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## EXTERNAL EVALUATION REPORT

**Report 1 (November 2021)**

*Revised (January 2024)*

**“Erasmus +” Project INTERBA**

**“INTERnationalization at Home: Embedding Approaches and Structures to Foster  
Internationalization at Western Balkans”**

**610429-EPP-2019-AL-EPPKA2-CBHE-JP**

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## TABLE OF ABBREVIATIONS

HEIs	Higher Education Institution
CBHE	Capacity Building in Higher Education
IaH	Internationalization at Home
WP	Work Package
PC	Partner Countries
WB	Western Balkan
EU	European Union
HE	Higher Education
QA	Quality Assurance
SC	Steering Committee
QB	Quality Board
PCB	Project Coordination Board
KPI	Key Performance Indicators
ToR	Terms of Reference
TtT	Train the Trainers
PCIs	Partner Countries Institutions
GA	Grant Agreement
PA	Partnership Agreement



## EXTERNAL EVALUATION REPORT

### ***PROJECT TITLE AND DATA***

Programme	<b>Erasmus+</b>
Sub-Programme	Cooperation for innovation and the exchange of good practices
Action	Capacity Building in Higher Education
Sub-Action	Joint Projects
Call for Proposal	EAC-A03-2018
Project Number	610429-EPP-1-2019-1-AL-EPPKA2-CBHE-JP
Agreement/Decision Number	20192024
Project Title	INTERnationalization at Home: Embedding Approaches and Structures to Foster Internationalization at Western Balkans

### ***PURPOSE AND THE METHODOLOGY OF THE EXTERNAL EVALUATION***

#### ***THE OBJECTIVES:***

The objectives of the external evaluation have been:

- to provide external view on the project implementation and its outputs,
- to make informed feedback about the performance of the project including the feedback of its efficiency and effectiveness,
- to indicate the lessons learned,
- to provide practical recommendations for follow-up actions.



### **The methodology:**

Preparatory work included the completion of all available documents, project proposal, agreements, reports, and deliverables. The second step was focused on mapping the project activities. Based on that, it was prepared the first draft, which was distributed to the partners. Their comments were taken into consideration for the preparation of Report 1.

## **BASIC INFORMATION ABOUT THE PROJECT**

### **Project Duration:**

November 15th, 2019 - November 14th, 2023

### **Project Partners:**

- P1 - Project Coordinator, University of Tirana, Albania
- P2 - Middlesex University London, UK
- P3 - Hamburg University of Technology, Germany
- P4 - University of Cagliari, Italy
- P5 - CESIE, Palermo, Italy
- P6 - European University of Tirana, Albania
- P7 - Universum College, Kosovo
- P8 - University of Prishtina, Kosovo
- P9 - University of Tuzla, Bosnia and Hercegovina
- P10- Dzemal Bijedic University of Mostar, Bosnia and Hercegovina
- In total: 10 academic partners, and 0 non - academic partners.





## OVERALL ASSESSMENT OF THE PROJECT

### *OVERALL ASSESSMENT OF THE PROJECT*

The creation of a large international network and the internationalization of higher education is a tool to improve the quality of education and increase the relevance of Higher Education Institution (HEIs) within society. Notably, for higher education institutions from developing countries, internationalization brings significant benefits in terms of the improvement of the academic effectiveness, through the mutual exchange and experience of different practices in teaching and learning. Moreover, it fosters the development of human capacities through international collaboration, and students/academic and administrative staff obtain intercultural competences by being exposed to an international setting.

Internationalization of HEIs in the Balkan region has been primarily achieved through student and staff mobility as well as Erasmus + CBHE projects that involved a limited number of staff. HEIs have realized that trying to approach internationalization through these initiatives leaves room for fragmented and individualistic results which prevents internationalization to be embedded within the institutional structures. **"Internationalization at Home" (IaH) is vital as it refers to the policies and processes that purpose fully integrate international and intercultural aspects into the curricular and co-curricular activities for students.** By leveraging on the potentialities of information and communication technologies, this project aims at removing the financial and formal barriers that prevent internationalization from reaching a wide number of students and staff. The process to integrate learning material and teaching approaches, and the technical solutions that will be devised, will allow promoting a framework that can be re-used in other contexts, thus providing an additional tool for effective internationalization in higher education.



