



# **Innovating Teaching and Learning European Studies (INOTLES)**

**Annual progress report**

**Year 2014**

## Executive summary

Throughout its first year of activity, the project has managed to set up the framework of activity and deploy the required resources and capabilities for successfully launching its activities and achieving the first results. Despite the administrative delay (grant transfer) of one month in the starting date of project activity, INOTLES management has mobilized in a timely manner the staff from partner universities to largely ensure the compliance with the original workplan.

Communication channels were defined early in the project timeframe, as well as the distribution of tasks and responsibilities among partner universities. A Quality Assurance manual was designed in order to define the monitoring mechanisms and developing quality assurance strategies. Each WP leader has coordinated the revision of the initial program and has produced at planning document, setting out the shawls, responsibilities, and timelines for each consortium university.

Also, an external evaluator was invited to monitor the state of project progress by attending various activities and following workpackages' (WPs) progress, contributing with practical recommendations as well as preparing a mid-term external report.

All the proposed activities and deliverables where achieved without major disruption in the flow or delay. The results of WP2 represented a ground stone for future project activities, including WP3 face-to-face and online pedagogical training of academic and IT staff from EU and PC partners. The exchange of practices and the training in innovative teaching methods, such as similes shins simulations, problem based learning, e-learning and blended learning has been successfully implemented in the second part of the year 2014, being highly appreciated as a main positive result of the project to date both by the EU and the PC partners. The first dissemination event, held in Brussels in June 2014, has reached external project audience and has raised the interest of the broader academic community as well as societal stakeholders in project. The project where portal has been launched in the first month of productivity and has been attracting over 400 users, representing both INOTLES community and external audience.

However, the project has encountered several challenges to its original workplan. Minor changes were adopted for the WP2, compressing the initial time devoted for its activities in order to ensure the deliverables before the face-to-face project meeting in Brussels, on 18–21st of June 2014. While the pedagogical training was highly welcomed by all the participants, it proved to be difficult for certain participants to follow actively this intensive learning experience either due to their primary professional commitments and lack of availability, or, in some cases, due to their digital skills or low degree of interest in e-learning and blended learning as within their own institutions.

Overall, the activities carried out within the first year of project timeframe have largely complied with the original project proposal and carried out in due time and prompt responses were given to address the emerging challenges in the due time and in the optimal way.

## **Background of the project**

### **Motivation and problems addressed**

The main project motivation is to tackle core ES problems within the EU universities and Partner Countries (PC), specifically Ukraine, Moldova, and Georgia, by identifying common and specific needs and developing strategies, providing a national and international example of ES curricular reform.

INOTLES project addresses the core ES problems, such as:

- the multidisciplinary character of European Studies (ES), which requires an amalgam of materials and teaching methods;
- evolving EU political system: need for course updates, balance knowledge and skills transfer;
- Bologna process and the Education and Training strategy (ET) 2020 ask for inter-university exchange and innovative teaching.

The higher education institutions of PC adopted development strategies of modernization of MA ES curricula through inter-university cooperation and the change of traditional teaching by encouraging innovative teaching culture. However, all the three PC experience a number of specific problems in pursuing these goals:

- MA ES programs are relatively new and underdeveloped. They mostly have limited ES focus due to the lack of expertise of the local academic staff within the broader ES field;
- Lack of a core MA ES curriculum at the national level and of a curriculum convergence with EHEA countries, often an obstacle for Erasmus student mobility, EHEA postgraduate studies, and graduates employability;
- Lack of innovative teaching methods that answer ES needs and address Bologna principles and ET 2020, domination of Soviet legacy of traditional teaching results in less interactive learning, low skills transfer and low flexibility of learning;
- Absence of pedagogical Centers for ES specialized in training academic and IT staff in innovative teaching. In some PC ES resource and research centres were established through international grants (e.g. NaUKMA, ULIM, IES TSU, CHNU). But their library resources, access to online journal and databases, and IT equipment are in an urgent need for update.

