

Financial and Institutional Sustainability Strategic Plan

“INTERnationalization at Home: Embedding
Approaches and Structures to Foster
Internationalization at Western BAlkans/ INTERBA”

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Abbreviations

HEI – Higher Education Institution

IaH – Internationalization at Home

PCO - Partners Country' Organization

PC – Partner Country

PCI – Partner Country Institution

IR – International Relations

EU – European Union

TtT – Training the Trainees

UET – European University of Tirana

Summary

This document highlights the main actions to be undertaken by the INTERBA project's consortium in order to ensure the sustainability of the project and its results after the end of the project in December 2022. This deliverable thus corresponds to task D.8.6. "Financial and Institutional Sustainability Strategic Plan", led by the European University of Tirana (UET). The present document has been drafted having in mind the following EU's definition of a project sustainability plan: "*a project is sustainable when it continues to deliver benefits to the project beneficiaries and/or other communities for an extended period after the financial assistance has been terminated*"¹

Following are highlighted the major project pillars identified to ensure the sustainability of INTERBA.

Firstly, the creation of a knowledge repository based on existing knowledge capital and reshaping knowledge to deliver new insights and practices. The knowledge repository will define a network of knowledge experts from PC universities working together to increase the research and innovation capacities at PC universities, as the industry generated practice-oriented research is the basis for generating innovations. Next important phase is the launching of an online learning platform for all partners to support e-learning platform and tools for delivery, support and exchange of existing and new knowledge capital. In order to avoid the need of mobility as a tool to have international teaching and learning approach, a core staff will be trained by Programme countries through Train the Trainers (TtT) program. "TtT" certified from the PC education ministries will increase the research and innovation capacities at PC universities.

¹ European Commission Directorate-General Education and Culture (2006) "Sustainability of international cooperation projects in the field of higher education and vocational training - Handbook on Sustainability". Luxembourg: Office for Official Publications of the European Communities, ISBN: 92-9157

1. The Project in Brief

Internationalization of HEIs in the Balkan region so far has given an important outcome in updating the curriculum and exposure to different teaching and learning practices. Nevertheless, because the number of students and staff involved in these projects was limited, the impact has not been alike between departments, institutions, organizations, etc.

The Partner Countries of the INTERBA Project are Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Kosovo. *The aim of the project is to strengthen international, intercultural and global dimension via Internationalization at Home (IA).* Moreover, the implementation of this project at partner HEIs aims to enhance the quality of education and to make a meaningful contribution to the society.

The objectives of the project include:

- To formulate a coherent and detailed IaH concept that could be mainstreamed into the partner HEIs; Roadmaps following on from their specific exigencies
- To level up the scope and viability of IaH activities implemented in partner HEIs;
- To train an expert pool capable of developing and integrating IaH into HEI environment;
- To launch an online platform as a tool for IaH implementation;
- To establish/modernize the existing structure/entities responsible for IaH at HEIs.

The project does not start from the scratch, but it builds upon the existing initiatives. During the first year the project conducts an analysis of all previous international projects implemented in each country within the field of internationalization. This produces an overview of mechanisms used to boost internationalization, but also provides a gap analysis which opens the gate to further and systematic improvement. Additionally, this allows to formulate a coherent and unified concept of IaH in all countries which facilitates the understanding and application of the concept in practical terms.

1.1 Purpose of the Financial and Institutional Sustainability Strategic Plan

The Financial and Institutional Sustainability Strategic Plan (further - sustainability plan) document is a blueprint for how INTERBA partnership will work to ensure the long-term sustainability of the positive effects for the HEIs to strengthen international, intercultural and global dimension via IaH. Simultaneously, to enhance the quality of education and to make a meaningful contribution to the society.

Sustainability for each organization will depend from the specific internal and external environment. That's why it is really important to have a plan for sustainable life of the INTERBA project. There is no single formula or answer to the sustainability challenge. However, creating a written sustainability plan will provide a road map and serve as guidance for sustainability efforts. The process of creating a written sustainability plan can also strengthen INTERBA partners' investment and understanding of the efforts needed to keep INTERBA partners working and improving.

The sustainability plan helps to identify sustainability pillars of the project, what resources are necessary to sustain the project, encourage the development of partnerships and support collaboration, and help define progress and the necessary action steps needed to ensure long-term success after the INTERBA project ends.

1.2 Defining “Sustainability”

Sustainability is a measure of the partner country organizations' (PCO) ability to fulfill their mission and serve their stakeholders over time. This document is designed for the PCOs, for which improved sustainability means broader sources of funding and an enhanced ability to deliver vital services to target groups.

There is a wealth of knowledge about the process of improving HEIs' sustainability, built on the experiences of many people who have worked over many years to improve the sustainability of many different organizations. The main insight from this collective experience is that an institution's level of commitment to sustainability is the most important factor in its success. There must be full commitment to the process throughout the institution, from the Board of Administrators through academics and the entire staff of a university. This

is because sustainability is a process, not an end. An institution does not “become” sustainable and then rest on its success. Sustainability involves all the elements and functions of an organization, and every major decision made within the organization — from human resources to finances to service delivery — must be considered through the filter of sustainability.

