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Assessment Report

Qualitative assessment
of the “transformative effect”
for six French institutions
of being members
of a European University
Alliance.

Report submitted to the attention
of the Director General of DGESIP

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EUROPEAN UNIVERSITY ALLIANCES REPRESENT:

- ▶ a French pride
- ▶ a new university government
- ▶ a catalyst for organizational and cultural change
- ▶ a one-stop shop to answer questions from territories, European regions, ministries, and businesses
- ▶ an opening to new skills through the mobility of academic, administrative and student staff
- ▶ HR innovation and the emergence of new players
- ▶ a revitalization of the Bologna process
- ▶ an experiment for educational renewal
- ▶ a structure for a new dynamic in research and innovation
- ▶ a sense of belonging to Europe to keep democracy alive
- ▶ Challenges: regulatory complexities, long-term funding, including for human resources, sustainability

Executive summary

In 2017, under the impetus of President Emmanuel Macron, the European Universities Initiative (EUI) was launched.

Although the initial objective by 2024 was the creation of around twenty Alliances of European Universities (EUAs), the results have exceeded expectations, with the creation of 65 EUAs and 8 *Seals of Excellence*¹. This success is described as "unprecedented" and represents the emergence of a new strategic model of long-term transnational cooperation in higher education and research.

The EUAs are seen as an accelerator of institutional transformation, or even a "revolution in progress".

This report responds to a **political mandate from the DGESIP (Directorate General for Higher Education and Professional Integration, CEO)** which was to **qualitatively assess the "transformative effect" of the European Universities Initiative (EUI) on French institutions involved in creating an Alliance of European Universities (EUA)**. Six French institutions from the first wave were targeted: **the University of Montpellier for CHARM-EU, Sciences Po for CIVICA, INSA Group for ECIU, the University of La Rochelle for EU-CONEXUS, the University of Burgundy-Europe for FORTHEM, and Sorbonne University for 4EU+.**

The method used for this qualitative evaluation of a public program is contribution analysis. This is an evidence-based approach that aims to reduce uncertainty regarding the attribution of changes observed as a result of a program, namely the EUI (Environmental Impact Assessment). Within this framework, the reports produced by each institution provide evidence of a profound and multidimensional transformative effect.

The transformative effect of EUAs stems from **double-loop learning** and the emergence of **communities of practice** that have challenged traditional structures, representations, and behaviors within institutions.

1 - A catalyst for organizational and cultural change

- ▶ **Strategic capacity:** The EUAs are a lever for cohesion, driving internal and external dynamics, and defining a new strategic capacity for the establishments.
- ▶ **Cross-functionality:** The EUAs break with the traditional siloed organization of services/departments (International Relations, Student Services, HR, Libraries, etc.), fostering **increased and unprecedented collaboration**. Project-based work has become the norm.
- ▶ **New profiles:** The EUI has brought about the crucial profile of **"European project manager/project engineer"**. This role of "translator" (in the sense of Callon, 1986) is essential to connect multiple actors and ensure the operational implementation of actions, although this status is often precarious.
- ▶ **Leadership:** The strong involvement at the highest level of the presidents/directors testifies to the strategic importance of the EUA.

¹ Projects from European universities that were unable to receive Erasmus+ funding due to budgetary constraints.

2 - A laboratory for educational experimentation

- ▶ The new courses are not an "improved Erasmus Mundus" but a collective and co-constructed experience.
- ▶ The EUAs are an effective way to implement the training models of the future, focusing on: **interdisciplinarity**, **program flexibility** (micro-credits, online course catalogues), strengthening the links between training, research and the socio-economic world (CBL), and **pedagogical hybridization** (BIP, COIL).
- ▶ The EUAs act as incubators to quickly offer relevant training to address urgent and international challenges.

3 - A tool for structuring and energizing research

- ▶ Although research is less funded than training by EUI (Erasmus+), EUA is a strategic tool for structuring and internationalizing research.
- ▶ The EUA enables the integration of existing collaborations, coordinated response strategies to calls for projects (Horizon, MSCA) and the **pooling of research infrastructures**.
- ▶ For doctoral and postdoctoral students, the EUA facilitates joint thesis supervision and offers a simplified opening at the European level.

4 - An unexpected effect: the development of a strong sense of belonging to Europe

- ▶ Beyond the academic and organizational aspects, the EUA has generated **an unprecedented development of a sense of belonging to Europe**.
- ▶ The participants feel they embody the motto "United in diversity" and concretely experience the strength of "acting as convinced Europeans".

The EUAs are not only Eurocentric: they generate new cooperation with countries outside the continent: Mexico, Chile, and Vietnam, countries from sub-Saharan Africa, positioning

Europe, and no longer individual institutions, as a desirable horizon.

Obstacles and barriers to sustainability

Despite enthusiasm and strong commitment, the EUAs are "at a crossroads" and face major challenges:

- ▶ **complexity:** This concerns the recognition of qualifications, accreditation mechanisms, the harmonization of regulations between Member States, and the synchronization of national academic calendars. The lack of a legal framework for their existence, due to a project-based approach, hinders the long-term development of university-level academic institutions.
- ▶ **Funding and sustainability:** Funding through calls for proposals (Erasmus+, Horizon) is considered insufficient, as it does not take research into account and is poorly coordinated between the DGEAC and DGRTD. Uncertainty regarding continued French support, the France 2030 budget being exhausted, and European Commission funding (bridge funding between 2026 and 2028) threatens the sustainability of the actions.
- ▶ **Human Resources:** The workload is very heavy and still poorly recognized, for both academic and administrative staff. The departure of highly qualified professionals (project managers/European project engineers), due to job insecurity and a lack of career prospects, represents a critical risk to the continuation of operations.

The six institutions have demonstrated that the EUA is a powerful lever for transformation and an unparalleled tool for the European competitiveness of higher education and research in the current context of globalization.

However, their full realization now depends primarily on **political decisions** aimed at ensuring their continued existence, as well as their integration with universities outside the EU and funding mechanisms such as Erasmus, Horizon Europe, and competitiveness funds.

General Presentation

The idea of a “Europe of universities” or “European universities” is itself an old one, even constitutive of the European political project, and appeared as early as 1948 (Catala, 2009; Ravinet, 2009; Gunn *et al.*, 2013; Smit, 2021; Gänzle *et al.*, 2025). However, it was not until 2017, *thanks* to the impetus of President Emmanuel Macron, that the European Universities Initiative (EUI) was implemented, by delegation from the Member States to the European Commission, from which the EUAs derive².

While the expected result of this Initiative, on an experimental basis, was the creation of around twenty EUAs by 2024, the result exceeded expectations with the creation of 65 EUAs as well as 8 Seals of Excellence³, hence the sometimes cited number of 74 EUAs.

If a single word could summarize the initial results of the European University Alliances, it would undoubtedly be “unprecedented.” The unprecedented success of a European experiment has exceeded initial expectations by tripling the number of effective EUAs. The unprecedented scope of the institutional transformations, which prompted this qualitative assessment, is highlighted in various reports: “the emergence of European champions”; “alliances as accelerators of institutional transformation” (Comby, 2022); “a very positive transformative effect for the institutions concerned,” even a “revolution underway” (Senate Information Report, Daniel and Le Gleut, 2024; Frame *et al.*, 2025); “the emergence of a new strategic model for long-term European transnational cooperation in higher education” (PPMI report for the European Commission, Grumbinaité *et al.*, 2025)...

As innovative phenomena, the EUAs themselves have become a research object (Charret *et al.*, 2022 ; Gunn, 2024 ; Frame *et al.*, 2025 ;

Hartzell *et al.*, 2025) of major interest to researchers specializing in higher education policies and governance, European policies, European integration and, more broadly, international relations, globalization and numerous disciplines in the humanities and social sciences: sociology of organizations, university pedagogy, interculturality, communication sciences... While the 2013 Higher Education and Research Act outlines the six missions of higher education and research, including: “5° Participation in the construction of the European Higher Education and Research Area; 6° International cooperation,” and while the internationalization of higher education and research is almost inherent to their operation, how and why has the EUI had such a transformative effect on participating institutions? What are these transformations, and what dynamics underlie them? In the context of the numerous reforms of recent decades—reforms that have generated not only immense material difficulties but also a certain pessimism and have revealed a complex, fragmented institution facing national and even international competition—how has this new university model managed to spark such unprecedented enthusiasm?

It is to shed light on these questions that a qualitative assessment of six French institutions that are members of a EUA was implemented, supported by a specific methodology: contribution analysis (Revillard, 2018; Delahais *et al.*, 2021; Delahais, 2023).

This approach aims to provide evidence and reasoning to draw a plausible and documented conclusion that a program, intervention, or public policy has made a significant contribution to the expected “transformative effects”.

In this perspective, each institution was supported in carrying out its own assessment to

² The generic term EUA is used in this document. However, with the participants, the term Euniv emerged, encompassing both Europe, Universities and the prefix “eu” meaning: good, well.

³ Projects from European universities that were unable to receive Erasmus+ funding due to budgetary constraints.

deliver a credible evaluation of the cause-and-effect relationship of the advanced transformations, while verifying the theory of change and its implementation in a complex environment.

This report offers, in addition to a meta-analysis of the respective assessments of the six institutions, a contextualization of the EUAs in the constantly evolving landscape of higher education and research.

This contextualization is necessary to understand the scale of the transformations through the results produced by the EUAs in terms of institutional organization, educational innovation, research development and new partnerships as well as a deep sense of belonging to the European higher education and research community.

While the European Higher Education and Research Area (EHEA) is not in itself a new concept, the creation of the European University Alliances is a fundamentally important innovation for its strengthening. Since 1996, the OECD has emphasized the shift from a capital-based economy to a knowledge-based economy, positioning knowledge as a strategic asset as natural resources. Within this framework, the EUAs represent a means of making Europe "the most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economy in the world"⁴; through a process of Europeanization that respects European values of freedom and democracy. This is where the most powerful transformative effect of the EUAs lies: the capacity to preserve the core elements of the university system and to hybridize knowledge

and skills through the Europeanization of higher education and research, while respecting the sovereignty of member states.

This transformation, like any socio-technical innovation process, as described by Callon (1986), derives its dynamic from the engagement of its stakeholders in the numerous controversies necessary to overcome the complexity of the obstacles encountered and to develop the most appropriate responses through mutual learning. This double-loop learning is considered the most transformative. The European integration resulting from this learning shapes both the discourse of the European Higher Education and Research Area and European identity.

Interculturality cannot be decreed, it must be learned, and while it inevitably takes time, its mechanics then allow for an incomparable time saving to meet all the challenges that establishments individually face and which they meet with all the more strength and efficiency because they operate in EUA.

The EUAs, although outside the walls, are comparable to those temples erected in ancient Greece to a civic deity, Homonoia, from whom we have inherited the notion of concord (Thériault, 1996)⁵.

Because harmony in the private, public and interstate spheres is the guarantee of civil peace but a permanent challenge, the ancient Greeks needed a reminder before their eyes to avoid falling into conflicts, sometimes fratricidal.

In this contemporary spirit of coopetition, the participants from the six institutions all reported, whether from the political sphere,

4 Point 5 of Chapter 1 of the conclusions of the Presidency of the European Council, Lisbon, 23 and 24 March 2000: "The Union has today set itself a new strategic objective for the coming decade: to become the most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economy in the world, capable of sustainable economic growth accompanied by quantitative and qualitative improvements in employment and greater social cohesion. Achieving this objective requires a comprehensive strategy aimed at:

- prepare the transition to a knowledge-based society and economy, through policies that better meet the needs of the information society and R&D, as well as by accelerating structural reforms to strengthen competitiveness and innovation and by completing the internal market;
- modernize the European social model by investing in human resources and fighting against social exclusion;
- to maintain the conditions for healthy economic development and favorable growth prospects by judiciously balancing macroeconomic policies.

