



MARIHE: A VETERAN OF ERASMUS MUNDUS

Master in Research and Innovation in Higher Education (MARIHE) is one of the longest-running programmes under the Erasmus Mundus framework. Launched in the early 2000s, at a time when higher education was becoming increasingly globalised, MARIHE aimed to bridge the gap between national and international perspectives in higher education management.

A JOURNEY OF GROWTH AND ADAPTATION

MARIHE began as a consortium of four partners: the University for Continuing Education Krems (Danube University Krems) in Austria, the University of Tampere in Finland, Beijing Normal University in China, and the University of Applied Sciences Osnabrück in Germany. By 2018, the consortium expanded to include Eötvös Loránd University (ELTE) in Hungary and Thapar Institute of Engineering and Technology in India.

While initially conceived as a European-focused programme in higher education management, it quickly became apparent that addressing global challenges in higher education required a broader approach – so MARIHE was the first consortia to include an Asian university as a full member, fostering collaboration and trust across regions and bringing in two of the largest higher education systems in the world. This commitment to diversity and adaptability has been a driving factor behind MARIHE’s development over the years.

“Having partners from Asia was not just an added complexity—it was a necessity. Higher education is a global phenomenon, and our programme thrives on the diversity and richness that comes from international collaboration.” — **Attila Pausits**, *University for Continuing Education Krems*.

Managing a diverse group of partners came with its own set of challenges, but it also led to significant improvements across the participating universities. Over time, these challenges turned into opportunities for learning and growth, as the consortium worked closely with their institutional leadership, committed to developing not just the programme, but their institutions as well based on the learnings from participation in Erasmus Mundus.

The journey was not without setbacks. The consortium’s first application for Erasmus Mundus funding was unsuccessful. However, reinforced in their belief that the programme they envisioned could not be realised without the grant the consortium persevered, eventually securing the funding necessary to bring their vision to life.

The Erasmus Mundus Support Initiative (EMSI) is an initiative of the European Commission, funded by the Erasmus+ programme (2021-2027) and operated by a consortium of four organisations, under a service contract with the European Education and Culture Executive Agency (EACEA).



“Success did not come easily. Our first attempt at securing Erasmus Mundus funding failed, but we did not give up. We believed in our vision and persevered until we brought it to life.”
— **Attila Pausits**, *University for Continuing Education Krems*.

The early years of MARIHE were particularly significant. The first cohort of students was seen not simply as students but as partners in a long journey in addressing the challenges ahead. The programme was shaped together with the students, maintaining a broad appeal while allowing students to specialise in areas such as research or administration based on their own needs and interests. Students from different backgrounds contributed to the programme, keeping its focus on connecting diverse people and educational systems, and building bridges between cultures and approaches. Many of those students went on to become leaders, administrators, and academics across the globe, building the global impact of the programme.

After this initial success, MARIHE applied for a second round of Erasmus Mundus funding, and once again, they faced rejection. Yet this only highlights a defining characteristic of the MARIHE consortium: its resilience. Committed to its vision, it continued its efforts and eventually secured the support it needed.

OVERCOMING CONTINUOUS CHALLENGES

Even though MARIHE is one of the longest-running programmes in Erasmus Mundus, it continuously faces challenges. As the consortium has grown, new viewpoints have been introduced and new processes implemented. Navigating different educational systems, cultural expectations, logistical challenges, and administrative practices has provided complexity. Practical issues, such as comparison of degrees, managing students and ensuring that they all are treated the same way and evaluated objectively no matter where they learn, even agreeing on definitions of terms and combining different legislations - discussions within the consortium are continuous and across partners.

Yet again, the attitude of the MARIHE consortium is notable here—that it is not always necessary to find the ultimate solution, but it is necessary to find a suitable solution. Challenges are solved through partnerships between consortia members and students based on high levels of mutual trust. This trust has, over the years, developed into friendships, community, and family. While not always a honeymoon story, overcoming those challenges has shaped the consortium into being highly functional and committed to a common mission.

The Erasmus Mundus Support Initiative (EMSI) is an initiative of the European Commission, funded by the Erasmus+ programme (2021-2027) and operated by a consortium of four organisations, under a service contract with the European Education and Culture Executive Agency (EACEA).



“Managing a diverse consortium across continents is never straightforward. It is not about finding the perfect solution, but rather about finding the right one through trust, collaboration, and a willingness to leave our comfort zones.” — **Attila Pausits**, *University for Continuing Education Krems*.

It is not only institutions that are challenged, but students as well. Jenny Henrika Nygård, from MARIHE Cohort 8 (2022-2024) highlights adapting to various cultural and academic environments. Studying in countries like China, India, Austria, and Finland, Jenny and her peers encountered significant differences in teaching methods, academic expectations, and institutional procedures. Different communication styles, cultural differences and procedural practices between European and Asian institutions required students to quickly adapt their approaches – while also being invaluable in teaching students how to navigate and succeed in diverse educational contexts. Combining multiple relocations with visa and residency permit procedures and adapting to varying administrative requirements in each country with language barriers can be time-consuming and stressful and requires dedicated support systems that are constantly developed. To support their students, MARIHE has developed Buddy programme, where alumni provide guidance for new students.