The seven elements of sustainability are:

- 1. Vision:** Clarity exists about fundamental issues such as what is being sustained, for how long, and at what level of activity; all partners in the initiative embrace the vision.
- 2. Results Orientation:** The entire focus is on the success of the university, national education institutions and industry/business collaboration.
- 3. Strategic Financing Orientation:** A long-term perspective is taken to financing activities, cultivating multiple diverse sources of revenue to maintain financing of the INTERBA at sufficient levels.
- 4. Broad Based Community Support:** Community members show solid support of the INTERBA project and its activities through volunteerism, donations, cooperation and other forms of involvement.
- 5. Ability to Adapt to Changing Conditions:** Flexibility is maintained to change strategies, services, systems etc. over time without losing sight of the end results sought.
- 6. Strong Internal Systems:** Internal organizational functions – governance, finance, human resources, evaluation, and others – are reliable and effective.
- 7. Sustainability Plan:** A written plan has been developed and agreed by the INTERBA members and, and is used to guide actions to promote long-term sustainability.

2. Sustainability Strategy and Actions

This plan aims to maximize the impact of project results over time by optimizing their value, strengthening their impact and transferring them to context of HEIs. To achieve this the PCs objectives will be as follows:

- The creation of a knowledge repository based on existing knowledge capital and reshaping knowledge to deliver new insights and practices. The knowledge repository will define a network of knowledge experts from PC universities working together to increase the research and innovation capacities at PC universities, as the industry generated practice-oriented research is the basis for generating innovations. The increase in the research capacities and the quality of the research results at PC universities will help to initiate and further maintain a continuous process of cooperation in research and innovation between universities and local enterprises.

Responsible Partner: University of Cagliari

Launch of the repository:

Main KPIs: The number of knowledge cases in the repository.

The number of experts participating in the network.

- Launching of an Online Learning Platform for all partners to support e-learning following the gap analyses conducted which will be the first pillar toward further and systematic improvement. European University of Tirana will be the lead partner for the Moodle System. UET will ensure that the system will continue to work after the lifespan of the project. Additionally, the materials will be available in English and in the local language, ensuring that users without English language knowledge will benefit equally.

Responsible Partner: European University of Tirana

Launch of the online Platform:

Main KPIs: The creation of the internationalization infrastructure and its pilot use.

The number of Requests submitted.

- Train the Trainers (TtT) programs will be performed with the participation of all national PCIs and monitoring from EU institutions, including monitoring of re-training sessions. These trainings will be certified from national institutions such as Ministry of Education. Furthermore “Training the Trainers” certified from the PC education ministries will increase the research and innovation capacities at PC universities. A TtT process is planned to be in progress even after the lifespan of the project. Students and Professors that do not have the chance to travel in a

mobility would thus benefit from the international experience integrated within the university internal system.

Responsible Partner: MiddleSex University

Launch of the Training Program:

Main KPIs: The number of staff trained.

The number of staff participating in re-training sessions.

- A quality assurance process will be conducted and will ensure that the project activities are in line and approved by institutional and national authorities. The project activities are implemented following a good dissemination and exploitation plan; thus, the results will be visible in all partner countries to all stakeholders and interested partners. The project has also planned several specific activities in this regard (dissemination materials, website, newsletter, national info day, conference paper, etc.) which will spread the results of the project at country level. Consequently, the results of the project will impact not only the INTERBA partner institutions but the countries at large.

Responsible Partner: CESIE

Main KPIs: Quality of indicators set,

Opened channels of communication

Successful implementation of each activity according to the Log frame

To summarize the above actions to ensure the project's sustainability partner organizations will develop and maintain the common e-learning platform and ensure the Training the trainers Program will be in progress after the project lifespan. Both these actions will contribute in the internalization and improvement of the research quality, which will be a direct link with business and potential funding.

3. Internal and External Stakeholders

In the table below are identified the direct and indirect stakeholders in the sustainability arena of the INTERBA Project. Each of these stakeholders might benefit and simultaneously play an important role in the success of this project after its lifespan.

Stakeholder	Expected Result/Outcome/Role
Students of PC universities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Students that do not have the chance to travel in a mobility would benefit from the international experience integrated within the university internal system. • Internationalization of higher education with e-learning platform will improve the quality of education and learning practices. • Gives an equal opportunity to students coming from remote areas, marginalized groups as well as those with several disabilities, since it provides an opportunity for them to experience internationalization at their institutions, without the need of a mobility. • Overcomes current Pandemic restrictions across countries
University Staff	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improves academic quality and teaching practices, fosters development of human capacities through international collaboration through IaH. • Enlarges the number of beneficiaries, compared to internationalization based on mobilities, because the project will include staff that does not necessarily speak English, since the materials provided will be in local languages as well.
University	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Creates strong links and interactions between INTERBA partners and other universities based on agreement and mutual collaboration. • The INTERBA consortium team up and creates in every way a new partnership to raise the profile of INTERBA and promote the project findings among the other academic institutions and academic stakeholders.
IT Units in each university	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • IT Governance at UET will support in the selection of a dedicated server to host this platform and to ensure the sustainability after the life of the project. • IT units at each university are responsible FOR X YEARS to ensure the functioning of the platform
IR Offices at Universities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To inform students about “in house” international experiences with e-learning platforms. • To increase awareness of the importance of internationalization in education through social media and students’ events organized by universities.
Business	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Raise awareness about the importance of the internationalization and quality of the recruited staff.

