



Soil Erosion and TOrrential Flood prevention: curriculum
development at the universities of Western Balkan countries

SETOF

External Evaluation Report

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Project and document background

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List of Abbreviations

CBHE	Capacity Building in Higher Education
D&E	Dissemination and exploitation
EACEA	Education, Audiovisual and Culture Executive Agency
EC	European Commission
EU	European Union
HE	Higher Education
HEI	Higher Education Institution
KPI	Key performance indicators
LLL	Lifelong Learning
MOOC	Massive Open Online Courses
NEO	National Erasmus+ Office
PA	Project application
PC	Project Coordinator
P1/UB	University of Belgrade
P2/UNS	University of Novi Sad
P3/UNI	University of Niš
P4/UBL	University of Banja Luka
P5/UNSA	University of Sarajevo
P6/INSZASUM	Institute of Forestry
P7/BOKU	University of Natural Resources and Life Sciences
P8/UNSCM	Ss. Cyril and Methodius University in Skopje
P9/UNIRC	University Mediterranea of Reggio Calabria
P10/FRI-BAS	Forest Research Institute at the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences
P11/SCE	Serbian Chamber of Engineers
P12/FMU	Forest Management Unit “Donjevbasko” Banja Luka
P13/CPCSF	Cantonal Public Company “Sarajevo-forests”
SETOF	Soil Erosion and TOrrential Flood prevention: curriculum development at the universities of Western Balkan countries
QAC	Quality Assurance Committee
WB	Western Balkan
WP	Work package



I Introduction

The SETOF project is an Erasmus+ Capacity Building in Higher Education joint - curriculum development project. It was awarded funding by the Education, Audiovisual and Culture Executive Agency (EACEA) in 2018 for the three project years. The donor approved the prolongation of the project in the period of 12 months making November 2022 the final project month.

The project consortium articulated the need for the project at two levels:

1. The level of the Western Balkan (WB) societies that face the soil erosion and torrential floods that have consequences as much on environment as on economy and social sustainability
2. The level of the education sector that should produce professionals able to tackle the problems of the environment.

According to the project application, the main project objective is *the development and improvement of curricula for the education of professionals in the Western Balkans (Serbia and Bosnia and Herzegovina) who will solve problems of soil erosion control and protection against torrential floods in compliance with EU directives*. The specific project objectives are:

- Improvement of land protection from soil erosion and prevention of torrential floods in WB
- Improvement of existing curricula and develop and implement new master curricula in the field of prevention from torrential floods, in compliance with the Bologna Declaration and EU good practices
- Implementation of the improved knowledge for practical solutions to prevention against torrential floods through project designing and execution
- Increase education of local self-governments for soil erosion and torrential flood protection



The above listed project objectives were to be reached by implementing activities structured within seven work packages out of which three are content related (training of teachers, modernisation of bachelor studies and the development of joint master programme), one focuses on ensuring the quality of activities and outputs, two aim at ensuring the dissemination and exploitation of the project results and one is a project management work package.

This report was commissioned as part of the activities towards ensuring the quality of project outputs as an external consultancy service. At the project level, the internal quality assurance was allocated to the Quality Assurance Committee (QAC) with the responsibility of implementing quality control and monitoring activities. The external quality assurance mechanism was articulated through the involvement of an *external evaluator for quality control of the implementation of the project and its results* (project application, page 45).

The external evaluation of the quality of the activities and outputs was implemented in the period June - November 2022 based on the methods described in the chapter



II Method. The evaluator would like to thank the project coordinator for making all the necessary documentation available and for facilitating the evaluation process.



II Method

The evaluation of the SETOF project articulated in this report was implemented at two levels:

- I **Evaluation of the project activities and outputs within each work package** that aims at reflecting on their quality and provide recommendations for the finalisation of the SETOF project and recommendations for the period after the end of the project.
- II **Assessment of the project outputs with regards to the in comparison to the Erasmus+ quality criteria.** The criteria were taken from the latest version of the Erasmus+ Programme Guide, mindful of the fact that they do slightly differ to the criteria promoted in the 2017 Programme Guide. As the latest version of the Programme Guide has more comprehensive description of quality criteria they will be used as the basis for this segment.

The main evaluation method will be desk research that will be conducted by analysing the project documents available on the SETOF project website and internal documents provided by the project coordinator. The documents that will be evaluated will be:

- The project application
- Interim project report submitted by the project partner to the EACEA
- The project reports available on the project website and internal project reports acquired from the project coordinator
- Dissemination material

The main theoretical and analytical framework for the implementation of the evaluation will be:

- Erasmus+ Programme Guide
- Guidelines for the Use of the Grant
- EACEA Guide for Evaluators.



III Project objectives and implementation

3.1 WP1: Analysis of soil erosion state and torrential floods in Western Balkan countries

The first, preparation, work package was envisioned as an analytical basis for the entire project. It aimed at providing the *analysis of soil erosion risks and the state of flash flood prevention* (Project application, page 58) in the Western Balkan countries.

