



Horizon Europe (MSCA-SE)

Progress Report

Project¹Number: [101086415]

Project Acronym: [CARSI]

Project title: [CaucasusandCentralAsiaResearch Social Innovation: Development Assistance,InnovationandSocietal Transformation]

Period covered by the report:from[01/03/2023] to [28/02/2024]

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¹ The term 'project' used in this template equates to an 'action' in certain other Horizon 2020 documentation



Table of contents

0. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY.....	2
1. MILESTONES, DELIVERABLES AND CRITICAL RISKS.....	2
2. OVERVIEW OF THE PROGRESS AND ACTIVITIES.....	4
2.1.1 WORK PACKAGE 2: RESEARCH	5
2.1.2 WORK PACKAGE 3: TRAINING	6
2.1.3 WORK PACKAGE 4: DISSEMINATION AND FOLLOW-UP	7
2.1.4 IMPACT	7
2.1.5 UPDATE OF THE DATA MANAGEMENT PLAN (IF APPLICABLE).....	8
2.1.6 FOLLOW-UP OF RECOMMENDATIONS AND COMMENTS FROM PREVIOUS REVIEW(S) (IF APPLICABLE).....	8
2.1.7 DEVIATIONS FROM ANNEX 1 AND ANNEX 2 (IF APPLICABLE).....	9
ANNEXES.....	10

0. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Development assistance to the Caucasus and Central Asian regions has grown significantly. However, instructions on how to maximise these inputs are still missing. CARSI is a training and research programme bringing together 16 leading institutions across two continents with a major focus on the Caucasus and Central Asia to train fellows through secondment and eventually produce new empirical evidence on the region. This has resulted, so far, into:

Academic deliverables (articles, chapters, dissertations)

Deliverables for specialised public (business forums, policy presentations, social media)

Activities targeting wider audiences (magazines, blogs, interviews, MSCA ambassador)

Launching of the website <https://www.carsi-se.eu/>

Coordination to join major ~~conferences as a panel~~ (i.e. ESCAS 2022, 2023)

Live report form (to be filled by each fellow as they have a new deliverable)

The team has remained in touch online since the beginning of the project but has also met already several times in person:

- 1) Kick-off meeting in Istanbul, September 2023, where most of the participants joined in person for a first session
- 2) ESCAS regional conference in Almaty, September 2023, where some of the participants contributed a panel and the main coordinator (Prof Polese) participated also as president of ESCAS (European Society for Central Asian Studies)

3) CESS regional conference in Almaty, June 2024, where some of the participants contributed a panel

More events are planned:

Workshop: Unorthodox Approaches to Eurasian Studies 11-13 October 2024,

International Conference: «Geopolitics, Migrations and Identities in Central Eurasia», January 8 to January 10, 2025 ESCAS and CESS supported conference, Lisbon, 8-10 January 2025 <http://www.escas.org/2024/06/2025-joint-escas-cess-supported-conference/>

ESCAS regional conference: “Moving Central Asian Studies ever further: Orthodox vs Unorthodox approaches” 5-8 June 2025: Tashkent and Samarkand (Uzbekistan)

1. MILESTONES, DELIVERABLES AND CRITICAL RISKS

- Explain the work carried out during the reporting period in line with the Annex 1 to the Grant Agreement.
- Include an overview of the project results towards the objective of the action in line with the structure of the Annex 1 to the Grant Agreement including summary of deliverables and milestones, and a summary of exploitable results and an explanation about how they can/will be exploited .

(No page limit per workpackage but report shall be concise and readable. Any duplication should be avoided).

Development assistance to the Caucasus and Central Asian regions has grown significantly. Not only do these regions attract international attention for some of the largest world reservoirs of natural resources, but they are also considered fertile markets for their proximity and links to Europe. What possibly distinguishes the EU’s approach from others (i.e. China, India, US) is its interest not only in technical innovation and local market shares but also the regions’ social and human development. This is a major tendency with the EC that has been addressed already as early as 2014, when development strategies started emphasising the importance of taking into account social impacts in its overall development approach. In spite of this declarative intentions by local governments, but even by EU agencies, to introduce social innovation in development and assistance have not been followed through by clear and precise instructions on how to do this. This is visible both at the international and local levels and may be due to: 1) the fact that although a framework for EU-Caucasus-Central Asia relations has significantly advanced, production of specialists and intelligence regarding the regions has not followed accordingly; 2) only a limited amount of intelligence on the region is available.

