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New curricula in Precision Agriculture using GIS technologies and sensing data (CUPAGIS)

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Minutes of the Zoom Coordination Meeting

Date: November 23, 2021

Participants:

All partners (except for the associated partner – Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research, Algeria).

Representatives of partners:

Tarmo Soomere, Anu Green, Ebe Pilt (Tallinn University of Technology, coordinator),
Svetlana Jasic (Exolaunch),
Dimo Atanasov (Agricultural University Plovdiv, Bulgaria),
František Kumhala (Czech University of Life Sciences CULS),
Dr Abdelkader LARIBI (Ecole Nationale Supérieure d'Agronomie, ENSA),
Dr Nadjat BENKHERBECHE (Ecole Nationale Supérieure d'Agronomie, ENSA),
Prof Hadjira BENOUDNINE (Universite de Mostaganem),
Prof Abdeddaim KADOUN (Djillali Liabes University of Sidi Bel Abbès),
Dr Riad DJELLOULI (Djillali Liabes University of Sidi Bel Abbès),
Prof Yahia LEBBAH (Université d'Oran 1).

Agenda:

1. Progress with registration of the new curricula and courses in Algerian partner universities.
2. Future steps with the equipment.
3. Overview of the expenses for the equipment and options for additional purchases.
4. Discussion of the budget for staff costs and travel and stay costs.
5. Information about an extension of the communication plan.
6. Reporting about the 2nd and 3rd year of the project.

1. New curricula and courses in Algerian partner universities

The partner universities provided a short overview about the status of curricula and courses developed within the CUPAGIS project. All the planned courses and curricula are ready to teach. Almost all curricula have been accredited for the teaching, except for one Master level curriculum where some minor changes are necessary. The new curricula have been announced.

Teaching of some courses has already been started whereas some others are about to start. In this aspect, the project has gathered clear success.

It was agreed that the Algerian partners send to the coordinator a short overview of the new curricula and their new constituents developed within CUPAGIS, indicating just the title of the curriculum, level (BSc/MSc), whether it has been registered/accredited, when the teaching has started or when it is planned to start, and – if available – the number of registered students for each curricula. A scanned copy of the registration certificates (in any language, including Arabic) is also appreciated.

2. Future steps with the equipment

The coordinator reminded the partners that the equipment received in the framework of the CUPAGIS project should be included into the inventory of the universities according to the local rules

3. The status of the budget for the equipment

The coordinator provided an overview of the use of funds foreseen for equipment. The proposal indicates 298500 euro in total for equipment, that is, 59 700 euro for each university. The expenses so far are about 265 000 euro in total. We have purchased all items foreseen in the proposal plus several specific sensor items necessary for teaching. This was possible because (i) we managed to effectively use the rules that make this kind of purchase an exempt of VAT (value-added-tax) in the EU, (ii) declaring the equipment as a donation from the EU, and (iii) investing a lot of efforts from the partners (especially the coordinator and University Oran1) into handling the process without external contractors.

Therefore, it is still possible to use about 33500 euro for equipment. Also, it is possible to increase the budget for equipment by maximally 10% on the expense of other items; first of all travel and stay costs. The absolute maximum budget for equipment could be 328 350 euro. This would mean almost 12 000 euro per each Algerian university partner. This increase does not need any approval by the European Commission.

4. The status of the budget for staff costs and travel and stay costs

The coordinator suggested to increase the budget for equipment to the maximally allowed level of 328 350 euro on the expense of travel and stay costs, and to divide these funds equally between the Algerian partners. This change will not affect the operation or budget of the EU partners.

The coordinator noted that the project has spent only a small fraction (about 15%) of the originally foreseen travel and stay costs during the first two years, and apparently very little during the 3rd year. The pandemic is still a great obstacle for travel, ticket prices are inconveniently high and reaching the goals of the project has increased the need for physical contribution of all partners.

Given these observations, the coordinator suggested to increase the budget for staff costs until the maximally allowed level for this kind of projects, that is, by 10% of the originally foreseen costs. The proposal allocates 399 288 euro for staff costs. An increase by 10% would mean almost 40 000 euro.

As the Algerian partners have the largest share of travel costs, the coordinator suggested that their budget for staff costs could be increased from originally foreseen 15 000 euro to 20 000 euro for each university. This means an increase by 5 000 euro for each Algerian university staff costs.

With these two changes, the budget for travel and stay costs (originally 80 005 euro for travel costs and 179 160 euro for costs of stay; total 259 165 euro) would be decreased to the level of

189 386.20 euro. Given that only about 40 000 euro has been used in the first two years, this amount still provides safe resource for travel for all partners. Every Algerian partner will still have about 30 000 euro for travel and stay costs.

Similar changes for the European partners will be smaller and will be discussed in a separate meeting.

It was decided that the coordinator provides via e-mail these suggestions to Algerian partners and describes possible scenarios, with and without these changes. The Algerian partners will make a decision and let the partners know.

5. Communication plan

The coordinator (Tallinn University of Technology) will employ a communication expert (Mrs Ebe Pilt) as a staff member of the team for some time. She will help to gather and share good news from all partners, shape them into professional form and communicate over the project website and social media channels (e.g. Facebook). The partners are invited to provide photos and short information about teaching and use of the equipment within the frame of the CUPAGIS project.

6. Reporting about the 2nd and 3rd year of the project

The coordinator suggested to start reporting also about expenses in the 3rd year. As large purchases of equipment have been performed, the coordinator applied for and received the second payment from the European Commission.

Notes taken by Tarmo Soomere and Ebe Pilt
24 November 2021