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- Mutual interest in the improved capacity of research that can be used in the local enterprises.

Policy Makers

- Include and maximize the impact of internationalization aspects in strategies, documents and plans implemented by policy makers
 - Certification of TtT Programs to foster and acknowledge a wider country support for the internationalization.
 - Advocate and Promote TtT and the e-learning platform as tools to internationalization.
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3.1. Role of Media in the sustainability

In this age of digital interconnectedness, people's perception of internationalization is changing largely because of media. Nowadays, intercultural and global integration is a much larger topic in media presentations. In this framework, INTERBA's legacy must also be integrated and disseminated through relevant media platforms.

The promotion of INTERBA's outcomes must then be done through various type of media including electronic and digital platforms and newspapers that deal with promoting qualitative education and innovative learning ways (such as e-Platform) to engage young people into another dimension of internationalization.

In addition to the digital platforms and as part of the sustainability of the project, the use of printed media and relevant science education publications and journals must serve the dissemination of the project findings.

INTERBA should be available on several social media including Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, etc. as part of its communication strategy.

Responsible Partner(s): European University of Tirana

Main KPIs: Engagements, clicks, likes, shares, comments, etc

4. Funding viability after the end of EU funding

INTERBA's consortium role is to promote the sustainability of the project and to embed policy linkages between internationalization and qualitative education through policy and decision-makers.

As part of its mandate in finding out effective ways to ensure the legacy of INTERBA's results, PCs are also in charge of seeking additional financial and intellectual support through strategic partnerships to ensure that the outcomes of INTERBA are kept up and running once the grant period is over.

- To secure financial support after the European funding has ceased, the project will start to identify income sources at an early stage by offering research-based consulting services to local enterprises, publishing advertising material, request for local and central government funding, producing training materials, etc.,
- The project personnel will be trained to form competences on accessing new funding sources from funding programs.
- Knowledge and expertise acquired by the partner institution staff during the project will be an added value. Additionally, all short-term trainings developed during the project will have future, through the TtT Program.
- Continuous promotion of the values of internationalization, trainings, research improvement, etc.
- Social media promotion of INTERBA and association with local enterprises.
- INTERBA partners will discuss the possibility of developing another proposal to seek EU funds after a follow up of INTERBA's results in a meaningful way.

5. Conclusions

The sustainability of INTERBA will mainly rely on a supportive and cooperative functioning within the INTERBA's consortium together with a solid partnership with the surrounding networks and collaborating institutions, which are essential for the sustainability of the project. A strong commitment among all partners is a vital factor for the legacy of INTERBA.

The end of INTERBA's project will be marked by the generation of updated/modernization of the existing structures. Expansion of project results in the national level increasing the awareness on the relation between internationalization and enhanced quality of education will be final aims.

The approaches to ensuring sustainability include:

- To begin with, the developed findings during the course of the project research, classified as "Gap Analysis", will guarantee the initial stages of viability of INTERBA, as they will be the first validation of the project's success. This will allow to formulate a coherent and unified concept of IaH in all countries which will facilitate the understanding and application of the concept in practical terms.
- Launching of an Online Learning Platform for all partners to support e-learning following the gap analyses conducted which will be the first pillar towards further and systematic improvement.
- Further cooperation with Programme countries involved in the project, beyond the life time of the project in order to progress the cooperation. The INTERBA project is committed to continuing the development of cross-regional cooperation between Western Balkans countries, in particular between Albania, Kosovo, Bosnia and Herzegovina, with particular focus on the development of the knowledge transfer process in the regions and the deployment of the cross-regional networking between PC universities and industry. Through the deployment of cross-regional networking and cooperation between universities and industry in the Western Balkan countries, PC universities will create opportunities for regional and national direct investments and promote individual initiatives to increase the research activity and knowledge transfer in the business environment.

- *Train the Trainers (TtT)* programs will be performed with the participation of all national PCIs and monitoring from EU institutions, including monitoring of re-training sessions. These trainings will be certified from the national institutions, which will serve as a jump in the national country wide recognition and promotion.
- Strong collaboration with the business to offer training/research and consider the potential funding opportunities and enhancing mutual benefits.
- Knowledge and expertise acquired by the partner institution staff during the project will be the added value.
- Dissemination materials, website, newsletter, national info day, conference paper, etc. and social media to increase awareness in national level.
- Experience of work with regional partners for a three years, will help in developing mutual trust and understanding, which will be important for development of common ground of cooperation and positive impact.
- Lastly, the dynamism and constant adaptation of the consortium, remaining always as a proactive organism and a renewable system, is fundamental for problem solving and obstacle anticipation in the future.