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## Intermediate Report on Internal Quality Control

**Done by: Quality Monitoring Committee**

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The following quality check report presents an overview of the MARDS PhD Doctoral Studies program in Sustainable Development. Interview with the main stakeholders were conducted and the propositions for improvement stated.

Special attention should be paid on the suggestions under chapter 7, "Interview with the Vice Rector of the University of Shkodra "Luigj Gurakuqi" (UNISHK) and members of the Faculty of Economics, 26.5.2022". The topics address the accreditation of the PhD program on the side of Albanian partners.

## 1. Interview with the MARDS Erasmus+ PhD Programme in Sustainable Development student representative at the University of Montenegro, 24.5.2022

### **General comments:**

Doctoral Study Centre has been established at the University of Montenegro. The Professors participating in the programme are accessible and provide excellent content. Students especially acknowledged the methodological lectures in “Methodology of science and research work”. Multidisciplinary of the programme is well accepted from the PhD students. At the time of Covid-19 pandemics the transition to online studies were performed. Communication regarding the organization was good.

The web page of the programme (<https://www.mards.ucg.ac.me/PhD/>) is accessible, the links and information provided are useful.

In the next period the Doctoral Colloquium will be conducted. This is an important step in the development of doctoral thesis.

Dissemination of the project results has been performed at the Fair of European Projects organized by the Chamber of Commerce of Montenegro.

### **Current situation:**

Dedicated PhD student administration office handling enrolment, grading etc. has not been established yet.

### **Suggestions for improvements:**

Dedicated PhD programme student administration office should be established at the University of Montenegro.

### **Current situation:**

Some of the students have already mentors, the topics of the dissertations have been determined.

### **Suggestions for improvements:**

Mentorships should be addressed early on, at the start of the studies. Provided elective subjects should be backed by eligible mentors. The set of the available elective subjects should be enlarged by other subjects.

The mechanism of collective supervision of PhD students should be established.

**Current situation:**

Inclusion of the PhD students into established research groups provides a challenge.

**Suggestions for improvements:**

Centre for doctoral studies should examine the possibility to include PhD students into established research groups as researchers as well as teaching assistants.

Connection with industry should be established by indication of research needs. Scholarship mechanisms should be established.

**Current situation:**

So far, student exchanges are provided only by University of Maribor.

**Suggestions for improvements:**

Project partners (in particular Vienna and Zagreb) are expected to share responsibilities with University of Maribor regarding the exchanges and supervision of Ph.D.candidates

## 2. Interview with the MARDS Erasmus+ PhD Programme in Sustainable Development Administrative Project Manager at the University of Montenegro, 24.5.2022

**General comments:**

The main activity in the project was Accreditation of the PhD programme, which was successfully acquired from Agency for Control and Quality Assurance of Higher Education of Montenegro on 21.6.2021. The international project office at the University of Montenegro has been established in March 2022. The communication between project partners was appropriate with no difficulties. The project management tree structure was established based on the e-mail threads mirrored on local storage. External technical evaluation was performed. Activities for the preparation of final report are already ongoing. The project financial evaluators are in direct communication with partners, performing needed corrections in order to meet documentation rules for final report. The website of the MARDS project as well as PhD program is timely updated. Communication with students was effective, they were informed about the programme and enrolment early on. The management of the project from the side of Head of the Project has been good, the leadership is also good as well as diligence at the documentation.

There are no issues regarding the preparation of the documentation for the final report. The main activities were performed in the first part of the project. In the second part of the project the program accreditation was performed as well as the enrolment of the first generation of the students which was one of the main objectives of the project.

**Current situation:**

There is increased number of activities that are related with student administration, such as curriculum schedule, exchanges etc. Temporarily the student administration has been provided at the Faculty of Civil Engineering.

**Suggestions for improvements:**

Dedicated PhD programme student administration office should be established at the University of Montenegro.

**Current situation:**

There are growing concerns regarding the sustainability of the PhD study program after the end of MARDS Erasmus+ project.

**Suggestions for improvements:**

Conference on the topic of sustainability of PhD programme should be conducted with all stakeholders. The agreement between UCG, UM, UDG, Chamber of Commerce and industrial partners to support the programme should be considered.

**Current situation:**

At the Albanian side the start of the program faced the delay due to unclear legal relationship between the University and Faculty.

**Suggestions for improvements:**

Legal counselling should be provided in order to timely launch the programme and enrol the students according to the MARDS Erasmus+ programme.

**Current situation:**

The timeliness off the documentation delivery on shared google drive has been an issue by some partners.

**Suggestions for improvements:**

Proper instructions should be provided to partners as well as communication with responsible, assigned persons.

**Current situation:**

The budget has been realized only up to the 56%, mainly due to the Covid-19 travel bans.

