



## Gender Equality and Diversity Management: a Case Study of the ERASMUS Mundus Project EMMA

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### 1. Introduction

International student and staff exchange programs foster cultural and educational acceptance of foreign values. They are almost unanimously perceived as a positive tool for personal and career development and strongly supported by different policies. Mobility programmes aim to support universities in establishing high quality standards through continuous monitoring of projects and the evaluation of contents. The programmes also create awareness of the cultural richness of the partnership. Intensified contacts of students will be beneficial – to both areas. Students in the mobility programme will acquire skills and knowledge to pursue a career as link between their home country and European companies. According to experiences collected in past programmes, this unique position often lead not to brain drain, but instead to a perspective for these young academics to stay in their country and develop future concepts. Learning is encouraged, facilitated and enabled in a simplified, integrated way across the world. At economical level it has been stated, not only once, that a way to combat the global economic and financial crisis is through investment and development of higher education. This will only be possible through the way of innovative projects, such as mobility programmes, that will fulfil students' expectations by providing opportunities for individual development and personal growth. By offering opportunities to diverse groups of learners, and by providing the optimal creative environment for the talented young students that the world needs, universities are increasingly central to future growth and to the consolidation of world's knowledge society.

Assuming that the diversity level of students and teachers in European universities – with respect to their national, cultural, religious and educational background – is going to rise over the next decades one very important question with regard to the sustainability of study programs and the educational process in general. Besides the quality of the content provided, are the approaches and methods used to integrate these values.

### 2. Erasmus Mundus Mobility with Asia Projects

Romania has made major steps towards the European Higher Education Area by reorganizing the entire higher education system. Lucian Blaga University of Sibiu (LBUS) is the only Romanian university involved in an Erasmus Mundus project with Asian partner universities. Erasmus Mundus external cooperation window was initiated, by a consortium of 17 universities [1] in 2009 under the name Erasmus Mundus Mobility with Asia (EMMA). The project objective is to develop cooperation between Asian and European higher education institutions, through the exchange of students and staff. As the consortium offers a wide range of thematic fields, any individual mobility demand will find the right educational programme or the right research team. The exchanges will contribute to enrich the educational environment in both sides and to prepare the future elites of the concerned countries to a better mutual understanding.

Erasmus Mundus Mobility with Asia- West (EMMA-West) [2] and Erasmus Mundus Mobility with Asia- East (EMMA-East) [3] are spin-off of the EMMA Consortium. The division of the original lot into Lot 11 and Lot 12 resulted in a split of the original consortium into two projects, which share some of the partners and use a similar methodology. These projects are the continuation of the consortium that started in an Erasmus Mundus cooperation window in 2009. Upon the change of the Asian lots, the consortium agreed to continue its work in Asia to form a network of universities to improve the situation in mathematics and the natural sciences. In this application we focused some of our attention on departments which deal with scientific computing (applications of computer modelling). While all faculties can access the mobilities of the program, some of our improvements (with respect of the first EMMA) took place mainly in the natural sciences. The reason for that is to work harder towards bilateral and network agreements on sustainability of the EMMA program, aiming for close cooperation between departments or even specific master programs.

EMMA is the result of long cooperation between many of the local contact persons in charge, in development programs such as Asia Link and CIMPA schools. This understanding and mutual trust has made each of these founders to devote themselves fully to the development of links in their own university, and build up a network of EMMA correspondents among whom they have found the key-persons of the Local Organization Bureaus [LOBs]. The strength of this founder network gave institutional visibility to EMMA enabling it to expand its work with new partners sharing the EMMA methodology that can now grow into two independent but related sub-networks, EMMA-West (for Lot 11) and EMMA-East (for Lot 12).

The selection of European partners is evenly distributed over most of the European Union, spreading from Portugal to Turkey and from Poland to Italy. In Asia, the partnership is located along the 20° parallel, stretching out from Pakistan to Bangladesh with a far extension to the Philippines as historical and well experienced partners of EMMA-West, originally through Asia Link joint programmes. EMMA-West main density of partners is at its centre, around the Gulf of Bengal. It covers most religions present in Asia, from an Islamic majority in



Pakistan or Bangladesh to a Roman Catholic majority in the Philippines. The two EMMA-West conferences will provide the opportunity to create among the participants the awareness of this cultural richness. In the Philippines, University of the Philippines Diliman (UP) and Ateneo de Manila University (ADMU) have branches located throughout the country, including Mindanao.

