

Networking as a Tool For Supporting Research in the Balkan Region (The Case of Surface Transport)

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The opening of the European Research Area (ERA) to third countries is a strategic objective of the European Union. As the integration of the Western Balkan countries (WBCs) is a key priority, the EC supports many initiatives which aim at unlocking and developing the existing research potential in the region. However, little has been done in the field of transport research. Only the FP6 project RRTC (Regional railway transport research and training centre foundation) and the ASO project CONSTANT (CONcepts for life long learning to further increase SafeTy on rail based trANsporT systems) were focused to networking of scientists in the Balkan region.

The further contribution to cooperation of transport researchers in West Balkans was made by the FP7 project TransBonus. Applying an effective methodology, the team with the ARC Fund as Coordinator managed to improve contacts and promote closer Scientific and Technological (S&T) opportunities of collaboration in surface transport between Europe and the WBCs. The project established an EU-Balkan Transport network of researchers (more than 200) from different universities in order to enlarge the research capacity in the region.

Keywords: networking, transport research, FP7, West Balkan countries, TransBonus project.

INTRODUCTION

Networking is a common synonym for developing and maintaining contacts and personal connections. The aim is to create a group of professional acquaintances and associates and keep it active through regular communication for mutual benefit.

Research networking is the provision of data communications for the use of research and academic communities. The involvement of organizations from different countries in pan-European research networking is a good example of European cooperation, which is fundamental to the objectives of the EU itself. The European research networking provides possibilities for all researchers, wherever in Europe they work, to participate in collaborative research projects contributing to the best of their abilities.

Of the TransBonus partners, the coordinator ARC Fund, the Higher School of Transport (VTU) and the Faculty of Mechanical Engineering in Kraljevo (MFK) have had experience in networking activities in the Balkans. The VTU organized the first meeting of Balkan higher education institutions in the field

of transport as early as in June 2002. Three years later with the MFK as a partner it coordinated the FP6 project RRTC, which full name "Regional railway transport research and training centre foundation" clearly reveals the networking nature of the project aims. The successful partnership of the two institutions continued in the ASO project CONSTANT (CONcepts for life long learning to further increase SafeTy on rail based trANsporT systems). In fact TransBonus was the third research project where the two institutions cooperated.

I TRANSBONUS: SCIENTIFIC AREA AND CONSORTIUM

The project aimed at research networking in the field of surface transport (road, rail and water-borne), which is considered critical to driving Europe's employment, prosperity and global exports and with positive impact on economic and social integration as a whole. The EU has targeted a number of objectives in surface transport research to meet the existing challenges, namely to:

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