



## **Report on external evaluation of the NatRisk project “Development of master curricula for natural disasters risk management in the Western Balkan countries”**

**ERASMUS 573806-EPP-1-2016-1-RS-EPPKA2-CBHE-JP**

The overall goal of this project is to educate experts for prevention and management of natural disaster risk management (NDRM) in the region of Western Balkan (WB) through development and implementation of new master curricula and educational trainings for the public sector and citizens. Crucial project objectives include: 1) Developed/modernized master curricula and modules in WB partner HEIs, in accordance with the highest EU standards, followed by accreditation; 2) Contemporary equipped laboratories for studies in the field of NDRM; 3) Enrollment of students to the new master curricula offering mobility options for them and teaching staff; 4) Developed and conducted educational trainings for citizens and public sector in the field of NDRM. Activities are organized in 8 work packages to deliver the desired outcomes.

### **Overall achievement**

Analysis of natural disasters that might appear in WB region is the goal of WP1 in order to identify natural disaster risks. The university of natural resources and life sciences (BOKU), was a work package leader and has organized a workshop and summarized all contributions with a comprehensive analysis and reports. The first task addresses all necessary parts in a corresponding report, including identification of natural disasters, analysis of risk management and responsible institutes for all partner countries (Serbia, Kosovo and Bosnia). The second activity resulted with a report on identified natural disasters and risk management strategies in partnering EU countries. In addition, a workshop on master curricula best practices was organized and the report contains details on the key elements of curricula design at partner WB countries.

WP2 addresses curricula development activities organized in 5 tasks, out of which the first three are completed, and the others are ongoing activities as scheduled. The workpackage leader was University of Messina (UNIME). Each developed study programme is defined with necessary elements, including purpose, learning objectives, competences to be gained, compatibility analysis, and course descriptions. The syllabi contain detailed descriptions on study programme, status, ECTS value, course objective, learning outcome, content, recommended literature, teaching methods requirements, and grading strategy. As a part of curricula development, the teaching staff was trained and all related activities were reported with elaboration of details on covered topics and lessons learned. Presented relevant statistics on training shows satisfactory quality. The final two activities target student's internship positions and harmonization of teaching environment with EU best practices.

Trainings for citizen and public sector are objective of WP3 realized in three activities, led by University of Defence (UNID). Surveillance of citizens' and public sector awareness was the goal of first activity, and the report shows that a corresponding methodology was developed and used for evaluation of results for prevention and understanding of natural disasters risk, protection and rescue system, resistance of social community to natural disasters, and final considerations and recommendations. The second activity covered study visits and analysis of

courses as best practices at EU countries, accompanied by agenda, evaluation lists, declarative report, gallery of photos and presentation slides. A handbook for civil sector training about natural disasters was developed and published.

WP4 is dedicated to implementation of developed master curricula and trainings that are forthcoming activities or currently in progress. University of Sarajevo (UNSA) is workpackage leader.

Quality assurance and monitoring procedures are target of WP5 led by Middlesex University (MUHEC). Three meetings of the Quality Assurance Committee were organized and all area documented with corresponding agenda, evaluation lists, reports, gallery of photos, and presentations if they were used on these meetings. Relevant conclusions were brought on these meetings in order to improve the quality of the deliveries.

The last three workpackages were coordinated by University of Nis (UNI).

Dissemination constitutes WP6 in 4 planned activities. The dissemination plan contains all necessary elements and details for dissemination strategy, with defined objectives, activities, target groups, key messages, specification of dissemination tools. Branding activities resulted with clear development of logos and key messages. Electronic presence has been ensured by opening social network profile and project web site. They have created a very functional and transparent web site, where one can get info on reports on realized project activities. The web site is constantly updated with new information. The project management platform is used to communicate all partners about activities. Promotional materials include brochure, poster, rollup, folder, notebook, bag, tags, etc. All partners have created their web pages and links to other web sites with the project results. Some activities are still in progress and are regularly updated.

Exploitation is addressed in WP7. Sustainability plan is specified to cover financial and administrative project goals, realization of the master curricula, enforcing cooperation with project partners and other stakeholders at national and regional level. The specified mechanisms include goals to create positive reputational effects, increase awareness and influence on policy and practice. A detailed list of short-term and long-term impacts are developed with identification of target groups, quantitative and qualitative indicators. The academic sustainability approach mainly addresses the master curricula and educational trainings with specification of principles, work domains and challenges to improve attractiveness and operational capacity. Detailed action steps with identified responsibility, timeframe, specification of resource and key indicators are developed for students' recruitment and communication; study programme quality, evaluation and adaptation, consortium cohesion and organizational capacity; financial sustainability. The plan also includes recommendations for follow up activities. The other two activities are ongoing.

WP8 is devoted to management activities. All public documents are transparent on the web site and they confirm that relevant activities were undertaken to manage all required activities and solve problematic issues, by established project management procedures. A software platform was used to enable monitoring of activities by corresponding project management bodies and coordinators. Detailed reports including presentations are given for all meetings, including, kick off meeting, steering committee and project management meetings, developed project management and reporting guidelines. For day-to-day activities, they use relevant project management software. Preventive monitoring visits are documented by relevant agenda, minutes and presentation slides.

## **Relevance**

This project addresses relevant and actual issues about natural disaster risks that appear due to climate change and/or other factors, including humans. A lot of activities were realized within the project scope to modernise the curricula and organize specific trainings, however,

there is no evidence about activities outside the project scope to raise the awareness level of relevant institutions and initiate positive changes in local and national governments towards managing the risks of natural disasters. This would be a great add on value to the project that covers all objectives specified in the project proposal.

Although, the project participants have already realized several contacts and influenced several national initiatives, this project should also aim at realizing or initiating a new strategy or procedure on risk management in case of disasters, by introducing the project concepts and relevant expertise to be built in national strategies and action plans at both the national and local government.

