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Enhancement of HE research potential
contributing to further growth of the WB region



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Enhancement of HE Research Potential Contributing to Further Growth of the WB Region
Re@WBC**

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Abstract	This report is mid-term internal report on the Project activities. It includes all the activities planned for the first half of the Project life time. The analyses have been carried out through work packages and their specific tasks. This report also shows the Project's great complexity and its' importance for WBC HEIs in the processes of their harmonization with other similar institutions in the EHEA.
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1. Introduction

The main goal of the project “Enhancement of HE research potential contributing to further growth of the WB region” is to empower management of human research (HR) potential at WB universities in line with EU and national strategies for researchers. This project doesn’t have an aim to make changes in national policy in this domain, but to enhance partner universities to improve their legislation, procedures and roles in the highest possible measure. This enhancement could serve as a good vehicle for further empowerment of HR potential on both levels: university’s and national. Namely, it is of a great importance to help universities to describe the whole picture of HR potential and its’ management and to improve those elements that are necessary and that are already prescribed (and not yet arranged in the best way) by their nation legislation frames.

The methodology to achieve project’s objective was created in order to combine top-down and bottom-up approaches. That was very good way to answer on higher demands in the area of HR management. The procedures and practices for HR management needs to be improved to meet European standards. Except that, training and informing of young researchers about professional skills and their career development should be established through a set of universities’ bylaws. Namely, it’s necessary to develop the whole platform (institutional policies and practices) for HR management in the terms of appropriate bylaws, procedures, regular training and information. HR management, developed through this project, should create two main basis for HE research potential improving: 1. Policy and procedure base to ensure universities’ regular practices in this field, 2. Knowledge and skills base in this area. Knowledge base could be described in the terms of developed skills, attitudes and values within HE research potential management. In that sense, the Project has two main pillars: knowledge-based and skills-based background and procedure-based set of the activities. This mixed methodology should serve as a vehicle for capacity building action in the field of management of human research potential at WB universities.

It is also very important to mention cooperation in the region, harmonization of HEIs and that part should serve as a vehicle for some further activities aimed to improve HEIs and to make them comparable with similar institutions within European Higher Education Area. Towards that, very important goal – harmonizing HEIs with demands of EHEA – this Project devoted actions on achieving standards that are expected for HR Excellence in Research Label. Namely, as the Project background is basically routed in the EU standards (especially with European Charter & Code), partner universities will make the efforts to be awarded with HR Excellence in Research label.

Project activities have been divided into three thematic groups:

Improving institutional HR policies and practices by harmonising them with EU standards and strategies for researchers, and with national priorities for sustainable development;

Enhancing career development and cooperation opportunities of researchers through professional and transferable skills improvement; and

Fostering regional cooperation in order to harmonise the management of university research potentials, and raise awareness about HRS4R principles.

For the realization of these activities work packages were developed and their deliverables and timelines were adopted by all the partners.

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The reports and trainings are dominant deliverables, which is quite in line with Project goals. On the one side, the Project should result in empowerment of the policy management in the area of HE research potential and different reports should give us the data about the progress. On the other side, it's necessary to train young researchers in: various skills, research methodology, teaching methodology, European Charter and Code etc. This is – as we pointed previously – double action: 1. improving policy and universities procedures in HE management, 2. developing new skills in order to help in young researchers empowerment.

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2. OVERALL ACHIEVEMENT: WHAT HAS BEEN DONE?

2.1 Overview of (un)realized tasks through work packages

Table 1 contains all the tasks developed under six work packages and partners' achievements in each of the tasks.

Table 1 – Activities in the Project Re@WBC

	Univ ersit y of Nis	Univer sity of Kraguj evac	Univ ersit y of Novi Sad	Univer sity of Belgra de	Univer sity of Monte negro	Univ ersit y of Saraj evo	Univer sity of East Saraje vo	Univ ersit y of Vlora	Univer sity of Tirana
1.1 Research potential at WBC universities mapped	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
1.2 Review of HR strategies at EU partners	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
1.3 Comparative analysis	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
1.4 Action plans for HE management reform	X	X	X			X	X	X	
1.5 HR offices and centers equipped	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
2.1 University centers and HR offices reinforced	X	X	X		X	X	X		
2.2 Administrative staff competences improved	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
2.3 University managements educated on the C&C implementation	X	X	X	X		X		X	X
2.4 HRS4R strategy created and adopted at partner universities	X	X	X		X	X	X		
2.5 Training trainers	X	X	X	X		X	X	X	X
2.6 Promotion procedures improved	X		X	X	X		X		
2.7 Plagiarism monitoring tools implemented	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	