The European partners exhibit a large diversity of tradition ranging from old historical universities (Padova, Heidelberg, Warsaw) to young ones (University of Nice Sophia-Antipolis, Lucian Blaga University of Sibiu, University of Twente, Middle East Technical University), with University of Evora representing both: its origins date back to 1559; after being closed in the 18th century for political reason, the university reopens in 1979 after the return of Democracy.

Similarly, in Asia, both Filipino universities (UPD and ADMU) have already a long tradition and so has Dhaka University. They are also the largest universities in their country. All other Asian partner universities are still young. The two other Dhaka partners are both private (Ahsanullah University of Sciences and Technology, BRAC University), founded with strong social development motivations. University of Kathmandu is the second largest in Nepal. In Kolkata we have one full partner university Jadavpur University (JU) that is one of the universities in the country with "Potential for Excellence", and one associate (RCCITT in India, Pathways, ADZU in the Philippines) who helped us to select students from vulnerable groups and assist them in their preparation to come and study in Europe.

These founders searched colleagues and universities that share this desire for openness, not only geographically but also from the academic thematic point of view, with concern for the development of their countries, in partnership with their neighbours, seeking in the unity of culture and knowledge the will to overcome the divisions resulting from History, like what is in the origins of the European Union.

### **3. Gender Equality Management**

The main tools to treat cross cutting issues in the program are a transparent and flexible selection process combined with the commitment by all partners to avoid biases if possible. In the case of gender balance this is achieved by a trade-off between evaluation and quota. To avoid brain drain, the strict use of double supervision (home and host university) in all decisions concerning a beneficiary and the subtle yet important change of some mobility durations is the response to observations from the first EMMA program. The overall strategy for the selection criteria is to maximize the usefulness of the mobility for the candidate, his institution and his country, under the constraint of gender-balance. In case of similar levels of usefulness the partnership agrees to favour disabled or economically disadvantaged people.

Learning from EMMA 2009, countries which had a low percentage of female applications got access to a total budget of 1000 Euro from the coordination funds to organize a recruiting day specially tailored towards promoting the program to female students. The participation on these events was posted to the application website to further promote the application to female students.

EMMA is based on strong local organization bureaus (LOB). They include a representative from the central administration (usually: foreign affairs), a professor or lecturer (for the scientific evaluation of candidates) and an office assistant. The application data base, the current global and local selection lists and statistics on applications and selections with reference to target groups, gender etc. was continuously available to the LOBs through the EMMA database to further strengthen transparency of the selection process. The final decision on mobilities was with a board of directors that includes the program coordinator and 4 directors (2 Asian, 2 European) elected by the local coordinators, again making sure that both hemispheres are sufficiently represented in decision processes.

### **4. Diversity Management**

If gender equality management is one issue that requires to be dealt with, especially, before the selection of EMMA beneficiaries, diversity management is on the other hand, another important aspect that raises problems after the selection of the beneficiaries.

Through EMMA projects, our main purpose is to build a bridge between Europe and Asia, between our European culture, which is more homogenous and Asian culture, which is much diversified. First of all, students and staff selected for a mobility in one of the European partner university face this barrier when applying for visas, which has to be made individually.

#### **4.1 Travelling to Europe**

In our country's case, the lack of Romanian Embassies in each country made it difficult for them to easily get informed, as they only maintained contact with representatives by mail. It was very difficult for them to prepare all the documents as the responses at their questions in the matter of visa were sometimes late or incomplete. So in order to help the beneficiaries LBUS representatives in the EMMA project also maintained contact with the Embassies' staff and provided additional information to the beneficiaries that applied for visas.

Another problem is the differences between the academic year in Romania and academic years in Asian Countries, which is not perfectly compatible. Some of the beneficiaries may require to return earlier to their countries, in order to present their final projects. Also one of the beneficiaries turned down the grant because of the incompatibility between academic years. As he did not received approval to come later than the 1st of



September, coming before 1st of September would have involved losing the final exam session at his university and consequently losing one year that he had already studied.

