



**Asociația INTERMEDIUNET  
România (INRO)  
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## **GUIDELINE ON THE ESTABLISHMENT OF AN INTERMEDIU CENTER**

### ***WHAT ARE INTERMEDIU CENTERS (SCIENCE SHOPS)?***

Starting in the 70s, in a wish to respond and offer support to civil society concerns, a number of Dutch universities established non-for-profit, consultancy and information centers offering such support, entitled *science shops*. Proving its usefulness, the concept was adopted by other Dutch universities, spreading afterwards in other Western European countries, USA and Canada, as well (information on the international science shop network may be found at [www.scienceshops.org](http://www.scienceshops.org)).

A science shop is an organization that offers independent research support in response to the civil society requests. With the support of the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs and in cooperation with the Universities of Groningen and Utrecht, eight such centers have been established in Romanian Universities (entitled InterMediu Centers), in two stages: four in 1998 and another four in 2002, Romania being the first of the ECE countries implementing this concept.

Besides the InterMediu Centers operating in universities in Iasi, Bacau, Galati, Bucharest, Ploiesti, Brasov and Oradea, other universities carry on science shop-like activities or intend to establish such entities, e.g. universities in Timisoara, Constanta, Baia Mare and Resita.

The activity of these centers focuses mainly on environmental issues and this is why they are called InterMediu Centers <sup>1</sup>; in 2003, representatives of these eight centers established a non-for-profit association, entitled INTERMEDIUNET Romania (INRO), with a scope on environmental, public health and social protection issues – details may be found at [www.intermediu.ro](http://www.intermediu.ro).

### ***WHAT IS THE OFFER OF THE INTERMEDIU CENTERS?***

-  information and education in the field of environmental, public health and social protection (databases, access to publications and legislation, development of educational programmes)
-  technical assistance
-  non-profit consultancy
-  technology studies/ project proposals
-  support to implementing research results
-  identifying of possible financing sources for research and education projects
-  continuous learning programmes

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1) In Romanian language, “mediu” stands for “environment”



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## ***PARTNERS AND BENEFICIARIES OF THE INTERMEDIU CENTERS' ACTIVITIES***

-  Non-governmental and governmental organizations
-  Owner and tenant's associations
-  Small and medium sized enterprises
-  Universities
-  Local authorities
-  Education institutions (e.g. schools)

## ***WHAT ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE AN INTERMEDIU CENTER MAY ADOPT?***

-  University departments
-  Centers included in the chair and faculty structures
-  NGOs
-  Branches of INRO Association

## ***ACTIVITIES OF INTERMEDIU CENTERS***

- Research, consultancy and information support to civil society on environment, health and social issues
- Organization of programmes, environmental education symposia in schools, highschoools, universities or upon the request of various interest groups
- Facilitation of cooperation between NGOs and universities, universities and non-governmental and governmental organizations, students and civil society groups
- Identification of opportunities for the students to work on interdisciplinary, applied research projects
- Organization of continuous learning programmes, short duration post-university courses and distance-learning programmes
- Access to computer database, specialty books and publications in the field of environmental, health and social protection
- Non-for-profit consultancy and technical assistance for project proposal writing or project implementation and management

## ***WHY TO ESTABLISH INTERMEDIU CENTERS IN OTHER ROMANIAN UNIVERSITIES AS WELL?***

The promotion of establishing *science shop*-type centers in Romania has a number of advantages, among which it is worth to mention:

- *science shops* represent a way to strengthen the links between the academic education and research and the society, while facilitating viable partnerships with the social environment;



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- their activity stimulates European integration at the university level, since InterMediu Centers currently existing in Romania are included already in the European Science Shop Network
- by their activities, *science shops* promote the extension of consultancy capabilities within Romanian universities, directing the students towards addressing concrete issues relevant for the civil society, while stimulating national and international cooperation
- InterMediu Centers contribute to the modernization of academic education by introducing and supporting project-based learning, as well as by developing other programmes (educational, post-academic, professional reconversion).

### ***WHICH ARE THE STEPS TO ESTABLISH AN INTERMEDIU CENTER?***

**1. Inform yourselves regarding the activities and achievements on Romanian InterMediu Centers and INRO Association !**

You may find information on each of the InterMediu Centers, including contact details and programme examples on the website [www.intermediu.ro](http://www.intermediu.ro). Should you wish to find more about the international science shop network and their achievements, please access their website at [www.scienceshops.org](http://www.scienceshops.org). You can also ask for more information on activities or projects, institutional settings, etc. or promotional materials, which will be sent to you by either regular mail or e-mail.

**2. Make sure that there is a real interest towards such type of activity in your University and faculty !**

You can discuss this matter with representatives of the university management (rector, vice-rectors, deans) but mainly with the teaching staff and students from your faculty. In the first months of operations – when results are not readily visible – it is crucial to benefit from the support of both the academic community and the students. The faculty profile should not be a problem – there are InterMediu Centers already operating in faculties of chemical engineering, biology, chemistry, and socio-humanistic sciences.

