



### A Conversation with...

**Peter Glavič, a young-minded and lively emeritus who actively defends the values of sustainable development in sports and higher education**

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*Climate change, pollution, and other challenges require immediate attention. How can education projects and higher education institutions support the European Union's current sustainability priorities? An emeritus of the University of Maribor, Slovenia, provides insights into a life dedicated to health of minds, bodies, society, and the planet...*

**Anne Zimmermann (AZ):** Last October you organized the first multiplier event of the project "Education for Zero Waste and Circular Economy (EduZWaCE)" in Portorož, Slovenia. Can you tell us more about this Erasmus+ project and what role higher education institutions have in the project?

**Peter Glavič (PG):** The project aims to fill the gap in Vocational Education and Training programmes dealing with waste and circular economy. The European Union, European Commission, and European Parliament have decided to carry out an ambitious programme to solve problems with critical raw materials and non-renewable energy, greenhouse gas emissions, and waste in landfills by creating new companies and over 1.2 million green jobs. There is an obvious gap in training for such green jobs and our project aims to fill this gap: we are preparing online training materials for two profiles: 1) managers/teachers at universities, and 2) technicians/workers at vocational schools. In Portorož we presented our state of the art report, as well as job descriptions, course concepts, and future plans, with the aim of getting feedback from experts gathered at the International Conference on Technologies and Business Models for Circular Economy, TBMCE. The EduZWaCE consortium has ten partners from nine EU countries: Austria, Czech Republic, Greece, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia, and Spain. The coordinator is the Greek Developmental Centre of Thessaly. The partners

come from a university, research and development institutions, consultancy companies, small enterprises, and nongovernmental organizations.

**AZ:** I find it remarkable that you are working with so many different types of partners. Have all of them been involved to the same degree in defining course concepts, or do the partners have roles that correspond to their specialities? Can you tell us a bit more about the project design?

**PG:** Partners are responsible for different tasks: elaborating job profiles and skill cards set, developing a manager course and a technician course, establishing a knowledge hub, a project platform, and a diagnosis tool, thinking about evaluation, dissemination, and operation, and coordinating the programme. Besides that, the training material is prepared by partners in each course with the following elements: introduction, material and resource efficiency, circular design, value creation and business models, self-assessment, and co-creation of circular solutions. The partners are also organizing five partner meetings, two side events, two workshops in each country, the translation of documents, organization and dissemination reports, etc. A lot of work to do for everyone!

**AZ:** This is a lot, indeed. So in a way, the project aims at training "work ready plus graduates", as suggested by Geoff Scott during the online COPERNICUS Alli-

ance conference last September (<https://www.copernicus-alliance-conference-2019.com/thought-provokers>)? This requires that courses also take into account attitudes and values in addition to knowledge and skills; do some partners in the project have a pedagogic focus and what do they suggest for attitudes and values?

**PG:** Circular economy suggests new opportunities for companies to create value for both customers and the company itself, or even the company's network. The concept proposes the simultaneous creation of well-known environmental, social, and economic benefits. Two additional value creation categories were identified by the partners: information value and 'uncaptured value'. The uncaptured value refers to the potential value that could be captured by a business but has not yet been captured; it refers to all the three lifecycle phases, from beginning of life to its end. These values differ from the core (ethical) values teachers should demonstrate: integrity, sense of hope for students, sense of urgency, continuous self-learning, mutual respect, and responsibility (according to *Educationtopia*).



Impressions from the first multiplier event of the project "Education for Zero Waste and Circular Economy (Ed-ZWaCE)" in Portorož, Slovenia. Photo by Samo Simonič

**AZ:** Thank you for pointing out the importance of ethical values in teaching. What are the developments in this area at the University of Maribor and other universities in Slovenia?

**PG:** The University of Maribor defines itself as sustainable and socially responsible in four dimensions: environmental, economic, social, and ethical (social responsibility). We have participated in several Erasmus+ projects in the last years that are related to sustainable development, the last one being the above-men-

tioned Education for Zero Waste and Circular Economy. Our Faculty of Education is offering several events for university teachers every year. Our department is doing research and lecturing on education for sustainable development. The University Institute for Development of Social Responsibility organizes one or two international conferences every year. Other Slovenian universities are not as active in this field. On the other hand, there are several educational courses organized by non-governmental organizations every year during the European Sustainable Development Week.

**AZ:** Thank you for this overview of what is happening in Slovenia. You were a keynote speaker at the CA Conference in Madrid 2015 and you presented your work and research in the area of sustainability assessment in higher education. More specifically, you presented an assessment tool to improve the methodology and indicators of existing ranking tables. Can you tell us a little bit more about this?

