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EXTERNAL EVALUATION REPORT:

ERAMUS+ project MARDS
”Reforming doctoral studies in Montenegro and Albania – good practice paradigm”
Project Nr: Grant: 598465-EPP-1-2018-1-ME-EPPKA2-CBHE-SP

November 8, 2022

1. INTRODUCTION AND STRUCTURE OF THE PROJECT

Erasmus+ project "Reforming doctoral studies in Montenegro and Albania – good practice paradigm (MARDS)", 598465-EPP-1-2018-1-ME-EPPKA2-CBHE-SP (www.mards.ucg.ac.me), is a three-year regional structural project, with a main objective to reconstruct doctoral studies in Montenegrin and Albanian higher education systems in line with Salzburg Principles and establish sustainable and modern Pilot Joint Doctoral Schools between Montenegro and Albania. The idea is to use further those established Joint Doctoral Schools as examples of "good practices" for the Western Balkan Region. The specific objectives of the MARDS projects are:

Project activities are organised in eight working packages (WP) with relating activities:

- **WP1 / PRE Monitoring and analysing of national systems and policies of doctoral education in Montenegro and Albania and comparing with EU practices**
 - A1.1 Evaluation of the existing doctoral education policy and standards in MNE and Albania and comparing with EU practices
 - A1.2 Organization of a Conference on doctoral education in Montenegro and Albania
 - A1.3 Recommendations and purpose of basic legal documents on university and national levels
- **WP2 / DEV Training of Montenegrin and Albanian academic staff and professionals/administration in doctoral education**
 - A2.1 Training of academic and professional staff on EU practices on doctoral education
 - A2.2 Creating a Guidelines and recommendations for WB academics and professionals in doctoral studies
- **WP3 / DEV Establishing a new model of funding doctoral studies on national levels**
 - A3.1 Evaluation of models for funding doctoral studies in Montenegro and Albania
 - A3.2 Adoption of bylaws on funding doctoral studies in Montenegro
 - A3.3 Adoption of bylaws on funding doctoral studies in Albania
- **WP4 / DEV Establishment and start-up of Joint Pilot Doctoral Schools**
 - A4.1 Development of the Curricula for joint Doctoral Schools
 - A4.2 Equipping the laboratories and other infrastructure at partner universities
 - A4.3 Accreditation of the Doctoral Schools
 - A4.4 Enrolling the first generation
 - A4.5 Programme implementation
- **WP5 / QPLN Quality plan**
 - A5.1 Internal Quality Control
 - A5.2 External Quality Control
- **WP6 / DISS / EXP Dissemination of the project**
 - A6.1 Creation and updating project web site
 - A6.2 Creating and distribution of dissemination documents

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- A6.3 Organizing dissemination conference with stakeholders
- A6.4 Organizing MARDS Doctoral Colloquium "Science, Technology and Services for Sustainable development"
- **WP7 / DISS / EXP Exploitation and Sustainability of the project results**
 - A7.1 Regular meetings about MARDS flow with stakeholders
 - A7.2 Universities - stakeholders networking in Montenegro and Albania
 - A7.3 Establishment of sustainable scholarships in Albania and Montenegro
 - A7.4 Promotion of Doctoral School in Region
- **WP8 / MNGT Management of the project**
 - A8.1 Daily management of the project
 - A8.2 Precise guidelines for management of the project
 - A8.3 Regular meetings of project bodies
 - A8.4 Reporting (progress, quality, financial)
 - A8.5 External financial pre-audit.

There are 16 partners in the project, as follows:

- P1, University of Montenegro (Coordinator, Management), Montenegro (UoM)
- P2, University of Vienna, Austria (UNIVIE)
- P3, University of Maribor, Slovenia (UM)
- P4, Faculty of Education and Rehabilitation, University of Zagreb, Croatia (ERF-UNIZG)
- P5, Matej Bel University, Slovakia (UMB)
- P6, University of Donja Gorica, Montenegro (UDG)
- P7, University of Shkodra "Luigj Gurakuqi", Albania (UNISHK)
- P8, Polytechnic University of Tirana, Albania (PUT)
- P9, University of Vlora, Albania (UV)
- P10, Metropolitan University of Tirana, Albania (UMT)
- P11, Ministry of Education, Montenegro (MoE)
- P12, Ministry of Science, Montenegro (MoSM)
- P13, Ministry of Education, Sports and Youth, Albania (MESY)
- P14, Chamber of Economy, Montenegro (CEM)
- P15, Association for Professionals in Doctoral Education, Austria (PRIDE)
- P16, Union of Chambers of Commerce and Industry, Albania (UCCIAL).

