Towards innovation in ECEC services from Tuscan approach to Slovenia
Summary

1. General presentation of the ECEC system in Slovenia ....... 4

   1.1 Legislation........................................................................................................... 4
   1.2 Types of services.................................................................................................. 5
   1.3 Coverage ........................................................................................................... 6
   1.4 Fees ................................................................................................................... 8
   1.5 Qualification and in-service training .................................................................. 9
   1.6 Quality guidelines ............................................................................................ 10

2. Brief description of ECEC services .............................................. 11

   2.1 Curriculum ....................................................................................................... 11
   2.2 Learning environment ....................................................................................... 12
   2.3 Family involvement ........................................................................................... 13
   2.4 Professional qualification/development ......................................................... 14
   2.5 Governance/management ................................................................................ 14
   2.6 Possible innovations to be explored ............................................................... 16

3. Brief description of the VVZ Kekec Grosuplje preschool .......... 18

Bibliography ........................................................................................................... 21
1. General presentation of the ECEC system in Slovenia

1.1 Legislation

Since 1993 preschool education is under the jurisdiction of the ministry responsible for the educational sector (Ministry of Education, Science and Sport). The Ministry of Education, Science and Sport (MESS) makes decisions at the national level about legislation and other regulations. Inspection is carried out by the School Inspectorate of the Republic of Slovenia which forms part of the Ministry. It supervises also the work of pre-school centres.

The Council of Experts of the Republic of Slovenia for General Education adopts pre-school programmes/curricula and gives opinion on the adequacy of programmes provided by public and private pre-school centres. The municipalities ensure that there are proper conditions for the implementation of the curriculum. Obligations of the municipalities are defined by law (Preschool Institutions Act, 2010). Municipality covers (from the budget of the municipality) the difference between the full price of the program\(^1\) and parents' payment of the program, it ensures maintenance funds and funds for investment in real estate, and funds for covering costs which are necessary for the implementation of the program but cannot be included in the price of the program. At the level of the pre-school centre annual work plans are discussed and adopted by the Pre-school Centre Council (Preschool Institutions Act, 2010).

The basic tasks of pre-school centres are: helping parents with the general care of the child, improving the quality of life of the family and the children and creating the conditions for the development of the child's physical and mental abilities (Preschool Institutions Act, 2010). The general educational objective of the public pre-school centres is to encourage different areas of the child's stage of development and his/her individual personality and to encourage the child to develop special abilities and skills\(^2\). (Unesco, 2006)

The goals of pre-school education in pre-school centres are:
- to develop the child's self-concept and his/her ability to understand others; to develop the capacity to negotiate, respect for diversity and cooperation in groups;
- to develop the ability to recognise feelings and encourage the experience and expression of emotions;

\(^1\) Labor costs of employees, costs of materials and services necessary for the implementation of the program, the cost of food for children.

to nurture curiosity, an inquiring mind, imagination, intuition and independent thinking;
• to encourage linguistic development for the purpose of effective and creative use of speech, and, at a later stage, of writing and reading;
• to stimulate artistic experience and expression;
• to stimulate motor abilities and skills;
• to convey the knowledge of various fields of science and everyday life;
• to develop independence regarding personal hygiene and health care (Preschool Institutions Act, 2010).

Pre-school education is not compulsory; it admits children from 1³ to 6 years of age or to the age when they enter elementary schooling.

Preschool sector is regulated by two mayor acts: Organization and Financing of Education Act (2007) and Pre-school Institutions Act (2010). The Organisation and Financing of Education Act (2007) regulates the conditions for the implementation and specifies the method of management and financing of education and training in all areas of education. Pre-school Institutions Act (2010) regulates pre-school education conducted by public and private pre-school centres (such as tasks of pre-school centres, objectives and principles, types of programmes in pre-school centres, financing, terms and conditions for employment of instructional and professional staff, work obligations of pre-school teachers and assistants, etc.).

1.2 Types of services

Pre-school centres can be public or private. Public pre-school centres are established and financed by the municipalities. Private pre-school centres are established by individuals or group of individuals. There are two types of private pre-school centres:

• Private pre-school centres with concession agreements (granted by the local community) which must meet regulatory requirements for public pre-school centre and implement the national curriculum and

• Private pre-school centres without concession agreements, which must also meet requirements concerning the staff, premises, equipment and a positive opinion from the Council of Experts of the Republic of Slovenia.(Unesco, 2006).

