

Academic Reconstruction in South Eastern Europe

University collaboration in Teaching, Study and Research



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Active for twelve years: the DYNET/SEEFORM Project

Co-operation on equal terms

DYNET/SEEFORM is founded on contacts which go back to the 1970s. Today, the partners set structural impulses for the future.

In 2000, engineering scientists in the Western Balkans and Germany formed a large collaboration platform: DYNET. Amongst other initiatives, this established two successful MSc programmes – “Computational Engineering” in Belgrade and “Earthquake Engineering” in Skopje, both with third-country scholarships from neighbouring countries. On the basis of this collaboration a smaller group from the platform took a decisive step further: partners from Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, Croatia, Macedonia and

Serbia built up a graduate’s centre in Skopje. This is how SEEFORM came into being, the South Eastern European Centre for PhD Formation. Nowadays, all participating institutes send doctoral candidates and mentor and examine them jointly. This successful structural project also began with single persons and contacts, namely with Prof. Dr.-Ing. Günther Schmid from RUB, who founded the network together with long-term partners in the region such as the recently deceased Professor Branko Verbic from Sarajevo, and consistently promoted it. The project has profited from collaboration on equal terms since this time. “Our local partners took on responsibility themselves. With their knowledge of the university structures in existence there, they of all people were best placed to efficiently go new ways in the regional network” according to Rüdiger Höffer, the current project director (RUB). SEEFORM has also gained important support within the administrative structures of the universities involved. This means that concrete reform ideas can be transmitted from the projects beyond the faculties and out to the universities. Future tasks include the development of joint research projects with responsibility delegated to the young scientists and the involvement of young scientists with advanced qualifications in the teaching.

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Editorial



Our regional programme conference in October in Tirana this year made clear the greatest success of collaboration and sponsoring: young professionals who are outstandingly well and internationally educated in our networks moving up into leadership positions at their universities. They in turn now shape scientifically and methodically demanding teaching.

SEEFORM, the Skopje-based graduate school for construction engineers from Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, Croatia, Macedonia and Serbia, stands as an example of best practice. The local faculties of building and rector’s offices are closely involved. With their support, partners align their PhD training standards and bundle their scientific capacities on the side of their tutors and also the doctoral candidates.

Moreover, the development of weaker universities in the region is looked at more closely: here, the regional activities of the networks were supplemented in 2012 with special faculty and further training measures. The aim of this was to increase the potential for co-operation at these sites.

I heartily thank all those involved in the networks and the conference for their commitment!

Dr. Anette Pieper
Stabilitätspakt für Südosteuropa



Colleagues and friends: Branko Verbic and Günther Schmid, collaborating on equal terms.

Aktive support with specialised courses and research visits

Structural development by the networks at the region’s weaker universities remains a challenge. Additional supportive measures should help here: In Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina and also Kosovo, five specialist courses and 16 research and further training visits for young scientists were realised in 2012. Activities range from agronomic research in Pristina, a specialised course on Albanian-Greek migration geography through to the setting up of sub-disciplines for medical law in Sarajevo. The aim: in the long term, to align the basic parameters for regional collaborations at comparable institutions.

The 2012 DAAD Conference in Tirana



A conference for the future

The "Academic Reconstruction of South Eastern Europe" Programme celebrates its 13th birthday: more joint master's and PhD programmes and regional centres of excellence were planned at the second DAAD regional conference in Tirana. The quality assurance of the joint study programmes and the securing of long-term prospects for project funding and collaborations were deemed to be urgently necessary.

1999: The conflict in Kosovo was just ending and the fighting had just stopped in Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina. The DAAD launched its special programme in this difficult period as part of the stability pact for South Eastern Europe. Prof. Dr. Dhori Kule, Vice-Chancellor of the University of Tirana, pointed out the significance of the venue which now bears the name "Godina Liria", Freedom Building. 22 years ago, protests emanated from here which changed the political landscape of Albania. "We want Albania to be like all other countries in Europe", it was said at the time. The DAAD provided a great deal of support for the integration of Albania into the European university landscape; the collaboration was "inspiring, stimulating and extremely important for the development and modernisation of the university".

At the time, it would have been extremely difficult to imagine that the conference participants would sit in the same room again with their colleagues from neighbouring countries today, said Ulrich Grothus at the beginning of the DAAD regional conference. The deputy DAAD general secretary formulated important prospects for the future: The development of quality "away from emergency measures and towards structured forms of institutional collaboration". Just as essential: targeted support for young academics within the region. Stronger centres in the region should also support weaker facilities. And finally, more intensive inclusion of humanities and social sciences was necessary.

Around 200 participants from South Eastern Europe and Germany held discussions under the

heading of "University co-operations in South Eastern Europe: dynamics and aims in the light of scientific and political change". The university landscape and the political context have changed. A broadly diversified network has developed within which currently over 140 South Eastern European and German institutes are collaborating. More than 17,000 students, graduates and scientists have been supported so far with 31.5 million Euros.

