

Academic Sustainability Plan

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Institution	University of Nis
Author(s)	Slavisa Trajkovic, Milan Gocic
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List of abbreviations

EACEA	Education, Audiovisual and Culture Executive Agency
ECA	Educational Credential Assessment
ENQA	European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education
EQAC	Educational Quality Accrediting Commission
EQAR	European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education
EU	European Union
HEI	Higher Education Institution
NatRisk	Development of master curricula for natural disasters risk management in Western Balkan countries
NDRM	Natural Disasters Risk Management
PMC	Project Management Committee
WB	Western Balkan

1. Introduction

1.1 Sustainability of the project

A project is sustainable when it continues to deliver benefits to the project beneficiaries and/or other constituencies for an extended period after the Commission's financial assistance has been terminated.

The project activities will be designed to ensure that by the end of the project, the participating WB universities will be able to carry out the main achievements of the project independently by themselves. The sustainability of the project will be ensured with the following outcomes:

- at least seven new master programmes in natural disasters risk management (NDRM) at the Western Balkans (WB) partner High Educational Institutions (HEIs) that will be developed, accredited and implemented;
- three new training programmes in NDRM (one per each WB partner country) with training materials for public sector and citizens developed and conducted;
- retrained teaching staff with up-to-date knowledge in NDRM to teach on the new master programmes;
- advanced teaching and learning process introduced;
- introduced new laboratory equipment, library units and software necessary for the continuation of the new master programmes.

The formed concept of trainings will be promoted and available on the request of public sector based on signed agreements (at least 5) with bodies and agencies in NDRM.

1.2 Exploitation strategy

Significance of exploitation activities for a project is very well outlined in Erasmus+ projects guidelines:

Having a strong plan for dissemination and exploitation from the beginning of a project is a key priority and should form an integral part of the CBHE throughout its lifetime. The objective of dissemination and exploitation is to maximise the impact of project results by optimising their value, strengthening their impact, transferring them to different contexts, integrating them in a sustainable way and using them actively in systems and practices at local and international levels.

Erasmus+ Programme Capacity-Building projects in the field of Higher Education (E+CBHE) Guidelines for the Use of the Grant, 2016

The NatRisk exploitation activities as devised in the project are to ensure the highest possible quality of the project activities, outputs and outcomes, and the optimal use of the project's results both within the lifetime of the project and after.

NatRisk is designed in such a way that produced results can be exploited even during the project implementation and lead to its multiplication outside the Consortium. Large number of deliverables, especially reports, will be publically available on the project website for wider use by both participating and HEIs outside the Consortium.

1.3 Expected impact of the project

In accordance with the objectives of the project, the target groups will be students, teaching staff, members of public sector actively involved in reducing of disaster risks and citizens who want to improve their knowledge and practical skills applicable in natural disasters situations.

Results of the project will be master curricula and educational trainings in NDRM accomplished with reports about master curricula in EU partner countries and natural disasters to be managed in WB partner countries and training materials available at the website to general public.

At local level, all target groups will be reached by dissemination tools such as delivering promotional materials to students and citizens, website, social and digital media. This kind of informing will arise the awareness about the importance of improving knowledge and skills in NDRM. Teaching staff will be in direct contact with the representatives of local public sector in NDRM to analyse their needs for improvement of current system of NDRM, transfer acquired latest knowledge and sign protocols for students' internships. Students will be reached through the call for enrolment at newly developed master curricula. Substantial project effect will be achieved by students involvement in gaining theoretical and practical knowledge in NDRM that can be applied immediately after the graduation.

At institutional level each of the WB partner HEIs will enrich their educational potential by implementation of new master study programmes, improved teaching staff skills through acquiring up-to-date knowledge and adopted new pedagogical methods in teaching and learning, upgraded laboratories with appropriate hardware and software infrastructure for analysis and simulation natural disasters and the new library units.

At national level at WB partner countries, the cooperation will be settled between HEIs and representatives of national bodies and agencies for environmental protection to impact on national efforts for developing the system of national protection by establishing institutional, organizational and personal conditions for the implementation of the protection in the emergency situations.

The global policy in the field disaster risk reduction requests national efforts, but efforts are particularly necessary and productive at the regional level for efficient prevention and reducing consequences of natural disasters. Therefore, realized networking between WB partner HEIs within project framework will have strong impact on strengthening common responses to the challenges in the field of NDRM.