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2.8 Ethical committee procedures improved		X	X	X				X	
2.9 Cooperation with scientific diaspora established						X		X	
3.1 Researchers trained on C&C and HRS4R	X	78%	X	X	20%	X	X	X	X
3.2 Webpages offer opportunity links		X			X	X	X	X	
3.3 Young researchers trained on research methodology	X	65%	X	14%	0%	90%	X	X	X
3.4 Young researchers trained in various skills	X	X	X	X		X	X	X	X
3.5 Training on teaching methodology									
3.6 Pilot Mentoring system introduced	X		X					X	
3.7 Measures for enhancement of multidisciplinary in research									
3.8 Guide book published	X	X	X	X		X	X	X	X
4.1 Quality Assurance Committee (QAC) established	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
4.2 Project quality procedures developed	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
4.3 WP reports	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
4.4 Annual QA reports	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
4.5 Reports analysis	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
4.6 External monitoring	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
5.1 Project web-site created and regularly updated	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
5.2 Promotional material distributed	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
5.3 Project results disseminated	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
5.4 The label "HR Excellence in Research" obtained by a number of WB partner universities	X	X	X				X	X	

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5.5 Establishment of awards for young researchers		X		X	X	X	X		
5.6 Mentoring system adopted	X								
5.7 Strategy on continual training of researchers adopted	X						X		
6.1 Kick-off and coordinating meetings realized	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
6.2 Procedures for project management	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
6.3 Project management bodies set up and PA signed	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
6.4 Software platform for project management	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
6.5 Day-to-day coordination	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
6.6 Financial management	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%

2.2 Overview of the achievements through work packages

Preparation phase has been planned within the WP1 – *Preparing for the HR research management reform*. In the frame of this WP there were five tasks planned to be done during 2016, with one which finalisation was predicted for the very beginning of 2017. The main deliverables (excluding task 1.5 which implies equipment for HR offices and centres) are reports. Each partner university finished mapping of research potential and each partner university took part in the tasks aimed on the review of HR strategies at EU partners and also in comparative analysis. The partners have distributed a number of questionnaires to map the research potential, and through this process the Consortium gained data on the current state. The most important categories are classified as follows: recruitment, ethics and professional responsibility, working conditions, education and training, and these categories were compared to those from EU partners. All reports were accepted by the Consortium and uploaded to the Project website.

Concrete activities and tasks that were planned within this preparatory phase are:

- 1.1 Research potential at WBC universities mapped
- 1.2 Review of HR strategies at EU partners
- 1.3 Comparative analysis
- 1.4 Action plans for HE management reform
- 1.5 HR offices and centres equipped

However, task 1.4. *Action plans for HE management reform* hasn't been finished by three partners in the planned timeframe: University of Belgrade, University of Tirana and University of Montenegro. University of

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Belgrade and University of Tirana are very big universities and each management reform considers larger time amount, while the University of Montenegro made delay by specific internal circumstances that lead to the general management changes. This partner university change three coordinators during the project lifetime and that was the biggest reason for slower tasks realisation.

Finalisation of these activities in WP1 means that the Consortium gained: (a) the “whole picture” of the field – research potential at partner universities mapped; (2) successful practice examples through the review of similar strategies at EU partners; (3) possibility for comparison and creation of the most suitable model(s) for WBC HEIs. Based on that data it was possible to create action plans for HE management reform. Partners that finished their action plans on time could help other universities with some ideas, technical questions etc.