5 From Plato onward, the political concept of Homonoia-ὁμόνοια was less a matter of common opinion than of knowledge, and more precisely, of the shared knowledge of what is desirable for all members of the same community. This knowledge stemmed from the friendship between citizens, from their shared desire to preserve the stability and freedom of their community, the city-state. For Aristotle, ὁμόνοια belonged primarily to the realm of praxis, of action. It was in political action, that is, within their community, that citizens realized and tested this friendship that united them. Action had to be beneficial to all, or concord would disappear. Consequently, this friendship constituted a state of mind in public action, binding all citizens together. More importantly, the principle of liberty implied that citizens could disagree: political friendship then consisted of an agreement not on the aspects of joint action, but on its fundamental frameworks, on the essential rules within which political conflict had to remain, because conflict is inherent in human nature. The importance of the ὁμόνοια was made visible by its numerous temples, shrines, statues, and coins bearing a representation of this civic deity.

teacher-researchers, administrative staff, or students, that operating in EUA had profoundly transformed their individual and collective work practices, but above all that they had discovered the strength of working in trust, internally and externally.

European Universities Alliances have thus created environments conducive to intercultural exchange, the co-construction of a shared vision of Europe, and the emergence of a generation of students and professionals deeply rooted in European values and challenges. They strengthen ties between administrative, teaching, and research communities, as well as with students, by developing a common space for dialogue and action, and transform mindsets for a more united Europe. This fuels the motivation of all participants to become ever more involved in the development of their EUA. If the equation for performance is indeed "Performance = Skills x Motivation⁶," then EUAs act as a powerful driver of skills development and, above all, motivation. They therefore constitute an invaluable tool for the competitiveness of higher education and research at

all levels: local, national, regional, European, and even global.

However, the EUAs are currently at a crossroads. The EUI is coming to an end, and future prospects, particularly regarding funding, remain uncertain. The Erasmus+ program is being renegotiated, and French support through PIA 3 funding has been fully utilized.

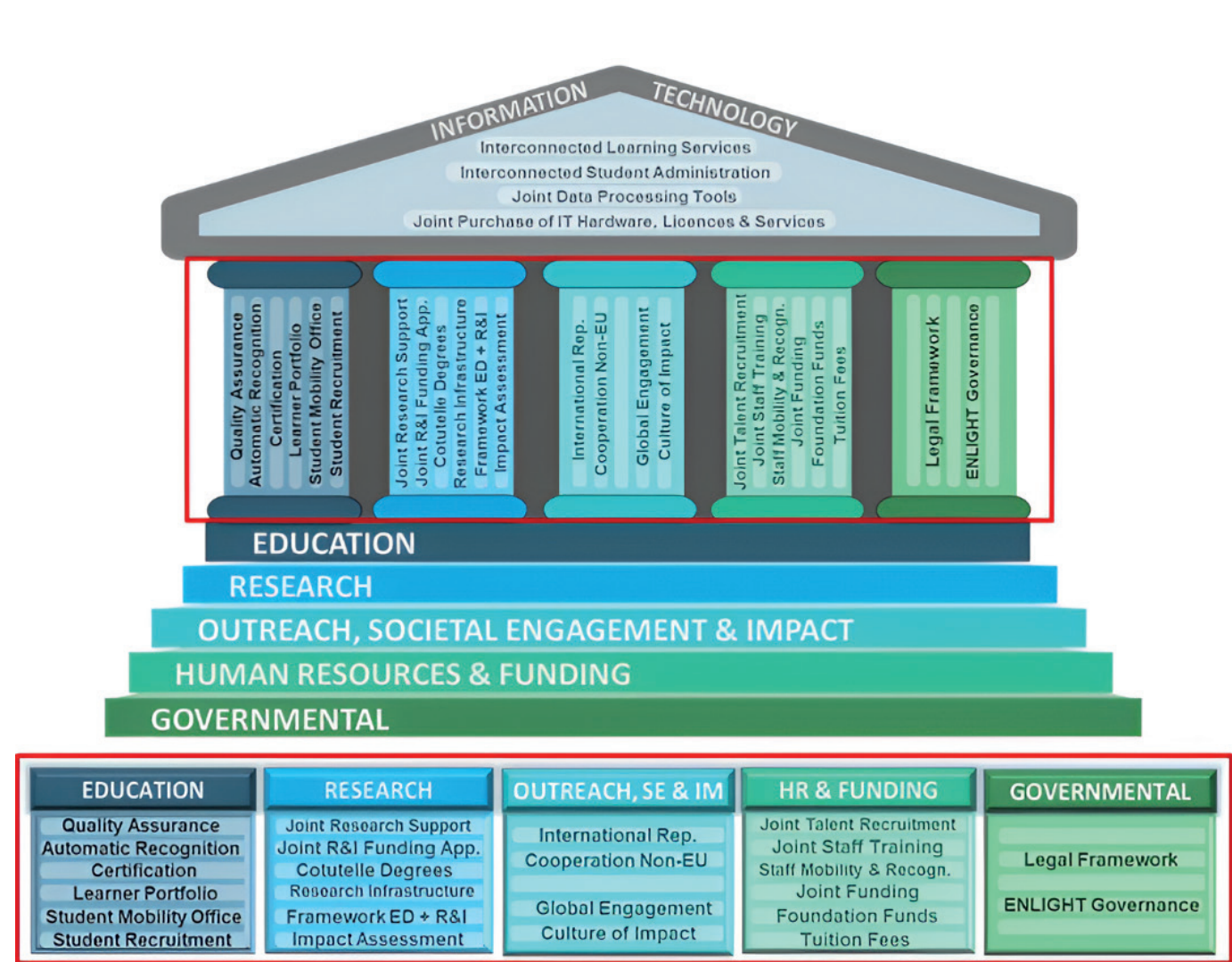
It is important to consider the financial investments granted by the European Commission, by France, by the other Member States in this perspective of effective Europeanization in its engineering, in its human investment which can erode due to lack of support, and to capitalize on these unprecedented results ⁷.

Below, as an illustration of an EUA, the ENLIGHT "Open Space" temple: creating a common ENLIGHT identity by organizing the areas of cooperation between partner universities and the AISBL (see p. 154 for a detailed presentation of ENLIGHT).

⁶ This well-established equation for performance was formulated in the 1980s by Christian Lemoine, Founding President of Center for Research and Study on Industrial Communication (CRECI). Christian Lemoine posits that performance is the product of competence and motivation: $P = C \times M$. However, if motivation is low, or even nonexistent, even the strongest skills will be ineffective. Currently, a term has been added to this equation: the "S" for solidarity. Interviews with participants have shown that, in addition to their proven skills, the EUA (Activity-Based Learning) program is a powerful driver of motivation and solidarity, which explains their success.

⁷ In this respect, the recommendations of Senator Le Gleut, Senator Daniel (Senate Information Report, 2024, cf. Appendix 1 p. 170), and MEP Farréng (Report for a New Vision of European University Alliances, cf. Appendix 3 p. 178), to perpetuate the EUAs as unprecedented tools for concord to continue building the European Higher Education and Research Area and to support European competitiveness, offer avenues for the future.

Figure 1: Representation of ENLIGHT Open Space.



Source: illustration taken from the ENLIGHT presentation for the MESR-ANR follow-up meeting, December 6, 2024

Historical context of the emergence of European Universities

Contextualizing a development spanning over 70 years, from 1948 to 2019, is a daunting task, given the numerous shortcuts involved. However, among the many changes in the world of higher education and research, some are crucial to consider. Placing them within the framework of the EUI offers insights into why and how the EUI is so transformative for institutions and their stakeholders.

This section traces the genealogy of the idea of a European University and the political tensions that have shaped both French and European higher education and research. These contextual elements allow us to appreciate the gap between the transformations of the last thirty years, sometimes experienced painfully in the field of higher education and research, and the enthusiasm of those working on the ground for the EUI and the resulting creation of the EUAs.

The Bologna Process led to the construction of the Higher Education Area, while the Lisbon Strategy laid the foundations for the economization of higher education and research and for global competition. At the national level, the consolidation of institutions creates a "French-style landscape" whose beneficial effects on institutions are rather uncertain (Musselin, 2017)...

By initiating the creation of EUA in this turbulent context, the EUI paved the way for an alternative. This experiment put people back at the heart of the action for renewed cohesion. Institutional governance, teaching staff, researchers, administrative staff, and students worked together to build a new university model on a European scale and strengthen the construction of a European Higher Education and Research Area based on "power," "prosperity," and "humanism"—the three pillars of President Emmanuel Macron's 2022 speech on the future of Europe, of which the EUAs constitute a robust tool.

The European Universities Initiative launched by the European Commission in 2019, under the impetus of President Emmanuel Macron during his inaugural speech at the Sorbonne in 2017, shows an evolution comparable to *La longue marche des Universités françaises* (The Long March of French Universities) (Musselin, 2001) then to *La grande course des universités* (The Great Race of Universities) (Musselin, 2017).

The Long March of European Universities

The concept of University

Regarding the long march of "European universities", the history drawn up by Charle & Verger (2012) shows "without unwelcome Eurocentrism that this institution is a specific creation, born in Italy, France and England at the beginning of the 13th century. This institution, despite multiple vicissitudes, spread throughout Europe and, from the 16th and especially the 19th and 20th centuries, to all continents. (p.2)".

Although Charles & Verger (2012) questioned the terminology to use in the re-edition of their work, considering the transformations of universities over the centuries, the notion of University was retained, as it carries a stronger symbolic power than other terms such as "higher education", "tertiary education (UNESCO)...

While the international reality is not limited to the University, there is a consensus that a University "designates, by its etymology as well as by its historical origin, a community of peers, scholars and teachers, gathered in the same place, organized autonomously and assuming together the same mission: the updating and transmission of their knowledge" (Paradeise et al., 2009, 288).

Therefore, calling for the creation of "European universities" raises the question of whether, in fact, they already exist, in the words of Xavier Darcos⁸: "To ask whether Europe was born from Universities or Universities were born from Europe is to revive the futile question of the chicken and the egg. Universities are by nature

European and Europe is inseparable from intellectual life."

However, while the EUI has given new impetus to the construction of the European Higher Education and Research Area through the experimentation of the EUAs and thus to the Europeanization of the continent's universities, the EUAs, as a new object, a new concept of University, are awaiting a definition, a status as well as their scope as well as the *minimum articulation* between the Member States, the States of the continent, the universities and the European Commission.

However, attesting to the anchoring of this new entity within the European landscape of higher education and research, Jean-Marc Sauvé, in concluding his speech¹⁰, set a date: "*I now invite you to meet again in 15 years, in 2037, to take stock of the development of European universities. This time, I am not inviting you to an alternate history, but rather a dystopia. More precisely, it is a reality in development whose blossoming and maturity I invite you to witness 15 years in advance.*" This dystopia¹¹ was presented by de Sousa (2012, see Appendix 5, p. 182, for a presentation) as a choice between two conceptions of the University, with a preference for a model compatible with the path opened by the EUAs "*for the European Higher Education Area [...] which has become a faithful and powerful ally in defending the values of academic freedom, institutional autonomy, and the diversity of knowledge, in a world threatened by the single way of thinking imposed by the imperatives of the market.*"¹² (de Sousa, 2012, 16).

8 Closing seminar of the French Presidency of the European Union on European universities. *The Europe of Universities*, speech by Mr. Xavier Darcos, Chancellor of the Institut de France, at the Sorbonne, Wednesday, June 29, 2022.