Within the first and second activity the project partners produced seven reports on the state of soil erosion and torrential floods in partner countries Bosnia and Herzegovina and Serbia. The project coordinator reported that the consortium agreed to prepare reports for programme countries, Bulgaria and North Macedonia, as they are regional/neighbouring countries and relevant for the analysis of the state of soil erosion and torrential floods. The additional effort to produce these reports is praiseworthy. While respecting the different roles that programme and partner countries have within the Erasmus+ programme, it should be noted that the regional countries are inevitably interlinked as they share soil water resources and climate conditions. Therefore, the SETOF project consortium decision to expand reports to programme countries is fully justified. The UNSCM, WP1 lead partner, produced a regional report on the state of soil degradation in the Western Balkan Countries. From the perspective of content all national reports seem to be of similar structure and volume which gives them comparability and increases their utility for both students and professionals.

The third activity within this work package provided input in the prevention measures for soil and torrent control of the participating EU programme countries. The Republic of North Macedonia was not included in this activity, even though its position in the Programme mandates its inclusion in this activity as well. According to the Project Application (page 21) it seems that the UNSCM was to be included in the production of the report of prevention measures for soil and torrent control in EU countries. Out of three reports produced within this activity (reports for Austria, Bulgaria and Italy) the report for Bulgaria is lagging behind in quality and volume behind the other two.



From the perspective of structure, project partners followed the EACEA visibility rules the *Guidelines for beneficiaries and other third parties: the use of the EU emblem in the context of EU programmes*¹ (October 2012): each report has the text about acknowledgement of the EU funding and disclaimer that waives the responsibility of the Commission for the content of the reports. Both are part of the project's report template that also contains quality control sheet that documents the name of the project, activity and report's authors.

The reports were developed as teaching and learning material which is where their greatest utility lies. According to the project coordinator, they can be used as learning material for students, but also as a source of information for decision makers, local authorities, for developing national strategies and for managing land and water resources.

The last activity within the work package one, Workshops on bachelor and master curricula best practices in EU, was envisaged as the series of field visits that will enable the analysis of the BA and MA curricula in the EU countries. The project application should have recognised the position of the North Macedonia in the programme and refer to programme not EU countries. However, the position of the UNSCM was recognised as the second workshop was organised at the UNSCM in October 2019. The first workshop was organised in Italy with the participation of partners from Bulgaria and Italy. The project partners published [both events](#) on the project website with appropriate documentation and presentations from the workshops. It is commendable that all presentations follow visibility standards and are developed on the project template.

The workshops were the solid basis for the development of the BA and MA curricula that followed within the second work package.

¹ https://ec.europa.eu/chafea/food/guidelines/documents/eu-emblem-rules_en.pdf



3.2 WP2: Development of curricula

The first development work package was structured into seven logically coherent activities. They are based on the outputs of the previous work package that looked at the programme country experiences with the BA and MA curricula and created the analytical basis for the content of the programmes within WP1.1 and WP1.2 reports.

Within the first activity that aimed to develop reports on the compliance of curricula with the Bologna Process, the project coordinator reported the production of reports for partner countries and *universities from the EU countries and North Macedonia* (interim report, section 2.1) although a report for Austria is not available on the project website. Available reports show consistency in describing the structures of higher education systems in programme and partner countries and structures of study programmes at participating HEIs. Information provided in reports are well structured, comparable and of equal quality. However, the analysis of the Bologna Process is focused only on the structure of the studies and the ECTS in Serbia and Bosnia and Herzegovina. The latter included the reflections on the student and teacher mobility and internalisation of higher education in much more detail. The consortium could have considered focusing a bit more on the aspects of Bologna Process that are proving to be vital for the development of higher education systems in the last decade: the implementation of Lisbon convention, internalisation of higher education, the social dimension of higher education, employability of graduates, lifelong learning. While it was not detailed in the project application, this recommendation does not affect the justification of unit costs within this work package as they are well justified by the reports already developed. However, the suggestion may be utilised for future projects that may be the continuation of the SETOF.

The second and third activity focused on developing the competencies and learning outcomes of bachelor and master curricula (two reports for Bosnia and Herzegovina and Serbia available on the project website) and based on them developing the new subjects and modernising existing syllabuses with new curricula units (five reports for each partner country institution is available on the project website). It is more than commendable that partner institutions developed syllabus within activity 2.3 in English which significantly increases their dissemination and exploitation



potential. From the perspective of internal quality assurance, all reports follow the visibility standards and are structured in a similar manner.

The fourth activity started at the beginning of 2020 and was hindered by the COVID 19 breakout. While the adoption of the structure of a new master programme started at the beginning of 2020 at the HEIs in Serbia, the rest of activities were hindered by the pandemic. It is worth remembering that Serbia took an extremely restrictive approach in handling the crises by pronouncing the state of emergency that took entire country in a standstill until June 2020. The situation with COVID 19 was particularly difficult in Italy, while the other countries handled the crisis in a way that suppressed activities that were not pertinent to the every-day functioning of institutions and individuals. The EACEA took note of this situation and approved the prolongation of projects. However, it should be noted that based on the documentation available the SETOF project consortium dealt with this situation remarkably well. The project coordinator reported that the Senate of the University of Belgrade adopted the new master programme in July 2020 which is an extraordinary success.

