

# 20<sup>th</sup> International Scientific Conference of the Landscape Governance College Grm Novo mesto Rural Areas in Transformation: Challenges, Opportunities and Innovations 5 november 2026

In a period marked by global changes, the green transition, digitalisation, demographic shifts and growing challenges in food security, European rural areas are once again moving to the forefront of discussions on sustainable development. As a region with exceptional natural, cultural and economic potential, Slovenian rural space is a place where questions of innovation, food production, environmental protection, quality of life and new economic opportunities intersect.

The 20<sup>th</sup> International Scientific Conference of the Landscape Governance College Grm Novo mesto will bring together researchers, practitioners and institutional representatives, opening a space for interdisciplinary dialogue on the key issues shaping the future of rural areas.

### Key Questions of the Conference

- How are rural areas adapting to demographic, environmental and technological changes?
- How can food safety and microbiological quality be ensured within local supply chains?
- How can rural economic development, tourism, social cohesion and quality of life be strengthened in rural areas?
- How do agricultural, environmental and development policies shape the future of Slovenian rural areas?
- Which innovative partnerships, knowledge systems and technologies can promote sustainable development?
- How can cultural heritage, natural resources and evolving practices come together to shape new rural identities?



# Thematic Sections

## 1. Slovenian Rural Areas: A Treasury of Tangible and Intangible Heritage

Section Chair: assist. Prof. dr. Alenka Divjak

Slovenian rural areas have greatly contributed to the preservation of Slovenian identity on this unique piece of land; therefore, they deserve extensive scientific attention. The Landscape Governance College Grm Novo mesto has made a forward-looking decision to broaden its conference with themes in the social sciences and humanities thereby opening possibilities for collaboration with institutions and experts who engage in academic research on various aspects of Slovenian cultural and national identity: literature, language, history, education, ethnology, customs, culinary heritage, housing and clothing culture, and other expressions of material and intangible heritage. We invite contributions addressing these topics, as well as related themes that enhance the understanding of rural Slovenia as a bearer of national identity and cultural heritage.

## 2. Socio-Developmental Aspects of Rural Areas

Section Chair: prof. dr. Uroš Pinterič

In the 21st century, rural areas often face developmental challenges that differ from dominant urban notions of progress. This section welcomes contributions that discuss the current socio-economic significance of rural areas as living environments, with particular attention to issues of repopulation and re-ruralisation. We encourage contributions addressing social differences between urban and rural settings, economic challenges and opportunities in rural regions, the role of information and communication technologies, and the importance of rural areas as foundations of societal self-sufficiency. Understanding demographic trends, migration, economic restructuring and changing community needs is essential for strengthening resilient rural communities. This section aims to facilitate a comprehensive dialogue on how public policies, local initiatives and innovative approaches can support vibrant, connected and future-oriented rural regions.



### **3. Circular Models for the Development of Contemporary Rural Tourism**

**Section Chair: Assoc. prof. dr. Lea-Marija Colarič-Jakše**

As rural areas undergo social, environmental and economic transformations, tourism is becoming a key contributor to their long-term vitality. Yet traditional approaches to rural tourism development are no longer sufficient. For destinations to remain sustainable, attractive and resilient, rural communities increasingly rely on circular models that bring together local resources, knowledge, community engagement and innovation into regenerative systems. This section invites contributions that critically examine and creatively explore how circular economy principles can shape a new paradigm of rural tourism. We are particularly interested in insights that illuminate how local value chains, regenerative practices, digital tools and innovative business models can strengthen community well-being, protect cultural and natural landscapes, and support long-term destination development. We welcome interdisciplinary perspectives, theoretical reflections, empirical studies, methodological approaches and examples of good practice. By bringing together diverse viewpoints, the section seeks to open a shared space for imagining how circular principles can guide the future of rural tourism – a future built on renewal, cooperation, creativity and knowledge-driven development.

### **4. Food Safety and Microbiological Challenges in Rural Areas**

**Section Chair: Assist. Prof. dr. Mateja Ožanič Bučar**

Food safety in rural environments is a key element of consumer health, the strengthening of local food supply chains and the long-term sustainability of agricultural systems. The quality of soil, water, plants and animals directly influences the microbiological safety of food, while climate change, traditional production methods and shifting dietary habits introduce a range of new challenges. This section invites contributions that address the microbiological quality and safety of plant- and animal-based food, good agricultural practices, risks associated with small-scale and traditional farming systems, and the impact of processing and storage methods on food safety. We also welcome research focusing on pathogen monitoring and control, the effects of climate change on food safety, the use of emerging technologies for quality assessment, and the role of education and awareness-raising in ensuring safe food production in rural areas. Contributions exploring the intersections between microbiology, rural development, sustainable food systems and responsible production practices are especially encouraged, helping to build a comprehensive understanding of how safe and resilient rural food systems can be achieved.



## 5. Innovation and Sustainability in Crop Production and Herbal Cultivation

Section Chair: assist. Petra Jeršin, Msc in Hort.

Rural areas offer numerous opportunities for the development of sustainable practices in crop production and herbal cultivation. These activities can significantly contribute to local self-sufficiency, the preservation of cultural landscapes and the strengthening of social cohesion within rural communities. As agriculture and rural economies evolve, the integration of modern technologies, ecological methods and traditional knowledge becomes essential for improving productivity, enhancing biodiversity and revitalising rural regions. This section invites contributions that explore sustainable production methods for herbs and speciality crops, innovative seed approaches, and cultivation practices that support local food systems and self-sufficiency. We are also interested in research on market strategies that enhance the visibility and competitiveness of local products, as well as digital tools and smart technologies that optimise production, monitor growth conditions and improve the distribution of herbal and plant-based products. In addition, the section encourages studies on the social and economic impacts of herbal cultivation as a driver of rural regeneration, job creation and the strengthening of local identities. Through interdisciplinary and practice-oriented insights, the section aims to highlight how sustainable and responsible plant production can contribute to the long-term development and vitality of rural communities.

**Save the Date: 5 November 2026!**

**Conference organiser:** Landscape Governance College Grm Novo mesto.

**Conference format:** The conference will be held in Slovenian and English and organised in a hybrid format - onsite at the Landscape Governance College Grm Novo mesto, Ljubljanska cesta 28, 8000 Novo mesto, Slovenia and **online via MS Teams**.

**Registration:** Registration for the conference is required and should be completed via e-mail address: [info@vsgrm.unm.si](mailto:info@vsgrm.unm.si)

**Submission of Contributions:** Contributions should be submitted by 20 August 2026 via e-mail address: [info@vsgrm.unm.si](mailto:info@vsgrm.unm.si)

**Publication:** Selected articles will be published in the scientific journal **Journal of Landscape Governance**.

We look forward to meeting you at this landmark 20<sup>th</sup> international conference as we explore the future of rural development.

**Participation in the conference is free of charge.**

