



Tropentag, September 18-20, 2019, Kassel

“Filling gaps and removing traps
for sustainable resource management”

TOPAS – From Theoretical-Oriented to Practical Education in Agrarian Studies in Eastern Europe and Central Asia

RALF SCHLAUDERER, HENRY MATTHEWS

Weihenstephan-Triesdorf University of Applied Sciences, Fac. of Agriculture, Food, and Nutrition, Germany

Abstract

Armenia, Ukraine and Uzbekistan share a common historical background and face similar challenges in the transformation of their agricultural sectors since the countries' independence in the 90s. The underlying social, economic and political changes had simultaneously impacts on the entire higher education system, which has to cope with significantly altered demands of employment markets on the competence profiles of their graduates.

Higher Education Institutes from Germany, the United Kingdom, Poland and Romania cooperate with partner universities in the mentioned non-EU countries in adapting agrarian studies. The ERASMUS+ funded project TOPAS aims at filling the gap between the theoretical, formal higher education in agricultural sciences and practical training. The objective is a better match between job market needs and the qualifications offered.

The project's concept focuses on concerted improvements in the interaction between teaching approaches, vocational student placements and the collection of local empirical data for teaching and research. Fostering partnerships between universities and local stakeholders, i.e. farming enterprises, industry and associations, by activities of TOPAS supports the suitability of the improvements for the demands of the local job markets.

Promoted teaching follows the learning outcomes and competencies approach, with flexible learning pathways and permeability among the different agrarian management programs. An additional element is the development of Massive Open Online Courses on core subject matters, which allow for distance learning by professionals and employees in agricultural enterprises.

The reorganisation of student placements includes the installation of networks with adequate enterprises, the definition of placement contents and reproducible assessments in curricula. The European Quality Charter on Internships and Apprenticeships (EQCIA) sets the framework, which consider also aspects of labour legislation and social care.

Teaching content in the partner countries relies predominantly on information and data from agricultural research stations and do reflect the situation of existing farming enterprises insufficiently. Improved student placements and related visits by supervisors offer the opportunity for the collection of local empirical data on agriculture and allow for the continuous improvement of teaching content. Preconditions are the definition of relevant data and the establishment of appropriate data management systems at the partner universities.

Keywords: Agricultural management, ERASMUS+ TOPAS, higher education