**PG:** Our analysis of global rankings in higher education has shown that they are dealing mostly only with research results in universities. Out of nine rankings, four of them covered nothing but research, three dealt with research and education, and two of them covered only the environmental dimension of sustainable development. Therefore, we developed a Sustainable Universities Ranking (SUR) covering all three dimensions with three subindices and 15 indicators. Their weights were determined by international experts: 57 % for research as economic pillar, 31 % for education as a social one, and 12 % for the environmental pillar (published in 2010 in the *Journal of Cleaner Production* Vol. 18, pp. 619–628). I would personally prefer the three weights to be equal. A Triangle Method shows strong and weak points of the universities' dimensions, and the time series indicates the evolution in each pillar and in total rank. Global, regional, and national rankings were examined. A need for standardization of reporting and data base was established. We suggested that the COPERNICUS Alliance could help our ranking method to break through in the EU and globally.

**AZ:** Discussions about whether and what ranking is the most effective for fostering sustainable development are ongoing and will likely be taken up again during the upcoming Higher Education Summit (HES2020), the CA's 2020 conference. The ESD community has recently been calling for alternative assessment and quality assurance processes that promote transformative learning and values associated with sustainable development. In your view, what indicators can help us

engage more meaningfully with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)? And, more importantly, how can we challenge existing world rankings?

**PG:** The above-mentioned review with international experts involvement has shown that the most important indicators were: patents and research expenditure for the research pillar; expenses for ICT and library, student/staff ratio, and graduation rate for the education pillar; voluntary environmental agreement/commitments and sustainability-oriented courses for the environmental pillar. Ten years later, experts would probably increase the importance of the environmental pillar given the climate crisis and species extinction, and the need for promoting renewable resources, circular economy, pollution prevention, and waste reduction. Quality education and social indicators (overcoming poverty, hunger, and inequality, and fostering health, decent work, peace, justice, and partnerships) should be included in evaluations of higher education. A list of 232 SDG indicators has been developed by the Inter-Agency and Expert Group at the United Nations. The CA could engage in the evolution of our Sustainable Universities Ranking by proposing a European Horizon project about it.

**AZ:** This is food for thought, indeed; But let us talk about a completely different area of your very active life: some weeks ago you told us about a prize that you received for your long-term engagement with sports in your community. We are really curious to know more about this!

**PG:** I received even two recognitions at the end of last year – (1) Voluntary's Torch from the Olympic Committee of Slovenia–Association of Sports Federations, for many years of voluntary work in sports, and for my contribution to recognition of sports in Slovenia and abroad, and (2) a Memorial Tablet for life-work in the Sports Club Ruse on the occasion of its 100-year anniversary. I chaired the Club with ten sections for 15 years, its Supervisory Board for 20 years, the Section of gymnastics for 35 years, and I was/am active in many local, regional, and national sports committees and the Slovenian Gymnastics Federation. I acquired a trainer's qualification in gymnastics 40 years ago. We have built our own sports-hall in Ruse, brought up many national champions and some international competitors in gymnastics and karate, organized two or three national

competitions each year, and published memorial books on the occasions of the 75<sup>th</sup> and 100<sup>th</sup> anniversaries of the Club.

**AZ:** Wow, this is amazing, congratulations! Let me finish this interview by asking what the relationship is for you between sports and sustainable development. What values are similar? And how can we handle the fact that some sports lead to intense use of natural resources? Can you provide some examples of good practices?

**PG:** Physical and mental activity is needed for every human being, young and old ones. To be fully acquainted with your body you have to master the elements of gymnastics. That is how I started my work in the Sports Club Ruse – I wanted my children to have gymnastics between six and ten years of age. At ten years they could move to any other sport but I insisted that they be active at least twice a week and took part in competitions. When you grow older you have to increase your activities – you have to be active as many days a week as your age in decades counts, e.g. I have to train every day as I am 79 years old: walking, cycling, swimming, or skiing, at least 45–60 minutes a day. Next year I shall train eight days a week, one day with two activities; at the seaside I normally do five activities per day (swimming, cycling and walking). The same is true for mental activity; that is why I am still teaching, doing research, and working in organizations. Cycling 24 kilometers a day to my university and back in summer is environmentally friendly, healthy, and costs less than taking the train, bus, or car. The same is true for walking in cities or cycling to a local store. Less than 1 % of the population is active in expensive and environmentally extensive sports. Of course, roads, mountain ways, sport halls, swimming pools, skiing places have to be built. But they must serve young and old people, and must be available for schools, competitions, and recreation.

**AZ:** Many thanks for these insights into a lifetime dedicated to the essentials of life: a healthy body in a healthy mind, and a healthy society in a healthy and rich natural environment!

**Reference:** Lukman, Rebeka; Krajnc, Damjan; Glavič, Peter. 2010. University ranking using research, educational and environmental indicators. *Journal of Cleaner Production* 18(7): 619–628. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jclepro.2009.09.015>