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## ***SUMMARY OF WORK PACKAGES (WP)***

Work Package Number	Title of the Work Package
WP.1	Existing knowledge capital analysis
WP.2	Creation a knowledge repository
WP.3	Developing training content
WP.4	Training key staff members
WP.5	E-Learning platform
WP.6	Sustainability
WP.7	Quality Assurance
WP.8	Dissemination and Exploitation Strategy
WP.9	Project management

**Official project webpage:**

[www.interbaproject.com](http://www.interbaproject.com)



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### ***FOLLOW-UP OF THE PREVIOUS RECOMMENDATION***

It is very important that all the suggestions from the EACEA’s have been taken into consideration (ANNEX 1 - Interim evaluation of the Project by EACEA).

**Recommendation:** The sub-contracting cost displays several flaws and most of the sub-contracting costs were planned for dissemination purposes. For several activities as Moodle platform creation, website, quality plan, previously it was not clear if the project partners could develop these themselves within the consortium, considering their expertise, or these may be developed by sub-contracting.

**Follow-up:** INTERBA consortium has decided that such activities may be developed by the partners taking into consideration their expertise and the experience to complete such parts.





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***MONITORING VISITS IN HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS  
EUROPEAN UNIVERSITY OF TIRANA  
18 DECEMBER 2020***

Key recommendations and follow-up measures:

1. It is highly recommended to start the procurement of equipment as soon as possible and speed up the process of installation to enable the effective use of the equipment during the lifetime of the project and beyond.

**Follow up:** During this reporting period, the procurement of equipment was done.

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***UNIVERSITY OF TIRANA  
23 DECEMBER 2020 (ONLINE)***

CESIE presented the main finding on the first annual report. Main findings were briefly presented including the recommendations. Main difficulties with implementation were due to Covid 19 situation producing delays in WP1 impacting some other WP. *Erasmus Office of Albania representative concluded that the project is on a good track.* Due to Covid 19, the project communication was digitized, and it was improved.

***Conclusions:***

1. Use of different channels of communication, especially for the reminder of deadlines and more frequent meetings.
2. Partners must elaborate different scenarios of actions especially for activities that might need adaptations and monitor closely current situations.
5. Confirm the bank account data and justification of changes in the equipment purchase.
6. Fill in the quarterly reports and long reports that were presented.

The overall project evaluation was positive; thus, no feedback was needed.



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**UNIVERSITY OF MOSTAR - 18 MARCH 2021**

Key recommendations and follow-up measures:

1. It is highly recommended to clarify the issue regarding an intermediary bank money transfer and finalize the transfer of funds to the Bosnia and Hercegovina partners.

**Follow up:** INTERBA coordinator has finalized the transfer of funds to all partners, which is a very good step forward.

2. It is highly recommended to start the procurement of equipment as soon as possible and speed up the process of installation to enable the effective use of the equipment during the lifetime of the project and beyond.

**Follow up:** The procurement of equipment has been delayed due to the delays in money transfer and administrative issues and it was not done during the reporting period. The tendering procedure for procurement of equipment is under way.

**Remark:** The supply of the equipment needs to be implemented as soon as possible.

3. Enhance communication and information exchange at the project level.

**Follow-up:** All partners are requested to report on a regular basis and send to the WP8 - Dissemination and Exploitation Strategy Leader, European University of Tirana, on relevant activities held at their institutions/countries and this information is available in the project website and social media accounts.

4. Continue with physical (when feasible) and online implementation of activities in line with the work plan.

**Follow-up:** The project has continued with on-line implementation of the activities. No physical meetings are carried out due to the Covid-19 restrictions.



***Suggestion:*** Taking into consideration the opening of the different countries against the Covid-19, I would strongly suggest having not only on-line meetings, but also physical meetings. We all know even from the platform on-line teaching that on-line communication never can replace the physical meeting.

5. Consider applying for an extension to ensure successful implementation of all planned activities.

**Follow up:** The consortium has requested extension of the reporting deadline to EACEA that has been approved.

***Suggestion:*** Because of the Covid-19 situation, I would like to see reasonable a revision of the plan agenda, which may cause an extension of the project in time, to carry out successfully all the activities planned.