The project website offers the structure of the joint master program, syllabi of the compulsory subjects and syllabi of the elective subjects on the project website. All comply with the visibility guidelines and are available in English language.

The fifth activity, study visits to the programme countries, were envisaged as a learning opportunity for partner HEIs to receive training on teaching methods, utilisation of equipment and other relevant topics. It started in 2019 and was postponed due to pandemic. Based on information provided on the project website, the consortium implemented one visit in 2019 while the rest of visits (five) were implemented in 2022. Information on visits, including meeting reports and presentations are available on the project website. Having in mind that this activity was affected by the COVID 19 pandemic, a suggestion for the future projects would be to consider putting additional effort on the improvement of teaching and learning methods at partner HEIs, first and foremost on the digitalisation of the learning material and on the development of Massive Open Online Courses - MOOCs.

The project consortium wrapped up the second work package with the report on the harmonisation of the changes in BA and MA curriculum and the implementation of trainings by the



programme countries at partner country HEIs. According to the report produced after the trainings implemented by the programme country HEIs representatives, the participants from all partner HEIs took part in them. While it seems that the coverage of trainings is at the satisfactory level, the room for improvement would be to establish a platform that will connect teachers who are a part of the modernised BA and MA programmes with colleagues who are not directly involved in the SETOF project for the purpose of exchanging experience, resources, teaching and learning material etc. As the SETOF project application does not foresee such platform, a possible Erasmus+ KA2 project could be developed for such purposes. Additional training could be acquired through Erasmus+ KA1 mobility project. The production of reports and meeting materials meets quality and visibility standards.



3.3 WP3: Implementation of developed curricula and training

Within the third work package the project consortium implemented modernised BA courses and joint master programme and purchased equipment.

The modernised bachelor courses are well disseminated on the project website which contains decisions of the participating HEIs to adjust bachelor studies at their respective institutions, and course materials for both bachelor and master studies. Course material is available in English. The project partners also published the results of the student evaluation of courses and report on master and bachelor curricula quality.

While it seems that the timeline for this event has been changed due to the pandemic, the project consortium managed to implement all activities as envisaged in the project application. The need for modernising the courses and developing new master programme had been rationalised in the application and will be addressed later within this report. From the standpoint of the quality of implementation it seems that the unit costs for this work package have been duly justified by the content produced. A suggestion for the potential future projects would be to centralise the quality assessment and utilise the expertise of the sociologists and education psychologist to assist in selecting the evaluation method, develop measuring instrument and assist in data analysis. Centralisation could enable the comparison of data between study programmes or upgrade existing evaluation procedures at HEIs. In addition, the evaluation of study programmes could be implemented utilising qualitative methodologies and interviews with the first generation of students as the students are not just users who are (un)satisfied with the product offered, but equal partners in the education process who can, given the opportunity, provide valuable feedback that goes beyond measuring satisfaction.

Regarding the Report of master and bachelor curricula quality, the project consortium could have considered including the output indicators, such is the employability of graduates and employment rates in the relation to the employment sector. As this was not possible to be implemented within the SETOF project additional funding in the potential future project could go towards measuring how to increase the employability of graduates in terms of ensuring that both sector specific and soft skills are acquired during the education process.



3.4 WP4: Quality plan and monitoring

The quality assurance of the SETOF project was articulated within a work package four and its four activities. Based on the information available on the project website and internal correspondence that was made available for the purpose of evaluation by the project coordinator, activities towards ensuring the quality of the project started at the beginning of the project implementation period.

The project partners developed a comprehensive quality plan, that detailed steps and procedures to be implemented throughout the project span including the internal reports and assessment questionnaires that were to be completed by the project partners. The quality plan could have benefited from key performance indicators (KPI), though it seems that the progress was successfully tracked without predefined benchmarks.

The quality plan envisages the external project evaluation to be implemented by:

1. National Erasmus+ Offices - three times during the project span. As Serbia changed status in the Erasmus+ programme, only the Bosnia and Herzegovina NEO was mandated to implement visits. The advisory monitoring visit was implemented by the NEO team from the Bosnia and Herzegovina in June 2021. Based on the advisory monitoring report submitted by Mr Suad Muhibić the overall assessment of the project was satisfactory. It seems that the project partners took note of team's suggestions to ensure the implementation of the Joint Master Programme at the UNSA and compensate for the delays and implementation changes induced by the pandemic.
2. External evaluation expert(s) - that are to develop two reports, one midterm and one at the end of the project implementation period. This report belongs to the latter category and aims at, aside from assessing the quality of activities and outputs, looking at opportunities for developing further cooperation among SETOF project partners.