**3. Select a coordinator fit for the InterMediu Center's activities !**

This coordinator will take care of the first initiatives associated to the functioning of the center and the start-up of its first activities. It is advisable to select a young, enthusiastic staff member experienced in both project management and student supervising, and having good communication skills as well. During the center operation, other collaborators may be selected as well, from among the faculty staff or the students.

**4. Decide the institutional setting of the InterMediu Center you may want to establish !**

Depending on your specific circumstances, you may select from a department within the University, an NGO or a team of a Chair and, to this end, you must take care of



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the legal proceedings required to establish the organization (statute/by-laws, operation rules, organizational chart). In Romania, InterMediu Centers are usually entities created at faculty level, but it is equally possible to operate such a center as an NGO or a science shop established at university level. Our colleagues from the other InterMediu Centers in Romania will gladly answer your questions regarding their institutional setting and associated particularities.

**5. Organize an office where to carry on the activities, that is easily accessible for collaborators from inside and outside the University !**

The management support is crucial because it facilitates the start-up of your activity by providing for a minimum of organizational needs (an office room, access to a computer, internet connectivity, phone, etc.) The initial expenditure made by the organizing university or by a supporting NGO will be compensated later on from the budgets of projects implemented through these entities. If successful, these projects have a contribution in increasing the university prestige, developing of project-based learning for students, enhancing the multidisciplinary of research programmes and, last but not least, in attracting extra-budgetary funds for the university.

**6. Access the support (mentoring) and short duration training (e-learning, summer school) offered through a programme financed by the European Commission !**

Through the TRAMS (*Training and Mentoring of Science Shops*) financed by the European Commission in the "Science and Society" Programme and with the support of the European Science Shop Network, newly established InterMediu Centers will be able to access support and training programmes and attend the summer school to be organized with a view to share the existing experience and operation practices. In this project, INRO Association is one of the 16 partner organizations, along with two other experienced InterMediu Centers from Romania, having objectives set in this regard to facilitate the development of similar structures.

**7. Start your activity with a pilot project on a topic that is relevant for the local community while having a scientific research potential**

The pilot project represents the best way to initiate science shop-like activities. The subject of the project may be defined upon a request addressed by a local NGO or may be selected among the priority issues/concerns of the local community (drinking water quality, waste management, energy efficiency, public health issues, public participation in decision making, etc.) The selection of the topic is important because besides the link with the teaching activity (academic curricula and the profile of the university in question) it must also have a potential for scientific research and look interesting for the students and the supervising staff as well. It is advisable that a minimal co-financing exists for project implementation, as coming from the NGO, the local authorities or the university. In this project, one may find all the elements that are characteristic to the center's operation mode, and the specific activities with civil society groups must be carried out by a staged approach (objective setting, mediation, project start-up, actual implementation, internal and external communication, report writing and outcomes presentation).



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**8. Get students involved in the activities of the newly-established InterMediu Center !**

Students are highly interested in the activity of InterMediu Centers because they can acquire theoretical knowledge and practical skills that contribute to their professional progress and create increased employment chances. There are various aspects that prove important for student education and their future careers, e.g. improvement of skills in communication, teamworking and computer command, gaining of working experience in national and international projects and in research methodology and practice. For activities carried on in connection with InterMediu Centers, students may be granted credits (for practical periods, development of graduation thesis or dissertations, participation in courses organized by the centers); another option for them is to carry on the activity on voluntary basis.

**9. Involve faculty staff members in project supervising !**

The staff faculty members are involved in science shop projects because of their own interest for the teaching and research activity or the development of project management capabilities while associating social valences to their scientific work. For university teaching staff being in the same time science shop coordinators, problems may appear when these activities have no time frames allocated within the research activity, and are generally evaluated as project-type specific activities. However, current educational projects or programmes of InterMediu Centers proved useful in using the information within local, national or international programmes or in initiating cooperation with other experts governmental organizations.

**10. Make the results of your activity known by publications, research/documentary reports, communications, fliers, project proposals, symposia, media articles and presentations !**

The activity of InterMediu Centers in Romania demonstrated that project outcome dissemination includes all these steps and, generally, for centers operating in universities the interest for scientific publications remains quite high. However, in line with the main objectives of this kind of activity, special attention must be paid to developing and disseminating reports/presentations addressed to the public and the local community.

**11. Maintain the contact with and constantly benefit from the support offered by national and international science shop networks !**

Science shops experience shows that they are small organizations usually working at local level, which can effectively benefit from the support of national and international networks, e.g. increase of visibility, better access to information, knowledge transfer, initiation and participation in joint research and education programmes.



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**12. Adequate financing and support from universities and civil society groups may facilitate science shop-type activities**

In the Romanian context, the support for InterMediu Centers may take various forms, as for instance:

- ✓ Core-financing or coverage of operational expenses provided by the University;
- ✓ Ensuring of specific administrative rules or financial autonomy;
- ✓ Partial coverage of project expenses by the research / project beneficiary (from zero to full coverage of costs, depending on the actual cost supporting capacity), the publicity for science shop projects and the presentation materials being financed through the support of the central university structures.

*GOOD LUCK TO ALL THOSE WILLING TO ESTABLISH AN INTERMEDIU CENTER! Please do not hesitate to contact us if you wish us to support you in this endeavor.*

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