

NEWSLETTER 5

SmartAL

Master: European Innovations for a Sustainable Management of Albanian Territories, Rural Areas and Agriculture: Instruments, policies, strategies

SMARTAL IS AN ERASMUS + CAPACITY BUILDING IN HIGHER EDUCATION PROJECT FOCUSING ON:

- 1 Strengthening the linkages between universities and job providing institutions
- 2 Improving the theoretical and practical knowledge of students
- 3 Offering innovative teaching tools and methodologies
- 4 Consolidating synergy among Albanian universities
- 5 Creating 9 teaching modules at executive and professional master level



EDITO

The last year has been incredibly complex for everyone: However, despite the shock and the anxiety that followed in such an unprecedented context of global pandemic, the efficiency of the SmartAL project has not been jeopardized.

Indeed, even though we had to adapt to a substantial slowdown in mobilities –borders being closed or facing strong restrictions in terms of quarantine- the dynamics never faltered, thanks to our wonderful partners'

unfailing commitment.

After obtaining from the EACEA a one-year extension of the project to October 2021 –a necessary amendment due to the late legal authorization for the Master to open in December 2020 –, the concrete implementation of the teaching could start.

Twenty-five students, coming from different professional horizons, were selected, and since January 2021, seven modules could have been taught by pairs of Albanian and EU lecturers from the universities: you can read the testimonies of the teachers in this newsletter.

On April 1, 2021, the EU Ambassador to Albania, Luigi Soreca, met the team of the SmartAL project at the Agricultural University of Tirana. It was an important opportunity for the project team to show the EU Representation all the work done in the framework of this project. The Ambassador could exchange with students and express his enthusiasm on the development of our project.

We are now on the final straight with the evaluation of the Master in its capacity of being accredited. This assessment will be a key deliverable, enabling the Albanian partner universities to get ready for its accreditation.

And finally, I give you an appointment in the first week of October 2021 in Tirana for the final workshop of this project: an important moment of exchanges and perspectives between the Ambassadors of the EU countries involved, the academic authorities, the professional sphere/ future employers, the teachers and of course, a unique opportunity to give the floor to students! Please, save the date!

Magali Maire,

CIHEAM-IAMM, SmartAL Project coordinator

WHO ARE THE PARTNERS?

Lead partner

International Center for Advanced Mediterranean Agronomic Studies - Mediterranean Agronomic Institute of Montpellier -CIHEAM-IAMM (France)



Partners

Fan S Noli University Korçë - UNKO (Albania)
University of Hohenheim - UHOH (Germany)
European University of Tirana - UET (Albania)
Agricultural University of Tirana - UBT (Albania)
Panteion University of Social and Political Sciences - UPSPS (Greece)
University Paul Valery Montpellier - UPV (France)

Associated partners:

Network for Rural Development (Albania)
Ministry of Education and Sports (Albania)
Ministry of Agriculture, Rural Development And Water Administration(Albania)
Ministry of Urban development (Albania)
Korçë Regional Council (Albania)



Project duration: 2017-2021
Total EU Grant: 760 000 EUR



LAUNCHING OF THE MASTER EXECUTIVE SMARTAL ON "TERRITORIAL PLANNING AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT OF RURAL AREAS" FOR THE ACADEMIC YEAR 2020-2021



Co-funded by the Erasmus+ Programme of the European Union

Albania: New Executive Master!

Territorial planning and economic development of rural areas



SELECTION PROCESS

The selection process for the Master Executive was launched on 4 December 2020 by the Agricultural University of Tirana. Twenty-five students were selected. Nine modules will be taught by pairs of EU and Albanian teachers.

OFFICIAL INAUGURATION CEREMONY

The official inauguration ceremony of the SmartAL Master Executive took place on 18 January 2021, in Tirana, in the presence of the high-level representatives of the Albanian universities: Prof. Dr. Fatbardh Sallaku, Rector of the Agricultural University of Tirana, Prof. Dr. Remzi Keco, Dean of the Agricultural University of Tirana, Prof. Dr. Elvin Meka, Dean of the European University of Tirana, Prof. Assoc. Dr. Dhimitri Bello, Rector of the University Fan S. Noli, Korçë and Ms. Magali Maire, SmartAL coordinator, CIHEAM Montpellier.

