

## SHORT TERM SCIENTIFIC MISSION (STSM) FINAL SCIENTIFIC REPORT

**This report is submitted for approval by the STSM applicant to the STSM coordinator**

**Action number:** TN1302

**STSM title:** Sharing best practices on pre award activities and activities useful to develop and support the scientific career of researchers

**STSM start and end date:** 10/04/2017 to 12/04/2017

**Grantee name:** Zsuzsa Radnai

### PURPOSE OF THE STSM:

The aims of this Group STSM were the followings:

- to learn the best practices in EU research project management from experienced project and financial administrators at Politecnico di Milano;
- to learn about pre award activities and Research Offices optimal organization;
- to share best practices regarding useful activities to develop and support the scientific career of researchers;
- to receive knowledge on EU research support and project management;
- to learn about general operation of the Politecnico di Milano's Research Office and to receive an insight in the internal procedures, tools and services offered for their researchers;
- to meet and and learn from various professionals from different departments, institutions involved in project management.

### DESCRIPTION OF WORK CARRIED OUT DURING THE STSMS

The work programme:

#### Day 1

The first day was mainly for introducing the host institution and the participants. Thus, Politecnico di Milano (PoliMi) introduced the structure of the university and its research related services. These institutes – such as Research Office, Fondazione Politecnico di Milano (Foundation of Politecnico di Milano) – support the university's research projects at national and international level. It was very interesting to get familiar with the administrative background and project management structure of an Italian university, the collaboration of the institutes and departments within the university and how the project life process looks like in PoliMi.

The colleagues of the Research Office introduced the composition, branches, competencies of their work. Our hosts also presented Departments, Labs and Areas and Top scientists selection. Then the participants introduced the sending institutions, namely the Technical University of Madrid (ES), the Univeristy of Belgrade (SRB) and HÉTFA Research Institute (HU).

After introduction part, we discussed about the phases of project management activities and stages of strategic process. PoliMi put a strong emphasis on the pre-pre award phase when there is no project idea or funding opportunity yet. Since my organization also deals with this phase however it has not such a well-defined strategy for it, this part was particularly useful and interesting for me.

## **Day 2**

We learned the best practices on pre award activities and Research Offices optimal organization, especially in the following issues:

- How to organize the support for collaborative projects,
- How to organize the support for individual grants,
- How to select researchers for individual grants,
- How to advice researches to build their CV,
- How to combine pre- and post-award.

We talked a lot about the opportunities of researchers provided by the Research Office of PoliMi, such as ERC and MSCA helpdesks or trainings, especially aiming at developing such soft skills as e.g. how to write and present a competitive CV, how to write a good abstract, etc.

In the afternoon we had the opportunity to meet administrative staff of the DEIB – Department of Electronics, Information and Bioengineering. They introduced their work related to post award project management and presented a useful internal timesheet tool for teachers.

## **Day 3:**

The third day was about sharing best practices related to scouting useful activities to develop and support the scientific career of researchers. In this framework, we participated in an internal workshop for researchers and administrative staff about the practical use and possibilities of Research Professional funding opportunities database (<http://info.researchprofessional.com/>). After that, we met the Principal Investigator of an ERC project. We had a very interesting discussion about the proposal writing and evaluation process of PI.

During the closing meeting of the Group STSM we discussed with the colleagues of the Research Office about possible joint projects and methodology for optimizing the support in a grant office.

## **DESCRIPTION OF THE MAIN RESULTS OBTAINED**

### **New approaches and methodologies:**

In contrast to other European universities, PoliMi recognized early that the future is research and recognized the significance of investment in research activities. Therefore, it collaborates with companies and different sectors of industry which finance research activities. PoliMi has a well-defined strategy with realistic long-term vision related to research activities and internationalization. One of the main results of this visit for me was to get to know a model, a good example to be followed in the field of project management. The Research Office of PoliMi is well-organized, and characterized by efficient and fast working methods as well as marketing-oriented approach. It developed innovative activities, such as prep-pre award and career development as well as interdisciplinary labs. Consequently, I learned a lot about efficient task sharing, organizational culture and communication methods which can be implemented within my organization.

