

UNIVERSITY OF MARIBOR: HALF A CENTURY OF SCHOLARSHIP AND RESEARCH

GORAZD MEŠKO

University of Maribor, Maribor, Slovenia
gorazd.mesko@um.si

The University of Maribor celebrates its fiftieth anniversary on September 18, 2025. Since 1975, it has undergone an extraordinary development journey, and the second-largest public university in Slovenia has positioned itself as a globally recognised university with a high ranking in Times Higher Education (THE). The development of education, research, and art indicates great achievements and many challenges for the future. The young and, at the same time, mature universities face the same challenges as all other modern universities – to provide quality educational programmes that reflect employment needs, to conduct research that contributes to global science, and to adapt to the needs of sustainable development. The chapter presents the period of the university's formation and its founding, the development of education, research, and art, ensuring quality and sustainable development, international cooperation and internationalisation, social action, and appearance in public media, as well as the management and administration of the university.

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1 Introduction

Maribor, a university city that might have become one later if not for the people who believed that Slovenia's once most developed industrial city deserved support through additional local knowledge and knowledge-based development activities. The efforts of many individuals, most notably Vladimir Bračić, a geographer, educator, politician, one of the initiators of the establishment of the University of Maribor and its first Rector, provided the momentum for all subsequent activities related to the university's development.

The formal proclamation of the University of Maribor took place on September 18, 1975, at 10 a.m. in the Union Hall in Maribor. The ceremony began with fanfares announcing the start of the event, followed by the arrival of Rectors and Vice-Rectors from all Yugoslav universities, as well as representatives from eight universities and higher education institutions from Austria, East Germany, Italy, and Hungary. The event was attended by prominent representatives of the Socialist Republic of Slovenia, including: President of the Presidency Sergej Kraigher, President of the Central Committee of the League of Communists of Slovenia France Popit, President of the Assembly Marijan Breclj, President of the Executive Council of the Assembly Andrej Marinc, President of the Republic Conference of the Socialist Alliance of Working People of Slovenia Mitja Ribičič, General Secretary of Slovenian Trade Unions Ivanka Vrhovščak, President of the Republic Conference of the League of Socialist Youth of Slovenia Ljubo Jasnič, Member of the Federation and Presidency of the Socialist Republic of Slovenia Vida Tomšič, representatives of the Yugoslav People's Army, delegates of Slovenians living abroad, and other public socio-political workers. The ceremony was officially opened by Miran Potrč, President of the Council of the University of Maribor and member of the Executive Committee of the Presidency of the Central Committee of the League of Communists of Slovenia. In his address, he emphasized the importance of merging higher education institutions into a university and highlighted its role in educating professionals who would also be active and responsible participants in self-governing decision-making. He stressed that the formal establishment of the university was not the end of the process, but merely the first step toward a new model of self-governing operation involving all university stakeholders: students, teachers, and delegates of associated labour. The University of Maribor was envisioned to further develop as an open institution connected to the working environment, where professionally qualified and socially engaged teachers would

ensure high-quality and Marxist-oriented education and scientific work (Melanšek & Friš, 2025; Univerza v Mariboru, n.d.-j).

Since 1975, extensive social changes have occurred, and we have experienced turbulent times. Broadly speaking, significant socio-political changes began with the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989. Even more important for Slovenia was its secession from Yugoslavia and the achievement of independence, during which it had initially two public universities: the University of Ljubljana and the University of Maribor. After 1991, notable changes in higher education occurred within the European Union, which Slovenia joined in 2004. One must also mention the global economic crisis that began in 2008 and the associated austerity measures that lasted nationally until 2017. Despite these challenges, the university continued to develop successfully, as its staff increasingly secured European, international, and industry-related projects. Crises often mark turning points in development, and once again, the University of Maribor proved its resilience. During the difficult times of the economic crisis, it paved the way for more intensive development. Finally, the university successfully adapted to another global crisis – the COVID-19 pandemic – which completely transformed work, especially educational and research processes at the university. Amid all the societal changes since its inception, the contribution of the University of Maribor to Slovenia’s development, particularly in the eastern region, has been of exceptional importance.

In 1975, Slovenia’s second-largest city gained a university. Its role over the past fifty years has extended beyond the city itself, becoming significant for the entire eastern Slovenian region, as well as nationally and internationally. Following the first Rector Vladimir Bračič (1975–1979), the university was led by: Dali Đonlagič (1979–1983), Dane Milavc (1983–1987), Alojz Križman (1987–1993), Ludvik Toplak (1993–2002), Ivan Rozman, (2003–2011), Danijel Rebolj (2011–2015), Igor Tičar (2015–2017) and Zdravko Kačič (2018–)¹ (Univerza v Mariboru, n.d.-j). Each Rector, together with their team, left a unique mark on the development of the University of Maribor. Over the past fifty years, the university has evolved into a modern, high-quality, and ambitious institution that plays an important societal role in tertiary education and research in Slovenia.

¹ In all further references to colleagues, only first and last names will be used, following the example of the list of Rectors of the University of Maribor, except when referring to members of the Slovenian Academy of Sciences and Arts. Academic titles have been omitted, as individuals who shaped the university over different periods held various academic ranks.