9 Some university associations have established a legal entity under the status of a Belgian non-profit association (AISBL). This status streamlines fund management. However, in some cases, the association adds an extra layer of bureaucracy that can prove financially costly due to additional HR functions (president, secretary, treasurer) or organizational burdens. This association status does not resolve the issue of obtaining a European label or diploma. On the other hand, the Multilateral Treaty on the Automatic Mutual Recognition of Higher Education Qualifications, currently being ratified by Poland in May 2025, could be a promising avenue. Entering into force on May 1, 2024, between Belgium, the Netherlands, Luxembourg, Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia, **this treaty guarantees the automatic recognition of higher education degree levels**. In practical terms, a degree obtained in one of these countries is recognized at the same level in the other signatory countries. Students no longer have to undertake lengthy and costly procedures to have their diplomas recognized if they wish to pursue their studies in one of these countries. **An alternative would be a multilateral treaty recognizing the existence of EU-wide agreements.**

10 Closing seminar of the French Presidency of the European Union on European universities. Speech by Mr. Jean-Marc Sauvé, President of the foundation of the Cité internationale universitaire de Paris, at the Sorbonne, on Wednesday, June 29, 2022.

11 Speech by Mrs. Boaventura de Sousa Santos delivered at the inaugural conference on the occasion of the 22nd anniversary of the Magna Charta Universitatum, held at the University of Bologna, on September 16, 2010, published in 2012.

12 Our translation.

The idea of a "Europe of universities" versus the idea of "a European university".

The EUI is reviving old goals, namely the creation of supranational universities.

Indeed, the literature on the principle of "European universities" shows that the idea predates 2017. Although it was a succession of missed opportunities (Catala, 2009; Ravinet, 2009; Gunn, 2013; Smit, 2021; Gänzle et al., 2025), they nevertheless paved the way for EUAs.

The first trace of a desire to create a "European university" appeared as early as 1948 in the discussions leading to the signing of the Brussels treaty.

The debate between foreign ministers on education and higher education immediately crystallized around two different conceptions of higher education: "a Europe of universities", meaning Europeanized universities versus "a European university", meaning a single multidisciplinary higher education and research institution.

In the same year, the Hague speech called for the creation of "a European cultural center, one of whose missions would be to support all efforts aimed at the federation of European universities" (Ravinet, 2009, 355). Under the influence of these tensions, the Council of Europe, created in 1949, would take particular responsibility for issues of education and higher education.

However, in 1955, "the discussion of higher education was not from the perspective of cooperation, but from that of the creation of a 'European university': a multidisciplinary teaching and research institution designed to overcome the technological 'gap' that separates Europe from the United States." (Ravinet, 2019, 355). However, and particularly due to French resistance "to a supranational project in an area falling under national sovereignty" (*ibid.*), this principle of a "European university" would, at best, result in an institute on nuclear energy. Instead of a "truly multidisciplinary university" naturally combining education at all levels and research, a European system of exchanges between universities and a European student passport were conceived—proposals that "appear in retrospect to be remarkably modern" (*ibid.*), later followed by the creation of the Florence Institute in 1972.

The most recent creation is that of the EIT, in 2008, as part of the Lisbon Strategy to promote employment and growth and facilitate synergies between businesses and higher education and research institutions.

This series of partially successful attempts at creating "European universities," despite the remarkably modern initial principle of 1948 (Ravinet, 2019), remained stuck between two visions: that of a "European university" perceived as a takeover by the European Commission of an area outside its jurisdiction, and that of a "Europe of universities" promoting cooperation. This latter vision found favor with both the member states and the Commission of European Rectors (CRE), which established itself as a significant body, eventually becoming the European University Association (EUA) in 2001. However, the principle of cooperation between universities on the continent has never been abandoned (Chiang, 2009; Kaniv, 2011; Charle et al., 2012; Forest, 2012) and has developed in a so-called "Bolognese" style (Ravinet, 2011), based on a perpetual tension between national sovereignties and the European Commission around the autonomy of higher education and research institutions.

The Bologna Process.

Although officially the idea of creating a "European university" has been abandoned, the principle of a European functioning for higher education, as for research, has developed, intertwined in two separate movements for these nevertheless related fields, through the Bologna process and the Lisbon strategy.

In this genealogy of "European universities", two Bolognese moments should be considered.

First, on September 18, 1988. On the occasion of the 900th anniversary of the University of Bologna, the oldest institution in Europe, nearly 400 rectors and directors of universities from across Europe signed the *Magna Charta Universitatum* (MCU). This MCU, a symbol of the principles of academic freedom and institutional autonomy introduced by the Humboldtian revolution at the beginning of the 19th century, outlines the guidelines for good governance and self-understanding among European universities.

Then, on May 25, 1998, four ministers of higher education (German, French, Italian, and British) called for the harmonization of the architecture of the European higher education system. Coming from ministers of higher education, rather than foreign ministers, this call generated the momentum of the Bologna Process, formalized in 1999, with the main objective of establishing a common European Higher Education Area by 2010.

This event will also be key with regard to the European Commission. As this is an area over which it has no competence, it has therefore been excluded and will now strive to enter the negotiations.

While the aim was to create the European Higher Education Area, a sharp critique emerged of the Bologna Process regarding the strange relationship between the European Commission and the Member States (Charlier *et al.*, 2003; Charlier, 2011), reflected in the very titles of scholarly articles, sometimes with a touch of irony: "European Coordination 'Bologna Style'" (Ravinet, 2011), "Building Europe by Resisting the EU? The Case of the Bologna Process" (Muller *et al.*, 2008), "Is There a Pilot in the Union?" (Bruno, 2008 a), "Evolution of

a Project for a Europe without Brussels: The Case of the Bologna Process" (Croché, 2009), "Europeanization without the EU" (Hoeffler *et al.*, 2015)...

In 2003, although higher education was presented as a pillar of knowledge Europe by the European Commission, the Bologna process remained "the arena where objectives are defined, and where the coordination of national higher education policies is structured" (Ravinet, 2011, 366), making the development of the European Higher Education and Research Area complex in view of the political ambitions of the European Commission.

That said, the Commission's orchestrating role in the EUI for the creation of EUAs did not provoke widespread opposition from either Member States or universities; quite the contrary, in the French case. This opens up interesting avenues of research for specialists in the European integration of higher education and research regarding the role of the European Commission, Member States, university communities, and associated institutions in this transformation.

The Great Race of European Universities

The Lisbon Strategy.

Under the influence of the Lisbon Strategy, a strong current of criticism of the economization of knowledge has emerged as a subjugation of higher education and research to the sole benefit of the interests of the neoliberal market (Charlier *et al.*, 2003; Garcia, 2007; Cussó, 2008; Croché *et al.*, 2008; Bruno, 2008 (b); Bruno, 2011; Bruno *et al.*, 2013; Crespy *et al.*, 2014).

This strategy does not explicitly name higher education, or even universities, in favor of "knowledge", which is never defined elsewhere, but which, through the performativity of discourses, becomes the cornerstone of competitiveness and therefore of growth (Ravinet, 2011).

Criticism of the disjunction between higher education and research, as well as criticism of the rhetoric on the knowledge economy, are extremely sharp and both are presented as deadly to the idea of the University.

Martins (2025) posits that the current state of the University, globally, corresponds to the passage from the Humboldtian idea of the University (first revolution), a University in which the production of knowledge was an end in itself, without economic concern, to an "entrepreneurial university model" (second ongoing revolution) dominated by its "third mission" (*triple helix*, Etzkowitz, 1998; Etzkowitz *et al.*, 1998). According to this critical current, against a backdrop of budget cuts, the academic ethos is mutating towards an entrepreneurial ethos, requiring the emergence of scientific profiles capable of capturing new financial resources, driving managerial changes and therefore mentalities, so that the University produces knowledge useful for purely economic purposes.

The substrate of this transformation is the integration of the rhetoric of the knowledge economy, to which are associated competition, employability, flexibility... promoted by the OECD since 1996 on the grounds that Universities would be "ivory towers" disconnected from society (Etzkowitz, 1998).

This rhetoric, functioning like a mantra, has obscured a fundamental role of the University: that of "the relationship between the University and society, such as its institutional contribution to the formation of citizenship, the building of democracy, equity, and social inclusion" (Martins, 2025, 191). This quote opens the field to new research questions insofar as the EUI has, on the contrary, allowed for a reconnection with the idea of the University, establishing concord among the actors within the federated institutions around the objectives of their EUA, and even beyond, since the EUAs reconnect with the very idea of "European universities."

The EUI has reinstated the collective spirit and the taste for working together within and between transnational institutions. Thus, the trajectories for achieving the observed transformations can offer an answer to the problem raised by Paradeise & Lichtenberger: "The problem is above all that of renewing the university culture of living together. [...]. A difficult moment unless we hope that these difficulties will stimulate, in counterpoint, the need for confrontation within institutions, based on their project debated and decided collegially, between bodies and disciplines called upon to harmonize their relationship around their common missions and to articulate them in a shared regulated space, without losing the specific effectiveness of each. In short, to see the creation of true universities!" (Paradeise et al., 303-305, 2009).

EUAs: an organizational innovation for a third revolution underway?

At the national level, the last three decades of reforms in higher education and research have made it inevitable to adapt to incessant changes: the logic of calls for projects, competition, differentiation, and the need to reach a critical size without which national and international visibility is impossible (Musselin, 2017). At the European level, if the European Higher Education Area is being built "in the Bologna style" (Ravinet, 2011), an amalgamation between the Bologna process and the Lisbon strategy has allowed the European Commission to address the issue of the modernization of higher education and to gain ground in an area sensitive for Member States, while disseminating a neoliberal vision oriented towards an economization of knowledge.

However, the effects of the Bologna process on the transformation of institutions are mixed (Musselin, 2014; 2020; 2021) and the importation of neo-managerial principles into universities shows an "accordion-like transformation" (Bollecker, 2021).

Therefore, in this context, the enthusiasm and excitement of institutions for the EUI raise questions. To create this new entity, the EUAs (European Universities), institutions have had to adapt, and in adapting, fundamentally revisit their vision, missions, and values, leading to the profound transformations observed. In other words, European universities are both a construct built from entities which, when combined, exceed the sum of their parts, allowing for the creation of something new through adaptation, and a new entity that permeates each of them to such an extent that they can become a fractal adapted to the whole.

In her book *"We Must Adapt": On a New Political Imperative* (2019), Barbara Stiegler paints a portrait of two competing visions of neoliberalism: that of Walter Lippmann and that of John Dewey, thus shedding light on the globalization that began in the 18th century and its frantic race for competition, the effects of which are being felt by higher education and research. Stiegler (2019) devotes a sub-part of his work to education "Towards a neoliberal redefinition of education and health" (pp. 257-270), the reading of which offers an interesting key to understanding to highlight one of the factors of adherence of university communities, in the broadest sense, to the EUI, despite the underlying neoliberal agenda on the background of "employability, flexibility, mobility", or even adaptation to catch up through competition to stimulate competitiveness.

While a more or less strong perception of a Lippmann-style neoliberal agenda is implicit in the EUI, the interviews and assessments produced show rather a neoliberal vision compatible with Dewey's philosophy.

According to Lippmann's vision, humans, seen as a mass, are always considered behind their time, closed in on themselves and incapable of evolving on their own, hence the recourse to a government by experts who alone know what course to give, and to manufacture consent, so that humans adapt precisely to the defined course.

In this neoliberal interpretation, education no longer aims at the emancipation of the individual, the development of their critical thinking, or the means of cultivating their difference and uniqueness. Instead, education becomes what makes the individual mobile and flexible, a concept reflected in European texts on education, in order to make the economy competitive in a changing and uncertain world.

According to Dewey's vision, there is not a single direction to the course of things, but a multiplicity of environments in which humans can decide to go and, more importantly, decide to go there together.

At the heart of his philosophy lies collective experimentation to solve a problem identified by several people. The underlying dynamic of evolution is therefore collective, not individual. In other words, for Dewey, evolution occurs through a series of actions, considered together, in which everyone plays their part, at every stage of the experimentation, to implement an adaptation to the challenges posed by the situation.

Dewey's originality lies in his advocacy of a necessary dialectic among all individuals who undertake these actions to meet the challenges that reality presents them. In the same movement, individuals co-educate themselves by building together and thereby transform their environments while transforming themselves.

