

# **Integral Conceptual Framework for a new Economic and Social Reality in Slovenia and Europe**

**Dr. Darja Piciga**

Citizens' Initiative for an Integral Green Slovenia  
[darja.piciga@gmail.com](mailto:darja.piciga@gmail.com), <http://integralna-zelena-slovenija.si/>  
Ministry of the Environment and Spatial Planning  
[darja.piciga@gov.si](mailto:darja.piciga@gov.si)

## **Abstract**

There are a number of integral approaches that have helped shift our global perspective towards a more integral viewpoint over the past 200 years. On the other hand, the awareness that humankind urgently needs more integrated and holistic approaches for coping with increasingly complex global and local challenges, that conventional “silo” thinking and doing has to be overcome, is growing in the context of sustainable development discussions and policy planning. In a unique approach to fuse and upgrade these two paradigms, a new, integral conceptual framework has been developed by Trans4m Center for Integral Development in Geneva: realms of nature and community, culture and spirituality, science and technology, politics and economics are altogether forming an integral, systemic whole and are held together by a “moral core”, a unique expression of the innermost value base that a society considers essential to its being. In cooperation with the Citizens' Initiative for an Integral Green Slovenia this framework has been applied in the innovation ecosystem of the European Union, smartly integrating policies for sustainable development, particularly green economy, social economy and social responsibility.

Keywords: global challenges, integral worlds approach, integral economics, sustainable development, Integral Green Slovenia, smart integration.

## **Integralni konceptualni okvir za novo ekonomsko in socialno realnost v Sloveniji in Evropi**

**Dr. Darja Piciga**

Državljska pobuda za Integralno zeleno Slovenijo  
[darja.piciga@gmail.com](mailto:darja.piciga@gmail.com)  
Ministrstvo za okolje in prostor  
[darja.piciga@gov.si](mailto:darja.piciga@gov.si)

Obstaja veliko integralnih pristopov, ki so v zadnjih 200 letih prispevali k premiku naše globalne perspektive k bolj integralnim pogledom. Hkrati pa v kontekstu razprav o trajnostnem razvoju narašča tudi zavedanje, da človeštvo za soočanje s čedalje bolj kompleksnimi globalnimi in lokalnimi izzivi nujno potrebuje bolj integrativne in celostne pristope in da je potrebno preseči konvencionalno “silosno” mišljenje. V edinstvenem pristopu k združitvi in nadgraditvi teh dveh pristopov je Center za integralni razvoj Trans4m iz Ženeve razvil integralni konceptualni okvir: sfere narave in skupnosti, kulture in duhovnosti, znanosti in tehnologije, politike in ekonomije vse skupaj oblikujejo integralno, sistemsko celoto, povezuje pa jih “moralno jedro” - edinstven izraz za najgloblji vrednotni temelj, ki ga neka družba šteje za bistvenega za svoj obstoj. V sodelovanju z Državljsko pobudo za Integralno zeleno Slovenijo smo ta okvir uporabili v inovacijskem sistemu Evropske unije in pri tem pametno integrirali politike za trajnostni razvoj, zlasti zeleno gospodarstvo, socialno ekonomijo in družbeno odgovornost.

Ključne besede: globalni izzivi, pristop integralnih svetov, integralna ekonomija, trajnostni razvoj, Integralna zelena Slovenija, pametna integracija

## 1 Introduction

There are a number of integral approaches that have helped shift our global perspective towards a more integral viewpoint over the past 200 years. Thinkers like Vladimir Solovyov, Henri Bergson, Alfred North Whitehead, Sri Aurobindo, Teilhard de Chardin, Jean Gebser, Jürgen Habermas and, more recently, Ken Wilber and Don Beck, along with many others, have had a significant impact on shaping such a new viewpoint. Furthermore, in recent decades, we have witnessed an increased global interest in and drive towards higher levels of consciousness and integration, resulting in an understanding that we are witnessing an emergent “Integral Age”. What most of these integral thinkers have in common is an attempt to combine into an integral perspective diverse value orientations that emerged over time and space. The key feature across most approaches is the propagation of a new evolutionary level of human consciousness, enabling humanity to transcend fragmented, isolated perspectives into an integrative one, including all those levels that came before. None of them, though, have been particularly concerned with the economic aspects of society, as we are in this paper, and all adopt a universalistic integral approach, whereby what they propose supposedly applies to all societies.