2 About the University of Maribor

The role and significance of the university in society are substantial, as it educates individuals pursuing tertiary education in the first, second, and third cycles of higher education. The university offers appropriate educational programmes and develops research activities. The University of Maribor is not merely a higher education institution – it is the heart of academic, cultural, and social development in the city of Maribor and the broader region. Through its activities, the university not only educates new generations of professionals but also connects the city with the scientific world, fosters innovation, and contributes to economic and social progress, opening the region to the international environment. Its role has been and remains crucial for the development of the city, the region, and the entire country. The University of Maribor is unique in its structure, as some of its faculties are located in other towns but still belong to the university. These include the Faculty of Agriculture and Life Sciences in Hoče, Faculty of Organizational Sciences in Kranj, Faculty of Logistics in Celje, Faculty of Tourism in Brežice, Faculty of Energy Technology in Krško and Faculty of Criminal Justice and Security in Ljubljana. Most of the university's faculties are based in Maribor, where the rectorate is also located. The University of Maribor Library and Student Dormitories are also members of the University of Maribor.

From its beginnings, the university developed through higher education institutions that later became faculties. The founding members of the University of Maribor were the College of Economics and Commerce Maribor, Technical College Maribor, College of Work Organization Kranj, Pedagogical Academy Maribor, Junior College of Law Maribor, Junior College of Agronomy Maribor, Academic and Study Library Maribor (Melanšek & Friš, 2025). This was followed by the gradual inclusion of other young faculties and the division of larger faculties into smaller ones (e.g., the Faculty of Education evolved into the Faculty of Arts and the Faculty of Natural Sciences and Mathematics; the Faculty of Energy Technology emerged from part of the Faculty of Electrical Engineering and Computer Science). As of 2025, the University of Maribor consists of the following 17 faculties: Faculty of Economics and Business (EPF UM), Faculty of Electrical Engineering and Computer Science (FERI UM), Faculty of Energy Technology (FE UM), Faculty of Civil Engineering, Transportation Engineering and Architecture (FGPA UM), Faculty of Chemistry and Chemical Engineering (FKKT UM), Faculty of Agriculture and Life Sciences (FKBV UM), Faculty of Logistics (FL UM), Faculty of Natural Sciences and

Mathematics (FNM UM), Faculty of Organizational Sciences (FOV UM), Faculty of Mechanical Engineering (FS UM), Faculty of Tourism (FT UM), Faculty of Criminal Justice and Security (FVV UM), Faculty of Health Sciences (FZV UM), Faculty of Arts (FF UM), Faculty of Medicine (MF UM), Faculty of Education (PEF UM) and Faculty of Law (PF UM) (Univerza v Mariboru, n.d.-i).

Since 2016, the University of Maribor has ranked among the top 4% of the most prestigious universities in the world. It is the only Slovenian university listed in the *Times Impact Rankings 2021*, and it is also ranked among the best young universities on the *Times Young University Rankings*. It has received several recognitions, including the HR Excellence in Research award, Recognition for the Well-Being of Foreign Students at Higher Education Institutions, Global Student Satisfaction Award, Apple of Quality (Sl. *jabolko kakovosti*) and the Athlete Friendly Education Certificate. The university also upholds ethics and integrity in its operations (Univerza v Mariboru, n.d.-b).

3 Educational Activity

Educational activity has been a fundamental mission of the university since its inception. Significant changes in higher education occurred with the Bologna reform of study programmes. The high ideals of the Bologna process in European higher education brought numerous transformations. The ideal university professor is envisioned as a teacher, an excellent researcher, a contributor to national policy in their field, and someone whose impact is also visible in the local community and within the university itself. Educational activities take place at the faculties, which offer students 178 study programmes (Sotlar & Frumen, 2025). In addition to formal study programmes, the university also provides lifelong learning opportunities. The University of Maribor is highly adaptable to the education of Erasmus+ students, who attend lectures in English. They are offered a wide range of subjects with a reduced scope. There are also numerous programmes available for international students pursuing regular studies and obtaining formal qualifications. The university also proudly hosts a doctoral school, which, in cooperation with the faculties, ensures the highest level of education and prepares personnel for work in science and research. The number of graduates who have successfully completed their

studies in one of the cycles is 147,800, including: 130,380 at the undergraduate level, 15,537 at the master's level, and 1,882 at the doctoral level.²

An important aspect related to studying is student accommodation in the Student Dormitories in Maribor, where living and study conditions are well provided (Univerza v Mariboru, Študentski domovi, n.d.). Ensuring the same quality of student accommodation at locations outside Maribor remains a greater challenge.

Particular attention should be given to the development of the Faculty of Medicine and the Faculty of Health Sciences, which are excellently adapting to the growing demand for healthcare professionals in Slovenia, especially during a time of staff shortages in the health sector. In addition to medical studies, new programmes in dental medicine and pharmacy represent a significant added value for the University of Maribor and the wider community. Other faculties are also actively adapting to labour market needs and projections of future demands for various educational profiles.

