



Erasmus Mundus Action 2: EURICA **“Europe and America: Enhancing University Relations by Investing in Cooperative Actions”**

by Joyce Fongers* and Neydi Cruz**

EURICA is one of the fifty-three mobility projects implemented within the framework of the European-funded Erasmus Mundus Action 2 (EMA2) programme between Europe and Latin America since 2008¹, coordinated by the University of Groningen (the Netherlands) and the *Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México* (UNAM).

The basis of EURICA is the consortium of twenty Higher Education Institutions (HEIs), from eight Latin American and seven European countries. Latin American partners include the main public HEIs in four Central American countries: El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras and Nicaragua. Additionally, EURICA includes two partners from Argentina, Chile and Colombia and three in Mexico. All of them are public, but very diverse in terms of their size and experience with internationalisation. Together we aim to implement nearly three hundred mobility flows over the period 2013-2017 back and forth between Europe and Latin America, targeting both students, researchers and support staff on all levels.

Besides the mobility implementation and its direct, life-changing, impact in 300 individuals, the expected success of the consortium goes beyond the scholarships for studying abroad. EURICA has taken on the challenge to address some of the most relevant issues in the development and modernisation of higher education, both in Europe and Latin America.

We do believe there is a strong correlation between an institutional infrastructure for internationalisation and the opportunities for mobility of individual students. Consequently, one of EURICA’s effectiveness challenges is to ensure ownership and commitment in all partners for the well-being of the entire consortium. Additionally, for our project to have a sustainable impact, it is vital that the project results are not limited to those individual mobility flows. Results should therefore be measured both in the short as well as the longer term. We consider it not possible, nor desirable, to regard individual mobility in EMA2 independent of the larger institutional, national and regional contexts.

The different governmental investment schemes in Latin America reflect a need to improve the coverage, quality and equity of higher education. In recent years, in different countries – particularly Chile, Colombia and Mexico – four major government-supported developments can be distinguished: (1) the establishment of scholarship and loan programmes; (2) the

¹ EMA2 funding for cooperation with Latin America is mostly provided by the Development Cooperation Instrument of the European Commission and so far has benefited more than seven thousand individuals. EMA2 is implemented by the Education, Audiovisual and Culture Executive Agency (EACEA).

establishment of quality evaluation mechanisms; (3) curricular reform; and (4) internationalisation. EURICA uses the consortium platform as an opportunity to discuss these topics on the micro-level of the project. The so-called “Learning Communities” (LC’s) consist of four partners led by an experienced Latin American university addressing: (1) Public-private cooperation; (2) Quality & Equity; (3) Learning Outcomes; and (4) Double Degrees. The aim is that the good practice sharing between and among the European and Latin American universities will not only create a better basis for the implementation of EURICA, but also contribute to the larger capacity development processes of which all of our universities and their individuals are part. The EURICA consortium meetings therefore include lectures from invited speakers – authorities in each of the four LC’s topics – to promote discussions that lead to a learning process within the participants.

Through the LC’s, we additionally foster the inclusion of other departments whose tasks are not primarily internationally-oriented, such as those dealing with educational support, research and valorisation. We can definitely say the Learning Communities are an added value/benefit of EURICA as an EMA2 project. Additionally, the operational challenges that come about with the implementation of EURICA provide a great learning experience for our international offices. Those effects are difficult to measure in the (financial) reporting to the European Commission, but they certainly represent development outcomes.

During the closing event of ALFA III and Erasmus Mundus impact meeting for Latin America, organised by the European Commission in June 2014, EURICA shared experiences with other projects and confirmed that the major obstacles to sustainability lie in both the practical design of the project as well as what we would like to call “the human factor”. That is, not only should the expected results be realistic, tangible and reproducible, but also should the support and commitment of all stakeholders, particularly on a financial and administrative level, be guaranteed. What we often see now is that success is dependent on the efforts of individuals. Hopefully in EURICA, through the Learning Communities, we will be able to include other areas in the processes of internationalisation, without losing sight of the realistic changes that we will be able to make through a project that is primarily focused on mobility.

Groningen and UNAM, in any case, have moved their cooperation beyond individual student exchange. Not only through our close cooperation in EURICA, but also because of the establishment of strong research links in different areas. Also, we have made major steps towards the formalisation of double degree programmes. It takes time and effort, but is also great fun. Things that are easy tend to become a bore easily, and one thing we can say about our collaboration is that it certainly is not boring. From a Dutch perspective, one can live in continuous amazement about hierarchical structures and bureaucracy, and for sure, a Mexican will be outright surprised about so much honesty and bluntness. Never mind, we are all humans. In our case we wish to contribute to the quality of education and research through internationalisation, and have made great friends on the side.

* **Joyce Fongers** (MA) is Coordinator for Latin America at the University of Groningen.

** **Neydi Cruz** (MSc) is Director of International Programs at UNAM.

This paper is a contribution to the September 2014 edition of the newsletter of the EU-LAC Foundation dedicated to higher education.

www.eurica.nl