The total of six quality assurance meetings are reported on the project website. They were mostly organised on the margins of the content meetings and were used for the quality assurance committee members to present the status of activities and project partners to report to present self-assessment reports. The final overview of self-assessment reports was produced and published on the project website.

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The overall assessment of the quality package is positive. The room for improvement would be to monitor project activities and outputs in the direct relation to the indicators set in the project application, develop key performance indicators and include them in the quality assurance manual, monitor the project progress in comparison to the KPIs and expand the team working on the ensuring quality to colleagues with primary expertise in quality assurance and project management. However, with the efforts of the project consortium and continuous evaluation and monitoring procedures it seems that the quality standards have been met.



3.5 WP5: Dissemination of project results

According to the Erasmus+ Programme Guide Version 1 (2018) dissemination is:

“a planned process of providing information on the results of programmes and initiatives to key actors. It occurs as and when the result of programmes and initiatives become available. In terms of the Erasmus+ Programme this involves spreading the word about the project successes and outcomes as far as possible. Making others aware of the project will impact on other organisations in the future and will contribute to raising the profile of the organisation carrying out the project. To effectively disseminate results, an appropriate process at the beginning of the project needs to be designed. This should cover why, what, how, when, to whom and where disseminating results will take place, both during and after the funding period. (...) The first goal of dissemination and exploitation is to spread projects' results. The second goal is to contribute to the implementation and shaping of national and European policies and systems. Beneficiaries should develop their own way of achieving this goal. Developing ideas for dissemination and exploitation is important for every project funded by the Erasmus+ Programme. However, the type and intensity of dissemination and exploitation activities should be proportional and tailored to particular needs and type of project developed. This includes whether the project is process oriented or aimed at producing tangible deliverables; if it is stand alone or part of a larger initiative; whether it is developed by large or small scale participating organisations, etc. Participating organisations should discuss the aims and objectives of the activities/plan and decide on the best activities and approaches as well as share the tasks among partners taking into account the particular specifics of the project. (Page 308).

In line with the definition above the SETOF project partners kickstarted the dissemination activities at the beginning of the project implementation period by developing the dissemination plan, setting up the project website and developing the project's visual identity.

The dissemination plan was, according to the project coordinator, adopted during the first steering committee meeting in the first half of 2019. It is available on the project website. The plan foresees the implementation of Dissemination Activity Report as a tool for monitoring the dissemination activities that can be considered as an example of good practice. The Dissemination Activity Report was intended to be completed for each activity that is to be disseminated by identifying the dissemination channel and target audience. The room for improvement would be to publish the



developed reports on the project website so that they can be used as examples of good practice for other projects.

The project website was developed at the beginning of the project and is well structured for two purposes, the dissemination of the project results and presenting the project activities in line with the Erasmus+ demands so that external monitoring of the project is enabled. It is commendable that information on the main project output (joint MA degree programme) was published separate to the rest of the project activities together with all relevant information on the programme. The project coordinator confirmed that the project website will remain available after the project ends.

The SETOF project visual identity was also developed at the beginning of the project and was used consistently through out of the implementation span. It can be concluded that the use of project dissemination material and consistency in applying visibility guidelines is another example of good practice that can be utilised for other projects.

A decision to include trainings of engineers and local governments in the dissemination work package could have hindered project's design and budget balance as it is expected that the budget absorption of staff and travel costs goes primarily through the development packages while the project management, quality and dissemination are considered as supportive activities and should absorb budget accordingly. The recommendation for future projects would be to include trainings into development packages in order to balance the budget and keep dissemination package for dissemination conferences and promotional activities. However, it seems that this decision was not in the way of funding and implementing trainings.

The project partners developed SETOF training plan that contained the goal and the scope of trainings and schedule of trainings. The project website reports on eight implemented trainings for engineers in enterprises and eleven trainings for the representatives of local governments. Looking at the trainings as the actualisation of the third mission of universities is yet another example of good practices. The third mission of universities refers to practices and activities of academic community that generate knowledge outside of the academic community towards supporting development at individual, local and global level and responding to social challenges. The willingness to go back into the community and support lifelong learning of colleague engineers and support local governments in their activities in the field of prevention from, torrential floods



is praiseworthy, primarily as this not a regular practice of WB universities. The institutionalisation of third mission and its application in different fields, in the case of SETOF project partners soil erosion and torrential floods, could be another foundation for future cooperation through developmental and mobility projects.

The overall assessment is that the project consortium worked hard on disseminating project activities and outputs. The only suggestion would be for the future projects to attempt at working with media and dissemination the project in local media, news, by inviting journalist to attend project conferences and organising media events in cooperation with relevant ministries and local government representatives (such are Media Centre events in Belgrade). Having in mind the high relevance of the project goals for societies in Bosnia and Herzegovina and Serbia, the media interest is expected to be high.



