



OTMED

1. Noteworthy productions

1.1. Outstanding progress regarding research

OT-Med has its compass towards an integrative issue, that of impacts of environmental change and natural risks on human society in the Mediterranean Basin. A large array of studies of ecosystem processes are thus complemented by investigations on ecosystem services, social and political processes affecting the Mediterranean environment.

OT-Med intends developing an important network around the Mediterranean. Accordingly the main added value so far has been building a large community of researchers to develop a common and multidisciplinary framework for studies of environmental change as well as basic water resources in the Mediterranean area.

1.2 Striking progress in other “Labex” fields

a. Formation

The activities in the project are embedded in research carried out by the member laboratories. Several joint scientific projects, training events and mobility fellowships have been co-funded.

Every year a call for projects is launched. Initially (in 2013), there were separate calls for scientific projects, PhD fellowships and postdoctoral fellowships. In 2014 and 2015, a single call for projects was launched in order to allow the support of bigger projects with salaries (PhD or postdoctoral fellowships), alongside smaller projects.

The project has established so far 14 PhD and 14 postdoctoral fellowships (3 PhD and 3 postdocs are planned for 2015). Otherwise OT-Med training activities are mostly linked with the MedNet project (“Mediterranean Network of environmental training sites supporting OSU Pythéas master’s degrees and international academic partnerships”), which is co-funded by A*MIDEX and OT-Med.

b. Valorization

The collaboration with a private enterprise, ACTERRA Conseil, has been productive, resulted in two Master fellowships. OT-Med is member of a group led by the regional cluster labelled by the region PACA, Ea éco-entreprises, on the quality of life in the French Mediterranean sector.

c. International (outreach, attraction, networking...)

Building an interdisciplinary research network around the Mediterranean with an aim to set up a virtual Mediterranean Research Institute and the international MISTRALS program, dedicated to global change in the Mediterranean, are the driving international networking routes.

The interdisciplinary “Mediterranean Earth Institute” is aimed to be created within the recently unified Aix Marseille University (AMU). The MEI aims to develop a high international profile, focusing on the environment and sustainable development of Mediterranean and semi-arid environments.

OT-Med aims to move progressively into MEI by initiating or strengthening north-south collaborations through the calls for proposals, by participating in various initiatives based on Mediterranean networks and by developing institutional contracts with partners (being the main objective for years 2015-2016).

2. Added-value resulting from labelling and funding as a “Laboratoire d’Excellence”

The main added value of OT-Med has been to allow a large community of researchers to develop a common and multidisciplinary framework for studies of environmental change in the Mediterranean and to move towards building a virtual Mediterranean Research Institute. Aiming such ambitions efforts is strongly dependent upon the Labex support.

3. Main weaknesses

3.1. Main weaknesses that might require corrective actions regarding the research performed in the “Labex”

There have been some problems on initial tendency of geographic and thematic dispersion in some research projects taken, but the project has aimed to correct them. Further emphasis on transversal workpackages is needed.

3.2 Main weaknesses that might require corrective actions regarding other fields of the “Labex”

a. Formation

The project team reported that they have had challenges in creating close interactions between PhD students and postdoctoral fellows from laboratories. Such collaboration is essential in terms of interdisciplinary approach underlined in the project, thus further efforts are needed. Some concern about the employability of students graduating in such a multidisciplinary environment should be recommended.

b. Valorization

No major weaknesses but some need to develop linkages with circum-mediterranean regional authorities to enlarge the stakeholder panel.

c. International (outreach, attraction, networking...)

No major weaknesses, but further effects are needed in developing the challenging international network planned.

4. “Labex” contribution to structuring the gathered scientific strengths (governance, synergy, common scientific programming, visibility...)

Labex has supported the process of building new science based institutions, which seem to be not only important but also very demanding and thus resources are definitely needed.

5. Beyond scientific results specifically obtained by the “Labex”, give an assessment on its contribution to the development, outreach and overall visibility of the concerned institutions and of the corresponding site.

Cooperation with enterprises and regional authorities seems to be at reach.

6. Overall opinion and recommendations

OT-Med focuses on the integrative issue of impacts of environmental change and natural risks on human society in the Mediterranean Basin. The project has shown some progress in building an interdisciplinary research network. The aim for interdisciplinary approach is definitely worth supporting. Still, given that such an action is demanding, further management and education efforts are needed to move into more effective and visible deliverables. Linkages and exchanges with other western Mediterranean countries with similar scientific concerns should be promoted. Similarly, further efforts to enlarge activities towards the eastern Mediterranean sector might be needed. The Labex might consider highlighting a few integrative research issues to focus collaborative efforts from all disciplines represented in the network.