

BACKGROUND

The GeoRegNet network was established in 2006 by four universities: the University of Maribor (SI), the Palacký University in Olomouc (CZ), the University of Prešov (SK) and the University of Zagreb (CRO). The idea to create this network was born from a long and successful cooperation among the universities in the area of Geography and Regional Development. This is reflected also in the network's name (GEO = Geography, REG = regional, NET= network). Based on the established common interest for the need of a qualitative and sustainable regional development, the partners decided to establish a network of experts in the aforementioned field, in order to create favourable possibilities for research and studies for both students and academic staff from the Central European region. Over the years, the network has grown and currently consists of 19 partner universities representing 12 countries from Central Europe and the Balkans. Besides the 4 founding partners, the other partner universities are: Karl-Franzens University in Graz (AU), University of Zadar (CRO), University of Pecs (HU), Jagiellonian University in Krakow (PL), Charles University in Prague (CZ), University of Ljubljana (SI), University of Primorska (SI), University of Novi Sad (SRB), University of Oradea (RO), University of Sarajevo (BIH), University of Mostar (BIH), Ss Cyril and Methodius University of Skopje (MK), Mendel University in Brno (CZ), Constantine the Philosopher University in Nitra (SK), and University of Prishtina. Since 2019/2020, the network is coordinated by Mendel University in Brno. Previously, the network coordinator was the University of Maribor.

One of the network's biggest achievements is the establishment of annual GeoRegNet summer schools, which take place at a different partner university normally every summer since 2008. These summer schools are an excellent opportunity for students and teachers of partner universities to meet and discuss current issues and developments in the different fields of Geography and Regional Development. Four network partners are also involved in the preparation of the Joint PhD programme *Regional Studies and Identity of Central Europe*, which will be launched in the near future.

PARTNER INSTITUTIONS

Mendel University in Brno is the oldest independent specialized university in the Czech Republic, established in 1919 as the University of Agriculture. In 2010, the University took on the name Mendel University, and in 2011, the establishment of an independent university institute CEITEC MENDELU within the Faculty of Agronomy incorporated the University into an international scientific centre of excellence, the Central European Institute of Technology. At the end of 2012, the University received the prestigious certificates ETCS Label and Diploma Supplement Label from the European Commission.

The University of Maribor is the second largest Slovene university with 17 faculties and around 15,000 students. The university co-operates with various higher education institutions and academic associations throughout the world in numerous research fields. It is also active in various networks, such as regional and European Rectors Conferences, and in multilateral programs of co-operation. The Faculty of Arts has 12 departments covering the fields of arts and the humanities, social sciences and teacher education. The Department of Geography at the Faculty of Arts celebrated its 50th anniversary in 2011 and received the highest award of the Slovene Geography Association in 2013.

The University of Zagreb is among the oldest and the biggest in South-Eastern Europe, with over 70,000 students. It consists of 29 faculties and three art academies. The Faculty of Science at the University of Zagreb is the best place for acquiring knowledge in natural sciences in Croatia. Around

200 professors, about 720 employees and around 5000 students at the faculty, as well as 10 per cent of Croatia's total scientific contribution, assure high standards for young people's education, imposed by the accelerated technological and scientific development of the global society. Its first chair of Geography was founded already in 1883, however, the Department of Geography was formed in 1946.

Palacký University in Olomouc is the second oldest in the Czech Republic. Its beginnings are connected with the Jesuit University, established in 1573, which became a state university in 1773. In 1946, the Palacký University was restored and in 1953, the Faculty of Science was established. Nowadays, the university has eight faculties with over 21,000 students. The Faculty of Science offers the following study programmes: Mathematics, Informatics, Physics, Chemistry, Biology, Geography, Geology and Ecology.

The University of Prešov was established in 1997 and is the third biggest in Slovakia, however, the individual faculties have a much longer tradition. The university consists of eight faculties: Faculty of Arts, Faculty of Humanities and Natural Sciences, Faculty of Education, Faculty of Management, Faculty of Sports, Faculty of Orthodox Theology, Greek-Catholic Theological Faculty and Faculty of Health Care. The university has around 10,000 students. The Department of Geography and Regional Development at the Faculty of Humanities and Natural Sciences has in more than 60 years of its existence become one of the best geographical institutions in Slovakia. It focuses on development of geospatial analytical visualization technologies.

