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eument-net

**Building a European Network of Academic Mentoring
Programmes for Women Scientists**

Coordination Action

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eument-net - Building a European network of mentoring programmes promoting women academics and researchers

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Since the 1990's, mentoring programmes have been one of the prominent measures introduced in many European countries to address the issue of gender inequality in higher education and research.

The experience of numerous mentoring programmes shows that these offers have been important in providing new and efficient structures of support for women researchers aiming for a career in academia and research. Mentoring programmes not only provide adequate support for young researchers, but also the means for confirmed women researchers to act effectively as role models. In addition, these programmes have contributed to familiarising a great number of professors with new practices of support for young researchers. By making informal rules and codes of the academic and research career apparent and by offering a forum in which to discuss them, mentoring programmes thus foster dynamics of institutional change favouring gender equality.

Yet, at the beginning of the 21st century, a closer look at the situation of many mentoring programmes reveals that in many cases, even after years of successful practice, they are not financially secured on a long-term basis and their position inside the academic institutions often remains precarious. Furthermore, and notwithstanding the apparent popularity of mentoring, in many countries of the European Union, mentoring programmes for the promotion of women in academia and research are still scarce or non-existent.

Aims of eument-net and objectives of the eument-net project phase

The eument-net project has been funded as a Coordination action in the framework of FP6. Starting in January 2007, the project phase of eument-net has stretched over 21 months. It has brought together five partners from four different countries (Austria, Bulgaria, Germany and Switzerland), with the support of an advisory board with members from France, Ireland, Slovenia and the UK.

The aim of the eument-net project was to develop a European network of mentoring programmes promoting women in academia and research. By establishing such a network, the project partners' aim was to create a basis that will strengthen existing mentoring programmes in an evolving European Research Area and promote mentoring as an effective tool for promoting gender equality in academia and research. At the end of the project phase, such a European network has successfully been established, taking the form of an association constituted under Swiss law, and is now ready to expand. In line with the objectives of the eument-net project, the European network of mentoring programmes will promote the advancement of women's careers and their position in academia and research by:

- fostering the exchange of experience and best practices among mentoring programmes;
- promoting quality standards and highlighting the role of mentoring for the promotion of women and gender equality in academia and research, and for knowledge transfer,
- supporting the transfer of knowledge and expertise, especially in countries where mentoring programmes for women in academia and research are still scarce;

- facilitating cooperation among programmes and the promotion of new mentoring services and activities;
- helping to put mentoring for women in academia and research on national and European science policy agendas.

To achieve this aim in the period assigned to the project phase, the partners have organised their work around 4 lines of action or work packages. These work packages are named as follows:

- Work Package 1: Organise knowledge transfer on mentoring as a measure to enhance the advancement of women scientists and their position in science governance in the wider Europe.
- Work Package 2: Set up a European network of mentoring programmes for high potential early career women scientists in the academic field.
- Work Package 3: Strengthen women as role models through conferences and debates between mentoring programmes and stakeholders in science policy and gender equality.
- Work Package 4: Create an electronic platform and a public database of mentoring programmes as the virtual home of the eument-net network.

The different aims of the project phase have been interlinked to a considerable degree, requiring very close cooperation among the partners involved in the project. To monitor the progress of the activities and to take the necessary decisions regarding the project's implementation, a steering committee has been set up. Three ordinary and one extraordinary meeting have been organised to assure the success of the project.

Exchange of experience on mentoring and knowledge transfer

The eument-net guideline manual

The main result of this first line of action is the eument-net guideline manual "*Establishing Mentoring in Europe. Strategies for the Promotion of Women Academics and Researchers*". The English edition of the manual was published in July 2008 under the editorship of eument-net. Herta Nöbauer and Evi Genetti from muv, University of Vienna, acted as lead coordinators of this activity and were responsible for the scientific edition of the manual.

The manual offers guidelines and best practices for establishing mentoring schemes for women academics in Europe. Based upon a systematic comparison between the four mentoring programmes involved in the eument-net project, the manual presents case studies that give readers examples of best practices in how to design, implement, and prepare the ground for mentoring programmes under specific conditions at local, regional, and national levels. This approach provides an important basis for transferring expert knowledge on mentoring to countries where there is as yet no mentoring scheme. In the manual, these questions are exemplified in a detailed analysis of the situation in Bulgaria. In its final part, the manual also provides a framework for how mentoring schemes can be connected throughout Europe by the transnational network eument-net in order to realise gender equality in academia more effectively¹.

