of individual Institutes and centers differ with respect to their geographic scope.

The Institute for Oliveculture has an immediate impact on the region as it improves the cultivation of olives as well as the quality of olive products, namely olive oil. As an international partner in research projects, the Institute has an impact on European olive oil development.

The Mediterranean Health Center has established itself as an important hub for promoting health education, with a focus on activation and based on sound scientific knowledge in the Primorska region. A mobile station brings knowledge and activities to the local neighborhoods.

The Institute for Social Studies has a regional, national and international impact through its research on migration and integration and the dissemination of scientific results in the region, in Slovenia as well as through publications in international scientific outlets.

The Institute for Historical Studies demonstrates an impact on Slovenian/Italian/Roman and Slovenian/Austrian territory with important new discoveries and publications focusing on these regions, and shapes international scientific debates. Once the *Centre for Venetian History and Cultural Heritage* is completely renovated, ZRS will create a new hub where the knowledge of arts and history will be disseminated to an interested audience through conferences and public talks.

The Institute for Kinesiology has an international impact through its presence in international research projects. Moreover, it has an immediate impact on the region through delivering health care knowledge and practices.

Some Institutes and Centers are engaged in education and disseminate their knowledge at schools. Other Institutes cooperate with NGOs in the region to disseminate knowledge. Through cooperation with the Koper Theater and other regional cultural hubs, ZRS impacts the way culture and sciences are perceived by regional inhabitants. The magazine *Svetilnik* wonderfully engages the youngest audiences.

# A WRITTEN EVALUATION OF OF INDIVIDUAL RESEARCH UNITS AT ZRS KOPER

## **Below, the EEB provides a written evaluation of individual research units at ZRS Koper**

The EEB's assessment of the individual research units was performed in view of ZRS's objectives: i) excellence in science; ii) excellence in the transfer of knowledge; and iii) excellence in training future researchers.

Throughout Section B we have devised and followed a standardized evaluation scoresheet for institutes/laboratories and their heads, as outlined below.

### Our main criteria for the classification were:

- the level of worldwide recognition of the individual research unit;
- appropriateness of the research topic with respect to worldwide trends;
- instrumentation and methodology available with which to conduct research;
- organizational advantages and weaknesses within research groups;
- impact of the research group on society.

### Our assessment of the research units was furthermore based on:

- scientific excellence within the field,
- contribution to the field;
- technological impact;
- innovative power;
- training of future researchers;
- future potential of the presented research vision;
- additionally, we evaluated the unit heads in terms of their leadership and research strengths/weaknesses.

We have summarized our main conclusions regarding each research unit, awarding separate scores for past performance and future plans:

## **a) Past performance**

### Excellent:

- have a leading position in their research field
- have an outstanding level of international recognition
- have outstanding scientific / socio-economic / technological achievements at the highest level of impact
- have frequent breakthroughs as evidenced by lead authors' publications in the best journals in the field and / or important socio-economic and innovative breakthroughs supported by translation to the industry/culture.

### Very good:

- have a very high level of international recognition in their research field
- have a very high level of international recognition
- have very good scientific / socio-economic / technological transfer achievements at a high level of impact
- have several scientific / socio-economic / technological breakthroughs and / or however a lack of continuity or frequency in this leading position.

### Good:

- international reputation is far above average
- internationally recognized with a reputation far above average
- good scientific / socio-economic / technological transfer achievements of a significant level of impact
- domestic scientific / socio-economic / technological breakthroughs and / or international collaboration realized, but no leading position in the field; performance is qualitatively or quantitatively below ZRS's ambitions.

**Average:**

- international reputation is average
- belong to a broad group of recognized specialists in the field
- average scientific / socio-economic / technological transfer outcome with average impact as compared to international benchmarks
- performance is average: scientific / socio-economic / technological breakthroughs and / or industrial collaboration are realized occasionally, but most output is of average impact in the field.

**Below average:**

- weak international reputation
- low recognition by specialists in the field
- below average scientific / socio-economic / technological transfer outcome with weak impact as compared to international benchmarks
- performance is below average: no notable scientific / socio-economic / technological breakthroughs, and / or industrial collaboration occasionally realized, but most output is of average impact in the field.