## CROSS-REGIONAL NETWORKING AND COOPERATION BETWEEN UNIVERSITIES AND INDUSTRY IN THE WESTERN BALKAN COUNTRIES

### *COOPERATION IN WESTERN BALKAN COUNTRIES*

#### **Universities and Industry**

Cross-regional networking and cooperation between universities and industry in the Western Balkan countries. This project tries to strengthen international, intercultural, and global dimensions via IaH implementation at partner HEIs to enhance the quality of education and to make a meaningful contribution to society.

Thus, its success is clearly dependent on cross-cutting issues, which constitute the pillars of its implementation. Europeanization/internationalization; disadvantaged groups; social cohesion and cross-regional cooperation are few of the keywords.

The project is approaching internationalization in a more holistic way, by embedding and strengthening “internationalization at home”, as vital. Internationalization at Home refers to the policies and processes that purpose fully integrate international and intercultural aspects into the curricular and co-curricular activities for students.

Strengthening international, intercultural, and global dimension via Internalization at Home (IaH) implementation at partner HEIs to enhance the quality of education and to make a meaningful contribution to the society, by increasing social cohesion as a necessary tool for a fair and equal opportunities and access to education.

The INTERBA project is committed to continuing the development of cross-regional cooperation between Western Balkans countries, between Albania, Kosova, 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.

**Remark:** The creation of a strong connection/network between universities and the industry/business in the Balkan Region remains a big challenge for the universities, because in the existing situation this connection/network is not the proper one. There has been a lot of progress during the last years through different programs as Erasmus +, but still there is lot of to do.

## CREATING EQUAL EDUCATION OPPORTUNITIES

### Creating equal education opportunities

The INTERBA Project was designed to provide equal opportunities for all students, apart from their study place.

**This means that, through this project, there are many students studying outside the capital city or in small institutions who will have equal access to the EU grants to get involved in project activities.** It has moreover combined public and private Higher Education Institution (HEI) trying to offer opportunities to a wide range of students in an unbiased way.

All resources will be available to the public, students, and staff, free of charge and it is intended to design trainings that will not disadvantage any stakeholders due to their personal characteristics.

Lastly, the project outputs will be used during and after the project's timeline by academic and administrative staff that does not necessarily have English as a working language, since the materials provided will be in local languages as well.



**Suggestion:** Creating equal opportunities for the people, apart from their location, capital city or small cities, public or private institution, big or small institution, may be a strong orientation of a such projects, entire and the future project, as it is also one of the most important EU education and development policies.

## INTERNATIONALIZATION PROCESS IN UNIVERSITIES IN WESTERN BALKAN COUNTRIES

### **Internationalization process in universities in WB countries**

Albania, Bosnia and Hercegovina, Kosovo are almost walking through the same path in terms of Programs of European Union in the field of HE. Having said this, Erasmus has been an important tool to boost internationalization in all countries. The INTERBA project first aims at the innovative approach of creating 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.

Internationalization process in Albania, as in the other Western Balkans countries prior to Erasmus+ has been only a remote and sporadic process. There have been several individual incentives, but Erasmus+ was the one who pushed the governments and universities to look for a general framework. Moreover, the need to boost the participation of Albania in the EU projects is also recognized and systematically addressed by the Ministry of Education and Sports of Albania, the National Erasmus+ Office. Over the last year, there have been significant changes of legal framework for higher education and scientific research in the HEI, there is already a new law (Law 80/2015) and number of bylaws currently being developed aiming to device the conditions and mechanisms that would enable improvements regarding internationalization and increase of inclusion for Albanian HEIs.



**Notice:** Internationalization process in Balkan Countries, not only in the terms of universities, still reminds weak, and that happened not only because of the universities, but also because of the government and their missing reforms, which keeps these countries still far away from EU membership. In such circumstances, Erasmus+ projects may help a lot for internationalization of universities in the WB Countries.

## QUALITY OF THE PROJECT IMPLEMENTATION

### Quality of the project implementation - Description of the implemented activities

The following activities are carried out during the reporting period:

**WP1: Existing knowledge capital analysis:** The goal of WP1 is to identify existing knowledge capital in a standardized way that will assist the creation of a knowledge repository at institutional and national level. The WP1 dealing with Gap Analyses had some delays which occurred due to pandemic outbreak impacting some other activities in the project. At the end, activities within this WP are fully implemented.