"It's a great day for higher education in Albania: SmartAL-Master in European Innovations for Sustainable Management of Albanian Territories, rural areas and agriculture, a CBHE Erasmus+ Project, is a master of excellence; an innovative master designed in close collaboration with 3 Albanian universities. and 4 European institutions, in the field of rural development of territories. It perfectly meets the needs of Albania in a view to train high-level executives in a context of decentralisation" said Magali Maire.



Natasha Hodaj
UBT

Fatbardh Sallaku
UBT

Elvin Meka
UET



Dhimitri Bello
UNKO



Remzi Keco
UBT

Fatmir Guri
UBT

Magali Maire
CIHEAM Montpellier

TEACHING OF THE MODULES OF THE MASTER EXECUTIVE

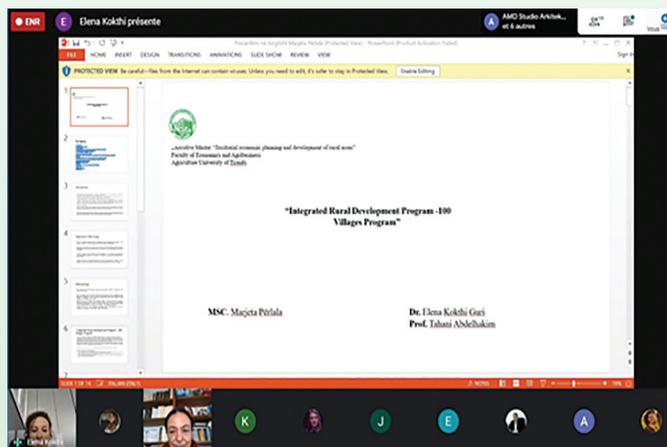
Hapet programi i studimit në Master Ekzekutiv “Planifikim dhe zhvillim ekonomik territorial i zonave rurale” në Universitetin Bujqësor të Tiranës



The courses of the SmartAI Master Executive started in January 2021 at the Agricultural University of Tirana (UBT), Albania. Due to the pandemic, courses were taught online. Each module lasts on average 3 weeks and includes theoretical courses and practical exercises (case studies).

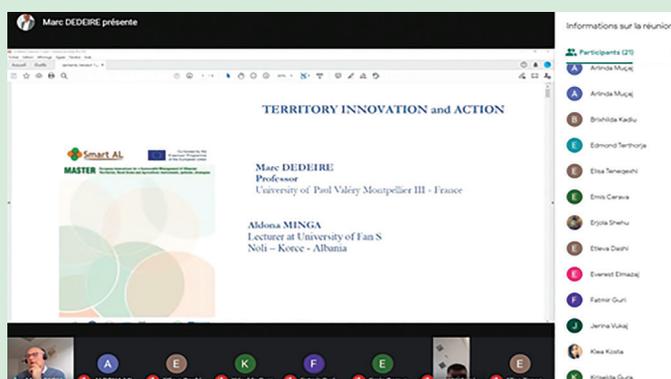
1-Module 1. “Institutions and actors in territory”

The teaching started with the module on “Institutions and actors in territory” given by Tahani Abdelhakim (CIHEAM Montpellier) and Elena Kokthi (Agricultural University of Tirana).



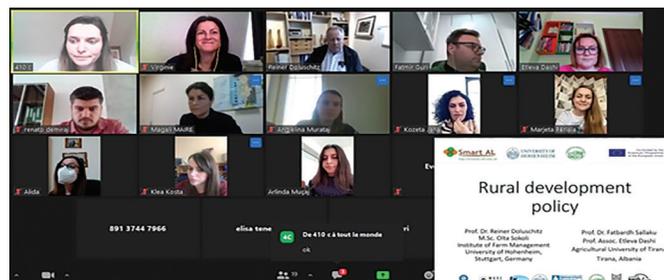
2-Module 2. “Territory innovation and actions”

The second module, on “Territory innovation and actions” was taught by Marc Dedeire (Université Paul Valéry Montpellier) and Aldona Minga (University Fan S. Noli, Korçë).



