

METKA PETRIČ

## INTERNATIONAL KARSTOLOGICAL SCHOOL »CLASSICAL KARST« AND THE »SMART-KARST« PROJECT



Participants of the 14<sup>th</sup> IKS at the field trip in Rakov Škocjan (Photo: B. Macarol).

The first International Karstological School “Classical karst” was organized by the Karst Research Institute at ZRC SAZU in 1993. In the following years the School has evolved to an important annual meeting of karstologists from all continents. Since the beginning it has been sponsored by the Slovenian National Commission for UNESCO, and later additionally co-financed by the Ministry of Science of the Republic of Slovenia, Slovenian Research Agency, Scientific Research Centre of the Slovenian Academy of Sciences and Arts, and Municipality of Postojna. It has been supported by the Speleological Association of Slovenia, International Union of Speleology UIS, and IGU Commission CO4.22 Karst.

The opportunity to try some new approaches emerged with the call “Marie Curie Conferences & Training Courses” in the 6th Framework Programme of the European Commission. With some adjustments of the existing programme, we prepared a proposal for the project »SMART-KARST: International KARSTological School: Sustainable MAnagement of Natural Resources

on karsT« in which four Schools and one symposium in the period from 2006 to 2009 were presented as five training courses. The idea was to strengthen the educational character of this internationally already acknowledged annual meeting, to emphasise the interdisciplinary character of the study of karst, and to improve the linking between the theory and its practical application.

The proposal was successful and within the project we were able to reimburse for each School the travel costs, living allowances, and registration fees to at least 45 researchers in early stages of their careers, and four invited speakers. Additionally, the costs for organisation and management activities were partly covered.

For each event the main topic was selected. In June 2006 the 14<sup>th</sup> International Karstological School was dedicated to “Sustainable management of natural and environmental resources on karst”. The next event was the symposium “Time in karst”, organised in March 2007 together with the Karst Waters Institute from the USA. In June 2007 the topic of the 15<sup>th</sup> School was “Manage-

ment of transboundary karst aquifers”, and the next two events in June 2008 and 2009 were dedicated to “Karst sediments” and “Cave climate”.

Each time the main topic of the School was initially introduced by four keynote speakers. Some basic definitions and principles were explained first to make the topic easier understandable to young researchers, but also several open questions were exposed in order to stimulate the research interest of all participants. As keynote lecturers we invited 20 internationally renowned experts from different parts of the world (Australia, Austria, Czech Republic, France, Germany, Italy, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia, Switzerland, United Kingdom, USA) and various fields of interest (lecturers at universities, researchers from institutes, consultants of International Organisations, environmental managers, public officials). Additionally, 125 oral and 235 poster presentations were given by the participants at all five events.

The topics discussed during the lectures were presented and additionally explained by the practical examples in the field. The majority of participants agreed that these field trips, guided by the co-workers of the Karst Research Institute, were the highlights of each event. Altogether 10 half-day and 7 whole-day excursions were organised, and every year also a tourist visit to the Postojna Cave was possible.

During lectures, poster sessions and excursions the latest results of research work in the selected scientific fields were presented and discussed. The discussions were vivid, continuing also in the time of coffee breaks, social events, and especially field work.

592 participants from 44 countries attended at all 5 events. In the project SMART-KARST, which ended in November 2009, altogether 232 Marie Curie Grants were assigned and reimbursed to 150 eligible participants from 34 countries (51 of them received the grant more than once). The competition for the selection was hard, as each year the number of applicants highly exceeded the agreed number of grants. In the selection process we tried to ensure the participation of early stage researchers from different parts of the world, but the main criteria were the quality of their research work and their interest in further scientific development. The participation at the training courses enabled them to increase the knowledge about karst, to learn from some of the world leading experts in this field and to establish new bonds with the colleagues on the international level. For many young researchers this would not be possible without the financial support from the SMART-KARST project.

Our own good experiences, positive responses of the majority of participants, and the support of various organisations and scientific associations are a solid basis for the continuation of the International Karstological Schools also in the future. The 18<sup>th</sup> School with the topic “Dinaric karst” will be held in Postojna from June 14 to 19, 2010.

*Metka Petrič*