**b) Future plans**

• **Excellent:** uniquely innovative research program of extraordinary scientific / socio-economic / technological transfer significance; good fit with the strategy of ZRS Koper.

• **Very good:** very good research plan, showing potential to become a leader in the field (if the right choices are made); good fit with the strategy of ZRS Koper.

• **Good:** good research plan, with potential to make significant contributions to the field; moderate fit with the strategy of ZRS Koper.

• **Average:** research plan is solid but less innovative; moderate fit with the strategy of ZRS Koper.

• **Below average:** research plan is not ambitious, moderate fit with the strategy of ZRS Koper.





## 1. The Institute for Oliveculture

### 1.1 Evaluation of the scientific quality of the research units and their heads for the last 5 years based on their documented scientific achievements, transfer of knowledge and the role in training future researchers

#### Good:

- *international reputation is far above average:* The 10 staff members are balanced in their backgrounds and scientific performance vs. applied services skills, with more emphasis on the latter.
- *internationally recognized with a reputation far above average:* The service performed is well within international standards, but peer reviewed publications are not in highly ranked journals.
- *good scientific / socio-economic / technological transfer achievements of a significant level of impact:* Public service in Slovenia is important, and the placement of the institute and the laboratory in the Mediterranean part of Slovenia ensures its leading role in Mediterranean agriculture focusing on olive cultivation and oil production, as well as quality control.
- *domestic scientific / socio-economic / technological breakthroughs and / or international collaboration realized, but no leading position in the field; Performance is qualitatively or quantitatively below ZRS's ambitions:* The publication record does not demonstrate papers in leading journals, and the citation record is accordingly low.

### 1.2 Appropriateness of future plans (actions) in terms of achieving a level of scientific excellence with the aim of being among the leading groups worldwide

#### Good:

- *Good research plan with the potential to make significant contributions to the field; moderate fit with the strategy of ZRS Koper.* Although the placement of the research at the institute is integrated in the future of ZRS given the public service and applied value of the current activities, the EEB does not see that its future plans are ambitious enough in terms of achieving the three pillars of ZRS objectives: i) excellence in science; ii) excellence in transfer of knowledge; and iii) excellence in training future researchers. While the institute does demonstrate excellence in the transfer of knowledge, the first and third of these three components would need to be approached more ambitiously. One critical hindrance to achieving excellence in science and in training of future researchers is the lack of modern premises that would allow the solid technological and scientific equipment of the institute to facilitate scientific breakthroughs.

## 1.3 Evaluation summary

The past, present and future of the Institute of Oliveculture were presented to the EEB by Dr. Vasilij Valenčič on behalf of the institute's head Dr. Maja Podgornik. The activities of the institute date back to 1995 but the year 2016 was pivotal with the governmental recognition of ZRS Koper. With this the institute took the leading role in Slovenia on the topics of Mediterranean agriculture focusing primarily on olives. The institute's past and present have seen numerous project-based activities in olive research and quality control and since 2018, the establishment of public service, which makes it the national reference laboratory. The laboratory of the institute operates under ISO 17025 standards, accredited since 2014, which makes it unique nationally. As such it monitors and checks the quality and authenticity of olive oils produced in Slovenia. In addition, the 10 staff members at the institute perform basic and applied research with a healthy albeit not outstanding track record in peer reviewed journals, both national and international, as well as other professional publications. The research and public service activities are well integrated internationally and follow clear research and analytical standards. The EEB deems the relevance of the institute and the laboratory as important both nationally as well as internationally, and considers its future to be well suited for ZRS considering its Mediterranean setting and importance. The future of the institute is also deemed relevant given the topic and its national primacy, and its applied nature ensures its place in the further development of ZRS. However, the institute lacks a plan on how to achieve scientific breakthroughs that would result in high-ranking publications, perhaps through the development of novel analytical tools or the application of the latest biotechnological approaches (e.g., genetic engineering). The integration of the institute into international biobanking efforts (e.g., germplasm banks) is viewed as the way forward. More international staff exchanges would also be viewed as essential in the near future.

