



# Conclusions

## On the lessons learned from the quality assurance of INTENSE

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INTENSE: Integrated Doctoral Program for  
Environmental Policy, Management and  
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## External QA Report of INTENSE



These conclusions represents reflections by Prof. Ruben Mnatskanian of Central European University, who served as the external quality assurance officer of the Erasmus+ CBHE project INTENSE. In this document he has summarized the lessons learned from his experience of the INTENSE QA, and overall observations about the capacity building for higher education in Eastern Europe and Asia. The conclusions have been presented on the final INTENSE consortium meeting on October 7, 2021.

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Evaluation of the training PhD programs within INTENSE project was complicated by the fact that seven partner universities are representing educational approaches of different traditions of the three countries to which they belong. Characteristic feature of the old Soviet-time system of training of PhD students in Ukraine and Mongolia (so-called “aspirantura”) was focusing of educational process mostly along the individual research. Students were attending very few theoretical courses, dealing mostly with philosophy of science, history and general methodology of the branch of science they were specializing in. Students were not required to attend specialized courses, especially the ones which were not related to their narrow research topic.

Three universities that are representing Ukraine in INTENSE, namely Odessa State Environmental University, Kharkiv National University and Institute for the Carpathians’ Ecology probably are the ones where transformation of the old Soviet system of “aspirantura” into more European-like PhD was the most profound. Two Mongolian universities, namely National University of Mongolia and Khovd State University, also moved away from the old system and offer numerous specialized courses at the PhD level.

Education system in Vietnam originally was modelled along the French examples, and with time transformed into combination of old European system and systems, more common in former Socialist countries.

The most impressive, advanced achievement of INTENSE project, besides other things, was development of MOOCs, which for many partner universities was the first opportunity to create proper on-line courses. During the INTENSE project time frame not all universities were able to include MOOCs properly into their educational programs, but then COVID struck and on-line education suddenly became a mainstream. We are sure that in all three countries it would be quite a challenging task for local universities to develop a proper MOOC course, which is done up to international standards, while the universities of INTENSE consortium already have such experience and therefore have better starting positions in the post-COVID world of international education. Unfortunately, not all MOOCs were open for external observer, one has to sign up for the courses in order to have proper access, but based on available materials and on-line data we can conclude that the courses are up to international standards.

Another important aspect of development of on-line courses relates to the system of mutual recognition of credits. Such system is well-developed within EU, (ECTS) but for countries as diverse as Ukraine, Moldova and Vietnam this is a novelty, and INTENSE network universities are put in advantageous conditions in their respective countries.

Many standards of international co-operation in the field of education, promoted by EU, are based on the assumption that all partner universities either already adopted or at least are aware about Bologna system, already have experience of working with partners who are using it and are ready to implement some of its provisions, especially in the field of mutual adoption of courses and counting of teaching loads. Although it is true, that Bologna system mostly applies to Bachelor- Master levels of education, it also



covers PhD level as well, especially in terms of teaching credit requirements, system of counting of teaching loads, etc.

Some partner universities, especially Ukrainian ones, are already using Bologna system. Ukraine adopted Bologna process back in 2005 and since that moment it works within the Bologna framework. Mongolian universities have much less co-operation with European ones, they are mostly oriented on Chinese, American and partly Russian Siberian universities. Russia itself joined Bologna system back in 2003, but it is not clear to what degree it was using its provisions in dealing with Mongolian Universities. Usually, co-operation of Russian universities with their Mongolian counterparts is limited to the exchange of students and professors and may be participation in joint research projects but is not extended to organization of joint courses or mutual acceptance of teaching credits. We assume that for Vietnamese universities it was very new experience as well, so another important outcome of the INTENSE project was introduction of new partners from Asian countries to the European educational space.

In the end it looks that INTENSE was extremely positive and successful program, bringing together a group of very diverse universities from EU countries, Ukraine and Asia and compiling a working program that was using joint courses, common denominators for assessing student work and providing enhanced opportunities for PhD students and professors to move between partner institutions and to get additional knowledge and expertise. Unfortunately, it is also clear that in the current international environment, with COVID-19 limitation and war in Ukraine and disruption of many established links and connections, rising travel costs etc., it would be an impossible task for partner institutions to maintain that level of co-operation and mutual work that was achieved during the implementation of INTENSE project. It is also clear that the partner universities themselves simply will not have enough internal resources to support and maintain this level of international co-operation.

But what is important, that large number of young students and researchers were introduced to this model and therefore will bring with them in their academic life memories of how such international co-operation is possible to achieve, and therefore may be in the future, when (and if) external conditions again will allow, we can expect revival of similar forms of international co-operation in the field of post-graduate studies.