2. PROJECT EVENTS AND ACTIONS

Various types of events and mobility of teaching and other staff and students are well supported by the Erasmus+ programme, which focuses on achievement of additional knowledge, skills and further competences. For the MARDS project, as a project that is focused to joint doctoral schools, mobility represents an important factor during both, development of doctoral schools and their implementation in near future. However, the issues influenced

by Covid-19 virus has influenced limitation of mobility and orientation to on-line virtual mobility and meetings.

As presented, there are events organised within the MARDS project

(<https://www.mards.ucg.ac.me/workflow.html#EventsWorkflow>):

- WP6 / DISS / EXP Dissemination, MARDS promotion at Shkoder, 02/11/2018
- WP6 / DISS / EXP Dissemination, MARDS promotion at Erasmus+ Info Day at University of Montenegro, 13/11/2018
- WP6 / DISS / EXP Dissemination, MARDS promotion at TAM Seminar about Reform of Doctoral Studies at University of Montenegro, 19/11/2018
- WP6 / DISS / EXP Dissemination, MARDS presented on Erasmus+ Info Day, guest Gullia Moro from EACEA, 29/11/2018
- WP9 / MNGT Management, Grant holders coordination Meeting, Brussels, EACEA, 28-30/01/2019
- WP6 / DISS / EXP Dissemination, Presentation of MARDS at Metropolitan University of Tirana, 14/02/2019
- WP8 / MNGT Management, MARDS Kick-off meeting in Podgorica, 20-23/02/2019
- WP5 / QPLN Quality Plan, Quality report / questionnaires on Kick-off meeting, after the meeting
- WP6 / DISS / EXP Dissemination, MARDS is promoted at similar project coordinated by University of Zagreb, HarISA, 25/02/2019
- WP6 / DISS / EXP Dissemination at University of Maribor, 09/04/2019
- WP6 / DISS / EXP Dissemination at University of Vlore, 03/05/2019
- WP8 / QPLN NEO Monitoring visit at University of Vlore, 31/05/2019
- WP11 / PRE Workshop / Conference in Kotor, 03-05/06/2019
- WP5 / QPLN Quality report/analysis of questionnaire, after the Workshop / Conference
- WP6 / DISS / EXP Dissemination of MARDS project at MECO'2019 conference, 10-14/06/2019
- WP2 / DEV Training #1: University of Vienna: "Professional Management of Doctoral Studies", 24-28/06/2019
- WP5 / QPLN NEO Monitoring Visit to the Universities of Montenegro and Partners, 08/07/2019
- WP6 / DISS / EXP Dissemination at Website of University of Montenegro, Interview of Project Coordinator Prof. Dr. Radovan Stojanović, 22/07/2019
- WP2 / DEV Training #2: University of Zagreb, Dubrovnik (CAAS): "Professionalization of PhD Supervision", 04-06/09/2019
- WP8 / MNGT MARDS Bilateral Meeting between the Coordinator (University of Montenegro) and partners from Albania, 23/09/2019
- WP6 / DISS / EXP Round Table: "Doctoral Studies, Industry, Services and Society", Montenegrin Chamber of Commerce, 26/09/2019
- WP2 / DEV Training #3: Matej Bel University, Banska Bystrica: "Collaborative Doctoral Programmes", 02-05/10/2019
- WP8 / MNGT Regional Cluster Meeting on the CBHE project's impact in the Western Balkans, Durres, Albania, 22-23/10/2019