### **2.1 Evaluation of the scientific quality of the research units and their heads for the last 5 years based on their documented scientific achievements, transfer of knowledge and the role in training future researchers**

#### **Very good:**

- *have a very high level of international recognition in their research field:* The 21 staff members are from various backgrounds and nationalities, making the team international and interdisciplinary, which has been instrumental in positioning the research group within very high international standards and recognition.
- *have a very high level of international recognition:* A long-term research program funded by ARRS, several ongoing ARRS research projects as well as numerous international ones ensure that the research agenda of this multifaceted group is stable, and ambitious, certainly on par with western standards in kinesiological research.
- *have very good scientific / socio-economic / technological transfer achievements at a high level of impact:* The bibliography of the group is on par with comparable research departments in the western world. In fact, the last 5 years have seen a dramatic rise in peer reviewed publication—some published in elite journals—from roughly 150 to over 350 units. Accordingly, the citation rates have increased even more steeply, from roughly 2,000 to over 12,000 citations, a commendable achievement. The Institute has become one of the FIFA medical centers of excellence, and the group has worked on the recovery of some of Slovenia's top athletes.
- *have several scientific / socio-economic / technological breakthroughs and / or however a lack of continuity or frequency in this leading position.* The Institute has pioneered research in the fields of human well-being in microgravity, and as an extension has become the reference for research of human health as it relates to physical inactivity, ageing, and recovery and rehabilitation.

### **2.2 Appropriateness of future plans (actions) in terms of achieving a level of scientific excellence with the aim of being among the leading groups worldwide**

#### **Excellent:**

- *Uniquely innovative research program of extraordinary scientific / socio-economic / technological transfer significance; good fit with the strategy of ZRS Koper.* The EEB predicts the future of this research group will increase in impact in solid pursuit of the three pillars of ZRS objectives: i) excellence in science; ii)

excellence in the transfer of knowledge; and iii) excellence in training future researchers. The exponentially increasing publication rates as seen today are likely to stabilize, but the citation rates will continue to increase over time. Given the international relevance and recognition of the research group, as well as their numerous ongoing EU, international and domestic research projects and partners, it is very likely that their results will be published in leading interdisciplinary journals. The doctoral students are capable, international, and highly motivated, and thus show potential to become future lead researchers.

### **2.3 Evaluation summary**

The past, present and future of the Institute for Kinesiology Research were presented to the EEB by its head Dr. Boštjan Šimunič. The 21 staff members are supported by a long-term research program funded by the national agency, as well as numerous ongoing, domestic and international projects, all totalling 10 FTE. The group is in part international, and uniquely interdisciplinary with staff having been educated as kinesiologists, engineers, biologists, physicians, and sociologists. The group has demonstrated a huge leap in scientific output since 2016, with exponential growth in the number of SCI publications, as well as citations, and the institute publishes its own house journal. The need for better infrastructure is acute, as the institute and its supporting Mediterranean Health Center currently rent space in the Bonifika sports hub in Koper. The staff are engaged in developing new technologies, and have an impressive track record of working with the world's top athletes and clubs, e.g., Slovenian world champions and the Champion League heavy weights FC Barcelona. They have been appointed as a FIFA medical center of excellence, and the institute is visible on academic Ranking of World Universities. The EEB visited the laboratories of the institute and was given a guided tour and brief lecture by Dr. Rado Pišot and Dr. Uroš Marušič. They introduced the main activities done by the Mediterranean Health Center, which supports data gathering and analyses of the projects conducted at the institute, such as PANGAEA, a 1.8 million Euro EU grant, and TWIN BRAIN, a 0.9 million Euro EU Twinning grant, both led by institute researchers. The EEB also met with three doctoral students whose research takes place at ZRS and their respective universities from Ljubljana to Berlin, and deems their motivation and intellect to be extraordinary.