¹ See back cover of the eument-net guideline manual, by Herta Nöbauer, in: Eument-net (2008). *Establishing Mentoring in Europe. Strategies for the Promotion of Women Academics and Researchers*. Fribourg: eument-net.



Covers of the English and Bulgarian edition of the eument-net guideline manual

The eument-net guideline manual has been very widely disseminated in European and associated countries. In order to enhance its impact in Eastern European and particularly in the Balkan countries, the eument-net guideline manual has also been translated into Bulgarian under the responsibility of the Bulgarian partner Dr. Nikolina Sretenova. This translation process required specific considerations regarding the translation and transfer of concepts used in the manual. Thus the translation of the manual from English into Bulgarian highlighted the complexity, but also the interest and novelty of the specific kind of knowledge transfer proposed in the framework of the eument-net project.

Exchange of knowledge in international workshops

The ground for eument-net's knowledge transfer was established during two workshops that were organised in the framework of this first line of action. Each of the workshops brought together the eument-net partners, members of the advisory board and external experts for two days. They also benefited from the presence of professional moderators, engaged to support the discussions among workshop participants.

In the first workshop, which took place in May 2007 in Vienna, similarities and differences between the participating mentoring programmes were discussed in detail on three levels: various aspects related to the mentoring designs; specific contexts and prevailing academic systems and cultures; and, contextualised strategies for implementing mentoring schemes.

The presentations by partners and experts were completed by the discussion in working groups of specific topics related to the definition of best practices, the conditions of transfer of knowledge and best practice examples, and supporting and hindering factors for the implementation of mentoring programmes.

The discussions held among partners during this workshop generated new and interesting insights into the conditions, specific objectives and contexts that shape the implementation of mentoring programmes.

The outline and themes of discussions for the first workshop had been prepared by the organising partner muv on the basis of a comparison of the main documents for the participating programmes. After the workshop, the partner in charge of this work package elaborated the concept for the eument-net guideline manual. The writing and editing of the different sections of the manual spread over more than 9 months, as each contribution was thoroughly discussed and compared with the others.

The second workshop organised in the framework of this first line of action was held in Sofia in December 2007. Organised by the Bulgarian partner in the eument-net project, the workshop focused on the specific obstacles to women's careers and to gender equality addressed by mentoring programmes and on the transfer of best practice examples. The workshop allowed the partners to discuss the results of the study, presented in greater detail below, with Bulgarian women PhD students and early career researchers. In addition to the inputs from the programmes involved in the eument-net consortium, two other experiences with mentoring were presented: an experience with more informal, less structured offers of mentoring in American universities, and an experience as the partner in charge of implementing a pilot mentoring scheme at a private Bulgarian University in the framework of the ADVANCE project. The workshop thus provided an important opportunity for preparing the ground for the future implementation of formal mentoring schemes in Bulgaria. During the 2nd workshop, eument-net partners also discussed the first contributions to the eument-net guideline manual.

In addition to the specific role and contribution these workshops made to the realisation of the manual, they can be considered best practice examples on how to organise the exchange of experience and foster the transfer of knowledge between mentoring programmes and stakeholders from different countries and contexts. As such, they will be of benefit also for the future activities of the eument-net association.



eument-net partners at the Workshop in Mannheim (Germany)

Study on attitudes among women PhD students and early career researchers towards career possibilities and mentoring

The Bulgarian partner's contribution to the first line of action in the eument-net project dedicated to the exchange of experience and knowledge transfer includes a specific focus on the "receptivity" to this knowledge in academic contexts where mentoring is not yet known. To this end, an empirical study has been carried out by Nikolina Sretenova and a team of researchers from the Institute of Philosophical Research of the Bulgarian Academy of Science.

Based on focus group interviews with women PhD students and early career researchers from various scientific backgrounds and institutions, the study allows an enhanced understanding of the specific obstacles, difficulties and gaps experienced and perceived by women PhD students and early career researchers in relation to the advancement of their academic career.