Public pre-school institutions are founded and partly financed by local communities. They are also financed from parents' contributions, from the national budget (for specific purposes like transport of pre-school children) and from donations and other sources (Preschool Institutions Act, 2010)

The opening hours of pre-schools centres in larger cities is up to 11 hours and they are adjusted to suit the need of working parents. They are opened every weekday throughout the year except Saturdays, Sundays and public holidays. The day programme lasts from 6 to 9 hours and can take place in the morning, in the

³ Maternity leave lasts for 12 months. Since mother can start with the maternity leave 28 days prior to birth, children can enter pre-school with 11 months.

⁴ http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0014/001472/147239e.pdf
afternoon, daily or in shifts. The half day programme lasts from 4 to 6 hours and can take place in the morning, in the afternoon, or in shifts. They are both intended for children aged 1 to 6 and include education, care and meals (Pre-school Institutions Act, 2010).

Short programmes last from 240 to 720 hours yearly in demographically threatened regions and remote areas. It is intended for children aged 3 to 6. The short programme may be performed throughout the school year or in a more concentrated form within a specific time frame (Pre-school Institutions Act, 2010).

Pre-school education is organised in two age groups: the first age group includes children aged 1 to 3 years, and the second includes children aged 3 to school age. Preschool institution can form homogeneous, heterogeneous and/or combined groups. In homogeneous groups are included children in the age span of one year, in heterogeneous groups are included children in the first or second age group in the combined groups are included children in the first and second age group. The number of children is twelve per first age group, and twenty-two per second age group. The legislation provides the possibility of establishing groups of children with a more favourable staff to child ratio (depending on whether the group is homogeneous, heterogeneous or combined or is a childminder's family, or if there are children with special needs in the group or in the case of Roma children) (Unesco, 2006). Since 2003, the municipalities can increase the number of children per each age group up to two children. In such a case the municipality must set out their arguments for increasing the number of children per group. The introduction of the flexible group sizes monitors MESS. In school year 2013/14 78% of the groups in kindergartens are in the category of flexible group size (Požar Matjašič, 2014).

Pedagogical work in pre-school institutions is conducted in Slovene, except in ethnically mixed areas, where it is conducted in Italian or bilingually - in Slovene and Hungarian. Slovenia has established an integrated approach to pre-school education, combining education, play and care in pre-school institutions. Comprehensive care for preschool children involves meals, rest and sleep, as well as various educational programmes. The system of pre-school education is regulated in a unified manner (includes children from ages 1-6) (Pre-school Institutions Act, 2010), which means that a child does not have to change the centre.

1.3 Coverage

In the school year 2013/14, 83,700 children are attending preschools. As of 30 September 2013, 83,700 children were enrolled in preschools, which is 75.6% of all children aged between 1 and 5 years. In the programs of the 1st age period were enrolled 53.8% of all children aged up to 3 years and in the programs of the 2nd age period 88.6% of all children aged 3 years until entering elementary school. Nearly a

quarter of all pre-school children remain outside the educational system provided by public and private preschools (Požar Matjašič, 2014).

The data show the end of a period of great boom in enrolment of children in preschools, which was characteristic for the period between 2007 and 2011. For two consecutive years the number of children enrolled in preschools has not been increasing as rapidly as in the previous years. The main reasons for such a situation are the decrease in the number of births, the occupancy of pre-school facilities and the lower enrolment of the youngest children aged 1 to 2 years in preschools.\(^6\)

Despite the fact that some new preschools were opened in school year 2013/14, especially private ones, the data show that in 24 municipalities a fifth of their pre-school children attend preschools in another municipality. The situation is unfavorable in some small municipalities of the Podravska region (Zavrč, Hajdina, Majšperk, Destnik). Majority enrolment (90% or more) in preschools within their own municipality is ensured only by a little less than two thirds of all Slovenian municipalities. Large municipalities such as Ljubljana, Maribor and Novo mesto provide a place in a preschool in their municipality to approximately 98% of all children enrolled in pre-school education.\(^7\)

In the school year 2013/14 pre-school care and education in preschools is provided by about 10,558 professional staff, of whom 5,057 preschool teachers and 5,501 preschool teacher’s assistants. There are 2% men – mostly preschool teachers’ assistants – among professional staff. There are on average 8.1 children per preschool teachers and preschool teachers’ assistants ; in the first age period 6.1 children and in the second age period 9.3 children.\(^8\)