### 3. The Mediterranean Institute for Environmental Studies

#### 3.1 Evaluation of the scientific quality of the research units and their heads for the last 5 years based on their documented scientific achievements, transfer of knowledge and role in training future researchers

##### Very good:

- *have a very high level of international recognition in their research field:* The five year bibliography of the research team shows a very strong publication record in globally reaching research on mammals. These papers are published in some of the leading zoological journals and demonstrate the world recognition of Dr. Kryštufek, a global authority on biodiversity and natural history research. However, these papers are not coauthored by any other institute members, and thus the cohesiveness of the research group is not obvious. Likewise, the link of the few sporadic papers on environmental philosophy, and biotechnology by individual members of the research team demonstrate neither cohesiveness nor a balanced contribution by other research team members.

- *have a very high level of international recognition:* Beyond the recognition of the institute head (above), the staff is also internationally recognized in environmental philosophy and, through joint appointments with the Institute for Kinesiology Research, also in human health.

- *have very good scientific / socio-economic / technological transfer achievements at a high level of impact:* Linking environmental science with philosophy represents a fresh look into preserving the biodiversity of the region and may warrant further development of this interdisciplinary group. However, the three projects that currently fund MIOS are not led by MIOS staff, and thus the ability to attract stable financing, or that from EU projects, is not demonstrated.

- *have several scientific / socio-economic / technological breakthroughs and / or however lack continuity or frequency in this leading position:* The research activities within the biodiversity and biotechnology agendas of MIOS could be more in sync with the current trends in the field and be more innovative. New synergies could be achieved by working more closely with other groups in natural sciences in Slovenia and beyond, including ZRS's Institute of Oliveculture.

#### 3.2 Appropriateness of future plans (actions) in terms of achieving the level of scientific excellence with the aim of being among the leading groups worldwide

##### Average:

- *Research plan is solid but less innovative; moderate fit with the strategy of ZRS Koper.* While the EEB recognizes the value and importance of environmental studies anywhere, and particularly in a regional institution such as ZRS Koper, future plans of how to achieve scientific excellence at MIOS are too vague and thus the EEB does not see that its plans for the future are ambitious enough in terms of achieving the three pillars of ZRS objectives: i) excellence in science; ii) excellence in the transfer of knowledge; and iii) excellence in training future researchers. In biodiversity science, which is the field of research of the institute chair Dr. Kryštufek, future plans do not include facilities for DNA analyses, a standard in modern biology. Nor do these plans involve the training of young researchers. The foci of the remaining personnel in the group appear to be too dispersed to suggest scientific excellence can be achieved. In the absence of a nationally funded, long-term research program recognized by ARRS, the future of this research group seems to be insecure, relying only on soft money. Additionally, for a truly interdisciplinary approach to environmental questions, there is a lack of critical mass of scientists at MIOS. Hence, ZRS might consider either a reorganization of this institute—this could include joining other research programs in other institutes or outside ZRS—, or new recruitments of established scientists with clear research plans in environmental science. Alternatively, ZRS could redefine the institute to return to its roots, biodiversity, but would i) need to secure continuity by training young researchers, ii) and introduce a scientific group working approach.

#### 3.3 Evaluation summary

The past, present and future of the Mediterranean Institute for Environmental Studies (MIOS) were presented to the EEB by its head Dr. Boris Kryštufek. Established only recently in 2018, the institute unites an interdisciplinary research team whose intention is to integrate biological and life sciences, biotechnology, philosophy, sociology, economics, food technology and health studies experts. There are currently six researchers, all scientists with doctorates, whose total supporting grants only account for 2.75 FTE. The focus of this varied team is to provide holistic environmental expertise in the Mediterranean region, but the scientific reach of the institute chair Dr. Kryštufek is global, as he is a recognized expert on biodiversity with a particular focus on small mammals. Bibliographies of the remaining staff are dispersed over many other

22 areas of research that aims to bridge natural and social sciences. This unorthodox mix of ideas as well as the lack of stable financing, prompt the EEB to question the critical mass and focus of these varied scientists within MIOS. Additionally, the EEB detected the lack of a group working mentality at MIOS as evidenced by the authorships of publications. The EEB suggests that ZRS consider either a novel recruitment strategy or a reorganization with the aim to link the institute with an existing research program in Slovenia. One critical hindrance to achieving excellence in science and training future researchers is the lack of modern premises that would allow for the acquisition and use of modern technological and scientific equipment. Finally, more international staff exchanges and involvement in training of the next generation of scientists would both be essential in the near future.