The interviews conducted for this assessment illustrate each of these points and suggest that the "great transformation" described is based on having worked together, no longer in competition but in coopetition (Chiambaretto, 2011; Chiambaretto *et al.*, 2019; Couston *et al.*, 2019). While Dewey, a pragmatic philosopher, did not coin the term "coopetition," his philosophy is reflected in it and could explain the enthusiasm and passion of university communities for EUI and why, by providing an opportunity to revisit the missions and values of higher education and research, both within and between institutions, at the national and European levels, EUAs may constitute the third revolution of the university system. However, if EUAs are the phenomenon of an ongoing innovation which, like any innovation process, has three phases: emergence, development and institutionalization (Durand, 2010; Mérindol, 2014), the last phase will depend on future political decisions.

Finally, according to Dakowska (2020), the European Commission's initiatives in pursuing the Bologna Process pose a risk of expanding its competences into areas it does not possess, using much-needed funding during a period of budgetary constraints. The EUI is nearing the end of its experimental phase and comprises 65 EUAs and 8 Seals of Excellence, all directly dependent on European Commission funding. Given past obstacles to the creation of a "European University" and the EUAs' demonstrated capacity to operate as European Universities, and because the current focus is on negotiating the next framework program, Member States have an opportunity here to further develop the European Higher Education and Research Area by redefining roles. Indeed, the EUI offers Member States a way to reaffirm their sovereignty in defining, with the support of the European Commission, the future of the European Higher Education and Research Area. In this sense, the EUI is a means for Member States to reopen questions that have been left unresolved for some forty years.

The results collected from the institutions involved in EUA open up avenues for overcoming previous oppositions and for concretely projecting ourselves into the Europeanization of higher education and research, with the support of the European Commission, while respecting the sovereignty of the Member States.

Transformations observed in member institutions of a "European university".

Having set the scene in which the EUAs emerged, and shown the intertwined and sometimes divergent ambitions of the multiple levels of actors involved in the project: European Commission, Member States, Universities... the context of the present work is as follows.

As early as 2022, Jacques Comby's white paper on European Universities, submitted to Minister Frédérique Vidal, followed by the 2023 national seminar on European University Alliances and the 2025 seminar on the Future of European University Alliances, highlighted an unprecedented transformative effect for institutions of being a member of an EUA. The Director General of the DGESIP (Directorate General for Higher Education and Professional Integration) therefore requested an evaluation of this experiment, an evaluation to learn from and make informed decisions.

- ▶ **" Learning "** because the speed with which the EUAs were put in place gave the impression of a teeming and very heterogeneous landscape, complex to understand given the diversity of actions undertaken;
- ▶ **" Decide "** because every experiment has an end, and the question then becomes whether to continue it, redirect it, or end it.

The order from the director of the DGESIP was therefore to have a qualitative assessment of the transformative effect of the EUI on French establishments that had committed to the creation of a EUA.

To this end, six member institutions of a Wave 1 EUA, to benefit from their experience and expertise acquired on the ongoing experiment, were selected as the target of this qualitative evaluation:

- ▶ University of Montpellier involved in CHARM-EU;
- ▶ Sciences Po: involved in CIVICA;
- ▶ The INSA Group committed to ECIU
- ▶ University of La Rochelle involved in EU-CONEXUS;
- ▶ University of Burgundy, which in the meantime became University of Burgundy Europe, involved in FORTHEM;
- ▶ Sorbonne University committed to 4EU+.

These six establishments reflect the diversity of the EUAs: generalist EUAs CHARM-EU, FORTHEM, 4EU+, thematic EUAs CIVICA, EU-CONEXUS and engineering via ECIU, spread across the entire territory¹³.

¹³ These six institutions are to be considered as case studies, although they tend to shed light on the phenomenon of EUA as a whole.

Methodological Framework for Qualitative Evaluation

Responding to the CEO's request required identifying what had been transformed, why, and how.

To do this, the first step was to determine, in the broad field of evaluation, the appropriate methodological framework to observe whether there had been a transformative effect and whether this transformative effect was a consequence of the experimentation, or of the European public policy implemented by the EUI.

This is why contribution analysis (Delahais, 2023) was used as a method for the qualitative evaluation of a public policy (Revillard, 2018). The political sociology of the uses of European integration (Jacquot *et al.*, 2003; Woll *et al.*, 2004) will also be considered to illustrate the effect of the EUI on the sense of belonging to Europe.

Contribution Analysis

Contribution analysis falls under mixed-methods evaluation approaches "based on theory" (Evidence Based Theory, EBT, Revillard, 2018; Delahais *et al.*, 2021; Delahais, 2023), which rely on "what is visible." They are particularly well-suited to complex interventions, such as public policy experiments, in multi-stakeholder and multi-level environments, and have been considered suitable impact assessments for public policy since the 2000s (Revillard, 2018). Delahais (2023, 1) succinctly presents this method, which: "is organized around a process aimed at

1/ developing a set of hypotheses about the effects of an intervention being evaluated (how these effects are obtained, in what cases, why...) – called the 'theory of change';

and then

2/ testing these hypotheses through the collection and analysis of empirical information;

Finally,

3/ update the initial theory by indicating which hypotheses are verified.

The originality of the method lies in the fact that contribution analysis does not seek to demonstrate the success or failure of a program or public policy, but rather to reduce uncertainty about the contribution of this intervention to the alleged changes or transformations, in order to inform the political decisions to be made because: "It is indeed this uncertainty that is considered here to be detrimental to the decision and, more generally, to the making of public action" (*ibid.*).

Finally, contribution analysis "is particularly appropriate for cases where the contribution of an intervention to the expected changes is very uncertain, or seems unlikely, but where this contribution is of strategic interest to the stakeholders: for example because expectations are very high with regard to this contribution, or because the continuation or not of the intervention depends on this contribution." (*ibid.*, 4).

The choice of this method is directly linked to the EUI, an ongoing experiment, which aims both to test the transformative effect on the establishments involved in the creation of an EUA and to inform the thinking of political decision-makers regarding the future of this experiment.

The purpose of contribution analysis is to deliver a narrative ¹⁴progressively supported through interviews, and as many iteration loops as necessary, so that the final narrative only includes elements verified by tangible evidence.

In this context, the working hypothesis was to test the transformative effect of EUI on French institutions involved in the creation of an EUA. The work undertaken with stakeholders from the six institutions resulted in the drafting of six narratives stemming from this process—six assessments to be considered as proven documents validating the hypothesis of a transformative effect on all of an institution's missions as a result of being a member of a EUA. These assessments thus provide policymakers with the necessary elements for making decisions regarding the future of the experiment.

¹⁴ In the lexicon of contribution analysis, the finished product is called a "narrative". However, this term was not favored by the participants who preferred the term "assessment", close to a self-evaluation, on a particular object, that of the transformations supposedly attributable to the EUI, and which can serve as a basis to orient, guide, secure the future

Finally, since this is a European public policy, contribution analysis also makes it possible to operationalize the questions raised by Duez (2024, 19) concerning the processes of Europeanization: "How can we demonstrate that the observed change would not have occurred in the absence of European pressure? How can we assess the share of European integration and other factors in explaining domestic change? How can we 'measure' Europeanization, at least for those who set this objective, implicitly or explicitly?"

The political sociology of the uses of European integration (Jacquot et al., 2003; Woll et al., 2004) offers an original conceptual framework to account for the development of a strong sense of belonging to Europe and its values, revealing a Europeanization of the actors and their functioning.

Jacquot et al., (2003) and Woll et al., (2004) identify three types of uses that shed light on the observed transformations linked to the Europeanization of institutions: strategic uses¹⁵, cognitive uses¹⁶, and legitimizing uses¹⁷, demonstrating the impact of the EUI in fostering a strong sense of European belonging. The section of the assessments devoted to governance transformations reflects the dynamic and dialectical nature of the benefits for stakeholders of these back-and-forth movements between the national and European levels in this process of European integration (Jacquot et al., 2004, 5-6).

Before presenting the six reports, the approach implemented for their production is detailed.

The operationalization phases of the contribution analysis.

Phase 1: Enroll participating institutions.

The first step was to contact the actors, sometimes political and administrative pairs, responsible for the activities of the EUA in each establishment to present the evaluation exercise, to ensure its interest, knowing that the exercise was not mandatory and that if it were to be done, it would have to be subject to an agreement of the establishment.

While these responsible persons were already heavily involved in an evaluation process initiated on the one hand by the DGEAC (Gru-minaitè et al., 2025, in addition to the usual monitoring) and, on the other hand, by the Senate (Senate Information Report, Daniel,

Le Gleut, 2024, See Appendix 1, Summary, p. 170), the reception given to a new evaluation by the supervisory authority was all the more welcome as it immediately appeared to be complementary to the ongoing evaluations, because it was qualitative and intended to produce knowledge on the effects of transformations. "Yes, of course it's never the right time and we're always overwhelmed with the actions we're carrying out for the EUA anyway¹⁸, but the idea of being able to show everything we've achieved in such a short time is important to us" (R)¹⁹, "It will also be a necessary pause to take a step back and reflect on what we're doing because, ultimately, it's time we can never really take and which we need to move forward more effectively." (R)

With each official having given their agree-

actions to be undertaken within each establishment.

15 Strategic uses: "They describe the use of European integration as a resource for political action. For actors, this involves increasing their room for maneuver, their access to the political game (national or community), or expanding their repertoire of actions." (Duez, 2014, 18).

16 Cognitive uses: "[They] are part of the dynamics of interpretation and persuasion surrounding community practices. Cognitive use therefore concerns both the necessary understanding/interpretation of European policies and practices by actors and the dissemination by these same actors of concepts aimed at persuading in political exchanges and debates." (Duez, 2014, 18).

17 Uses of legitimization: "[They] aim to increase or renew political legitimization. It is essentially a matter of mobilizing, in national debates, discursive figures invoking a European reference." (Duez, 2014, 18).

18 Although participants refer to their EUA by its acronym, this is replaced by EUA for reasons of anonymity.

19 In order to preserve the anonymity of reported comments, the codes work as follows: **P** for president/director of establishment, **VP** for vice-president, **R** for head of Alliance actions regardless of the professional body teaching-researchers or administrative staff (project managers/European project engineer), **EC** for teaching-researchers and researchers, **A** for administrative staff and **E** for students.

ment in principle, it was their responsibility to organize a broader meeting to present this qualitative assessment exercise, with a view to obtaining the necessary political agreement to then initiate the assessment process itself.