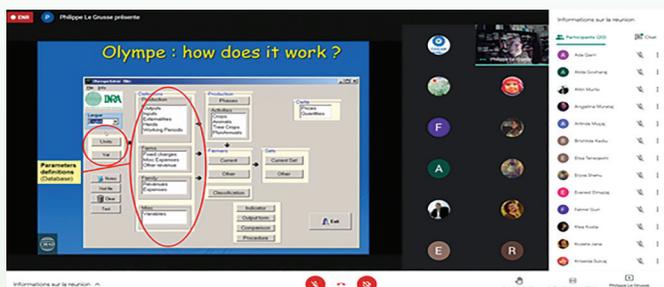
3-Module 3. “Territory innovation and actions”

Reiner Doluschitz and Olta Sokoli (University of Hohenheim, Stuttgart), Fatbardh Sallaku and Etleva Dashi (Agricultural University of Tirana) delivered the courses of Module 3 on “Rural development policy”.



4-Module 4. “Economics of natural resources and environment”

Module 4 on “Economics of natural resources and environment” was taught by Philippe Le Grusse (CIHEAM Montpellier), Fatmir Guri (Agricultural University of Tirana), Oussama M'ghirbi (CIHEAM Montpellier) and Zenepe Dafku (Agricultural University of Tirana).



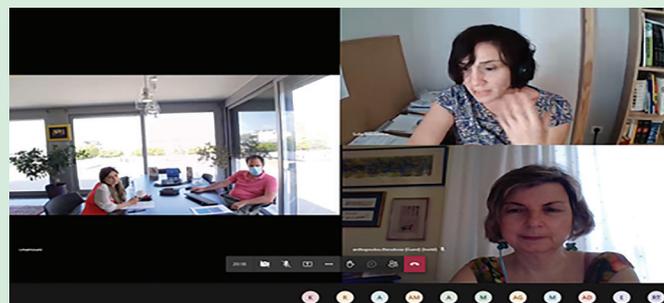
5-Module 8. “Intruments and policy evaluation methods”

Module 8 was taught by Dorjan Marku (University Fan S. Noli, Korçë), Manfred Zeller and Reiner Doluschitz (University of Hohenheim, Stuttgart). It related to “Intruments and policy evaluation methods”.



6-Module 6. “Territorial administration, planning and governance”

Theodosia Anthopoulou (Panteion University of Social Sciences, Athens), Elias Beriatos (University of Thessaly-Volos), Ani Mbrica (European University of Tirana), Sofia Nikolaidou (Panteion University of Social and Political Sciences, Athens) delivered the module 6 on “Territorial administration, planning and governance”.



7-Module 7. “Data administration and geoinformatic tools”

The module 7 on “Data administration and geoinformatic tools” was given by George Petropoulos (Harokopio University of Athens), Yiannis Faraslis (University of Thessaly) and Elvin Toromani (Agricultural University of Tirana).

FEEDBACKS OF THE PAIR OF TEACHERS ON THE TEACHING OF THE MODULES 1 TO 4

What were the key-steps and the strong points in terms of collaboration with your pair-teacher, in the co-building of the module and the preparation of the teaching?

MODULE 1

One of the key steps of the pair of teachers' collaboration was the discussion on case studies with the students. The case studies were designed to tackle the aspects of territory development in several directions, linked principally to institutions development in Albania. Social capital analysis and cooperation among actors, identification of the potential to cooperate among stakeholders and other aspects were covered in students' empirical works. The discussion on the topics among the pair of teachers improved the design and the application of the case studies.

Elena Kokthi, UBT

MODULE 2

The collaboration with Marc DEDEIRE has been and continues to be very good. His professionalism and experience over the years in the management of territories has made it possible to design a module on territorial innovation, to meet the unique needs of all students in this master.

Aldona Minga, UNKO

MODULE 3

The extensive involvement of both partners in this process since the module's content must be adapted to the Albanian concept is crucial. The experience sharing from both sides makes the module more adaptive to the needs of the Albanian executives and the needs of the master overall.

Reiner Doluschitz, UHOH

MODULE 4

In the case of the module of Economics of natural resources and environment, the collaboration with the EU lecturer required the complementarity between both of us in covering the part of the module where each of us has had a larger experience.

Fatmir Guri, UBT

During the teaching of your course, what were your impressions on the students' interest in the topic? What added-value do you think it will bring it in their professional life?