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- WP6 / DISS / EXP Dissemination in Matej Bel University newsletter (page 23), 10/2019
- WP2 / DEV Training #4: University of Maribor: "Quality Assurance of Doctoral Studies", 06-08/10/2019
- WP6 / DISS / EXP Dissemination about the MARDS Training at the University of Maribor, 12/11/2019
- WP8 / MNGT MARDS Meeting between the Coordinator (University of Montenegro) and local partners, 18/11/2019
- WP6 / DISS / EXP Dissemination at the University of Shkodra, 18/11/2019
- WP6 / DISS / EXP Dissemination at the University of Vlora with young researchers, 25/11/2019
- WP6 / DISS / EXP Dissemination on Facebook page of the University of Donja Gorica, 09/12/2019
- WP4 / DEV Equipping the room at the University of Montenegro, 09/12/2019
- WP8 / MNGT MARDS Consortium Meeting Vienna, 10-13/12/2019
- WP5 / QPLN MARDS Open Call for External Evaluators, 20/12/2019
- WP6 / DISS / EXP Presentation of MARD project during Erasmus+ Info day at Polytechnic University of Tirana, 21/01-2020
- WP6 / DISS / EXP Article from University of Maribor Magazine UMNiverzum, nr 11, 02/2020
- WP8 / MNGT 2nd MARDS Bilateral Meeting Albania – Montenegro, 04-05/02/2020
- WP6 / DISS / EXP MARDS Seminar at Metropolitan University of Tirana: Digitalization in Tourism for Sustainable Development, 20/02/2020
- WP5 / QPLN 2nd National Erasmus+ Office Monitoring Visit to the University of Montenegro and Montenegrin partners, 02/06/2020
- WP6 / DISS / EXP Dissemination about MARDS project, The problems of Doctoral Education in Montenegro in Light of MARDS Project, Reforms Inside, Publication of Higher Education Experts in Montenegro, Issue 1, 02/06/2020
- WP6 / DISS / EXP MARDS project disseminated at MECO'2020, 08-11/06/2020
- WP6 / DISS / EXP Interview with Prof. Dr. Radovan Stojanović and Prof. Dr. Predrag Miranović about new doctoral studies in Montenegro and Albania, 15/10/2020
- WP8 / MNGT MARDS 3rd Consortium Meeting, 30/10/2020
- WP4 / DEV The first candidate within MARDS Programme in Montenegro, announcing his interest in enrolling the new PhD studies, 07/11/2020
- WP5 / QPLN External Experts Selected, Prof. Dr. Mile Dzelalija and Prof. Dr. Yannis Manolopoulos, 15/11/2020
- WP4 / DEV Document Management System for Doctoral Studies, purchased with MARDS, in TEST operation at University of Montenegro, 26/11/2020
- WP2 / DEV, WP5 / QPLN, WP6 / DISS / EXP MARDS Workshop Proceedings, 26/11/2020
- WP2 / DEV Government of Montenegro, Council for Qualifications, approved proposal for development of PhD qualification, 02/12/2020
- WP2 / DEV Doctoral Education – 15 years of reform after Salzburg, 09/12/2020
- WP6 / DISS / EXP Montenegrin Chamber of Commerce Webinar, 09/12/2020
- WP6 / DISS / EXP Dissemination in Article about MARDS in "Prosvjetni rad", 01/2021
- WP8 / MNGT MARDS – Senate of the University of Montenegro approved MARDS programme related to the establishment of new doctoral studies, 21/01/2021

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- WP4 / DEV Governing Board of the University of Montenegro approved MARDS Elaborate on the establishment of doctoral study, 27/01/2021
- WP5 / QPLN Intermediate Report on Internal Quality Control by Quality Monitoring Committee, 30/01/2021
- WP5 / QPLN NEO #3 Monitoring Visit to MARDS project, 04/03/2021
- WP6 / DISS / EXP Dissemination of NEO #3 Monitoring Visit to MARDS project, 05/03/2021
- WP4 / WP8 The Elaborate about "Doctoral Programme in sustainable development" is submitted to Agency for Control and Quality Assurance of Higher Education (AKOKVO), 12/03/2021
- WP4 / WP8 "Doctoral Programme in sustainable development" is accredited by the AKOKVO, 21/06/2021.
- WP4 Commission for licensing visited University of Montenegro, 27/09/2021.
- WP8 3rd Consortium Meeting, Shkoder, Albania 05-06/10/2021.

