

# **Introductory address by coordinator, of the project Erasmus+ key action 2: Interdisciplinary short cycle programs in public policy making and analysis (PPMA)**

Ladies and gentlemen, respected officials from public institutions, from the rectorate and faculty of sciences management, dear colleagues,

Thanks to all of you for getting to Novi Sad for this two days kick off meeting, it is a great pleasure to have you all here.

This is also an opportunity for me as a project coordinator to CONGRATULATE to all of us for getting to this stage where we got EU support and can start with the implementation of our idea. Thank you for your CONFIDENCE AND CONTRIBUTION TO THE DEVELOPMENT of the idea to provide modern courses in policy making and policy analysis in particular to civil servants and any other interested parties in Serbia and the region with support from renown EU partners.

We are facing a period of turbulent changes in our society with new and complex problems in the area of public decision making. Therefore, Universities have an important role to take part in the societal change, to provide answers in support to policy problems and to provide through their curricula a high quality education programs for professionals that will help decisions making process in public sector. Moreover, they have a role in taking a more active part in a public debate in order to promote an evidence based approach, especially against the environment of fake news and abundance of available information to citizens.

I would like to share here some insights from my recent 4 years long work on the reform of public administration in the area of evidence based policy making – that was a basis of my personal motivation for initiating this idea for which I did not encounter any difficulty to gather the team of all of you here to support. For me it was a proof that we are on the right path.

Well, that experience of work in the public administration with civil servants help me to understand the need and the situation in terms of potential „demand side” for further education if we observe this work through market lances.

What we see on that „market”, after we achieved to insert into the system of public administration solving any problem with drafting of amending an existing law, which therefore was and still tends to be – very bureaucratic, formal and over normed -- some structure, system and formal requirements for evidence based planning, result based management of implementation of policies. We created a kind of a frustration for existing civil servants.

To make our starting position even more complicated, during last decade, initiated from requests from EU – 100+ strategies that are vague, wishful thinking and non-implementable.

Culture in public administration is on one hand very dedicated to the protection of public interest, although with very weak understanding of laws of market and needs of market economy, probably as a legacy from the past system.

Another legacy is that these part of very dedicated civil servants, were instructed over generations not to think – but to act. And everything they are asked to act was prior prescribed by some regulation or procedure. These procedures were not inspired to facilitate the achievement of result but to ensure the proper use of collective property and to compensate for individual responsibility. This is probably the legacy of communist era of one party system and self-government in the economy where “Policy” was not something that was communicated neither subject to consultations, but something that entered the system of administration through politically nominated managers, who knew what was the policy of the party.

To resume, now we have in civil service mostly individuals educated at law schools, political sciences or economics (in minor part) know probably to much the legislation, but are struggling with a lack of analytical skills, data literacy, problem solving skills, communication skills to pursue consultations, but also who seem to lack of some fundamental knowledge in the area of economics, public finance, sociology, psychology, governance, political science, but also methodological knowledge in statistics and other applied disciplines.

What we have on the “supply side” of this market for knowledge and skills. Well, in Serbia, as probably in the whole region, we have brilliant achievements in the area of natural sciences – STEM field, engineering (IT in recent period – NS – Serbian Silicon Valley), while in social sciences and humanities – it is quite different. There is a number of brilliant individuals that are dispersed and usually educated abroad but not leading in their institutions in the area of education in social sciences. Above this, there is probably no need to mention the fragmentation of universities.

policy making that is now formally introduced in Serbia, but in order to give it effect to support better decisions of public interest we need to raise the level of competences of actual and future participants in the process of policy making.

We see the framework of evidence based policy making not only as a necessary tool to support decisions, analytical basis, consultative process and collaboration of all interested parties in the society, but as a framework to integrate the separated academic disciplines providing today a fragmented knowledge and also to raise the level of the educational practices in these various fields that we have here reflected in the project team: sociologist, economists, political scientist, sociology, mathematics, computer science, layers...

I hope this exercise will be inspiring for all of us. I wish us a fruitful work which I would like to be open, honest, participative and creative.