**Table 1: Preschools in Slovenia\(^9\)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>School year 2012/13</th>
<th>School year 2013/14</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>preschools with their units</td>
<td>class units</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>938</td>
<td>4,861</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Public preschools</strong></td>
<td>888</td>
<td>4,696</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Private preschools</strong></td>
<td>50</td>
<td>165</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Table 2: Children in preschools, Slovenia

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>School year 2012/13</th>
<th>School year 2013/14</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>total</td>
<td>1st age period</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>83,090</td>
<td>24,856</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public preschools</td>
<td>80,456</td>
<td>23,947</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Private preschools</td>
<td>2,634</td>
<td>909</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1st age period</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>83,700</td>
<td>23,967</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public preschools</td>
<td>80,626</td>
<td>22,887</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Private preschools</td>
<td>3,074</td>
<td>1,080</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3: Enrolment rate of children attending preschools by age, Slovenia, school year 2013/14

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age of children</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>1 year</th>
<th>2 years</th>
<th>3 years</th>
<th>4 years</th>
<th>5 years</th>
<th>6 or more years</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>75.6</td>
<td>42.1</td>
<td>65.4</td>
<td>83.8</td>
<td>87.8</td>
<td>94.3</td>
<td>5.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Boys</td>
<td>76.3</td>
<td>42.5</td>
<td>65.5</td>
<td>83.9</td>
<td>88.8</td>
<td>94.9</td>
<td>7.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Girls</td>
<td>74.8</td>
<td>41.7</td>
<td>65.5</td>
<td>83.7</td>
<td>86.8</td>
<td>93.8</td>
<td>3.8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1) The calculation is based on the current available data of the population (1 July 2013).

1.4 Fees

Fees paid by parents are set by Centre of Social Work on the basis of the scale classifying parents according to the family income. The amount of payment is determined according to the average monthly income per person. The basis for the payment is the cost of the programme attended by the child. Parents pay not more than 77% of the cost of the pre-school programme attended by their child. If the average monthly income per person (parent) is less than 18% of net average monthly salary, a parent is exempt of payment.12. Parents, who have two or more children included in the preschool, pay for the first child fee, that is determined by the scale for parents’ payment for the programme; for the second child they pay 30% of the fee determined by the scale of parents’ payment (the difference to full payment according the scale is paid by the municipality) and for the third and each subsequent child the parents are exempt of payment (the fee is paid by the municipality)13.

1.5 Qualification and in-service training

Staff in the preschool are the following: preschool teacher (vzgojiteljica), preschool teacher’s assistant (pomočnica vzgojiteljice), head teacher and head’s assistant (ravnateljica in pomočnica ravnateljice), education counsellors (svetovalna služba): psychologist and/or pedagogue and/or social worker and/or other professionals, e.g. organizer of the health hygiene regime. Teacher and assistant can change group every year or the teacher/assistant can take the children to the next age group. This is jointly decided by the pre-school centres and by the parents (Pre-school Institutions Act, 2010).

Regarding the staff to children ratio, two professionals must be present together at least six hours daily in a class of the first age group, and in the class of the second age group two professionals must be present together at least four hours daily (Preschool Institutions Act, 2010).

Professional qualifications for preschool staff are following: As initial training for preschool teacher, since 1994, a 3-year higher education course of Preschool education in Faculty of Education is needed or first cycle university study programme of Preschool Education on Faculty Education (from 2009/2010) is needed. Adequate qualification is also university degree from some other field (pedagogy, art, humanities, sociology), with a specialization in pre-primary education. Preschool teacher can also have from 2009/2010 (Bologna) initial training for preschool teacher. Preschool teacher's assistant was introduced to the preschools in 1996. Required initial training for preschool teacher's assistant is upper secondary vocational school in the field of preschool education (4-year secondary education) or upper secondary general school with additional course of preschool education (Požar Matjašič, 2014).

In 2008, childminders at home were introduced. To become a childminder, one has to receive accreditation at the MESS. Required qualification for childminder is upper secondary school (vocational or general). Till 2014, there are 277 registered childminders (Požar Matjašič, 2014).