After the beginning of the operation of the doctoral program, a new website has been developed, where all activities have been recorded. Thus, the above list is extended as follows:

- 28/12/2021, Season meeting/start-up
- 29/12/2021, Prof. Dr. Milutinovic lessons #2
- 10/01/2022, Prof. Dr. Milutinovic lesson #3
- 10/03/2022, Local meeting
- 11/03/2022, 5th Consortium meeting
- 17/03/2022, Meeting with the Chamber of Economy of Montenegro
- 20-21/07/2022, Consortium meeting, Shkoder
- 25-28/10/2022, Competition for enrolment of the 2nd generation of PhD students
- 2-4/11/2022, 7th Consortium Meeting with Final Conference and Training for PhDs, Podgorica, Montenegro.

All events have been organised according to the workplan with relevant agendas, topics and participation of relevant stakeholders.

According to the evidence, the consortium has organised and conducted the project activities very much in line to the work plan of the project, structured into eight working packages (WP). There have not been significant deviations, besides rescheduling of events influenced by well-known covid-19 issues.

Promotion and dissemination events of project results and outcomes, as well as project objectives clearly support project mission and vision and the related Erasmus+ programme. Besides organisation of dissemination events, the MARDS project presented project results and activities in newsletters.

Very important events of the project are a set of 4 training sections at various universities in EU member states.

3. ACHIEVED DELIVERABLES

The project "Reforming doctoral studies in Montenegro and Albania – good practice paradigm (MARDS)" has objectives that are relevant to EU standards.

Achievement of the project deliverables is very clear. There is an analysis of the existing national policies and standards regarding doctoral studies in both countries, Montenegro and Albania, elaboration of a new model of doctoral studies for those countries, model of funding, and preparation of the base for the implementation of two pilot Joint Doctoral School. One of two pilots is realistic to be piloted (Montenegro), and another one (in Albania) needs further maturity actions. The Joint doctoral School in Montenegro (Podgorica) "Natural sciences and Technology for Sustainable Development" has been prepared for the implementation, while the joint doctoral school "Economy and Tourism for Sustainable Development" in Albania (Shkoder) needs further preparatory actions in order to become operational.

Deliverables of the project are organised withing working packages:

- WP-1. (PRE) Monitoring and analysing of national systems and policies of doctoral education in Montenegro and Albania and comparing with EU practices**
 - D1.1. Report on the "state of the art" in doctoral education in Montenegro and Albania and comparison with EU practices
 - D1.2. Proceedings from conference about doctoral education in Montenegro and Albania
 - D1.3. Legal documents to be send to responsible bodies for adopting
- WP-2. (DEV) Training of Montenegrin and Albanian academic staff and professionals/administration in doctoral education**
 - D2.1. Report on academic and professional training of WB staff profs and admil' at EU
 - D2.2. Guidelines and recommendations for WB academics and professionals in doctoral studies
- WP-3. (DEV) Establishing a new model of funding doctoral studies on national levels**
 - D3.1. Report on appropriate funding doctoral studies in Montenegro and Albania
 - D3.2. Obligatory decision on adopting MARDS's methodology on funding for Montenegro
 - D3.3. Obligatory decision on adopting MARDS's methodology in Albania
- WP-4. (DEV) Establishment and start-up of Joint Pilot Doctoral Schools**
 - D4.1. Curricula book for Joint school suited in Albania (Shkoder)
 - D4.2. Curricula book for Joint pilot school in Montenegro
 - D4.3. The report on MARDS's equipment resources
 - D4.4. Final version of accreditation application
 - D4.5. Decisions on accreditation
 - D4.6. The list of enrolled students
 - D4.7. The records on implementation flow
- WP-5. (QPLN) Quality plan**
 - D5.1. Quality plan adopted

- D5.2. Internal quality assurance reports delivered
- D5.3. Tender for subtracting external QC experts completed
- D5.4. External quality control and monitoring delivered
- WP-6. (DISS/EXP) Dissemination of the project**
 - D6.1. Setting up and maintaining the project web site
 - D6.2. Dissemination material created and distributed
 - D6.3. Dissemination events with relevant stakeholders organized
 - D6.4. MARDS doctoral Colloquium organised
- WP-7. (DISS/EXP) Exploitation and Sustainability of the project results**
 - D7.1. Sustainability strategy adopted
 - D7.2. University – stakeholders network created
 - D7.3. Doctoral scholarships provided
- WP-8. (MNGT) Management of the project**
 - D8.1. Overall project management
 - D8.2. Project coordination meetings
 - D8.3. Periodical and Final reports.