## INOTLES general and specific objectives

INOTLES presents remedies to these specific problems in line with the TEMPUS goals of curricular reform with regard to the modernization of European higher education. It follows the wider objectives of

- 1) contributing to curricular reform and modernization of higher education in UA, MD and GE in accordance with Bologna principles
- 2) building up the capacity of higher education institutions in opening up to society and responding to the requirements of the labour market. This would be achieved through
  - pedagogically innovated MA ES curricula in accordance with Bologna principles
  - an increase in number and quality of MA ES students
  - the establishment and activity of one national CES in PC specialized in ES teaching.

### **The specific INOTLES objectives are:**

1. To promote the convergence of ES core courses between EU and UA, MD and GE
2. To promote innovative learning and real-world skills in ES curricula across EU and PC universities
3. To disseminate the benefits of innovative ES teaching to a broad base of local, national and international stakeholders by providing a model of ES curriculum reform
4. To establish teachers' training in innovative ES teaching methods, in accordance with the ET 2020 objectives
5. To increase competitiveness, employability and flexibility in accordance with job market requirements
6. To develop inter-cultural skills and mutual understanding between EU and PC through inter-university cooperation.

The project is structured on seven working packages: WP1 Project Management, WP2 Review of the State of the Art in teaching methods in ES, WP3 Training and supporting the trainers, WP4 Restructuring the Curriculum, WP5 Restructuring the Curriculum, WP6 Exploitation, WP7 Quality assurance and monitoring.

With the exception of WP4, all the WPs started their activity in the first year of project's timeframe (2014). The next sections aims at providing an overview of the achievements and challenges in the implementation of specific WP activities within the first year of INOTLES project.

## Workpackage achievements and challenges

### WP1 Management

#### Overview

Workpackage (WP) 1 Management aims at establishing lean and effective project administration and transparent resource administration throughout the project life cycle. WP follows project management work-flow, with local project coordinators reporting regularly to Project Manager (PM) based at MGSOG, UM, responsible for day-to-day project management and financial reporting. Local project coordinators are in charge of coordinating project activities at local level, including dissemination activities.

#### Activity achievements

##### **WP1.1 Kick-off meeting – 13 February 2014, Maastricht University**

The first project meeting took place at UM in Maastricht, and brought together 2 representatives from each consortium university (except USC and CHNU). The meeting resulted in the revised workplan and budget, revised WP programmes and the setting up of Project Management Board (PMB).

##### **WP 1.2 Project Management Board meetings**

Project Management Board (PMB) has been meeting regularly via skype (1\*2 months) and face-to face (twice a year) to discuss progress of project activities, strategic development, budget management and quality assurance monitoring.

##### **WP1.3 Annual reports**

First annual report was delivered, MGSOG, UM responsible for compiling data and writing up the report, with contribution of partners and WP leaders as well as writing of the report. Project progress was assessed during the year 2014, specifically the success of activities, achievement of objectives, challenges and solutions.

##### **WP1.4 Transparent resource administration**

Transparent resource management has been ensured via regular financial reporting, checking time reporting and financial documents. MGSOG, UM overseeing annual financial statements from each consortium partners.

##### **WP1.5 Lean and effective project administration**

Lean and effective project administration throughout the first year of project timeframe was ensured via facilitation of communication among partners, clarification of various TEMPUS rules and the conflicts with national level

legislations; continuous monitoring and update of workplan, reporting periods, transparent budget management.

### **Challenges and solutions**

Project started on 01/01/14, accordingly the kick-off meeting (1.1) took place in February 2014, after the Tempus Representatives meeting in Brussels.

There has been a change in the activity 1.5 with the purpose of re-distributing administrative tasks (and budget) among PC institutions, as well as the decentralization of administrative coordination based on a collaborative approach and a more active partner involvement, in line with EACEA/experts evaluation report.

For budget-saving purposes, PMB meetings (1.2) are to be combined with other project activities whenever possible (in line with EACEA/experts evaluation report). For example, in Brussels, during a four-day event in June 2014, PMB was combined with the dissemination event (5.1) and the face-to-face training (3.1).