The realized activities defined in the project *correspond* to the *project objectives* and addressed *real problems and needs*. The project partners have analysed and defined priorities in natural disaster risk management and developed curricula and trainings that raise awareness and expertise about natural risks. The *target beneficiaries*, as defined within the project proposal have participated in planned activities and organized events (seminars, trainings, etc.) and other measures were taken to support the project realization.

I would recommend some add on content in the curricula addressing how to realize resilient communication services protecting end-user applications in the case of disasters. We are witnesses that social networks and similar applications may play a crucial role in establishing communication to people affected by natural disasters, and one course and/or training would definitely will be in taking measures to establish reliable and resilient communication infrastructure. In addition, I recommend to put accent on human initiated disasters, not just natural disasters, since a lot of technical mistakes or human mistakes may provoke disaster, not just disasters initiated by the nature.

All trainings and presentations were carefully prepared and organized. Final reports on all organized events and delivered presentations are transparent and accessible on the web containing details on the organization, intended goal, lecturers and participants. Relevance can be confirmed by a relatively high number of participants, quality of presentations and evaluation reports of these events. I recommend that the event organizer and project coordinators also to report on the selection criteria for all participants on realized activities, in order to ensure that the main target audience is communicated.

Finally, to prove that the project participants have taken all relevant measures and ensured high standards, I would also suggest that within a final dissemination event a more general audience will be included, for example to invite all other WB Universities that are not part of the consortium within the WBC country, or other WB countries in order to promote what they have achieved and encourage others to improve in managing the natural disaster risks. This will improve the regional cooperation and overall visibility of the project results and outcomes.

## **Efficiency**

The project was coordinated and managed in a professional manner using a specific project management software that ensures all participants are communicated and enables a platform for monitoring of realized activities, which makes the efficiency to be on a high level. The web site, personal e-mail communication, skype conversations and other electronic supported technologies helped in better realization of all activities, as well as in coordination of a relatively huge number of project participants.

I found that the reporting is realized on a high level, and all activities, organized events, trainings and seminars are well documented and relevant docs are shared on the project web site.

Analysing how are the inputs and activities transformed into outputs, one can conclude that all scheduled tasks started and are executed in planned deadline. No severe deviations have been noticed in project executions, and the small delays for some tasks were justified.

### **Effectivity**

All wider and specific objectives defined in the project proposal are fulfilled and all main outputs delivered. The reports shared on the project web site confirm that the project purpose was reached by a high number of participants on the organized events. I would encourage the project coordinator to explain the strategy or methodology how the target group was selected for participation on the events, trainings or mentoring, giving details if all relevant target audience is communicated.

Dissemination strategy is realized on a high level and all relevant promotional materials have been sufficiently developed. However, I would recommend that additional dissemination activities to be carried out, in order to raise awareness by including a more general audience from the included partner countries and wider in the region. These events need to cover also details on sustainability and further project results exploitation.

I would comment that there is no evidence that a quality management strategy is delivered with description of quality procedures. There are several quality assurance and monitoring activities successfully realized in WP 5, but a more systematic and documented way will be more beneficial.

### **Impact**

The overall impression of the project is that it contributes to the realisation of the project general goal. All planned outcomes are being delivered or are in progress according to the project plan.

In order to measure the overall impact, we need data on what was the situation prior to project start and what is the situation now. Since we lack data to make this comparison, I encourage the project participants to make a questionnaire among relevant stakeholders in order to evaluate the level they are prepared for risk management of disasters. Also, another questionnaire would evaluate the participants if the desired level of competences is enhanced via the conducted practical trainings and seminars. This would give sufficient answer on the project impact and quality of project results.

### **Sustainability**

Sustainability plan is realized on a high level and all relevant activities have been sufficiently developed and specified.

Analysing the project sustainability, I would suggest more efforts to be set in enabling work positions for prospective students, as this will be motivator for students to study the proposed master curricula. This can be achieved by initiating a development strategy on a national or local level, that will organize administration or institutional support of managing the natural disaster risks.

Financial sustainability needs to be supported by action plans in addition to the adopted University strategical documents in order to ensure that the University will continue to finance and organize the new master curricula and organize trainings after project termination.

In addition, some more efforts need to be taken to motivate the prospective students within the dissemination activities, including organization of open days or promotional activities for raising the awareness level about existence of the developed master curricula.

I would also comment on tendering procedure and equipment purchase is not finished activity 2.5 for UNSA – it is not clear what is purchased. Only empty tender docs and procedures are presented. It was due for 2017. I cannot see that TCASU has purchased any literature, and no details of what is purchased by UNSA. There is no report how many handbooks were printed or distributed. Also, a small number of docs, such as promotional activity for trainings are not translated in English as they are only in Serbian language. This will increase the visibility of the project result.

I have to point out that over 40 events were organized within the project realization so far, including seminars, conferences, workshops, symposia. Several articles are published in relevant magazines (1 Serbia, 1 Hungary, 2 Greece, 1 Austria). Also, several press releases were broadcasted on WB media, including TV and radio. Three newsletters were sent to hundreds of registered users. Market research included 3058 inquires. Electronic media (including facebook social network, youtube channel and Instagram) is heavily used in dissemination. Four handbooks were published in English and mother tongue languages of project participants.

The project has already initiated several add-on project values. TCASU, UNID and KPA have adopted documentation related to mobility such as mobility action plans, guidelines for students and staff exchange and strategies for internationalisation and have formed International Relations Offices.

Organized events, such as trainings, workshops and study visits included average of 27 project participants. The realized self-evaluation marks for held events realized via questionnaires among project participants was 4.75.

Skopje 31.08.2018

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