At European level, WB partner HEIs will benefit the rich experience of EU HEIs in NDRM forming new master curricula. Students from WB HEIs will be included in realization of

mobilities between WB and EU partner HEIs. The teaching staff will be involved into the teaching trainings into EU partner countries through the study visits. The EU teaching staff and students will be also in position to apply their knowledge to the specific cases in WB region, enriching in that way their experience. The WB partner countries with such trained staff in line with EU standards and directives in NDRM will contribute to recommendation of European Forum for Disaster Risk Reduction (“create a safer Europe by reducing the impact of natural hazards to reduce vulnerability, and increasing the ability to minimize consequences of disasters”).

1.4 Overview of short and long term impact indicators

In the following tables the short and long term impact indicators of the NatRisk project are presented:

Short term impact	Target groups/potential beneficiaries	Quantitative indicators	Qualitative indicators
Professional development	Teaching staff	93 trained staff	Professional performance, assessment, self-evaluation
Innovative knowledge gaining	Students	At least 120 of enrolled and graduated students	Knowledge assessment
Capacity building	Institution	7 laboratories with new equipment; upgraded 7 libraries with new library units	Better working conditions
Awareness about new educational trainings and their significance	Citizens/public sector	At least 420 registered participants	Interest in trainings participation
Improved competences through educational trainings	Citizens/public sector	At least 420 trained participants; 14 one-day trainings	Knowledge assessment
Innovative skill and knowledge gaining	Students/Staff	At least 15/21 of realized mobilities	Skill and knowledge improvement

Long term impact	Target groups/potential beneficiaries	Quantitative indicators	Qualitative indicators
Quality of teaching staff	Scientific community	Number of scientific papers in international journals in the field of management of natural disasters	Quality of papers
Permanent modernisation and update of master curricula	Experts in management of natural disasters in WB region	Number of newly topics and courses	Periodical reaccreditation
Graduated students with the knowledge that can be immediately implemented in practice	Labour market in WB region	Number of new employees	Quality of measures in improving system for risk reduction
Innovative knowledge application	Wider community	Number of projects related to management of natural disasters by educated professionals	Quality of application achieved through the practice

2. Sustainability approach and objectives

The central objective of the sustainability plan is to maintain the main project output after the end of the funding of the NatRisk project.

To this aim, the following points are considered as crucial:

- The attractiveness of the Master's Programme to the main target groups, i.e. students and professionals of the natural disasters risk management
- The accreditation of the Master's Programme in the respective countries delivering a degree (Western Balkan countries)
- The funding of the Master's Programme: the Programme shall not operate at a loss, the revenues secured shall be reinvested in favour of the students or to reinforce the attractiveness of the NDRM Master (e.g. through communication actions).
- The management of the Master's Programme and the involvement of the partner HEIs, from the teaching and administrative staff involved in the operation of the programme, to the decision-making level.

The sustainability plan and sustainability process is based on a continuous improvement approach. The consortium wants to increase the NatRisk attractiveness, success and quality, and to make this around clear common goals, to the mutual benefits of the students, partner HEIs and professional organizations.

3. Key elements for sustainability

Sustainability of the NatRisk project will be based on two main sustainability principles. The programme depends of the solidity of both pillars at the same time

- NatRisk attractiveness, including communication, programme's quality, curriculum evaluation and update, students' employability, employers' awareness,
- NatRisk operational capacity including political support, the cohesion and involvement of the partner university, adequate funding.

The working axes and main challenges related to these pillars are summarized in the table below and related action plans are detailed in the sections below:

Sustainability pillars	Priority work domains	Related challenges
1. NatRisk attractiveness	1.1 Students' recruitment and communication	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Increase the number of candidates and the number of students enrolled up to the number agreed (10-15 students per WB HEIs), ➤ Attract students from the WB HEIs.
	1.2 Programme quality, evaluation and adaptation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Have the course results evaluated by the main stakeholders (students, academic staff, employers), ➤ Develop NatRisk community around students, alumni, partner HEIs and professional organizations, ➤ Promote students' employability and stay in line with the job market expectations, ➤ Guarantee NatRisk quality assurance.
2. NatRisk operational capacity	2.1 Consortium cohesion and organizational capacity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Secure the continuous accreditation of the programme in each WB country, ➤ Maintain a strong cohesion within the consortium, making sure that the ownership of the programme is also shared at the highest level of the partner HEIs, ➤ Guarantee NatRisk operational and organizational efficiency.
	2.2 Funding stability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Ensure the programme's financial stability, ➤ Evaluate the interest and secure additional programme-based revenues, e.g. participation in new European or bilateral funding programmes.