**WP2: Creation a knowledge repository:** Activities within WP2 have been implemented. UNICA has proposed and detailed a structure for the template that describes the knowledge cases and the experts' profiles. A survey was circulated among consortium to receive feedback, finalizing the templates for the knowledge cases and the experts' profiles. Data regarding the shareable knowledge were collected providing information on 52 courses and experts. Based on the data provided, a repository of knowledge and experts has been created.



**WP3-Developing training content/WP4-Training key staff members:** Activities within these WP's are partially implemented. WP3 is primarily focused on developing training content preparing short training opportunities and creating guidelines for Request for Knowledge (RFK) documentation. WP3 training includes a Train the Trainer program. MUHEC as the WP3 leader has submitted a preliminary program structure in February 2021 to be considered for delivery in March 2021. The training planned for online delivery was postponed pending the decision from EACEA for approval of the changes in the project leader's coordination team. The Train the Trainer program is planned for fall 2021. **Notice: The Train the Trainer program, which was postponed for January 2022, needs to start as soon as possible, in order not to be postponed again!**

**WP5: E-Learning platform:** Is not fully implemented. The goal is to deliver an E-learning platform and tools, support, and exchange of existing and new knowledge capital. A Moodle structure for the delivery of e-learning and its monitoring for the lifespan of the project and beyond is planned to be developed, supporting the introduction of materials and the monitoring of the translation of key documentation.

**Notice: Needs to be fully implemented according to the time schedule. If it is not possible within the existing time schedule, there is a need for revision of the time schedule!**

**WP6: Sustainability:** Is not implemented. It is focused on sustainability, aiming to maintain project results beyond the project lifetime. Partner Countries are committed to elaborate plans to sustain the objectives of the project: developed training courses and the Moodle platform for the training materials, the Train the Trainer workshop and the training model developed for academic staff as well as the established network of knowledge experts.





**Notice: Needs to be implemented according to the time schedule. If it is not possible within the existing time schedule, there is a need for revision of the planned agenda and Gantt chart by the consortium.**

**WP7: Quality Assurance:** Almost all tasks foreseen in WP7, have been carried out. A Quality Assurance Plan (QA) plan was prepared, to ensure the overall quality of implementation and monitoring of the progress of project activities. The First QA Annual Report was released, based on two surveys: general monitoring questionnaire and WP leader questionnaire. The project has robust QA processes and tools in place guiding partners in implementation of all project activities.

**WP8: Dissemination and Exploitation Strategy:** Fully implemented for the reporting period. The project has a dedicated website in which all the activities are published. A Dissemination and Exploitation Strategy, which has been revised by partners, and then approved by the consortium. The financial and institutional sustainability strategy plan has been drafted.

**WP9: Project management:** Fully implemented for the reporting period. Partnership’s agreement was drafted and sent to partners for feedback soon after the signature of the Grant Agreement following the first pre-financing finalization. Outputs of WP9 are Steering Committee (SC), Quality Board (QB) and Project Coordination Board (PCB) established during the kick-off meeting. The project management has been evaluated and Key Performance Indicators (KPI) are measured under WP7 with two surveys. Regarding the timeliness of WP activities, several WP leaders report delays, mainly due to Covid-19 crisis. However, no partner envisages that a delay could be an issue for overall partners.



## QUALITY ASSURANCE

### Quality Assurance

A Quality Assurance Plan was written by WP7 leader CESIE in April 2020 and approved by all partners aiming to provide a set of guidelines and procedures for internal use to ensure the overall quality and the progress of the project activities and an efficient project management. This document is available upon request. The overall quality management of the INTERBA project is a transversal activity as it regards the monitoring, evaluation and quality assurance of all WPs and is conducted by CESIE in close cooperation with the coordinator and WP Leaders throughout the full duration of the project.

This is done by monitoring and evaluating:

- 1) The progress of the activities against project work plan and timeline.
- 2) The Quality of the project outputs and activities.
- 3) The Performance of the consortium, including communication and cooperation.