At the same time, the awareness that humankind urgently needs more integrated and holistic approaches for coping with increasingly complex global and local challenges, that conventional “silo” thinking and doing has to be overcome, is growing in the context of sustainable development discussions and policy planning. In September 2015, at the United Nations summit, world leaders adopted the post-2015 development agenda, called Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, or shortly Agenda 2030 (<https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/>). With the 17 Sustainable Development Goals and 169 targets at its core it is probably the most ambitious agenda in the history of humankind. The SDGs are integrated and indivisible, and they balance the three dimensions of sustainable development: the economic, social and environmental. It is obvious that Agenda 2030 will have to be strongly supported by equally ambitious and integrally framed, holistic, trans-sectoral policies for sustainable development.

Green Economy, one of the twin themes of the Rio+20 conference in 2012 when the process of drafting the Agenda 2030 had started, has become a topic of debate and dialogue in the context of sustainable development and poverty eradication and is increasingly perceived as a vehicle to achieving the social, economic and environmental goals and objectives (UNEP, <http://www.unep.org/rio20/About/GreenEconomy/tabid/101541/Default.aspx>).

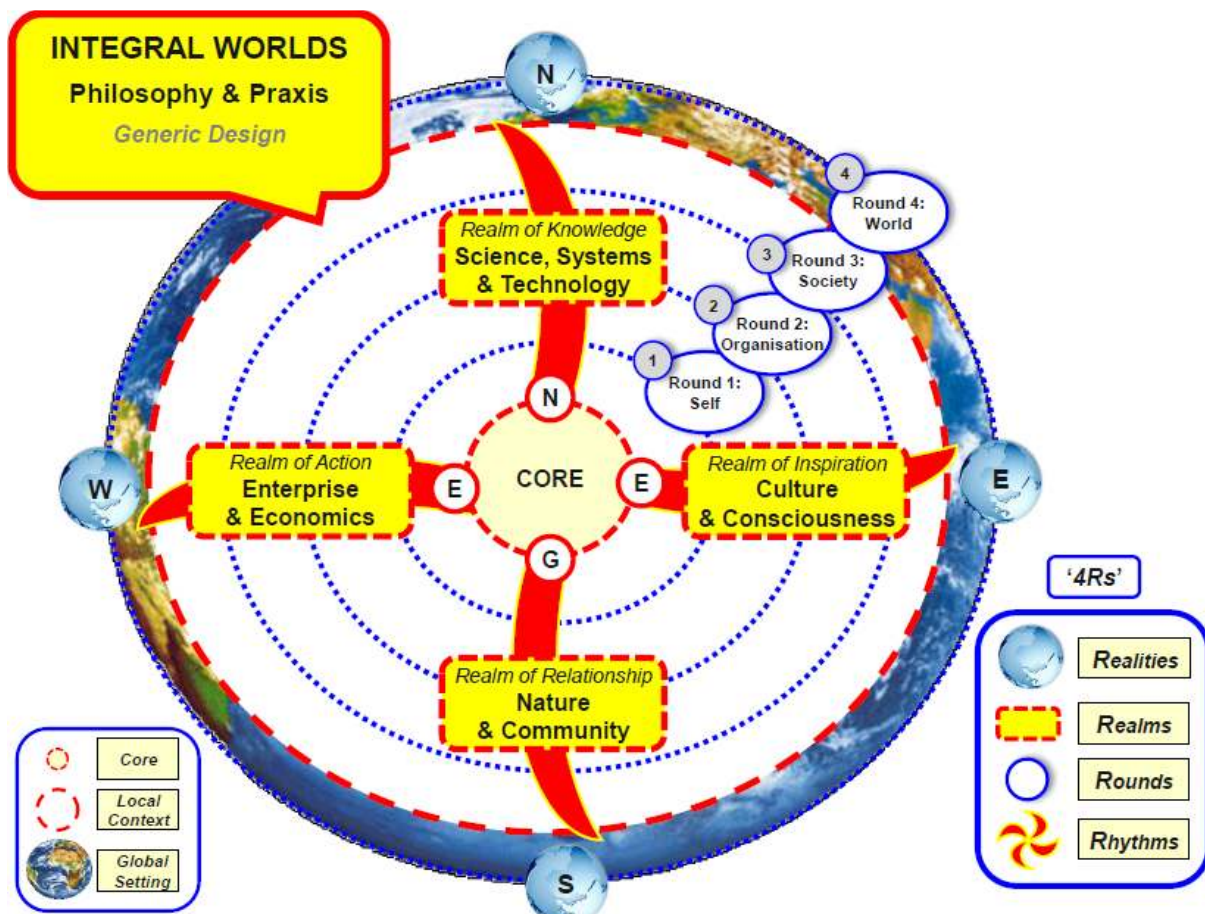
In a unique approach to fuse and upgrade these two paradigms, a new, integral conceptual framework has been developed by Trans4m Center for Integral Development in Geneva and elaborated, *inter alia*, in the realm of economy. In a unique process of co-construction, Trans4m and the Citizens’ Initiative for an Integral Green Slovenia have applied this new framework within the innovation ecosystem of the European Union, on the level of individual sustainable enterprises and local communities, but also on national level, and depict this multidimensional and multi-layered process in the new Gower and Routledge volume *Integral Green Slovenia* (Piciga, Schieffer and Lessem, 2016).