Professional staff have right to continuing professional development. This is their professional right and duty and is also necessary for promotion. Every person has right to 5 days training per year or 15 days every three years for professional development (in jobs requiring at least secondary education; for the rest of the employees, at least 2 days a year or 6 days every three years) (Collective agreement for education in the Republic of Slovenia, 2013). Goals of in-service trainings are: professional development, personal growth, improvement in quality, efficiency of the educational process (Požar Matjašič, 2014). In-service trainings are provided by faculties, Educational Research Institute, National Education Institute of the Republic of Slovenia, Institute of the Republic of Slovenia for Vocational Education and Training, Slovenian Institute for Adult Education or providers of public educational programs authorized by the Minister (Rules on in-service training of educational professionals, 2009).
Table 4: Professional staff in preschools, Slovenia, school year 2013/14\textsuperscript{14}

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Men</th>
<th>Women</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>11,379</td>
<td>261</td>
<td>11,118</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Preschool teachers - total</td>
<td>5,057</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>5,008</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>in programs of the 1\textsuperscript{st} age period</td>
<td>1,833</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>1,825</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>in programs of the 2\textsuperscript{nd} age period</td>
<td>3,224</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>3,183</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Preschool teacher’s assistants - total</td>
<td>5,501</td>
<td>180</td>
<td>5,321</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>in programs of the 1\textsuperscript{st} age period</td>
<td>2,202</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>2,139</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>in programs of the 2\textsuperscript{nd} age period</td>
<td>3,299</td>
<td>117</td>
<td>3,182</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Management staff</td>
<td>374</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>360</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advisers</td>
<td>143</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>141</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other professional personnel</td>
<td>304</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>288</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1.6 Quality guidelines

Monitoring-evaluation of preschools is executed by different bodies regarding their field of expertise. School inspection within the Ministry (MESS) is responsible for monitoring the normative and legislative level in the programmes. Health Inspectorate within the Ministry responsible for health is responsible for monitoring health issues connected with preschool programmes. The National Education Institute is responsible for counselling and professional development - for organizing and conducting seminars, thematic conferences, study groups etc.

Director of the preschool is responsible for (self) evaluation of the staff. The area of self-evaluation is proposed at the kindergarten level and is part of the Annual Working Plan (UNESCO, 2006; Požar Matjašič, 2014).

2. Brief presentation of the ECEC services

2.1 Curriculum

The Curriculum for pre-school institutions (approved in March 1999) is a national document, which represents a scientific basis for preschool work. The objective of the curriculum is to enhance the respect for human and children’s rights and to accept and take into account the diversity of children. Each child is an active participant in the process, who gains new knowledge and skills by exploring, experimenting and making choices. The basic emphasis is placed on the educational process as well as on the entire interaction and experiences, from which the child learns.

The preschool curriculum also represents expert groundwork for:
- instructions for curriculum implementation in classrooms with Roma children,
- instructions for curriculum implementation in preschools from bilingual areas,
- instructions for curriculum implementation for children with special needs.15

The objectives, contents and activities are designed separately for the first (1-3 years old) and the second (3-6 years old) age-group of children. For the sake of better transparency, they are divided into various fields; however, the suggested curriculum themes extend over the stringent limits of a single field and are placed into the context of children's every-day life in pre-school institutions.

The Curriculum for Pre-School Institutions (Kurikulum za vrtce, 1999) defines six areas of activities: movement, language, art, nature, society and mathematics. It defines also the global objectives and the objectives of individual areas of activity, examples of activities for individual age groups and the role of adults. The curriculum does not specify the skills, which the children should master at the completion of the individual age period. The objectives of each field represent the framework in which the pre-school teacher chooses the contents and the activity in order to achieve the objectives. The curriculum emphasises that the various methods and approaches to activities involving pre-school children must take into account the diversity of the age group and enable the integration of various fields of activity. With various methods and through play, the pre-school teacher stimulates and motivates the children to use various strategies and tools in their search for answers.

2.2 Learning environment

The spatial standards in Slovenian preschools are defined in “Rules on norms and minimal technical conditions for premises and equipment of pre-school institutions”. According to article 19 and 20 of the mentioned rules, classrooms are usually connected to the main area. In each classroom, it should be able to set up several playing centres for smaller groups of children or individual work. The recommended floor plans should be dynamic. The child care area for children younger than one year is designed as a compartment of the classroom. The premises are required to offer 4 m² or at least 3 m² of indoor space per child. The indoor space includes all surfaces for educational activities for children in the building of the preschool institution, e.g. the classroom, additional area for children’s activities and the central area. The indoor playing surface does not include the floor surface, where furniture has been set up (e.g. heavy cupboards), the specialized area for physiotherapeutic exercises and resting in the developmental section and the surface, intended for children’s changing rooms and defined in article 20 of the mentioned rules, if it is part of the central area.