4 Research and Artistic Activity

Research activity at the University of Maribor is based on four fundamental pillars, namely stable funding of scientific research, national research projects, European and international projects as well as research groups and individual researchers (Univerza v Mariboru, n.d.-f). Stable funding is ensured through four pillars: institutional funding pillar, programme funding pillar, development funding pillar and national research programmes. The University of Maribor covers a wide range of scientific fields, including: Mathematics, Fundamental Constituents of Matter, Condensed Matter Physics, Physical and Analytical Chemical Sciences, Synthetic Chemistry and Materials, Computer Science and Informatics, Systems and Communication Engineering, Products and Processes Engineering, Universe Sciences, Earth System Science, Materials Engineering, Molecules of Life: Biological Mechanisms, Structures and Functions, Integrative Biology: from Genes and Genomes to Systems, Cell Biology, Development, Stem Cells and Regeneration, Physiology in Health, Disease and Ageing, Neuroscience and Disorders of the Nervous System, Immunity, Infection and Immunotherapy, Prevention, Diagnosis and Treatment of Human Diseases, Environmental Biology, Ecology and Evolution,

² Special thanks for the data go to Sebastijan Frumen from the Rectorate of the University of Maribor.

Biotechnology and Biosystems Engineering, Individuals, Markets and Organisations, Institutions, Governance and Legal Systems, The Social World and Its Interactions, The Human Mind and Its Complexity, Cultures and Cultural Production, The Study of the Human Past, Human Mobility, Environment, and Space (Univerza v Mariboru, n.d.-h).

In 2024, the university hosted 51 programme groups with 111 early-stage researchers. The University of Maribor is implementing 92 basic research projects, 13 applied research projects, 6 postdoctoral research projects and 40 projects of the targeted research programme. The university participates in 126 international research and development projects, including those co-financed by European structural funds. In total, research is carried out within 111 research groups. There were 361 projects involving industry or other knowledge users. Support for research activities is provided by the Department for Research and Arts at the University of Maribor (Univerza v Mariboru, n.d.-e). The university is part of the open science movement (Univerza v Mariboru, n.d.-g), making scientific achievements accessible to a broader audience.

The University of Maribor Library provides essential support through electronic access to national and international publications (Univerza v Mariboru, Univerzitetna knjižnica Maribor, n.d.). The Institute of Information Science monitors researchers' achievements (SICRIS, Informacijski sistem o raziskovalni dejavnosti v Sloveniji, n.d.; IZUM, Institut informacijskih znanosti, Maribor, n.d.) and ranks them by discipline for calls issued by the Slovenian Research and Innovation Agency (Javna agencija za znanstvenoraziskovalno in inovacijsko dejavnost Republike Slovenije [ARIS], n.d.) and other research funders.

At the faculty level, the following research areas stand out: Production Technologies and Systems (FS UM), Computer Science and Informatics (FERI UM), Civil Engineering and Transportation (FGPA UM), Chemistry and Chemical Engineering (FKKT UM), Biology, Mathematics, Physics, Education (FNM UM), Administrative and Organizational Sciences (FL UM), Energy and Electrical Devices (FE UM), Economics (EPF UM), Linguistics (FF UM), Education (PEF UM), Administrative and Organizational Sciences (FOV UM), Law (PF UM), Criminology and Social Work, Administrative and Organizational Sciences (FVV UM), Economics (FT UM), Microbiology and Immunology, Metabolic and Hormonal Disorders, Biochemistry and Molecular Biochemistry (MF UM), Plant Production and

Processing (FKBV UM), Public Health (Safety at Work) (FZV UM). The university also excels in the arts, particularly in music and visual arts (Korošak et al., 2025).

Educators and researchers at the University of Maribor have received numerous national awards for scientific research. Most notably, the Zois Award and Zois Recognition, the highest national honours for achievements in scientific research and development. The Zois Award is presented for lifetime achievement to researchers who have made exceptional contributions to scientific research and development, as well as for outstanding accomplishments in scientific research and development.³

Recipients of the Zois Award for Lifetime Achievement include: *Željko Knez* in the field of Chemical Engineering (2024), *Joso Vukman* in the field of mathematics (2023), and *Zinka (Terezija) Zorko* for research on the dialects of Carinthia, Styria, and the Pannonian dialect group at the phonological, morphological, syntactic, and lexical levels (2013). Other Zois Award recipients include: *Matjaž Perc* for outstanding scientific achievements in the field of complex systems physics (2018), *Zdravko Kravanja* for outstanding achievements in the development of computer-aided methods and tools for process synthesis and reconstruction (2017), *Gorazd Meško* for outstanding achievements in ecological criminology (2014), *Matjaž Klemenčič* and *Vladimir Klemenčič* (University of Ljubljana) for outstanding scientific and development achievements for the book *Die Kärntner Slowenen und die Zweite Republik: zwischen Assimilierungsdruck und dem Einsatz für die Umsetzung der Minderheitenrechte*, Mohorjeva družba/Hermagoras, 2010 (2011), *Miha Drofenik* for outstanding research achievements in the field of materials (2010), *Marko Jesenšek* for outstanding achievements in the field of the Slovenian language (2009), *Sandi Klavžar* for outstanding scientific and development achievements in mathematics (2007), *Željko Knez* for outstanding scientific and development achievements in technical chemistry (2006), *Leopold Škerget* for outstanding scientific achievements in process and environmental engineering (2001), and *Marko Robnik* for outstanding achievements in the field of physics (1997).

