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“GRaduates Advancement and Development of University capacities in Albania”

Event title: Competence provision for Career Office enhancement and development of students employability skills

Event date: 19-20 May, 2021

Event Venue: European University of Tirana

Event Address: Blv. GJergj Fishta, Nd.70, H.1, 1023

MINUTES - EVENT REPORT

Participants:

In presence:

Agriculture University of Tirana	AUT-UBT
University of Tirana	UT
University of Arts, Tirana	UART
Polytechnic University of Tirana	PUT
University of Medicine Tirana	UMT
European University of Tirana	UET
POLIS University	U-POLIS
Catholic University "Our Lady of Good Counsel"	UNIZKM
Albanian University	AU
Chambers of Commerce and Industry, Tirana	CCIT
Consorzio Inter-Universitario AlmaLaurea	ALMALAUREA

Online:

Alma Mater Studiorum Università di Bologna	UNIBO
University of Siena	UNISI
Universitat de Barcelona	UB
ISCTE - Instituto Universitariò de Lisboa	ISCTE-IUL
Ministry of Education, Sport and Youth	MESY

First day-19 May 2021

After a long break due to the Covid 19 situation, in the premises of the European University of Tirana (EUT), the next meeting with focus on "Competence provision for Career Office enhancement and development of students' employability skills" in the framework of Gradua project, took place. The meeting opened with the welcome speech of EUT's Rector, Mr. Tonin Gjuraj, who after thanking all participants for their presence, stressed that the GRADUA project is one of the most important projects for EUT. Through this project graduate students are being tracked, but not only that, alumni is contributing to motivate students to enroll and become part of the platform. For 2 years, the career office has been successfully using the platform, thus creating a very important database in support of EUT internal policies. He also stressed that the cooperation with AUT has been continuous, this is observed in many other EU projects and not only. Wishing good luck during the two days of the meeting to the participants, he said that EUT will be open with all consortium partners, for other successful collaborations such as the GRADUA project.

The project coordinator Mrs. Hoxha, continued the speech by thanking all those present and especially the organizers of the meeting, clarified all the doubts about the organization of the meeting outdoors since there was the Covid 19 situation going on. However, the large presence during the meeting, stressed that these formats will always be more fruitful than online ones. She went on to present the agenda, and then passing the word to Mr. Dorel Manitiu, who presented the strategies that Almalaurea has been following for years in creating graduate-company connections through the online market, enabled through the same platform in Italy. He explained that AL has in the consortium, 76 Italian universities thanks to a work of 13 years. He emphasized that the platform implemented in Albania is operating at a very satisfactory level, as currently 13 universities have become part of it, of which 4 are new, and work is underway to include 4 other universities. These achievements in a period of almost 2 years are undoubtedly achieved thanks to the persistent work of the project staff, unlike the AL, that 4 universities could be part of only after 5 years. Focusing mostly on the work of AL staff, related to data management and the many employment opportunities offered through the platform, he brought concrete experiences as why the career office staff should manage the functioning of the student-company relationship. He also suggested that the experience of AL, in organizing the annual conference where everyone can be informed about the achievements and successes in the employment sector through the platform, should be in the future plans of Albanian partners. He expressed the conviction that the findings and results will be very necessary for the political institutions that make up our country. For

this he drew attention to the excellent work done by Albanian researchers in preparing the report on the profile of graduates and the report on internship.

The meeting was followed by presentations from the career office staff of 9 partner universities, which were focused on current collaborations with companies, where it was noted that all universities had cooperation agreements with companies, which were also invited to become part of the platform. They further focused on the difficulties they have encountered over the years in creating a database where students can be tracked, as the career office structures themselves have recently begun to consolidate. However, some of the universities brought their experiences, presenting the findings of some studies done in the absence of the platform, where it was noticed that the number of respondents was negligible in the number of enrolled in the platform. So despite the efforts towards creating a database by the universities themselves, the role of the GRADUA project is significantly greater in the contribution to increase this information. They already have a list of graduates with contacts and important data, a complete questionnaire with data in various fields, etc. However, they also pointed out the difficulties and the ongoing work for student enrolment process, as it is extremely difficult to motivate and push graduates to enrol in the platform during the very first steps of its population. This problem is most evident in private universities, where Ms. Danaj, representative of EUT, was one of those present who asked for suggestions from public and European universities in this regard. On the other hand, the staff of the career office present at the meeting expressed the need for continuous training in the management of these offices (as well as the purpose of this meeting), given that they are new structures recently organized in HEIs. With these presentations the morning session ended.

After the lunch break, in the afternoon session, the meeting carried on by presenting the situation of the promotional activities of the project. Mrs. Hoxha stressed that more work needs to be done in this regard, as there are partners that do not reflect satisfactory figures in this regard such as UT, UA and European ones. Meanwhile, she thanked the staff of PUT, UNIZKM, Polis and the commitment of AUT staff for excellent work in this regard, reflected in concrete results the number of students enrolled but also in cooperation with companies.