MODULE 1

The application of the case studies and the evidence based institutional analysis framework was received with great interest from the students. This will be used as a lesson learned for the future courses development. The combination of the teaching setting with pre-elaborated case study proposals will also add value to the content of the course by transmitting theoretical concepts in a practical way.

Elena Kokthi, UBT

MODULE 2

The development of the module was online due to the conditions created by the Covid 19 pandemic, which did not penalize the students' attendance of the course. During these lessons, the students created dynamics and very good interaction between them.

Aldona Minga, UNKO

MODULE 3

As it is the first testing year of the master program, we were not prepared for what to expect from the students. Adding the fact that the students come from different backgrounds, we were open to any challenge and possible adaptation to fulfil our students' needs. Remarkably, the students had a high interest in the module on Rural Development Policy. They found it valuable for their further career in their professional life.

Reiner Doluschitz, UHOH

MODULE 4

The module of Economics of natural resources and environment is part of the theoretical group of modules, where the fundamental information is more than required, but the students, and external experts' presentations, added a lot of practical elements to the module, by presenting examples from their professional experience. The students' interest has been vivid during the main part of the module.

Fatmir Guri, UBT

In terms of pedagogy, which strong points and areas for improvement do you identify for this teaching? (taking into account the fact that they are remote courses)

MODULE 1

The pair teaching is well received by the students due to the experience sharing process on other countries territory development institutional contexts. However, the introduction to team working and to blended methodologies concerning students' involvement should be further improved in the future course development.

Elena Kokthi, UBT

MODULE 2

Conditioned by the situation created by the pandemic, learning was done online, there were things we could consider as strengths such as communication and connection, which was created between the lecturer and the students. There were moments where students shared their experiences on the development of territories in different regions of Albania.

Aldona Minga, UNKO

MODULE 3

As highlighted before, this is a process and a testing year, which means there will be improvements and further elaboration to fulfil students' needs better. We had involved the design of a scientific poster for the students. This involves them in practical work and training them to represent their work in a more condensed way and more presentable. It has been remarked that there is more time needed to further elaborate on this topic and manner of presentation, like showing more examples and involving students in evaluating different posters to understand better the importance of the content and visualization. They found it interesting as it was something new for most of them.

Reiner Doluschitz, UHOH

MODULE 4

I consider that the practical features of the module have to be developed even more in the future, more examples have to be presented to the students. During this year, the teaching class has been online, and the students have had complaints regarding the lack of direct communication with the lecturers, on the other side some students consider that online teaching allows them to follow more extensively the modules.

Fatmir Guri, UBT

What was the highlight of this distant teaching experience, and for this course in a new Master's degree in particular?

MODULE 1

The students' motivation and their high expectancies towards this study program.

Elena Kokthi, UBT

MODULE 2

The main point of this experience in online learning was the development of learning by creating dynamism and participation in debates of all students. I will also appreciate the cooperation of all partners whom work made possible the opening of this master.

Aldona Minga, UNKO

MODULE 3

Certainly, there would have been a different experience to handle the classes in presence for both sides, lecturers and students. Students' willingness and the pair of teachers to make the most of the module online was remarkable. Students' eagerness to benefit from the lectures and practices was very passionate and made the distance teaching not difficult at all.

Reiner Doluschitz, UHOH

MODULE 4

We saw that distant teaching can be a powerful tool to have the interaction of European colleagues, who can assist and participate in the module, without having a huge burden to find time availabilities. I consider that this has to be taken into consideration even in the future.

Fatmir Guri, UBT

VISIT OF HIS EXCELLENCY LUIGI SORECA, EU AMBASSADOR TO ALBANIA



The EU Ambassador to Albania, Mr Luigi Soreca, visited the Agricultural University of Tirana on April 1, 2021, in a view to meet the students of the first cohort of the new Master Executive.

He also reviewed the IT laboratory equipped within the framework of the SmartAL project, co-funded by the Erasmus+ Programme of the EU, which enables students to attend remote courses and work in groups in the best conditions.