³ Special thanks for the list of award recipients go to Lidija Gregorec from the Rectorate of the University of Maribor.

Recipients of the Zois Recognition from the University of Maribor are: *Uroš Potočnik* for significant achievements in genome research for personalized medicine (2024), *Irena Stramljič Breznik* for significant achievements in scientific research and the development of innovative approaches in linguistics (2023), *Matjaž Finšgar* for significant achievements in the development of unconventional tools in analytical chemistry (2023), *Lidija Čuček* for significant achievements in process systems engineering (2022), *Nataša Vanpotoič* for research in modelling structures and resonant responses of multidimensional thermotropic phases (2021), *Samo Kralj* for significant scientific research achievements in soft matter physics (2020), *Boštjan Brešar* for significant achievements in graph theory (2019), *Maja Rupnik* for significant scientific achievements in microbiology (2014), *Mojca Škerget* for significant scientific and development achievements in chemical engineering (2012), *Boštjan Golob*, *Samo Korpar*, and *Marko Starič* (University of Ljubljana) for significant achievements in experimental particle physics (2012), *Valerij Romanovskij* for significant scientific achievements in mathematics (2011), *Matjaž Perc* for significant achievements in theoretical physics (2009), *Jože Bališ* for significant achievements in production technologies and systems (2007), *Matjaž Valant* for significant scientific achievements in materials science (2003), *Borut Zalar* for significant scientific achievements in mathematics (2001), *Andrej Polajnar*, *Erich Štefanec*, *Zlatko Vežjak*, and *Slavko Mlinarič* for inventions and technological achievements in the development of anti-burglary systems and safes (2001), *Sandi Klavžar* for significant scientific achievements in mathematics in the field of graph theory (2000), *Božidar Krajncič* for significant scientific achievements in the physiology of flowering (1999), and *Željko Knez* for significant scientific achievements in the improvement of sub- and supercritical fluid extraction processes (1998).

Since 2005, the Republic of Slovenia has been awarding Puh recognitions, and since 2018, also Puh awards, granted to individuals who have made significant contributions through inventions, technological and non-technological development achievements, and the application of scientific findings from all fields in introducing innovations into economic and social practice. The Puh Recognition in 2020 was awarded to *Daroko Goričanec* for his innovative technology that increases the efficiency of primary fuel for high-temperature heating purposes.

The National Awards of the Republic of Slovenia for Scientific Research Work were the highest state awards for scientific research and were presented from 1992 to 1996/97. The 1995 National Award was given to *Andrej Žnidaršič*, *Marjeta Limpel*, and

Miha Drofenik for the invention of a chemical composition and the technological and production process for preparing high-power Mn-Zn ferrites, usable in the frequency range from 16 kHz to 1 MHz. The 1993 National Award was awarded to *Jera Vodušek Starič* for outstanding achievements in the field of history.

From 1957 to 1991, the Kidrič Award was the highest Slovenian recognition for scientific achievements. Recipients of the Boris Kidrič Fund Awards include: *Mirko Križman* for his work *Jezik kot socialni in nacionalni pojav – primerjalno z jezičkovnimi odnosi v Radgonskem kotu* (1991), *Joso Vukman* for contributions in functional analysis (1990), *Vladislav Rajkovič* and *Marko Bohanc* for achievements in computer-aided decision-making using artificial intelligence methods (1990), *Jožef Mlinarič* for his work *Kostanjeviška opatija 1234–1786* (1988), *Savo Spaič*, *Alojz Križman*, and *Anton Klemenčič* for research and development of low-alloy copper alloys (1985), *Vladimir Bračič* for significant research achievements in geography (1984), *Miha Drofenik* for work on the synthesis and characterization of magnetic phases based on Fe_2O_3 and semiconducting ceramics based on BaTiO_3 (1983), *Borut Belec* for studies on the geographical characteristics of vineyard, orchard, and hop field development in Slovenia (1982), *Andro Alujevič* and *Leopold Škerget* for work on methods of simultaneous analysis of temperature and stress in fuel elements and reactor pressure vessels (1981).

The Invention and Improvement Award for 1990 was awarded to *Vojko Ozim* for the invention of a hydrokinetic process for iron removal from water using oxygen.

Employees of the University of Maribor have also received awards in the field of arts. The Prešeren Awards and Prešeren Fund Awards are the highest recognitions of the Republic of Slovenia for achievements in the arts. The Prešeren Award is given to artists who have, through outstanding artistic achievements over their lifetime, made a lasting contribution to Slovenia's cultural heritage. The Prešeren Fund Award is presented to artists for exceptional artistic achievements made public in the past three years, enriching Slovenia's cultural treasury. The Prešeren Fund Award in 2004 was awarded to *Oto Rimele* for his exhibition *Illuminations*.