As a response, CARSI is a training and research programme bringing together 16 leading institutions across two continents with a major focus on the Caucasus and Central Asia to train fellows through secondment and eventually produce new empirical evidence on the region. By processing first-hand data and thus identifying the gap between declarative approaches and reality with regards to social innovation CARSI teams will define new

relationships between global social innovation approaches and social theory while working to translate research findings into policy recommendations. This has resulted, so far, into:

Academic deliverables (articles, chapters, dissertations)

Deliverables for specialised public (business forums, policy presentations, social media)

Activities targeting wider audiences (magazines, blogs, interviews, MSCA ambassador)

Launching of the website <https://www.carsi-se.eu/>

Technically, this has been made possible thanks to setting up project structures, namely:

List of deliverables shared with each seconded fellow (static report form)

List of activities to be filled by each fellow (monitoring)

Coordination to join major conferences as a panel (i.e. ESCAS 2022, 2023)

Live report form (to be filled by each fellow as they have a new deliverable)

Also, fellows secondments have been managed with the help of

Financial form

Report form with deliverables shared before secondment as a guiding document

Post-secondment briefing and follow-up

Pre-departure contract

Half stay contract

Instrument of delivery

Report form: seminar, workshop, article, testimonial requested from each secondment

The team has remained in touch online since the beginning of the project but has also met already several times in person:

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More events are planned:

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2. OVERVIEW OF THE PROGRESS AND ACTIVITIES

List the specific objectives for the project as described in section 1.1 of the DoA and described the work carried out during the reporting period towards the achievement of each listed objective. Provide clear and measurable details.

- 1) A comprehensive training component allowing participants to gain a specialisation in a new field, sector and discipline(s); this came in the form of individual (learn-by-doing) training in the course of secondments as well as sessions at domestic and international events like the ones mentioned in section 1
- 2) Explore the nexus between potentially theory and practice of social innovation from a two-fold perspective. This has happened through a coordinated effort by participants for data collection during their secondments and production of academic articles and pieces for the general public

Management of the project was enabled programme coordination and on-time and quality deliverables. The PC worked to creation and coordination of management structures while ensuring day-to-day management and communication with partners and the EC. Input from partners was coordinated for preparation of reports and measurements of project progress.

Main tasks for this WP were: 1) Day-to-day Management; 2) Relationship with the European Commission; 3) Setting-up of project structures; 4) Ethics review; 4) Review progress against deliverables and milestones.

The research and development office of the coordinator, DCU, has put at disposal of the

project a vast experience in managing EU-funded projects (e.g. FP7, H2020, Erasmus+). Financial administration has been provided by DCU's Office of Research Support Services, Human Resources and Finance Offices. DCU has asked each partner to designate Contact Person (CP) as part of the Management Board (MB) that will then liaise with their respective scientific and administrative representative. At the first meeting, the MB has been formalised and MSCA rules have been explained and project procedures agreed upon. Rules for secondment, eligibility, reporting have been illustrated to all the project partners, a timeline for the project, including the expected deliverables. Conflict resolution structures have also been explained but the project has recorded no disagreement between the teams so far. Ethics clearance has been obtained both during the negotiation phase, when the research plan was checked by DCU ethics committee and during the first phase of the project, when an opinion has been made available so to ensure that research approaches are fully in line with national guidelines for ethics. Communication has been regular between Contact Persons, the Project Coordinator and the administrative team. Until summer 2022, this has happened in the form of email communication until an in-person meeting has been allowed. Also, thanks to the high number of secondments involved and that some of the main researchers from the project have been seconded so to establish and develop contacts. Reporting has been initiated by the Coordinator who has created a report form that needs to be submitted by each fellow at the end of every secondment. Thanks to the form, all activities happening during the secondment have been kept track of and recorded easily. Before every reporting period the coordinator has organised another check asking each MB member to submit any additional information on activities carried out by their staff in each partner country. Monitoring of the project has been carried out thanks to the report forms. Before each secondment, fellows are provided with a checklist and a report form where the main obligations per fellow per secondment are listed. This provides a guidance document (especially for fellows who are less familiar with MSCA actions) illustrating the main tasks that are expected during secondment and upon return (a seminar/workshop to share the experience with the sending team). Evaluations of the overall goals of the project have been conducted at network events to which all partners are present and where each contact person can share their experience as sending and hosting partner.

