

Towards 2020: New Horizons for RTD and Innovation in the Western Balkan Region

WBC-INCO.NET Final Conference & Brokerage Event

Tech Gate Vienna / Donau-City-Straße 1 / 1220 Vienna / Austria

Parallel Session 1: Horizon 2020 - Focus on
Inclusive, innovative and reflective societies

Social science research in the Western Balkans, challenges and perspectives

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 **Regional Research**
Promotion Programme | **Western Balkans**



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INTRO: Jasmina Opardija-Susnjar, Programme Manager Regional Research Promotion Programme in the Western Balkans (RRPP)

- ▶ **J. Opardija- Susnjar**, managing the RRPP since 2007, at the University of Fribourg (Switzerland). Has 15 years of experience in several development and research projects in the Western Balkans. Holds an MA in East European Studies from the Free University of Berlin and a BA from the Faculty of Political Sciences in Sarajevo (Bosnia and Herzegovina), Department of Journalism.
- ▶ RRPP is fully funded by **Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC), Federal Department of Foreign Affairs** and implemented by **Interfaculty Institute for Central and Eastern Europe (IICEE) at University of Fribourg (Switzerland)**.

The RRPP - www.rrpp-westernbalkans.net

1. is committed to high quality social science research
2. enables national, regional and international cooperation
3. fosters involvement of young researchers in academic and policy research
4. makes research useful for development
5. initiates policy dialogues



WHY SOCIAL SCIENCES?

1. Lack of **PhD study programmes** offering quality methodological training corresponding with international standards.
2. Insufficient national, regional and international **mobility**.
3. Low level of **scientific production and visibility**.
4. **Bureaucratic hurdles**

More specifically:

- ▶ Severely **underfunded by national governments**
- ▶ Internationally **less competitive**
- ▶ Lacking **high-quality research at universities** that are primarily focusing on teaching
- ▶ Lacking **high-quality research methods training**
- ▶ Lacking **modern, transparent research management structures**, especially at state institutions, with financial management as the weakest feature.

CHALLENGES AND PRIORITIES

1. Governments across the region need to make sure that higher education and research are not only in place and linked with each other, but that researchers and their institutions enjoy **freedom and autonomy in order to be able to produce excellent and globally relevant results.**
2. Financing: faces immense bureaucratic hurdles and lacks management capacities that follow the principles of **good governance principles.**



1. **Expanding** existing **funding** mechanisms dedicated to research. **Government accountability** can be increased via introduction of transparent programmes, evaluation schemes and national research agendas.
2. promotion and the creation of additional mechanisms that are **transparent** and related to current socio-economic issues; Marko and Unger (2010: 130) suggest that ‘universities should be a “spring of culture”, combining the different needs and interests of society.’

3. **Openness towards regionalization and internationalization** on all levels and relevant budgeting in order to increase mobility of students and access to internationally produced knowledge and networks; Introduction of quality PhD programmes that contain excellent methodological training, research opportunities and better perspectives for younger researchers, women and other marginalized groups;
4. **Improvement of scientific production and visibility** and internationalization of research results through wider participation at international conferences and training opportunities in academic writing; Clear evaluation procedures and transparency would facilitate the production of societally relevant research results, which can be used in decision making, covering the needs of different parts of society, including those who are marginalized, such as minorities.
5. Removal of **bureaucratic hurdles** and an increase in **transparency in terms of management policies**, especially at **public institutions** that are indispensable and can be the first step forward.

Impact: WHAT HAVE WE ACHIEVED SO FAR?

- ▶ RRPP has managed to develop a **large network of social scientists** from the region and beyond, offering them opportunities to conduct empirical research and improve their research skills through a number of regional methods colloquia and regional/international networks.
- ▶ By doing so, the programme has contributed to **the emergence and strengthening of a new generation of researchers** in the region that utilizes necessary state-of-the-art research methods while conducting regional research projects.
- ▶ RRPP helps reversing “brain drain” into “brain gain”. According internal evaluation results (2012): “**80%** of the responding researchers say that the programme has helped them **staying within the research sector** in their country”.
- ▶ In terms of capacity building measures, according the online-survey 2012, **70%** of responding researchers state that **similar trainings are not offered within their institutions**, further expressing that the most important underlying trainings are those on methodological issues.
- ▶ It strengthens the capabilities of researchers and research institutes to develop **advocacy activities for the social sciences (72%)**; and

- ▶ It allows social science research in the Western Balkans to **the international social science research community**
- 7Inputs based on Article within: Stagnation and Drift in the Western Balkans: The Challenges of Political, Economic and Social Change (2013)

Results: WHAT HAVE WE DONE SO FAR?

- ▶ Under the umbrella topic “Political, Social and Economic Change in the Western Balkans”, **50 research projects** funded (26 regional and 24 national) valuing **3.7 million CHF**. Projects deal with topics relevant to transformation processes in political sciences, sociology, social work, cultural and gender studies, migration studies, economics, political economy and other relevant fields.
- ▶ Organised and funded a great number of regional events, mainly focused on capacity building and networking. These included, inter alia, **6 international conferences that gathered over 600 scholars** dealing with the region.
- ▶ Initiated **policy-dialogues** in all countries, including functional working groups with representation of different age and backgrounds.

WHAT'S NEXT?

1. FUNDING AND PROMOTING REGIONAL RESEARCH

Some 25-30 two-year **regional projects** till 2016 :

- ▶ MIGRATION
- ▶ SOCIAL DISPARITIES AND THE WELFARE STATE
- ▶ GOVERNANCE AND DECENTRALISATION

Transversal themes: GENDER, REGIONAL COOPERATION AND MEDIA

2. INTERNATIONALISATION THROUGH CAPACITY BUILDING AND NETWORKING

Initiated **policy-dialogues** in all countries, including functional working groups with representation of governments, scholars of different age and backgrounds.

3. LINKING RESEARCH AND POLICYMAKING

- ▶ **involvement of major actors taking part in core research processes**, such as researchers, universities, ministries, politicians / policymakers, academics, think-tanks, civil society organisations, media and publishing houses and international funding institutions.



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Thank You For Your Attention!

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