"Clear political will and also political concessions are needed"

Prof. Dr. Oliver Jens Schmitt from the Institute for East European History at the University of Vienna went right to the heart of important aspects of the connection between nation building and the founding of universities: universities are more than just institutes of higher education. The emerging nation states in South Eastern Europe in the 19th and 20th centuries also founded universities to strengthen national identity and as showcases for their education, civilisation and culture. After the Second World War, universities were to both support the industrialisation and modernisation of society and also educate a new socialist elite.

Technical sciences increased in importance in that period – but they then lost it again in the course of the transition in the 1990s. The situation today is characterised by fragmentations, political splits and the breakup into different nation states and entities which set up universities as symbols of national and cultural sovereignty in the tradition

of the 19th century. The states of South Eastern Europe needed closer co-operation, including in humanities, and also co-ordination and concentration. A look back at history shows that sustainable collaboration at a scientific level has never really existed. "Clear political will and also political concessions are needed", according to Schmitt.

Evamarie Hey-Hawkins (University of Leipzig) showed that collaboration in individual areas can work successfully by heading the "Master and Postgraduate Programme in Materials Science and Catalysis", a joint master's programme set up in stages. "MatCatNet" began in 2005 with three partner universities and was extended to eight institutions in Germany, Romania, Macedonia, Serbia and Kosovo. One important programme is the sponsoring of students who come to Leipzig to complete their dissertation and then return to their home universities. Hey-Hawkins emphasised there was no wish to support the brain drain but to enable young scientists to do applicable research. The network also enables the highly specialised co-operation of young scientists in individual projects. Researchers from Cluj-Napoca/Romania and Skopje/Macedonia are working together on developing sensors.

Young scientists should be given the opportunity to do applicable research

The "MatCatNet" is one of 19 networks which the DAAD is currently supporting. A poster exhibition at the conference emphatically illustrated the diversity of the networks, from applied spec-

An overview of the conference workshops

Five topics, five teams, five promising concepts



Interdisciplinary meeting: the DAAD regional conference provided many platforms for inspiring dialogues, fascinating scientific discussions and joint workshops.

Workshop 1

Building confidence and transforming conflict through the prism of science: What will be the future challenges of legal, sociological and cultural science in the field of teaching and research?

Conflict analysis in a broader, international, European context was regarded by workshop participants as decisive. Joint post-war and post-communism memories in the Western Balkans must be dealt within an ongoing process and publicly presented and discussed on a platform yet to be set up. Regional co-operation with neighbouring countries is judged to be indispensable; at the same time, the role of German institutions as a kind of catalyser is valued.

Workshop 2

Perspectives for joint master programmes: How can the given spectrum of MA-study programmes in the region best be supplemented? What are the specific needs of joint master education?

Workshop participants recommended that general guidelines for joint master's programmes and their accreditation at an European level should be worked out. They wished the DAAD to take an active role in this. They also found the promotion of mobility important and that the broad range of study programmes in South Eastern Europe should be especially emphasised in order to get more German students interested in this region. A cross-network platform was suggested to exchange experiences.

Workshop 3

Prospects of structured doctoral training programmes: What is the potential of joint doctoral training? How can we best contribute to shape and reform regional doctoral degree regulations?

All agreed that research is essential for individual and structured doctoral study. The imparting of additional skills in graduate colleges or other doctoral programmes is welcomed. Standards for the mentoring of PhD students were discussed at length. Workshop participants recommended the setting up of young researchers' seminars similar to the summer schools for master's students. The DAAD special programme offers good prerequisites for co-operation with means of mobility and material resources.

Workshop 4

Significance of research and publications for the career of young scientists: How can the research potential of young academics in the region be strengthened and extended?

In order to promote "brain circulation" and not "brain drain", resources should increasingly be used within the Western Balkan countries, especially in the field of research. In order to increase the competitiveness of individual research projects, more attention should be paid to their relevance for industry and also the applicability of individual results. A further suggestion affected the extension of networking and collaboration beyond existing DAAD project networks in order to improve interdisciplinary research.

Workshop 5

Facing and mastering regional differences: How can regional cooperation overcome structural academic imbalances within the region? How can the centres of competence recently established influence this process?

The prospect of long-term project promotion is especially essential to confront the regional differences which no doubt exist in the Western Balkans. The formation of networks with individual, optimum sizes which can act most flexibly and effectively in this context is recommended. The increasing of mobility and the publication of research results in well-known international journals is just as important as public relations in politics and local government.

troscopy, participation through architecture and materials science, entrepreneurship through to human rights and social work in South Eastern Europe. The networks work out strategic perspectives for the future in joint workshops. The most important points were: the quality assurance of joint study programmes, the setting up of interdisciplinary network platforms and the bundling of regional resources for training at doctoral level and research as well as the discussion of a necessary long-term perspective for project financing.