With 18% women professors (Grade A), the Bulgarian university and research sectors fare above the European average. However, it is considered that the increase in the share of women professors has been favoured by a degradation of work conditions in academia and research. Even so, actual figures contradict a widespread assumption in Bulgaria, i.e. that gender equality in research has been achieved.

According to the findings of the survey conducted by Nikolina Sretenova and her team, the main obstacles perceived by women PhD students and early career researchers are related to difficulties in the work environment and working conditions, a lack of dynamics of innovation, and a lack of perspectives for applying research. Women PhD students and early career researchers in Bulgaria also voice a sense of age-related discrimination and institutional obstacles for young researchers. They also express a lack of practical skills necessary to apply for projects, particularly for projects and positions abroad, and the poor

image of science in Bulgaria. Further research is needed to show how these – apparently not gender-related – obstacles nonetheless have a gender-specific impact. The focus group interviews also highlighted the specific obstacles faced by women, such as a lack of role models, gendered notions of “the successful researcher”, a tendency towards “traditional” role distribution when both partners are engaged in science, limited access to and knowledge of networks of women scientists, but also a lack of awareness of gender-related discriminations, etc.

From mentoring, Bulgarian women PhD students and early career researchers expect support in becoming involved in international projects and access to international contacts. They also expect an increased visibility and recognition for their research, advice for their career planning, and consultation for practical requirements related with project preparation and the skills necessary to apply for projects, in Bulgaria and abroad.

Mentoring seems to be an appropriate tool to tackle the issues highlighted by the Bulgarian study among women PhD students and early career researchers.

The Bulgarian partner identifies the lack of national regulations and policy to promote gender equality in research (gender equality as opposed to an anti-discrimination legislation), the absence of infrastructures such as gender equality offices, as well as the novelty of the instrument, to explain why there are no such measures as mentoring for Bulgarian women academics and researchers yet.

The study conducted by Nikolina Sretenova provides information about the potential of mentoring to strengthen women’s position in academia and research. It also provides new data on the Bulgarian context and will help to make informed decisions when implementing academic mentoring programmes in Bulgaria. The design of the study is also interesting for stakeholders in other countries.

Quality standards for mentoring programmes

The discussions among the partners in this first line of action also served as a basis for defining a set of quality standards providing a framework for the European network of mentoring programmes, which is the aim pursued by the 2nd line of action.

Set up a European network of mentoring programmes for high potential junior women scientists in the academic field.

Survey among stakeholders in gender equality and persons involved in mentoring

The second line of action of the eument-net project phase is concerned with the elaboration of legal structures for the eument-net network, uniting mentoring programmes in Europe around common goals and a set of international cooperation activities. In order to assess the landscape of mentoring programmes in Europe and evaluate the expectations towards and the interest in a European network of mentoring programmes, the partners of the eument-net consortium conducted two surveys among European stakeholders and coordinators of mentoring programmes and formulated minimum quality standards for mentoring programmes.² The aim of this survey was to obtain a broad picture of the situation and attitude in different European countries with regard to mentoring programmes for women in academia and research, and the perception of the utility of a European network.

² The survey was composed of two different questionnaires. One questionnaire was addressed to 770 stakeholders in gender equality and science policy from 37 European and associated countries. A second questionnaire was addressed to 109 persons involved in academic mentoring programmes from 15 European and associated countries. The addresses had been collected by the partners of the eument-net project and are mainly based on Internet research. There are important differences in the data collected for the different countries. Accordingly, the lists of addressees were very heterogeneous. This may explain the relatively low rate of respondents. It also sets limits to the interpretations of the results.

With a response rate of 21% from stakeholders, and a return rate of 36% from mentoring programmes, the survey does not claim to be representative. Nevertheless, the results suggest a series of interesting observations and provide a basis for further investigations.

The general and provisional conclusions that can be drawn from the results of the survey among stakeholders and mentoring programmes can be summarised as follows³:

Considerably fewer respondents from countries in Southern and Eastern Europe say that they know about specific programmes in their countries designed to promote gender equality in higher education and research than respondents from Central and Northern Europe. This observation also applies to the knowledge about mentoring programmes designed to promote women's careers in academia and research, where differences are even more accentuated.