These activities also shown complexity of this Project and its' importance for WBC HEIs. Namely, the Consortium found many gaps within HE management at partner universities, starting with the fact that many young researchers didn't know anything about European Charter & Code and that many of them didn't have any training in research methodology. These facts, founded through mapping process, may be seen as a positive feedback for the necessity of this or similar project. Except that, action plans could serve as the evidence of the projects' complexity. These plans contain so many universities' procedures, bylaws etc. and it seems that the project is dealing with almost the whole universities' legislation: bylaws that will enhance the legislative aspect of university HR services by strengthening and regulating the position of university centres; bylaws that will regulate promotion procedures in a more efficient and transparent way; bylaws that will provide more efficient resolution of ethical issues by regulating the responsibilities of ethical committees; bylaws that will establish a sustainable system of awards for successful researchers to further motivate them; bylaws that will regulate a new institution of a Mentoring System for assistant professors.

The second work package (WP2) is devoted to gain excellence for the researchers (entitled *Excellent university for the researchers*) and it contains of nine complex tasks:

- 2.1 University centres and HR offices reinforced
- 2.2 Administrative staff competences improved
- 2.3 University managements educated on the C&C implementation
- 2.4 HRS4R strategy created and adopted at partner universities
- 2.5 Training trainers
- 2.6 Promotion procedures improved
- 2.7 Plagiarism monitoring tools implemented
- 2.8 Ethical committee procedures improved
- 2.9 Cooperation with scientific diaspora established

Just one task has been finished by all the partners, and that's task 2.2, while other activities – due to their complexity – need more time and more efforts to be done. Tasks 2.4, 2.6, 2.8, and 2.9 shown their big complexity and some differences between universities and their national legislation frames. Some of these activities were connected directly with ministries of education at the national level, while some of them are in the universities' authority. For example, promotion procedures are in some WB countries under the national ministry's authority. But, even when the procedures (e.g. ethical committee procedures) are in the

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university's authority, it's necessary to have more time for its' reform due to very slow and complicated university's bylaws. Namely, it's important to discuss reforms at different university levels.

It's interesting to underline here that plagiarism monitoring tools is implemented on time by almost all the partners. This is also complicated procedure and needs a lot of the activities with different actors at the national and institutional level, but partner universities recognized its' relevance in the scope of the Project's overall goal. This new tools that are implemented through this Project are already recognized as one of the greatest project's achievements and the factor of its sustainability. Adopted procedures for plagiarism monitoring were properly disseminated through the region.

The last task, considering cooperation with scientific diaspora, could be seen as the most difficult, if we bear in mind its' accomplishment by the partners. Two partner universities finished it on time, while the others are searching for the best ideas how to deal with it. It's important to underline that the Project proposal supposed the task complexity and predicted its' finishing for October of 2018.

The third WP is also developmental, such as WP2, and its tasks were divided into 8 groups:

- 3.1 Researchers trained on C&C and HRS4R
- 3.2 Webpages offer opportunity links
- 3.3 Young researchers trained on research methodology
- 3.4 Young researchers trained in various skills
- 3.5 Training on teaching methodology
- 3.6 Pilot Mentoring system introduced
- 3.7 Measures for enhancement of multidisciplinary in research
- 3.8 Guide book published

When we think about the tasks complexity, it's important to underline that there isn't something like "absolute" tasks complexity, e.g. the same complexity for all the partners. For example, for those universities that are organized as an integrated institutions and which have one webpage for all the faculties, it was relatively easy to add opportunity links. On the other side, un-integrated universities have many web pages (for each of their faculties separate web page) and this was challenging task for them. In that context, it's very important that the applicant (the leading partner) assumed wider time frame for most of the activities. This WP3 is predicted to be realised during three years and it covers almost all the Project lifetime.

Another consideration could be devoted due to the different size of the partner universities. E.g. the University of Montenegro has less teaching assistants and less assistant professors than the others. From the very beginning of the Project it was obvious that some predicted numbers (such as 200 young researchers trained in teaching and in research methodology) are going to be difficult to achieve. But, in the case of this university, there were delays in the trainings from the very beginning. That wasn't the only problem with this partner, because those difficulties arising from coordinator's changes very more difficult to gain with. From the end of 2017 the third coordinator finally started to work seriously on the Project's tasks, but for some of them it was too late to deal with, such as task 3.8 (guide book preparation and publication). However, other Consortium members finished this task and published book served as a very good starting manual for young researchers. This is the first product of that kind at WBC HEIs and it was created from different perspectives. These qualities are prerequisite for its' further usage among young researchers from different science, social science and humanities fields.