Also, a Quality Board was created to perform the activities on time and ensure their quality and to review the final draft of deliverables. All the results and activities of the INTERBA project are analysed using a variety of quantitative and qualitative indicators; available on Google Drive “Overview for all Work Packages Table”. For each WP, indicators were defined, based on the application and on indications of WP leaders at the beginning of the project. For each indicator, the partnership defined Means of Verification, i.e., the source of data serving as “proof” for the indicator. QA data are collected by CESIE; depending on the means of verification, other partners are involved in the collection and data analysis. The process for quality control of deliverables includes the following phases:

- 1) A draft is sent to the partners.
- 2) Partners have 2 weeks to submit their comments.
- 3) The WP leader has one week to revise the deliverable and send the final version to the coordinator and CESIE, conducting a final check.

The following quality assurance activities have been carried out:



- QA questionnaires were distributed to partners to obtain feedback about management, cooperation within the partnership, chances/opportunities of the project, threats/risks for the project:
  - 1) Evaluation of First Skype Meeting.
  - 2) Evaluation of Kick-off Meeting.
- Further, in preparation of the First Annual Report, INTERBA partners were asked by CESIE to fill in two questionnaires:
  - Monitoring Questionnaire for all WP leaders to track the progress and achievements of all project activities. WP leaders were asked to provide information on the progress of the WP(s) they lead in the reporting period. All WP leaders filled in the questionnaire, and so the report on WP progress was filled.
  - An Internal QA and Monitoring Questionnaire: For an overall monitoring and evaluation of the management, cooperation within the partnership and outcomes in the first project year, a separate questionnaire was developed, for each partner organization.

The First QA Annual Report documents a period covered from 15 November 2019 to 15 October 2020. Main findings of the First Annual Report were presented to partners during the skype meeting on 23 December 2020.

Further to this, CESIE reviewed all Deliverables prepared so far, including 1.1 Gap Analysis; 8.1 Setting up and maintaining the project website (including visual identity - logo); 8.2 Dissemination and Exploitation Strategy. CESIE reviewed Deliverables on the background of quality criteria and indicators set out in the QA Plan and sent comments and suggestions of improvements to the WP Leaders.

During the reporting period, Terms of Reference (ToR) are prepared for the external evaluator. Because of the comprehensive reasons, the appointment of the expert was delayed until July 2021.



## VISIBILITY

A dedicated Work Package is being implemented, to ensure that its activities, results, and impact is disseminated in a proper and coherent way. There is a Dissemination and Exploitation Strategy, ensuring a smooth roll out of key messages, while synchronizing targeted outreach with project implementation milestones. A variety of communication tools are used for measuring communication and awareness raising effectiveness. Deliverables of WP8 finalized under the reporting period are:

**8.1** Setting up and maintaining the project Web Site - Done

**8.2** Consolidation of Dissemination and Exploitation Strategy - Done

**8.3** Two papers on project activities and results  
published in relevant scientific magazines and/or  
presented at a relevant international conference – In  
Process.

**8.4** Organizing 4 dissemination events with relevant stakeholders - In Process

**8.6** Creation of the financial and institutional sustainability strategic plan - Done

The project is supported by a visual identity and a user-friendly website and social media are developed and a series of actions were carried out through face to face and online activities.



## WEBSITE

<https://INTERBAproject.com/> as created to serve as the main channel of communicating the project results/deliverables. It is available to the public from the very first months of the project and it provides detailed information regarding Work Packages, timetables, tasks, outcomes, and activities that have been organized so far. The project website has been structured in 6 menus:

- Home: visitors can find useful introductory information about the project and events.
- Project: organized in five subsections starting from the 'Partners', 'Project Team', 'Objectives and target groups', 'Deliverables' and 'WP'.
- Dissemination: a menu has been created, organized in two sub-categories, 'Information Materials' and 'Project activities' in which the following materials are available: Newsletter, Leaflet, and all activities developed with a chronological order.
- Deliverables: publications of the project are stored, such as Dissemination Plan. Upcoming publications (such as Scientific Papers, etc.) are expected to be published as well.
- Reserved area: This menu is dedicated to a section available for the project partners only, who have been provided credentials to access it.
- Contact us: dedicated to all project partners, interested in getting more information on the project activities.

Regarding the website audience, the website has been visited by 7483 unique users during 2020 and another 7774 unique users during 2021.

The selected provider for the design and deployment of the official website is also expected to ensure the maintenance of it for at least 3 years of the project duration.



The maintenance plan is specified and tailored for current project needs. Consortium actions ensuring the visibility, exploitation and publicity obligations are in full compliance with the Grant Agreement. The Work Packages Leader has designed a strategy based on the existing visibility rules and applicable for Erasmus+ projects.