Educators and researchers of the University of Maribor are also members of the Slovenian Academy of Sciences and Arts (Slovenska akademija znanosti in umetnosti (SAZU), n.d.). Active members of SAZU are *academician Marko Jesenšek*, PhD in Linguistic Sciences, Full Professor at the Department of Slavic Languages

and Literatures, Faculty of Arts, University of Maribor. He became an associate member on June 1, 2017, a full member on June 1, 2023, and has served as Secretary of the Class for Philological and Literary Sciences since October 1, 2021, as well as *academician Željko Knez*, Full Professor of Chemical Engineering at the Faculty of Chemistry and Chemical Engineering, University of Maribor. He became an associate member on June 1, 2017, and a full member on June 1, 2023. Deceased members of SAZU include *academician Jože Mlinarič* (born 1935, died 2021), Full Professor of the History of Feudalism and Auxiliary Historical Sciences at the Faculty of Education, University of Maribor, and its Professor Emeritus. He became an associate member of SAZU on June 6, 1995, and a full member on June 7, 2001, as well as *academician Zinka Zorko* (born 1936, died 2019), PhD, Full Professor of the History and Dialectology of the Slovenian Language at the Faculty of Education, University of Maribor, and its Professor Emerita. She became an associate member of SAZU on June 12, 2003, and a full member on May 21, 2009.

The Republic of Slovenia has been awarding national prizes in education since 1966. These are the highest state awards granted for outstanding achievements that significantly contribute to the development of pedagogical practice and theory, promote quality education, strengthen the protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms in education, enable positive educational influences of schools, and encourage the humanization of relationships within schools. Lifetime achievement awards in higher education were received by *Martin Kramar* (2006), *Peter Glavič* (2010), *Ivan Gerlič* (2014), *Boris Aberšek* (2019) and *Jurka Lepičnik Vodopivec* (2020). *Majda Schmidt Krajnc* received the award for outstanding achievements in higher education (2017).

The Honorary Badge of Freedom of the Republic of Slovenia was awarded to *Majda Slajmer Japelj* (1996) and *Milan Ževart* (2002). The Silver Badge of Freedom of Slovenia was awarded to *Tine Lab* (1999) and *Ivan Vanek Šiftar* (1999). The Honorary Badge of Freedom of the Republic of Slovenia was also awarded to *Jože Florjančič* (2000) and *Božidar Krajncič*. Recipients of the Golden Order for Merits of the Republic of Slovenia include *Zora Janžekovič* (2004) and *Ludvik Toplak* (2022). The Order for Merits was awarded to *Zmago Turk* (2006), and the Medal for Merits was awarded to *Ivan Kranjc* (2014). Researchers from the University of Maribor have also received numerous international awards and recognitions.

5 Quality and Sustainable Development

International ranking systems, based on publicly available methodologies, produce quantitative assessments of the quality of study programmes, activities, institutions, or national higher education systems. These rankings measure and compare academic achievements using quantitative indicators, thereby promoting academic excellence. Rankings have become established in the international higher education area as a source of information and a tool for monitoring quality (Univerza v Mariboru, n.d.-b).

The University of Maribor places the principles of social responsibility and sustainable development at the forefront of its activities. The strategy of the University of Maribor pursues an inclusive, innovative and integrated higher education area that will train active, critically-thinking and responsible citizens, guarantee the quality of education and research, academic integrity, and cultivate concern for sustainable development of society. The University of Maribor strives for sustainable, socially responsible and high-quality development of sciences and arts, research fields and sub-fields, while considering the smart specialization principles, with emphasis on tackling societal challenges. The University of Maribor is the highest-rated Slovenian university on the *Times Impact Rankings*, which assess how universities incorporate and promote sustainable development goals in their work. The University of Maribor is monitoring and introducing an increasing number of sustainable development objectives in its operation. This year, it participated in the rankings with eleven sustainable development objectives. The field of quality also includes courses and trainings for employees, evaluations of work across different fields, and student surveys. The university is also inclusive toward students with special needs, adapting the educational process and making infrastructure modifications to buildings to ensure easier access and use of facilities (Univerza v Mariboru, n.d.-a).

Efforts toward sustainable development at the university take place in two ways, namely by integrating green and other sustainability-related content into education and research, and through the university's social engagement in promoting the sustainable development of society as a whole (Vovk et al., 2025).

The university's reputation and connections with other institutions, organizations, and civil society are reflected in numerous results across various fields of activity and in the integration of knowledge into efforts to improve quality of life, understand social and natural phenomena, and contribute to the development of technologies and processes. Awards and recognitions, from university-level to national and international, as well as memberships in national scientific associations and international academies of sciences and arts, testify to the development of individuals and of the university as a whole. The contribution of individuals who have received high national and international awards and recognitions to the university's reputation is significant.

6 International Cooperation and Internationalization

International cooperation is essential for the development of the university. Collaboration with leading institutions fosters progress, the adaptation of practices, and the acquisition of new knowledge. The requirement of a three-month teaching or research stay abroad for appointing higher education teachers and staff to academic titles is of great importance, especially when the individual chooses to spend time at a university that is a leading one in a particular field. Such cooperation enables mutual understanding, and if it results in the development of a course, publication of a scientific article, or preparation of a new project, it is highly beneficial. Visits from colleagues from other universities to Maribor are also valuable for both sides. Moreover, the involvement of students in international exchanges, not only in education but also in student research, participation in international conferences, or summer (doctoral) schools, is an exceptional experience for young people (Univerza v Mariboru, n.d.-d). The number of University of Maribor cooperation agreements with universities worldwide, agreements that are more than just words on paper, reached 650 by 2025.⁴

