



CHARM-EU European University alliance

First steps towards an innovative governance and management
model for a new type of alliance

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Concepts, challenges and lessons learned from the higher education sector and beyond

Report presented to the Rectors Assembly
of the CHARM-EU European University alliance

26 October 2020

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Executive summary

This report was commissioned in order to **inform the preparation of the European University Alliance CHARM-EU's governance and management model**, by providing innovative ideas and lessons learned on how other strategic alliances respond to the challenges of governance in a diverse and multicentric environment. Governing and managing strategic alliances is extremely challenging, particularly when an alliance brings together a huge variety of partners which are themselves decentralised organisations. There are **no blueprint** solutions. However, it is important to **learn from the experience**, both by monitoring projects within CHARM-EU and by seeking inspiration from other alliances. In the field of higher education, research and innovation, our benchmark focuses on three strategic alliances (Eucor, U4Society Network, EIT Health). Beyond the higher education sector, we explore the logic of strategic alliances in the private sector.

The benchmark leads us to identify **6 key recommendations to inform the preparation of CHARM-EU's future governance and management model**:

1. **Build on the existing governance of the alliance's member institutions.** While most alliances privilege a rotating presidency between leaders of their member institutions, it is important that such mandates are not too short in order to ensure a minimum level of continuity. Beyond political leadership, the involvement of the members' governing bodies is key to ensure democratic legitimacy and raise awareness within member institutions.
2. **Adopt a 'living strategy' approach.** Successful alliances must enable its members to experiment innovative projects, initially on a limited scale, and learn from such pilot projects. This requires a capacity to define achievable goals and clear monitoring processes. While long term visions are important, unachievable goals may lead to frustration and inefficient use of resources.
3. **Build on the partners' complementarity of skills and knowledge.** Rather than geographical or historical identity, what counts in designing and implementing joint projects are specific operational skills and areas of specialised knowledge that each partner can bring to the table.
4. **Carefully balance inclusiveness and flexibility.** A certain degree of flexibility is key to implement successful projects within an alliance. A strategic alliance must not be a burden to its members. Therefore, all partners do not necessarily need to be involved in the same way in all projects.
5. **Focus on financial sustainability to ensure long-term success.** To ensure long term viability and the commitment of member institutions, successful strategic alliances cannot depend exclusively on external funding. Most strategic alliances set up membership fees which vary with regard to the size of each member institution.
6. **Facilitate networking among the member institutions' communities and support services.** While political leadership at the top is key to an alliance's success, the benchmark also demonstrates the importance of getting people within the member institutions involved in joint projects and activities.

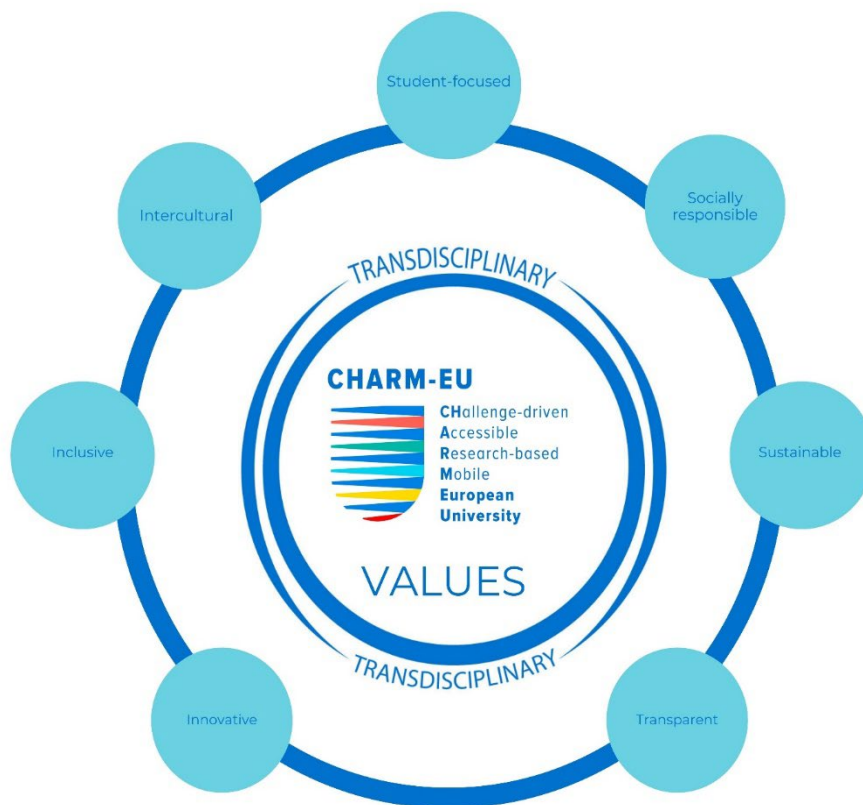
Finally, creating a legal entity¹ can be an asset to support an alliance's long-term strategic development, but the legal entity should not be an end in itself. It should be designed so as to facilitate the coordination of joint projects, without hampering the autonomy of its member institutions or overshadowing their respective brands.

¹ Future choices regarding a potential legal entity for CHARM-EU should of course be made in light of the broader debate on the creation of a new legal status for European university alliances. See the EU Commission's Communication on achieving the European Education Area by 2025, 30/9/2020.

1. Context and objectives

CHARM-EU (Challenge-driven, Accessible, Research-Based and Mobile European University) was founded by five research-based universities (University of Barcelona, Trinity College Dublin, Utrecht University, Eötvös Loránd University Budapest and University of Montpellier) to become a leading example of good practice by increasing the quality, international competitiveness and attractiveness of the European Higher Education landscape. In 2019, CHARM-EU was selected by the European Commission in the framework of the **European University Alliance** call for projects.

CHARM-EU aims to offer a learning experience that, with mobility and inclusiveness at its core, is based on the implementation of a transformative approach to program and curricula design. It combines the best of the different European traditions in structuring curricula through knowledge-creating teams, with a flexible, skill-oriented modulization structure. CHARM-EU will deliver an innovative, challenge-driven, student-centred, and self-directed teaching model that integrates research, teaching, innovation and enquiry within and across the disciplines open to the world. This model envisages a European higher education campus utilizing the latest technology in the service of accessibility and internationalisation.



In this context, the objectives of this report are two-pronged:

- **Identify key challenges** that CHARM-EU's governance will have to tackle for the alliance to fulfil its missions
- **Provide innovative ideas and lessons learned** on how other strategic alliances respond to the challenges of governance in a diverse and multicentric environment, and **inform the preparation of CHARM-EU's future governance model**

2. Concepts and methodology

Key concepts

Defining governance and management

Governance and management are two closely intertwined concepts, which encompass a wide semantic spectrum of practices and catalyse many conceptual debates.² For this report, we suggest using simple working definitions, which fit our understanding of the challenges that CHARM-EU faces in the definition of its governance and management model.

We suggest approaching **governance** as “**the manner in which power and authority is exercised in organisations in the allocation and management of resources**”.³ The term governance has given rise to a growing literature since the 1990s. Most definitions rely on three main dimensions: (1) **Authority**: who has a voice in making decisions? (2) **Decision-making**: how are decisions made? (3) **Accountability**: who is accountable?⁴

The term **management** refers to the “**process of working with and through others to achieve organizational objectives in a changing environment**”.⁵ Put simply, governance aims at determining the ‘what’ (deciding what the organisation will achieve or implement), while management is concerned with the ‘how’ (the practices and processes through which decisions are implemented). However, these definitions remain somewhat abstract. To translate them into more concrete and precise terms, we need to clarify first what is to be governed and managed.

Governance and management of strategic alliances

Strategic alliances can be defined as “**voluntary arrangements between firms [or other organisations] involving exchange, sharing, or co-development of products, technologies, or services**”.⁶ Alliances hence differ from mergers in the sense that their founding organisations keep their independence. Some alliances can also be considered as meta-organisations, i.e. organisations whose members are other organisations⁷ (sports leagues or federation, intergovernmental organizations, confederations of trade unions, etc.). Their main objective is to organise the collective actions of their members.⁸ A meta-organisation’s members have more resources than the meta-organisation itself and their membership is critical for the survival of the meta-organization.⁹ However, in some cases, the membership of the meta-organisation is also essential for the member organisations’ activities (e.g. in the case of sports leagues).

² Van Kersbergen and Van Waarden (2004) identify as many as 9 different meanings to the term ‘governance’ (Kees Van Kersbergen and Frans Van Waarden, 2004. “Governance’ as a bridge between disciplines: Cross-disciplinary inspiration regarding shifts in governance and problems of governability, accountability and legitimacy.’ In *The European Journal of Political Research* 42 (2))

³ Garry D. Carnegie, 2009. ‘The ABC of University Governance.’ In *Campus Review* 19 (9): 8.

⁴ <https://iog.ca/what-is-governance/> [Accessed: 30/09/2020]

⁵ Robert Kreitner, 1995. *Management 6th Edition*, Houghton Mifflin Company, USA, p. 4.

⁶ Ranjay Gulati, 1998. ‘Alliances and networks’ In *Strategic Management Journal*, 19(4): 293.

⁷ Göran Ahrne. and Nils Brunsson, 2008. *Meta-organizations*. Cheltenham: Edward Elgar Publishing.

Hervé Dumez, 2009. La théorie des méta-organisations. In *Annales des Mines-Gérer et comprendre* (No. 1, pp. 77-78). ESKA.

⁸ Héloïse Berkowitz, and Hervé Dumez, 2016. The concept of meta-organization: Issues for management studies in *European Management Review*, 13(2), 149-156.

⁹ Göran Ahrne and Nils Brunsson, 2005. Organizations and meta-organizations in *Scandinavian journal of Management*, 21(4), 429-449.