Whereas the potential of mentoring programmes to promote gender equality is considered high by a large majority of respondents, the main reasons for the lack of mentoring programmes identified by respondents from countries where there are no such programmes are mainly structural, such as: the lack of governmental support; the lack of funding; the lack of support from higher education or research institutions; the lack of institutional structures (on different levels); and, the novelty of mentoring.

Responses to the survey also confirm the high interest in a European network of mentoring programmes promoting women in academia and research. They also support the direction taken by eument-net partners. The main expectations towards and interest in a European network of mentoring programmes are focused on exchanging best practices, sharing guidelines and standards, developing cooperation, strengthening women's impact on science policy, widening the mentee's network and mobility, and organising trans-national meetings and seminars.

The results of the survey support the claim that additional efforts are needed in Europe to implement effective instruments for gender equality in higher education and research, and that mentoring programmes hold an important potential for addressing this issue. However, for mentoring to deploy its full potential, a considerable effort is needed to foster structural and financial support by governments, research and higher education institutions and the European Commission, but also to promote and disseminate knowledge about mentoring. The unequal distribution of mentoring programmes and knowledge about mentoring in Europe shows that the science policy of the European Union plays a particularly important role in addressing these issues.

Defining the structure of the European network

As for the first line of action, eument-net project partners have organised two workshops to discuss the structures of the European network and to initiate cooperation activities among the participating mentoring programmes.

The first workshop, organised in Mannheim (Germany) in July 2007, focused on eument-net partners' respective integration in and experience with networks and discussed their expectations towards the future eument-net network.

The discussions in working groups allowed the participants to establish a consensus about the need for formal cooperation structures. The creation of an association makes it possible to pursue the activities started in the eument-net project, integrate new members, become more visible and facilitate cooperation with partners, but is also important for representation in dealings with sponsors and funding agencies and for defining the responsibilities and liabilities of members. During this first workshop, eument-net partners also defined the main goals of the network, as well as criteria and categories of membership.

³ Results from the survey : <http://www.eument-net.eu/activities/other/default.aspx>

The discussions among partners benefited greatly from the experiences of two experts active in two different European networks, namely Adelheid Ehmke, president of epws, and Dagmar Meyer, former head of the Marie-Curie Fellowship Association and member of the eument-net advisory board.

In line with the main goals of the association: exchange of experience, cooperation and transfer of knowledge, there will be different categories of membership. Full members comprise the founding members of eument-net and institutions with mentoring programmes that meet the eument-net quality standards. Associate members are institutions interested in mentoring to promote gender equality in higher education and research and individuals with specific expertise related to the aims of the network. Finally, there is a category of Supporting members.

The discussion on the Statutes and objectives of the future network were continued at meetings of the project Steering Committee and at the second workshop organised in this line of action.

Pilot Cooperation Scheme

Whereas the Mannheim workshop allowed eument-net partners to define the basic lines for the future network of mentoring programmes, it appeared that the definition of a Pilot Cooperation Scheme for international “mentoring exchange” needed more in-depth discussion and a detailed understanding of how such a trans-national offer can be integrated and implemented by the participating mentoring programmes involved. Among the questions that arose were: Does this international mentoring offer complete or interfere with the offer of the participating programmes? How time-intensive will the participation be for the coordinators of the participating programmes? How should the specific announcement and “matching” procedures be organised in order to allow mentoring programmes with different structures, communication channels and matching procedures to cooperate?

Thus, in the wake of the workshop in Mannheim, a working group comprising three of the four mentoring programmes from the consortium continued the work on the international mentoring exchange.

The first pilot cooperation scheme was launched in April 2008 as Short Term International Mentoring Exchange (STIME). STIME supports international contacts and networks for women researchers in their early career who have participated in a regular mentoring exchange, or who have been selected as participants in a mentoring programme, but have not yet started a regular mentoring relationship. Thus, eument-net Short Term International Mentoring Exchange does not replace regular mentoring exchanges. It is also limited to a formal duration of a maximum of two months and one or two scheduled meetings. It is specifically designed for women researchers who are planning to make their next career step at a new institution, or plan to establish international cooperation, etc., and want a contact person.

By focusing on mentees who have been selected by a partner programme, but are no longer (or not yet) engaged in a formal mentoring exchange within their programme, and by limiting the duration of the mentoring exchange to a period of two months, the STIME pilot cooperation scheme has managed to circumvent possible conflicts between the formal mentoring programme, and the additional offer from eument-net.