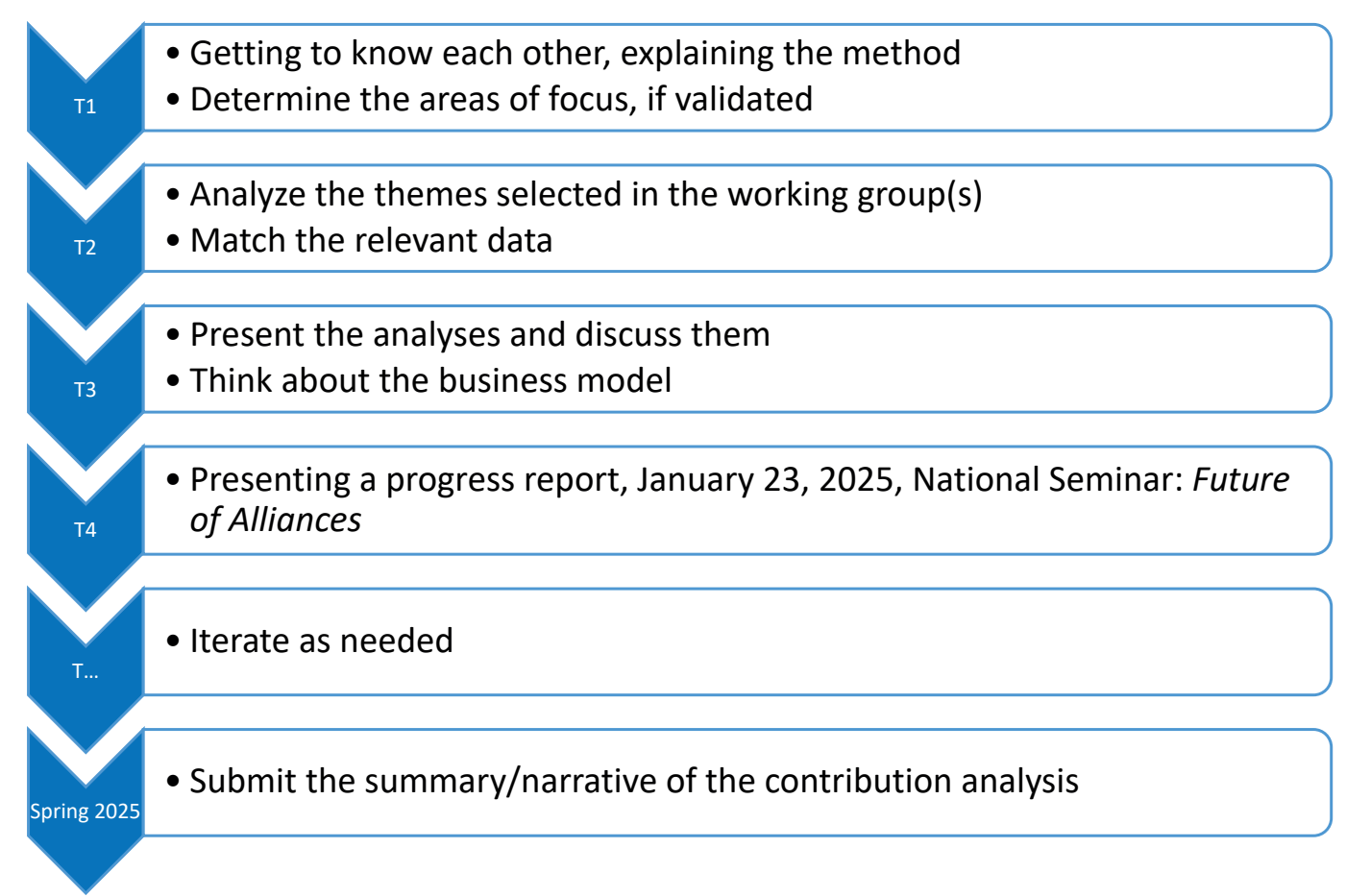
Phase 2: Presentation of the qualitative evaluation exercise to an expanded committee.

These presentations to the expanded French committee each time brought together, in addition to the EUA officials, the management levels: president, vice-presidents, and the Director General of Services where applicable, key departments: primarily International Relations, Student Services, and Management Control, as well as students. These presentations took place from the end of November 2024 to the beginning of January 2025.

The aim of these presentations to a larger group (between 5 and 22 participants) was to explain the evaluation process and its procedures to as many stakeholders as possible, in order to raise their awareness should they become involved in the practical phases of the contribution analysis. This relatively unknown method generated many questions, primarily of curiosity, without encountering any opposition. To complement the qualitative analysis, a review of the institution’s financial needs, as a member of a University Association, was proposed, drawing on the Methodological Guide for Conducting Economic Mapping and Strategic Analysis of University Activities (IGAENR, 2013). This review aimed both to assess needs and to provide information for the new EU and French budgets.²⁰

Below is the adopted work plan:

Figure 2: Work plan for the qualitative assessment of each establishment



Source: Excerpt from the presentation of the report to the expanded committee.

20 This part of the exercise is still ongoing, given the heavy workload already represented by the contribution analysis. Two institutions are particularly committed to adapting the IGAENR Guide (2013) in order to offer all six institutions a full cost analysis model.

Only the timeline, deemed too tight given the existing workload and the time required to conduct a thorough analysis, has been adjusted. The results are therefore expected by June 2025.

The contribution analysis in the form of a summary sheet (Delahais, 2023), the Self-Assessment Framework for Public Functions adapted to education (CAF, EUPAN, French version of 2013 established by Christine Defoin and Sandrine Canter, ASBL IMPEQes) as well as the IGAENR Guide (2013) were given to the interested parties, as methodological resources. With each school's management having given its approval, the work continued as presented below.

Phase 3: Implement the contribution analysis.

The EUA activity managers received on-site and remote support, based on mutual trust, to carry out their contribution analysis and write it up in the form of a report presenting the main transformative effects of being a member of an EUA.

One-to-two-day working sessions were offered to each establishment in order to organize specific working groups, according to the transformations that seemed most relevant to them.

The objective was to guide these working groups through semi-structured interviews to encourage the freest possible expression. Pre-established questions served to move beyond simply presenting the results and to delve deeper into the analysis of the transformation, taking into account the context, attitudes, and reactions of the participants²¹, for example:

- *In your opinion, how is this result a transformation?*
- *Who contributed to this result and how?*
- *How is this result concrete and sustainable?*
- *In your opinion, how is this result beneficial to you personally and professionally? What part of this benefit would you attribute to the EUI?*
- *What benefits do you derive from these transformations for yourself and your practices?*

- *How can this transformation, this result, be linked to your participation in the EUA?*
- *Would you have undertaken such an action outside of the EUI?*
- *Would you have achieved such results without the EUI?*
- *What did the EUI allow you to realize concretely that you didn't already realize?*
- *Did you previously have the same contacts and relationships with foreign partners?*
- *What differences do you make between the partnerships you already had and the partnerships you have with the members of your Alliance?*
- *In your opinion, is this experiment a windfall in a context of budgetary constraints? ...*

The process required a constant adaptation of the questioning in relation to the elements presented as particularly transformative in order to rule out other explanatory factors.

The choice of areas in which transformations were deemed most relevant was left to the participants' discretion. This choice could include governance, training, research, or any other area. It is striking to note that, despite the work involved, all participants decided to investigate all three areas: *"It's impossible to choose; it's like ignoring one or the other. In fact, we've questioned everything while working for the EUA, and there are repercussions at all levels. So, it's going to mean a lot of extra work for us, because we already have many things underway, but not in this direction. Therefore, we're going to conduct this assessment across the three areas because it's important to clearly demonstrate that without the Alliance, we wouldn't be where we are today, we wouldn't have accomplished all this, and we need to make that very visible" (R).*

The time commitment and availability of the participants were remarkable. Without their unwavering support and enthusiasm, despite a workload often described as overwhelming²² due to the division of tasks between activities for the EUA and for the institution, the reports could not have been submitted in June.

²¹ Apart from interviews with the presidents, interviews were conducted in focus groups, the composition of which was decided by each internal manager of the EUA.

²² Apart from the fixed-term contract staff recruited specifically for the EUA project, the permanent staff (academic as well as administrative) all insisted on the time they had to devote to the EUA, although they were already overloaded for the institution.

During the national seminar organized by the DAEI (January 2025), EUA managers presented the ongoing evaluation process and gave their opinion on the method. Following this seminar, some EUA member institutions, but outside the scope of the six selected institutions, either requested support on a specific issue or spontaneously offered to write a two-page presentation outlining the main transformative aspects concerning their institution, thus providing their own contribution. Therefore, in addition to the reports from the six institutions, nine other reports are presented in short format²³: EC2U, ENGAGE.EU, INVEST, SEA-EU, UNITA (EUA report + a focus on research), UNIVERSEH, YUFE, ENLIGHT as well as an analysis by the network of VP International Relations-Europe focused on research, an analysis conducted by students, and a presentation by FOREU4ALL, totaling 12 additional contributions.

This spontaneous willingness demonstrates the importance of the EUI for institutions, higher education, and research, beyond a mere wind-fall. Dedicating time to drafting such documents, despite already significant constraints, proves a strong commitment and belief in the EUI's potential to transform the way universities operate, and a firm commitment to ensuring the EUI becomes sustainable so that *"all the efforts devoted to achieving results that are both unimaginable and 'colossal,' in the words of the President of the Commission, 'are not reduced to nothing'"* (President's speech, Choose Europe for Science event, 5 May 2025, Paris).

The table below summarizes the sources of information as well as the working sessions with the target institutions, referred to as participant observations (N=49), and the non-participant observations that contributed to the analysis (N=43). Notes were taken for each participant observation and provided for the meta-analysis.

²³ These supplementary reports are presented following the reports of the six institutions whose evaluations were supported. However, it should be noted that only the transformations reported by the target institutions were systematically verified.

Table 1: Presentation of the information sources used.

Types	Sources	Number of people present	Number of distances	Descriptions
Documents	Documentation on EUIs and EUAs			Factsheets.com, J. Comby White Paper, Senate Information Report, European Parliament Report, PPMI Report, scientific articles...
	Institutional communications			Website, international policy, institutional strategy, adapted EC timetable, brochures on the Alliance, course development log, questionnaire on the evolution of Alliances for the national seminar of 23/01/2025...
Participant observations, interviews, site visits	Direction (P)	4	2	Contribution analysis
	Heads of EUA activities and all relevant staff	16	19	Contribution analysis
	Students	5	3	Contribution analysis
Non-participating observations		6	37	ECIU seminar, IMT innovation seminar, national seminar on the Future of European University Alliances, follow-up video conferences for French institutions that are members of EUA-ANR, UEFR working group, FOREU4ALL, FU, visits to other EUA member institutions...

The facilitator's role in contribution analysis is to guide the participants in an intervention (here, the EUI) impartially through their own analysis, in order to identify the causal factors of transformation. Based on the reports prepared by the EUA leaders, each reader can then form their own opinion regarding the transformation, or rather the postponed transformations, resulting from being a member of a EUA.

In conclusion, the system implemented does indeed answer the initial question, which was whether there was a transformative effect and if so, whether this effect is mainly due to the EUI and being a member of an EUA.

Readers are thus referred to the two formats of the assessment, a short two-page version and a longer version of about ten pages which further explains the paths to achieve these results and clearly highlights a profound and multidimensional transformative effect of their governance, their internal organization, their training offerings, their research strategies and, more unexpectedly, the development of a strong sense of belonging to Europe.

Below is a meta-analysis of the main transformations, inviting you to read the reports of each institution for more details.

Meta-analysis of the transformations observed as a result of being a member of an EUA.

The EUA: A vector of institutional transformation.

The interviews revealed that the institutional transformations presented stem from organizational learning (Argyris *et al.*, 1996) in two spheres in particular, and not insignificant ones because they are the linchpins of the EUI: school leadership (or its "governance," according to Mignot-Gérard, 2003; 2019) and the administrative/functional departments. Under the influence of the EUI, because it was necessary to create the EUI with its work packages to be operationalized, the interactions between individuals and between institutions gave rise to genuine communities of practice (Wenger, 1998). These communities explain how and why these profound collective and individual transformations took root with a strength and speed that, despite everything, have never been equaled, given the scope of these transformations. This constitutes a **particularly remarkable result** of the EUI for these two spheres, allowing them to break free from their traditional constraints, and has often been described as a phenomenon more powerful than any formation or other device previously experienced.

Indeed, implementing the EUA strategy involved a shift from competition between institutions to cooperation, if not coopetition (Couston *et al.*, 2019), and thus, for the stakeholders, entering into a process of collective learning. According to the interviews, this paradigm shift relied on **the development of**

communities of practice (Wenger, 1998) both within and between institutions, particularly at the level of institutional leadership and operational departments/services, which are the driving force behind the creation and advancement of the EUA. In fact, the observed institutional transformations result from learning through practice and from experiences acquired through the interactions necessary for carrying out tasks together. These communities connect the individual, the collective, and the organizational, similar to Argyris & Schön's (1996) double-loop learning, presented as the most transformative learning within an organization because it profoundly challenges structures, representations, and behaviors. This is precisely what the assessments of each institution demonstrate. Although Palmowski & Angouri (2025) qualify the actual impact of these communities of practice, primarily due to uncertainty regarding their future, the resulting learning, reflected in the scale of the achievements, the capacity building, and the collaborative know-how, constitute unprecedented transformations.