Governing and managing a strategic alliance requires a constant effort of striking a balance between diverse interests and perceptions. This is particularly challenging for international alliances. Based on our interviews and case studies, the key challenges of governing international strategic alliances can be summarised as follows:

- Implementing joint initiatives despite diverging national and institutional regulations and laws, internal organisations, processes, and practices
- Working efficiently in a multicultural and multilingual environment spread across several countries
- Mobilising a diversity of stakeholders whose perceptions may differ strongly
- Ensuring financial sustainability despite a budget that is often very limited in light of the alliance's ambition
- Designing agile and legible decision-making processes in a complex institutional environment

Governance and management in the higher education sector

In the field of higher education and research, there is a **growing trend towards international partnerships**, which is motivated both by **inter-organisational drivers** (changes in the production of knowledge, resource dependencies, new opportunities of information exchange and communication) and **inter-national drivers** (demands for international linkages from student and staff, increase in opportunities for transnational education and research, and calls for a more utilitarian perspective of universities).¹⁰ International partnerships take various forms. Stockley and de Wit¹¹ distinguish between academic association (Association of European Universities, International Association of Universities), academic consortia (Joint Study Programmes in the ERASMUS scheme) and institutional networks, which are leadership-driven and multipurpose (Eucor, ALMA, Coimbra group, ...). Other definitions, based on recent practice of higher education internationalisation, distinguish strategic alliances as a specific type of network that is more focused: while a network essentially means a group of interconnected actors, an alliance can be defined as pursuing a joint strategy, and thereby acting together to tackle challenges that one member cannot tackle alone.¹² In this perspective, the concept of networks seems more relevant to analyse how individuals and organisations interact within a strategic alliance, rather than to define an alliance itself.¹³

Though all strategic alliances in higher education vary in size, visibility and geographic spread, they cover a rather similar range of activities: student exchange, academic and administrative staff exchange, research and innovation cooperation, researcher exchange, benchmarking, delivery of transnational education, joint bids for international projects, joint curriculum development, joint or double academic programmes, shadowing programmes, short course programmes, developmental projects in a third country, relationships with the private sector, etc.¹⁴

¹⁰ Eric Beerkens, 2002. 'International inter-organisational arrangements in higher education: Towards a typology' In *Tertiary Education and Management* 8, pp. 297–314

¹¹ David Stockley and Hans de Wit, 2011. 'The Increasing Relevance of Institutional Networks' In de Wit (ed.) *Trends, Issues and Challenges in Internationalisation of Higher Education*, Centre for Applied Research on Economics & Management, School of Economics and Management of the Hogeschool van Amsterdam.

¹² Interview with Alain Béretz, Former president of University of Strasbourg and former adviser to the French Prime Minister on the European Universities Initiative

¹³ Ranjay Gulati, *Alliances and Networks*, Strategic Management Journal, Vol. 19, 293–317 (1998)

¹⁴ Stockley and de Wit, 2011: 51-52

Strategic alliances in the HE sector have to face specific challenges. Most universities and other HEIs are characterised by a tradition of decentralisation and internal democracy, gather strong (and often diverging) disciplinary cultures and identities, and a variety of internal and external stakeholders (students/lifelong learners, academic staff, support staff, public and private partner organisations, ...). As Larsen et al.¹⁵ put it, reconciling these specificities of the HE sector with increasing calls for effectiveness and competitiveness leads to 4 main dilemmas:

- **Representative democracy vs organisational effectiveness:** How should academic leaders be designated? What influence should representatives of students and staff have in the decision-making processes?
- **Integrated vs dual management structures:** To what degree should actors and bodies responsible for administrative and academic matters be kept distinct? How should they work together/be positioned towards one another?
- **External vs internal influence in institutional decision-making:** How and to what extent should external stakeholders be included in strategic decision-making? What profiles and competences should they have (representatives from business and industry, external academic experts, civil society actors ...)? What weight should insiders and outsiders respectively have in the decision-making process?
- **Centralisation vs decentralisation in (increasingly) autonomous universities:** How much and what kind of power and authority should be attributed to different organisational levels within HEIs?

In order to find the right balance in answering these dilemmas, European universities have adopted different governance models, giving more or less weight to board-type or senate-type bodies: the former are usually tasked with strategic institutional decisions while the latter are often responsible for academic matters. Their different missions influence their size and composition: board-type bodies tend to be smaller and more diverse; senate-type bodies are often larger and more 'academic-oriented'. In light of these distinctions, Pruvot and Estermann¹⁶ identify two main types of governance models: (1) unitary governance models, where one governing body exerts decision-making powers; (2) Dual governance models, where governance structures include both a senate-type body and a board-type body that share decision-making powers.¹⁷ One can further distinguish traditional dual models, where each body has an equally important portfolio of responsibilities, and asymmetric models, where one body has more weight than the other.

In each country, strict, loose, or no regulations apply to the size and composition of governing bodies, hence the governance landscape of European universities is quite contrasted. Therefore, designing an effective governance and management model for **an alliance that brings together a variety of institutions with strongly diverging national regulations and internal practices** is a huge challenge.

¹⁵ Ingvild M. Larsen, Peter Maassen, Bjørn Stensaker, 2009. 'Four basic dilemma in university governance reform' In *Higher Education Management and Policy* 21 (3)

¹⁶ Enora Bennetot Pruvot and Thomas Estermann, 2018. 'University Governance: Autonomy, Structures and Inclusiveness' In A. Curaj et al. (eds.), *European Higher Education Area: The Impact of Past and Future Policies*, New York: Springer Publishing.

¹⁷ Dual governance models can be observed for roughly 2/3 of the 22 cases studied by Pruvot and Estermann

Methodology

Key management processes to be analysed

Rather than providing an abstract overview of the debates on 'good' governance, this report should be directly relevant for the choices to be made on the future governance and management of CHARM-EU. The governance model of CHARM-EU must be designed in light of its missions and values, and the strategic vision of how to fulfil these missions (see the work in progress on the other WPs).

While CHARM-EU's strategy remains to be defined in more detail during the pilot phase, **5 key areas of management processes** can be identified at this stage:

- **Strategy** - For instance: How to design a joint strategic vision for the CHARM-EU alliance that builds on the strengths and complementarities of the founding members? How to involve civil society and socio-economic partners in the design of CHARM-EU's curriculum? How to promote the visibility and attractiveness of CHARM-EU within the founding institutions and beyond? ...
- **Finance and funding policy** - For instance: How to develop new sources of funding, e.g. through joint application to external funding calls? How to develop partnerships with NGOs, companies, and governmental actors? How to be sustainable as public institutions? How to share infrastructures and costs? How to compensate the cost of contributions of each partner in joint programmes? How to set up a unique tuition fee for all CHARM European students? ...
- **Staffing/HR** - For instance: How to pool human resources and share academic and non-academic staff on cross-country initiatives? How to recruit joint staff? How to set a common quality standard while accommodating different working cultures and languages?...
- **Services** - For instance: How to combine services to be provided at the European University and the ones provided at the local level? How to align different institutional calendars and procedures? How to ensure a smooth communication between different IT systems? How to ensure equal access to support services throughout the European campus? How to define joint standards while maintaining diverse cultures? ...
- **Quality and accreditation** - For instance: How to develop a joint quality assurance/control system? How to obtain European quality accreditation at the institutional level (and not merely at the programme level)? How to issue CHARM-EU accreditations in the name of the 5 universities? How can CHARM-EU help its members improve their quality processes? ...

Methodology and sources

This report builds on three main types of sources:

- A review of academic and professional literature on the governance and management of strategic alliances in the field of higher education and beyond
- Case studies of international strategic alliances based on a variety of sources (websites, evaluation reports, newspaper articles, and interviews)
- Interviews with academic and professional experts who have been closely involved in analyzing and managing international alliances in the field of higher education and research (Alain Beretz, Janosch Nieden, Aurelle Garnier, Gijs Coucke, Hans de Wit)

It should be brought to the reader's attention that, due to the health crisis of the COVID-19 pandemic and the disruptions that followed, our planned on-site visits were cancelled, and we had to adapt our methodology accordingly.

The concepts and definitions used in this report are anchored in the academic literature. However, it is important to keep in mind that this is not an academic publication. Rather than contributing to academic debate, the main goal of this report is to provide lessons learned and practical recommendations to inform the design of an innovative model of governance and management for the CHARM-EU alliance.

3. Lessons learned from strategic alliances in the higher education sector and beyond

Case selection

CHARM-EU constitutes a pilot project for an entirely new type of alliance. Thus, there is no blueprint that fits the needs of the CHARM-EU governance and management model. Rather, the benchmarking¹⁸ seeks to provide inspiring ideas and lessons learned on how other strategic alliances respond to the challenges of governance and management in a diverse, multicentric environment.

The case studies presented below were selected with regard to the characteristics of the CHARM-EU alliance and the key challenges it faces. All case studies share one or more similarities with CHARM-EU, as they **are structured as networks, multinational, multilingual and multi-site**. Beyond these similarities, the cases studies were also selected so as to cover **a variety of institutional settings** (more or less integrated...) **and missions** (education, research, innovation, ...). As CHARM-EU members are public universities, the benchmark focuses mostly on public institutions and institutions with a clearly identified public service mission. However, a short subsection provides lessons learned from private sector alliances as well.

Inevitably, there is a bias in the sample of benchmark cases: all cases are alliances that have, to some extent, succeeded. Failed attempts at creating strategic alliances are generally not well documented enough to be used for benchmark purposes. We try to mitigate this potential bias in three ways: first, the expert interviews focused on both success factors and potential risks and pitfalls of international alliances. These interviews have strongly contributed to the conclusions drawn in section 4. Secondly, in the case studies, we systematically analyse the challenges and risks that even (relatively) successful alliances are facing. Finally, we explore the experience of regional higher education alliances in France, which provide lessons learned on how to (and how not to) articulate the governance of an alliance with that of its members.