The evaluation of the first experiences with STIME shows that there is a real interest among mentees in such an offer. It also shows that the interest in STIME comes mainly from the English-speaking countries, and only to a lesser degree from other European countries.

The eument-net association and cooperation statement

The second workshop organised in this second line of action, focusing on building the European network, took place in July 2008, in Brussels. The workshop was dedicated to assessing the outcome of first concrete cooperation measures, and notably the pilot cooperation scheme and the electronic platform, discussing adjustment of cooperation structure and defining the possibilities and conditions for the continuation of activities under the umbrella of the eument-net association.

The discussions during the workshop helped to highlight the considerable experience acquired during the eument-net project phase in a broad range of activities concerned with international cooperation among mentoring programmes, as well as an exchange of experience and knowledge transfer on a European level. This experience indicates the distinctive dimensions in which eument-net wants to build its claim and strategy for the future, and to extend its network.

A special focus of the workshop was concerned with the issues of advocacy and fundraising. To discuss these issues, the eument-net partners were able to benefit from the expert inputs and advice of Maren Jochimsen and Pauleen Colligan from epws, who presented their specific experience with advocacy and fundraising strategies for networks and projects promoting women in academia and research.

Taking the workshop discussions as their starting point, eument-net partners defined a Cooperation statement which serves as a basis for the future activities of the eument-net association. The cooperation should also serve as a presentation of eument-net and its activities to potential new members.

Based on the partners' assessment of the experience and the results of activities during the eument-net project, eument-net partners have drafted a Policy Brief, with recommendations for policy makers on European and national levels, for the scientific community, civil society associations, and industry representatives.

The policy recommendations are based not only on the results and on discussions from Work Packages 1 and 2, but also on debates with stakeholders in gender equality, mentoring experts, women researchers and science policy representatives during activities organised in the 3rd line of action of the eument-net project.

Strengthen women as role models through mentoring: debating with women researchers, mentoring and gender equality experts and science policy representatives.

The 3rd line of action pursued during the eument-net project phase was dedicated to strengthening women academics in science decision-making positions as role models for women who want to pursue an academic career, by disseminating the findings and results of WP1 and WP2 at European, regional and national levels, taking into account the specific national, regional or international context.

During the 1st year of the project, the main occasion for disseminating the results of the eument-net project and informing about its aim was the 5th conference on GEHE in Berlin (28-31st August 2007). The eument-net partners participated in the Workshop-panel on mentoring programmes and presented their project and first results. In addition to panel participation, eument-net organised a special expert meeting. Through these activities, eument-net was presented to a broad range of European experts and stakeholders in gender equality in higher education. The Findings of the eument-net project were thus integrated in the publications of Results and Recommendations issued after the conference⁴. The eument-

⁴ Kriszto, Marianne (Ed.) (2008). 5th European Conference on Gender Equality in Higher Education. Results and Recommendations, Berlin.

net contribution to the 5th GEHE conference is also published in more detail in a separate book on this conference.

However, the European conference did not allow eument-net to attend with experts and stakeholders from countries of Eastern and Southern Europe or from the Balkans to the degree that they had hoped for.

Activities undertaken in the second year of the project phase, and in particular the two international conferences organised in Berne (Switzerland) and in Sofia (Bulgaria), provided additional occasions for debating on mentoring as a tool for promoting women's careers and presenting the objectives of eument-net. These conferences allowed us to focus on themes related to the potential of mentoring to promote gender equality, taking into account the specific regional contexts and, especially in the Bulgarian case, to achieve a better integration of experts from Balkan and Eastern European countries.

Berne conference: The Future of Mentoring in Europe

Under the title "The Future of Mentoring Programmes. Linking Programmes, Experience and People in Europe", seven speakers explored the future of mentoring in Europe from different angles. 70 participants from 14 countries took part in the conference discussions.