## SOCIAL MEDIA

In order to reach a broader audience, which includes students, policymakers, university staff and other organizations, a Facebook (<https://www.facebook.com/INTERBA/>) and an Instagram account (<https://instagram.com/INTERBAproject?igshid=4aaswoar8076>) have been set up. The logo, templates, a roll-up banner, yearly E-newsletter, and leaflets to be used during reporting and documentations are designed. The INTERBA Facebook page has reached 170 likes so far and posts have had about 300 hits on average.

A YouTube page (<https://www.youtube.com/@interbaproject1843>) is opened for the project, to better share the information.

All partners have regularly published the project activities in their institutional websites and social media.

## EQUIPMENT

In the framework of the INTERBA project, for 6 partners it is planned to procure equipment. Initially, tendering procedures for the acquisition of the hardware equipment are initiated by some of the partners and for some others this procedure has been finalized (best value for money). National tendering procedures were found more convenient to ensure a better offer from the selected provider. In general, all the proposed procedures and regulations were initially approved by the Steering Committee and after a final approval from the Agency was requested.



## MOBILITY FOR TEACHING, TRAINING AND/OR RESEARCH ACTIVITIES

During the first year of the project is conducted an analysis of all previous international projects implemented in each partner country within the field of internationalization, is created a knowledge repository and a bridge between experts and a coordination model for using existing resources based on a knowledge capital repository and are identified knowledge gaps (WP1 & WP2 tasks). This has not only produced an overview of mechanisms used to boost internationalization but has also provided a gap analysis which opened the gate to further and systematic improvement. This has allowed to formulate a coherent and unified concept of IaH (Internationalization at Home) in all partner countries which have facilitated the understanding and application of the concept in practical terms. During the second year of the project, a core staff of Partner Country (Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Kosovo) was foreseen to be trained in October 2021 by Program Countries through Train the Trainers (TtT) during a 3-day workshop (WP3 & WP4) tasks. Training pilots is foreseen to be performed with the participation of all national Partner Country Institutions and monitoring from EU institutions. Overall, the project objectives for three Partner countries HEI in this phase is to have 52 courses as part of the network of knowledge experts in the region. The necessary network will be in place allowing retrieving expertise.

## QUALITY OF COOPERATION PROJECT MANAGEMENT

INTERBA consortium is established based on issues of quality assurance, formalized with a partnership agreement which ensures credibility and interaction among partners and that sets the terms and conditions of relationship between partners. After the signature of the



Grant Agreement (GA) with the Agency, the Coordinator drafted the Individual Partnership Agreement (PA). The revised version which fully complies with each institution's internal procedures as well as their national laws and standards was signed. Key governance body is the Steering Committee (SC), composed of representatives from each partner as the main body in charge of any conflict resolution. The decision-making process starts with a draft-proposal presentation to the consortium. For operational and technical decisions, the Work Packages leader in consultation with the coordinator can judge on the received feedback from partners and incorporate them/make the necessary adjustments in the draft-proposal when found pertinent. In principle, decisions are made at Work Package level (technical) in full consensus (or by majority-rule). Other two boards are established, the Project Coordination Board (responsible for operative and operational issues) and the Quality Board.

Google Drive is the cloud storage service used by the INTERBA consortium to internally share all relevant project documents and communications. A shared folder is accessible by all partners in which documents that belong to all the partners are stored there. For documents with sensitive content or subject to any data privacy restriction, partners are requested to store them in their dedicated folders in which the access is granted only to the respective partner and to the coordinator's project team can access them.

The project activities have been carried out as programmed in the Project timeline implemented online through a Gantt chart, with delays that have not affected the overall implementation foreseen for the progress reporting period. Also, important documentation such as Dissemination plan, Quality plan, Communication plan, Gantt chart and management tools are fully implemented.

Due to the Covid-19 travel restrictions all project management meetings (except for the kick-off meeting, which was held in the hybrid form) were held online. The kick-off meeting was organized in Tirana, on 9 -10 of March 2020. The coordinator continues to monitor the situation with the travel restrictions for the different countries of the partners





involved and discusses with the partners the more appropriate and safer way to hold the meetings. Realization of daily technical and administrative tasks is managed and assured by the project coordinator and its project administrative team. For both face-to face and online meetings, draft-agenda is shared with all partners in advance, and they are invited to comment/proposed issues to be discussed during the meeting. For each meeting minutes are drafted and distributed a few days after the meetings and commented until approved. On average, 1 online meeting per month is organized.