Though we initially intended to include in our benchmark the European University Institute, we decided not to, for two main reasons. First, the EUI is not a strategic alliance but a one-of-a-kind project, born out of a Convention signed between EU member states. Contrary to multicentric alliances such as CHARM-EU, the EUI is built around a clearly identified location (its campus in Florence). Secondly, although an interview was conducted with representatives of the EUI, the interviewees asked us not to share any detailed information on the EUI's internal processes and practices.

Eucor – the European Campus

Eucor in a nutshell

'Eucor – The European Campus' is a **trinational alliance of five universities in the Upper Rhine**, a border region between Germany, France and Switzerland. It gathers **the universities of Basel, Freiburg, Haute-Alsace, Strasbourg, and the Karlsruhe Institute of Technology (KIT)**, which translates into 15,000 researchers, 13,500 doctoral candidates and 117,000 students. In 2015, Eucor became a **European Grouping of Territorial Cooperation (EGTC)**, a structure created by the European Commission to promote interregional activities, and was subsequently financed by the EU Interreg

¹⁸ We use here the term 'benchmark' in the sense of a qualitative analysis relying on case studies, and not as a systematic qualitative and quantitative comparison of CHARM-EU with other objects.

programme. This legal entity, which solidifies a cooperation that dates back to 1989, enables the universities to retain their autonomy, and yet act together under the name “Eucor – The European Campus”. The creation of the EGTC has had consequences both at the political and operational levels. Firstly, since Eucor was both the first EGTC carried exclusively by universities and the first EGTC headquartered in Germany, it gained visibility. Furthermore, at the operational level, this new legal structure had an impact on its funding model and financial management: Eucor can carry out internal calls for tenders and joint fund-raising (e.g. responding to external calls), and manage its own budget.

Eucor’s activities are organised around six objectives: ¹⁹

- **Strengthening cooperation in the field of research.** In order to help scientists to network, organise joint workshops or joint grant applications, a focus is set on priority themes, each under the responsibility of one or two universities: quantum sciences and technology (Strasbourg, KIT), personalised health – precision medicine (Freiburg, Basel), sustainability (Freiburg, Strasbourg), European identities (Strasbourg, Freiburg) and interculturality (Haute-Alsace).²⁰
- **Providing common access to all training courses in specialised skills for PhD students.**
- **Developing a common research infrastructure.** The research infrastructures attached to EUCOR’s member institutions will be the subject of a joint assessment of means, in order to draw up a programme of use.
- **“Reconciliation” of academic calendars** in order to facilitate student mobility
- **Enhancing the student mobility between the member universities** by facilitating the administrative procedures in the member universities and by improving the framework conditions, i.e. contributing to the development of a trinational travel ticket in the Upper Rhine, in order to simplify the journey from one university to another.
- **Fostering the networking of administrative entities**, so that different departments within university administrations learn to know each other better and exchange their experience at a trinational level. In the long term, it is planned to create services that all members of the member universities can use jointly.

Four of the five founding members of Eucor are part of the **EPICUR European University**, in collaboration with the University of Amsterdam, the Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań, the University of Natural Resources and Applied Life Sciences in Vienna, and the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki. Eucor’s fifth member, the University of Basel, is not eligible to apply in the European Universities Initiative, as Switzerland is not an Erasmus+ program country.²¹ Though EPICUR benefits from Eucor’s experience in governance and management, it was emphasised that Eucor’s model is based on the members’ geographical proximity, which is not the case of EPICUR. As such, many initiatives implemented at Eucor’s level will not be extended to the level of EPICUR.²²

Governance model²³

¹⁹ Eucor Strategy 2023 (2019), available at <https://www.eucor-uni.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/Eucor-Strategieplan-Plan-strat%C3%A9gique-2019-2023.pdf> [Accessed 31/08/2020]

²⁰ Interview

²¹ <https://www.eucor-uni.org/en/> [Accessed : 31/08/2020]

²² Interview

²³ <https://www.eucor-uni.org/en/> [Accessed : 31/08/2020] ; Eucor’s Convention (2015), available at https://www.eucor-uni.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/de_evtz_ubereinkunft_fr_gect_convention-1-1.pdf [Accessed : 31/08/2020] ; Eucor’s statutes (2015), available at https://www.eucor-uni.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/de_evtz_satzung_fr_gect_statuts-1.pdf [Accessed : 31/08/2020]

Eucor relies on a governance model which strongly emphasises **the autonomy of its member institutions**. Eucor’s governance model pre-existed the creation of the EGTC and was formally translated into EGTC’s convention and statutes in 2015. Its main decision-making body, the Assembly, is composed exclusively of rectors/presidents of Eucor’s members, who all have an equal vote, regardless of the size of their student population. The Eucor Assembly and the Commission of the Vice-Presidents are composed of representatives elected within each university. To draw an analogy with international relations theory, these bodies are based on an ‘intergovernmental’ model bringing together representatives of national governments in an effort of international cooperation. The Eucor Coordination Office/Secretariat, on the other hand, is an integrated administrative entity, whose members are placed under direct responsibility of Eucor (though the personnel might not be directly employed by the EGTC). In this sense, the Coordination Office/Secretariat resembles ‘supranational’ institutions such as the EU Commission (albeit with a very different level of power and responsibility). Finally, there are **no external stakeholders involved** in Eucor’s governance scheme.²⁴

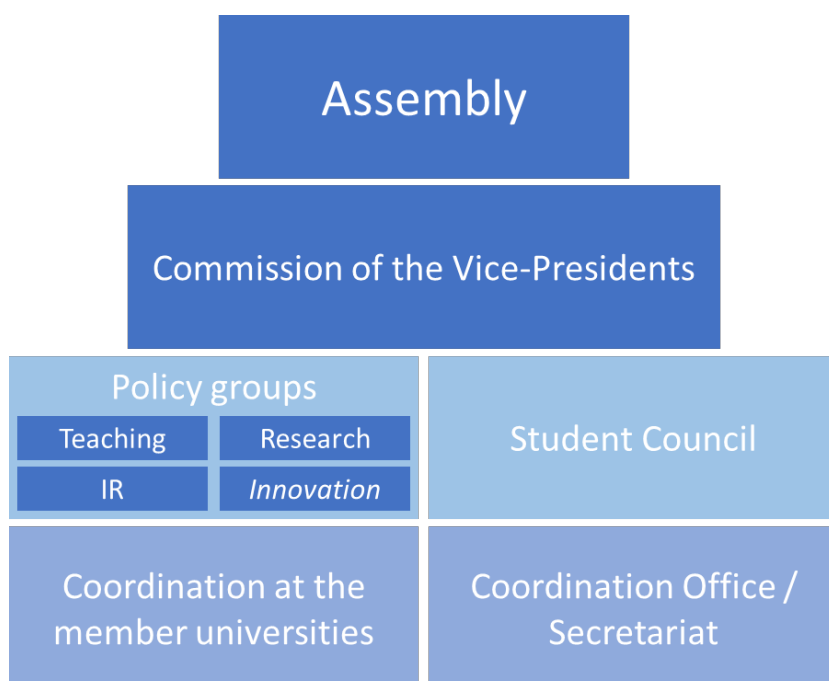


Fig. 1. Eucor governance model

The Assembly is the main **decision-making body** of the EGTC. Consisting of the Rectors/Presidents of the member universities, it sets the annual budget and the members’ contributions,²⁵ approves the general strategy and the annual work programme. Moreover, it has the competence to dissolve the EGTC and modify its convention and statutes. The Assembly meets twice a year,²⁶ or more often upon request of one of the EGTC’s members. For a decision to be adopted, 4/5 members must be present, and they must all agree unanimously. **The**

President as well as his/her deputy are elected among the Assembly’s members for a three-year mandate. Though there is a tacit understanding to alternate between universities when electing the president, it is “above all a matter of motivation, as Eucor needs strong steering”. For instance, the President of the University of Freiburg has been Eucor’s President for the past 5 years, since Eucor has been in a phase of restructuration following the creation of the EGTC.²⁷ The President is responsible of the budget and its implementation, as well as of the annual budgetary report and activity report (submitted for the Assembly’s approval). He/she also is the EGTC’s legal representative.

²⁴ The Eucor Policy groups may of course consult external experts if necessary, depending on the issues on their agenda.

²⁵ Calculated on the basis of the number of students of each university

²⁶ Eucor Strategy 2023 (2019)

²⁷ Interview

The President is supported by **the Commission of Vice-Presidents (VPs)**, which constitutes the link between the political and the operational levels. The Commission consists of a member of the presidential team of each of the five member universities. Each VP is selected in his or her university, and they may have different portfolios: at Strasbourg University for instance, it is the VP in charge of French-German relations. Led by the President, this commission meets up to four times a year²⁸ and deliberates on substantive issues related to the EGTC. Each university is theoretically in charge of one domain: strategy (Freiburg),²⁹ research (Strasbourg), training (Basel), HR and finance (KIT), interculturality (Haute-Alsace). However, this distribution of roles “is mostly on paper”³⁰ as all universities treat all of them. However, if a specific issue arises, the university in charge of the corresponding domain should take care of it. This is the case for example for the organisation of the Policy Groups Research, led by the Eucor Vice president for research, and the organisation of the Policy Group Education/training, led by the Eucor Vice president for training.

The Secretariat (in Freiburg) and its Coordination Office (in Strasbourg) are headed by a Director³¹ designated by the Assembly for a three-year renewable mandate. They are currently composed of 5,7 FTE,³² who support the Assembly, the President and the Commission of VP in their work, and are tasked with budget implementation, HR management, project management and communication. Though they are in principle two distinct instances, in reality they gather the same employees who are based in Freiburg and Strasbourg. The Director travels once a week to Germany to exchange with the team members in Freiburg.