2.1.1 WORK PACKAGE 2: RESEARCH

Research tasks completed involved agreement on agree on methodological choices, research and workplan; coordination of surveys and use of the results to prepare reports and scientific publications. Main tasks of the work package are: 1) Institutional analysis, study of the context and review of main theories; 2) Ethics review, ethical clearance; 3) Data collection, processing and interpretation; 4) Coordinate scientific production. Institutional analysis has been partly completed during secondments. In other cases fellows have been trained to conduct such kind of analysis and will be collaborating with incoming researchers. During their secondment, fellows have been introduced to relevant theoretical debates and the limitations of existing empirical work and exposed to the main research methodologies used for measuring CARSI economies across the world. Thanks

to this, fellows have gained a solid understanding of the context and cultural embeddedness within which they will need to ground their research.

2.1.2 WORK PACKAGE 3: TRAINING

Training was mostly centred around secondment of non-academic fellows to academic institutions. Thanks to their stay at academic institutions in the region and in the EU, they were enabled to develop a deep understanding of the region, context and specificities. In addition, thanks to the presence of non-academic partners, the network could enable training in complementary skills (project management, presentation and communication skills, public engagement, policy analysis, public speaking) so to equip them wider perspective on the use of research skills for theoretical and practical tasks, with emphasis on ethics and gender perspective. By doing this, the network was able to create and foster a learn-by-doing approach with significant experience in non academic sectors

Tasks of this Work Package were: 1) agree on a general approach for the training path of seconded fellows; 2) hold training events; agree and manage learning paths during secondments; 3) Coordinate the preparation of deliverables

A total of 350 months have been put at the centre of this project. Each secondment is composed of general activities that all fellows should perform while leaving them a large amount of room for a tailored development that is decided case-by-case by the fellow along with the host organisation. The core requirements of each secondment are a seminar presenting the visiting fellow's research activities and interests a hands-on workshop during which the fellow shares a particular practical skill with the host integrate into seminars and activities organised by the host; make contacts with other researchers and institutions publish academic and non academic studies

The quantity of activities are adjusted to the duration of the secondment. In principle, all fellows are supposed to stay for 5-6 months but some have remained as long as 12 months and others, for time limitation issues, have only been able to stay for a month or a bit more. Accordingly, the workload and expected deliverables has been adjusted case-by- case. Transfer of knowledge is intended to continue after the secondments through seminars in the sending institution; a practical workshop sharing skills acquired during secondment; exploring possible collaborations among researchers from the host and sending institutions. Transfer of knowledge also rotates around the network events that have offered a) opportunity to meet and discuss progress of the project, both in terms of scientific quality and measurement against initial objectives) and b) share project progress and achievements with a large (academic and non-academic) community. The workshops and network events have been a major milestone towards the preparation of written production.

2.1.3 WORK PACKAGE 4: DISSEMINATION AND FOLLOW-UP

The team met to design a comprehensive strategy to communicate results to multiple audiences (scientific, specialised, general public) and maximise the channels of

communication used to reach a variety of audiences. This meant to reach out to scientific and specialised audiences but also to engage with the general public.

Tasks within this work package were: 1) Dissemination plan with details on where to disseminate and how to reach various communities; 2) website and social media accounts; 3) Coordinate production of academic high-level outputs and participation in academic conferences; 4) Follow-up Working Group conceiving, discussing and preparing follow-up actions and projects; 5) coordinate preparation of follow-up projects and joint doctorates beyond this project.

Dissemination has been composed of: academic articles published by the fellows alone or jointly; scientific chapters for edited books or for the books produced by the project (or in preparation), blog posts, media interviews or podcasts, presentation at academic conferences (including organisation of panels).

