

## **Western Balkans, adherent of advanced educational and economic practices**

The final conference of the BESTSDI (Western Balkans Academic Education Evolution and Professional's Sustainable Training for Spatial Data Infrastructures) and NatRisk (Development of Master Curricula for Natural Disasters Risk Management in the Western Balkan Countries) Projects was held on 4<sup>th</sup> September 2019, in Sarajevo, in the framework of Erasmus+ programme aimed at capacity building in the field of higher education, supported by the European Union.

This conference has brought together participants from the Western Balkan academic community, prestigious European universities, government and non-governmental sector, professionals in higher education and curriculum development, information and communication industries, security, as well as resource and risk management.

The conference was held in the University of Sarajevo Rectorate.

### **New curricula and study programmes**

After three years of intensive BESTSDI project implementation, it can certainly be noted that the project has completely achieved all its objectives and prof. Željko Bačić, from the University of Zagreb takes pride in this fact as project coordinator.

"A high level of understanding of Spatial Data Infrastructure (SDI) concept has been reached among academic institutions and project partners who create different expert profiles, which has, furthermore, made possible the formulation of a new curriculum in the field of SDI and the implementation of SDI classes within 88 subjects at 16 faculties in the region. In addition to those faculties and universities, the economy will mostly benefit from this by getting new profiles of electronically literate experts - capable of developing applications with a modern understanding of the use of spatial data and interdisciplinary educated experts, who will understand the needs of other professions. Such experts will be able to rise to the challenges of current times, especially in terms of spatial management, climate change impact and society management in entirety, based on spatial data and geoinformatics. This is precisely why we organized a joint final conference of BESTSDI project and NatRisk project that developed a new curriculum for the Natural Disaster Management study ", said prof. Bačić.

European Union experts suggest that the economy based on the design of applications for the spatial data use and processing will develop to such an extent by 2030 that geoinformatics, with spatial data infrastructure as one of its bases, will become a new independent / standalone profession.

### **How to manage natural disasters?**

Natural disasters have become a constant threat to the community and the environment as a whole. The damage they sometimes cause exceeds all preventive measures.

„We have witnessed that exposure to the impacts of natural disasters - droughts, floods, landslides, earthquakes - largely increased due to low level of knowledge about causes, mechanisms of action and manners of protection. Therefore, the objectives of NatRisk project are: development and implementation of master study programme in the Western

Balkans in line with European standards, modernized laboratories for research in the field of natural disasters, mobility of students and teaching staff to learn about & adopt innovative methods in classes, development and conducting training for citizens and public sector in the field of natural disaster management. " said prof. Milan Gocić from the University of Niš.

In addition to the training of teaching staff and students, four training manuals were created within the NatRisk project for civil sector training purposes in situations of natural disaster and 14 several-day trainings were held at Higher Education Institutions in the Western Balkans, where at approximately 500 participants from more than 150 institutions were trained.

Thanks to the participation in projects BESTSDI and NatRisk, with the support of European universities, the faculties/colleges of the Western Balkans have become leaders in the region when it comes to the scientific endeavors of this kind – much to the benefit of society as a whole, especially in terms of the development of electronic literacy in the adequate use of spatial data when managing space and natural resources.

(Nihad Penava)