

Bridge Project Action 4 - Analysis of Erasmus Mundus case studies

Final Report

Introduction:

Under the Bridge project, Action 4 has the objective of assessing and collecting, through the analysis of five different Erasmus Mundus Master Courses (EMMC), issues related to recognition during different phases of the life of these courses.

In this context, each National Structure participating in the project was responsible for one course analysis, and the Portuguese National Structure was in charge of coordinating the Action and preparing this final report which summarizes the activities undertaken, as well as the main results and comments of the analysis of five Erasmus Mundus Master courses.

The visits to the courses took place between November 2011 and June 2012, and were only possible due to the collaboration of the institutions and stakeholders of each course (academics, students and administrative staff) that were open to present to us their good practices, but also the difficulties they encountered with their courses. Two of the courses chosen presented some problems, while others were successful overall, helping us to better understand the recognition issues involved.

1. The choice of the courses:

For this purpose, and being a decisive issue for the goals of this Action, common criteria were established to guide in the selection of the courses to be analysed by each partner:

- Limited to EMMC, as the Erasmus Mundus Joint Doctorates only started recently and had no graduates;
- Choose a course with the participation of an institution of the country responsible for the case study in order to facilitate contacts and visits (although the course could be coordinated by an institution of another country);
- The course should still be functioning in the academic year 2011-2012, as it would facilitate meeting with the stakeholders;
- Preferably choose courses that have been renewed, as the longer they had been functioning the more students would have faced recognition issues;



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- Try to have courses with joint degrees, double and multiple (or maybe more than one type of degree per course), in order to understand if the type of degree makes any difference for recognition issues;
- Choose some courses of which there may exist information of eventual problems;
- Try to cover diversified fields of study;
- It could also be interesting to have cases involving institutions of third countries and to try and diversify countries participating.

In accordance with these guidelines, and in order to avoid the analysis of the same course by two National Structures, each participant communicated to the Portuguese National Structure three courses they would wish to analyse in order of preference, having all the first choices been selected, as is presented in the table below.

Country	EMMC	Coordinator	Partners	Field of study
Italy	EMLE - Master in Law and Economics	Erasmus University Rotterdam (NL)	University of Bologna (IT) ; University of Aix-Marseille 3 (FR); Ghent University (BE); University of Haifa (IL); University of Hamburg (DE); Indira Gandhi Institute of Development Research (IN); University of Vienna (AT); Warsaw School of Economics (PL)	Social Sciences, Business & Law
Estonia	NORDSECMOB - Master's programme in Security and Mobile Computing	Aalto University Foundation - Helsinki University of Technology (FI)	University of Tartu (EE) ; Royal Institute of Technology (SE); Norwegian University of Science and Technology (NO); Technical University of Denmark (DK)	Sciences, Mathematics & Computing
Malta	IMEC - International Master's Programme in Early Childhood Education and Care	Oslo University college (NO)	University of Malta (MT) ; Dublin Institute of Technology (IE)	Humanities & Arts
Spain	EMDiREB – Erasmus Mundus Master on Diagnosis and Repair of Buildings	Univeristy of Sevilha (ES)	University of Calabria (IT); Lublin University of Technology (PL)	Engineering, Manufacturing & Construction
Portugal	GeoTech – Master of Science in Geospatial Technologies	University of Munster (DE)	New University of Lisbon (PT) ; University Jaume I (ES)	Sciences, Mathematics & Computing

It should also be mentioned, that the selected EMMC cover courses with 60, 90 and 120 ECTS.

2. Issues analysed:



In order to have coherent and comparable results, we also previously agreed on the main issues that should be analysed in each case, namely:

- The creation of the joint course, including national accreditation and recognition in participant countries (legislation, obstacles);
- Type of degree awarded–national legislation and maybe the respective higher education system;
- Diploma Supplement;
- Selection of students and academics;
- Recognition of the course/degree in other countries (both academic and professional recognition).

For this purpose, and to help in the preparation of this report, a common report model was also developed.

2.1 Creation of a joint programme

Through this specific item, we expected to better understand the process of creating joint and integrated courses, and how the national accreditation or recognition process is undertaken. The analyses of the cases allowed us to also have a perspective of the changes occurred in some countries.