3.6 WP6: Exploitation of project results

According to the Erasmus+ Programme Guide Version 1 (2018) dissemination is:

Exploitation is (a) a planned process of transferring the successful results of the programmes and initiatives to appropriate decision makers in regulated local, regional, national or European systems, on the one hand, and (b) a planned process of convincing individual end users to adopt and/or apply the results of programmes and initiatives, on the other hand. For Erasmus+ this means maximising the potential of the funded activities, so that the results are used beyond the lifetime of the project. It should be noted that the project is being carried out as part of an international programme working towards lifelong learning and supporting European policies in the field of education, training, youth and sport. Results should be developed in such a way that they can be tailored to the needs of others; transferred to new areas; sustained after the funding period has finished; or used to influence future policy and practice. (Page 308).

The SETOF project consortium devoted entire work package to achieving above describe goals and articulated it into three activities: the creation of the sustainability plan, accreditation of MA curricula and promotion of enrolment.

The sustainability plan reflects on the education systems in both partner countries, in particular, on the need to ensure sufficient enrolment of students within systems that are based on input-based funding. Aside from the mandatory accreditation of the master study programme the project consortium defined promotional and dissemination measure that are to support enrolment of students during the project span. The consortium had briefly reflected on the sustainability of the MA programme after the project ended. However, this section of the sustainability plan could have been more elaborate. The project consortium members could have developed and signed letters of intent for future cooperation that would be basis for the future projects but also defined steps towards ensuring the sustainability of developed MA programme.

It is commendable that the partner country HEIs decided to sign the Agreement on developing and implementing joint MA programme. The Agreement is available on the project website and defines roles and responsibilities of partners within the programme. The programme is accredited as a joint programme of three HEIs in Serbia while partners from Bosna and Herzegovina are taking part in the implementation of the programme. Students from Bosnia and Herzegovina can enrol in the

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programme provided that they go through the process of recognition of higher education degrees acquired at bachelor level. Having in mind the volume of mobilities within two countries, i.e. between Bosnia and Herzegovina and Serbia, the recognition process should not be a major obstacle for the students from Bosnia and Herzegovina. At the same time the fact that Serbian universities accredited study programme and ensured its recognition in other countries as the recognition procedures have been established within the European Higher Education Area. The MA programme was included in the Call for Enrolment at the 2022/2023 academic year.

The promotion of studies, as reported on the project website, was implemented through social media and website, online promotion events and implemented trainings. The report on the promotional activities is available on the project website. Following the completion of the SETOF project the project partners should continue promoting the MA studies at their respective higher education institutions among bachelor students and on the margins of other events organised or participated by the SETOF project partners. Erasmus+ mobility projects between programme (Serbia) and partner (Bosnia and Herzegovina) countries could be submitted for the purpose of facilitating student and teacher exchange.



3.7 WP7: Project management

The last work package was implemented through five elaborate activities designed to manage the project and its activities and to ensure adherence to the obligations of the project coordinator defined in the EACA - UB Grant Agreement.

The project consortium developed two documents: Guidelines for reporting and correspondence and Day to day correspondence on the SETOF project. Both documents define a way in which the management of the project is to be implemented by detailing rules of conduct and responsibilities of all partners, including the project coordinator. Instructions cover complete management of the project, from the financial management of the grant and financial reporting to event organisation, everyday communication and visibility guidelines. While these documents are of high quality and as such examples of good practice for other project, a recommendation for the project coordinator, the University of Belgrade, would be to centralise project management documents, revise them and offer them to project managers at faculties so that project managers can just revise them and not produce them over and over again for each project. In this way experienced managers at faculties could improve the quality of the documents while the less experienced ones and newcomers would have a solid basis to lean on.

Six project management meetings have been implemented on the margins of the content events while the project coordinator reported continuous communication with the project partners.

The project coordinator submitted the interim report to the EACEA that was made available to the evaluator. The project was qualified as good with recommendations that seem to be tackled by the project consortium in the second half of the project. The recommendation for the final report would be that the project coordinator describe achievement per each activity in more detail and to reflect on the EACEA interim comments and recommendations.



IV Assessment in comparison to the Erasmus+ quality criteria

The Erasmus+ Programme Guide published on 2022 (version 2) offers quality criteria that have to be followed by each project at the stage of applying for grants and designing the project application. Even though this version of the Programme Guide is not applicable on the generation of projects to which the SETOF belongs, it worth reflecting on the same criteria after the project ended not just for the purpose of assessing the quality of implemented activities and produced outputs but for developing recommendations for the future projects.



4.1 Relevance of the project

Purpose: the proposal is relevant to the objectives and activities of the CBHE action and specificities of the Strand. It constitutes an adequate response to the current needs and constraints of the target country(ies) or Region(s) and of the target groups and final beneficiaries. The needs of the targeted participants with fewer opportunities (where applicable) are taken into account. The extent to which the proposal addresses the EU overarching priorities.

Objectives: the objectives are based on a sound needs analysis; they are clearly defined, specific, measurable, achievable, realistic and time bound. They address issues relevant to the participating organisations (in line with the modernisation, development and internationalisation strategy of the targeted HEIs), and development strategies for higher education in the eligible third countries not associated to the programme.