## 2 From Integral Worlds Approach to Integral Green Economy for Slovenia

### 2.1 Moral core as the integrating and inspirational centre of four realms, also in Integral Economics

Integral Worlds is a holistic approach to understanding and consciously evolving human systems, which serves to address imbalances – within an individual, organisation, community and or society, but also within specific fields, such as economics, enterprise, human development at large etc. (Schieffer and Lessem, 2014, p. 93 – 94). By “integral” Alexander Schieffer and Ronnie Lessem mean the dynamic, integrated inclusion of all dimensions (including natural ones) of a human system, be it on an individual (species), organisational, communal or societal level. There are four core dimensions that all such systems share and that need to be considered equally if the entire integrated system is to flourish. Mapping these four dimensions in a circular way (see Figure 1) they distinguish between the “southern” realm of nature and community; the “eastern” realm of culture and spirituality; the “northern” realm of science, systems and technology; and the “western” realm of finance and enterprise, all related to Slovenia as a particular society. All of these realms are held together by what they termed a “moral core”, a unique expression of the innermost value base that a society considers as essential to its being, ideally to be embodied in its overall polity.

Figure 1: Integral Worlds Approach: Generic Design



Source: Schieffer & Lessem, 2014, p. 93.

The *Integral Worlds* framework incorporates an inbuilt transformational rhythm, which not only makes the entire approach dynamic but also serves as a rhythm to enable you to actively engage in building an integral organisation, community, society, .... This rhythm is called the GENE (an acronym for Grounding, Emerging, Navigating, Effecting), representing a fourfold spiralling force, activating the entire model. The fourfold GENE rhythm functions within the four levels of each realm, as well as in between the four realms.

Economy is regarded as just one of the integral parts of society - one that needs to be fully “re-embedded” into society. Thereby, the Integral Economics (Lessem & Schieffer, 2010) seeks to counteract what we often witness economically around the world - global economy that acts as an almost independent, and hence often unrelated, and even destructive force on a social and environmental level. Based on the recognition that the mainstream economic paradigm is largely to be blamed for the present imbalances in relation to sustainable development goals of the humankind, the present paper focuses on implementation of the generic *Integral Worlds* model in constructing new integral and green economy as elaborated in *Integral Green Slovenia* book (Piciga, Schieffer & Lessem, 2016) and introduced in *Integral Economics* (Lessem & Schieffer, 2010).

While, according to Lessem and Schieffer, we see the GENE as an iterative, ever-unfolding rhythmical force, we nevertheless start the transformational process in the south, thereby beginning with a conscious grounding in a given context and issue, before we then engage in its transformation. The transformative GENE process for an Integral Economy begins with Grounding (G) in a particular nature and community, to surface key economic developmental needs and potentials. We then progress towards Emergence (E), tapping into the cultural creativity of a particular economy and society, inviting and generating insights to respond to economic challenges and aspirations, by also tapping into the cultural potential for the economic renewal of a society. In activating its own cultural capacities, a society does, on the one hand, affirm its own cultural uniqueness, but it also, on the other hand, invites other cultural perspectives from outside, to broaden its own co-evolution. The insights gained from the cultural space are then further expressed and developed in a process of Navigating (N) new economic knowledge and concepts, in the “northern” realm of science, systems and technology that is particular to that society, Slovenia in our case here. It is here that a society shapes, in explicit terms, its own socio-economic perspective, in touch with its natural and communal grounds, and resourced by its cultural capacities. Such new economic theory is then ultimately Effected (E) and practically realised via a new form of enterprise and/or economic policy. The entire GENE process is connected to an inspirational and integrating (I) moral core, helping a particular society to make, together with others, a collective (US) contribution to new economic thought and practice.