The Ambassador was welcomed by par Prof. Dr. Fatbardh Sallaku, rector of the Agricultural University of Tirana (UBT), Prof. Dr. Remzi Keco, vice-rector of the UBT, Prof. Dr. Natasha Hodaj, responsible for the SmartAL project at the UBT, Prof. Assoc. Dr. Fatmir Guri, head of the Department of Economy and Rural Development Policies, UBT, and Ms. Magali Maire, Coordinator of the SmartAL project at the CIHEAM Montpellier who declared: "The SmartAL Master responds to the needs identified in the Albanian labor market on territorial management and enhances the employability of future graduates." H. E. Luigi Soreca stated: "I can see that funds are used for the best teaching. On my first visit to the UBT, I can say that you are a very good structure. I wish the students every success, and it seems to be the right place for it."

QUALITY ASSESSMENT OF THE SMARTAL MASTER

The Audit of the Executive Master in its capacity of being accredited was launched at the beginning of May 2021. The main objective of the assessment is to provide a detailed analysis of the teaching modules

developed in the framework of SmartAL project, in line with the Albanian national legislation and a detailed Report of evaluation and recommendations to enhance the quality of the study program, themselves being in line with the Bologna criteria. The external evaluation report should follow a clear and approved ENQA Methodology for external study program evaluation, and provide detailed and useful recommendations in order to improve the study program quality and prepare the latter for an external evaluation by the Albanian Higher Education accreditation authorities. This evaluation will be a key deliverable of the project and will enable the official implementation of the SmartAL Master to the benefit of the three Albanian universities: Agricultural University of Tirana, European University of Tirana, University Fan S. Noli of Korçë..

PROJECT MANAGEMENT Extension of the SmartAL project

After a request for amendment submitted in October 2020, the SmartAL project was officially extended by one year by the Erasmus+ Agency, until the 14 October 2021.

Organisation of Operational Committees & Scientific Committees

THE 6th OPERATIONAL COMMITTEE of the SmartAL project took place on 15 January 2021 and concerned the launching of the SmartAL Master.

Discussions were held on the preparation of courses, the modalities for teaching in pairs, the knowledge control process, the creation of a feedback datasheet to record "lessons learned" per module, as well as technical modalities for distant courses.



THE 7th OPERATIONAL COMMITTEE of the SmartAL project was organised on 12 February 2021.

Tahani Abdelhakim (CIHEAM Montpellier) and Elena Kokthi (UBT) gave the consortium their feedbacks on the teaching of Module 1 on "Institutions and actors in Territory". The knowledge assessment modalities were discussed as well.

A reminder of the communication requirements of this CBHE Erasmus+ course (deliverables/courses) was provided.

THE 8th OPERATIONAL COMMITTEE of the SmartAL project took place on 11 March 2021.

Reiner Doluschitz (UHOH), Eteva Dash (UBT) and Ota Sokoli (UHOH) gave their feedbacks on the teaching of Module 3 "Rural development policies". This presentation was followed by exchanges and discussions.

Decisions were taken on the evaluation of the students at the end of the first period, as well as the evaluation by the students of the theoretical and practical courses of the Master.

THE 6th SCIENTIFIC COMMITTEE of the project took place on 1 April 2021.

Magali Maire (CIHEAM Montpellier) informed the consortium of the visit to the UBT of the EU Ambassador, Luigi Soreca: an opportunity for the UBT team and the Coordinator to present the SmartAL project. A feedback on the course on "Economics of Natural resources and environment" was given by Aldona Minga, UNKO (module 2) as well as on the course on "Economics of Natural resources and environment" by Fatmir Guri, UBT.

The consortium took stock of the development and distribution of the questionnaire collecting the students' evaluation of courses for the four modules already taught.

Finally, Magali Maire informed the partners of the launching of the Call for pre-accreditation evaluation, scheduled in the WP6 Quality.

THE 9th OPERATIONAL COMMITTEE of the SmartAL project was organised on 6 May 2021

This Operational Committee was the occasion for Dorjan Marku,

UNKO, to give partners a feedback on the teaching of the module on “Instruments and policy evaluation methods” (module 8). Magali Maire (CIHEAM Montpellier) provided a Feedback on the students’ evaluations of the first 4 modules. Finally, the consortium was informed of the result of the call for the evaluation of the master in its capacity to be accredited (WP6 Quality).