## 4. The Institute for Linguistic Studies

### 4.1 Evaluation of the scientific quality of the research units and their heads for the last 5 years based on their documented scientific achievements, transfer of knowledge and role in training future researchers

#### Good:

- *international reputation is far above average*: While the 10 staff members are from very similar backgrounds, mostly sociolinguistics and languages in contact, scientific performance and research projects developed over the last five years have been recognized by the international community.
- *internationally recognized with a reputation far above average*: The institute is renowned for its linguistic research of language and cultural contacts in the region and has received the Glasnik znanosti award for five years and two times by the University of Primorska.
- *good scientific / socio-economic / technological transfer achievements of a significant level of impact*: The Institute focuses on studying the Slovenian linguistic situation in the Northern Adriatic.
- *domestic scientific / socio-economic / technological breakthroughs and / or international collaboration realized, but no leading position in the field; performance is qualitatively or quantitatively below ZRS's ambitions*: The publication record does not showcase papers in leading and international journals. The citation record is accordingly low.

### 4.2 Appropriateness of future plans (actions) in terms of achieving the level of scientific excellence with the aim of being among the leading groups worldwide

#### Good:

- *Good research plan with the potential to make significant contributions to the field; moderate fit with the strategy of ZRS Koper*: the research plan of the Institute is consistently embedded in the future of ZRS in terms of strategic objectives (especially regarding pillar ii) excellence in the transfer of knowledge) and focus on studying the Slovenian language in intercultural situations. However, the EEB recommends that its future plans be guided by the ambition of achieving the first and third pillars of ZRS's strategic objectives as well (see respectively: i) excellence in science; and iii) excellence in training future researchers). To that end, a broader and more comprehensive scientific perspective should be taken, including basic and applied research on second language acquisition, given the ambition of the Institute to "become the referential scientific institution for researching linguistic and cul-



tural contact in the south-western part of the Slovenian cultural area". Special attention should be given to recruitment as well as training of new international researchers who could contribute to enlarge the scope of activities and networks of the Institute.

#### 4.3 Evaluation summary

The past, present and future of the Institute for Linguistic Studies were presented to the EEB by Dr. Irena Moira Cavaion on behalf of its head Dr. Vesna Mikolič. In her presentation, Dr. Cavaion highlighted the mission of the Institute, which is to study the Slovenian linguistic situation as a concrete laboratory of linguistic and cultural contacts, both from a synchronic and diachronic perspective. The 10 staff members (out of which 9 hold a PhD) have a strong background in sociolinguistics, dialectology and languages in contact studies, with a special reference to the specific area and related issues (multilingual and intercultural education in multilingual border areas, particularly on the Slovenian-Italian one). The impressive number of publications (see the bibliography of Dr. Vesna Mikolič, the Head of the Institute) and scientific projects implemented in this field testify to the strong specialization of the Institute and its potential to fully achieve the three pillars of ZRS's strategic objectives in the coming years. In this respect, the following actions are recommended by the EEB: 1. To strengthen the international profile of the Institute through recruitment of international researchers; 2. To integrate some additional competences and fields of research such as bilingual studies and second language acquisition, which could aid in fulfilling the ambition of making the Institute the referential scientific institution for researching linguistic and cultural contact in the region.

## 5. The Institute for Philosophical Studies

### 5.1 Evaluation of the scientific quality of the research units and their heads for the last 5 years based on their documented scientific achievements, transfer of knowledge and role in training future researchers