To summarise: we work purposefully through each of the four economic realms and gradually through all of them in a south–east–north–west fashion (starting with nature and ending with enterprise)—informed by the wealth of the moral economic core. A society needs to begin its process of integral economic development by securing “southern” nature-based economic self-sufficiency, before it focuses on the other, “eastern”, “northern” and “western”, economic functions. Thereafter it needs to respectively include the building up of a culture-based developmental economy (ensuring that the economy is aligned with the cultural evolution of the society), a knowledge-based social economy (aligning its socio-economic structures with technology-driven knowledge systems) and a life-based living economy (reconnecting finance and economic performance measurement to natural and human well-being).

We shall briefly reveal in the next subchapter how the integral philosophy is applied to the Slovenian economy and society.

## 2.2 Integral Green Slovenia: a social innovation for sustainability with social responsibility at its core

*Integral Green Slovenia: Towards a Social, Knowledge- and Value-Based Economy and Society at the Heart of Europe*, edited by Darja Piciga, Alexander Schieffer and Ronnie Lessem (2016), is the second book in the Integral Green Society and Economy series. It tells the unique story of a society pursuing a newly holistic and green approach to economics. The story is framed by real-life stories of integral communities and organisations on a path of social innovation for sustainability. These good practices (about 20 of them) and corresponding conceptual framework are in the book presented by 43 Slovenian authors in collaboration with the series editors.

In genuine application of the theory of integral economy and integral development, they draw on the Slovenian history and on each other – from grassroots developments in organic food self-sufficiency to the remarkable case of Pipistrel, a world leader in ultra-light aircraft design and construction; from Slovenia’s cooperative movement in the beginning of the 20th century to one of the country’s most prominent high-tech manufacturers, Domel, co-owned and co-managed by employees; from the socially innovative Kindergarten Slovenska Bistrica, widely recognised for its holistic approach to child education and community engagement, to an integral consideration of strategic environmental assessment – altogether geared to take Slovenia forward as an integral society and economy. Among successful models from the past, sustainable forestry, common land management and classical cooperatives are highlighted. Municipalities Solčavsko, Šentrupert and Poljčane, regional development model of the Heart of Slovenia, Biotechnical Centre Naklo, Institute Metron, green social enterprise Tekstilnica and other distinguished practice cases are inviting, together with all co-authors and co-editors of the book, a larger audience to actively participate in the re-making of Slovenia’s economy and in the creation of a societal role model involving a culturally authentic approach to sustainable economic and societal development.