Link to EU policy and initiatives: the proposal takes into account and enhances complementarity/synergies with other interventions funded by the EU and other entities (donors, public and private), where appropriate.

EU added value: The proposal demonstrates that similar results could not be achieved without the cooperation of HEIs from the EU Member states or third countries associated to the programme and without the EU funding.

([Erasmus+ Programme Guide](#) 2022 (Version 2), page 301)

The project relevance was soundly elaborated in the project application and remains unchanged at the end of the project span. With Bosnia and Herzegovina becoming the EU candidate country, the regional countries are now officially in similar position in the process of the EU accession. They are not, however, in the same position within the Erasmus+ Programme nor are they at the same developmental stages in the field of ecology. The relevance of the project applications like SETOF could be increased by involving the relevant ministries and government officials and directly correlating the future projects with national developmental strategies. The difference in the status within the Erasmus+ programme could be utilised to compensate for the differences between the Republic of North Macedonia and Serbia (as programme countries) and other regional partner countries. The recommendation would not be to centralise the future efforts, but rather to coordinate them so that they can produce the ripple effect.



4.2 Quality of the project design and implementation

Coherence: the overall project design ensures consistency between project objectives, methodology, activities and the budget proposed. The proposal presents a coherent and comprehensive set of appropriate activities to meet the identified needs and the expected results.

Methodology: the logic of the intervention is of good quality, planned outputs and outcomes are coherent and feasible, and key assumptions and risks have been clearly identified. The structure and content of the Logical Framework Matrix (LFM) is adequate, i.e. the choice of objectively verifiable indicators, data availability, baseline data, target values, etc;

Work plan: quality and effectiveness of the work plan, including the extent to which the resources assigned to work packages are in line with their objectives and the deliverables; the relation between the resources and the expected results is adequate and the work plan is realistic, with well-defined activities, time-lines, clear deliverables and milestones.

Budget: the proposal is cost efficient and allocates the appropriate financial resources necessary for a successful implementation of the project. The estimated budget is neither overestimated nor underestimated.

Quality control: control measures (continuous quality evaluation, peer reviews, benchmarking activities, mitigating actions etc.) and quality indicators ensure that the project implementation is of high quality.

Environmental sustainability: the project is designed in an eco-friendly way and incorporates green practices (e.g. green travel) in different project phases.

([Erasmus+ Programme Guide](#) (Version 2), page 302)

The above listed components of the quality of the project design and implementation seem to be up to par (excluding the budget as it was not subject of this evaluation. The room for improvement would be the implementation of the quality control by including colleagues from social sciences in the production of the quality plan and implementing surveys or interviews. While external expert was involved in the advisory role, more intensive cooperation with external quality experts could have been of benefit, primarily for offering an outside perspective and recommendations that go beyond the project scope.

Regarding the project documents and reports produced within the quality work package the main recommendation would be for the large universities to centralise the production of documents



and activities. The centralisation of universities was on the policy map of the EAHEA for quite some time. Most universities in Europe are centralised. Even in Serbia, where faculties within the University of Belgrade (and within majority of other universities) are separate legal entities, one of the main centralising roles of the University is anchored in international cooperation. Therefore, the University project offices could benefit of centralising projects' quality assurance (and project management, dissemination and exploitation) documents whether by employing quality assurance experts or subcontracting them to produce the guidelines and procedures that can be utilised by projects and HEIs participating in international cooperation or by revising high-quality documents (such are SEOF documents) to be applicable to all projects within the same funding scheme.



4.3 Quality of the partnership and the cooperation arrangements

Management: solid management arrangements are foreseen. Timelines, governance structures, collaboration arrangements and responsibilities are well defined and realistic.

Composition: the partnership gathers an appropriate mix of organisations with the necessary competences relevant to the objectives of the proposal and to the specificities of the Strand; the proposal includes the most appropriate and diverse range of non-academic partners.

Tasks: roles and tasks are assigned on the basis of the specific know-how, profiles and experience of each partner and are appropriate.

Collaboration: effective mechanisms are proposed to ensure efficient collaboration, communication and conflict resolution between the partner organisations and any other relevant stakeholders.

Commitment: the contribution from the project partners is significant, pertinent and complementary; the proposal demonstrates the partners' involvement, commitment and ownership of the project's specific objectives and results, in particular from the third countries not associated to the programme

([Erasmus+ Programme Guide](#) 2022 (Version 2), page 302)

The SETOF project consortium consists of the Western Balkan partner countries (Bosnia and Herzegovina and Serbia) and programme countries from the European Union (Austria, Bulgaria, and Italy) and the Republic of North Macedonia. It was well-balanced in the design and remained as such throughout the implementation period. The project [website](#) offers the list of participating partner institutions with contacts and CVs of the national team members. The visibility of national teams and experts who worked on the project is a solid basis for establishing future cooperations whether as the continuation of the SETOF project or for developing a CBHE project with similar outputs in another partner countries. The Monitoring report implemented by the National Erasmus+ Office in Bosnia and Herzegovina noted that the *project partners are equally represented*² after the regular mid-term monitoring visit. In addition, the project consortium includes non-academic partners that had been vital in the implementation of project activities and dissemination of results. Therefore, the composition and of the SETOF project is an example of good practice. It is established in a way that fully supports the academic efforts but also to support the third mission

² Monitoring report signed by Suad Muhibić, the Head of the National Erasmus+ Office in Bosnia and Hercegovina



of universities and establish new and reinforce existing connections with expert bodies and local government.