#### Very Good:

- *have a very high level of international recognition in their research field:* The ten members of the Institute are distinguished researchers with numerous published articles and scientific conference contributions at prestigious global publishing houses.
- *have a very high level of international recognition:* The Philosophical Institute operates as a scientific institute in the field of philosophy and has received a substantial number of projects since its foundation. In the past five years, the Institute issued over ten scientific monographs in Slovenia and abroad.
- *have very good scientific / socio-economic / technological transfer achievements at a high level of impact:* The Institute is the core institution in the Primorska region which studies classical and contemporary philosophical topics within the scope of fundamental and applied studies. The field of intercultural philosophy is also well developed within the scope of the Institute's work, combining research in the fields of Islamic, Indian and Chinese philosophy.
- *have several scientific / socio-economic / technological breakthroughs and / or however a lack of continuity or frequency in this leading position.* The Institute is working towards becoming one of the centers of philosophical research in Slovenia, whereas the researchers at the Institute cover areas which other institutions in Slovenia and abroad do not integrate into their work. These areas include the philosophy of American pragmatism, environmental ethics, studies of Islam and Asian philosophy, ecofeminism and feminist theology and Luce Irigaray's philosophy.

### 5.2 Appropriateness of future plans (actions) in terms of achieving a level of scientific excellence with the aim of being among the leading groups worldwide

#### Excellent:

- *Uniquely innovative research program of extraordinary scientific / socio-economic / technological transfer significance; good fit with the strategy of ZRS Kooper.* The Institute is founded on studying contemporary phenomena in the wider philosophical area, notably in the field of dialogue between cultures and religions (the Mediterranean, Islam, Asia) and Asian studies (India, China) and applied Buddhist studies. The goal of the Institute is to become one of the centers of philo-

24 sophical research in Slovenia. Given the specific competences and high scientific profile of the researchers as well as their interdisciplinary approach, the Institute is uniquely positioned to become a reference point in the field of intercultural philosophy at the international level.

### 5.3 Evaluation summary

The Institute for Philosophical Studies was founded in 2013 and its past, present and future were presented to the EEB by Dr. Lenart Škof, the head of the Institute. The Institute is composed by highly qualified researchers with doctorates and an extensive number of published articles. The 10 staff members at the Institute are experts in modern philosophy, social and environmental ethics, studies of comparative religion including theology and feminist studies. In virtue of its unique position in the Primorska region as the principal institution that studies classical and contemporary philosophical topics within the scope of fundamental and applied studies and as the sole establishment that covers areas which other institutions in Slovenia and abroad do not integrate in their work, the Institute for Philosophical Studies has a very good advantage in developing a leading position in the field and becoming one of the centers of philosophical research in Slovenia, as per their presented intentions. It has been proven that the Institute demonstrates a unique research program with outstanding scientific, socio-economic, and technological transfer value. For these reasons, the EEB sees the Institute as a strong fit for ZRS Koper's strategy and of significant national and worldwide relevance.

## 6. The Institute for Historical Studies

6.1 Evaluation of the scientific quality of the research units and their heads for the last 5 years based on their documented scientific achievements, transfer of knowledge and role in training future researchers

### Very good:

- *have a very high level of international recognition in their research field:* The 14 staff members have an impressive publication record and international project collaboration. They are very well recognized internationally through their international and interdisciplinary research.
- *have a very high level of international recognition:* The members are active in applying for high-end ERC grants; even if not all applications will be successful in 2022, they are a hallmark for their high level of international recognition.
- *Have very good scientific / socio-economic / technological transfer achievements at a high level of impact:* In addition to scientific research, the Institute conducts applied research projects with political and civil society institutions as well as economic partners in the region with a focus on the use of cultural heritage. The cultural impact is very good.
- *have several scientific / socio-economic / technological breakthroughs and / or however a lack of continuity or frequency in this leading position:* The knowledge production with respect to contemporary history and Venetian history are impressive – as the book publications show. The Institute is an established leader in research on the history in the cross-border region of Slovenia, Italy and Austria.

### 6.2 Appropriateness of future plans (actions) in terms of achieving a level of scientific excellence I with the aim of being among the leading groups worldwide

#### Good:

- The Institute for History and the Centre for Venetian History and Cultural Heritage developed a good research plan, and the members will be able to make significant contributions to the field of research in older history as well as in contemporary history. The plan to establish the “Inter-University Centre for the Venetian historical and cultural heritage” and to establish a cultural hub for historical research and public events in the new location is very promising. Future plans should include the integration of younger scholars as well as female scholars. Overall, the strategy of the Institute fits the strategy of ZRS Koper.