Coordinators in member universities are decentralised interlocutors of the Secretariat and the Coordination Office in the member institutions and provide immediate support to the Vice-Presidents in their assignments. They constitute the first point of contact in the universities for any request (help in creating cooperation, questions related to mobility, etc).

Several **advisory bodies** are mentioned on Eucor’s website, but they have evolved several times since the creation of the EGTC.

- **The Senior Advisory Board** gathering external representatives only met once in the context of the Interreg project. Eucor has not decided yet under what conditions it will continue.
- **Policy groups**, which are exchange fora on specific domains, gather the corresponding VPs from the universities two or three times a year. They were created as it became clear that more VPs needed to work together and present their universities’ projects (only few of them sit in the Commission of VPs). Originally, there were only two policy groups, research and teaching. Recently an IR policy group was launched, and the creation of a policy group on technology transfer and innovation is under consideration. The meetings of each policy group are organised by the university in charge of the corresponding domain (e.g. the University of Strasbourg for research, ...). Eucor’s Director and/or the Deputy participates in

²⁸ Eucor Strategy 2023 (2019)

²⁹ As the EGTC’s President has been the University of Freiburg’s rector since the creation of the structure, it was logical for Freiburg to be in charge of the strategy. The election of a new President might bring a new distribution of roles to the universities.

³⁰ Interview

³¹ The director and his team bring together a strong experience in the management of strategic international projects in the field of higher education and research, and fluency in Eucor’s working languages (French, German, and English)

³² Organigram of Eucor’s Secretariat and Coordination Office, available at: https://www.eucor-uni.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/Eucor_Secr%C3%A9tariat_bureau_de_coordination_Organigramme_FR_v4.1.pdf [Accessed 01/09/20]

all meetings of the policy groups and is responsible for keeping the other instances aware of the topics discussed.

The **Student Council** is an association whose members are representatives of the local student associations of the member universities. As the Student Council precedes the creation of the EGTC, its legal structure is a French association (“association loi 1901”). Its members elect a steering committee, composed of a President, a Secretary General, a Treasurer and a Communications Officer, who defend the interests of students within the EGTC bodies. The Student Council also organises events gathering Eucor students (festival, linguistic tandems, ...). However, in practice, “it’s more complicated, and quite informal”: there is a strong turnover in the Student Council, which makes it difficult for its members to effectively represent all students. Though the president of the student council participates in meetings of the Assembly and the Commission of VPs, there is a lack of ex-ante coordination across Eucor’s student population. Therefore, the extent to which the Student Council effectively represents students remains very limited.³³ Moreover, the composition of the Student Council Steering Committee itself does not reflect Eucor’s diversity, as the 4 members elected in 2019 are all French, and only represent two universities.³⁴

Finally, at the operational level, **working groups** have been created both to share good practices, network and identify topics where the cooperation could be intensified (e.g. on student mobility, language learning, university libraries, HR, welcome foreign researchers, ...). Many of them have been tested during the Interreg project, but they have not all been continued. The working groups might be launched upon suggestion either from the political level (such as the WG on student mobility), or from the operational one (such as the WG on university libraries). These working groups are key to make the European Campus exist. In the everyday functioning of each member’s administrative services, « the priority does not lie in everything that is cross-border, so it can be difficult to mobilise people for Eucor projects. Making all these people meet, network, it helps a lot.”³⁵ These working groups hence prove to be a key lever to raise awareness of cross-border projects within the member universities. At the political level, all actors seem strongly convinced of Eucor’s role and mission. At the operational level, however, there is still work to be done.

When it comes to Eucor’s governance, the **coordination of calendars** proves to be extremely challenging. Though an effort is made to fix a meeting calendar for the whole year ahead, it is constantly modified in light of the schedules of the involved parties’, which means that Eucor’s meeting calendar is not always coherent. This complexity is increased by the necessity for all decisions taken at Eucor’s level to be first discussed within the universities’ own decision-making instances, which have different **governance model and rules**.

*Key management processes*³⁶

Eucor’s governance is subject to the legal provisions of German law, and of the Land of Baden-Württemberg, where the EGTC is located. All documents must be available in both French and German.

³³ Interview

³⁴ <https://www.eucor-uni.org/en/new-student-council/> [Accessed 30/09/2020]

³⁵ Interview

³⁶ Eucor’s statutes (2015), Eucor’s convention (2015), Eucor’s website

Strategy

In February 2019, the universities adopted a joint strategic plan for the years 2019 to 2023.³⁷ The strategic plan details 10 projects in the areas of research and innovation, teaching and doctoral training, to which correspond 20 objectives and 33 actions. Among others, the document plans a mid-term evaluation of Eucor's governance structures.

Once a year, Eucor has a high-level strategy meeting, where all universities' presidents, 2-3 main VP (Training, Research, IR, ...) and CEOs are invited. It is the occasion to discuss Eucor's short and medium term priorities in view of the Strategic plan.

Finance, funding and partnership policy

Eucor's 2020 draft budget amounts to 3,04 M€. The resources come from different sources:

- **The European Union**
 - From 2016 to mid-2019, the project "Eucor – The European Campus: cross-border structures" was co-financed by the Interreg VA Upper Rhine Programme of the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) for a total of 2 M€.
 - For the period 2017-2020, Eucor is a partner in the European Cross-Border Skills project and obtains in this context funding from the Erasmus+ programme of the European Union. In 2019, Eucor received 4,2 M€ of funding from the Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme for its doctoral training programme "Quantum Science and Technologies at the European Campus" (QUSTEC), in the framework of the 2018 Cofund call for projects.³⁸
- **Contributions from its members.** The members' annual contribution is calculated on the basis of a fixed amount and of a distribution key proportional to their student population. The distribution key is reviewed each year by the Assembly. In 2020, members have provided 600 000€ of contributions, i.e. 19,7% of the overall 2020 budget.³⁹

The Local authorities such as Baden-Wurtemberg, Région Grand-Est, Eurométropole Strasbourg currently do not finance the EGTC directly but provide financial contribution respectively to the French and German universities. I.e. the Land of Baden Württemberg provides a contribution of 2,4 Million Euros until end of 2023 to implement the Strategic Plan of Eucor.⁴⁰

The creation of the EGTC was the most impactful when it comes to funding and finance. Via this legal entity, Eucor was **able to apply to European funding in its own name**. In 2018, Eucor won a MSCA COFUND call for project in the framework of the Horizon 2020 Programme. Since the COFUND programme is a mono beneficiary action, the subvention of 4,2 Million Euros is **received centrally by the EGTC Eucor**, and then distributed among the project partner institutions that host the 39 PhD students of the programme. Furthermore, with its legal entity, Eucor was able to launch internal call for projects (Seed Money), which allows all member universities to provide funding in a common pot and distribute it to innovative projects in Education and Research. This would not have been possible without the legal entity.

There are **two legal limits** to the EGTC's powers: firstly, an EGTC cannot apply to all European funding programmes – for instance, the EGTC Eucor could not apply for the European universities call since it does not hold an Erasmus Charta and is not considered as a Higher Education Institution. Moreover,

³⁷ Eucor Strategy 2023 (2019)

³⁸ Eucor's website [Accessed 31/08/2020]

³⁹ Budget prévisionnel pour l'année 2020, available at : https://www.eucor-uni.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/Eucor_budget_previsionnel_2020.pdf [Accessed 01/09/20]

⁴⁰ Eucor Strategy 2023 (2019)

the EGTC is not yet allowed to apply to some national calls for projects, such as those provided by the Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft (DFG) or the Agence Nationale pour la Recherche (ANR). However, lobbying work is underway and this situation might evolve.

There is also a **political limit**: the success at external funding calls is taken into account as an indicator to evaluate research performance by some international rankings, which means that universities might be reluctant to apply as Eucor, as it implies not applying in their own name, and hence not counting the funding obtained as their own.⁴¹

The EGTC is responsible for its debts, but if it cannot meet its financial commitments, its members are responsible for those – according to the distribution key fixed annually by the Assembly. The accounting and budgetary rules are the German national rules as well as those of the Land of Baden-Württemberg in which the EGTC is located. The auditor for the EGTC is the Court of Audit of the State of Baden-Württemberg.

Staffing/HR

The EGTC has the **power to directly recruit personnel**, the management and recruitment of which would be the responsibility of the Secretariat's Director.⁴² However, in 2020, it is only using seconded personnel, administratively attached to the universities of Freiburg and Strasbourg.⁴³ This seems to be mostly due to the fact that it has many advantages for the daily work as the staff is embedded in a local working environment (computer, telephone, office equipment). Furthermore, it avoids to build up a heavy administrative structure on the level of the Secretariat. Finally, the risk connected to the employment of staff is on the side of the member universities that are experienced with the HR management and its complexities. However, the use of seconded personnel might be an issue as, due to national differences, there are strong discrepancies in salary for similar tasks. Moreover, the use of seconded personnel may be subject to taxation (VAT), as it could be considered by the local authorities as an exchange of services.⁴⁴

Quality and accreditation

Within the Eucor framework, the scientific personnel of the member universities has developed joint courses resulting in a double or triple degree from different member universities, as well as joint courses resulting in one university diploma but with mandatory mobility.⁴⁵

The Eucor Strategy 2023 states: "In the context of the promotion of common curricula, exchanges on quality assurance systems within the member universities as well as on the issue of common quality assurance mechanisms will be continued. A harmonization of evaluation systems for common courses is under consideration. In addition, it is necessary to develop common success mechanisms and common procedures for the elimination of under-demanded common courses."