In addition to established international cooperation programmes and the ATHENA European University Alliance, teaching, student, and other exchanges within the Erasmus+ programme, and the organization of summer schools, other programmes are also important for strengthening researcher connections (e.g., Swiss National Science Foundation and the Fulbright Programme), which enhance the quality of work and integrate University of Maribor staff into European and international

⁴ Special thanks for the data go to Uroš Kline from the Rectorate of the University of Maribor.

scientific circles, associations, and project and development groups (Swiss National Science Foundation, n.d.; U.S. Embassy in Slovenia, n.d.; Univerza v Mariboru, n.d.-d). International cooperation can be linked to research work, followed by teaching, student exchanges, and recently also international cooperation and exchanges of administrative and support staff at the University of Maribor. Through various activities, including conferences, the University of Maribor has established its presence on the global scientific map.

7 Social Engagement and Media Presence

Thinkers and social critics within the academic environment of the University of Maribor are important observers and evaluators of social developments. They comment on current events and represent the university in the media, especially on television, radio, and in daily newspapers. Media contributions significantly influence the presentation of university work, commentary on social developments, and public awareness of specific topics. In the age of information technology and the modern information society, this area is strongly influenced by the internet and open science. University representatives are indispensable members of working groups preparing legislation (not only in higher education and research) and national programmes across various sectors of social life (e.g., social, health, agricultural, migration, security, and criminal justice policies). The university informs the public about major events on its official website (Univerza v Mariboru, n.d.-c).

8 University Governance and Management

Governance and management are key aspects of university operations, especially as it faces increasing challenges, particularly in the specialization of certain administrative tasks. Professional services at the Rectorate, faculties, and the University of Maribor Library play a vital role. Highly qualified staff who support pedagogical and research activities are extremely important. Human resource care at the University of Maribor is especially crucial, as sustainable development can only be ensured by top-level staff dedicated to their mission. Without competent and committed personnel, there can be no pedagogical, research, artistic, or development work. This is a prerequisite for establishing a high-quality educational and research system, offering students quality knowledge, and ensuring competitiveness in the labour market. The university is committed to the professional development of all staff, respects ethical and professional standards, ensures good employment

conditions, provides appropriate working environments, and implements training and quality development across all fields. This commitment to quality is a hallmark of the University of Maribor in most fields, because without quality, there is no progress. Monitoring and implementing human resource policies with efforts to attract and retain the best staff is essential for current tasks and the future development of the university.

The university leadership also promotes staff education and training. The beginnings of systematically organized training for employees date back to 2014, when the goal was to establish a Centre for Career and Staff Development, aimed at offering workshops accessible to all employees to identify and enhance key competences for their work. Based on information obtained from examples of best practices from partner universities and the results of a survey on the necessary knowledge and competences of employees, the University of Maribor developed its first comprehensive education and training programme for employees in 2015. Development in this field has been intensive, and by 2025, the university offers a wide range of trainings and educational courses, delivered by domestic experts and renowned professionals from Slovenia and abroad with rich experience and expertise. Additional education and training is also available to students and early-stage researchers.

The University of Maribor proudly hosts the Centre for Professors Emeriti and Retired Higher Education Teachers (Univerza v Mariboru, n.d.). The Centre's purpose is to encourage and support intellectual and social engagement among members through planned activities (e.g., meetings, lectures, workshops, excursions, interest groups), support academic work of members who continue their scholarly activities, ensure members receive recognition, benefits, and attention appropriate to their long-standing contributions to the university, maintain close cooperation between members and the university, collaborate with the university to leverage intellectual and academic resources of its members, raise awareness of past, present, and potential future contributions of members to the university and the local, national, and global community, seek and utilize additional avenues to serve and engage members. A key role of the Centre is also to promote intergenerational cooperation.

The university has established the University of Maribor Press, which publishes monographs, anthologies, journals, textbooks, and other publications important for the educational and research process, and for promoting the university in the broader environment. From September 2016 to spring 2025, the Press has published 782 different monographic publications. It publishes 16 professional and scientific journals and is actively working toward indexing in Scopus (Univerzitetna založba Univerze v Mariboru, n.d.).

The University of Maribor is positively recognized for student involvement in decision-making processes and evaluation of the pedagogical process. Very early in the university's development, they became members of its bodies – the Senate, Committees, Boards, etc. It is also important to note that many graduates from various fields, after completing undergraduate and postgraduate studies, form part of the university's development core.

9 Final Reflections and Acknowledgements

The University of Maribor is present throughout the city, in the city centre, on its outskirts, and in various districts. This is why Maribor is a university city: a city full of young people who enliven the urban centre and the city as a whole, breathing life and youth into it. The same applies to locations where students study at faculties based outside Maribor. Over its fifty-year development, the University of Maribor has become a globally recognized, ambitious, sustainably oriented, open, and evolving higher education and research institution. It possesses all the qualities of an institution that is aware of its past and present and is focused on the future. The university proudly boasts excellent students and distinguished graduates in all cycles of study. It is well integrated into Slovenian society and continues to strengthen its social role. It therefore invests in the development of staff and appropriate working conditions for pedagogical staff, researchers, and all other employees.