The additional premises for children’s activities can be used for the enlargement of classrooms and the central area or can be rearranged into several smaller additional areas for children’s activities. The basis for calculating the playing area is 22 children per classroom (Rules on norms and minimal technical conditions for premises and equipment of pre-school institutions, 2000)\(^1\).

An important part of the curriculum, which emphasises the child’s right to choose, is the organisation of space and time, which follows some important principles:

- organisation of a healthy, safe and comfortable area (inside and outside premises),
- ensuring privacy and intimacy,
- ensuring flexible and stimulating premises (classroom organisation should change according to children’s age and the activities that take place in the classroom).

The organisation of preschool premises should be flexible enough to enable group activities, which take place in the entire group simultaneously, and smaller group activities, while it should also provide areas, where individual children can retreat to for some time (a “house, castle, secret corner or a tenth”).

It is recommended that each classroom also has various screens, improvised room dividers, for example low cupboards and shelves, so that the room can be separated into several smaller parts, centres, which are set up and rearranged according to activities. Children can cooperate in this decision-making process. The playing centres should be organised in a way that enables a good overview of the classroom and does not hinder the movement in the classroom. The classroom has a good overview when children stand up and see their peers in other centres and when adults can take a quick look at the room and find each child immediately. Children

\(^1\) http://pisrs.si/Pis.web/pregledPredpisa?id=PRAV3140#, 24.6, 2014)
should move freely from one centre to another. For example, they should be able to access the art centre without having to go through the home centre. Arranging passages around centres is important as it provides children easy access to centres and enables them to play in a relatively calm atmosphere. The passages and the entrances into playing centres should give children enough space to move freely and to carry their own products and materials. Flexibility is the key importance of activity centres. If the classroom has little space, we should only arrange two activity centres, which we change from time to time. This is no ideal plan for spatial planning; however, having a few centers and changing them is more acceptable than having a little bit of everything in one classroom with a lack of premises and materials. In this way, children could actually be creative.

The full time playing centres or the classrooms in general should always offer various toys and other unstructured playing materials (e.g. mirrors, boxes, fabric, clothes for role playing), books (for various fields of activities), pictures (artistic, photographs, illustrations) and sculptural works, which should all be kept at children’s fingertips (in open cupboards, on shelves). The playing centres with water, sand and other materials should also offer protective clothing. Interest and activity centres are divided by low, open shelves with materials, always available to children. This classroom arrangement enables children to develop their sense of initiative, autonomy and social competence. Since playing centres are available every day, children know which materials they can choose from and where to find them. Consistent space organisation gives them the opportunity to anticipate, where they would like to play and what they would like to do with the available materials. Children can rely on the availability of materials and can therefore focus on the playing process and the interaction during it.

Preschool classrooms and hallways should be decorated with children’s products that reveal their individuality and creativity and with reproductions of artwork. The pursuit of the principle of openness or flexibility and choice depends on the quality and type of the premises, indoor and outdoor spatial arrangements, accessibility of outdoor premises, the number and diversity of indoor areas. All this co-decides on the quality of children’s preschool life (Kurikulum za vrtce, 1999).

2.3 Family involvement

According to the curriculum (Kurikulum za vrtce, 1999), the cooperation of preschools and parents represents an important quality aspect of preschool education, as it contributes greatly to an appropriate complementarity of family and institutional education.

The relationship of preschool and parents is all about sharing responsibilities and powers.

The institution should offer parents its services without compromising their privacy. Preschools should respect the culture, identity, language, world-views, values, beliefs, habits and customs of children’s parents, while parents should respect the limits of the co-decision procedure and should not interfere with the professional competence of the institution.

Parents have the right to participate in the planning of life and work in preschool and in classroom and can, in agreement with the preschool teacher, cooperate in
educational work, given that they respect the professional autonomy of the preschool. When coming to preschool, in the morning or in the afternoon, they can stay in the classroom for a shorter or longer period of time and in agreement with the teacher take part in various activities.

It is of extreme importance that parents have the right to gradually introduce their child into preschool and to discuss the most acceptable way of adapting their child to preschool. Parents should also have access to the preschool’s publication, which includes information about the law and appropriate rules. The notice boards in front of the classrooms inform parents about the activities and life in preschool.