And of course, another challenge comes from the field of higher education itself. As it evolves, so too must the MARIHE programme. Adapting the curriculum to incorporate emerging trends, such as the impact of artificial intelligence on education and the geopolitics of higher education, presents an ongoing challenge for those in charge of programme development. Ensuring the programme remains relevant and prepares students for the future job market requires constant innovation and responsiveness to global developments.

IMPACT ON STUDENTS AND HIGHER EDUCATION

The programme has significantly impacted both its students and the broader field of higher education. Over a third of MARIHE alumni have pursued doctoral studies, branching out across sectors. Many of the alumni work in leadership roles and contribute to the global academic community, bringing new insights and leadership to universities and research institutions around the world.

For students like Jenny Nygård the programme has been transformative, both professionally and personally. Before joining MARIHE, Jenny had a vision of working in the field of higher education, particularly in internationalisation. Her studies, internships, and the extensive networking opportunities provided by MARIHE contributed to this vision becoming a reality – and this experience exemplifies the broader impact of MARIHE on its students. With emphasis on mobility, cultural immersion, and real-world experience students are equipped with the ability to navigate and thrive in diverse educational environments. For Jenny, studying across

The Erasmus Mundus Support Initiative (EMSI) is an initiative of the European Commission, funded by the Erasmus+ programme (2021-2027) and operated by a consortium of four organisations, under a service contract with the European Education and Culture Executive Agency (EACEA).



countries and cultures provided perspectives and insights, as well as preparing her for the challenges facing higher education today. MARIHE builds gateways, and for Jenny, those gateways have opened to internships at international educational organisations, and interactions with professionals at international forums – global connections that support her and other MARIHE students in their journey.

“Before MARIHE, I had a vision of working in international higher education, but it was through the programme’s studies, internships, and networking opportunities that this vision became a reality.” — *Jenny Nygård*

THE ESSENTIAL ROLE OF ERASMUS MUNDUS

It would be safe to say that there would not be MARIHE programme as it is without Erasmus Mundus. From its inception, MARIHE has relied on the funding provided by Erasmus Mundus to bring its ambitious vision to life.

Yet, Erasmus Mundus has been more than just a source of funding; it has served as a gateway for international collaboration and innovation. The financial support allowed the MARIHE consortium to develop a curriculum that spans continents, bringing together institutions from Europe and Asia. It has provided the necessary framework for managing the complexities of a transnational academic partnership. It has facilitated the mobility aspect of the programme, allowing students to gain firsthand experience in diverse educational and cultural contexts, and it continues to be a critical factor in the programme’s ongoing development and impact.

It is important to note that this relationship is not one-sided; programmes like MARIHE are also vital to Erasmus Mundus. They highlight the high standards and global reach of European Union educational initiatives and how Erasmus Mundus can foster not only academic excellence but also meaningful cross-cultural exchange and innovation. The achievements of MARIHE, in turn, elevate the prestige and importance of Erasmus Mundus, demonstrating its capacity to support programmes that have a significant impact on global higher education.

“Erasmus Mundus is not just a funding source; it is the backbone that allows us to build a truly global educational experience. Without it, the MARIHE programme would not exist as it does today.” — *Attila Pausits, University for Continuing Education Krems.*

The Erasmus Mundus Support Initiative (EMSI) is an initiative of the European Commission, funded by the Erasmus+ programme (2021-2027) and operated by a consortium of four organisations, under a service contract with the European Education and Culture Executive Agency (EACEA).



Funded by
the European Union

LOOKING AHEAD: THE FUTURE OF MARIHE

With 2024 marking the 20th anniversary of Erasmus Mundus, MARIHE looks back fondly, as well as hopefully and excitedly towards the future. In July 2024, MARIHE received another round of funding, with a revamped curriculum including a new specialisation in policy analysis. The consortium is also expanding, to include the University of Aveiro in Portugal as a new partner, bringing fresh insights into higher education, innovation, and research for all involved.

Attila Pausits says: 'MARIHE is not just one meeting, it is really a marathon.' Among the consortia of Erasmus Mundus, MARIHE is a veteran with years of experience, and it shows no sign of slowing down. Instead, it keeps going, with determination and resilience, dedicated to international collaboration, innovative thinking, and commitment to excellence, on a mission to shape the future of global higher education.

For more information on the MARIHE programme, please visit their website:
<http://www.marihe.eu/>

The Erasmus Mundus Support Initiative (EMSI) is an initiative of the European Commission, funded by the Erasmus+ programme (2021-2027) and operated by a consortium of four organisations, under a service contract with the European Education and Culture Executive Agency (EACEA).