Despite its apparent youth, the **University of Zadar** is a well-established university with a long tradition of academic excellence. Its mission is to contribute to society as a provider of high quality teaching and excellence in research. Today, the University consists of 25 departments and four research centres. Zadar is not only an ancient town with three thousand years of history and rich cultural heritage, archaeological findings, architecture and monuments dating from the classical, medieval and Renaissance periods, but also one of the oldest Croatian university towns (1398). With its rich libraries and archives, it offers an exceptional learning environment to its students.

For over 400 years, the **Karl-Franzens University of Graz** has had an important influence on the lively character and image of the Styrian capital. It is the second oldest and one of the largest universities in Austria, with over 32,000 students, 6 faculties and 76 institutes. Many famous academics worked and made revolutionary discoveries there, among them 6 Nobel laureates. The main principles at the university are interdisciplinarity and internationality.

The University of Pécs with its ten faculties and over 20,000 students is one of the largest higher education institutions in Hungary. The modern University of Pécs, founded on January 1, 2000 through the merging of the Janus Pannonius University, the Medical University of Pécs and the Illyés Gyula Teacher Training College of Szekszárd, is committed to endorsing and popularizing the idea of lifelong education. The credit system was first introduced in Hungary at the University of Pécs, which has resulted in an increasing number of Hungarian students participating in international study programmes as an integral part of their education, and likewise, an increasing number of international students and researchers come to the University of Pécs to study and conduct research every year. Therefore, the University continuously works on expanding and improving its co-operation with other universities and international research institutions and is already part of a large network at different levels.

The University of Primorska is a young university and the third largest in Slovenia. The first efforts to found the University of Primorska were made almost one hundred years ago; however, the first concrete steps towards the establishment of a new Slovene university were taken after the country

had become independent. The university was officially established in 2003. Today, it consists of 7 faculties and two research institutes.

The University of Ljubljana is the oldest and the biggest Slovene university, established in 1919. Nowadays, it has 23 faculties and 3 academies with over 56,000 students. The University is famous for the quality of its study courses, both in the humanities and in scientific and technological fields, as well as in medicine, dentistry and veterinary science. The Department of Geography is part of the Faculty of Arts and is the oldest and the biggest in Slovenia. It was established in 1919 and has over 500 students. It offers Bachelor, Master and PhD programmes in the field of Geography. The Department also houses the largest geographical library in Slovenia, which includes a cartographic collection. Its physical geography laboratory and the cartography and geo-informatics laboratory (GIKL) enable students to gain practical knowledge and skills that help them use modern tools and procedures. In the spirit of international cooperation, the Department is always pleased to welcome foreign lecturers and encourage their own professors and assistants to test their expertise in foreign universities or at international conferences.

Charles University in Prague, founded in 1348, is one of the oldest universities in the world and nowadays belongs to the most eminent educational and scientific establishments inside and outside the Czech Republic. It consists of 17 faculties, 3 collegiate institutes, 6 additional establishments for educational, scientific, research and developmental activities. There are over 51,000 students and 7,500 employees. The University is dedicated to international cooperation with prestigious educational and scientific establishments. The Geographical Institute, which is part of the Faculty of Science, has been ranked among the top 100 universities worldwide in the subject of Geography according to QS World University Rankings by Subject. The institute consists of four departments including Dept. of Social Geography and Regional Development, Dept. of Physical Geography and Geoecology, Dept. of Applied Geoinformatics and Cartography, and Dept. of Demography and Geodemography.

The University of Novi Sad was founded in 1960. Today, it comprises 14 faculties located in the four major towns of the Autonomous Province of Vojvodina: Novi Sad, Subotica, Zrenjanin, and Sombor. The University of Novi Sad is the second largest among six state universities in Serbia. Having invested considerable efforts in intensifying international cooperation and participating in the process of university reforms in Europe, the University of Novi Sad has come to be recognized as a reform-oriented university in the region and on the map of universities in Europe.

Jagiellonian University in Krakow with its 650 years of tradition is the oldest university in Poland and the second oldest university in Central Europe, after the Charles University in Prague. It has 15 faculties and almost 50,000 students. The study of Geography is offered at the Institute of Geography and Spatial Management at the Faculty of Biology and Earth Sciences. The Geography studies at the Jagiellonian University offer specializations in the fields of Physical and Human Geography with the emphasis on the connection between Geography and other disciplines and the practical applications of geographical knowledge.

The University of Sarajevo is the oldest and the largest university in Bosnia, which was originally established in 1531. Nowadays, it has 22 faculties, 3 academies and 5 research institutes. The Department of Geography at the University of Sarajevo was founded in 1950 and is considered to be the most eminent institution of higher education in Bosnia and Herzegovina in the field of Geographical Science. It offers Bachelor, Master and PhD Geography study programmes.