On institutional level, preschool is obliged to collaborate with parents in two ways: Preschool is obliged to form the Parents’ council, a consulting body that includes one parents’ representative from each group. The Council suggests above-standard programs, gives its opinion on the draft Programme for the Development of kindergarten and the annual work plan, discusses the reports of the Director - educational issues, deals with complaints from parents relating to education - educational work and performs other duties in accordance with law and other regulations.

The second form of obligatory collaboration with parents is the Preschool council. This is a governing body that includes representatives of the preschool (5 representatives), municipality (3 representatives) and parents (3 representatives) (Organisation and Financing of Education Act, 2007).

2.4 Professional development of staff

Members of professional staff have the right to continuous professional development. This is their professional right and duty and is also necessary for their promotion. Every person has the right to 5 days of training per year or 15 days every three years for professional development (in jobs requiring at least secondary education; for the rest of the employees, at least 2 days a year or 6 days every three years) (Collective Agreement for Education in the Republic of Slovenia, 2013). The goals of in-service trainings are: professional development, personal growth, improvement in quality, efficiency of the educational process (Požar Matjašič, 2014). In-service trainings are provided by faculties, Educational Research Institute, National Education Institute of the Republic of Slovenia, Institute of the Republic of Slovenia for Vocational Education and Training, Slovenian Institute for Adult Education or providers of public educational programs authorized by the Ministry (Rules on in-service training of educational professionals, 2009).

2.5 Governance/management

The founder of public preschools is the municipality, while private preschools can be established by Slovenian and foreign natural or legal persons. After the preschool has been registered in the company register as a legal person, it must also be registered in the register of public educational programme implementers, run by the ministry. The application for the register is handed in by the local community – the
founder of the public preschool or the preschool itself, while private preschools must apply by themselves.

Public preschools implement the national Curriculum for Preschool Institutions, approved in 1999 by the Council of Experts of the Republic of Slovenia for General Education.

Private preschools have a different programme than public ones. The private preschool’s programme is defined by its founder according to article 13 of the Pre-School Institutions Act; however, it can also choose to implement the national programme of public preschools. Before the implementation of the programme, the practice of the private preschool needs to get a positive opinion from the Council of Experts of the Republic of Slovenia for General Education. Private preschool institutions, which implement their programme according to special pedagogic principles (Steiner, Decroly, Montessori and similar), are given a positive opinion once the Council of Experts establishes that the programme has been approved by an appropriate international institution.

Just like public preschools, private preschools can also start operating only after being registered by the ministry. For the registration, certain conditions regarding educators, premises and equipment need to be fulfilled. The municipality can, if required, award a concession to the private preschool. In this case, the private preschool has a public-service mission and implements the same programme as public preschools, while a special concession contract defines the amount of funding, provided by the municipality. Private preschools without concession can acquire the right to be financed from local communities, if they fulfil the following conditions: they implement at least a half-day programme, they have enough children for at least one preschool classroom, they have enough preschool teachers and assistants for programme implementation according to the law and regulations and they are available for all children (article 34 of the Pre-School Institutions Act).

The type and number of preschool groups and the number of children in them is decided by the preschool with the consent of the municipality, the founder of the preschool. Classrooms are formed before the beginning of the school year for the period of one school year. Children of the second age-group are those, who will turn at least 3 years old by the end of the calendar year. When deciding on the age range, one must consider the calendar year. The number of children in one classroom must also be adapted to the size of the playing area per child, which is defined in the rules for premises and equipment of pre-school institutions.

The preschool’s highest managing authority is the public preschool council, consisting from: three founder’s representatives, five employee’s representatives and three parents’ representatives.

17 (http://www.mizs.gov.si/si/delovna_podrocnja/direktorat_za_predsolsko_vzgojo_in_osnovno_solstvo/predsolska_vzgoja/#c17792, 1.7.2014)
Preschools with at least 10 groups of children are managed by the director, who is a pedagogical leader and a management authority at the same time. The director’s weekly working hours should include a fix number of hours spent on direct work with children or counselling work, depending on the number of groups (a director with 14 or more groups of children is not obliged to work with children). The director can appoint one or more assistant directors (up to 3), depending on the number of preschool groups. The organisational preschool unit is managed by the director, who is also a pedagogical leader. The leader of the preschool unit can be a preschool teacher or a counselling worker. The director can add this task to the duties of the assistant director. In preschools, which are part of a primary school or other institutions, the director assigns the pedagogical and organisational management of the preschool to his/her assistant director.