Although communication channels were defined early in the project timeframe, sometimes the communication or information exchange between the WP leaders, activity leaders or university coordinators did not lead to academic staff getting information on various activities or deadlines in a timely manner. As of January 2015, all INOTLES staff was encouraged to actively use the intranet space, the project's e-platform, for improving the communication and archiving the communication and the exchange of information on the e-platform.

Political crisis in Ukraine has presented a main challenge for project management and implementation. This led to a delay in the transfer of pre-financing to Ukrainian partners and required the management of Ukrainian partners resources and partial bookkeeping by the grant holder.

National legislative challenges of project registration and buying equipment led to the delay in buying equipment for partner universities, postponed for the summer 2015.

## **WP2**

### **Overview**

This WP had the purpose of preparing the ground and collecting information for the later WPs, especially 3 (training) and 4 (course development). It aimed at providing a literature review and mapping the provisions on teaching European Studies and pathways (survey on teaching ES) for understanding the nature of European Studies teaching, both generally and specifically among INOTLES PC partners); the status of all partners and the potential scope of later actions.

## Activity achievements

### WP2.1 Literature review

Literature review, conducted in February – May 2014 by all INOTLES partners, identified relevant research and other works of use to INOTLES. This allowed the INOTLES staff to provide an external context and reference framework for the project.

The results were presented during the Brussels project meeting 18-21 June 2015.

### WP2.2 Survey on teaching ES

The survey A, conducted in March-May 2015 by MGSOG, UM under the coordination of US, mapped existing provision in European Studies programs and pathways worldwide and gained understanding of pedagogies in practice: it complemented the literature review by giving a wider context of teaching.

The results were presented during the Brussels project meeting 18-21 June 2015.

### WP2.3 Needs analysis

A survey was conducted by ULIM, with the cooperation of USC, MGSOG, UM, and US, with the purpose of needs analysis needs of the six PC partner universities. The survey was completed by all PC partners and further interviews were conducted to complement the survey information. This allowed INOTLES staff to be properly prepared for WP3 and WP4 by having an internal set of reference points regarding the training and development and teaching of core ES courses.

The results were presented during the Brussels project meeting 18-21 June 2015.

### WP2.4 Group analysis

The survey C on group analysis matched the needs of the PC partners with the pedagogical capacities and expertise of the EU partners. TSU produced the questionnaire, in conjunction with US, and provided an analysis of the collected data, presented during the Brussels project meeting 18-21 June 2015.

## Challenges and solutions

Time constraint represented a major challenge of this WP. The WP leader advanced the idea of organizing two separate surveys for activity 2.3 and 2.4 for overcoming this challenges, collecting the data, and providing an analysis on time. WP deliverables were presented during June 2014 Brussels meeting, the writing of some follow-up publications (two academic articles and at least one

policy paper) was decided to be conducted during the rest of the project timeframe.

The short timeframe necessitated regular contact with all partners by the WP lead, to ensure no slippage. This was supported by a WP planning document, which set out all roles and timelines, a practice that has been subsequently adapted by the project as a whole as good practice.

## WP3

### Overview

WP 3 focused on training the participants in using several teaching methods they can apply to their European Studies curricula. The training was conducted through a blended learning approach, including a face-to-face training session in Brussels, followed by online group training, giving the participants the chance to work together with their peers over a period of five months deepening their understanding of a pedagogical method of their choice. The activities of this WP were informed by the results of the literature review and needs analysis conducted in WP2 and constitute the pedagogical foundation for the course development planned to take place in WP4. The training outcomes were presented and discussed during the wrap-up conference in January 2015 in Tbilisi, Georgia and synthesized in a training handbook.

### Activity achievements

#### WP3.1 “Training the Trainer: Brussels Session”

Face-to-face pedagogical training and exchange of best practice in teaching ES (19-21 June 2014, Brussels), EU partners trainers in four methods: PBL, simulations, blended learning and e-learning, with the participation of five members of academic staff from each PC university and representatives of EU institutions.