The intention of the conference was to present the goals of the eument-net project, and to disseminate and discuss the findings of Work Packages 1 and 2, such as the survey results, the findings of the Bulgarian focus group study, and the eument-net quality standards. In addition to speakers from the eument-net project, Maya Widmer presented the aims and means deployed by the Swiss government's programme to increase Gender Equality in Higher Education and Research. She then highlighted the major role of mentoring programmes in achieving successful results. Christine Kurmeyer presented the experience of the German network ForumMentoring. Among the motivations and benefits for mentoring programmes to join national and international networks, she mentioned the potential of strengthening gender-specific offers in an environment that increasingly questions such gender-specific programmes. Sybille Drack questioned the future of mentoring programmes in the light of the Bologna reforms and their impact on the level of PhD training. She argues that current changes in PhD training and career models in Europe favour forms of support like mentoring. However, Drack argues, gender-specific offers will still be needed. It will be of major importance to benefit from a supportive context for mentoring, and to achieve a sustainable integration of gender-specific mentoring programmes into academic and research institutions.

The conference provided an effective platform for an exchange and discussion among mentoring and equal opportunities experts from various countries. Among the specific outcomes of the conference there are the recommendations that the participants formulated during debates and reaffirmed at the end of the conference. These recommendations stress the clear need for more exchange of experience, the necessity for networking mentoring programmes, the importance of transfer of knowledge to countries with few or no mentoring programmes, the importance of securing funding for national and European networking initiatives, and the need for more statistics and longitudinal studies about the effectiveness of mentoring in order to be able to promote mentoring even more successfully.

Foster mentoring schemes in Balkan countries

The second international conference of the eument-net project was organised in Sofia. Under the title "Start-Up of New Mentoring Initiatives for the Balkan Region and Strengthening the Visibility of Women Scientists as Role Models for Early Career Women Academics and Researchers", the Bulgarian conference pursued two objectives: to disseminate the current results of the eument-net project towards Bulgaria and the countries of the Balkan Region; and to build up a regional network of experts and institutions oriented towards the

encouragement and support of young women in science through the implementation of mentoring programmes, training courses or other supporting activities.

The target audience for the conference were experienced women academics and researchers, i.e. potential mentors, and early career women academics and researchers, i.e. potential mentees. These participants were reached through the database of women academics which the Bulgarian partner established in the framework of the eument-net project, and through the list of applicants who participated in the focus group study⁵. Invited to join the dissemination event were also gender experts from Bulgaria, Romania, Turkey, Croatia, Serbia and Macedonia and policy- and decision-makers from the respective Ministries of Education and Science, as well as from the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences.

The presentations by eument-net representatives and by three women researchers who participated as mentees in the pilot mentoring programme implemented in the framework of the ADVANCE project, provided a valuable starting point for an in-depth discussion with participants in the conference on standards and best practice in mentoring and on different understandings of mentoring as an informal practice by supervisors, or as practiced by mentors and mentees in the framework of a formal programme.

The inputs by government representatives highlighted the importance of the level of national governments in providing adequate structures and means for implementing efficient gender equality measures in academia and research.

During the networking session, stakeholders in gender equality and science policy representatives were asked to share their ideas and visions about possible forms of support for young women in science, e.g. through training and coaching courses, seminars, workshops and the implementation of pilot mentoring schemes and programmes on national and regional levels; to share their ideas on future cooperation and to formulate an action plan for creating a Balkan network for promoting young women in science; and to discuss the possibility of launching a “Balkan Association of Women in Science”.

The Conference made visible the lack of mentoring programmes or similar gender equality measures in Bulgaria as well as in the other countries of the Balkan region. It also manifested the common conviction that they are necessary tools and the readiness for start-up activities in the respective countries.

It also manifested the readiness to establish a Balkan network of women in science and common guidelines. This means that, in the Balkans, there is an opportunity to start up networking activities simultaneously with the local efforts for implementing mentoring programmes and not to initiate the networking activities afterwards (as happened in the case of the partner countries). According to Nikolina Sretonova, one of the main contributions of the Conference is the idea that it is very important to develop and introduce *ethical codes* as a structural part of the mentoring schemes.