The outputs show the full participation of all project partners. The only pause that could be addressed is the fact that the joint master programme was not accredited in Bosnia and Herzegovina (BA). However, the obstacles existing in BA, from relations between two entities to differences between cantons within the Federation, to the loose or non-existent role of Federal bodies and questionable accreditation procedures, that is encored in much deeper and more complex relations between the Federation and the Republic of Srpska in the context of Dayton Agreement, implies that different standards should be applied when evaluating the aspect of accreditation of study programmes. Having said this, the SETOF consortium showed impeccable sensibility and resourcefulness in fully respecting laws and procedures in Bosnia and Herzegovina and including the BA HEIs in the joint master programme in the best way possible.



4.4 Sustainability, exploitation, impact and dissemination of the expected results

Exploitation: the proposal demonstrates how the outcomes of the project will be used by the partners and other stakeholders, how multiplier effects will be ensured (including scope for replication and extension of the outcome of the action at sectorial, as well as local/regional/national or international level) and it provides means to measure exploitation within the project funding time and after.

Dissemination: the proposal provides a clear and efficient plan for the dissemination of results, and includes appropriate activities and their timing, tools and channels to ensure that the results and benefits will be spread effectively to all relevant stakeholders and non-participating audience, reaching out and attracting relevant stakeholders to the outcomes within and after the project's funding time;

Impact: the proposal ensures a tangible impact on its target groups and relevant stakeholders at local, national or regional level. It includes measures, as well as goals and indicators to monitor progress and assess the expected impact (short-and long-term) at individual, institutional and systemic level.

Open access: if relevant, the proposal describes how the materials, documents and media produced will be made freely available and promoted through open licenses and without disproportionate limitations;

Sustainability: the proposal explains how the project results will be sustained financially (after the end of project funding) and institutionally (activities and services continuing to be in place) and how the local ownership will be ensured.

([Erasmus+ Programme Guide](#) 2022 (Version 2), page 303)

The exploitation potential of the project outputs seems to be high due to their high quality and implemented dissemination to date.

The reports produced within the first work package can be used as teaching and learning material in the region. As they were published in English language their utility surpasses national borders. They can be also used by national stakeholders for developing strategies and action plans and professionals working with soil erosion and torrential floods. The project consortium members can utilise reports and data collected as the basis for future trainings.

The project management, quality sustainability, exploitation plans could be utilised by the participating universities to revise them so that they can apply to other projects and offer them to future project coordinators/consortia.

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Lastly the exploitation potential of bachelor and master courses as well as trainings for non-academic partners remains high. However, the sustainability of the project results remains crucial in ensuring their exploitation. During the project span, both BA and MA studies have been accredited. Their future funding, however, depends on the number of enrolled students. Therefore, the project partners should continue promoting the studies especially the joint master programme. They could also consider exploring the options of applying for mobility projects for students and teaching staff to ensure the additional funding and support the sustainability of the studies. The sustainability of trainings can be ensured through continuous collaboration with the professional institutions and bodies (three of which had been members of the SETOF consortium). The SETOF academic project partners should continue with the cooperation with non-academic partners and open a possibility to repeating the trainings to local governments and professionals who were not part of the SETOF project on the self-funding basis.

Impact of the project was expected at three levels:

- (1) **Individual level** - on which was expected for teachers from partner country HEIs to acquire training and increase their skills and knowledge, students receive contemporary knowledge through modernised and newly developed courses and representatives of local governments and professionals to be trained by the project members. The expected impact seems to be fully accomplished. The mid- and long-term impact at this level could be ensured with the continuation of collaboration with professionals in the fields and representatives of local governments that and by ensuring that both BA and MA studies continue to run and receive interest from students.
- (2) **Institutional level** - on which institutions were modernised by increasing human resource capacities and receiving contemporary equipment for laboratories. The impact at institutional was additionally achieved by reinforcing the cooperation between universities who took part in the SETOF project and establishing and/or reinforcing links with non-academic partners. The impact that SETOF project had at institutional level could be a fertile ground for future cooperation and developing more projects, scientific, cooperation and mobility projects.



(3) **Level of societies** - that cannot but benefit from the project that have high relevance both by enhancing academic capacities by increasing the cumulative knowledge that is the basis for progress and applying that knowledge in solving problems linked to soil erosion and torrential floods. The impact at the societal level could be increased further by project partners increasing the cooperation with the representatives of ministries and local governments as well as non-governmental sector towards uniting all three pillars and articulating joint activities.