LBUS made some particular arrangements so that students will be able to return in their countries in due time, for example it might be arranged for some students to have exams earlier or other demands that will allow them to solve their problems in the matter of incompatibility of academic years.

#### **4.2. The New Romanian Environment**

For welcoming the selected beneficiaries at our university, we arrange for them flight bookings, insurance certificates and accommodation in the university's campus. They are introduced to a new environment by offering Romanian Intensive Language Courses and by organising monthly cultural events and activities in order to facilitate a common understanding framework regarding values and awareness of Romanian national culture.

It is a new world for them, from weather conditions, food differences to culture and religious differences. The staff involved in the project understands this barriers and does all the best to pass them. All our national holidays are all celebrated together with the international students and staff in our university. As we respect their culture, the university offers its support for the Asian beneficiaries to celebrate their own holidays. It has been founded an Asian Students Centre, in Faculty of Engineering, where European and Asian Students socialize and share ideas. Regarding the educational process, compromises have been made, regarding the language of teaching. The professors are helping the students with additional bibliography for the courses where Romanian is the language of teaching.

#### **5. Conclusion**

LBUS, as each higher education institution in Romania is responsible for ensuring quality for all activities and at all levels, in agreement with the standards of reference, which are being updated. The quality management system within the higher education institution has as its objective the internal processes for assuring quality, including self-evaluation at every level, in accordance with the standards of reference, including the requirements of the systems of external evaluation of quality.

Even though, for relatively small universities who before entering into such programs draw staff and students from a culturally homogenous pool, integrating groups of students and teachers with different cultural, religious and gender-specific values proves to be a challenge. Now after 3 years of partnership in mobility programmes between Asia and Romania, Lucian Blaga University of Sibiu is aware of the importance of internationalization and integration of students and staff with different culture, together with European society, as it is amazing to discover so brilliant students and an honour to welcome them to our university.

#### **References**

- [1] EMMA Consortium: University of Nice Sophia-Antipolis, Bordeaux 1 University, France; University of Heidelberg, Germany; Lucian Blaga University Sibiu, Romania, University of Padova, Italy, International Institut for Geo-information Science and Earth Observation, Netherlands; University of Warsaw, Poland; University of Santiago de Compostela, Spain; Middle East Technical University, Turkey; Dhaka University, Ahsanullah University of Sciences and Technology, BRAC University, Bangladesh; Royal University of Phnom Penh, Cambodia; Jadavpur University, India; NED University of Engineering and Technology, Pakistan; University of the Philippines, Ateneo de Manila University, Philippines.
- [2] EMMA West Consortium: University of Nice Sophia-Antipolis, France; University of Heidelberg, Germany; Lucian Blaga University Sibiu, Romania, University of Padova, Italy; University of Twente, Netherlands; University of Evora, Portugal; University of Warsaw, Poland; Middle East Technical University, Turkey; Dhaka University, Ahsanullah University of Sciences and Technology, BRAC University, Bangladesh; Kathmandu University, Nepal; Jadavpur University, India; NED University of Engineering and Technology, COMSATS Institute of Information Technology, Pakistan; University of the Philippines, Ateneo de Manila University, Philippines; Associates: RCC Institute of Information Technology, India; Pathways To Higher Education, Ateneo de Zamboanga University, Philippines.
- [3] EMMA East Consortium: University of Nice Sophia-Antipolis, France; University of Heidelberg, Germany; Lucian Blaga University Sibiu, Romania, University of Genova, Italy, Adam Mickiewicz University, Poland; Middle East Technical University, Turkey; Royal University of Phnom Penh, Cambodia; National University of Laos, Laos; Ho Chi Minh City University of Technology, Vietnam Academy of Science and Technology, University of Danang, Vietnam; University of the Philippines, Ateneo de Manila University, Philippines; Chulalongkorn University, Prince of Songkla University, Asian Institute of Technology, Thailand. Associates: Pathways To Higher Education, Ateneo de Zamboanga University, Philippines; Passerelles Numériques, Cambodia.