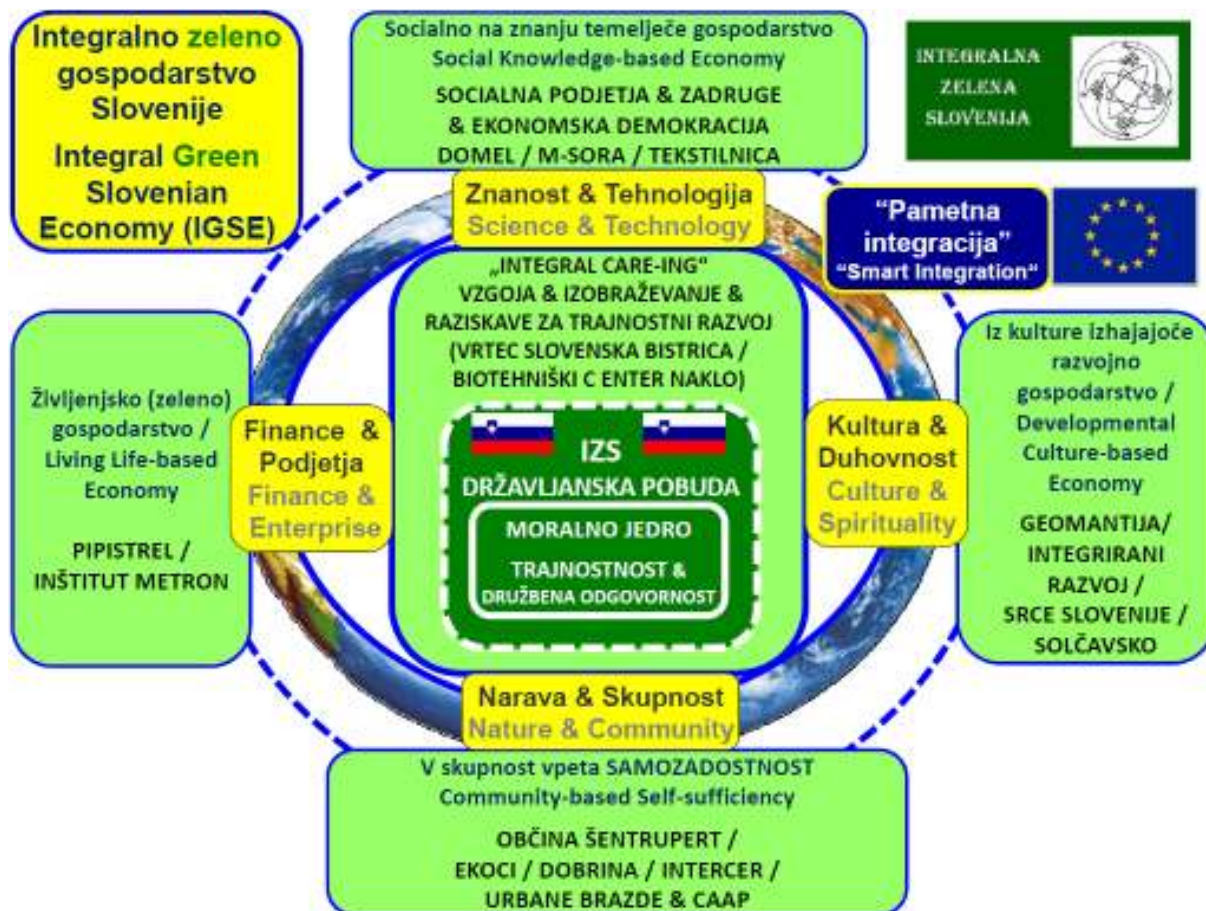
The integral economy framework with its GENE concept is in the book well documented in the case of Domel, one of the country’s most prominent high-tech manufacturers. Domel has built its vision on the values of socially responsible and innovative entrepreneurship. Such values are expressed in a strong connection and integration with the surrounding community, caring for its weakest members, and respect for the natural heritage: Domel is a global player with local Grounding. Domel’s employees are aware of the cultural and cooperative heritage that has shaped them and have developed an awareness of the necessity for continuing development: enterprise evolution is Emerging from a rich cultural heritage. This awareness is reflected in the development of new knowledge, particularly in the field of technology and education and in conjunction with academic institutions. Another “northern” element of the Domel story is thoroughly illuminated: Navigating the battle for employee ownership through the process of ownership transformation and privatisation. Innovations also contribute to greater energy efficiency of its products, which is characteristic of a green and circular economy. Effective crisis management and an enhanced market position are regarded as cooperative impact, too.

As you read through *Integral Green Slovenia*, you are *not* confronted with a discordant set of chapters, but invited into an interdependent storyline. The book follows the key elements of the integral economic model, its core parts dealing with nature- and community-based economics of self-sufficiency, a culture-based developmental economy, a knowledge-based social economy and a finance- and enterprise-based living economy.

One of the key distinctive features of the Slovenian model of integral green development – compared to the other models presented by Lessem and Schieffer - is its embeddedness in the policy framework of the EU. The authors don't build a new development model from scratch; quite the opposite, their argument is that a number of existing policies and guidelines, measures and instruments across several policy domains (e.g. for green economy, social economy, social responsibility) are already supporting sustainable development goals and the integral green model of development. A new concept of “smart integration of European Union (EU) policies for sustainable development” is therefore presented and explained. Sustainable development is described with four dimensions (environment, economy, society and culture), and emphasis on values of social responsibility is added. Various EU policies are reflected in the good practices presented throughout the book, which witnesses that smart integration already works.

The rich set of authors jointly introduce a purposeful developmental process, helping Slovenia as a whole to become more “integral” and more “green”, thereby responding to its specific needs and drawing on its particular strengths. Key components of this movement, illustrated with a few practice cases, are depicted in Figure 2. The Citizens’ Initiative driving this process included all sectors of Slovenian society in co-evolving sustainable societal and economic development. As a whole, this book serves as a global showcase for an integral European economy, dealing with an entire society at the geographic heart of Europe.

Figure 2: The evolving Integral Green Slovenia movement: Key components illustrated with a few practice cases. Source: Piciga et al, 2016, p. 224



### 3 From Integral Green Slovenia to a New European Renaissance

According to Hrast et al. (2015), Social Responsibility means a timely and requisitely holistic thinking/reflection that reaches beyond a single viewpoint to be interdisciplinary. The present paper elaborates the general theme of the 11th IRDO Conference - use of holistic approach and interdependence that are exposed in ISO 26000 to link everything – from the perspective of the Integral Worlds approach as implemented in the empirically based model of Integral Green Slovenia (Piciga et al., 2016). The values of social responsibility and sustainability (called moral economic core) are not only the central element of the new model of integral green economy and society; they also play the crucial integrating role in this model (Figure 2).