4. Action plans for priority work domains

4.1 Priority Domain #1: Students' recruitment and communication

4.1.1 Rationale

The success and sustainability of the programme is mostly based on the number and quality of applicants and the number and quality of students enrolled.

The challenges are the following:

- Increase the number of candidates and the number of students enrolled, and ensure the diversity of students' origin.

The objectives there of are:

- Increasing the number of students enrolled will ensure the financial stability of the programme (this intersects with the Priority work domain #4), since NatRisk revenues depend mainly of the students' registration fees.
- Increasing the number of candidates will enable the consortium to reach a higher selection rate (number of candidates / number of students admitted) to ensure the students' quality.
- Increasing the diversity of students' origin will help maintaining the international and cultural dimension of the programme.
- Attract students from the consortium partner HEIs and from the consortium countries. This will enable the sharing of the students among the home HEIs, and guarantee the involvement of each partner HEIs (this intersects with Priority work domain #3).

4.1.2 Action Steps

Action steps

1. Yearly evaluation of the communication actions made by the partner HEI. Based on this evaluation and the updated financial budget, discussion and agreement on the future communication actions
2. Keep NatRisk website regularly updated as it is the first source where students has found information on the programme
3. Organize special promotion activity at each partner HEI
4. Build on the students' feedback on the programme and jobs occupied, to improve the programme's attractiveness (students written testimonies, videos, participation of students and alumni to promotional activities, etc.)

Responsibility

1. Project Management Committee
2. Project Management Committee
3. Each partner HEI
4. Each partner HEI

Timeframe

1. Between September and November each year
2. Regularly
3. Dates at each partner HEI
4. From 2019-2020 on when the first cohort will be in and graduated

Resources needed

- 1.1. Analysis of the source of candidates' awareness of the programme
- 1.2. Feedback on the fairs where NatRisk is promoted by each partner HEI
- 1.3. Updated budget
- 2.1. Information from partners on their communication actions
- 3.1. Updated flyers
- 3.2. Updated posters
- 4.1. Students' interview
- 4.2. Students' video

Progress monitoring – Key indicators

- Number of candidates
- Number of admitted students
- Origin of candidates
- Origin of admitted students
- Number of leads at the fairs attended
- Number of students' visit to the website and bounce rate
- Number of students from each cohort registered at each home HEI
- Number of students from each NatRisk partner country

4.2 Priority Domain #2: Programme quality, evaluation and adaptation

4.2.1 Rationale

The consortium will work in a view to continuously improve the NatRisk programme. This will increase the attractiveness of the programme and participate in the realization of the "Priority work domain #1". The objective is to make sure that the programme meets the needs of the main target audience, i.e. students and employers.

The challenges of this Priority Domain are:

- To have the programme content and structure evaluated by the main stakeholders (students, academic staff, employers) and adapted in order to meet the needs of these stakeholders,
- To develop NatRisk community around students and alumni,
- To promote students' employability and stay in line with the job market expectations. The NatRisk consortium has to evaluate the matching between the programme's outcomes and the evolution of the employers' needs.

- To guarantee NatRisk quality assurance.

4.2.2. Action steps

Action steps

1. Evaluation of the NatRisk content and outcomes by the students
2. Evaluation of students' capacities by the professors
3. Evaluation of students' capacities by the professional organizations hosting the master's theses
4. Develop and adopt any necessary amendment or improvement to the programme based on these evaluations
5. Create a students' community around NatRisk to increase the ownership of the programme.
6. Create an alumni community and use it as a channel for further students' employability
7. Create a community of professionals around the programme.
8. Develop links with the EU quality insurance programme which is the most relevant to the national accreditation scheme of each partner HEI (EQAR, ENQA, ECA, EQAC, etc.)