### 6.3 Evaluation summary

The past, present and future of the Institute for Historical Studies were presented to the EEB by its head Dr. Egon Pelikan, the Centre for Venetian History and Cultural Heritage was presented at the new building, which is still under construction, by its head Dr. Tilen Glavina. The 14 researchers compose two research teams, one for the period from the 16<sup>th</sup> to the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and one for the history of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Most of the staff (only 5.5 employees have a permanent position) are paid by research national and international research projects. Due to the funding situation the Institute lacks younger researchers. Members of the Institute plan to apply for 3 ERC grants in 2022. The team takes part in unique research initiatives in the region with a specific and unique focus on the fields of research of Northern Adriatic and Slovenian history, specifically cultural history. The new location could and should be used as an interface between research and a wider audience interested in history and culture in the region. This is an excellent fit with ZRS Koper's strategy to become a visible player in the region as well as a transnational perspective. The EEB recommends investing in this development as well as in a rejuvenation and feminization of the team.

## 7. The Institute for Social Studies

### 7.1 Evaluation of the scientific quality of the research units and their heads for the last 5 years based on their documented scientific achievements, transfer of knowledge and role in training future researchers

#### Very good:

- *have a very high level of international recognition in their research field:* The 5 staff members at the Institute come from various disciplinary backgrounds and have built a cohesive multi- and interdisciplinary research group. Over the last years the team focused on migration, integration and ethnicity research and was able to secure excellent international research funds in these fields. In the field of migration and integration (of children), the Institute is internationally very highly recognized.
- *have a very high level of international recognition:* Members of the Institute are internationally highly recognized due to their publications and obtaining international funding.
- *have very good scientific / socio-economic / technological transfer achievements at a high level of impact:* Members of the Institute publish with internationally well recognized publishers in the field (e.g., Oxford University Press) and in peer-reviewed international journals. The output of the group is impressive and meets the standards of comparable European institutes. Furthermore, the team disseminates its scientific findings to policy makers and those in education in the Primorska region as well as on a national level.
- *have several scientific / socio-economic / technological breakthroughs and / or however a lack of continuity or frequency in this leading position:* Members of the Institute have been able to secure an excellent publishing environment for their recent research results. This will contribute to their international leading position in the field of child-migration and integration.

### 7.2 Appropriateness of future plans (actions) in terms of achieving a level of scientific excellence with the aim of being among the leading groups worldwide

#### Very good:

- The Institute has a very good research plan focusing on new projects (e.g., Birth Cohort Study) and exploiting existing research results in high-end publications, such as a handbook with Oxford University Press. Without doubt, the Institute has the potential to become a leader in the field of migration, integration, minority and family studies. The researchers are encouraged by the EEB to also publish their research results in international peer-reviewed journals. Fur-

26 furthermore, the EEB recommends following the path of studies on technological and digital change and its impact on society. The Institute's strategy is a good fit with the strategy of ZRS Koper to internationalize as well as disseminate results in the region.

### 7.3 Evaluation summary

The past, present and future of the Institute of Social Studies were presented to the EEB by Dr. Mateja Sedmak, the head of the Institute. The Institute was established in 2001, then as the "Institute for Mediterranean Humanities and Social Studies". The "Public Opinion Research Centre" was presented by the Centre's head Dr. Maja Zadel. The Institute consists of an interdisciplinary team of scholars from sociology, media studies, cultural studies, anthropology and social geography. Over the years, the institute has developed a clear and distinct research agenda - focusing on ethnic and intercultural studies, migration integration and cultural contact and family studies - not only in the region but on a European scale. The institute's past and present have seen a great deal of project-based research in this field, with international (EU) and national funding. This has resulted in an excellent publication record of its members. The team generates knowledge which is presented to an international scientific community but also to stakeholders in the region and on a national Slovenian level. For the future, the members of the Institute want to specify the research focus on multi-