*Integral Development* (Schieffer and Lessem, 2014) and *Integral Economics* (Lessem and Schieffer, 2010) provided us with a strong theory base as well as global role models for a new economic paradigm. By actively working with and creatively co-evolving the original integral theory base – the process that is documented in Proceedings of the IRDO conferences since 2012 (<http://www.irdo.si/skupni-cd/>) – we generated a powerful vision for an alternative economic and societal perspective for Slovenia. Together with Schieffer and Lessem, we adapted the integral economic approach to Slovenia and its particular context and situation. Over the past three years, we gradually came to the conclusion that by building on the country's potentials for all four integral economic paths and fundamental values underlying its cultural heritage, we have the opportunity, in both theory and practice, to co-evolve a knowledge-and-value based economy and sustainable society that can serve as a pilot case for the integral green approach at a time when Europe is seeking to develop a smart (knowledge-based), sustainable and inclusive society and economy.

At this point we are able to expand the integral conceptual framework explained above to show its relevance for a new economic and social reality in Europe as a whole.

7

In the European tradition, philosophy, social structures, educational systems, politics and policies, we can identify significant foundations that inform today's longing for more sustainable, collaborative and holistic approaches to life and to human systems, including the economy. As demonstrated in the case of Integral Green Slovenia, European Union has great potential for integral green development by drawing upon its natural *and* cultural heritage, as well as its relevant scientific thinking and good social and economic practices. Furthermore, a number of its policies, particularly if smartly integrated, are already in line with the principles and elements of Integral Economics and Integral Development (although impeded by certain others, e.g., fiscal and macroeconomic policies).

By building on the European potentials for all four integral economic paths and fundamental values underlying its cultural heritage(s), we have the opportunity, in both theory and practice, to co-evolve a knowledge-and-values based economy and sustainable society - that can help to Navigate the efforts of the global community in implementing the Agenda 2030 for sustainable development.

The theoretical framework of Integral Worlds Approach (with its transdisciplinary, transcultural and transformative character) can be applied in an original and practical way:

- By placing fundamental values, underlying the European cultural heritage, in the centre and as the starting point of practical policies and measures;
- By authentically building on European culture(s) as well as recognising contributions of neighbouring and other cultures;
- By connecting and upgrading a number of European integral green practices, explaining them with the help of Integral Economics and Integral Development; among them Integral Green Slovenia as a pilot country;

- By smart integration and effective implementation of EU developmental policies based on sustainable development principles, such as the green and circular economy, social economy and socially responsible entrepreneurship, ethical banking, and sustainable development of towns and rural areas with food and energy self-supply (synergies and cross-sectoral approach) ;
- By purposely building on the paradigm of sustainable development that encompasses four dimensions (i.e., economy, environment, society, culture), with particular emphasis on values of sustainability and social responsibility.

#### 4 Conclusion

We could even argue that an Integral Green Europe would be a more viable and appealing aim for European citizens than the six strategic initiatives of the Appeal of the May 9th, proposed by a number of European personalities earlier this year as initiative towards a comprehensive, ambitious and realistic strategy for keeping Europe's values and regaining its role as source of progress for all. (The Appeal of the May 9th, 2016).

#### References

- The Appeal of the May 9th - a Roadmap for a New European Renaissance* (2016). Available at: <http://www.m9m.eu/L201/> (Accessed: 5 October 2016).
- Hrast, A., Mulej, M., & Lorbek, D. (eds.) (2015). *Zborniki posvetovanj 'Družbena odgovornost in izzivi časa, 2006–2015; vsi na CD*. IRDO; Maribor (Proceedings of Ten Conferences 'Social responsibility and current challenges, 2006–2015', All on One CD). Available at: <http://www.irdo.si/skupni-cd/> (Accessed: 11 August 2015).
- Lessem, R., & Schieffer, A. (2010). *Integral Economics: Releasing the Economic Genius of Your Society*. Farnham: Gower.
- Piciga, D., Schieffer, A., & Lessem, R. (2016). *Integral Green Slovenia: Towards a Social, Knowledge- and Value-Based Economy and Society at the Heart of Europe*. Oxon: Routledge.
- Schieffer, A., & Lessem, R. (2014). *Integral Development: Realising the Transformative Potential in Individuals, Organisations and Societies*. Farnham: Gower.