4. MAJOR ACHIEVEMENTS

Coming to its end, the MARDS project has succeeded the vast majority of its initial goals. The following lists emphasizes its major achievements.

1. The system of PhD studies in Montenegro has been changed. It is characterized by a modern approach, mobility capabilities, with motivated candidates and teachers working intensively – aiming at high research with publications in journals, conferences etc. In addition, the MARDS project contributed to the improvement of other policies and measures in doctoral education in Montenegro, e.g. at the University of Montenegro.
2. The tuition fees for doctoral studies have been reduced to symbolic amounts (nominally, from 0€ to 750€ per semester). Notably, excellent students are free of fees, whereas other students are paying minimal fees, many times less than the respective fees at other European countries.
3. The doctoral program has already been developed, accredited, licensed and started operating. It is mentioned that it is the first international multidisciplinary PhD programme in Montenegro (<https://www.mards.ucg.ac.me/PhD>). To this end, 29 courses have been developed within 5 clusters under the umbrella of Sustainable development.
4. The first generation of students has made a great progress. The MARDS program attracted most of the students enrolled in Ph.D. studies (16 studies programs) at the University of Montenegro in the 2021/2022 academic year. For instance, as many as 15 students out of a total of 93 are enrolled in this program (16%). At the end of the academic year, all enrolled students mastered the defined curriculum with more than 75 % of success ratio. In addition, all the above students have defended their colloquium works within Doctoral Symposium. The students have

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- been very proactive in mobility, their research stays at a partner institution, whereas 83% spent that stay, mainly at the University of Maribor.
5. It is mentioned that about 93% of the students of the first generation are employed or self-employed; this fact shows the attractiveness of the doctoral program among the industry-based PhD students.
 6. Due to MARDS project, the doctoral program is “de facto and de jure” an international program. In other words, it has originated from an international project, conducted in English by international institutions and professors, including international students. Circa 36 % of the enrolled students of the first generation completed their previous level of education at one of the foreign universities. This percent in 2nd generation of students reaches about 90 %. Some of them returned to Montenegro to continue their studies and professional development. Also, about 50% of professors and supervisors were from foreign universities; about 40 % of all authors, at the Symposium, were based out of Montenegro. The Program offers opportunities for the scientific diaspora of Montenegro and the wider Western Balkan.
 7. In term of infrastructure equipping MARDS was very fruitful projects. In Montenegro, all premises (3 classrooms) for education of doctoral students have been equipped, including equipping a New Centre for Doctoral Studies. In Albania, Shkoder, 2 lecture rooms (classrooms) have been equipped, as well as resources have been delivered to all Albanian Partners.
 8. Already, the second generation of students has been accepted (7 out of 15 applications have been accepted).
 9. A traditional Colloquium for Doctoral Students has been established, the first in history of Western Balkans (www.doc-me.com). More than 22 student papers have been presented emanating from project, from 7 Regional countries.
 10. Conclusively, the outcome of MARDS project, i.e the doctoral program, has become a good example in the Region on modern Doctoral studies.

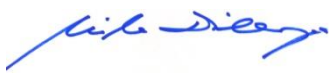
5. SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The project started according to the time schedule and was progressing successfully by organising all the planned activities and delivering the proper reports and other outputs. Since the beginning of 2020, due to the covid pandemic, it was not viable to continue as it was planned. Despite the obstacles and problems, the MARDS project continued to progress, however, delays were faced.

The following points are mentioned in the spirit to finalize the main goals of the project, as well as to ensure its sustainability and strengthen its status in the area and beyond:

- the accreditation process of the doctoral program on the Albanian side has to be completed,
- the involvement of distinguished academic staff and mentors has to be strengthened,
- the Career Services Office of the University of Montenegro, as well as that of the Shkoder University in the future, should support the graduates of the program for faster employment in the private and public sectors,
- a system for scholarships must be set, and finally
- the disseminating actions have to be continued intensively, especially into the region.

Our congratulations to the Project team for the achieved results.



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