



Self-imposed evaluation of the Helmholtz Research School MICMoR as a tool for quality assurance and advancement of a structured graduate programme

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The Helmholtz Research School MICMoR (Mechanisms and Interactions of Climate Change in Mountain Regions) offers a structured graduate programme for doctoral students in the field of climate change research. It is hosted by the Institute of Meteorology and Climate Research (KIT/IMK-IFU) in Garmisch-Partenkirchen, in collaboration with 7 Bavarian partner universities and research institutions. Hence, MICMoR brings together a considerably large network with currently 20 doctoral students and 55 scientists. MICMoR offers scientific and professional skills training, provides a state-of-the-art supervision concept, and fosters international exchange and interdisciplinary collaboration. In order to develop and advance its programme, MICMoR has committed itself to a self-imposed mid-term review in its third year, to monitor to which extent its original objectives have been reached, and to explore and identify where MICMoR has room for improvement. The evaluation especially focused on recruitment, supervision, training, networking and cooperation. Carried out by an external expert (Beate Scholz from scholz ctc), the evaluation was based on a mixed methods approach, i.e. combining a quantitative survey involving all doctoral candidates as well as their supervisors and focus groups with different MICMoR stakeholders.

The evaluation has brought forward some highly interesting results, pinpointing challenges and opportunities of setting up a structured doctoral programme. Overall, the evaluation proved to be a useful tool for evidence-based programme and policy planning, and demonstrated a high level of satisfaction of supervisors and fellows. Supervision, with facets ranging from disciplinary feedback to career advice, is demanding and requires strong commitment and adequate human resources development by all parties involved. Thus, MICMoR plans to offer mentor coaching and calls on supervisors and mentors to form a community of learners with their doctoral students. To realize this vision, a long way lies ahead for all participants. Here, the evaluation provided useful suggestions on how to best use scarce time resources. Due to the fact that MICMoR's fellowships provide only supplemental funding for its fellows to participate in the programme, their base funding (salaries, stipends) needs to be secured independently, e.g. through project funds. However, this created a significant challenge as doctoral topics were determined more by the projects' research questions than by the research school's research focus. To improve this situation, MICMoR introduced some full stipends in its third year.

We conclude that, in order to successfully run an interdisciplinary, multi-network research school, sufficient funds for its general framework, but also for doctoral stipends/salaries are needed to obtain a more accurate fit between the programme's research focus and the doctoral topics. Furthermore, a high level of commitment and identification with the programme of both, doctoral students and their supervisors, is required. Finally, regular review and programme assessment are essential for tailored programme development and strategy planning.