In this respect, the EUI served as a lever for internal transformation within institutions. By learning by doing, to create their own EUA, thanks to **the emergence of various communities of practice** (Wenger, 1998) that transformed practices while simultaneously providing fertile ground for organizational and individual

transformations, the institutions became learning organizations. According to the seminal theory defined by Wenger (1998), the benefits of communities of practice are as follows:

- ▶ **learning through social interaction and practice**, to the point of allowing a revision, or even a modernization, of old individual and collective modes of operation;
- ▶ **the emergence of a common identity and values**, the establishment of mutual trust, in particular between actors with heterogeneous knowledge and distributed in space, including in similar fields;
- ▶ **the reduction of the cognitive distance between individuals** leading, beyond learning, to the creation and recombination of knowledge necessary for the production of new things.

The observed organizational transformations reveal the adoption of a new, efficient mode of operation: a network-based and coordinated approach among all stakeholders involved in the creation of the EUA: president, vice-presidents²⁴, faculty, administrative staff, and students. In this respect, these organizational transformations correspond to the dynamics stemming **from an ongoing sociotechnical innovation process**—the creation of the EUA—as described by Callon (1986) and Boiteau (2016), who adapted this theory to the university hospital context.

This ongoing innovation process, known as EUAs, is based on a particular characteristic: the initially weak coupling of actors. However, according to the spiral metaphor characteristic of sociotechnical innovation (Latour, 1989, 232), EUAs operate in a spiral fashion, involving different spheres of actors who are not accustomed to working together. Hence the emergence of a specific role, that of "translator" in Callon's theory (1986), filled by a new profile: **European project managers/engineers**, who structure and support actions within their institutions, in constant interaction with their counterparts in partner institutions. They thus ensure a double translation loop, both within and between institutions, by translating strategic orientations to each sphere for the purpose

of collective alignment with the objectives of their EUA, while also taking into account the strategic objectives of their own institution. Consequently, these organizational transformations reflect a major shift in university operations, which Cyrulo and Frame (2025, 191) described as **"revolutionary"**. These changes could not have occurred without the commitment of the participants and the unwavering enthusiasm sparked by the EUI. Beyond strengthening the EUA identity and fostering professional development through co-creation and the identification of complementarities resulting from this collective engagement, participants also expressed enjoyment in working together, describing interpersonal relationships as friendly. This contributes significantly to the success of tasks accomplished through communities of practice (Dameron et al., 2007) and to the organizational commitment necessary for developing the EUA (Paillé, 2005).

The transformations observed at the institutional level stem from learning that would not have been possible outside of the EUI, therefore of the EUA, and which revitalize the organization of the missions of an institution through its internationalization.

Thus, whether at the political, administrative, or teaching and research level, and while the context of higher education and research is often presented as being on its last legs, participating in the creation of the EUA has often been presented as a way to **"regain faith in my profession, my vocation" (P, EC, R)** and **"more effectively than in any other change management plan or change management training." (P, R, A)**. The EUI has opened up possibilities for moving beyond traditional practices, breaking down silos, and creating collective intelligence in service of an ideal that transcends particularities: **"A single university could not have achieved these exceptional results and transformations. It is because we have learned to pool the best of each university—it's difficult, it takes time, but it's possible and beneficial—that we have arrived here." (VP, R, A)**; **"It is a learning process that will allow us to cope with the context. This implies that the stakeholders know each other, recognize each other, understand each other, and trust each other. It takes time to define the new system adapted to take**

²⁴ While the connection with the political level is not new for vice-presidents, the creation of a vice-presidency dedicated to EUA is, although not systematic. On the other hand, the creation of a network of VP Europe/VP IR focused on EUAs is a new development and demonstrates the importance of the subject (see Analysis of the role of research for UNITA, p. 147; Analysis of VP IR-Europe on the role of research in EUAs, p. 157).

into account our complex and evolving world, so we mustn't come back every year with a new policy, a new law, because trust takes time to establish, but once it is there, we can all move forward together." (P).

Finally, the EUI gives stakeholders the feeling that they can work concretely towards building the European Higher Education and Research Area and in this way also contributes to the creation of a strong European university identity to meet current challenges.

Effect of the EUA on the management of institutions: the different organizational models

The strategic capacity of an institution is deduced from its ability to drive momentum within the institution by mobilizing all of its internal forces in service of the institution's project.

"This capacity cannot be improvised through the magic of discursive goodwill or formal organizational charts and procedures. It is based on specific social processes that formulate norms and frame the actions and relationships between the various internal parts. These cultural, normative, relational and behavioral processes make it possible to link more or less closely the two facets of the interdependencies that structure a social and economic environment: an internal facet that concerns the links between its organic components; an external facet that covers the relationships with the stakeholders who populate its environment." (Thoenig et al., 2016, 7).

On the university as an organisation (Mignot-Gérard, 2003, Musselin, 2016) different types of operation have been theorised presenting "collegial systems" (Polanyi, 1972), "loosely coupled systems" (Weik, 1976), "professional bureaucracies" (Mintzberg, 1979) or even "organised anarchies" known under the name of the "garbage can model" (Cohen et al., 1972) to name only the main ones. Each one reveals a lack of consideration for all the internal forces of a university in a single dynamic, hence the

"entrepreneurial university" model conceptualized by Clark (1998) intended to make the university capable of adapting to the changes of the end of the 20th century: globalization, decrease in public funding, massification, commodification and economization of higher education and research...²⁵

This model, adopted and amplified by the "triple helix" model (Etzkowitz, 1998), has spread to many regions of the world with varying degrees of success, creating tension between the Humboldtian ethos and the new entrepreneurial ethos, far from simplifying the "system of governance" (Mignot-Gérard, 2003) of a university. Because the EUI involves operating across multiple institutions of different nationalities, it was necessary to begin by creating a new "system of governance" (*ibid.*) adapted to each EUA, which led to a profound transformation not only of each institution's internal organization but also of its own "system of governance" (*ibid.*). Each report highlights the EUA as a lever for cohesion, driving momentum both internally and externally with all partners, and thereby defining a new strategic capacity reflected in the institutional project, international policy, training policy, etc. Each EUA has a dedicated "governance system" (*ibid.*) or governance structure. *"This governance allows for the definition, at the highest university level, of joint teaching guidelines." and research. It's a specific space for university presidents to define a common direction. Unlike a university network (EUA, Coimbra Group Universities), the governance can define priorities in terms of research and teaching within a Strategic Board. This has never existed before. The presidents present themselves united as an alliance to carry out a number of missions: international relations, education, and research. In particular, projects integrating both the research and teaching dimensions by combining local and national funding sources and creating synergies between them. For example, the presidents jointly define the alliance's external relations priorities, which then allows them to approach external partners on behalf of the alliance and thus be stronger." (P).*

²⁵ This model is based on a transformation of internal functioning in 5 points:

- a centralized management center with a specialized team of managers for agile action strategies and decision-making,
- University departments with an entrepreneurial culture to develop both education and research beyond disciplinary boundaries,
- a managerial governance model that involves academic staff more closely in major projects and decisions,
- a drive to seek diverse sources of funding
- profoundly transformed values, originating from high-tech companies, so that entrepreneurial culture permeates all levels of the university.

In this respect, the EUAs offer a new university organizational model:

- ▶ by revitalizing the collegial model, since it is open to the international community, the EUAs are repositioning the University as a major player in the transmission of knowledge, in the production of research in the service of society and now within a European ethos;
- ▶ the extremely strong involvement and highest level of responsibility of the presidents/directors testifies to the strategic importance of the EUA for the institutions.

In fact, a president/director of an institution rarely gets personally involved in setting up an Erasmus Mundus program or a research project. These new arenas (Mintzberg, 1985) constitute privileged spaces for rediscovering the meaning of reflection and collegial decision-making, and have thereby repositioned presidents/directors on strategic aspects from which they sometimes feel somewhat removed due to an obligation *"to distribute the scarcity rather than to fully invest themselves strategically, for lack of sufficient room for maneuver."* (P)

The interviews revealed different forms of structuring of these arenas: *presidium*, *board*, steering committee, thematic committees, secretariat,... whose presidency can be rotating, as well as the creation of new vice-presidencies or missions directly associated with them. Notably, these arenas systematically present a close articulation with internal services, an unprecedented and appreciated transversality, breaking with the usual verticality.

For the presidents/directors, these new forums represent a privileged space for debate, enriched by shared political perspectives on the development of higher education and research, and have given some the feeling of being able to fully exercise their strategic mission. To their knowledge, no other project had allowed them this level of reflection and involvement in the future of their institution through coordination with their European counterparts and within a framework of European co-construction. All acknowledged a considerable investment of time and energy, but also a correspondingly enriching experience. Another notable effect is that the transformations of the university's "governance system," resulting from the EUA's participation, have not generated a conflict of values, unlike the reforms undergone over the last twenty years, as Tandilashvili (2022) demonstrates. These transformations have also

given meaning to the concept of autonomy (Chatelain-Ponroy et al., 2012; Musselin et al., 2012; Goy, 2015), and have even removed some of the obstacles related to the organizational characteristics of institutions (Thoenig et al., 2016). **Furthermore, these new arenas have also opened up to participants who were not previously involved.** While the names vary, the committees created to ensure operational management meet regularly with the political boards, and, quite significantly, students are also involved. These new structures contribute both to the appropriation and dissemination of the EUA's objectives, while also facilitating their implementation through closer ties with decision-making bodies. A university president even summarized the advantages of this approach by adapting the maxim *"Si vis pacem par bellum"* to: *"Si vis pacem, para Europam Universitatum."*

Finally, by fully embracing the creation of a EUA, the European question, while not necessarily simpler, has become more than just an opportunity: a concrete reality, reflected in the institution's strategy with, at a minimum, a revision of its international policy, which has been Europeanized since it is based on the EUE strategy. Finally, far from being merely cosmetic, the renaming of a University: Université Bourgogne Europe, is intended as proof of the institution's identification with the European ethos.

Effect of the EUA on the organization of services/business management

While the siloed organization of operational departments/divisions is traditionally identified as a barrier to implementing an institution's strategic objectives, Participation in an EUA reinvents the way services/departments are structured, resulting in a powerful transformative effect on how they operate. Overall, assessments show that the driving force behind this effect lies in the integration of the EUA objectives within the operational departments/divisions themselves and in increased collaboration among these departments/divisions, a level never before observed, leading to new internal synergies and, above all, increased motivation.

The decision to decentralise the distribution of staff responsible for EUA tasks within the departments/business units, rather than creating a dedicated EUA unit, ensured that the

EUA culture was more widely disseminated, including among staff who were less directly involved. Thus, all core functions—student services/teaching, research—as well as support functions—international relations, communications, HR, finance, IT, quality assurance, library, continuing education, disability and diversity, corporate relations, etc.—are now working collaboratively for the EUA and are adopting new practices to improve their daily operations, beyond their EUA responsibilities. Project-based work has become second nature, and despite the disruption of traditional hierarchical structures, which may have generated conflicts and tensions, those involved report that they can no longer revert to the old, rigid, "tubular" practices. There is therefore a transfer of learning from participation in EUA activities to the benefit of the institution, thanks to the development of both professional and personal skills. Under the effect of the EUI, the resulting internationalization can be considered as a driver of strategic development for the institution, which can now rely on an alignment of its internal forces, forces whose capabilities are strengthened thanks to the experience acquired through the EUA.

This observation should be considered in light of two chapters in the book by Frame & Curylo (2025): Chapter 6: "Critical cosmopolitanism as a theoretical and methodological approach to the EUI" (Gonzalez del Vallee-Brena et al., 102-0013) and Chapter 10: "The impact of the European University Initiative (EUI) on non-academic university employees in Poland" (Antonowicz et al., 163-178).