It should be mentioned that especially in the first masters, that started in the Erasmus Mundus phase I, there were some obstacles in the course creation. Bologna Process was being implemented and Erasmus Mundus was a new programme, opening new types of courses within very different national legislations.

Through the five courses analysed, and the variety of institutions and higher education systems involved, we were able to have a very interesting perspective. In some countries there was no legislation regarding joint programmes and diplomas, which were not an obstacle in the creation of the course, but were so later in terms of recognition. We should also mention that one of the EMMC analysed is considered a professional oriented course, although it does not concern regulated professions. This is also an issue, as not all countries distinguish between Masters if they are or not professionally orientated.

We also were able to understand that in some countries institutions are accredited by national quality/accreditation agencies to conduct studies in a relevant study group and issue corresponding degrees, and not on individual curricula, while in others each course has to be accredited. In these last cases, we can state that it has been a major obstacle for Portuguese higher education institutions since 2009, namely as they apply normally after being selected by Erasmus Mundus and the process of accreditation tends to be long. Also, some specific



national legislation can make the creation of joint courses difficult, such as the requirement for final thesis/or work to represent a certain percentage of the course ECTS.

Another issue that could be referred, is that in some countries there are degrees that have to be accredited and in others they can just be approved internally by the university as they have autonomy and the institution is accredited.

Through these visits we found that an interesting case was Estonia, as there are some requirements for joint programmes: all institutions must be qualified to carry out the studies corresponding to the level; at first and second cycles, the studies must be in one of the accredited study groups; foreign partners and the diplomas must be recognised in their country; all participants must fully recognise the studies completed in other partner countries, the joint programme must be jointly prepared; all HEI involved must sign the cooperation agreement.

Spain is another interesting example, as recently they adopted an innovative new legislation regarding joint courses that allows automatic accreditation and register of Erasmus Mundus courses¹.

For good examples in avoiding future problems, we should mention, that previously obtaining information on the different national legislations in order to prepare for accreditation is, without a doubt, a fundamental factor. It is also essential to have a clear consortium agreement with all the important information on the course laid down and establishing joint guidelines for evaluation, grading, thesis, etc... A clear division of tasks and responsibilities has also proven very useful for the success of joint courses.

2.2 Degrees awarded and Diploma Supplement

Regarding the degrees awarded in these five courses, we had the example of double, multiple and joint degrees, as well as one specific case where there was for a time one degree and two certificates. All these options are related to national legislations and there were some changes throughout time.

One of the courses portrayed an example of difficulties concerning degree awarding, as there was a lack of national legislation in two of the participating countries, leading to the awarding of a diploma² created by the University and recognised by the Ministry of Education and two certificates from the other institutions of 30ECTS. With the evolution of the national legislation, this 90 ECTS programme was accredited with 60 ECTS, as this was the number of ECTS established for second cycles in national legislation, and the students received the extra 30 ECTS through certificates. However, this issue seems now to have been solved due to

¹ Royal Decree 861/2010, of the 2nd July.

² *Titulo propio* (Spain)



national legislation changes and present and former students will receive a joint degree awarded by the coordinator institution in the name of the partners.

Legislation in another country³ was problematic, as Universities were only allowed to issue diplomas with the number of credits undertaken in that university, but recently this has also changed.

Delays in the issuing of final documents have also been reported, one of the most known cases has been Spain where it is required that the King signs the diplomas.

We also encountered some countries where institutions generally do not issue Diploma Supplements, another example of difficulties implementing the Bologna Process. But in most cases there are Diploma Supplements, and more and more joint Diploma Supplements. Estonia is an interesting case, as although joint Diploma Supplements are allowed they must be issued alongside a national Diploma Supplement. The European Commission, Council of Europe and UNESCO/CEPS joint diploma model was often used as a reference.

Another course had the particularity of offering degrees that differ in nature: some gave access to PhD studies, while others did not. This is interesting, as this can lead to students having degrees with more value externally than nationally.