### **New opportunities to support researchers:**

As I work for a research institute, it was very useful to receive an insight in the internal procedures and services offered by Politecnico di Milano for their scientists: how they can find and offer relevant programmes for the scientists, how they help the researcher to obtain scholarships or participate in international consortiums.

PoliMi invests a lot in trainings and other opportunities to support researchers, such as presence at research platforms and networking events. PoliMi provides numerous trainings held by external experts to develop researchers' soft skills and competences. Moreover, it operates helpdesks dedicated e.g. to ERC and MSCA. Beside organizing trainings, ERC helpdesk offers tutorship,

organizes and participates in international networking events and deals with pre award activities, e.g. promotion of ERC. In order to find contacts, possible partnership opportunities for the researchers, PoliMi uses several platforms, for instance, an IT tool called SCIVAL. During the STSM this system was presented and explained its use for scouting, different promotion activities and encouraging researchers to participate in consortiums. Although my institution has no financial and human capacity to implement these tools at this moment, they can be useful in the long run.

**Know-how and best practices regarding project management and Horizon2020:**

Through presentations and discussions about ERC I also learned some practical information and tips which can be useful at my proposal writing and project management tasks.

I acquired new knowledge about the phases of project management, especially regarding pre-pre-award and pre-award activities. I became familiar with different European networks for research managers (e.g. Vision2020, ScienceBusiness, EUA, EARMA, etc.) and platforms for researchers (SCIVAL and PIVOT) in order to collaborate and find funding opportunities within and beyond Europe.

**Wider picture on European universities' project administration and project management:**

Thanks to this visit I could broaden my knowledge about the organizational structure, internal processes, working methods related to project management, administrative, legal and financial situation of European universities.

Since my organization is not a university but an SME, sometimes it was difficult to compare my institution with the universities because of the huge differences in size and capacities. Nevertheless, as my institute work with universities, moreover, project managers face similar difficulties in every country in every sector (e.g. huge administrative burdens, bureaucracy, challenges in activation and communication with researchers) I could learn a lot from the best practices and solutions provided by both the host organization and the participant organizations.

I found the main difference between PoliMi Research Office and HÉTFA Research Institute related to project management in the following issue: As HÉTFA International Office has only 4 employees, while 13 persons work in PoliMi Research Office, the task sharing is totally different. This means that in PoliMi the responsibilities and tasks are shared by project stages, everyone is focused only one specified stage of the whole proposal and project management process. Meanwhile, in HÉTFA everyone deals with the whole process from the pre award phase to the implementation phase and we share responsibilities by projects.

It was very interesting for me that all participant institutions face the same challenge regardless their size, namely the lack of collaborations between researchers and professors from different departments and the lack of respect of the administrative staff. Therefore, one of the main conclusions of the visit was that each institution faces challenges, thus sharing the best practices in the following fields like *promotion of multidisciplinary and inter-departmental projects; making researchers aware that administrative staff works for them*, is important and useful.

**Networking:**

The visit provided an important opportunity for networking and getting in touch with colleagues from different countries dealing with similar activities. As Politecnico di Milano is engaged in a wide range of research topics in the field of social sciences where HÉTFA Research Institute has also gained extensive experience, this visit could serve as a basis for a long-term cooperation between the two institutes, for instance under the Horizon2020. HÉTFA is satisfied to have the opportunity to build relationship with these three participant universities, which have wide range of network.

### **FUTURE COLLABORATIONS**

During the STSM we have already had ideas how can we continue and deep our cooperation with possible joint projects under Horizon2020, Interreg and Erasmus+ programmes. So I would like to confirm that HÉTFA is open for future joint projects. Since HÉTFA is not a university, it can provide a different approach in a possible future collaboration. As a project manager, I will seek the opportunities to cooperate and form a partnership with the participant institutes of this STSM. In case we have any relevant project idea I will contact the other institutes to develop a joint proposal.