U4Society Network

U4Society Network in a nutshell

⁴¹ Interview

⁴² Eucor's convention (2015)

⁴³ Budget prévisionnel pour l'année 2020 [Accessed 01/09/20]

⁴⁴ Interview

⁴⁵ <https://www.eucor-uni.org/en/studies/joint-course-offerings/> [Accessed 08/09/2020]

The U4Society Network is a partnership of universities gathering **Ghent University (BE), University of Göttingen (DE), University of Groningen (NL), University of Tartu (EE), and Uppsala University (SE)**. It is not a legal entity. In order to enhance the impact of its member universities on the global scene, the network aims to “provide a **supportive platform for joint cooperative initiatives in the field of education, research and institutional management, as well as to offer a solid framework for cooperation as preferential partners in international projects and contexts**”.⁴⁶ Building on a long tradition of academic cooperation, the network was originally founded in 2008 between four partners (‘the U4 Network’). In 2018, it was enlarged to include the University of Tartu as U4 was ambitioning to apply to the European University project. The U4Society Network finally joined a consortium of 9 universities,⁴⁷ and the ‘ENLIGHT’ project was selected as a European University in 2020.⁴⁸ It should be noted that the benchmark focuses on U4Society before the ENLIGHT project, and the network’s structure and perimeter are likely to evolve following the creation of the ENLIGHT alliance.

The U4Society Network represents 158.000 Bachelor’s and Master’s students, 14.000 PhD students and 27.700 researchers and staff. From 2013 to 2017, the network led to 2.688 joint bi-/multilateral publications and 203 joint scientific workshops, and enabled 1.098 student mobilities, 40 joint summer schools, 52 Joint PhD students and 9 double/joint Master programmes.⁴⁹

In the framework of a 2017 scientific evaluation of the DAAD programme “Strategic Partnerships and Thematic Networks”,⁵⁰ the U4 Network was compared to other university networks funded by the DAAD. The conclusions of the evaluation are positive, as the U4 Network had enabled more Ph.D. exchanges (207) than the other 20 projects combined and more administrative staff exchanges (212) than the other 20 projects combined. It was also deemed the most successful in acquiring third-party funding and had the highest number of joint bi-/multilateral publications. The alliance explains its success by the **similarities shared by the partners (close profiles, similar sizes, common academic ethos)**. However, since U4Society does not have its own funds nor recruit its own staff, its projects operate on an ad hoc basis, which is hardly reconcilable with a European University Alliance’s ambitions such as CHARM’s.

Governance model

⁴⁶ <https://u4society.eu/index.php/network/about-u4/65-about-u4> [Accessed 08/09/2020]

⁴⁷ With the Universities of Bordeaux, Basque Country, Galway and Bratislava.

⁴⁸ <https://u4society.eu/index.php/news> [Accessed 08/09/2020]

⁴⁹ <https://u4society.eu/index.php/network/about-u4> [Accessed 08/09/2020]

⁵⁰ https://www2.daad.de/medien/veranstaltungen/bk/2018/daad_berlin_26.09.2018_-_lk_sns.pdf [Accessed 08/09/2020]



Fig. 2. U4Society Network governance model

The governance model of the U4Society Network preserves each university's autonomy.

The alliance is governed by the **Rectors group**, which gathers the universities' five Rectors. They meet annually to define the general U4Society strategy. At the executive level sits the **Directors group**: the vice-presidents, vice-rectors and directors of IR, who meet physically two times a year, and have remote meetings when required. The **daily management** of the network at an overarching level is run by **coordinators** based at the respective international offices of each of the partner universities.

The cooperation is structured around **four academic clusters**, within which are organised thematical meetings to bring people together and foster new projects. Moreover, whenever researchers have an idea of cooperation, it is picked up by the cluster corresponding to their discipline. Each of the academic clusters is hosted by one partner university: Humanities (Ghent University), Social Sciences, Economics and Law (Göttingen University), Medicine and Pharmacy (Groningen University) and Science and Technology (Uppsala University). Discussions were ongoing to attribute a cluster to the University of Tartu (either by splitting the Social Sciences, Economics and Law cluster, or creating a transversal cluster dedicated to digital transformation), but were frozen when the ENLIGHT alliance was selected as a European University.⁵¹ These clusters are each governed by a cluster chair/Director of the designated host university.

Apart from the academic domain clusters, the **cluster Institutional Management** is in charge of all central activities for institutional management (HR, finance, etc) and sets up transversal initiatives in support of the academic clusters, such as mobility calls.

Another distinctive feature in the organisation is the **U4Society Student Network**, which brings together the **student representatives** of all U4 partner universities. In addition to small-scale sport or cultural events for students, the U4SN organizes two meetings per year on a central theme of interest (student housing, inclusiveness, ...) and presents its recommendations on an annual basis.⁵² Each year, most of the student representatives change, which is challenging, as the U4Society Student Network is more or less active from one year to another.

Key management processes

Strategy

U4Society is part of the **institutional strategy of each of the partner universities**. An **annual meeting** takes place each year and gathers the universities' rectors, VPs and vice-rectors, directors of IR,

⁵¹ Interview

⁵² <https://u4society.eu/index.php/students-exchange/175-u4-student-nations> [Accessed 08/09/2020]

U4Society coordinators and students representatives. During this meeting, the annual report of activities is presented, and the priorities for the following year are decided.⁵³

One of the specificities of U4 lies in their **Peer Review cycle**, which was set up with the very aim of sharing knowledge and taking benefit of the complementary expertise at the partner universities and of the different organisational cultures. Each of the partner universities alternately takes the lead in preparing and hosting a thematic session. The Peer Review cycle is an initiative of the U4 University Directors. In addition to the directors, sessions always involve relevant experts in the chosen theme (Finance and Allocation Models, HR and Gender Policies, Research Infrastructures, Governance Models, Sustainability, Innovation and building your Campus Eco-structure, Collections and Museums, ...). The network on Sustainability and the U4 Career Services have been established as spin off activities of the Peer Reviews.

Finance/Resource management

Since the U4Society Network is not a membership organisation, there is no membership fee or fixed contribution. In practice, all universities set aside **an allocation for a working budget** (50.000€/year). Each university manages its own funding, and may apply for external funding.⁵⁴ As a general rule for joint U4 activities the 'sending university' funds the travel and accommodation of its own outgoing staff and students; the 'host university' covers any organizational costs related to the activity.⁵⁵

Staffing/HR

The U4Society Network has no staff *per se*, but each university **provides a central coordinator in the international office**. The coordinators do not work full time on U4Society's activities.

Quality and accreditation

A handbook for the development of joint degree courses integrating all partners will be available soon and will ease the establishment of further joint degree courses between the U4 partners. This handbook, which was initiated within U4Society, will be developed in the framework of the European University Alliance.

EIT, European Institute of Innovation and Technology

The EIT in a nutshell

The European Institute of Innovation and Technology (EIT) is a **EU body** created in 2008, whose missions are focused on innovation, research and learning. More specifically, its role is to strengthen Europe's innovation capacity by supporting entrepreneurs, innovators and students to develop their ideas and turn them into products, services and jobs. Based on a '**knowledge triangle**' model, it brings together leading organisations from business, education and research. Today, the EIT gathers more than 1500 partners across Europe: 249 higher education institutions, 252 research centres, 983 companies, including SMEs, as well as 133 cities, regions and NGOs. By fostering their collaboration, the EIT model seeks to overcome structural weaknesses in the EU's innovation landscape: limited entrepreneurial culture, low level of cooperation between academia and industry, insufficient development of human potential...

⁵³ Interview

⁵⁴ Interview

⁵⁵ <https://u4society.eu/index.php/network/funding> [Accessed 08/09/2020]

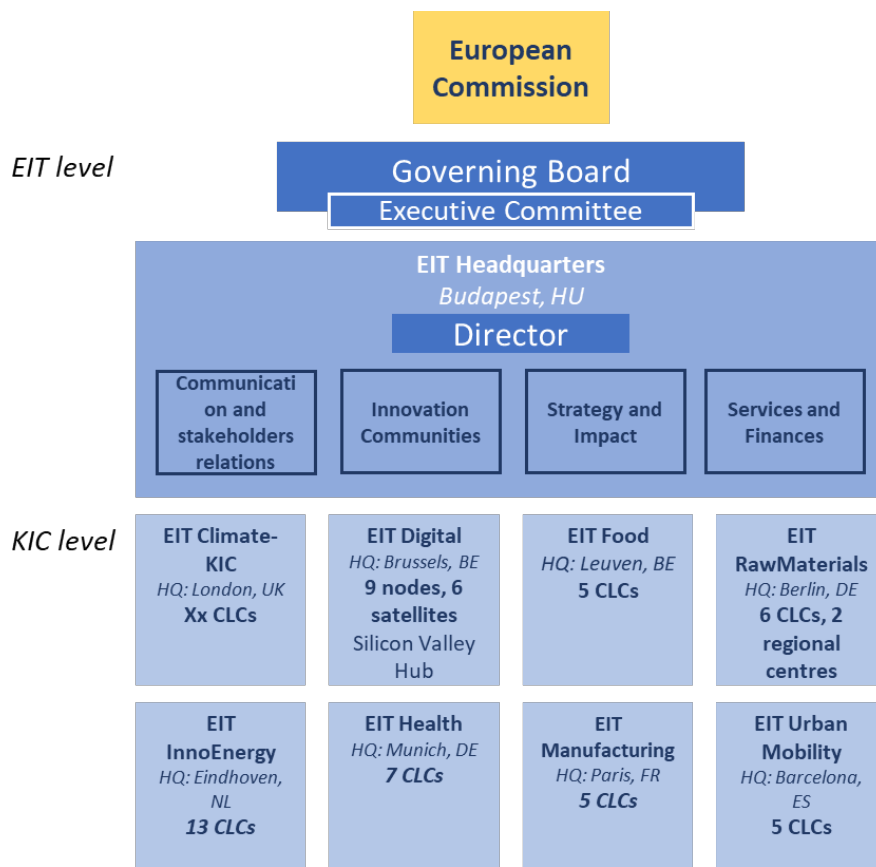


Fig. 3. The EIT governance model

The EIT is based on independent legal entities called Knowledge and Innovation Communities (KICs), which are thematic long-term partnerships between companies, research labs and higher education institutions. Each KIC is dedicated to finding solutions to a specific societal challenge. There are currently 8 KICs (see Figure 3), which have been selected via open calls for proposals by the EIT Governing Board. Furthermore, 2 new KICs are planned to be launched by 2025: one focused on the cultural and creative industries

(CCI), and another in a field yet to be determined.⁵⁶ Each KIC is organised around a small number of Innovation Hubs (also called co-location centres - CLCs, or nodes) and satellites. These Hubs are regional clusters gathering partners in close proximity and providing a physical space for interaction within a local innovation ecosystem.⁵⁷

Though relevant to our benchmark, it must be noted that the EIT differs from a European University Alliance to the extent that its goal is not so much to bridge the gap between countries as between business, education and research. Meanwhile, a European University's *raison d'être* is to be transnational.