cultural issues, starting from inter- and multicultural contacts and areas in and around Slovenia but also in other regions of the world. To expand the network of international partners seems to be a viable idea as well as to forge stronger links to the economic sector in the region, which will profit from multicultural knowledge. Here the focus on digitization and its impact on society might be helpful. Attached to the Institute is the "Public Opinion Research Centre" (also founded in 2001) which provides quantitative and qualitative public opinion research for ZRS but also consumer research for societal and economic recipients. Both the research and public service activities of the Institute and Centre are internationally well integrated and follow clear research and innovative standards. The EEB considers the relevance of the Institute and the Centre as important both nationally as well as internationally. In future, both parts will also have an important scientific impact on policy making and economic development in the field of migration, integration, education and ethnicity in the region. The future of the Institute and the Centre are seen as (nationally and internationally) relevant given the topics under study and hence they will have an important place in the further development of ZRS. While the Institute has ideas in the works for future development in the international scientific landscape, this nevertheless still needs to be developed and substantiated. Their human resources base is prone to disruption, thus more robust staffing seems essential for sustainable international development.





## 8. The Law Institute

### 8.1 Evaluation of the scientific quality of the research units and their heads for the last 5 years based on their documented scientific achievements, transfer of knowledge and role in training future researchers

#### Good:

- *international reputation is far above average:* The law institute is a very small department focusing on basic research on the role of law in society and the politics and philosophy of law. These are very important issues and some publications have been in international journals which increases the international reputation of the Institute's members. Research is mainly funded by national agencies.
- *internationally recognized with a reputation far above average:* Research deals with internationally relevant topics such as human rights and the research outcome is well within the international standards, but the Institute lacks the overall critical mass for high quality international publications.
- *good scientific / socio-economic / technological transfer achievements of a significant level of impact:* Public service in Slovenia is important, and the research topics contribute with basic knowledge regarding Slovenian and international development of law and politics. The institute is active in disseminating research results to a wider public and to political and economic stakeholders. The publication record, currently coming from bibliographies of two researchers, could be improved.
- *domestic scientific / socio-economic / technological breakthroughs and / or international collaboration realized, but has no leading position in the field; performance is qualitatively or quantitatively below ZRS's ambitions:* The publication record does not demonstrate many articles in leading international journals. This may be due to a lack of critical mass.

### 8.2 Appropriateness of future plans (actions) in terms of achieving a level of scientific excellence with the aim of being among the leading groups worldwide

#### Average:

- *Research plan is solid, but less innovative; moderate fit with the strategy of ZRS Koper.* The research plan includes three interesting research areas – business ethics, human rights violation and sharia and European law. This is a solid plan but still rather vague and should be substantiated through a plan on how funds will be obtained and who – due to a lack of members – should write research applications for funding. The

EEB recommends developing a plan on how human resources could be improved.

### 8.3 Evaluation summary

The past, present and future of the Law Institute were presented to the EEB by Dr. Rok Svetlič, the head of the Law Institute. The Institute was founded in 2010 with the aim to develop an interdisciplinary approach to law. This interdisciplinarity is mainly achieved through co-operations with researchers from other Institutes at ZRS Koper. The institute has a broad focus on law with a focus on the role of law in society. The Institute has acquired basic research projects funded by the Slovenian Research Agency. The research topics fill gaps in the Slovenian scientific landscape of law, society and politics. The outcome of this research is also disseminated to a wider audience, for instance to public and private companies, to the banking sector but also to civil society organizations in the field of minorities and human rights. Furthermore, the institute consults municipalities and organizes workshops in the field of education in the region. The publications consist of books and international journal articles. As the institutes deal with highly relevant research topics it should strive to discuss the results on an international level and seek international research partnerships. A critical point is the human resources base of the Law Institute which lacks a critical mass of researchers. Solving this issue appears to be essential for sustainable international development. The EEB suggests developing stronger co-operation with other research groups, or even consider merging the group either with the Institute for Philosophical Studies or with the Institute of Social Studies, where co-operation already exists.

This report was written in January and February 2022, then finalized, approved and signed by the three members of the EEB on March 21, 2022:

Prof. Dr. Stefania Giannini

Prof. Dr. Birgit Sauer

Prof. Dr. Matjaž Kuntner







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