

Interview with Dr. Irina Rommel about the trip to Costa Rica (end of Nov. / beginning of Dec. 2021) within the project "Costa Rican Vocational Education and Training (CoRi VET)".

Conducted on 04.02.2022 by the Costa Rica Center (Lea Schlotterbeck)

Lea Schlotterbeck: Could you please summarize what the project is about?

Dr. Irina Rommel: The project has two main major goals. The first is to modify and revise an existing degree program for teacher qualification in vocational education at the Universidad Técnica Nacional (UTN). This study program has so far been very general education oriented. Now it is to be adapted more specifically and better to the needs of the vocational education system by integrating vocational pedagogy and technology didactics into the teacher qualification. In the course of this, further training will also be provided for the lecturers within the course. Among other things, we aim to support the innovations of the course with regard to vocational pedagogical concepts and methods in the design of teaching and learning processes. The second goal is the institutionalization of vocational education research at UTN, this on a structural and personnel level. For example, young researchers who are engaged in vocational education and training research on a national and international level are to be supported. We also plan to promote doctoral studies in cooperation between UTN and the Osnabrück University's Department of Vocational and Business Education (BWP). Of course, topics of (inter)national vocational education research will also be part of the updated study program.

The main actor on the Osnabrück side is the BWP. On the UTN side, the Center for Vocational Education and Training Technology (CFPTE) is involved. An important point or also a goal of CoRi VET is to integrate further important actors of vocational education in these processes. There is an exchange with the Costa Rican Ministry of Education (MEP), the National Institute for Training (INA), with representatives of the business development, etc. In the long term, we would like to integrate other Costa Rican universities in order to create a joint academic network in teacher qualification and to strengthen the continuous scientific exchange or research in this regard.

Lea Schlotterbeck: Why is the Universidad Técnica Nacional suitable for carrying out the project?

Dr. Irina Rommel: The UTN is the only university in Costa Rica that offers this course of study and thus has a unique selling point. In addition, we in Osnabrück look back on many years of cooperation with the UTN and want to support them in their need to present themselves more specifically in Costa Rica and to achieve a certain pioneering position.

Lea Schlotterbeck: What did you and the project group do during your research stay in Costa Rica?

Dr. Irina Rommel: During the kick-off for CoRi VET, we informed all the relevant players from the various sectors about the project and its goals and were able to present the initial results, milestones and next steps. First, we wanted to promote acceptance and discourse on the topic in Costa Rica, to involve and inform people, and thus also to increase their willingness to support our measures. This included discussions and presentations by German and Costa Rican representatives. An important point of the trip was also the workshop with the lecturers of the study program, most of whom only work part-time in the program. We were able to identify concrete needs, which the lecturers consider important and which are, of course, essential in the context of updating the study program and in the conception of further education offers.

Lea Schlotterbeck: What are the most formative experiences you had during the research stay? What is the significance of the research stay for the further implementation of the project? Could you please describe which project steps you plan next?

Dr. Irina Rommel: When you come into contact with another culture, you realize how much you are stuck in your German scientific context and are guided by specific ideas. You have to be very open to how different structures, ideas and procedures can be and how differently communication can work - that is always a very enriching experience for me. At the same time, I am very impressed by the motivation and willingness shown to us by the UTN and the other stakeholders. For example, staff members were specifically assigned to the project, which is absolutely not a matter of course in bilateral international projects. This encouraged us in our plans and showed how much relevance the

project has for the UTN. It is very important to emphasize that we do not want to implement something German in Costa Rica, but create something of our own for Costa Rica together. The face-to-face meetings made possible by the trip were very helpful for building relationships, especially in times of so much digital communication.

Now that the needs have been identified, the steps ahead for 2022 are to implement the concept for the course, plan the modules, develop and implement the first continuing education measures with the lecturers, and at the same time institutionalize vocational education research. Over the course of the next few years, this should then ideally transition into sustainable structures.

Lea Schlotterbeck: Is there anything else you would like to mention?

Dr. Irina Rommel: We are still relatively at the beginning of CoRi VET, for which a term of four years is planned. That is where it is particularly important to pay a lot of attention to the process of matching needs, because that is always a particular challenge that comes with cultural, institutional, etc., conditions. It is then important to set realistic goals that are adapted to the actual needs of the UTN, the students, the vocational education system, and the faculty of the program. This is not an easy task. That is why we must ensure now, hand in hand with Costa Rica, that the project is steered in the right direction. Among other things, we have to deal with the difficulty of a lack of data and have to conduct many of our own empirical studies and, in some cases, basic research. Here we collect and generate important findings and information that are crucial in international vocational education research and bilateral vocational education cooperation. Of course, we will publish these findings and make them available to the scientific national but also international community.

Lea Schlotterbeck: Thank you very much for the interview and good luck for the future!



From left to right: Prof. Dr. Thomas Bals, Prof. Dr. Dietmar Frommberger, Anastasia Goncharova, Dr. Irina Rommel, Adriana Rodríguez Castro, Monserrat Vargas Mendez, Daniel Láscarez Smith