Programme Norway – Global partner – NORGLOBAL

Research and education in the Western Balkan countries

They have universities with long-standing traditions, but these institutions also need to adapt to new times. How can research collaboration contribute to the establishment of a facts database for universities, research and higher education?

Today, the universities in the Western Balkan countries have limited possibilities to collect facts about themselves and compare themselves with other institutions. For example, they do not have an adequate overview of their own students and lack data about student throughput. Since the data basis for comparative analyses is inadequate, the political authorities do not have the same opportunity to adopt a knowledge-based policy for research and higher education as the authorities in other European countries have.

All countries focus strongly on higher education and research as driving forces for economic development. How are the Western Balkan countries going to develop? To what extent can the experience gained by the EU countries in research and education serve as a useful model for the Western Balkan countries, and what experience of their own can they draw on?

The University of Oslo (UiO) is heading a project in which Oslo University College (HiO) and the Nordic Institute for Studies in Innovation, Research and Education (NIFU) are also participating. The partners are the University of Zagreb (Croatia) and the University of Belgrade (Serbia). The title of the research project is: 'European Integration in Higher Education and Research in the Western Balkan countries'.



Bjørn Stensaker is head of the research project.



Martina Vukasovic has a key role in this research project.



The Faculty of Philosophy at the University of Belgrade. (Illustration photo: Wikimedia Commons)

Establishing a database

The project is a combined development and research project led by Bjørn Stensaker of the Department of Educational Research at UiO. The Centre for Educational Policy (CEP) in Belgrade will have chief responsibility for the development part of the project, which involves establishing a database.

'Once the database is up and running, the universities in the Western Balkan countries will be able to use it to carry out comparative studies,' Stensaker says. Facts and figures about the University of Zagreb and the University of Belgrade will be entered in the database first. Once the project has gained experience from these two universities, the plan is to enter data for more universities in the region.



Students at the University of Belgrade. (Illustration photo: Shutterstock)

'Our goal is for the database to become a tool for use by the universities in these countries,' Stensaker says.

The research part of the project entails developing concrete research questions that can be tested on the basis of the systematised information collected.

The countries in the region that have a shared history as part of the former Yugoslavia can now go their own separate ways. The fact that these countries have for periods had a common history means that the researchers can study how choices and priorities in each country influence the direction in which research and education is changed.

Building bridges

The universities in Zagreb and Belgrade will recruit PhD students, who will be an important part of the project. A post-doctoral resear-

Partners

- > University of Zagreb, Croatia
- > Faculty of political science, Belgrade, Serbia
- > Centre for Education Policy, Belgrade, Serbia
- > NIFUSTEP, Oslo

cher will be appointed at the University of Oslo. Martina Vukasovic has a key role in relation to both the database part and the research part of the project. Originally from Serbia, she is currently attached to the Department of Educational Research at UiO.

'I hope to be able to build bridges between the Norwegian and Western Balkan partners in the project,' she says. The project is important to the partners in the Western Balkan countries because it will enable them to strengthen their own capacity in relation to research studies and higher education. This capacity is currently dispersed. For the Norwegian researchers, the project provides access to knowledge about a region that has not been thoroughly investigated. It will also enable Norwegian researchers to build networks and develop expertise of their own.

Bjørn Stensaker believes that there are several measures that could enable universities in the Western Balkan countries to devote more resources to education and research. More efficient student administration is one example. Together with Vukasovic and colleagues, he is planning to hold conferences with their partners at which they can share and discuss experiences from this project.

The goal of the projects in the NORGLOBAL programme that focus on the Western Balkan countries is to address relevant challenges at the national and regional level, illuminating questions that are important in relation to sustainable economic development and to institutional and democratic reforms that can advance the countries' Euro-Atlantic integration process.

The NORGLOBAL-program

NORGLOBAL shall strengthen Norwegian research on and with the South. It includes Povpeace, Cgiar, Women- and gender research, Globalisation of the environment-, energy- and Climate research, Econpop, Western Balkan and The networks. New research related to development might be placed under NORGLOBAL

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