#### WP3.2 Online pedagogical training (merged with WP 3.4- online training coordination)

The online training (**July-November 2014**), involving around **45 professors** from the nine participating universities. EU trainers have shared their expertise with PC (five academic staff from each university) and EU academic staff in three groups: PBL, simulations, and e-learning/blended learning.

The training had both asynchronous and synchronous components. The **asynchronous activities** on three specially created modules on the EU modules platform were method-specific, but the core concept was to use a hands-on approach, with tasks that encourage the design, practice and reflection of the respective method. The **synchronous part** of the training, organised via Adobe Connect, consisted of **four webinars** (online seminars), bringing together all the group members to exchange cross-cutting pedagogical issues.



IES and MGSOG staff ensured the overall coordination of the online training, the organization of cross-group webinars for exchange of knowledge and skills, as well as the collection of material for training handbook.

### **WP3.3 IT training**

IES and MGSOG staff offered the training for IT staff (20 June 2014) on how to develop and maintain e-learning courses and an introduction to the use of the e-platform for online pedagogical training (one IT staff from each PC university, except USC).

### **WP3.5 Development of a Training Handbook**

The Training Handbook, compiled by IES and MGSOG staff, summarizes and synthesizes the outcome of the face-to-face and online training sessions, focusing on the essential features of the three pedagogical methods and how they can be best implemented in teaching various aspects of European Studies. The Handbook will serve as a valuable resource for further training within the participating universities. The Handbook will be translated in the languages of the countries participating in the project.

### **Challenges and solutions**

The activities of WP3 were planned and delivered in accordance with the original project proposal. Minor adjustments were made, as the activities were being designed in detail, in order to ensure that they can be carried out in a way that is most beneficial to all participants involved. This included, for instance, that the EU group leaders/trainers of each online training group were given more ownership of their group activities design, implementation and evaluation, under the overall online training coordination of IES & UM.

However, there were a few obstacles noticed along the implementation period to which the project team had to adapt. One of these is linked to the involvement of project participants in the online training activities. As the training was designed as a rather intensive learning experience (including weekly tasks, deadlines, etc), it proved to be difficult to follow actively by some participants, involved in a series of other activities at the same time in their universities. The group coordinators thus tried to offer everyone the chance to catch up with the training workload, allowing for a certain flexibility regarding the task deadlines as well as providing extra support/ tutoring if required.

Another obstacle, this time related both to the training as well as the potential future implementation, is linked to the use of e-learning and blended learning. Some of the participants from Ukraine, Moldova and Georgia are facing issues with the recognition/ accreditation of e-learning courses, as well as the perception among colleagues and students that e-learning courses have a somewhat lower status than traditional courses. This had implications regarding their active involvement in the online group work and might also be an issue of concern for the implementation and use of these methods in the courses to be

developed in WP4. These topics were discussed both initially in Brussels and at the end of WP3 in Tbilisi and a possible solution is to integrate technology-enhanced elements in the current and future courses, using more a blended learning method rather than a fully online approach.

The training activities of WP3 contribute to the overall capacity building in partner universities, which is vital for the modernisation of Higher Education in general and the reform of the ES curricula more in particular. Thus, the trainings have a long-lasting effect that will be reinforced by the internal trainings to be organized in each university by the participants in the project for their colleagues. An important resource for that purpose, and at the same time, a strong contribution to the sustainability aspect, is the training handbook.

## WP5

### Overview

WP 5 focuses on dissemination of the results of each project activity both within the consortium of partner universities and outside, reaching communities of academic faculty and learners interested in teaching ES, as well as policy-makers/practitioners within PC and at the regional and EU level. Each workpackage and sub-workpackage activity leads to a deliverable, taking the form of a product, method or an agglomeration of experience and is disseminated via various channels: video recordings, webportal, WIKI, conference participation publications, etc.