Governance model

At the EIT level

The EIT relies on a **governance model** with an emphasis on **organisational effectiveness over representativeness**. Indeed, the **Governing Board** of the EIT, is composed mostly of members appointed by the European Commission (12),⁵⁸ as well as 3 representative members elected by the

⁵⁶ Annex to the Proposal for a Decision of the European Parliament and of Council on the Strategic Innovation Agenda of the European Institute of Innovation and Technology (EIT) 2021-2027.

⁵⁷ EIT's website (<https://eit.europa.eu/> [Accessed 31/07/20])

⁵⁸ selected by the EC on the basis of a call of expression of interest, with a specific attention paid to balance between expertise (business, higher education and research), as well as to gender and geographical balance. The appointed members have a 4-year non-renewable term of office. The Chairperson of the Governing Board is elected by the Governing Board among the appointed members and has a once-renewable two-year term of office.

KICs among all of their partners.⁵⁹ These 3 representative members have no right to vote on most key issues related to the KICs, the appointment or dismissal of the EIT Director, the appointment of the members of the Executive Committee, the promotion of the EIT globally, the EIT's language policy, ...⁶⁰

Within the overall EIT structure, the KICs enjoy a great degree of autonomy: the EIT Governing Board only meets three times a year (or more, if convened for an extraordinary session⁶¹). It is entrusted with the strategic leadership of the EIT, the overall direction of the operational activities implemented by the EIT management team, and the selection, evaluation and support of the KICs. The Governing Board is supported by an **Executive Committee**, which oversees the implementation of its strategic decisions, and is composed of 3 members appointed by the Governing Board, as well as the Board's Chairperson. Both instances' meetings are attended by a European Commission's Observer.

Finally, the **Management Team** heads the EIT Headquarters, in Budapest. Aside from grant management, the EIT headquarters also focuses on communication and dissemination, outreach, and improving the knowledge triangle integration (KTI) model. The Management Team is composed of the **EIT Director** and the **heads of the EIT Headquarters' 4 units** (Communications and Stakeholder relations, Innovation Communities, Strategy and Impact, Services and Finances). The Director, appointed by the Governing Board, is the legal representative of the EIT. He/she is responsible for operations and day-to-day management.⁶²

At the KICs level: the example of EIT Health

A KIC is defined as "an autonomous partnership of higher education institutions, research organisations, companies and other stakeholders in the innovation process in the form of a strategic network, regardless of its precise legal form".⁶³ Because KICs have different legal forms, they all have different governance models. EIT Health is a 'second-wave' KIC, created as a non-profit organisation in 2015 in order to bring together a variety of players on issues related to health and aging. It focuses on 6 challenges: reforming care pathways, healthcare transformation, harnessing real-world data, bringing care home, health in the workplace and fostering healthier lives. EIT Health's headquarters is in Munich, with 7 regional innovation hubs (CLCs) located in Rotterdam, Paris, Heidelberg/Mannheim, Stockholm, Barcelona, London and Budapest. Today, EIT health gathers 150 partner organisations.

EIT Health' relies on a **governance system** (see Figure 4) based on a **strong bottom-up approach**: its highest decision-making body is the Partners' Assembly, which chooses the composition of the Supervisory Board, itself a representative instance gathering representatives of the KIC's 7 CLCs.

⁵⁹ The representative members have a once-renewable two-year term of office. The conditions and procedures for the election and replacement of the representative members are adopted by the Governing Board on the basis of a proposal from the Director.

⁶⁰ This asymmetric balance of responsibilities between appointed and representative members manifests itself in the complete disappearance of representative members from EIT's website.

⁶¹ when convened by its Chairperson or at the request of at least one third of all its members.

⁶² Regulation (EC) No 294/2008, Regulation (EU) No 1292/2013, EIT's website (<https://eit.europa.eu/> [Accessed 31/07/20])

⁶³ Regulation No 1292/2013

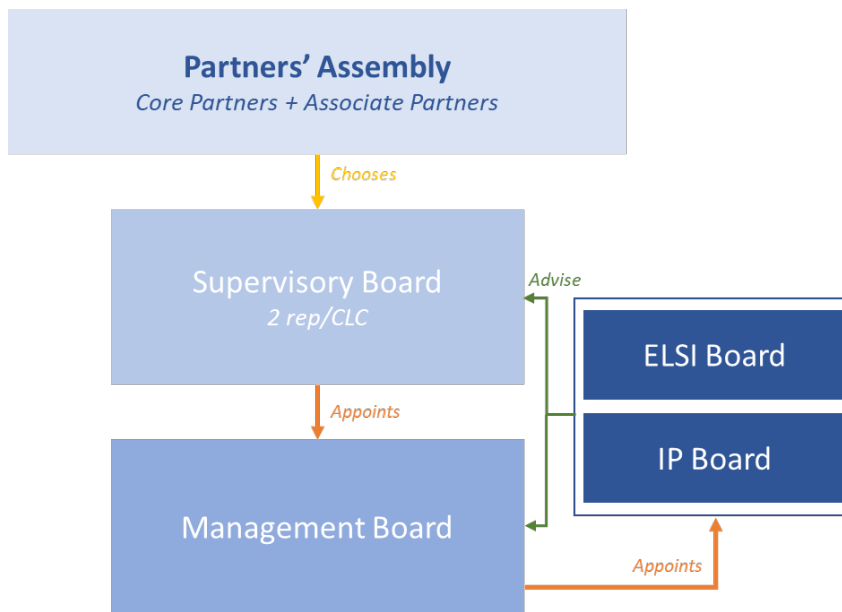


Fig. 4. EIT Health governance model

The **Partners' Assembly** is composed of EIT Health's Core Partners⁶⁴ and Associate Partners.⁶⁵ They all have voting rights on matters of operational importance and are responsible for choosing the Supervisory Board. The **Supervisory Board** consists of 2 representatives for each Co-Location Centre, one representing the CLC's industry members and one representing its non-industry members. It appoints the Management Board and its Chairperson

(who is also the KIC CEO), supervises the work of the Management Board and makes strategic decisions guiding EIT Health's organisation. The **Management Board** handles the day-to-day operations of EIT Health, representing all teams in the organisation and across Europe. It comprises key management positions including the Chief Executive Officer, Chief Operating Officer, Director of Finance and Director of External Affairs. The Management Board also includes the directors of the Innovation, Accelerator and Campus programmes, and the Managing Directors of the 7 innovation hubs. Together with the Supervisory Board, it selects new partners on the basis of their application. The work of both Board is informed by 2 advisory boards, whose members the Management Board appoints: the **Ethical, Legal and Societal Issues (ELSI) Board**, and the **Intellectual Property (IP) Board**. Though each partner is responsible for ensuring the compliance of its project with all applicable laws and regulations, they are required to complete a specific form for review by the ELSI Board when submitting innovation project proposals. THE IP Board advises the Management and Supervisory Boards in all matters with respect to IP, including the IP Policy. The board offers support to project participants in negotiating access to necessary background IP, knowledge and data. The IP Board also offers advice to partners wishing to deviate from EIT Health's IP policy and, upon request, acts as a mediator to resolve disputes between partners in projects regarding IP conflicts.⁶⁶

Key management processes

⁶⁴ Core partners pay an annual membership fee of €75,000. In turn, core partners can propose activity in response to the EIT Health business plan and there is no limit to the funding they can request to support such activity.

⁶⁵ Associate partners pay an annual fee of €30,000. In turn, associate partners can propose activity in response to the EIT Health business plan and can request up to €350,000 in funding to support such activity. There is a third type of partnership, External Project Partners. Core and associate partners may choose to work with external project partners to deliver on activity that is accepted for funding within the EIT Health business plan. Organisations that wish to participate in projects without obtaining formal membership, can do so alongside Core and Associate Partners. However, they are not part of the Partners' Assembly.

⁶⁶ <https://connections.eithealth.eu/web/internet-eithealth/governance-and-boards> , <https://eithealth.eu/who-we-are/> [Accessed 31/07/20]

Strategy: the contractual relations between the EIT and the KICs

The KICs are independent legal entities receiving EIT grants. The relation between the EIT and the KICs are laid down in 2 agreements, which set out their respective rights and obligations outline the mechanisms for reporting, payment and control arrangements, monitoring and evaluating KICs' activities and outcomes:

- A 7-year **Framework Partnership Agreement (FPA)**, which specifies the general rights and obligations of each party and can be renewed pending the EIT Governing Board's approval.
- A **Specific Grant Agreement**, which is the contractual instrument through which the EIT implements 'specific grants' – typically on an annual basis – to finance KIC added-value activities ('specific actions') implemented by the KIC.

Both agreements are signed by the EIT Director, as the EIT's legal representative, and the KIC CEO, as the KIC's legal representative. A KIC partner may benefit from the EIT grant through acceding to the FPA by signing an internal agreement with the KIC Legal Entity and signing the Accession Form.

