

Evaluation of the Curriculum for a Master's Degree and Ph.D Degree Programme: Governance for Sustainable Development

Introduction

The aim of this document is to present an evaluation of the Curriculum for the Master's Degree and Ph.D Degree programme entitled "*Governance for Sustainable Development*". In particular this document addresses the following questions:

- Does the program sufficiently explain the concept of sustainable development?

In my opinion, the programme contains all the most important elements concerning the theory, practice, and implementation of the concept of sustainable development. The content of the courses and different paths of study are very professionally elaborated.

- Does the programme answers students' needs?

According to me, the programme fully responds to the students' needs and expectations, in particular those who would like to work in governmental administration in the future (from the level of supra-national down to the local level), or be involved in the development of programmes of sustainable development in different countries.

Prior to elaboration of the GAVA programme, the petitioners clearly carried out a thorough analysis of the interdependent needs of potential students, administrative workers, and coordinators of Ph.D programmes.

The aim of the analysis was to identify existing programmes and models of education used to deliver Master's and Ph.D programmes in developed and developing countries, and to gain an understanding of and insights into the education and training on governance and sustainable development-related activities in developed and developing countries. For the purpose of the analysis following persons were surveyed: Students (433 students/13 countries/36 nationalities); officials in (non-)governmental institutions (41 officials); Coordinators and PhD supervisors (64 coordinators).

The students surveyed assessed the proposed project very highly and stressed the need to implement the GAVA programme. Results of the analysis were incorporated into the elaboration of the programme.

- Is the programme needed in the current economic situation?

I'm convinced that this programme is extremely important from the point of view of implementation of programmes of sustainable development, not only in the Member States of the EU but also in third countries. These countries are often characterized by a neglect of the natural environment, corruption, lack of appropriate social security measures, over-exploitation of natural resources, social

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inequality, and high unemployment. Thus, especially during this time of economic crisis they make little or no effort to mitigate the negative environmental effects of their activities.

Short presentation of the GAVA project

GAVA - Governance for Sustainable Development – is a project realized under LLP Erasmus Curriculum Development (project no.: 510751-LLP-1-2010-1-PL-ERASMUS-ECDEM). Its main objective is promotion of the following fields in higher education:

- the concept of Sustainable Development among students both in Europe and outside Europe, with special reference to the public sectors and non-governmental institutions;
- the mobility of students in Europe and outside Europe, in the context of the newly elaborated international programmes of Higher Education: Master's Programme and Doctoral Programme.

The GAVA project intends to achieve above-mentioned goals through offering a Master's and Ph.D level programme entitled "Governance for Sustainability". The curricula for both programmes were elaborated by a consortium consisting of the following five Higher Education Institutions in the EU:

- University of Lodz (UL) - Poland (Coordinator of the Program)
- University of Applied Management (UAM) - Germany
- University of Westminster (UW) – United Kingdom
- University of Crete (UC) - Greece
- VetAgro Sup Graduate Institute for Food, Animal Health, Agricultural and Environmental Sciences (VAS) - France.

Content of the Curriculum

I also assess very positively the particular elements of the programme. They are composed in such a way that they are characterized by a logical division into specializations and subjects. They offer students a comprehensive and thorough theoretical background knowledge as well as carefully planned practical experience related to the problems connected with sustainable development and related areas. The well-defined stages of study also constitute a guarantee that the proper relationship between the Master's Programme and the Ph.D programme is maintained. I also think that the division of the Master's Programme into five specializations is well substantiated. The combination of traditional methods of study with modern approaches (e.g. 'online' courses using the most modern didactic techniques) is also worthy of commendation. Each of the consortium universities taking part in the programme will be offering courses which fall within their areas of specialization, which should give the students a certain competitive advantage upon completion of the programme.

Evaluation of the Programme of Studies; Master's Degree and Ph.D Degree

Master's path:

- **core courses:** students are presented with basic knowledge connected with sustainable development as it relates to their chosen area of specialization
 - Political Stability and Regulatory Quality
 - Governance Effectiveness
 - Sustainable Development and Environmental Protection
 - Social Policy and Better Security

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- Sustainable Agriculture, Food and Public Health
- Anti-corruption measures and Legal Aspects of Sustainable Development
- **Specializations**
 - Governance Effectiveness
 - Sustainable Development and the Environment –Eco-hydrology
 - Sustainable Agriculture, Food and Public Health
 - Management of Sustainability
 - Sustainable Urban Development
- internship (to gain work experience)
- thesis (preparing students to write their MA thesis).

The programme of Master's Degree studies is characterized by a logical sequence of courses - beginning with theoretical knowledge and leading to specialized knowledge – in such a way as to encourage the deepening of theoretical knowledge by its confrontation with practical problems. In the third semester the number of courses is reduced to the necessary minimum in order to ensure that students have time available to work on their Master's thesis, the requirements of which will force them to make use of their previously-acquired theoretical knowledge and practical experience. Another significant positive aspect of this programme is worth emphasizing: the required courses on the methodology and techniques of carrying out public opinion surveys, a component which is too often missing in other programmes.