### Activity achievements

#### WP5.1. Brussels dissemination event

On June 18, 2014, 50 consortium participants plus external stakeholders and interested parties shared results and discussed needs analysis. The event was valuable for informing project partners about PC university level and national level challenges and needs. Also, it created a first platform for exchange and support, and ensured that project partners have realistic expectations but also motivation to participate actively in the next steps of our project. This first exchange was crucial in order to promote convergence of ES teaching.

#### WP5.4. International conference dissemination at CHNU, Ukraine

PC partners acted as crucial disseminators of INOTLES project results, as their presentations of INOTLES results at Vth International Conference of Junior Scholars “Political science developments: European practice and national prospects” has showed. PC partners sharing first experiences and innovative ways of teaching ES to colleagues represents a crucial step to build capacity of PC higher education.

#### WP5.4. International conference dissemination at 1<sup>st</sup> European Teaching and Learning Conference

This project presentation made INOTLES known to wider ES community and contributed to the international exchange on best practices in teaching ES. This event directly supports project objective 3 to disseminate the benefits of innovative ES teaching to a broad base of local, national and international stakeholders.

### **WP5.5. Preparation of various international publications**

INOTLES project partners teamed up to share their experience in comparative manner in international publications, disseminating the benefits of innovative ES teaching to a broad base of local, national and international stakeholders by providing best practices and model of ES curriculum reform. Publication of the literature review and survey data from 2.2 in a peer-reviewed academic journal is currently being prepared, as well as a policy paper based on needs analysis of PC partners.

### **Challenges and solutions**

A remaining obstacle is the ongoing competition in national and international publications, which we try to address by taking extra care and time that publications produced are of high quality. Teaming up of various project partners as advantage to increase chances of publications to be successful. Realistic expectations of publications only for second half of project timeframe: only once we have first results, it makes sense to invest in sharing those in publications. Advantage, at the same time, that community very interested in results of our project.

If possible, dissemination efforts have been taped and shared on youtube, so that people can use those inputs also at later point in time. If taping is not possible, we ensure dissemination through short reports and blogs on our website.

## **WP6**

### **Overview**

Exploitation and sustainability are at the core of WP6 activities, which aim at exploiting the results of WPs 1-7 through mainstreaming and multiplying these results via webportal (newsletter to internal and external audiences; blogposts, videos, documents, etc.), Papers series (online and printed) reaching both academic and policy-making audiences, WIKI, with voluntary contributions from project staff and international academic community, as well as national CES (establishment, capacity building and institutional strengthening of national CES in each PC), which will act as nodal dissemination and exploitation points.

### **Activity achievements**

#### **WP6.1 - Webportal**

Webportal was developed and maintained, in cooperation with IT company from MD (subcontracted). MGSOG, UM staff is responsible for the coordination of tasks with the IT company, regular upload to webportal of project information and of activity results from each WP; development and maintenance of intranet space (online project collaboration mechanisms). The process of translation in local languages in UA, MD, GE has been initiated by December 2014.

In the first year of activity, the webportal and WIKI have reached around 400 users worldwide.

### **WP 6.2 WIKI**

Development and maintenance of WIKI, an academic open-source welcoming voluntary individual contributions worldwide, exploitation of results of WP2 and WP3. MGSOG, UM staff, responsible for creating starting pages on innovative teaching methods based on expertise of EU staff and used in training activities and moderating the WIKI activity.

### **WP 6.3 Working papers and Policy Papers series**

The UM staff set up the Editorial office, hosted by FASOS, UM, developed the call for papers and has been sending regularly invitations for internal (project) and external submissions within the INOTLES community and through various professional networks.

### **WP6.4 Establishing or supporting national CES**

Discussion was initiated on administrative requirements for setting up/supporting CES in UA, MD and GE and PC countries presented initial report on local procedures and national legislative contexts, including the procedure on buying equipment.

IES, VUB and MGSOG, UM work together on coordinating the activity and sharing their academic and technical experience on setting up a CES, sustainability strategy and planned mobilities.

### **Challenges and solutions**

Buying equipment was delayed to end of July 2015 due to national legislative obstacles. There has been an increase in the equipment budget, following monitoring evaluation in Moldova of National Erasmus + office in October 2014.