Funding and partnership policy: the example of EIT Health

EIT Health is a non-profit organisation. In addition to commercial activities (charging fees for its services), its resources come from:

- **The European Union, through the EIT.** Under Horizon 2020, the EIT manages a budget of EUR 2.4 billion for the period of 2014-2020. Grants to EIT KICs are allocated annually in a competitive manner on the basis of business plans and performance reports that are reviewed by the EIT and external experts. KIC business plans describe the implementation of the 7-year KICs' strategy and the planned portfolio of KIC activities for a particular period, detailing targets, deliverables and key performance indicators for each KIC's added value activity. The EIT applies a co-funding model whereby **the EIT's financial contribution does not exceed 25% (on average) of a KIC's overall resources** over the KIC's lifetime.
- **Contributions from members.** In addition to their in-kind contributions and their increasing participation in the co-funding of projects, the partners of EIT Health contribute fixed annual partnership fees (75.000€ for Core Partners, 30.000€ for Associate Partners).
- **Regional or national grants.** EIT Health receives contributions from regional organisations who have a vested interest in supporting health innovation such as local government including the Bavarian Ministry of Economic Affairs, Regional Development and Energy.⁶⁷

In the Final Report of its evaluation of the EIT (2017), the European Commission states that "given the current levels of reliance on EIT funding, the KICs' strategies for financial sustainability, although laudable, look highly ambitious" and emphasises the "**contradiction between the EIT's role (addressing market failures and societal challenges) and achieving financial sustainability**".⁶⁸

Finance/Resource management

EIT Health's partners are encouraged each year to answer a call for proposals to propose how they can help EIT Health to deliver on its strategic objectives, a process called *The EIT Health Business Plan*. Within this process, EIT Health sets out its strategic agenda, to which its partners respond by submitting project proposals. The proposals are submitted by consortia involving EIT Health Core and

⁶⁷ COMMISSION STAFF WORKING DOCUMENT 2017, EIT Health's website (<https://eithealth.eu/who-we-are/>) [Accessed: 31/07/2020])

⁶⁸ European Commission, Final Report of its evaluation of the EIT (2017).

Associate Partners as well as outside partners. The eligible proposals go through a two-stage process: remote expert evaluation (by 5 independent external evaluators contracted by EIT Health) and hearings (conducted by Evaluation boards, each of them consisting of 5 external experts, appointed by EIT Health Supervisory Board and chaired by a member of the HQ Management Team).⁶⁹ However, according to the European Commission's Final Report of its evaluation of the EIT (2017), **many KICs' partners criticise that the one-year funding system impedes on the efficiency of the KIC delivery model. The EC hence recommends a shift to multi-annual funding** in order to reduce the resources consumed in planning and enhance the efficiency of the KICs.

Furthermore, the report suggests that "KIC decision-making processes can be slow: some partners **call for greater decentralisation in KIC decision-making (to CLC level) which, it was argued, would speed up the process of reviewing applications and awarding grants**". While CLCs have been designed as physical spaces with the aim to bring together diverse organisations and people and hosting networking activities, partners suggest that they should be given more power as "KICs are too centralised and have too much "middle management"; resources that could be better deployed locally."

Staffing/HR

EIT Health's 160 staff are deployed over the Munich headquarters as well as the 7 regional Innovation Hubs. The staff comprehends people employed directly by the KIC's legal entity, but also individuals 'seconded' from partner organisations. According to the EC's Final Report of its evaluation of the EIT,⁷⁰ this **dual HR system "brings complexity when seeking to harmonise management and delivery systems across a KIC"**. Moreover, "[d]iscussions with KICs have highlighted that they have often endeavoured to bring staff in-house to overcome issues caused by such fragmentation."

Quality and accreditation of training programmes

The EIT QALE (Quality Assurance and Learning Enhancement) system is based on the learning outcome paradigm as brought out in the Bologna process, where the aim is to move from 'teacher-driven' to 'student-centred' teaching and learning, changing higher education from being only knowledge based into also being competence based. The system is in line with European Standards and Guidelines (ESG) for quality assurance in European higher education.

The system includes 2 different review processes. The first concerns the ex-ante labelling of new programmes. The second is a review performed after the first validation period expires, once the programme has produced a certain number of graduates. This ex-post review also takes into account the educational outcomes (examples of student/learner products, and student, alumni and stakeholder experiences) in order to decide if the EIT Label can be renewed or not. Both processes (labelling and review) are performed according to the standard pattern of quality assurance processes; 1) a self-assessment report, 2) an evaluation by an expert commission, 3) a final decision made by the EIT.⁷¹

⁶⁹ All experts of the evaluation process receive training on EIT Health's strategy, rules and procedures; Sources : EIT Health's website (<https://eithealth.eu/who-we-are/> [Accessed 31/07/2020]), EIT Health's 2021 Business Plan calls

⁷⁰ European Commission, Final Report of its evaluation of the EIT (2017).

⁷¹ COMMISSION STAFF WORKING DOCUMENT on the Interim evaluation of the EIT, 2017; interview with EIT Digital.

Other examples

The experience of French higher education site policy

In the 1980-1990's, the French HE sector was confronted with an increasing student population. To cope with this challenge, the French government launched a policy of territorial networking, which notably led to the creation of university satellites.⁷² However, this policy of regional networking has led to new challenges with regard to quality of teaching and research.

A new **site policy** emerged in the 2000s. Faced with **strong international competition** and the growing influence of international rankings, the government decided to encourage the different actors of the French HE sector to create local or regional **higher education and research clusters** bringing together universities, *grandes écoles* and national research organizations. This policy was formalized in the 'Goulard' law of April 18, 2006, which creates **the PRES (Pôle de recherche et d'enseignement supérieur)**. The PRES could pick between several legal statuses, but most chose the so called EPCS (Etablissement public de coopération scientifique). An EPCS gathers 'founding' and 'associate' members and is governed by an Executive Board (Conseil d'administration), whose members represent the institutions. The EPCS can employ staff and, from 2010, deliver national diploma. Between 2010 and 2011, the 'excellence initiatives' of the government's *Future Investments Programme* targets the PRES as a priority with a view to transform them into full-fledged universities. However, numerous PRES experienced internal tensions of member institutions opposed to such integration processes.

In 2013, this 'site policy' logic was strengthened. As the PRES were suppressed, it became mandatory for all HEIs to **choose between merging, joining an 'association of institutions'** (association d'établissements) **or joining a 'community of universities and institutions'** (communauté d'universités et établissements, or 'Comue'). The ambition of this law (Loi Fioraso) was to coordinate the training offer and research and innovation strategy on a given territory on the basis of a shared project. The government's goal was to facilitate the development of merged, 'federal' or 'confederal' universities which would contract with the State on behalf of their member institutions. Contrary to the PRES, the Comue benefit from legal and financial autonomy. In 2018, a fourth option of institutional cooperation was created, the EPE (établissement public expérimental), which seeks to facilitate strong integration of research and teaching, but enables member institutions to retain their legal personality. This EPE status is adopted by numerous institutions throughout the French higher education landscape to bring together universities and *grandes écoles* in new organisational settings allowing for relatively strong internal decentralisation and subsidiarity.⁷³

Although the Comue vary widely in their composition and strategy, several criticisms recur in most of them. In many cases, the Comue model was accused of being both a somewhat soft and blurry object without a clear purpose,⁷⁴ and a 'superstructure without significant added value' which is 'too heavy in its institutional functioning' and 'too costly'.⁷⁵ More and more Comue are being terminated or express their willingness to be terminated, on the basis of three main criticisms:

⁷² For instance, at Belfort, Nîmes, Quimper, Saint-Nazaire ou Valence. Gilles Ferréol, 2010. 'Développement universitaire et logiques territoriales : entre cadrage national et arrangements locaux' In *Education et sociétés* 25 : 171-189

⁷³ Anne Mascaret, 2015. *Enseignement supérieur et recherche en France*, Paris : La Documentation Française, pp.68-77.

⁷⁴ Alain Fuchs, 2016. Source: <https://education.newstank.fr/fr/article/view/80704/politiques-sites-entre-succes-collaboratifs-defis-institutionnels-seminaire.html>

⁷⁵ Press release from the Comue Languedoc Roussillon's founding institutions' Presidents, 2019. Source: <https://www.letudiant.fr/educpros/actualite/languedoc-roussillon-les-universites-preferent-un-rapprochement-d-etablissements-a-la-comue.html>

- **A heavy governance without legitimacy and disconnected from the field.** The 2013 law defines three governance bodies, the specific composition of which could be chosen by each Comue (among several options):
 - An Executive Board (Conseil d'Administration), which elects the **President of the Comue who cannot be a President of one of its member institutions – a clause that has been widely criticized among many university leaders.** The Executive Board determines the Comue's strategy, approves its budget and controls its execution.
 - A Council of Members (Conseil des Membres), which gathers a representative of each member institution. The Council contributes to prepare and implement the decisions of the Executive Board.
 - An Academic Council that has a consultative role on the Comue's strategy and the Pluriannual Site Contract with the State. In most cases, the Comue's Academic Council works as a rather broad assembly of academics with a purely advisory function.
- **An imposed transfer of competencies from the members to the Comue.** Some Comues took over the management of highly strategic and visible responsibilities from their member institutions, such as the PhD training or international policy. This has led to political tensions within many Comues.
- **The challenge of conciliating the Comue and the brand and visibility of its members.** In many cases, it was felt that the creation and strengthening of the Comue's brand had been done at the expense of the members' own brands.⁷⁶

Strategic alliances in the private sector

In the private sector, the decision to join an alliance obeys to a different logic than in HE. While alliances of public HEIs are often triggered by external incentives (such as national calls for projects), in the private sector, it is a market-driven strategic decision, which entails **strong risks** as alliances gather competing firms. As such, a private company's decision to join an alliance generally relies on a **stringent cost/benefit analysis** (see table 1 below). Because there are strong risks to joining an alliance in the private sector, there are **few truly cooperating alliances** which go further than common branding and marketing.