Regarding Chapter 6, the authors tested Delanty's (2009) theoretical framework of critical cosmopolitanism and its four dynamics to analyze the European Commission's discourses and assess their contribution to the construction of a European identity and the ongoing process of Europeanization. While the interviews conducted for this review cannot be generalized, they offer an initial response to the authors' reservations concerning two of the four dynamics that could not be verified: "Therefore, the analysis shows that the second dynamic, the positive recognition of the Other, may or may not occur. The third dynamic, the capacity for mutual evaluation of cultures or identities, is not present in the texts. This may be because, at the time of the publication of these texts and of conducting this research, the

COVID-19 pandemic required avoiding physical and cross-national mobility" (ibid., 109). It is likely that capturing these two dynamics requires focusing not on official discourses but on the discourses of the actors themselves. The communities of practice mentioned above are particularly strong among administrative staff. Benefiting from unprecedented European cooperation, these staff members have developed their skills by sharing their practices, learning from the work cultures of others, and creating common ground. In this sense, according to Delanty (2009), the constant dialectic of self-reflection towards the Other, and a return to self enriched by both knowledge and the knowledge of the Other, allows us to verify the two dynamics absent from the Commission's discourse and to validate critical cosmopolitanism as an explanatory model for the observed transformations. Finally, this also confirms the role of the EUI as an effective driver of the ongoing Europeanization process.

Regarding Chapter 10, the authors demonstrated the added value of the EUI for staff who are less involved in international issues, even considered "invisible" and traditionally "overlooked" (ibid., 164): "Overall, it represents an important change in the role of non-academic staff in university governance. Suddenly, the non-academic staff, their individual skills and expertise have turned out to be pivotal for the EUI and, therefore, need to be developed. With time, the non-academic staff have progressively come to be seen less as a bureaucratic machine that streamlines the circulation of documents, the so-called 'messengers of bureaucracy' (Collinson, 2006), and more as human capital" (ibid., 171). Both interviews and assessments reveal a significant and growing number of staff exchanges in support functions such as communications and libraries, which are generally considered less involved in internationalization issues. *"When I went to the partner institution for staff week, I didn't expect to discover that the communication problems within the university would be the same. This made us want to think about it together and find ways to overcome this problem that we each had on our own. Even though everything was done in English, it wasn't a disaster; ultimately, the barrier was in my head. And we are embarking on a joint communication strategy based on a comparison of our practices between partners. Three administrative and technical staff members are scheduled to*

go on staff week in early January 2025, thanks to additional funding from the French National Research Agency (ANR).” (A). “Our libraries are undersized compared to the needs of internationalization. With the Alliance, it’s an opportunity to change things and correct what hasn’t been a good direction until now.” (A).

The EUA is therefore not limited to a handful of key players. Its influence extends to all staff of an establishment, regardless of their status, and constitutes an unparalleled source of motivation, commitment and cohesion in a national context considered less inspiring.

Finally, for the professions, the emergence of three resource networks should be highlighted: at the national level: **the UEFR Working Group**, bringing together the operational actors of the EUAs; the network of **VP RI-Europe** which works extensively on the EUAs and is setting up a community of practice at the highest level; at the European level: **FOREU4ALL**, an initiative of the EUAs, offering a collaborative and supportive platform where all the EUAs come together to share their good practices, exchange their experiences and strengthen their cooperation.

A new profile: the European project engineer

1 - A new player

Organizational transformations are breaking with established professional norms. The EUI has given rise to new profiles for the administration and management of the EUA’s activities, which can be considered transformative from an HR perspective. These new profiles encompass skills that sometimes already exist within existing staff, and sometimes need to be supplemented or acquired. However, in most cases, *ad hoc recruitment* was necessary to handle the new activities related to the creation of the EUA.

Throughout all the interviews, this new role was highlighted and emphasized as crucial. It involves a new profile dedicated to the operational coordination of EUA activities both internally and in collaboration with counterparts at other partner institutions. This profile is very often recruited at the start of a project, is almost always funded through ANR grants, and without it, the completion of tasks would be impossible. There is no official title for this

role, but it is somewhat similar to the European project engineer profile recently created within the CNRS and INRAE to support and facilitate the submission of large-scale European projects and the securing of funding. Highly qualified, this profile requires a wide range of skills: excellent knowledge of the workings of higher education and research, expertise in European project management, financial management, international cooperation, HR management, as well as proven legal, linguistic, and intercultural skills. This profile also resembles the role of project manager described by Harroche (2019) within the framework of the IdEX program as a new professional stratification supporting research, situated between managers and implementers within an organization (Izraeli, 1975). Project managers are responsible for "translating general political and administrative guidelines into specific rules, tools, action plans, routines, or organizational structures designed to structure and regulate the work of frontline professionals" (Barrier et al., 2015, 20). Harroche (2019) also shows that these project managers have precarious status, linked to contract funding, which limits career prospects. These project managers perform demanding and difficult work requiring both strong administrative skills, as the implementation of these projects of excellence relies on new organizational practices that break with those in place in universities, and academic professional experience and expertise.

2 - Translator function

Callon’s (1986) theoretical framework is particularly illuminating for understanding the dynamics of innovation. This is especially true because ongoing innovation is also considered an "actant". Now, the EUA can certainly be considered an actant that acts upon its actors at the same time as they contribute to its development.

Based on the interviews, it became clear that the European project manager/project engineer played a key role in the success of an innovation under development: that of "translator". This key role was defined by Callon (1986) in his sociology of translation, or actor-network sociology, highlighting the dynamics and interactions necessary between actors in any innovation process.

The translator’s role is to connect multiple actors at various levels, including in intercultural

contexts, by translating 26 facts into each individual's realities to help find solutions to the difficulties encountered in advancing innovation. The challenge of translation lies in facilitating this breakdown of silos, which Akirch, Callon & Latour (1988a, 1988b) describe as "an art," given how delicate this challenge can be. The translator "operates both as a mediator in the production of knowledge and as a vector of translation in the arrangement of heterogeneous worlds. [...] Thanks to this true builder of cooperation during the project phase, they can guarantee the concrete implementation of new tools supporting the project." (Boiteau, 2016, 261). Finally, the translator manages the controversies arising from collaborative work between initially isolated actors²⁷, who do not necessarily share the same interests or cultures, and who come from different backgrounds, but who gradually come together through these controversies to reach the inevitable compromises in the innovation development process.

For these reasons, given that the EUA has brought this role to the forefront and raised awareness of its crucial importance, it is essential to provide institutions with the resources to sustain this new role of European project manager/project engineer, without which the EUA's activities cannot be carried out. However, these profiles do not exist as such in the REFERENS directory, and this leads to several types of difficulties.

3 - Recruitment

According to REFERENS in the BAP J, two profiles coexist: Research Partnership and Research Valorization Manager and International Cooperation Manager. However, the role of European Project Manager/Project Engineer is a hybrid of the two. Therefore, opening a position through a competitive process and assigning it to a salary scale proves delicate and can be a source of tension among staff. The required skills, both robust and extensive, are poorly matched by the current salary levels. This, coupled with the precarious nature

of contracts linked to the project's duration, hinders career planning. The challenge then becomes finding ways to retain these highly specialized individuals, whose skills have been further enhanced by experience gained within the EUI, and whose departure would jeopardize the very continuation of the project. The reality is that project managers/project engineers are increasingly leaving their positions due to insufficient compensation commensurate with the skills they employ, the lack of career prospects inherent in the EUI's project-based approach—and the absence of visibility regarding its future—despite their exceptional commitment and keen interest.

The departure of a European project manager/project engineer poses a critical risk to institutions, as recruitment is lengthy and difficult due to the breadth and specificity of the required skills. Workloads are already very heavy, particularly for European project managers/project engineers, and cannot simply be redistributed to other staff.

Since other institutions like the CNRS and INRAE also unanimously agree on the crucial importance of these new profiles, which go far beyond a simple support function, shouldn't we explore further to ensure the long-term viability of these new roles? The EUA has restructured existing professions, resulting in increased potential. Should we create a new status within REFERENS, at the IGR level, given that the needs are not limited to the EUAs?

In this section on organizational transformations, this question is intended as a warning point for the future of internationalization, within the framework of the EUA or not, because the need for highly qualified profiles is fundamental to support European-scale projects in the long term.

²⁶ This is not about linguistics but about being able to make oneself accessible to the multi-level actors involved in an innovation and ensuring a shared level of understanding and appropriation for a process that is taking place.

²⁷ The sociology of translation uses the term "actants" to encompass both human and non-human actors. This theory posits that the innovation to be created constitutes a sociotechnical object that exerts feedback on human actors. In the context of EUA, which is a sociotechnical innovation, this means that EUA influences the work of actors; in this case, EUA unites actors as much as it drives individual and collective transformations.

In summary

the EUAs act as catalysts for cultural and organizational change, forcing institutions to rethink their internationalization strategies around a resolutely European approach, to structure new forms of collaboration and to adapt their administrative practices and organization to align with common and resolutely European objectives.

Although this may present challenges (workload, complexity of financing, difficulties in recognizing investment, etc.), the benefits in terms of sharing expertise and strengthening skills are considerable.

The EUA: A Vector of Pedagogical Transformations

The considerable results described in the training assessments constitute profound transformations in themselves and are underpinned by the development of communities of practice and double-loop learning as presented above. Regarding training programs, their internationalization is not a new phenomenon. On this point, all participants strongly emphasized that the new programs designed within their EUAs should not be considered *"enhanced Erasmus Mundus"* (R). Furthermore, they see no subsidiarity between the Erasmus Mundus program, Erasmus mobility, and the training developed within the EUAs: *"Erasmus Mundus is an individual experience, whereas the EUA experience is a collective one."* (R)

While the question of innovation in university teaching has been central to discussions for the past twenty years (Berthiaume et al., 2013), the responses provided have often been the domain of isolated teacher-researchers (Bartoli et al., 2016). The EUI has provided a framework, resources, and sufficient freedom for communities of practice among teacher-researchers to form and engage in an innovation process. By pooling their cognitive and technical resources, their personnel (for example, not all institutions have a teaching support service), and by addressing issues of transnational peer-to-peer training, the dynamics of pedagogical transformation have been particularly accelerated: *"Everything we have managed to do, we could not have done at a single university, and we managed to do it so quickly because we learned to work together thanks to the Alliance, pooling all our resources and skills. Given the scale of the work, it's also less daunting to go all together."* (R)

The most significant transformations concern:

- ▶ Interdisciplinarity: working in a European context has made it easier to develop interdisciplinary training by allowing us to overcome disputes between disciplines and to break down the barriers between disciplines from their faculty habits;
- ▶ the flexibility of the programs: online course catalogues, via platforms specifically dedicated to EUA training, multiply the possibilities for personalizing the paths, as do the micro-credits currently under development;
- ▶ the co-construction of training programs with local, regional and European stakeholders: *"European universities are the only places where it is possible to have integrated teaching and research programs"* (R, EC);
- ▶ strengthening the links between education, research and the socio-economic world: thanks to the CBLs;
- ▶ Pedagogical hybridization: thanks to BIP and COIL programs, internationalization "at home" is made efficient. These new practices also provide a springboard for longer-term mobility, or even enrollment in Erasmus Mundus, for students who would probably not have otherwise participated.

However, although EUAs contribute to the development of national legislation, such as the legislative development in Spain and Hungary through the joint master's program of CHARM-EU, for participants, the European diploma is not the essential priority.

For them, the essential transformation lies in the transformation of their operating methods within the very design of university education. Based on their experience, they believe that the EUA represents the University of the 21st century, ready to meet the enormous challenge of renewing its university training programs and practices to better prepare the citizens and professionals of tomorrow by providing them with the knowledge and skills necessary for the numerous changes they will face. Having been transformed by their EUAs themselves, they believe that these institutions are now perfectly organized to gather the needs of non-academic stakeholders and describe the EUAs as *"the most suitable incubators for rapidly offering training programs in response to urgent and international challenges in a relevant and highly efficient manner, by being able to broadly mobilize academic and non-academic experts at the European level"* (R).