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Interesting and in some aspects open for further discussion is task 3.7 entitled *Measures for enhancement of multidisciplinary in research*. Although all the Project partners (or – precisely – their team members within this project) have clear and strong attitude that multidisciplinary in research is something necessary from today's scientific perspective, we consider that WB HEIs have a lot of traditionalistic within this issue. Namely, “pure” sciences, and accordingly “pure” faculties are still predominantly present at the WBC HEIs and in many cases it's not easy to start the second or the third study cycle at the faculty for which the persons haven't finished bachelor studies. In such a circumstances, multidisciplinary doesn't have appropriate stimulation in the academic community. That's why we consider this activity as one of the biggest project achievements under the hypothesis that it will be done. For now, no one of the partner universities didn't finish this activity.

Pilot mentoring system introduction was finished by only three partners. This could be also seen as something that challenges some traditional procedures, established a years ago. While it's necessary to have full mentoring support during the PhD studies, it's almost impossible to develop appropriate system for young researchers which gained their PhD, especially in the case they were promoted in the title of assistant professor. Lack of traditionally recognized support and assistance for young researchers influenced the task's difficulty for almost all partners – only three partner universities finished this task up-to-date.

Activities aimed on training in teaching methodology are closely connected with previous mentioned supporting of young researchers. At WBC HEIs there isn't systematic training in teaching methodology for young teaching assistants. The only categories of young researchers that were trained in this area are those included in teacher education departments from their bachelor studies. For the rest of them it's somehow assumed that their research skills will help them to become good teachers. That's why this project should serve as a basis for deeper understanding of the connection between research and teaching but also young researchers could see quite a big differences between the two.

When considering time and deadline questions, some of the activities were planned to be done during 2016, but most of them were predicted for 2017, and several for 2018. In the time coordinates, it's real to assume that the Consortium will achieve majority of its' goals under the project lifetime, but with adding some management efforts. Of course, at this point in time, it's not so clear if the tasks 3.6 and 3.7 will be finished due to complex procedures and due to lack of time.

WP4 is entitled as Quality, and its activities are predicted as follows:

- 4.1 Quality Assurance Committee (QAC) established
- 4.2 Project quality procedures developed
- 4.3 WP reports
- 4.4 Annual QA reports
- 4.5 Reports analysis
- 4.6 External monitoring

All of the necessary activities for the very beginning of the Project were established by the Consortium. Quality Assurance Committee has been established and quality procedures developed. Templates were created for all the reports and each partner university finished its' reports up-to-date. These reports were accepted by the Consortium and uploaded on the Project website.

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WP5 was created with an aim of the Project dissemination and exploitation of its' results. Several activities were planned:

- 5.1 Project web-site created and regularly updated
- 5.2 Promotional material distributed
- 5.3 Project results disseminated
- 5.4 The label "HR Excellence in Research" obtained by a number of WB partner universities
- 5.5 Establishment of awards for young researchers
- 5.6 Mentoring system adopted
- 5.7 Strategy on continual training of researchers adopted.

Starting tasks, e.g. creating of Project website and promotional material were finished on time. Project website was created in a user friendly way – it's clear, easy for finding information, well organized and transparent. Each important Project element could be found there and in some aspects – we could assume that this product will be of a great help in the Project sustainability and its' relevance for some similar project ideas.

Within this WP some tasks need more time and it's obviously that some of the partners can't finish them at the end of the Projects' third year. We should underline the activity 5.4 which is focused on the label "HR excellence in Research", because the gap analysis – that is necessary for applying for this label – is very complicated process due to 40 items that need to be properly analysed by the university teams. This label has already been obtained by 5 partners.

Mentoring system is, as we already mentioned, something that will need more time and more efforts, especially due to its new ideas which are not traditionally established in the most partner universities. In the line with mentoring system, we may assume that development of strategy on continual training of researchers and its' adoption will search for more time especially for those partner universities which already had some delays. But, on the other side – which we consider as a great Project's achievement – during different activities, meetings, study visits, discussions etc. – the partner university representatives developed common understanding of the necessity of these activities. Namely, mentoring system is, from our point of view, something that is absolutely necessary in contemporary scientific society. This is also the case with continual training in different transversal skills – new skills are booming thanks to technical and technological advances and many of them are becoming an integral part of day-to-day research and teaching practice.

