

## SHORT TERM SCIENTIFIC MISSION (STSM) SCIENTIFIC REPORT

This report is submitted for approval by the STSM applicant to the STSM coordinator

Action number: CA 15221

STSM title: *Analysis of institutional support for WRLT in the field of civil engineering at the University of Granada and possibility of similar method application at the University of Montenegro*

STSM start and end date: 23/04/2019 to 30/04/2019

Grantee name: Biljana Šćepanović

### PURPOSE OF THE STSM:

The fact of lack of adequate institutional support for W(riting)R(earch)L(earning)T(eaching) at the STSM grantee home institution (University of Montenegro), was inspiration to apply for this STSM aiming two points:

- analysis of model of WRLT institutional support at the host institution (University of Granada);
- analysis of the possibility of applying similar model at the home institution (University of Montenegro).

University of Granada has been chosen as a host institution for several reasons – its tradition and excellence, as well as already existing cooperation in research field between the two (home and host) institutions.

Having in mind current initiative of creating strategies for institutional development, which assumes improvement of WRLT institutional support at the University of Montenegro, STSM grantee does believe this is right moment for such STSM which is expected to be beneficial for new trends at the home institution.

The COST Action CA 15221 investigates in general advancing effective institutional models towards cohesive teaching, learning, research and writing development. This STSM was concentrated to CA 15221 topic in the field of civil engineering, with particularly emphasised items of *teaching* and *writing*.

## DESCRIPTION OF WORK CARRIED OUT DURING THE STSM

STSM work has been realised in line with the planned strategy consisting of the following steps:

- data gathering by means of questionnaire among and interviews with teachers and PhD students as well as by familiarisation with official university rules and procedures in academic career

[Existing CA 15221 questionnaire was used, after slight adaptation to the field of civil engineering. It was fulfilled by teachers of different career stages (from assistants to full professors; from temporarily to regularly employed) as well as by PhD students (some of them also included into teaching activities). It was considered important to provide insight into different points of view and attitudes, depending on age, (life and professional) experience and position at the university. Gender balance was also considered. Independently on questionnaire, teachers and PhD students were also interviewed. Oral conversation always brings something new, something delicate, personal, more than it may be shown in an interview. It draws attention to certain issues that may not be pointed out enough in general interview. In the STSM grantee's opinion, as a more sensitive investigation tool, interview is finer, giving opportunity to discover feelings up to the certain level, not only facts.];

- data organisation and analysis, leading to interpreting and communicating what the data may mean i.e. conclusions on effectiveness of institutional support model at the host institution

[A month after attending CA 15221 training school in Skopje, it was a challenge and very interesting to try, in reality, using newly obtained analytical skills for synthesizing the analyses of a variety of data sets. The STSM grantee does believe it has been done in adequate manner.];

- analysis of possibility of similar model application at the home institution, resulting in conclusions, ideas and recommendations for the home institution

[Logically last step in the list, this is actually the core of this STSM purpose, in line with the CA 15221 initiative – *advancing institutional WRLT models.*].

This STSM was concentrated to general CA 15221 topic - *advancing effective institutional models towards cohesive teaching, learning, research and writing development* - in the field of civil engineering, with particularly emphasised items of teaching and writing through questionnaire and interviews. As a discipline from the domain of technical sciences, civil engineering is very specific regarding all WRLT issues. However, while *learning* and *research* are natural courses in and core of engineering, *teaching* and particularly *writing* are not “natural skills” for engineers – engineers were not educated for these activities. Furthermore, they are used to express themselves, their designs and/or research results in numbers, drawings, graphics, diagrams etc, not in essay-type writing. Hence, appropriate training and instructions on academic writing, as well as on teaching, are always appreciated in an engineering discipline.

## **DESCRIPTION OF THE MAIN RESULTS OBTAINED**

### ***Institutional support for WRLT in the field of civil engineering at the University of Granada***

Until recently (couple years ago), situation at the University of Granada was very similar to the situation at the University of Montenegro – no carefully and appropriately constructed model of institutional support for WRLT. Teachers who started careers 10, 20 or even more years ago all agree that at that time they were on their own, mostly having only support of their PhD supervisors through instructions and advices. They had to work by themselves very hard in order to find out their own way, particularly in teaching and academic writing, for which they were not trained through their university education. It was path full of trials and errors, resulting in continuous improvements by self-experience. Not an easy way, resulting in collection of interesting advices for young colleagues.

However, the situation is quite different nowadays and all agree about that – young PhD students as well as experienced teachers. It is of particular importance that University of Granada now provides institutional support to its students and staff at the beginning of career through two models:

- course on academic writing for PhD students

[All interviewed PhD students agree about significance and benefits of this course. Teachers also support it, considering it helpful and good for young colleagues. The problem is limited number of participants and therefore course is not available for all PhD students at the university. Also, students have suggestions for improvement of the course. At the moment, course is general, for students of all fields/disciplines. Students believe it may be useful to make the course partially more specific, adjusted to particular disciplines (e.g. by inviting experienced scientists/teachers from specific areas to give a lecture on their experience re publishing in those areas etc). Nevertheless, even with quoted small-scale drawbacks, the course is considered as a great idea and supported by students and teachers.] and

- programme of mentoring young teachers by experienced professors

[Very good and practical programme, in opinion of both sides – mentored novices and mentors. It assumes that mentor attends some lectures of young teachers as well as that some of those lectures are recorded. Later on, mentor and young teacher discuss lectures and records. Mentor also prepares reports about young colleague performance and improvement. Interviewed mentored novices (PhD students) said it is helpful and useful for them, providing important advices, leading to the significant improvement of their teaching performance. It must be pointed out that mentors also consider this programme useful not only for young colleagues, but for themselves as well. Mentors believe this engagement also help them to see things from different points of view and to improve themselves as well.].

### ***Possibility of similar method application at the University of Montenegro***

It has been evaluated that above described models of institutional support for teaching and academic writing may be successfully applied at the University of Montenegro, having in mind facts about organisation of the University of Montenegro (number of PhD students; centralise system of PhD studies; fact that almost all young teachers, i.e. teaching assistants, are PhD students; number of university staff and experienced professors among them, general size of the university etc).

Having in mind current initiative of creating strategies for institutional development, which assumes improvement of WRLT institutional support at the University of Montenegro, STSM grantee does believe that size, structure and organisation of the University of Montenegro make a great conditions for successful application of obviously successful methods from the University of Granada, without demanding financial or any other resources that may be inhibition factor.

**FUTURE COLLABORATIONS (if applicable)**

Already existing cooperation in research field of civil engineering between the two institutions (home: University of Montenegro and host: University of Granada), deepen through this STSM, but also widen in another sphere (of institutional organisation), is expected to be continued in both courses – scientific research as well as institutional capacity building.

It has been planned to summarise findings and conclusions of this STSM, with more details, in a conference paper, as a collaboration of the two institutions and COST CA 15221.