

WP5 WESTERN BALKANS WORKSHOP REPORT

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ABBREVIATIONS

EC	European Commission
ERC	European Research Council
EU	European Union
R&D	Research and development
SWP	Sub-work package
UL	University of Ljubljana
WB	Western Balkans
WP	Work Package
WS	workshop

DESCRIPTION

Work package 5 (WP5) lead, University of Ljubljana (UL) has taken over the responsibility to organise the series of the Western Balkans workshops (WS) throughout the lifetime of the EUTOPIA2050 project. The workshops are a part of Sub-work package 5.2 (SWP5.2), which is specifically focused on the regional inclusion in Western Balkans region. As proposed in the Project bid, there will be six (6) WS' within the period of three (3) years, amounting to two (2) WS' a year.

Initially, each of the planned workshops were supposed to be held in countries across the Western Balkans (WB), as to enable cross-border communication and networking not only for the WB universities, but also for EUTOPIA Partners. However, due to the ongoing social distancing because of the COVID-19, the first Western Balkans workshop was held virtually, using Microsoft Teams.

The workshop was shortened to roughly four (4) hours per day, so the workshop could be manageable by everyone.

BEFORE THE EVENT

Before the event, the UL team has disseminated the news about the event to three main groups: WB participants, EUTOPIA WP Leads and Co-leads (to forward to their team members) and UL faculties.

Aside from e-mail communication, the announcement for the WS was published on several platforms. EUTOPIA official website and Twitter were primary platforms for information dissemination, as well as UL official website, Facebook and LinkedIn page. Lastly, the information about the event was also published on EUTOPIA SharePoint page.

Greatest challenge regarding communication of the WS was that most contacted people were still on vacations, and the universities have not started classes yet. Hence, it is possible that the reach was smaller than expected due to potential absence of the readers of universities' portals and websites.

Nevertheless, the event has been communicated continuously for approximately three weeks, which should have had strong reach among professors, administrative staff and students.

THEMES/ GUEST SPEAKERS

The overarching theme of the first WB WS was Research work and EU R&D programmes, where each of the speakers addressed different aspects of the theme according to their expertise and experiences.

To ensure diversity of speakers and topics, the organiser hosted guest speakers from EUTOPIA2050 project, WB universities and external experts (ERC, EC), all of whom provided important and interesting information about EU R&D programmes, research work and support for research at universities. The details about each guest speaker are available in the table below.

Table 1: Guest speakers and their presentation topics

Name	Institution/Role	Topic
Dr. Ivan Svetlik	University of Ljubljana; Researcher	Organisation of research at University of Ljubljana
Staška Mrak Jamnik	University of Ljubljana; Assistant Secretary General for Research	Structure and specifics of the new Horizon Europe 2021-2027 programme, and how to prepare for its calls?
Dr. Göran Landberg	Gothenburg University; Vice-president at Gothenburg University	How to optimise research support; EUTOPIA – Research work - vision
Dr. Damir Boras	University of Zagreb; Rector	How to organise research work and supportive activities at the university to enhance researchers' interest, and to increase their capacities to write high-quality applications for research projects? How to manage research work effectively?
Marie Marchand	CY Cergy Paris Université; PhD candidate	The involvement of PhD and post-doc students in the research work: experiences and proposals of students' representatives
Dr. Tea Romih	Mlada Akademija; Founder of Mlada Akademija	The involvement of PhD and post-doc students in the research work: experiences and proposals of students' representatives
Dr. Vladimir Todorović	University of Novi Sad; Head of International Relations Office	The involvement of PhD and post-doc students in the research work: experiences and proposals of students' representatives
Anita Tregner Mlinarić	META group Vice chair of the MSCA Advisory Board at the European Commission	Brain circulation and the Innovation gap: Bridging the divide
Dr. Mieke Verloo	Radboud University Nijmegen ERC panel member; Professor of Comparative Politics and Inequality Issues	Experiences of an ERC panel member
Tjaša Nabergoj	University of Ljubljana; EUTOPIA project manager and research advisor	Research support at University of Ljubljana

PARTICIPANTS

As previously mentioned, the event has been disseminated among the WB participants continuously.

Because the event was planned for May 2020 in Dubrovnik in the beginning, the potential WB participants have been informed about the event's changes since the delay in May. The participants were primarily contacted through email. Our target audience were individuals responsible for research in their institutions, administrative staff and researchers, as well as PhD students at Western Balkans universities.

The initial number of invitees was approximately 30, however, since the event was transformed to a virtual event, the number limit was lifted and we aimed to reach as many people as possible.

As seen in the table below, the first day had more viewers than the second. It is important to note that the number of viewers is relative, as it is possible that multiple users watched the event using only one device. According to the registration for the event, the viewers were from Croatia, Slovenia, Kosovo, Serbia, Bosnia, Montenegro and Macedonia.

Table 2: Maximum number of viewers per day

	Day 1 (Sep 3)	Day 2 (Sep 4)
<i>Number of viewers (max.)</i>	23	18

All of the sessions during the two days of the workshop were successful in terms of Q&A sessions. Our participants had at least 15 minutes (in most cases more than 15 minutes) to ask questions regarding each topic, which the presenters answered.

Overall, we have received 33 questions during seven (7) presentations, which shows relatively strong interest in the topics from the viewers, and that the topics chosen were relevant.

In short, questions we mainly based around issues such as: funding, resources, grants, innovation gap, ERC, research support and PhD research opportunities. Detailed report of the questions is available as an attachment to this report (.xls).

POST-EVENT PLANS

There are several tasks that are planned after the WB WS.

Firstly, the collection of PowerPoint presentations will be sent both to the guest speakers and the registered viewers. In addition to PowerPoint presentations, we plan to send out two

surveys – speaker's survey and viewers survey, as to receive feedback and be able to adjust our organisation and potentially content of other WB workshops in the future.

Secondly, we will publish several news pieces/interviews with some of the guest speakers for continual promotion of the WS and to increase the interest of WB universities in future participation.

It is crucial to maintain the information about the WS in circulation, so the promotion of other WB workshops throughout the project becomes easier and has wider reach.

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS

It is important to acknowledge the technical difficulties that the organiser had with the online event. At the same time, the technical difficulties are expectable, especially since this workshop was the first event of this kind for the organiser.

The technical difficulties that occurred were resolved relatively quickly, and the organiser was able to execute the event in time and without any significant interruptions to the programme. Nevertheless, organiser will be able to adjust better according to the feedback that is received from guest speakers and viewers.

CONCLUSIONS

In sum, the Western Balkans workshop was successful for several reasons.

Firstly, the guest speakers were prominent experts and researchers in their fields, and the diversity of the speakers was ensured. It was very important for the organiser to have representatives from EUTOPIA and Western Balkans, as well as experts from EU institutions and bodies such as the European Commission and the ERC. This kind of diversity meant that different points of view and different experiences provide useful information on research activities, possibilities and support Europe-wide. The institutions, which the speakers represented, are at different levels of development in terms of research support, facilities and capabilities, which makes for a great balance in information provided to the WB institutions.

Secondly, the technical difficulties that have been present were resolved, so the programme could be executed only with minor interruptions. Nevertheless, all of the speakers had enough time to present their topics and answer questions afterwards.

Thirdly, considering that the workshop was held right at the beginning of the academic year, the turnout should be considered satisfactory. Some of the invitees were still on vacations at

the time of the WS and majority of students have not returned to their institutions yet. Thus, next workshops should be planned around academic activities to ensure optimal response from potential viewers.

Next workshop is planned for November 30 – December 1. Considering the current circumstances, it will also be held in virtual form.