**Suggestions for improvements:**

Head of the project should propose to the Erasmus+ to transfer the part of the funds to support sustainability of the program in next 6 years.

**Current situation:**

Training of the administrative personal regarding the project administration has not been provided due to Covid-19 pandemics.

**Suggestions for improvements:**

Erasmus+ Higher Education staff training programme should be used in order to build the PhD Administrative department capacity.

### 3. Interview with the President and Vice President of Doctoral Studies Centre at the University of Montenegro, 24.5.2022

**General comments:**

The main task of the Centre for Doctoral Studies at the University of Montenegro is coordination and »Capacity Building«, both scientific and administrative. Centre for Doctoral Studies is partner in the MARDS project. Currently the administration for the MARDS PhD Programme in Sustainable Development is conducted at the Faculty of Civil Engineering.

One month study visits are coordinated by the Centre in the framework of MARDS PhD Programme in Sustainable Development.

The problems with the Albanian partners have been indicated. The Chair of the PhD studies should be determined which should be on University or Faculty.

There have been 25 application for the MARDS PhD Programme in Sustainable Development. 15 candidates have been selected by reference letters and average grade at the undergraduate studies.

Each Faculty at the University of Montenegro has it's own committee for doctoral studies. MARDS representative is included at each committee meeting.

The organization is not completely defined between Doctoral Committee and Centre for Doctoral Studies.

The problem of sustainability of the MARDS PhD studies in Sustainable Development has been pointed out. The financing after the MARDS project completion should be provided.

**Current situation:**

Doctoral Studies are not completely embedded into institutional strategy and policies. Organization structure is not completely defined. “Capacity Building” is not sufficient, especially administration.

**Suggestions for improvements:**

Embedding in institutional strategies and policies: universities as institutions need to assume responsibility for ensuring that the doctoral programmes and research training they offer are designed to meet new challenges and include appropriate professional career development opportunities.

## 4. Interview with the MARDS Erasmus+ UDG Partner Group, 25.5.2022

**General comments:**

The finances are still available for the student exchange. At the time of the interview, three exchanges were ongoing.

Dissemination has been conducted via UDG website and electronic media.

Additional subjects should be provided as the electives.

Students are well informed and willing to go on exchange at University of Maribor. The PhD study in Sustainable Development is novelty. The information of the programme was timely provided to prospective students. There is great interest for studies.

Students have their own PhD studies office at UDG. The contact with UCG is established to assist administration.

The studies are conducted at UDG. Financing for professors is provided by MARDS project.

Conditions for the PhD mentorships should be considered.

**Current situation:**

Financing of the professors is provided by MARDS project. Sustainability in this regard has not yet been addressed.

**Suggestions for improvements:**

Address the sustainability of the program after the end of the MARDS project.

**Current situation:**

The group of potential PhD mentors from UDG has not yet been considered.

**Suggestions for improvements:**

Establish the group of potential PhD mentors from UDG that meet the conditions for mentorship.

## 5. Interview with the national coordinator of Erasmus+ projects, 25.5.2022

**General comments:**

Erasmus+ office is monitoring the project from the beginning. The preventive monitoring has been conducted as well as expert analysis. The review of the equipment has been conducted. Monitoring of the partner activities has been conducted as well.

After the end of the project the monitoring will be conducted in order to determine whether the PhD programme started within the Erasmus+ project »lives on«, i.e. is sustainable. The interest for the PhD studies was significant.

Two quality monitoring have been conducted according to the risk level. The project applications have been applied in this regard. Analysis has been conducted in the case of unrealized activities. Project inter-coaching was conducted in order to improve project management.

The dissemination of the project was proper with the emphasis of the project on the broader society. The integration of local community and students is also important.

The problem with the accreditation of the PhD programme with Albanian partners was identified due to organizational and administrative issues.

**Current situation:**

Dissemination of the project results could be improved not only to general public but also to ministries.

**Suggestions for improvements:**

Information of the project impact to broader society as well as ministries should be provided. Sustainable development impact on the society should be emphasized.

**Current situation:**

Sustainability of the PhD studies after the MARDS project has not been systematically addressed.

**Suggestions for improvements:**

Contact Erasmus+ main office in order to address possibilities regarding sustainability as well as government institutions that might support the programme.

## 6. Interview with the representative of Chamber of Economy Montenegro, 25.5.2022

**General comments:**

Chamber of Economy Montenegro helps with the MARDS PhD Sustainable development program at establishing cooperation with enterprises and institutions. Chamber enables access to the current, ongoing research projects which are of interest for students as well. Dissemination activities were conducted. The Ph.D. programme has been recognised as valuable asset since it offers sound career opportunities for all students. New areas of research are of interest such as green deal and circular economy and sustainable development.

Chamber of Economy Montenegro cooperates with MARDS representatives' right from the start of the project. The project is fulfilling the expectations of the Chamber. The project contributes to better connection between industry and university.