Her next presentation focused on financial and sustainability issues of the project. In this period RASH had just expressed the lack of capacity in infrastructure and human resources to continue managing the platform. In these conditions, the possibilities of solving this problem were discussed, followed by the online meetings previously organized. Undoubtedly, RASH requested to provide equipment and staff payments that were not accepted by the consortium, as it is impossible under EU rules, so one of the suggested solutions was the possibility of hosting the platform by consortium members. The proposal initially went to PUT and UT, as the fields of study that these universities offer are related to the field of

IT / electronics and AUT in the capacity of coordinator but also based on its capacities. However, it was agreed that these issues should be discussed at internal management levels. The other discussion on the sustainability of the project, focused on the ways of managing the platform after the completion of the project as well as funding issues. Graduation fees, number of graduates to be paid, etc., were some other issues on which it was agreed that they initially needed to be discussed with the management staff. In this regard, the CCIT staff was also asked to prepare a questionnaire to see the wiliness of companies regarding their payments for the use of the platform.

Finally, financial issues were discussed, focusing on the findings of audit report conducted for the mid-term report. In general, the problems identified were minimal. The emphasis was mostly on the lack of staff payments from UMT and MESY. Also, completing documents related to the requirements of the guide. Ms. Hoxha stressed that this was a partial report and that detailed checks on the documentation will be made in the final stage, emphasizing the importance of reporting in the time frame and submission of documents by all partners.

Second day - 20 May 2021

The second day of the meeting was opened by the project coordinator Mrs. Hoxha, who after presenting the agenda of the meeting passed the floor to Mrs. Edmira Shahu, staff of the coordinating institution, who made a brief presentation on the problems of professional and employment practices during the pandemic period. Among the most important findings of this study, was the negative impact that Covid-19 had on the development of professional practices, but also employment opportunities. Most of the students had stated that they could not do the internship in the company premises, they had not been receiving job offers during this period as they usually do during their development. On the other hand, conducting professional internships online was not considered very useful by the surveyed students. Regarding the use of the Gradua platform in this regard, the students' evaluation was positive and most of them had navigated in it to see job offers or internships, but the Covid-19 situation did not favour further such cooperation.

Although it must be acknowledged that the impact of the pandemic on employment was negative, this was also confirmed by the representatives of the companies participating in the meeting, the consortium staff worked to bring success cases, where 2 of them were present at the meeting. One of them, Mrs, Nestjana Dedo, who was hired through the GRADUA platform, by CCIT. She brought to the audience her experience and the steps she followed to become part of the platform, emphasizing the contribution

of Mrs. Hoxha as her former lecturer in promoting the platform among AUT students. Mr. Bajraktari, employed by the Databooz company, who also shared his experience. The meeting was joined online by 1 of the 2 employees through the platform from the cement factory Fushëkrujë, as well as the Chief of Human Resources, Mrs. Elma Zeneli, who presented and confirmed once again the importance of the project and the GRADUA platform in the employment of graduates.

The meeting then turned into an open discussion about the work and commitment of the career office staff regarding student support in writing compiling CVs and Cover Letters / resume, dealing with job interviews (social network approach) how the hiring process works, how to apply for a job, making a video presentation etc.

In this regard, those who shared their experience were the participating staff from AUT, PUT, Polis, EUT, UNIZKM as these universities have consolidated their career offices for several years, while the staff of UT, UMT, Warts, etc., are on the steps of initiation. It was emphasized the awareness of students regarding the functioning of the career office and their more frequent consultation with the staff of these offices. In most cases the compilation of a CV is done by students and often times they are not ready to accept consultations, but recently it has been noticed that there is an awareness in this regard - said some of those present. However, the representative of U Polis said that one of the common motivations to push students to register on the platform is the generation of CV in Euro pass format, avoiding the problems of its organization in Word format. This fact was confirmed by other participants of the career offices. Also, during the meeting was suggested the use of presentation videos as a new very effective way that is being used recently and was accepted as a good presentation alternative in terms of Covid-19.

Regarding the positioning in the workplace in the first steps of employment, nothing is currently offered by the career offices, and there is room for a lot of training by the staff of career offices from European partner universities.

The meeting then proceeded to a presentation of the platform for the new participating career office staff from AUT. Most notably the presentation focused on downloading data, tracking job offers and the ongoing information they need to do for their students as well as match academic data with those of the platform.

The last part of the meeting was followed by training presentations by the staff of the career office of the University of Bologna and that of the University Institute of Lisbon. They focused mainly on their experiences in terms of student support in drafting CVs, positioning in companies, and university company collaborations in terms of graduate employment.