Without the professional services and dedicated staff of the rectorate, faculties, libraries, and student dormitories, the university's development would not have been possible. The university is a complex system, and its quality depends on all segments of that system. Behind many of the highlighted achievements are the efforts of professional staff, who create the foundation for quality education, research, artistic work, student learning, and academic teaching.

While preparing such an important publication and writing this foreword, many feelings and memories arise. Although the faculty where I have worked since 1992 has undergone several transformations and became a full member of the University of Maribor only in autumn 2003, we are among the younger members of the university, yet certainly among the very active ones. During this time, I have experienced many levels of university life: from higher education teacher to Head of the Department of Criminology, Vice-Dean for Research, Dean, President of the Management Board of the University of Maribor, member of faculty and university Committees, and member of the faculty and university Senates. Of all these roles, working with students is the most important – they are our future. Research activity is also vital, as it motivates us researchers to strive for higher quality, allowing us to express our scientific curiosity, creativity, and search for new knowledge. This wonderful world of discovering truths and laws is complex during the research process, but often quite simple in the end. University members are very diverse, and it is difficult to place social sciences, humanities, engineering, natural sciences, and arts under a single umbrella. What matters is that, in addition to pedagogical work with students, we contribute to science, critical social thought, and art, not only nationally but also globally. In doing so, we must uphold humanistic values and the social responsibility of the university.

Fifty years is both a lot and a little. I recall a conversation during a visit about ten years ago to Pembroke College, University of Cambridge in the UK. One professor asked me whether the university I came from was old. I replied that it was about forty years old. That it is quite old. He smiled and said that it's probably very young. It depends on perspective and comparison.

The youth of our university is actually an advantage. Despite its youth, the university's staff and students achieve excellent results, some of which have global impact. From something small, something great can grow, and fifty years is a beautiful age that allows for much. As highlighted in the final chapter on the university's development, even very old universities face similar challenges as do younger ones. The age of a university is not the most important factor. What matters are funding, quality of staff, quality of study programmes, research achievements, and the university's impact on social life, critical thinking, and its integration into various societal activities – international, national, regional, and local. International cooperation, learning from the best, collaborating with the best, and transferring knowledge into our social environment are especially important. Everyone working

in academic environments faces similar challenges. Nevertheless, we can look to the future with optimism, as the university has promising staff to maintain its position in higher education and research. Let me mention education for shortage professions, such as the lack of doctors and dentists, and other areas where the university can fill gaps, however, not overnight. The only constant in society is continuous change, which we must adapt to and seek optimal solutions. The University of Maribor is committed to achieving high goals in this area, and I dare say there is no fear of running out of work or new research challenges.

A brief overview of the chapters in this monograph opens many perspectives of the university's development, and I would highlight the following: Efforts before, during, and after the establishment of the University of Maribor laid the foundation for future development (Melanšek & Friš, 2025). Awareness of the university's needs, the difficult path taken, legal foundations, and political support in the 1970s played a crucial role (Ivanjko et al., 2025). Lobnik and Gabrijelčič (2025) emphasize that the university must have premises that are integrated into the broader environment and enable functionality for education, research, artistic work, and other activities. These spaces must be aesthetic and reflect the university's stature. Besides functionality, the appearance and safety of premises and buildings are also important. The authors (Lobnik & Gabrijelčič, 2025) present past construction and renovation efforts and the challenges of building new faculty facilities. The Rectorate, the university's centre, is housed in a beautiful building from 1886, which gives the whole university its charm (Univerza v Mariboru, n.d.-i). Žnidaršič et al. (2025) present the characteristics of university staff and future challenges in human resource policy, highlighting the importance of a staff-friendly working environment. There are many future challenges in HR, especially in maintaining the quality and visibility of the university, which depend on staff quality, employees' qualifications for work, employees' competences and their ability to learn and adapt to new conditions, and high ethical standards. In 2022, the Resolution on the National Higher Education Programme until 2030 ("Resolucija o nacionalnem programu visokega šolstva do 2030 (ReNPVŠ30)", 2022) was adopted, which foresees two key measures in HR: promoting an internationally open HR policy and strengthening the systemic HR capacity of higher education institutions, as well as ensuring attractive research conditions, which the University of Maribor is also committed to (Žnidaršič et al., 2025). Sotlar and Frumen (2025) guide us through the wide range of faculty programmes and educational activities at the University of Maribor, as education is the core activity of every university. The fields of education