Gender aspects have been taken into account from the very project design phase. The network had committed to second no around 50% of female researchers and keep gender disaggregated statistics.

2.1.4 IMPACT

Include in this section whether the information on section 2.1 of the DoA (how your project will contribute to the expected impacts) is still relevant or needs to be updated. Include further details in the latter case.

By fostering exchanges between academic and non-academic partners, both from the EU and the Central Asian region, CARS has been offering an opportunity to the seconded fellows involved as well as their teams to advance their core research skills, acquire complementary expertise and boost their career prospects. In particular, the proposed action is helping academic fellows undergo a work experience in the non-academic sector where they will have the opportunity to focus on practical and applied aspects of research while giving an opportunity to non-academic fellows to systematise their knowledge and expertise by concentrating on the academic aspects of their research.

Overall, this has resulted in an enhancement of the professional development of fellows, their respective teams and the consortium as a whole by building their training and research capacity, by broadening their view of the job market, and by giving them access to a wide network that will allow them to develop ambitious projects. The project has also been working of lasting international multi-disciplinary and multi-sectorial collaborations tested during tested during this action with the intention of making them sustainable well beyond the lifespan of this project. This has been happening through secondments contributing to research and training activities as well as network activities, enabling representatives of all partners to meet in both formal and informal settings to identify possible areas of collaborations.

Self-sustainability of the partnership has already been explored and is based on the foundation of a lasting collaboration between network partners, both individually and as consortium, which is not dependent on any one funding stream for sustainability. The partnership will create the conditions to produce new knowledge and policy expertise on the politics of precariousness in the context of the region.

By offering a detailed understanding of post-covid realities, the project is currently

addressing the scarcity of insider views on these environments. A key aim of the project is to promote interaction between policy and academia which is very underdeveloped in this context, despite growing EU interests in the region. The innovative potential of this proposal has been laying in offering a broader vision on the politics of informality that brings together perspectives from academia, the business environment and NAP.

From a professional development perspective, thanks to intersectoral, international and interdisciplinary activities, CARSI fellows have been developing first-hand research experiences in different geographical and institutional contexts. The project is thus contributing to an enhanced understanding of researchers' role in their ability to professionally engage with colleagues at different career stages and new research teams, work effectively in policy and business environments and communicate with the public, as well as making sustainable scientific interactions between Europe and the rest of the world.

Fellows have been encouraged and supported to present at major conferences as speakers or to pull together a section or a panel at Central Asian specialised conferences in the EU and in the region.

Because it is the first year of the project, results are still in the making and production of articles is still at an embrional stage but will soon progress to the level expected.

2.1.5 UPDATE OF THE DATA MANAGEMENT PLAN (IF APPLICABLE)

Include in this section whether the data management plan as described in the DoA needs to be updated and give details.

No major data produced has been produced but the coordinator has informed fellows on open science requirements and held a session on open science, in addition to share a few articles and blog posts about open science practices. Such as Open access at no cost? Just ditch academic journals <https://researchwhisperer.org/2021/06/22/open-access-at-no-cost/>
The next network meeting will see the delivery of a session on open science and a clear explanation of the project's commitment to open access (including the use of Openaire, F1000, academia.edu, university repositories)

2.1.6 FOLLOW-UP OF RECOMMENDATIONS AND COMMENTS FROM PREVIOUS REVIEW(S) (IF APPLICABLE)

Non applicable

2.1.7 DEVIATIONS FROM ANNEX 1 AND ANNEX 2 (IF APPLICABLE)

Explain the reasons for deviations from the DoA, the consequences and the proposed corrective actions.

The main issue that some participants have had to face were visa delays and bureaucracy. Several times already, the visa procedure has lasted much longer than expected and has delayed the arrival of a fellow to Europe. In some cases, visa extension has not been possible and the fellow has remained a shorter period than expected. This has obviously resulted in the change in some duration of secondments and uneven allocation of months

compared to the original plan. This is likely to affect the project also in the next months.

ANNEXES

LIST OF ANNEXES

n/a