



Prof. dr. Danilo Zavrtnik, rektor

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20. O B L E T N I C A • 20th A N N I V E R S A R Y

**The speech of the Rector of the University of Nova Gorica Prof. Dr. Danilo Zavrtnik
at the formal ceremony marking the university's 20th anniversary**

The origins of the University of Nova Gorica stretch back to the year 1994 when the management of the Jožef Stefan Institute was pondering its own future, wanting to chart a course for the transformation of our largest institute into a technical university or the Slovenian Institute of Technology as it was ambitiously named at the time after the American MIT. As is plain for everyone to see, we had missed that goal. Today, Slovenia does not have a technical university, but does have the University of Nova Gorica.

The University of Nova Gorica began its journey in 1995 when the Municipality of Nova Gorica and the Jožef Stefan Institute founded the Faculty of Environmental Sciences which was the first international postgraduate school in Slovenia. Despite the newly created institution having to operate in an inhospitable environment and in a time when it was considered a sacrilege to think of universities outside the public university system, it developed rapidly and successfully, emerging as the Nova Gorica Polytecnic in 1998. The school initially had a university structure indicating the ambitions of the founders of it gradually gaining the status of a university, which in turn came to fruition in 2006.

The University of Nova Gorica and its predecessors had to develop in an environment that was not and still is not inclined towards non-state sponsored higher education institutions. We also grew in this environment and tried to break through with our non-conformity and openness and in turn enrich the Slovenian higher education environment. It had not been easy for us and we often felt as an unwanted child, but it was these difficulties and our successes that made us stronger and determined to stay the course. We would otherwise not be here today, at least not in this form and with this level of quality.

Today, the University of Nova Gorica is still a young, and lively research-oriented university with international ties. What is dearest to our hearts are the words of the group of evaluators from the European University Association saying that they have "found a small, young, active, and enthusiastic university with happy and satisfied students". We also did well in the new U-Multirank university rankings where we received excellent, above-average scores in the areas of research work and internationalisation. This was not by chance of course, but rather the result of hard work and perseverance in staying the course that we set for ourselves twenty years ago. From the very beginnings of our two predecessors, the Faculty of Environmental Sciences and the Nova Gorica Polytecnic, our most important strategic orientations have been cutting edge research work and international openness and involvement.

Universities are the only institutions where new knowledge is born and is subsequently passed on to the younger generations and the entrepreneurial environment. They are also the place where students and professors live in an atmosphere of harmonious cohabitation and collaborate in co-creating new knowledge. There can simply not be good universities without excellent students and professors. Our BA, Master's, and PhD degree holders receive high quality



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education and are highly employable after completing their studies. Many of our students have successful careers at home and abroad. It is, however, true that the number of students who complete their studies at our university is low, which is not only due to the school's youth and small size. The University of Nova Gorica is known among young people as a university with demanding programmes that teach you a lot if you put in the hard work. We wish to keep this image in the future and want us to be recognised as a "demanding" university by the most talented and motivated young people so that more of them will enrol in our programmes. They will certainly not forget the positive experience of studying in small groups and in a peaceful environment, and they will also have no regrets about not having studied in places that offer more fun.

What is it that makes the University of Nova Gorica stand out from other higher education institutions in Slovenia and the broader environment?

One of the differences is certainly our status of a private, or better yet non-state sponsored university. Despite facing occasional difficulties because of this status on account of living in an environment where the word "private" still has a negative connotation, our status allows us greater flexibility and dynamism in the pursuit of our mission.

The second reason is that we were not created as a political project. The University of Nova Gorica was founded, shaped, and built by individuals, employees, external associates, and students. This is why all of us, including the students, feel the utmost loyalty to the school which we see as something that is our own and something that is worth the personal sacrifices.

And what is the key to success?

Our story is similar to the events in Mongolia in the beginning of the 13th century where the leadership of one of the Mongolian tribes was taken over by Temüjin who had the vision of uniting the tribes. The biggest obstacle in his way was the traditional staffing according to family ties. Temüjin therefore decided that this should be changed to a system based on ability, which he in turn put into practice. Within a few years, he was renamed as Genghis Khan, the first Mongolian emperor who created the biggest empire of all times. Sounds simple enough, or does it? Staffing is crucial for every university and perhaps also every other institution. University management must therefore never give into the temptation of staffing its positions in any other way than according to ability. Because of this, and mainly because of this, our university has outstanding associates in all fields who attain top level results.

After 20 year, the University of Nova Gorica finds itself at a crossroads. The development until now has shown that our university is unwavering when it comes to the pursuit of its mission, that it adheres strictly to international university norms and that it is responsible towards its students and society in general. It will stay this course in the future and must not stray from it on account of popularity or copying obsolete concepts of higher education.

This is why our strategic orientations envisage our university remaining a small, but different and open research university with international ties that offers access to first-class education to everyone. It is especially the latter that will require new approaches in the organisation of the university and perhaps even its ownership or its founding principles. This is the only way of it



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ensuring its existence in an international milieu and continuing to contribute to the diversity of higher education in Slovenia.

I would like to take the opportunity upon the university's 20th anniversary to thank all those who have contributed to its successful development, its employees, external associates, and especially the students who have placed their trust in us and lived through both the pleasant and the difficult moments with us.