Panels and conference participation

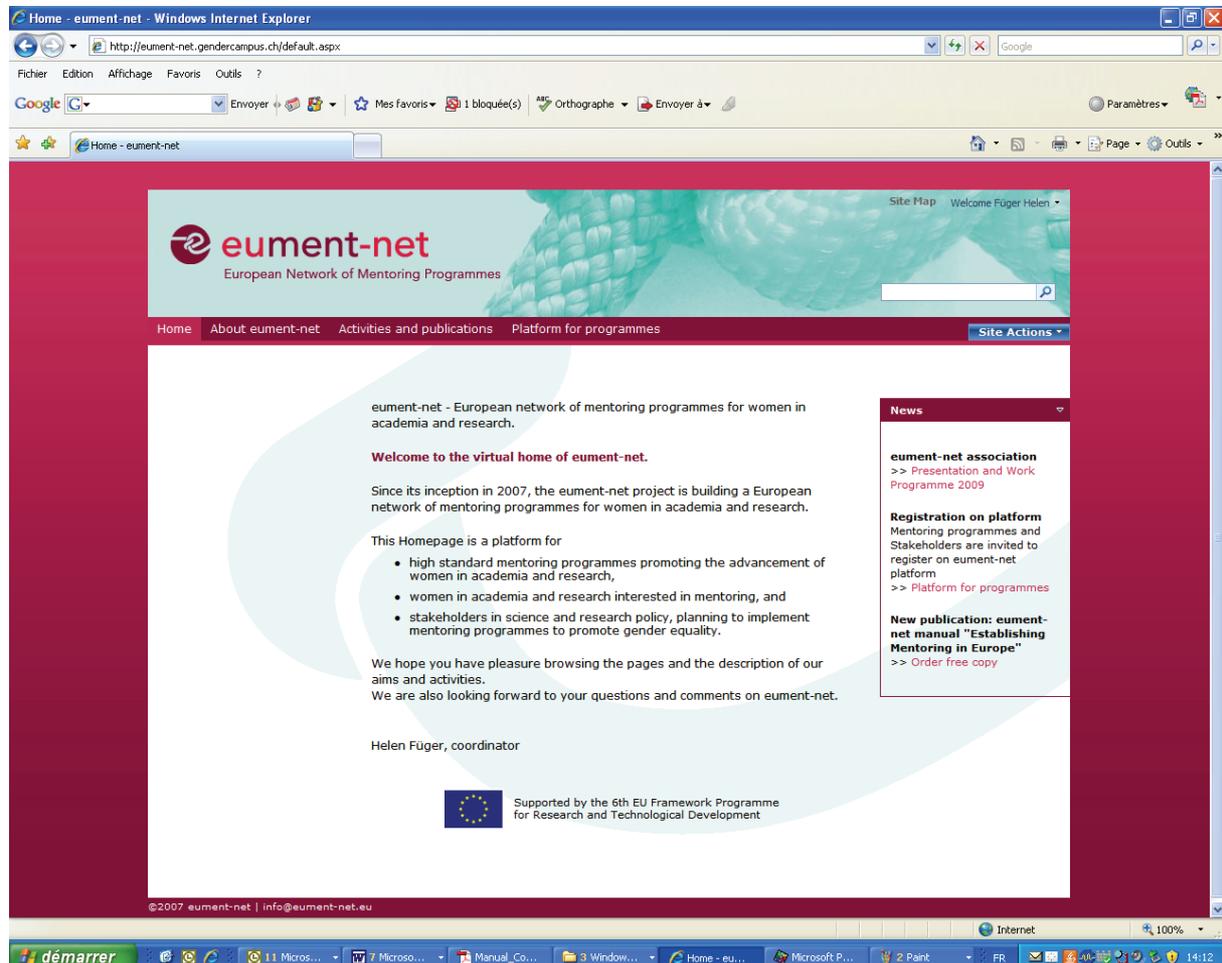
Under the umbrella of the 3rd line of action, eument-net has participated in a considerable number of activities which had not been planned at the outset. On the one hand, eument-net participated in various European conferences and published its results in a series of articles in periodical reviews or book publications.

eument-net has also started contacts with women’s NGOs and associations for future public events and possible cooperation, for example by developing concepts for round-tables on mentoring.

⁵ BAS women in Science on-line database: <http://womeninscience.bas.bg>

Creating a public database of mentoring programmes for women academics and researchers and an electronic platform as the virtual home of the eument-net network.

The 4th line of action of the eument-net project is dedicated to the establishment of the eument-net electronic platform and database of mentoring programmes for women academics and researchers⁶.