Ph.D path

- **core courses:** oriented toward learning and applying advanced research methods, both qualitative and quantitative (during two academic years)
 - Governance Effectiveness
 - Political Stability and Regulatory Quality
 - Sustainable Development; the Environment and Better Social Security
 - Sustainable Agriculture, Food and Public Health
 - Anti-corruption measures and Legal Aspects of Sustainable Development
- **Doctoral thesis seminar-** Each student will write and defend his or her doctoral thesis during a maximum of four academic years.

This path should also be highly assessed. Above all, it gives students the possibility to deepen their earlier-acquired knowledge in the field of sustainable development. The planning of the Doctoral thesis seminar is an added plus. During their participation in the seminar sessions the students will have the opportunity to acquire knowledge in all areas necessary to their defences of their doctoral dissertation theses.

Benefits of the programme

This programme will yield valuable benefits, both to the student-participants as well as to the universities organizing the studies. Among the most valuable benefits for the students should be mentioned:

Benefits for students:

- Consortium of universities (various organizations with various specializations)
- Mobility element. This will result in improved language skills, improved interpersonal skills, improved communication skills – the very 'soft skills' so valued by employers. Cultural and

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emotional maturity and developing an feel for cultural differences, which can be gained through travelling, are necessary attributes of work in international organizations and companies. Open Europe - and open markets - means that more and more often we work in multinational and multicultural teams. The students of this programme will have the possibility to study at a minimum of two Universities in two countries.

- The internship, which will give them experience and practical knowledge. This is a great benefit of the project and the length of the internship (at least 3-5 months) is well-designed, as this is considered to be the minimum time required for a practical experience to have lasting value. The internship will increase students' employability. Currently, many young people are struggling to find jobs and a big drawback in their search for employment is lack of experience. Thus this element of the curriculum answers the needs of the evolving modern Europe.

As noted above, the programme will also bring valuable benefits to the participating universities, among the most important of which are:

Benefits to Universities:

- Tightening cooperation between universities
- Preparation of a Guide for Teachers (presenting information needed for teachers, university officials and administrative staff to successfully implement and run the programme). The guide consists of: presentation of the GAVA project, syllabuses, e-learning platform guide, and study regulations, which tackle the administrative and operational aspects of introducing a common programme.

Conclusions

In my opinion the main strengths of the programmes of study are:

- Choice of subject
- Choice of specialization (master programme only)
- Practical components
- Mobilities
- Intercultural character.

My overall assessment of the elaborated program of studies for the Governance for Sustainability (GAVA) Programme is very positive. I believe that it can constitute a valuable instrument for implementing the principle of sustainable development, both in developed countries as well as in developing countries, by offering educational programs focused on implementation of the principle in various areas at both the Master's and Doctoral levels. Another advantage of the program is its modern nature, not only with regard to the subject matter (sustainable development) but also with regard to its methodology, in particular its embrace of distance learning and its focus on the needs of the public sector, i.e. training and preparing students to work as future public officials at the supranational, national, regional, and local levels, as well as in non-governmental organizations. The internship requirement and its proposed organization is also a great advantage, as it will enable students to learn best practices on the market and also learn about the state of the labour market as they prepare to commence their professional lives after graduation.

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Another important positive feature of the proposed programme is the focus on mobility for both the master's and doctoral students. This will grant them access to the particular areas of knowledge possessed by the various consortium partners in accordance with their chosen areas of specialization (i.e. by elective courses). It will also promote sustainable development and effective governance in accordance with the common principles worked out and applied by all the members of the consortium.

Currently Europe is facing an economic crisis which has, among others, has the following major consequences:

- Economic instability, social polarization
- Lack of trust in leaders. People do not trust Europe and its leaders as they did before.

This programme can tackle both of these elements. It teaches its students how to ensure sustainable development, which is the only alternative for Europe if we want to ensure long-term growth. However, the aim of the programme is also to reinforce current leaders and/or educate new young leaders, who thanks to their knowledge and training will be able to ensure sustainable development.

Additional comments:

I would like to add two comments to the assessment of the GAVA Master's Degree programme, and would suggest that they be taken into account in the implementation decisions.

- 1) I think two aspects of the new EU environmental policy should be included in a basic course entitled Environmental Policy and Climate Change. These aspects would be: a) protection of biological diversity; b) better and more efficient use of natural resources.
- 2) I would also propose that the elective courses offered in semesters 3 and 4 be reduced and comprised mainly of distance learning courses and/or courses focused more deeply on particular detailed aspects of sustainable development.

The above suggestions in no way reduce my overall positive assessment of the entire programme of studies.

In connection with all the above, I would assess the program given to me to review as fully positive and would recommend that the GAVA program be implemented with all due speed, both at the Master's and Doctoral levels.

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