The roots of the **University of Mostar** go back to 1895, however, the university as such was established in 1977. Nowadays, it has 10 faculties and one academy and approx. 16,000 students. The Department

of Geography at the University of Mostar offers undergraduate and graduate study programmes in Geography as well as a PhD study of Spatial Planning.

The University of Oradea has 15 faculties with over 35,000 students. It was established in 1990 as a Technical University, which later came to be called the University of Oradea. The mission of the University of Oradea is to train and educate on a large scale both the students and also the high education graduates, as well as to approach certain domains of science and technology at high level.

Ss Cyril and Methodius University of Skopje is the largest university in Macedonia. Nowadays, it has 23 faculties, 10 research institutes and approx. 50,000 students. The University's Institute of Geography is among the oldest higher education institutions in Macedonia, its beginnings dating to 1922. It is proud of its over 80 years of experience, high academic potential, and excellent spatial and technical equipment.

Constantine the Philosopher University in Nitra is the fourth largest university in Slovakia, with five faculties and approx. 10,000 students. The Department of Ecology and Environmental Science at the Faculty of Natural Sciences is an interdisciplinary scientific and education workplace, which contributes to environmental education by development and application of new methods in the fields of Ecology and Environmental Sciences in several forms of study.

The University of Prishtina is a young university established in the 1960s. The Department of Geography is part of the Faculty of Mathematical and Natural Sciences, and as one of the founders of the University of Prishtina has over 50 years of experience. The academic staff, especially young scholars are equipped with the necessary skills in foreign languages and are ready to work in the multicultural environment with students from different countries.

PARTNER COOPERATION

The GEOREGNET partner institutions have a long lasting cooperation in different fields also outside the CEEPUS programme. The University of Maribor and the Universities of Zagreb, Zadar, Graz, Prague, Krakow, Sarajevo, Mostar and Novi Sad have signed partnership agreements regulating mutual recognition among other things. The EU universities participating in the network also have bilateral Erasmus+ agreements, which enable student and teacher exchange through the Erasmus +programme. With the new Erasmus+ programme being launched, some Erasmus agreements have already been signed also with non-EU countries. The universities involved in the network also cooperate in bilateral research projects. The network partners also cooperate in joint international research projects and regularly prepare joint project applications.

NETWORK ACTIVITIES

Besides regular network activities, such as exchange of students and teaching staff in the field of Geography and Regional Development on BA, MA and PhD levels, the network also organizes annual summers schools that take place each time at a different partner institution and in which students and teachers from partner universities take part. There have been eight summer schools organized so far (in Maribor, Olomouc, Zagreb, Prešov, Krakow, Novi Sad, Graz and Brno). In 2018/2019 the 9th summer school will take place at the University of Ljubljana, and in 2020, the GEOREGNET summer school will take place at the University of Zadar. Occasionally, the partners also organize short-term excursions to other partner universities for their students.

JOINT PhD PROGRAMME

One of the main objectives of the network activities is the development of the Joint PhD Programme entitled Regional Studies and Identity of Central Europe, the coordination of which was taken over by Mendel University in Brno in 2017/2018. The concept of the Joint programme is in line with the criteria of the Bologna Declaration and will provide a comparable content with ECTS system and assure mutual recognition of achieved results between the institutions. For the purpose of joint research, student mobility will be promoted on the post-graduate level, where, besides the academic activities, the students will participate in the research cooperation among the partners while preparing their PhD thesis. The creation of the module with ECTS and the establishing of the quality assurance measures as well as the raising of mobility among students are in accordance with the goals set by the Bologna Follow-up declarations from Prague, Berlin and Berge. Regional development is one of the key factors for the European cohesion.

SUSTAINABILITY

The sustainability of the network activities is assured by the establishment of the joint PhD programme. In the scope of the PhD programme, the mobility of students and teachers will be managed within the CEEPUS programme, and additionally, where possible, from the EU mobility programme Erasmus. The partners will seek additional means for the research activities from bilateral institutional and national as well as regional and EU sources (Framework Programmes). The PhD programme will be open for the global audience of students, with an emphasis on Central Europe as the main pool of knowledge and transfer of knowledge. Thus, the main objectives will be regional cohesion in the European Research and University Area, cross-border cooperation with an emphasis on mutual tolerance and openness, trust building among the neighbouring countries in CEE and SEE by qualitative projects guaranteeing mutual recognition of study achievement based on the mobility of academic staff and students, as well as research mobility and mutual knowledge transfer.