In April 2020, the rector of the coordinator partner, sent an official request to EACEA for changing the contact person responsible for the official communication with EACEA with the motivation to increase the efficiency and impact of the project's activities and results. Due to this change, there were some activities with some delays but not affecting the overall objectives of the project.

The performance indicators related to project management are established and presented in the QA Plan. An annual general satisfaction survey on project management was conducted among project participants. The details about all surveys, distribution of related questionnaires and their further processing are available on request.

**Suggestion: Organization of face-to-face meeting, apart from on-line meeting, suggestion that was taken into consideration from the partners.**

## INVOLVMENT OF PARTNERS AND STAKEHOLDERS

The coordinator has regularly monitored the progress of all work done by the partners, as well as the timely completion of deliverables. Each partner was given a specific role and responsibility, which was communicated during the kick-off meeting as well. The responsibilities have been divided according to the relevant expertise and the experience of the participating institutions. The project is structured in 9 Work Packages. Each Work Package is led by the most competent partner in the domain area: WP1 is coordinated by



Universum College, WP2 by University of Cagliari, WP3 and WP4 Middlesex University, WP5 and WP8 by European University of Tirana, WP6 by Hamburg University of Technology, WP7 by CESIE and WP9 by University of Tirana. The Project Manager takes the overall lead of the project activities, facilitates, and supervises the achievement of project results. All partners have been involved and contributed to finalize entirely WPs activities, meanwhile the materials have been approved by the SC and the final versions have been approved by all partners. Project partners have communicated with diverse levels of stakeholders, e.g., universities, Ministry of Education and other associations related to the feedback to improve the activities and areas where it required more results in the future. External stakeholders will be involved in the second project year for dissemination purposes.

The share of responsibilities among partner institutions has been listed in a Gant chart of the INTERBA Project, which has been shared with all the partners. All partners are involved in the project equally, regardless of whether they are experienced, still the less experienced partners are provided with strong guidance and consultancy by the coordinating institution. In general, all partners have been actively involved in the project management and have facilitated the overall project coordination. Program country institutions have ensured the necessary expertise in the field, acting as knowledge providers. And partner country institutions on the other side have been actively involved in these knowledge transfer processes. The knowledge transfer process facilitated the overall project implementation to be very inclusive to all partners. The project contributes to increased cooperation between universities by building and transferring the capacities and knowledge between HEIs consortium and wider. Later, the implementation of the project will contribute to the visibility and availability of internationalization in general of consortium members and other stakeholders and thus it will increase cooperation between HEIs and non-academic sectors.



**Notice: It is very good for the project, sharing different experiences between universities in Western Europe with the universities in Western Balkan!**

## MANAGEMENT OF THE GRANT

The primary responsible partner for the management of the grant is the University of Tirana in the role of coordinator of the INTERBA project. Management of the grant went smoothly and followed EACEA rules and recommendations received during Grant holders meeting in Brussels and in accordance with the provisions stated in the Grant Agreement. In the agreement the timing and procedures for payments were clearly defined for each partner, as a further way to facilitate a general understanding of the correspondence between budget shares and subdivision of workloads, where in more detail some modification from EACEA guidelines were proposed.

The receiving of the first installment had some delays due to administrative issues with the National Bank of the coordinator and lockdown due to Covid-19.

Pre-financing was allocated respectively according to PA, to all institutions in the consortium and some of them had some delays in receiving the grant due to administrative procedures.

There were some issues in signing the PAs regarding the Covid-19 situation due to lockdown in many countries. Some of the PA we only signed electronically. Meanwhile, the legal representative of University of Tirana and some other legal representatives of some universities were changed. After consultation with the EACEA Project Advisory, it was agreed to amend all the PA changing the contact point details.

The coordinator's project team is composed as follows: Project Coordinator, Management Team, Communication Team and Financial Team. The Project Coordinator is actively involved in the day-to-day project management. The management team is responsible for



all the activities related to the Work Packages and the Financial team oversees all financial issues with partners and the Finance Department at the Coordinating Institution. The communication team maintains regular communication with the EACEA reporting on requested changes and requesting approvals and with all the members of the project. All the communications regarding the grant management and other issues related to the overall project management and implementation are forwarded to all partners.

