



RESPONSE TO THE FIRST EXTERNAL REVIEW OF THE PROJECT

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List of abbreviations

BOKU	University of Natural Resources and Life Sciences, Vienna
EACEA	Education, Audiovisual and Culture Executive Agency
EU	European Union
HEI	Higher Education Institution
KPA	Academy of Criminalistics and Police Studies
LLL	Life-Long Learning
MUHEC	Middlesex University Higher Education Corporation
NatRisk	Development of master curricula for natural disasters risk management in Western Balkan countries
NDRM	Natural Disasters Risk Management
OE	Óbuda University
QAC	Quality Assurance Committee
TCASU	Technical College of Applied Sciences Urosevac with temporary seat in Leposavic
TUC	Technical University of Crete, Chania, Greece
UBL	University of Banja Luka
UNI	University of Nis
UNID	University of Defence in Belgrade
UNIME	University of Messina
UNSA	University of Sarajevo
UPKM	University of Pristina in Kosovska Mitrovica
WB	Western Balkan
WP	Work package

1 Introduction

This report provides a response to the first external review of the project. The aim of the report is to summarise the external reviewer's recommendations and Quality Assurance Committee (QAC) team responses as part of the framework of WP5 "Quality assurance and monitoring" and activity A5.3 "External evaluation of the project" of the Erasmus+ Capacity Building in the Field of Higher Education project "Development of master curricula for natural disasters risk management in Western Balkan countries" (NatRisk).

The report and its recommendations were discussed during the fourth QAC meeting in Chania in September 2018.

2 Commendations

In general, the external report highlights some points of commendation and details the projects achievements to date.

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), led Work Package 1 and has organised a workshop and summarised all contributions with a comprehensive analysis and subsequent relevant 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 in a report on identified natural disasters and risk management strategies in partnering EU countries. In addition, a workshop on master curricula best practices was organised and the corresponding report contains details on the key elements of curricula design at partner WB countries.

WP2 addresses curricula development activities organised in 5 tasks, out of which the first three are completed, and the others are ongoing activities as scheduled. The work package 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 were trained and all related activities were reported with elaboration of details on those topics covered and lessons learned. The relevant statistics on training highlight a general agreement that those trained were satisfied with the quality of these activities. The final two activities are the targeting of student internship positions and the harmonisation of teaching environments with EU best practices.

Trainings for citizens and members of the public sector are a key objective of WP3 realised in three activities; led by the University of Defence (UNID). The 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 the 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 the study visits and the 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 the implementation of developed master curricula and trainings that are forthcoming activities or currently in progress. University of Sarajevo (UNSA) is work package leader.

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

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

Dissemination constitutes WP6 in four planned activities. The dissemination plan contains all necessary elements and details for dissemination strategy, with clearly defined objectives, activities, target groups, key messages, specification of dissemination tools. Branding activities resulted in the clear development of logos and key messages. An electronic presence has been ensured by the creation of social network profiles and a project web site. They have created a very functional and transparent web site, where one can get info on reports on realised 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 brochures, posters, a rollup, folders, notebooks, 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. A Sustainability Plan is specified to cover the financial and administrative project goals, the realisation 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 has been 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 responsibilities, timeframes, specification of resources and key indicators are developed for students' recruitment and communication; study programme quality, evaluation and adaptation,

consortium cohesion and organisational 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 any 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 the relevant project management software. Preventive monitoring visits are documented by information such as the agenda, minutes and presentation slides.

Project 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 realised within the project scope to modernise the curricula and to organise specific trainings.

The realised 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.

All trainings and presentations were carefully prepared and organised. Final reports on all organised events and delivered presentations are transparent and accessible on the web containing details on the organisation, 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.

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 realisation of all activities, as well as in coordination of a relatively huge number of project participants.

The reporting is realised to 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 according to 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.

Dissemination strategy is realised on a high level and all relevant promotional materials have been sufficiently developed.

There are several quality assurance and monitoring activities successfully realised in WP 5.

Impact

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

Sustainability

A Sustainability Plan is realised to a high level and all relevant activities have been sufficiently developed and specified.

Over 40 events were organized within the project realisation 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 the mother tongue languages of project participants.

The project has already initiated several additional impacts and unforeseen value to the project. 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 an average of 27 project participants. The realised self-evaluation marks for held events realised via questionnaires among project participants was very high at 4.75.

3 Recommendations

Project dissemination and awareness

- No evidence/activities outside the project scope to raise awareness level of the relevant institutions and initiate project changes in local and national governments towards managing natural disaster risks. This would be a great add on value to the project that covers all objectives specified in the project proposal.

It is recognised that this is principally out of the core scope of the project. However, the project has undertaken some activities which can have an impact in this area. During the promotion of trainings for citizens and public sector the WB partners' persons do contact relevant institutions and their responsible persons from the field of natural disasters and risk management (NDRM). As a response to this campaign, 93 different institutions participated into trainings which is summarised into Report on implemented first training for citizens and public sector (<http://www.natrisk.ni.ac.rs/activities?id=137>). Therefore, there is some wider awareness of the project and its outcomes.