Uta Zapf, member of the German Parliament, emphasised that the successful collaboration between universities in South Eastern Europe as part of the DAAD programme was an important aspect of the EU integration process during the podium discussion. Prof. Dr. Elena Dumova-Jovanoska of the University of St. Kyrill and Method in Skopje/Macedonia underlined the central significance of PhD programmes. Evan Rroço, Professor at the University for Agriculture in Tirana turned the spotlight on the entire university system with the question: "Do we have the same quality?" He called for the development of joint quality standards in order to ensure mutual recognition of diplomas. Elijor Vila, a young Albanian scientist who studied in Bulgaria and Germany and then returned to his home country, demanded a change in the system at universities. Young academics such as he himself needed better conditions in order to be able to make effective use of the knowledge they had acquired abroad.

Further Information:

www.daad.de/stabilitaetspakt/

Participants' comments

Conference splitter from Tirana



Dr. Elior Vila
University of N.Y., Tirana
and University of Elbasan

"I took part in the DAAD'S third party country programme at the Technical University of Sofia for students from the entire Western Balkans. There I noticed that we have a great deal more in common and that there are very few differences. Perhaps the young scientists who are participating in our programme today will be the politicians of tomorrow."



MSc Makedonka Dimitrova
University American
College, Skopje

"Several days ago, it was midnight, my husband asked me with whom I was skypeing. I said 'with Mike. You know, our project with Dragana, Janka and Vasilika.' It then occurred to me that one of the aims of the DAAD programme is probably to link us up. Our network combines 15 universities. It has drastically changed my career, especially as regards research potential."



Prof. Dr.-Ing. Daniel Lordick
Technical University Berlin

"We just had our network's first events this year but I hope that something long-term will develop from it. Here I was able to meet potential project partners, which was extremely helpful. I also discussed a great deal with German colleagues from other specialist areas. It is great to see how your own project is integrated into a larger framework."

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Interview with

The Materials Science / Materials Technology Network



Prof. Thomas A. Bier
(TU Bergakademie Freiberg),
Prof. Naim Sylja (University
of Pristina), Prof. Mira Shehu
(University of Vlora), Prof.
Bashkim Ziberi
(University of Tetovo).

Networking pays off

The Materials Science Network has existed since 2005 – it connects the TU Bergakademie Freiberg and Albanian-speaking universities in Pristina, Tirana, Vlora, Elbasan and Tetovo. It provided fundamental and important reconstruction support above all for Kosovo and the new University of Tetovo.

How important is the Materials Science Network for your work?

Prof. Naim Sylja, University of Prishtina: In my Physics department there were no lectures on solid-state physics for five years because there were no professors. I was myself just an assistant. Without the network and the DAAD I would have had no possibility to continue studying. I was able to perform experiments for my master's and doctoral theses at the TU Bergakademie Freiberg. The network continues to be extremely important for us. Because of it we have written an Albanian version of a script on solid-state physics. And we receive support through guest lectures.

Prof. Mira Shehu, University of Vlora: I also did experiments for my PhD in Freiberg. I gained further practical benefits from the network through getting to know the teaching methods of other professors, improving my skills in the field of fracture mechanics and exchanging information on material tests and new methods of cyclic stress tests.

Prof. Bashkim Ziberi, University of Tetovo: The summer school, which is a main part of the Network, gives students the opportunity to attend intensive courses – they are the only intensive courses at our university for students of physics, chemistry and construction engineering.

In the guest lectures they learn other ways of thinking and other methods. And they also have the opportunity to study at the partner universities for parts of their master's and doctoral degrees. We don't have the apparatus for experiments here – they can do them in Germany.

Is the Network purely reconstruction support for Albanian-speaking universities?

Prof. Thomas A. Bier, TU Bergakademie Freiberg: It is mainly support with reconstruct-

tion, but it is not all a one-way street. Students from the region come to us for four months to work for their master's degree. Many contacts are made; that means an opening up and internationalisation which is extremely good for Freiberg. In the last two years, the students who worked with me were extremely good. New findings were therefore made which we were able to publish. And we are working with them on topics which also interest us. That is then already joint research or development.

How important is collaboration within the region itself?

Prof. Sylja: Very important. For example, two students I tutored who were doing their master's thesis in Tirana or my assistant, who is now doing his PhD in Tirana. In the past, without the Network, the possibility of such collaboration would not have occurred to us.

In what direction should the work of the Network move in future?

Prof. Bier: The Network has been rejuvenated – now it's the turn of the second generation. The people who were able to profit from the Network themselves are now in academic posts. The regional conference has again produced the impetus to make a new attempt at joint master's programmes. The examples which we saw at the conference in Tirana, and the fact that our Network has regenerated itself, are the catalyst for a new attempt.

Prof. Ziberi: We want the Network to continue. We would like to set up a joint master's degree course in the near future. Part of the modules will then take place in Tirana, Pristina and Tetovo respectively.

Prof. Bier: The regional conference gave me some important ideas regarding study at doctoral level – I can definitely see potential there.