2.3 Selection of students and academics

One of the questions we tried to analyse was how our institutions verify the third country student's applications, degrees and higher education institutions, as students from all over the world apply for Erasmus Mundus.

In most cases students applications are centrally received and analysed both administratively and academically, but the selection process is carried out jointly by the partners.

We found different practices in the verification of foreign student's qualifications, namely in the case of doubts on the diplomas or the issuing HEI. In some courses they contact their NARIC centre, while others don't seem to know of their existence or consider it would delay the selection process. Some HEI seem to have highly qualified and experienced evaluators, with great knowledge of foreign degrees and educational systems. One of the courses even has in a website list of country specific requirements for applicants of certain countries, demanding specific documents depending on the issuing country.

Another practice we found in one course was the request of binding declarations from the universities or from public notaries, as well as certified translations of documents. The use of embassies of one of the partners to certify/validate the documents was also mentioned in one

³ Poland

of the courses. We should mention that the *Hague Apostille* doesn't seem to be required as it is considered an extra expense and may complicate the application process.

A good practice, that was more generalised, was the use of international databases such as Anabin, WHED, IAU database or ENIC/NARIC. In some cases, if doubts subsist students were interviewed telephonically or by *skype*, and HEI national accreditation boards or councils contacted.

Some obstacles mentioned were degrees that are not "traditional" 3 or 4 years (ie. 2 years, distance-campus universities). But globally all courses seem to have had no problem with their actual processes.

2.4 Recognition of the course/degree in other countries

One of the main concerns of Erasmus Mundus is how the European degree are received in third countries, especially in courses that involve various institutions' and multiple degrees that may be of different nature and in some cases different level. Another concern is how joint degrees are received. As one document signed by various institutions of different countries may be more difficult to recognise.

As already referred, the delay in issuing diplomas tends to complicate recognition, as substitute certificates are often not accepted. Spain, where the issuing it took in average two or three years, the Government recommended in 2010 the issuing of international joint degrees in a period of time no longer than 6 months.

When speaking with students, we were also able to understand that they sometimes have little information on the degree awarded or do not understand why they receive more than one degree. In other cases, they prefer separate national degrees as they may be more easily recognised. But globally there seem to have been no major recognition difficulties when returning to their countries, although they complain about the expense.

3 Conclusions

Both EMDIREB and EMLE were chosen as some difficulties or anomalies were identified related to the diploma issuing, serving as examples of the obstacles related to creating joint courses with different higher education systems and of how they have been solved.

It is also interesting to notice that in many cases we were able notice legislative changes at national level, due mainly to the implementation of Bologna Process but also, in some cases, due the Erasmus Mundus Programme, that had impact in the courses studied.

However, through this study, we were faced with the fact that the Diploma Supplement surprisingly is still not a generalised practice in some countries. This is important as the



Diploma Supplement has been known to be a very useful tool for assisting and facilitating recognition.

Additionally, from the information received, we were not able to make conclusions on if there were differences in recognition of joint, multiple or double degrees. We were, however, able to deduce that it has been mainly based on contents of the courses and the higher education institutions reputation, as Erasmus Mundus Programme is still not that well known. Unfortunately, the courses analysed did not award third country degrees so we were not able to assess if it had implications in recognition.

We were worried that students seemed to have little knowledge, in some courses, about the degrees awarded and some didn't understand why more than one degree was awarded. They did not seem to worry about how a joint degree would be received in their country, trusting that the training they received would speak for itself as well as the reputation of the institutions where they studied.

We were also able to confirm that clear establishment of the joint course and of the consortium, as well as the availability of comprehensive information on the course and degrees awarded, were also very helpful in reducing recognition obstacles of Erasmus Mundus degrees.

Regarding the selection of the third country students, which could seem to be an obstacle, in all courses useful and practical solutions seemed to be found that helped to avoid major problems. We were, however, surprised by the lack of knowledge of the existence of NARIC centres in some courses and confirmed that they were generally not used for this purpose. This led us to confirm that it would be useful to get promote this Centres with the Erasmus Mundus courses. Additionally maybe, with the collaboration of NARIC centres, useful tools could be established that could assist in different recognition aspects relating to joint courses.