- Influencing practice – project should also realise or initiating a new strategy or procedure on risk management, by introducing project concepts/expertise to be built into national strategies and action plans;

Affecting risk management practice over the short timeframe of the project is difficult and it would be difficult to substantiate any direct changes as coming from NatRisk activities. Indeed, the project aim does not involve building of national strategies and action plans. However, the core aim of the project is to initiate and deliver high quality Masters level curricula which will train the next generation of disaster managers in the Western Balkans and building professional capacity. Therefore, over a longer timeframe it is expected that the project will have a direct impact on the expertise of disaster managers and the strategies and procedures for managing disasters risks.

- A final dissemination event – include a more general audience (e.g. other WB universities/countries) to ensure a wider promotion of the project and its achievements. To improve regional co-operation/visibility;

The final meeting will be organised together with colleagues from the Erasmus+ KA2 project “Western Balkans Academic Education Evolution and Professional’s Sustainable Training for Spatial Data Infrastructures” (BestSDI) to exchange achieved experiences and also to include a more general audience.

- Dissemination activities should also be used to motivate prospective students – e.g. open dates/promotional activities to raise awareness of the new programmes;

Until now, the Masters' curricula were still under development. Particular attention will be paid during the third project year to organising more effective promotion of students' enrolment.

- Some material is only available in Serbian – translating into English would increase the

visibility of the project results.

Materials related to promotion of trainings have been translated into English (<http://www.natrisk.ni.ac.rs/activities?id=136>). However, the core delivery of project results (i.e. recruitment of Masters students and engagement with existing authorities and the public) is in the Western Balkans.

Consideration of project impact

- To measure impact – suggests we need to compare before and after – but that data is lacking. Therefore recommendation is to undertake a questionnaire among relevant stakeholders to evaluate their level of preparedness – then a second one to evaluate the enhanced competencies through practical training and seminars

Data regarding the previous state are summarised into the Survey of citizens' and public sector awareness (<http://www.natrisk.ni.ac.rs/activities?id=26>). An evaluation of the quality of presented material during the trainings for citizens and public sector is summarized in Report on implemented first training for citizens and public sector (<http://www.natrisk.ni.ac.rs/activities?id=137>).

Curricula content

- Add to content in the curricula addressing how to realise resilient communication services protecting end-user applications in the case of disasters.

This has been carefully considered and there have been some additions to the curricula. During implementation content will be presented to future master students addressing how to realise resilient communication services protecting end-user applications in the case of disasters.

- Recommend to put an accent on human initiated disasters, not just natural disasters.

This recommendation is accepted and some content on this topic will be added during implementations of master curricula.

Procedural/project management

- Recommend reporting on the selection criteria/methodology of selection for all participants within the realised activities – in order to communicate whether the main target audience is clear and has been recruited;

The selection criteria are explained into two newly developed reports: Report on implemented first training for citizens and public sector (<http://www.natrisk.ni.ac.rs/activities?id=137>) and Report on the realised dissemination activities (<http://www.natrisk.ni.ac.rs/activities?id=21>).

- Recommended a more systematic and documented way of reporting that the quality management strategy has been delivered; - link to Quality Control Plan – WP5.2;

The QAC reports to the Management Board serve as a check on the delivery of the Quality Control Plan. However, the QAC recognise this shortcoming of being able to check whether reports have been undertaken and a Quality Reporting Register has been created and uploaded to the portal. This register will act as a living document and be updated at each quality

reporting point to keep a track of those reports which have been submitted and uploaded to the NatRisk management portal.

- Equipment – detail needed about what has been purchased and information about the distribution of handbooks (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.)

A report on the harmonization of teaching environment with EU best practices (<http://www.natrisk.ni.ac.rs/activities?id=34>) has been created in order to summarise the purchased equipment, software and library units.

A report on the development of training's content corresponding educational materials and selection of teaching staff (<http://www.natrisk.ni.ac.rs/activities?id=121>) is created and summarises information regarding printed educational materials.

Sustainability

- More effort should be made to enable work positions for prospective students – increase motivation, and therefore, sustainability of the programmes. Suggest that this can be achieved through the initiation of a development strategy which would organise administrative/institutional support of managing the natural disaster risks;

This will be considered when implementing the Masters' programmes and considerations of employability will be paramount. Those delivering the programmes are already well-networked with disaster risk professionals and it is intended that these links (as well as any new ones that will be made) be exploited to closely connect the programmes with disaster practice. Students are required to undertake an independent research project for a portion of their credits and therefore there may be opportunities to link these to either work placements or to investigate topics of interest to disaster organisations.

- Action plans needed to ensure financial sustainability and maintain that the university will continue to finance and organise the Masters curricula/trainings after the end of the project;

Master study programmes will be accredited in duration of 5 years and the Ministry of education will finance them. Trainings should be part of Life-Long Learning (LLL) centres.