Creating an alliance in the private sector enables “firms to align multiple sets of complementary resources, often with the aim of creating additional synergies or complying with increasing customer demands”.⁷⁷ However, due notably to the absence of hierarchical governance, strategic alliances represent **relatively unstable organizational arrangements**, and are characterized by a high failure rate.⁷⁸ In order for its members to fully benefit from opportunities and minimise risks, a key challenge for private sector alliances is to **manage pluralistic interests and preventing free riding** behaviour, whereby a partner obtains benefits from the alliance but does not bear a proportional share of the costs. The table below provides an overview of typical risks and opportunities faced by the members of private sector alliances. While market-driven private sector alliances obey to different rules and constraints than public universities, **the challenge of making an alliance work for all its member institutions** seems highly relevant for international higher education alliances as well.

Table 1: Overview of opportunities and risks of joining private sector alliances⁷⁹

⁷⁶ Interview.

⁷⁷ Brian Tjemkes, Pepijn Vos, Koen Burgers, 2012. *Strategic Alliance Management*, London: Routledge, p. 228.

⁷⁸ Harrigan (1988) reports a 70% failure rate. Kathryn Rudie Harrigan, 1988. 'Joint ventures and competitive strategy' In *Strategic Management Journal* 9:2 (141-158).

⁷⁹ Adapted from Tjemkes et al. (2012: 5-6)

Opportunities	Risks
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Access to new markets, shared marketing and retail platforms • Access to resources enhancing speed to market (capital, specialized skills, market and technological knowledge, and production facilities) • Economies of scale, risk and cost sharing • Enhancing joint influence through reputation, lobbying activities, and neutralizing or blocking competitors 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Learning barriers and potential loss of efficiency and increasing complexity of operational management • Financial and organizational risks, potential loss of proprietary information (partners are also competitors) • Loss of decision autonomy and flexibility • Potentials antitrust implications (the benefits of alliances disappear if they are challenged by regulators)

Focus on the SkyTeam alliance

Since the creation of Star Alliance in 1997, several airline alliances have been founded. Indeed, the airline industry benefits particularly from forming close international partnerships, mostly because of the restrictions on landing rights and routes which are due to national ties between airlines and their countries of origins. Through code-sharing, joint network coverage and joint marketing initiatives (such as frequent flyer programmes), airlines are able to increase their utilization rates and offer an increased number of destinations.

SkyTeam is one of such airline alliances, founded in 2000 by Delta Airlines, Aeroméxico, Air France and Korean Air. It now brings together 19 carriers⁸⁰ from 5 continents to coordinate logistics, marketing and customer service. Headquartered at Amsterdam Airport Schiphol in Haarlemmermeer (NL), it covers 1,036 destinations worldwide, over 170 countries, with an average of 15,445 daily departures.⁸¹

Since its foundation, SkyTeam's structure has evolved and is now characterised by four features designed to prevent free-riding behaviours, whose likelihood increases with the number of partners.⁸²

- **A centralized management structure.** During the first decade, SkyTeam functioned through a decentralised management structure, which was less costly. However, with the expansion of the alliance to new partners, its management grew in complexity and had to be centralised. SkyTeam's governance and management model relies on three entities.
 - **A Governing Board**, which gathers the CEOs of each airline and represents the strategic level. The Board meets twice a year and discusses general alliances developments, its strategic orientations, and, when applicable, the admission of new partners (which must be approved with a majority of 85% of votes).
 - **A Supervisory Board**, which is in charge of the steering of the alliance, decides on specific projects to be executed, and monitors the activities of the Alliance Office. If an airline does not comply with SkyTeam's standards, it is up to the Supervisory Board to discuss measures to ensure the airline's compliance. It meets six times a year.

⁸⁰ Aeroflot, Aerolíneas Argentinas, Aeroméxico, Air Europa, Air France, Alitalia, China Airlines, China Eastern Airlines, CSA Czech Airlines, Delta Air Lines, Garuda Indonesia, Kenya Airways, KLM Royal Dutch Airlines, Korean Air, Middle East Airlines, Saudia, Tarom, Vietnam Airlines et Xiamen Air.

⁸¹ <https://www.skyteam.com/en/about> [Accessed 30/09/2020]

⁸² Tjemkes et al., 2012: 240-242

- **An Alliance Office**, set in Amsterdam, which deals with airlines contributions, overall performance, daily monitoring of projects execution and customer complaints. It reports to the Supervisory Board. Its Chair is also the Chair of the Governing Board, to ensure a smooth communication between the strategic and operational levels.
- **A careful partner recruitment policy**
 - **A selection process** guided by two criteria: (1) the network the potential partners can contribute to the alliance and (2) the access a partner can provide to new markets in, for instance, developing regions and countries. This pre-selection process aims at minimizing potential internal competition between the alliance.
 - **A negotiation phase** (1-2 years), during which the alliance terms and conditions are discussed and the potential partner must **meet all of SkyTeam requirements** (safety, organisation, IT infrastructures). As these requirements often involve considerable time and financial investments, SkyTeam may appoint a buddy airline to help the candidate in the transformation process.
- **A mandatory alliance fee**, which all partners must pay and which cover the alliance expenses such as marketing, communication and management cost.
- **An elaborate compensation system.** Based on each airline's performance, size and position, that airline receives an appropriate share of the benefits.

4. Conclusions and recommendations

Governing and managing strategic alliances is a **complex business**, particularly when such alliances bring together a huge variety of partners which are themselves rather decentralised organisations. Therefore, the challenges identified in the case studies above, might not be surprising to those who are actively involved in building the CHARM-EU alliance (or probably any other European University alliance). To respond to these challenges, there are **no blueprint** solutions.

However, the benchmark leads us to identify **6 recommendations to inform the preparation of CHARM-EU's future governance and management model**:

1. **Build on the existing governance of the alliance's member institutions.** The benchmark demonstrates that successfully governing a strategic alliance requires avoiding the pitfalls of over-centralised decision-making bodies which lack democratic legitimacy and are disconnected from the activities of the member institutions. Eucor, U4Society and SkyTeam's highest decision-making bodies are composed of their members' leaders (Rectors/Presidents/CEOs). This preserves the members' autonomy and ensures that decision-making remains anchored in the 'field'. A rotating presidency (cf Eucor) over a two- or three-year mandate appears to be an adequate system to ensure leadership and efficient steering of the alliance. Conversely, the EIT Health's centralised governance model is criticised as several of its partners call for more decentralised decision-making processes.
2. **Adopt a 'living strategy' approach.** Successful alliances must enable its members to experiment innovative projects, initially on a limited scale, and learn from such pilot projects. This requires a capacity to define achievable goals and clear monitoring processes. While long term visions are important, unachievable goals may lead to frustration and inefficient use of resources. Therefore, adopting a 'living strategy' to learn from experience and leave room for 'trial and error' is key for an alliance's strategic development. For instance, Eucor has created several structures and initiatives which were either abandoned (e.g. a Senior Advisory Board) or made permanent (e.g. thematic working groups) following an experimental phase.
3. **Build on the partners' complementarity of skills and knowledge.** Rather than geographical or historical identity, what counts in designing and implementing joint projects are specific operational skills and areas of specialised knowledge that each partner can bring to the table.⁸³ Examples hereof are the U4Society's Peer Review cycle and its organisation in academic clusters. Eucor's priority themes are also structured on the basis of the partners' complementary skills and knowledge, with each member institution being in charge of one theme.
4. **Carefully balance inclusiveness and flexibility.** A certain degree of flexibility is key to implement successful projects within an alliance. A strategic alliance must not be a burden to its members. Therefore, all partners do not necessarily need to be involved in the same way in all projects. For instance, within Eucor, the priority research themes are each under the responsibility of one or two universities, according to their scientific profile. Such flexible arrangements facilitate clear leadership and a strong commitment of the partners involved in each theme.
5. **Focus on financial sustainability to ensure long-term success.** To ensure long term viability and the commitment of member institutions, successful strategic alliances cannot depend exclusively on external funding. For instance, the members of EIT Health, Eucor and U4Society, as well as SkyTeam, have agreed mandatory membership fees (Eucor, 600.000€; EIT Health,

⁸³ See also: Stockley and de Wit, 2011: 53

75.000€/30.000€) or at least small allocations for an operating budget (U4Society, 50.000€). Generally, such fees vary with regard to the size of each member institution.

6. **Facilitate networking among the member institutions' communities and support services.**

Strategic alliances are often launched as top-down initiatives, making them essentially leadership-driven. While political leadership is key to an alliance's success, the benchmark demonstrates the importance of getting people within the member institutions involved in joint projects and activities. This can be achieved through incentives such as joint calls for projects and mobility grants, as well as investing in networking opportunities. Eucor's working groups and U4Society's academic clusters both organise such networking events.

Finally, creating a legal entity can be an asset to support an alliance's long-term strategic development, but the legal entity should not be an end in itself. It should be designed so as to facilitate the launch and coordination of joint projects, without hampering the autonomy of its member institutions or overshadowing their respective brands. The example of Eucor shows that creating a legal entity (such as an EGTC⁸⁴) can help an alliance to simplify its management processes and enhance its impact, especially through joint applications to external funding. On the contrary, U4Society shows that joint projects can be launched without creating a legal entity, although at a somewhat limited scale.⁸⁵

Future choices regarding a potential legal entity for CHARM-EU should of course be made in light of the broader debate on the creation of a new legal status for European university alliances.⁸⁶

⁸⁴ Obviously, an EGTC is only one option among several, and an imperfect one at that, since CHARM-EU is not characterised by the geographical proximity of its members.

⁸⁵ The U4 partners stress that its legal form and governance might change in the framework of their ENLIGHT European University Alliance

⁸⁶ See the Commission's Communication on achieving the European Education Area by 2025, 30/9/2020, p. 22