China Programme, final report for projects 2012-2014
SUMMARY REPORT of THE PROJECT

Name of the project
Sino-Finnish project for joint development of doctoral training in the fields of Economics, Information Technology and Sport Sciences - SINOFIN JOINTDOC

Coordinating Institution
University of Jyväskylä (JYU)

Objectives of the project (as indicated in the project proposal)

SINOFIN JOINTDOC project, involving Beihang University (BU), Shanghai University of Sport (SUS) and Xi'an Jiaotong University (XJTU) as partner universities, aims at

1) developing the quality and internationalisation of PhD programmes in the selected three fields - information technology, sport sciences, business & economics - and, thus, improving the employability of the PhD students, and

2) developing and piloting step by step a framework for joint Sino-Finnish PhD programmes.

The concrete objectives linked to these two main aims are

- to carry out benchmarking visits between the project universities
- to compile comparison tables on the current doctoral programmes
- to identify similarities and differences as well as good practices and challenges at each university
- to identify joint research topics
- to exchange doctoral students in the three focus fields
- to organize joint doctoral workshops
- pilot joint supervision with one or two doctoral students based on cotutelle agreements

Achieved results and outcomes

All the concrete objectives identified above, except for the last one, have been achieved within SINOFIN JOINTDOC, and consequently, we have been able to further the attainment of the two main aims of this project. However, due to national and also institutional obstacles, we have not been able to pilot the joint doctoral supervision based on cotutelle-agreements. We learned during the project kick-off meeting that the joint implementation of doctoral programmes leading to joint or double degrees is going to be very challenging due to national regulations for doctoral dissertations in China and due to the framework of doctoral training in general. Furthermore, our Chinese partner universities were not familiar with cotutelle-agreements as a framework for joint supervision and jointly implemented doctoral education, and it was pointed out that it will be difficult and time-consuming to get the central administration of the partner universities to approve cotutelle-agreements. And finally, the notion of awarding two degrees based on the same set of studies seems to be viewed as ethically problematic in Chinese higher education. However, the final conclusion was that if individual professors in Finland and in China have common research interests and prior
cooperation and if project funding is available, cooperation in the implementation of doctoral education can be carried out and the possibilities to conclude cotutelle-agreements leading to the award of a double degree should be further explored.

The most concrete outcome, which will be a very useful tool in the development of cooperation in doctoral education between Finnish and Chinese universities, is the Sino-Finnish comparison table of doctoral education. Other concrete outcomes include the signing of the Letter of Intent regarding the Development of Joint Doctoral Training between JYU Faculty of Sport Sciences and SUS, and several new initiatives and plans for research cooperation in new fields. Other, less tangible but equally important outcomes of the project are the intensified cooperation between all the universities of the project, the atmosphere of trust which was created during the joint meetings and the increased familiarity with the educational and research activities of each university.

Activities carried out during the project

The project included the following joint events:
- one-week kick-off meeting hosted by JYU in March 2013
- a 5-day project meeting hosted by XJTU in October 2013
- a 3-day multidisciplinary research seminar hosted by BU in June 2014
- a 2-day project meeting hosted by SUS in June 2014
- a 4-day final project meeting hosted by JYU in October

Altogether 10 doctoral students carried out a 3-month research period within the framework of this project, which was exactly the planned number of mobilities in our project proposal. However, we failed to implement the 5-month study periods of two Chinese doctoral students based on cotutelle agreements, which was one of our initial objectives. Instead of this JYU hosted two additional ‘regular’ exchange students from China. All in all, JYU hosted 8 doctoral students from China and sent out two doctoral students / researchers to China during the project. All partner universities were actively involved in the mobility of doctoral students.

Future developments

JYU and all the three partner universities are committed
- to explore further the possibilities for implementing doctoral education jointly - either based on cotutelle agreements for individual doctoral students or more extensive agreements - taking use of the Sino-Finnish comparison table on doctoral education
- to take the cooperation described in the Letter of Intent between JYU Faculty of Sport Sciences and SUS to the next level of concrete implementation in a specified field
- to proceed in the development of research cooperation in the detected new fields of common research strengths and to apply for external funding for the joint ventures and for post-doc mobility
- to extend the current (mainly undergraduate) bilateral student exchanges between JYU, BU, SUS and XJTU to new fields and to include doctoral level
- to involve new JYU units and faculty members to faculty exchanges and research
Other remarks

All the three partner universities have shown great motivation and true commitment to the project in all its stages. All universities have hosted project events, participated fully and actively in the compiling of the Sino-Finnish comparison table of doctoral education and taken part in the exchange of doctoral students.