Other preschool experts are: counselling worker, food organiser, organiser of the health hygienic system (60 groups of children), administration and accounting personnel, kitchen personnel, laundry personnel cleaning and other technical personnel. (Rules on norms and personnel requirements for the performance of preschool education activity, 2005)

The opening hours of pre-school centres in larger cities are up to 11 hours and are adjusted to suit the needs of working parents. They are opened every weekday throughout the year except Saturdays, Sundays and public holidays. The day programme lasts from 6 to 9 hours and can take place in the morning, in the afternoon, daily or in shifts. The half day programme lasts from 4 to 6 hours and can take place in the morning, in the afternoon, or in shifts. They are both intended for children aged 1 to 6 and include education, care and meals (Pre-school Institutions Act, 2010).

2.5 Possible innovations to be explored based on state of the art ECEC services related to the 5 dimensions

When planning and building preschools in Slovenia or during the final evaluation of preschool premises, the «voice of the user» is still not heard enough. Therefore, this issue stands out as an important (new) developmental theme, which should be given more systematic attention in the future.

Our project partner preschool sees the opportunity for further development especially in the fields of professional development and cooperation with families. In the field of family-partnerships, they would like to seek new solutions for working with families. It is necessary to consider, why we would like to look for new solutions and for reasons for new cooperation. In this context, the preschool is expanding the perception of its own mission: for whom is the preschool intended – for children (and parents), who are already attending preschool, or for everyone? In this perspective they wish to upgrade their relationship with families and the local environment.

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18 http://www.pisrs.si/Pis.web/pregledPredpisa?id=PRAV7036, 1.7.2014)
The next challenge, stressed by our partner preschool, is professional development. They have pointed out the problem of re-training (when a person with a random educational background decides to enter a re-training programme for a preschool teacher’s assistant) and the problem of programme quality. Another challenge for them was the lack of feedback from the faculty and the poor linkage between theory and practice; the transfer of theory from faculties to preschool practice is not fluent enough.

The curriculum represents an additional challenge. Although the Curriculum for pre-School Institutions has been in force since 1999 and although preschools have already handed in suggestions for amendments and changes, the curriculum has still not been evaluated or revised. However, the preschool gave a positive opinion about the possibility to form their own preschool curriculum as part of the project.
3. Brief description of the VVZ KEKEC GROSUPLJE preschool
(developed with the support of Majda Fajdiga, Director)

VVZ Kekec Grosuplje is a preschool educational institution, established by the Grosuplje municipality.

The preschool offers a daily 10 to 11-hour programme. Currently, 760 children aged from 1 to 6 years are enrolled in our preschool.

There are 9 preschool units in and around Grosuplje. Children are divided into 40 groups in the following way:

1. 12 groups of the I. age group (1 - 3 years),
2. 27 groups of the II. age group (3 - 6 years) and
3. 1 combined group.

The daily programme is implemented according to the objectives and principles of the National Preschool Curriculum, which includes:

4. basic principles and objectives of preschool education,
5. theoretical knowledge of child development and learning,
6. guidelines and conditions for work,
7. activity fields with the role of the adults.

The curriculum was first introduced in year 1999/2000. In the same year, the preschool also joined the Step by Step methodology, which was awarded the status of the implementing variant of the preschool curriculum.

OUR PRESCHOOL’S VISION:
“USING KNOWLEDGE, INTEGRATION AND MUTUAL RESPECT OF PEOPLE AND THE ENVIRONMENT IN ORDER TO PROVIDE CHILDREN A SAFE AND HAPPY CHILDHOOD.”

PRESCHOOL’S PRIORITIES:

EDUCATION FOR A SUSTAINABLE FUTURE
- FIT MOVEMENT - International project Fit Slovenia (Fit school of health, team harmony, the role of movement and sports activities for the prevention of diseases, Fit methodology, Fit didactic movement games, Fit sensual path).
- ECOLOGICAL PRESCHOOL AS A WAY OF LIFE – Ecological School, a national project (conserving natural resources: energy and water, health and a balanced diet, differentiated waste collection, concern for health and food, setting up ecological notice boards and centres, caring for a neat preschool environment, reading for life (eco picture books and fairytales), introduction of eco activities to broader environment, eco logo and eco preschool anthem, celebrating the eco day, developing positive mutual relations, our garden, toys and instruments from waste materials, natural and cultural heritage).
SUCESSFUL WORKING ATMOSPHERE – Inclusion of all employees, adjusting to changes, keeping the dynamics in culture and atmosphere, monitoring responses during atmosphere changes, the power of support, trust.