THE 10th OPERATIONAL COMMITTEE of the SmartAL project gathered on 11 June 2021. Theodosia Anthopoulou (UPSPS), Sofia Nikolaidou (UPSPS) and Elias Beriatos (University of Thessaly) provided their feedback on the teaching of the module on “Instruments and policy evaluation methods (module 6). An update on the process of evaluation of the master in its capacity to be accredited was given by Magali Maire (CIHEAM Montpellier).

The 7th Scientific Committee met on 2 July 2021. Feedback of the course on “Data administration and geoinformatic tools” was provided by the teachers (Elvin Torromani, UBT, Yiannis Faraslis, University of Thessaly, Giorgios Petropoulos, Harokopio). The 8th Scientific Committee gathered on 7 September 2021. Its main objective was to discuss the different points of the Assessment Report for the future accreditation of the Master, in a view to answer the questions asked by the auditor.

NEXT EVENTS

- SmartAL Assessment Report
- SmartAL Final Workshop



SmartAL / MODULES OF THE EXECUTIVE MASTER IN TERRITORIAL PLANNING AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT OF RURAL AREAS

MODULE 1 INSTITUTIONS AND ACTORS IN TERRITORY

The module covers the institutions in the rural areas, the participatory process, the role of actors, leaders on the rural areas, the decision making process, the collaboration among different actors, etc.

MODULE 2 TERRITORY INNOVATION AND ACTIONS

The module is focused on the innovation process in the rural areas aiming to identify the actors that may support and disseminate the innovative projects in the rural areas, and instruments of smart specialisation of the rural areas. The course offers examples and instruments on how to implement innovative projects and to replicate them.

MODULE 3 RURAL DEVELOPMENT POLICIES

The module deals with the theoretical information of the sustainable rural development, an overview of the existing rural development policies in Albania, and in EU, their evolution and the critic analysis on their effects, as well as the possibility to replicate them on middle income countries such as Albania.

MODULE 4 ECONOMICS OF NATURAL RESOURCES AND ENVIRONMENT

The module covers the information on the economic evaluation of natural resources and environmental goods, the ecosystemic services in the rural area, the evaluation of the pollution and environmental public instruments to apply, waste and policy instruments to regulate the issue.

MODULE 5 EU TERRITORY AND COHESION POLICY

The module provides information on the existing EU territory policy and cohesion policy. The course deals with the philosophy of these policies as well as the practicalities of the application (eligibility, measures, application process, access to funds, administrative and financial issues etc.)

MODULE 6 TERRITORIAL ADMINISTRATION, PLANNING AND GOVERNANCE

The module provides information on theoretical issues of spatial economics and regional economics and the practical organisation of the territory administration as well as the existing policy instruments that are applied in local level.

MODULE 7 DATA ADMINISTRATION AND GEOINFORMATIC TOOLS

This module develops advanced knowledge and understanding of spatial planning and territorial governance, aimed towards administrative government bodies, local government authorities, and third sector businesses and organisations. It is focused on the sustainable use of territorial resources and the development of land use programmes and plans at different scales of intervention (national, regional, municipal and local) that shape the rural environment of the future by addressing multiple economic, environmental, social, physical, and institutional factors.

MODULE 8 INSTRUMENTS AND POLICY EVALUATION METHODS

The module focuses on the public policy instruments, the identification of the policy answer to the issues in the rural and peri-urban areas, and the evaluation methods of the instruments.

MODULE 9 LOCAL ECONOMICS MANAGEMENT AND RISKS (offered by UBT)

This module will serve the formation of students with theoretical and practical concepts of entrepreneurship and of local small business management. It equips them with the basic concepts, techniques and methods of starting a business or buying an existing business as well as growing that business in a global and competitive world.

MODULE 10 PROJECT DESIGN /PREPARATION AND EVALUATION

The module focuses on all the phases of the project, from the project idea to the design, implementation, evaluation etc. In each phase of the project, the course provides tools and instruments for the best choice selection.

MODULE 11 TERRITORY MARKETING (offered by UBT)

The module aims to provide knowledge and concepts of geographic information systems (GIS) and Earth Observation (EO). It is designed to provide an understanding of GIS & EO data acquisition and handling from theory to practice, demonstrating also the different types of geospatial data in solving practical problems in a range of thematic areas.

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