Responsibility

1. Project Coordinator + Project Management Committee
2. Academic coordinators at each partner HEI
3. Primary thesis supervisor
4. Project Management Committee
5. Project Coordinator + Academic coordinator at partner HEIs
6. Project Coordinator
7. Project Management Committee
8. Project Management Committee

Timeframe

1. At the time of the graduation
2. At the PMC meetings
3. At the PMC meeting
4. At the PMC meetings
5. From Fall 2018
6. From 2019-2020
7. From Fall 2018
8. From Fall 2018

Resources needed

1. Organize an online evaluation for students and collect responses to the evaluation
2. Feedback from the academic coordinator at each partner HEIs
3. Feedback from the primary thesis supervisor of the opinion of the host organization
4. Prior work on amendment and improvement
5. Facebook page and TBC

6. Online directory or LinkedIn group (to be defined), Moderator, Employability survey
7. Provide online newsletters on the key news of the NDRM sector
8. Identify the most relevant programme

Progress monitoring – Key indicators

- Number of respondents
- Further adaptation brought to the programme
- Number of visits to the Facebook page
- Animation of the alumni community
- Number of respondents to the employability survey
- Employability rate 6 months/1 year after graduation
- Number of relevant connections made
- Consortium/projects in which NatRisk participate

4.3. Priority Domain #3: Consortium cohesion and organizational capacity

4.3.1. Rationale

The capacity to operate the NatRisk programme strongly depends on the Consortium cohesion and the organizational capacity.

It includes three main challenges:

- Securing the accreditation of the programme (this will of course strongly impact the attractiveness of the programme (Priority Domain #1) as well as student employability (Priority Domain #2).
- Maintaining a strong cohesion within the consortium, making sure that the implication in the programme is also shared at the highest level of the partner HEIs.
- Guaranteeing NatRisk operational and organizational efficiency. The project has established a specific organization to manage the NatRisk programme beyond the end of the funding.

4.3.2. Action steps

Action steps

1. Check and share any evolution of accreditation scheme and criteria in the partners' country
2. Evaluate the efficiency of NatRisk organization, making sure that there is no overlap between the roles and authority of each committee or individuals.
3. Identify any question, problem or withdrawal tendency from partner HEIs.

Responsibility

1. Administrative coordinators at each partner university
2. Project Management Committee
3. Project coordinator + all participants

Timeframe

1. Regularly from Fall 2018 on + specific annual review at each PMC meeting
2. Yearly at the PMC meeting
3. Regularly from Fall 2018 on + specific annual review at each PMC meeting

Resources needed

1. Information on any change or evolution to be given to the Project Coordinator in order to take any necessary actions within the consortium or at national level.
2. Analysis of the operation and activities of each committees, identification of any overlap or problems.
3. Regular bilateral conference calls between the Project Coordinator and the PMC members. Feedback from all participants on any problem arising from the project. Regular information from the NatRisk coordinators at each partner university to their own hierarchy.

Progress monitoring – Key indicators

- Accreditation maintained in each partner country
- Report of the PMC
- Questions raised, problems identified and solved

4.4. Priority Domain #4: Financial sustainability of the NatRisk Programme

4.4.1. Rationale

Two challenges are part of this priority domain:

- Ensure the programme's core resources, which are mainly based on the registration fees paid by the students. This challenge is closely related with the Priority Domain #1 (students' recruitment).
- Secure additional financial resources for the programme and for the partner HEIs. The consortium wishes to enable an equal access of students to the programme, whatever their financial capacity. To this aim, it is necessary to propose suitable scholarships for students. These scholarships can come from public or private sources. It will thus be necessary to increase the ownership of the programme by private organizations from the agricultural and food sector. The consortium agrees that all revenues from the programme will be reinvested to increase programme's attractiveness (communication actions) or to provide students' financial support.

4.4.2. Action steps

Action steps

1. Find suitable public scholarships for international students
2. Search for private scholarship from companies or foundations interested in the programme (through foundation for example)

3. Use part of the current programme content to develop vocational training for enterprises or professional organizations.
4. Offer the e-learning course or part of it in English or in the national languages, as a vocational training for companies

Responsibility

1. Administrative coordinators at each HEI
2. Relevant services/ departments at partner HEIs offering these services
3. Relevant services/ departments at partner HEIs offering these services
4. Relevant services/ departments at partner HEIs offering these services

Timeframe

1. Fall 2018
2. 2018-2019
3. From 2018-2019
4. From 2018-2019

Resources needed

1. Information on the existing public scholarships.
2. Support from the academic coordinators at partner HEIs offering these services or other relevant services/ departments
3. Market study and offer development
4. Follow-up on European funding opportunities and time for development of a European project

Progress monitoring – Key indicators

- Number and sources of public scholarship programmes identified
- Availability of this information on the website
- Number of students benefiting from public scholarships
- Number of companies or foundations reached, sources of private financial support for students
- Number of students benefiting from private scholarships
- Specific offer of vocational training developed from programme's content
- EU project developed

5. Project exploitation after the end of the project

Almost every result that will be developed within the project, most of reports, deliverables, operational manuals, procedures, new regulatory documents, promo materials, good practices, etc., will be visible and publicized on the web-sites of the project, participating HEIs and the Ministry, and thus accessible to HEIs staff, researchers and students. In this way, abovementioned target groups will benefit from project results even after the project ends.