The eument-net homepage and electronic platform

According to the project, the electronic platform will be the virtual home of the eument-net network and is designed to support cooperation among registered mentoring programmes as well as the exchange and dissemination of information and good practice examples.

The eument-net database will provide a tool enabling early career and senior women academics and researchers to access information on mentoring programmes responding to a defined set of quality standards.

The structure and elements of the eument-net platform and database are linked to the activities carried out in the different work packages or lines of action of the eument-net project. Also, the content of the homepage and to some extent its structure have evolved at different moments of the eument-net project phase.

The activities of the 1st Work Package mainly had an influence on the structure of the electronic platform, the protected access space where mentoring programmes can exchange best practice examples, tools, etc. While the eument-net manual will present the designs of the mentoring programmes involved in the eument-net project, it will not contain specific

⁶ www.eument-net.eu

documents issued by these programmes (such as: designs and planning; application forms; questionnaires; letters, etc.), which are to be found on the electronic platform.

The discussions that occurred in the framework of Work Package 2 to define the structures of the European network also had an impact on the concept of the electronic platform. Thus, it has been decided that the mentoring programmes which are to be integrated in the electronic platform will have to meet the eument-net quality standards. They are expected to become members of the eument-net association. Also, the database of electronic mentoring programmes will contain data on the programmes which have registered on the eument-net platform.

After a trial phase among the project partners, the electronic platform was launched for the registration of mentoring programmes in April 2008. Notwithstanding the interest expressed by representatives of mentoring programmes at European and international conferences, in the first few months the number of registered programmes has been small. The number of registered programmes has increased with the dissemination of the eument-net manual.

To further increase the number of registered programmes, the eument-net partners have decided on a strategy of active recruitment of new member programmes.

It is also expected that the establishment of the eument-net association and the publication of its work programme will make it more attractive for mentoring programmes to become members of eument-net, to register on the platform and to actively share in the European network.

Issues of management and cooperation with other projects and initiatives

The eument-net project is characterised by the high degree of interrelation between the different lines of activities. A detailed description of the work to be carried out and the distribution of responsibilities among the different partners in realising the various tasks and objectives has been a necessary basis. Even so, all eventualities and activities could not be foreseen. In addition to regular communications among partners, a certain degree of flexibility was also needed. Three regular and the one extraordinary meeting of the steering committee proved to be very important for discussing the activities in Work Packages where no specific Workshops have been planned, and to monitor progress in the different lines of action. The consortium has also elaborated an ownership regulation to decide on the use and dissemination of products and results after the end of the eument-net project. The two principles guiding these discussions have been to assure the highest possible degree of dissemination of products and results of the eument-net project (e.g. eument-net guideline manual; results of surveys and focus-group study; etc.), and to respect the intellectual property of contributions.

During the entire project phase, eument-net has been striving to establish links with other projects and initiatives in Europe pursuing similar aims. The establishment of a conditional full membership of epws has been one of the first steps. Having established its own association by the end of the project phase, eument-net will now be able to become a Full Member of epws.

Conclusion

The end of the eument-net project phase represents the beginning of the eument-net network in its new form as a legal association. The association and its members will be able to draw on the broad range of activities and the accumulated experience and expertise developed in the project. The eument-net project has allowed us to generate additional expertise on international cooperation among mentoring programmes, and on the exchange of experience and transfer of knowledge on mentoring, while taking into account the specific contexts.

For the partners involved in the project, this experience has allowed them to reflect upon practices in their specific mentoring programme, and to come up with new ideas and strategies to enhance their programme's offer and to continually improve its quality.

The eument-net project has also contributed to highlight the disparities among European countries with regard to the presence of mentoring programmes designed to promote gender equality in academia and research. At the same time, the activities in the eument-net project provide evidence for the great interest among stakeholders from countries in Southern and Eastern Europe and in the Balkans to establish mentoring programmes, just as the potential of mentoring for addressing issues of gender equality and the enhancement of women's careers is considered very high.

The experience and initiatives of projects such as eument-net will be fruitful only if additional efforts are deployed on the European level and on the level of national and regional governments to implement effective policies and instruments for gender equality in higher education and research.

Publications

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Institute for Philosophical Research, <http://www.philosophybulgaria.org/en/index.php>

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