The three mobilities envisaged within activity 6.4 (national CEU) were combined with the mid-term conference in MD (June 2016) and the final conference in UA (June 2016) for budget saving reasons.

The setting up of WIKI took a significant amount of time (September-February 2015) due to the need of a careful consideration of the choice of suitable and user-friendly platform and the development of the initial interface.

The e-tools for learning, communication, dissemination and sustainability were set up as planned. Yet, some might not have been used to their full potential. The WP leader has been working on discussing during PMBs ways of encouraging more active project staff activity on the webportal and promoting to the larger INOTLES community the web portal, the WIKI and the intranet space in order to enrich the existent resource and enlarge the professional network of users.

## **WP7**

### **Overview**

WP7 ensures the continuous monitoring and evaluation of the advancement and quality of each project activity. MGSOG, UM as WP7 coordinator ensures deploying and updating of quality assurance, process evaluation and reporting to European Commission.

An external evaluator, Ms. Eniko Kovacs from HESP, Open Society Institute, has been invited to monitor and evaluate project activities, providing a mid-term and a final external evaluation report.

### **Activity achievements**

#### **WP7.1 Quality assurance manual**

Quality assurance mechanisms and quality assurance manual was developed by June 2014, based on a preliminary research on best practices within other TEMPUS projects. The manual defined project priorities and objectives, quality requirements and standards, potential risks and control mechanisms, continuous feedback and evaluation.

#### **WP7.2 Mid-term evaluation report**

The external evaluator has been invited to monitor the state of project by attending various project activities and contributing with practical recommendations and preparing mid-term external report.

### **Challenges and solutions**

The preference of email as a main source of communication, particularly among PC staff, and not using the e-platform during training (July-December 2014) presented minor challenges in accessing and archiving the information for the purpose of a smooth monitoring of project activities. As of January 2015, all INOTLES staff was encouraged to actively use the intranet space, the project's e-platform, for keeping a better track of archiving the communication and the exchange of information.

## Conclusion

Overall, the first year of project timeframe was successful in achieving all project results without major disruptions in the flow or delays from the original workplan. From the management perspective, communication channels and e-tools were defined early in the project timeframe, as well as the distribution of tasks and responsibilities among partner universities. Monitoring mechanisms were defined for ensuring continuous project evaluation and quality assurance manual was designed to provide guidance for project activities and set clear roles, responsibilities and deadlines.

The project has provided a comprehensive review of the state of the art in teaching and learning European studies (WP2), mapping the existing provisions in teaching the European studies and pathways worldwide, assessing the PC partners needs and the matching the EU partners expertise with East European universities' needs. The WP three training, both face-to-face and online, within the field of problem based learning, simulations, e-learning and blended learning, has been acknowledged by PC staff as a major achievement of the project to date. Moreover, the project has achieved additional results from the planned ones, as the trained PC staff has embarked upon practical implementation of the freshly acquired pedagogical skills within their regular teaching.

Several challenges emerged during the project implementation. The time constraint for WP 2 activities, resulting from their administrative delay in the starting date of the project, what addressed through the choice of the survey as a mechanism for data collection, needs analysis and the matching of the EU expertise and PC needs, as well as a thorough planning and coordination on behalf of the WP leader and activity leaders. Some of the challenges, anticipated as potential risks during the writing of the project proposal, proved to be real life obstacles, such as poor e-skills and low degree of interest in the use of e-learning and blended learning is teaching approaches within the PC national and university level contexts. One of the biggest challenges so far has been the national level legislation regarding the buying of equipment, which has resulted in the delay of providing the necessary equipment to the PC countries to date.

In sum, INOTLES management and partners have been regularly discussing and designing optimal strategies for overcoming their existing and potential obstacles during the implementation of project activities, seeking the advice of more experienced partners, National Erasmus + offices, and EACEA. Measures have been taken for adjusting future activities to the existing realities, as well as defining strategies for reaching broader external audiences, both academic and societal stakeholders.