After the completion of the project, accredited master study programmes will be financed by the relevant governmental bodies and through scholarships. Best students will be awarded with Government scholarships. Through the improved cooperation with non-academic and public sector, a substantial number of scholarships will be available for students because of the lack of NDRM experts at labour market.

WB and EU partner universities will provide dedicated human and financial resources (premises, available equipment and staff) to maintain the project outcomes after the end of the Erasmus financing. The financial sustainability will be also achieved because the state universities in WB countries receive financial support for accredited study programmes from their ministries of education.

Trainings for citizens and public sector will be free of charge during the project lifetime and after the project they will be organized and realized in line with the needs of bodies in systems for NDRM and financed from funds of these systems.

The exploitation will be expressed through the following:

- WB HEIs will continue to implement the developed master curricula. The NatRisk Web master studies will be financed both by the public sources (national budgets for education) and private sources (students fees), as well as the eventual scholarships offered by interested companies.
- The formed educational courses will be offered to all interested stakeholders. The participation fees paid by the interested stakeholders (public services, companies, individuals) will cover costs for the courses, after the project completion.
- WB HEIs will continue to maintain the formed laboratories and the new teaching environment. NatRisk WebHEIs will use their own budgets in order to maintain the laboratories and the new teaching environment, after the project is finished.

After year 2019, the WB HEIs will enhance the quality of the education to the EU level and will be well prepared for further international scientific, educational and research programmes.

6. Actions by the teachers of the new Master's Degree programmes

Programmes that match the real needs of students, socio-economic actors, and the labour market are more likely to be sustainable. They will attract more students, more funding, and more support from the HEIs. In order to make an informed choice about a career, prospective students need to be aware of what is involved in the various jobs which would be open to them and their future prospects. Needs can change, however, even during a project lifetime, and the rapid transfer of knowledge about practices and technology does not necessarily provide an entirely appropriate curriculum for less developed countries. The job market for graduates from the course, and the knowledge, skills and attitudes required by potential employers, will need to be monitored regularly in future by the course teams to underpin changes in curricular content and pedagogy.

The partner institutions will need to ensure that the currency and relevance of the new NatRisk programme is maintained by implementing regular Quality Control and Assurance measures – an annual review of course content and learning resources, teaching methods and students' learning, supplemented by a periodic major review (perhaps every 4 to 5 years) of the currency of the curriculum, its consonance with the requirements of the local labour market, and its calibration against developments in the discipline reflected in courses in other institutions. The outcomes of the annual and periodic reviews should, as a matter of good practice, be posted on the courses' web sites for the benefit of current students and as reassurance for prospective students and the wider professional community.

Some consideration might be given to inviting international representatives, perhaps from the European partners in the NatRisk project, to take part in the first major periodic review of the course, which should take place in about 2024/2025.

The European Commission indicated that indicators of the sustainability of a project would be found in the intensity and enlargement of cooperation: the maintenance of international networks, continued engagement by the project team with local employers, and the enlargement of the initial network to incorporate other universities. As well as continuing contact with NatRisk teachers in the European partners, the partners in the project should also seek to make regular contact with local employers to share insights into their many common challenges.

The new programmes could also make a significant contribution to professional development through encouraging or directing the focus of students' theses.

Students could usefully be encouraged to use these studies to address small current problems in professional practice. Regular meetings of a course advisory panel could help to identify and prioritise these issues, as well as providing the support that may be needed to implement the investigations.

During the first few years after the conclusion of the project, the course teams should seek to involve their national ERASMUS+ Coordinators in monitoring issues relating to the sustainability of the programme.

7. Sustainability plan follow-up

The sustainability plan will be followed up and updated by the Project Management Committee. At each Project Management Committee, the action plans will be reviewed, results established and evaluated and new goals as well as new actions or corrective actions will be decided.

The Project Coordinator will update the document after each Project Management Committee meeting.

All participants to the NatRisk programme can submit valuable ideas to the Project Management Committee.