at the University of Maribor include social sciences, journalism and information science; business and administrative sciences, law; information and communication technologies (ICT); engineering, manufacturing and construction; natural sciences, mathematics and statistics; agriculture, forestry, fishery and veterinary medicine; transport, security, hospitality and tourism, personal services; health and social security; arts and humanities. Science and art are key areas developed by the university. Korošak et al. (2025) present the most active research fields at individual faculties of the University of Maribor, as well as the arts – visual and musical, which distinguish our university. Hrast et al. (2025) emphasize that, in addition to staff, students are the most important, as they are the largest group and the primary focus of education. Some students remain at the university after graduation and become part of its core workforce in education, research, administration, or logistics. The University of Maribor is known for the active role of students in many decision-making processes at both faculty and university levels. Tominc et al. (2025) highlight the importance of international cooperation among university staff and students, which is crucial for positioning the university in the international arena, collaborating on joint educational programmes (e.g., doctoral schools), research, and development projects. International cooperation also includes participation of researchers in editorial boards of international publications and collections, editorial work in international scientific journals, co-organization of international conferences, and other forms of collaboration with foreign universities. The sustainable development of the university aligns with the goals of sustainable development of society as a whole. The university's contribution in this area can be significant. If we summarize the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals, we can find reasons for the university's active role in education and research in each field. These goals include ending poverty and hunger, ensuring health, healthcare and well-being, quality education, gender equality, clean water and sanitation, affordable and clean energy, decent work and economic growth, industry, innovation and infrastructure, reducing inequalities, sustainable cities and communities, responsible consumption and production, climate action, life below water, life on land, peace, justice and strong institutions, partnerships for the goals. They also emphasize the importance of responding to security threats and ensuring quality of life (Vovk et al., 2025). Vovk et al. (2025) specifically highlight areas where the University of Maribor has achieved notable results in promoting sustainable development. Kačič et al. (2025) stress the importance of European integration, micro-credentials, digitalization, and the green transition – all pointing to a future-oriented development of the University of Maribor. The authors identify key topics for the university's future development

within the European higher education area, including awareness of globalization and the international dimensions of higher education, continuation of the Bologna Process, adaptation to new needs and conditions in Europe, such as employment trends and emerging professions. Ambitious goals follow, such as achieving 20% student mobility within Europe, creating a university without walls to address modern challenges like climate change and ecological issues. It is essential to establish European university alliances, to adopt appropriate national legislation, and to implement the Strategy of the University of Maribor 2021–2030. Let us not forget that a university must be strong, autonomous, and responsible, with strong leadership and sufficient autonomy to fulfil its mission effectively. It must be accountable to the society it serves, while respecting academic freedom and high ethical standards.

The following ten chapters present an exceptionally wide range of activities by the University of Maribor's staff and students. I recommend this book to anyone interested in the development of our university. Above all, I believe that every employee at the University of Maribor should read it to gain insight into its development over the past fifty years, its current position, and possible future directions, because the university is made up of people, from the first to the last employee.

The editors and authors have invested great effort in a short time to prepare this publication in honour of the 50th anniversary of our university, celebrated on September 18, 2025, where we work and fulfil our fundamental mission. Working with young people, research, and artistic activity, as well as contributing to society, is a privilege and a mission of the academic community.

This monograph should inspire colleagues to reflect on writing the history of individual faculties (some have already done so), going beyond brochures to produce precise and critical analyses and syntheses of their work. We should also consider monographs by specific areas of university activity, as this publication cannot encompass all the colleagues' work over the past fifty years. The editors, editorial board, authors, reviewers, proofreaders, and technical editors have done their best, and after about six months of intensive work, we present this comprehensive publication.

Reflecting on editorial work does not end when the task is completed; the thought process continues long afterwards. This was especially true in our case, as we completed the book in just over six months, coordinating 55 authors and editors. Work began in autumn 2024, and the manuscript was submitted to the publisher in June 2025. My reflections are framed on three levels of university functioning: societal, institutional, and individual. Universities play an important societal role by educating people at the highest level and fostering research and artistic creation. Their contribution is measured in many ways — scientific impact, student satisfaction, critical engagement, and stakeholder collaboration. Institutionally, universities are characterised by relative autonomy: while bound by national regulations, they also set their own rules and exercise self-governance. Individually, universities bring together diverse people whose unique perspectives enrich teaching, research, and artistic work.

Any reflection on universities must consider the sociology of science, particularly Robert K. Merton's work (1973/1942). His scientific norms — universalism, the sharing of knowledge, disinterestedness, organised scepticism, and intellectual integrity — remain foundational. His broader concepts, such as unintended consequences, reference groups, and the self-fulfilling prophecy, are equally relevant to understanding academic life. Universities, faculties, departments, institutes, and individuals differ greatly in size and contribution. Today, academic work is strongly shaped by state-driven bibliometrics and international rankings. This brings dilemmas, frustrations, and also creativity. I have been at the University of Maribor for 21 years and deeply respect the pioneers who built the institution. I have also worked outside the university and visited some of the world's leading institutions. Comparison is natural; my conclusion is that the University of Maribor is a good university with many opportunities for further development. Like in sports, our "bench" is short — excellence is scarce — yet the creativity and dedication of many colleagues remain a great strength. For many of us, academic work is not only a job but also a passion. Fifty years is a long time for an individual, but only the beginning for a university. The university does not exist outside society; science must include values, particularly because we bear responsibility for educating young people who shape the future. This is our most important and noble mission.

In closing, I thank everyone for their work, their critique, and the years they have dedicated to the University of Maribor. To those working at the university now and in the future, I wish much success. Working at a university is a privilege: engaging with young people and conducting research keeps us curious, lively, and continually seeking the new. The years pass, but the memories remain. Finally, regarding our book: spoken words fade, but written text endures. It offers reflection, opportunities for improvement,

and a foundation for future publications. Our book on 50 years of the University of Maribor is only the beginning — an invitation for others to share their stories and fill the gaps we could not address.

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