Lastly, it should be noted that the project envisaged entire work package devoted to the dissemination of project results, and reported, as detailed above, successful implementation of all activities. However, it would be beneficial for the project consortium to continue disseminating project results on the margins of other events and utilise the media so that future collaborations have better starting positions and are met with the immediate support by the relevant stakeholders.



V Recommendations

The overall quality assessment of the project both in terms of the implementation of activities and the quality of outputs is that there is a very high degree of correlation between the envisaged and implemented activities while the **quality of the project outputs can be assessed as very good**. The recommendation section of the report is structured to:

- (1) Summarise ways in which the SETOF project can be considered an example of good practice.
- (2) Provide suggestions for the consortium partners on how to continue with supporting SETOF project outputs
- (3) Provide suggestions for future projects and additional funding



5.1 Examples of good practices

The SETOF project outputs could be concomitated as examples of good practice in the following areas³:

- High quality of visual identity and its consistent utilisation for project outputs.
- High quality of project management documents, financial guidelines, quality, dissemination, sustainability and exploitation plans.
- The implementation of trainings for engineers in enterprises and trainings for the representatives of local governments. The trainings are the example of good practice for as the actualisation of the third mission of universities that refers to practices and activities of academic community aimed at generating knowledge outside of the academic community and towards supporting development at individual, local and global level and responding to social challenges.
- For the Erasmus+ joint projects that aim at developing joint study programmes with HEIs from Bosnia and Herzegovina and therefore meet obstacles in the accreditation of study programmes, the example of good practice is for legal representatives of participating HEIs to sign the Agreement on developing and implementing the joint study programme. As demonstrated by the SETOF project consortium, the Agreement should define roles and responsibilities of partners within the programme.
- The composition and of the SETOF project is an example of good practice as it involves well balanced academic partners (including regional representation in Serbia and the representation of both entities in Bosnia and Herzegovina) and the representatives of professional bodies.

³ It should be noted that the author of this document is not an expert in the field of soil erosion and torrential floods. Therefore, the recommendations in this section including the examples of food practices strictly refer to the project management, implementation and cooperation arrangements.



5.2 The sustainability and exploitation of the project outputs

Suggestions for the participating institutions towards ensuring the sustainability and exploitation of the project outputs would be to:

- Consider centralising project management, quality, dissemination, exploitation, sustainability guidelines as they are needed for all projects, and it seems a waste of resources for each project to develop them from ground zero. In this way experienced managers at faculties could improve the quality of the documents while the less experienced ones and newcomers would have a solid basis to lean on.
- Work towards increasing the visibility of the topics of soil erosion and torrential floods in media which can be accomplished by inviting journalist to attend project conferences and organising media events in cooperation with relevant ministries and local government representatives.
- Continue promoting the joint master programme at partner higher education institutions among bachelor students and on the margins of other events organised or participated by the SETOF project partners.



5.3 Proposals for future funding

The SETOF project consortium members could consider the following suggestions as the basis for expanding future cooperation:

- Support the other aspects of the Bologna process: the implementation of Lisbon convention, internalisation of higher education, the social dimension of higher education, employability of graduates, lifelong learning. The students with different socio-economic backgrounds studying modernised BA and MA programmes could benefit from developing additional mechanisms supporting the social dimension, while joint master programme could benefit from establishing mechanisms and negotiating faster recognition routes for the recognition of the degree in Bosnia and Herzegovina.
- Establish alumni network and implement graduate surveys towards collecting reliable data on employability of graduates and redefining study programmes and courses based on evidence collected. The SETOF consortium could utilise questionnaire and materials developed within the CONGRAD Tempus project that also had both the University of Belgrade and the University of Banja Luka as project partners.
- Develop online courses and MOOCs and digitalise the learning material, especially for the joint master programme as teachers come from two countries and traveling arrangements may not be sustainable long-term.
- Develop online network that will connect SETOF project partners and relevant stakeholders (state and local government representatives, NGOs, graduates, students, teachers etc.) and be a platform for sharing information about events, conferences, published papers, local needs and developments, relevant literature.
- Publish joint papers in journals as the basis for developing scientific projects.



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- Apply for additional funding that can be within the scope of:
 - (1) Erasmus+ CBHE projects within which Serbia and North Macedonia HEIs could unite as programme countries and share lessons learned with partner countries that did not take part in the SETOF project (other Western Balkan partner countries, Eastern and Southern Mediterranean countries, Russia and Central Asia)
 - (2) Erasmus+ strategic partnerships/partnerships for innovation (Serbia and North Macedonia)
 - (3) Jean Monnet
 - (4) Erasmus+ mobility projects for teacher and student exchange
 - (5) Horizon Europe
 - (6) National project schemes (such are in Serbia Innovation Fund and Science Fund).



VI Literature

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