Education for sustainable development and environmental education do not represent a new preschool assignment or task, but a different perspective, focused on new content and working methods.

The emphasis is placed on active learning, which enables children to perceive mutual relations and the sense of belonging to a community. Problems are addressed and solved critically and efficiently, the content has new priorities.

We are aware that the children of today will make important decisions in the near future, therefore we are already giving them the opportunity to use the eco preschool project activities in order to actively influence life in preschool and to implement the sustainable development principles.

ACTIVE LEARNING IN PRESCHOOL
The project was implemented in cooperation with the Educational Research Institute from Ljubljana. Due to professional training, preschool teachers and their assistants were able to: use approaches that stimulate critical thinking of children, channel children into using their knowledge creatively in new situations, consider children's interests and needs and encourage the cooperation between children and adults.

Educators of children, aged from 2 to 6 years, participated in this project.

INTEGRATION OF CHILDREN WITH SPECIAL NEEDS
Integration of children with special needs represents an integral part of preschool education. The preschool teacher, who offers additional expert help, implements the programme, adjusted for children with special needs. Another important element of professional help is counselling and guidance for parents and educators. Efficient preschool integration contributes to efficient primary school integration.

PROMOTING A HEALTHY DIET
The goal of organised school meals is to develop appropriate eating habits, ensure a sufficient daily intake of nutrients and address the energetic and physiological needs of children. Preschool meals should be healthy, safe and balanced and should, in accordance with minimum standards and norms, cover 70 % of energetic and physiological needs of a child. Food is also an important curricular and learning element. Changes in nutrition are introduced with the help of active learning techniques.

COOPERATION WITH PARENTS
Group work: teacher-parents conferences before the child starts attending preschool, classroom teacher-parents meetings, group events, celebrations, workshops, professional lectures and discussions with professionals, “School for parents”, tea party, etc.

Individual work: individual discussions before the child starts attending preschool, the presence of parents during child’s introduction into preschool, exchanging short
information in every-day contacts with educators, monthly teacher-parent meetings for longer and more thorough discussions about the child, written information about current preschool work and life.

**COOPERATION WITH THE ENVIRONMENT**
Our preschool intensively cooperates with the local environment, takes active part in events, exhibitions and cooperates with organisations and institutions in order to enrich our own and local programme.

**PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT OF EMPLOYEES AND MENTORING**
We are aware that professional and personal development of employees is of key importance for the implementation of quality programmes and approaches, therefore we encourage our employees to regularly attend trainings (related to their priority tasks and their individual interests), professional discussions, to exchange opinions and cooperate at good practice consultations, in study groups and regional workshops and to transfer their own knowledge to their colleagues. We regularly monitor classroom work through collegial teacher observations, exemplary teaching sessions and introduce our activities to expert public. We constantly reflect upon our work and evaluate it. Furthermore, our knowledge and experiences are intensively transferred to younger generations by mentoring interns and students.

**COOPERATION WITH PRESCHOOLS FROM SLOVENIA AND ABROAD**
During the last few years, we have had several exchanges and preschool visits from Slovenia and abroad (Idrija, Beltinci, experts from USA and Russia) and we were able to visit some preschools ourselves (Matulji, Goriška Brda, preschools in Ireland, Sardinia and in Athens).

**DEVELOPMENTAL RESEARCH WORK**
The developmental research work takes place through common research projects with the Developmental Research Centre for Educational Initiatives “Step by Step” from the Educational Research Institute in Ljubljana, through innovation projects in cooperation with the National Educational Institute of the Republic of Slovenia, as well as through networks and projects of the National School for Leadership in Education and some other institutions.

**SUCCESSFUL WORKING ATMOSPHERE**
We continuously plan and implement activities, which contribute to better mutual relations and working atmosphere (interactive workshops, pre-new year meetings, group trips and hikes, etc.).

**COOPERATION WITH THE FOUNDING MUNICIPALITY**
We are constantly in touch with our founding municipality. We inform them about our practice, the course of activities, we invite them to events, celebrations, and we coordinate employment in preschool, the annual work plan and the financial plan. Together, we plan our material needs and investments into buildings and the environment.

**LEARNING ENVIRONMENT AND PARTNERSHIP WITH PARENTS** are the two elements, which we would like to develop further, since we have the most influence on them. We are convinced that we could improve the quality of work in the mentioned fields by gaining new knowledge, information and experience.
I. Bibliography


Web pages