WP6 – Management is the last work package and it consist of six tasks:

- 6.1 Kick-off and coordinating meetings realized
- 6.2 Procedures for project management
- 6.3 Project management bodies set up and PA signed
- 6.4 Software platform for project management
- 6.5 Day-to-day coordination
- 6.6 Financial management

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Except activities labelled as 6.5 and 6.6, all the other activities were finished on time and with the whole Consortium consensus. This WP was very carefully and professionally lead by the leading partner, University of Nis. There were a lot of different risks to the Project implementation, but skilled leading helped a lot in its' overcoming.

The project was managed and coordinated in the best possible way, in a professional manner and with the greatest possible coordination skills. Namely, some partners' delays, unfinished activities etc. were fostered and many of them finished with a great amount of tolerance but with all the seriousness. Personal and group email correspondence, skype conversations and the website, also with other ways of electronic supported technologies helped a lot in the realization of all activities.

Reporting is realized on a high level, with serious feedbacks and all organized activities, project events, seminars, workshops and trainings are well reported and documented.

3. FURTHER ACTIVITIES: WHAT SHOULD BE DONE?

Considering the Project results and it's' up-to-date realized activities, it's obvious that those tasks aimed at reforms of some procedures at partner universities are looking for more efforts by the university managements to be done until the end of the Project. We are focused on the following tasks:

- 1.4 Action plans for HE management reform
- 2.4 HRS4R strategy created and adopted at partner universities
- 2.8 Ethical committee procedures improved
- 2.9 Cooperation with scientific diaspora established
- 3.6 Pilot Mentoring system introduced
- 3.7 Measures for enhancement of multidisciplinary in research
- 5.4 The label "HR Excellence in Research" obtained by a number of WB partner universities
- 5.6 Mentoring system adopted
- 5.7 Strategy on continual training of researchers adopted

Although it was necessary to finish each action plan during the first year of the Project realization, due to some specifics, some partners haven't finished this yet. It's important to mention that this fact didn't borrow their other activities. This task should be done as soon as possible.

Other procedures, measures, strategy etc. need time and it's of the greatest importance to arrange them with the aim of realizing the Project's main goal which assumes the whole necessary tools for young researchers to be supported through this management reform.

Another unrealized activities are those aimed at training in research and teaching methodology, and also in various skills. These tasks could become heavy due to some technical and organizational issues. Namely, during the academic year, sometimes it isn't easy to find appropriate dates for trainings. In that sense, it's important to deal with these tasks as soon as possible.

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4. CONCLUSION

This report includes activities that have been realized during the first and the second year of the Project realization. Many of the planned activities had been done in the assumed time frame, but some of them obviously were too complicated due to their nature (procedure and/or strategy reforms), or due to some specifics at the universities itself.

When we consider project's relevance and its' overall goal, it's absolutely clear that some of the tasks will have broader impact on WBC HEIs that are involved in this Project. For example, strategy for cooperation with scientific diaspora has the relevance for many aspects of the university functioning and it will enhance universities to think about possible cooperation and a broader exchange of expertise. Trainings in research methodology, various skills and teaching methodology are part of this Project with an aim to become regular practice at WBC HEIs.

The label "HR Excellence in Research" which should be obtained by a number of WB partner universities is also of the greatest importance for young researchers. To achieve this label, universities' management should reconsider many of their regular procedures, rules, even policies. On the other side, this label will be of the greatest importance in the process of harmonization WBC HEIs with other similar institutions across Europe.

The overall Project's goal is very high – it was clear in the Project proposal, but from today's standpoint it could be seen as a complex matrix of actions that are all inter-correlated. Of course, when we have in mind that the Project aims cover very complex area of HR management for young researchers, it's clear that it was necessary to deal with the highest university/national procedures (such as promotional procedures).

At the end of the second year of the Project lifetime it's visible that the Project Management functions well in accordance with adopted procedures. The slowest in the task realization is the University of Montenegro, but this trend started to change from the autumn of 2017 when they started to deal with their tasks much better than they did before. Other partner universities – according to their clear and detailed reports – are very devoted to the Project's goals. Communication among partners is on regular basis, with day-to-day responses to some questions when it's necessary.

The Consortium is well balanced in the terms of different scientific fields of the universities representatives.

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