The interim Technical Report by the agreement of EACEA was postponed till 14/09/2021. Due to the above situation the financial statement is not followed by the request for second pre-financing. This request is expected to be received later by the end of October 2021.

**Notice: Management of the grant was very correct and precise, in accordance with the project forecast and objectives of the project.**

## IMPACTS AND SUSTAINABILITY

Awareness raising, dissemination, sustainability, and exploitation of the project results. The project tries to gather key stakeholders around its agenda and ensure that all project outputs and results are transferred beyond the partnership as well as disseminated and used in the most efficient way. The dissemination strategy has been developed, with the main objective of ensuring the proper dissemination and awareness of the project outcomes as well as their exploitation.

A variety of communication tools are used or will be used for measuring communication and awareness raising effectiveness. To ensure cohesive delivery of project outputs and results, internal communication activities are performed concurrent to the external ones.

The project has a well-defined visual identity (dissemination materials such as rollup, leaflet, website, etc.).



A newsletter and a leaflet are prepared and shared with the relevant stakeholders annually. They are published in the e-version to disseminate relevant achievements and events. Tailor-made publications, papers to relevant international conferences or scientific journals, target oriented dissemination activities and quantitative dissemination activities will follow in the next months.

The main results in relation to the different beneficiary groups are:

Since the beginning of the project, some main activities are being disseminated through various channels, and these events were broadly advertised in the official project website, partner institutions' official websites and social networks, etc.

- INTERBA success story: On December 17, 2019, National Erasmus + Information Day brought the CBHE Session which included several presentations from the Erasmus + National Office as well as from Beneficiaries of Capacity Building programs as success stories. In this activity the INTERBA Project was introduced.
- Introductory meeting: The project team from University of Tirana, Lead Partner, met and discussed the implementation of the project: INTERBA - “Internationalization at Home: Embedding Approaches and Structures to Foster Internationalization at Western Balkans”, Ref. No. 610429 – EPP-1-2019-1-AL-EPPKA2-CBHE-JP.
- Presentation of INTERBA: In the framework of activities organized for the internationalization of the University of Tirana (UT), the presentation activity of the INTERBA project was organized, where UT will be Lead Partner for the first time. Participants in this meeting were from the foreign relations offices of partner universities of UT.
- Erasmus Days 2020: In the framework of #Erasmusdays2020 #INTERBA team presented the project in a series of activities organized in these 3 days, sharing the project to different audiences and stakeholders.
- After the pandemic hit, all meetings have been organized online, and have been



disseminated as well on the INTERBA Facebook page. INTERBA - Posts | Facebook

- Please check the following video, (<https://youtu.be/VvOhdK3IBHE>) where INTERBA project coordinator and partners talk about the impact of our project in the general context of the 2020 Pandemic. With the beginning of the new academic year, several training sessions will follow with the international partners. Pilots of the selected subjects too will be introduced and presented through the Moodle platform. Each partner will have to organize a national info day, where the findings and results of the training, capacities built, and sustainability of results must be presented to a wider public (staff; students; stakeholders; etc.). A final conference will be organized to attract learners and educational institutes and potential network partners and scientific papers will be published. These activities have a dedicated budget which needs to be implemented by partners.

Informative sessions are organized at both departmental and institutional levels, including students.



## CONCLUSIONS

Taking into consideration the situation caused by Covid-19 pandemics, I would conclude that:

1. The project progressed very well according to the time schedule, with very little objective delays, which has not affected the realization of the objectives of the project.
2. The management of the project was very professional and cooperative by all partners, who has fulfilled their responsibilities and their duties according to their engagement in the project.
3. The budget was used in a very correct and effective way, covering the supply of equipment and other expenses of the project, according to the budget plan.
- 4.

## RECOMENDATION

In the new circumstance created from opening of the different counties by Covid 19 pandemics, I would suggest:

Meetings between partners, stakeholders, and other groups of interests as well need to be organized face to face to be more effective and more present physically, which has been realized.

1. If it is a need based in the objective reasons to revise the project in terms of time frame, objectives, and budget, now is the time to do it.