Dissemination of the project information is conducted via standard communication channels. In May the European Project Fair will be organized where MARDS will be presented.

Companies would provide Scholarships to students, if they would recognize the interest. This might contribute to the sustainability.



In November the Chamber of Economy Montenegro will intensify the promotion in order to enhance the possibilities for sustainability of the MARDS program. Here investment in knowledge would be promoted.

The Centre of circular economy will be established which would provide the possibility for students to perform their research work.

The following profiles were identified which would be needed in Montenegro: Hydrogen Energy, Waste Management, Sustainable Tourism, Sustainable Energy, Circular Economy, Use of open source data for improvement of sustainability development, Open Data for sustainable innovation.

### **Current situation:**

New profiles in the area of Sustainable Development have been identified which are not covered in MARDS PhD Sustainable Development program.

### **Suggestions for improvements:**

Analysis of the needs of institutions and industries should be conducted and included in further improvement of the programme. All stakeholders should be included at the identification phase.

## **7. Interview with the Vice Rector of the University of Shkodra "Luigj Gurakuqi" (UNISHK) and members of the Faculty of Economics, 26.5.2022**

### **General comments:**

From the Rectorate viewpoint, the programme in Sustainable Development covers wide field of application. This study programme should not be strictly narrowed at the Faculty of Economics. In the first stage of accreditation application the application failed. In the second, the application passed due to inclusion of all Faculties.

University should use the program to benefit University and the region, not only the Economic Faculty.

Suggestion – the doctoral committee should consist of full professors from proper field of studies.

Ministry addressed the recommendations to the University in second stage, to open the study program to other fields. Internal regulations has to be meet to include qualified Faculties.

Remark from the MARDS project head: »At the Erasmus+ level there is no partner as Faculty. Rector represents the University and give approval for UNISHK to cooperate.«

**In the second part of the discussion the Dean of Economics Faculty was present as well as Program Leader from the UNISHK**

**General remarks from the Faculty of Economics viewpoint:**

Faculty of Economics states that organizational structure should be established at the Economics faculty, Rectorate should only provide administrative support.

Nothing stops the Faculty of Economics to start the project. Program Leader from the UNISHK plead the Vice Rector to support the opening of the project and not to make obstacles.

The request has been issued to discuss the situation with Rector, however, for two weeks there has been no answer. The start of the program is therefore blocked.

Vice Rector explained, that all the faculties should be included.

***Please note, that Quality Control Committee has no intention to interfere with UNISHK internal issues. Please consider next suggestions as our best effort to support successful launch of the UNISHK PhD Program.***

**Current situation:**

The obligation of the UNISHK within the MARDS project to start the PhD program in Sustainable development has not been fulfilled.

**Suggestions for improvements:**

The PhD programme should be launched as soon as possible without further delays.

**Current situation:**

The MARDS PhD Study program in Sustainable Development has not yet been started due to internal organizational issues.

**Suggestions for improvements:**

Member of the MARDS Quality Control Team suggested to talk over the topic before the Senate next week and resolve the issues and start right away with the Program and enrol students as soon as possible without any further delays. It is expected, that by the 15th of June the enrolment of the students is started.

**Current situation:**

There is no organizational structure set up which would support the start of the program.

**Suggestions for improvements:**

General Head of the MARDS program suggested, that Prof. Arjeta Troshani should be assigned as the PhD Programme Coordinator by Rector.

The Centre for Doctoral Studies should be established. Faculty of Economics should have a representative in the centre and take part of the main doctoral committee. Expert Board should supervise the program.

**Current situation:**

Dissemination and launch of the PhD programme has not been implemented.

**Suggestions for improvements:**

At the end of June / middle of July 2022 the MARDS partner meeting should be organized in Shkoder to promote the enrolment of the first generation of the students to the PhD program. State media should be present.

**Current situation:**

The new PhD programme has not been properly embedded in the institutional strategies and policies.

**Suggestions for improvements:**

Special attention should be made by the University to the following Salzburg principle of doctoral studies:  
»Embedding in institutional strategies and policies: universities as institutions need to assume responsibility for ensuring that the doctoral programmes and research training they offer are designed to meet new challenges and include appropriate professional career development opportunities.«

**Current situation:**

The PhD programme has not yet given an approval for Activation from the Ministry of Science and Sport of the Republic of Albania.

**Suggestions for improvements:**

The meeting should be organized as soon as possible between the Ministry of Science and Sport of the Republic of Albania Mr. Evis Kushi, UNISHK Rector Suzana Golemi, Chair of PRIDE Network Prof. Dr. Lucas Zinner and General MARDS Erasmus+ Project Coordinator Prof. Dr. Radovan Stojanović.

Prof. Dr. Andrej Škraba, Prof. Dr. Jernej Turk  
Members of the Quality Monitoring Committee