The depth of the pedagogical transformations can be seen in the recognition of the EUA in the institution's procedures: revision of the teaching and research staff timetable to value their involvement, revision of course structures to integrate ECTS credits specifically linked to the EUA, whether in the form of supplementary courses, micro-credits, BIP (Budgetary Integration Program), CBL (Complementary Learning Unit), integration of micro-credits as new formats for learning units...

Student services have had to completely overhaul their information systems to implement these transformations, which represents a considerable undertaking in terms of change management. While this significant work is sometimes perceived by staff as a "luxury" because it only affects a small number of students, it nevertheless opens the door to new possibilities, provided that the initiatives undertaken have the necessary human, material, and financial resources to be sustained.

In summary

the EUAs *"are an effective way to implement the training models needed in the future"* (R, EC). The EUA acts as a laboratory for pedagogical experimentation, stimulating innovation, flexibility, and the internationalization of training programs at all levels, while strengthening staff skills and integrating the university into a truly European dimension. However, this dynamic still faces the need for harmonization of national and European regulatory frameworks.

EUA a vector of transformation in research

International cooperation is not in itself a new activity for research. While initially efforts focused on governance and training, research now occupies an increasingly important place in the activities of the EUAs.

Although cooperative habits are more natural in research than in training, the benefits of developing communities of practice have also been verified for research.

Overall, taking part in the creation of the EUA has transformed research practices by enabling the integration of existing and future collaborations within the EUA, coordinated response strategies to intra-EUA and European calls for proposals, and the pooling of research infrastructures.

In the opinion of the participants, the creation of the EUA has also allowed for very fruitful collaborations between VP Training and VP Research, which were not as natural before and which contribute to strengthening internal cohesion for a better alignment of the objectives of the institutions with the strategy of their EUA.

Although research clearly appeared in the first pillar of the EUI alongside training, the EUI did not fund training and research equally, forcing participants to rely on two separate sources of funding: Erasmus+ and Horizon.

This was highlighted by participants and reiterated in the Senate's information report (2024), as well as in the Commission's report

(Grumbinaïtè *et al.*, 2025), as a particularly significant obstacle to building a truly effective EUA based on both training and research. The SwafS calls for proposals overloaded teams already heavily involved in training-focused work packages, and their format was not adequately adapted to the teams' needs: too short to define common strategies and too uncertain in terms of timeframe given the investment required to support large-scale research. While developing research collaborations might have seemed more obvious than developing training collaborations, participants all reported the same necessities: the need to know each other, recognize each other's contributions, trust each other, and understand each other in order to define how and on what to work together. However, as with developing training programs, this requires time, human resources, and financial resources.

Participants reported the same benefits in research as in training: the identification of opportunities, the rapid identification of inter-institutional partners through the creation of directories of scientific skills, the effective implementation of administrative frameworks for collaboration, the emergence of high-potential projects made possible by the pooling of expertise in strategic areas through obtaining funding such as MSCA, PRIMA, Widening, etc., and even initiating discussions on submitting an ERC grant application.

The EUA is thus seen as a tool for moving beyond ad hoc collaborations to develop a genuine inter-institutional research strategy and foster the emergence of multidisciplinary scientific networks. To this end, institutions have developed internal units/services dedicated to setting up European projects and

have also deployed seed funding to support the emergence of collaborations, which are intended to be strengthened over time.

For both doctoral and postdoctoral students, the EUA is seen as a means of opening up and simplifying access at the European level.

The EUA greatly facilitates joint PhD supervision by establishing shared procedures and a dynamic of mutual trust. The organization of summer schools and specific seminars, either before entering doctoral studies, during doctoral studies to acquire new skills, or during postdoctoral studies with a view to bringing the academic world and businesses/industries closer together, has been a great success.

For the beneficiaries, one of the most important aspects is the expansion of horizons and possibilities. "Being at the end of my PhD, I was quite worried about my future. But thanks to the Alliance, I received offers for post-doctoral positions in several different institutions, with which I had already worked for my PhD. This continuity was very reassuring for the future of my research and, above all, it was very simple thanks to the Alliance."(E).

Finally, the EUA strengthens the scientific diplomacy of institutions which alone would not have had the same ability to enter into discussions, nor with the same weight in terms of influence, with NGOs or intergovernmental bodies such as the United Nations, the IOM, the WHO... In this vein, the concept of "Euro-internationalization" proposed by Frame *et al.* (Chapter 1, 14-17, 2025) is particularly interesting.

In summary

EUAs are strategic tools for structuring, energizing, and internationalizing research by promoting interdisciplinarity, knowledge sharing, strengthening doctoral training, and pooling knowledge and expertise *through* easily accessible hubs of expertise. This robust network between EUA institutions, based on mutual trust, facilitates research activities. Through research, EUAs contribute to shaping a more competitive, sustainable, and influential Europe on the international stage.

However, while the momentum generated by training activities has led to new research collaborations, Erasmus+ funding does not allow for research funding commensurate with the potential and ambitions of the EUAs. Participants all emphasize, *at a minimum*, the need for ANR (French National Research Agency) funding to continue research activities that are currently ineligible under the Erasmus+ program but are fundamental to the development of the EUAs.

The EUA: A vector for transforming the sense of belonging to Europe.

Pacitto et al. (2016) demonstrate the importance of examining unintended consequences in the implementation of public policy, often to highlight unforeseen and counterproductive outcomes. If we consider the emerging socio-technical innovation (EUA) as an actor in the sense of Callon (1986), then the emerging socio-technical innovation, the EAU, in turn exerts an influence on all of its actors (or "actants").

Here an unexpected effect is worth highlighting for several reasons, insofar as it was not explicitly included in the four pillars of the EUI, because it reflects a profound transformation of mentalities in favour of Europeanisation, i.e. the effect of the EUA on people and because it also allows a revisiting of the concept of "Euro-internationalisation" put forward by Frame et al. (2025, 3-29).

Indeed, beyond the strictly organizational and academic aspects, a particularly transformative effect is the development of an unprecedented sense of belonging to Europe. All participants, regardless of their field, consider that participating in the creation of the EUA, engaging daily in its activities, and meeting the challenges this experience presents, constitute an effective way to materialize European identity through participation in building the European Higher Education and Research Area. Their experiences in carrying out the activities of the EUA represent for each of them a way to understand and embody Europe's motto: "United in Diversity." For the participants, without the EUI, there would be no EUA, and this motto would have remained a mere concept. According to them, no other project had allowed them such an awareness of what it means to "act as Europeans," united by a common goal: to build an EUA serving the three missions of a university: education, research, and service to society. Although all mention the overwhelming burden of difficulties of all kinds, they also all mention that by finding ways to overcome them together, they have concretely experienced the strength of "acting as committed Europeans."

Far from standardizing operations, each project represents a new way of approaching the actions to be taken. Based on a logic of mutual

learning, the aim is to draw upon each other's experiences. Given the results they achieved, all participants expressed their pride in contributing to the construction of the European Higher Education and Research Area by building their own EUA. This is evidenced by their reflections on the legal entity: the EUA became self-evident to them, more so than a network of institutions, like a single University integrating member institutions as if they were its "natural components". The EUA represents an umbrella structure that fosters strong identification and a profound sense of belonging, which is exceptional in university organizations. This is why, in their discussions, they systematically refer to their EUA by its acronym, a clear demonstration of their unquestionable ownership.

Participants see the EUI as the tipping point for their universities in the 21st century European University, capable of facing national, regional and global challenges together, such as Open Science, the Green Deal, Global Gateway, One Health...

This is why a complementary dimension could be added to the new concept of "Euro-internationalization" proposed by Frame et al. (2025, 14-17), through the feedback effect of "Euro-internationalization" on global internationalization processes. While the Europeanization of institutions is undoubtedly linked to a "piggy-backing" effect (*ibid.*) – with actors more or less implicitly conveying the ambitions of the European Commission under the impetus of the EUI – building an EUA may not be as "Eurocentric" as it appears, at least according to the concept of "Euro-internationalization" put forward by Frame et al. (*ibid.*). Participants reported new collaborations thanks to the strength of the synergies developed within the EUA with countries such as Mexico, Chile, Vietnam, and sub-Saharan African countries. These new collaborations with countries outside the European continent position the EUAs as a significant new player in the internationalization of higher education and research, thereby positioning Europe, rather than individual institutions, as a desirable future. The advantage perceived by these non-European countries lies precisely in broader cooperation within a consortium of institutions that leverage the

full potential offered by the EUAs, committed to and promoting the values of building the European Higher Education and Research Area through the EUI.

The new imaginary created by the EUAs (Palmowski *et al.*, 2025) thus transcends individual strategies of Europeanization of institutions and constitutes for countries outside the European continent a new path of internationalization with an unprecedented partner: the Europe of European Universities.

The contribution analysis provides evidence demonstrating that without the EUI, and therefore the development of EUAs, Europeanization would not have reached such depth²⁸. On the one hand, the Europeanization of institutions has become a strategic axis structuring institutional policies, and on the other hand, a Europeanization of mindsets. Strengthened by this new cohesion, the participants empha-

size two points. As explained above, they feel reassured by the EUA to face global challenges. However, they also state that their new EUA model is generating a phenomenon of attraction for countries outside the European continent. These countries are drawn to European academic values, reaffirmed through the EUAs, in a global context where these academic values are increasingly threatened. EUAs thus represent a pathway for developing European identity through the construction of the European Higher Education and Research Area, as well as a route for internationalization beyond Europe for EUAs and a pathway for non-European countries to access European internationalization. These new dynamics offer numerous opportunities to strengthen European competitiveness in higher education, research, innovation, and service to society.

In summary

EUAs are not only catalysts for structural and academic change, but also genuine drivers of European identity and citizenship. They offer unique opportunities for intercultural exchange, the co-creation of a shared vision of Europe, and contribute to the emergence of a generation of students and professionals deeply rooted in European values and challenges. They strengthen ties between administrative, teaching, and research communities, as well as with students and postdoctoral fellows, by developing a common space for dialogue and action, and transform mindsets for a more united Europe. Finally, these transformations also attract cooperation with countries outside the European continent, thereby reinforcing, through a ripple effect, the importance of European values.

²⁸ This conclusion applies to all six institutions based on the evidence and arguments presented. A further study comparing the effects of Europeanization between these institutions and institutions outside the EU could provide further insights.

Main obstacles and barriers to becoming a member of a UAU that hinder the future of UAUs

Although all participants demonstrated unwavering commitment and enthusiasm, the implementation of a UEA involves numerous obstacles and hurdles, highlighted in the survey conducted for the national seminar Future of European University Alliances (see Appendix 2, p.174) as well as in the Senate report (see Appendix 1, p.170).

The interviews revealed recurring obstacles, despite the diversity of contexts and specificities of each institution involved in an EUA.

► **Regulatory and administrative complexity:**

This obstacle is the most frequently cited, even though it has been possible to achieve adaptations of national legislation, as was the case in Spain and Hungary for the joint CHARM-EU master's program.

Overall, the obstacles relate to the recognition of degrees (dual, joint, European) and considerable uncertainty surrounding the "European degree label" for existing EUA degrees, accreditation mechanisms (national or transnational agencies?), specific national legislation (particularly French), the issuance and recognition of micro-credentials, and the complexity of joint doctoral supervision. Synchronizing academic calendars and adapting internal administrative procedures also pose significant challenges to organizing joint programs.

► **Funding and sustainability of activities:** Funding models based on calls for proposals, which are often uncoordinated (Erasmus+, Horizon Europe), lead to a dispersion of energy and funding levels deemed insufficient or inadequate to cover needs, particularly for recruiting necessary staff. The crucial questions of ensuring the sustainability of actions and tools developed once initial funding is exhausted are all the more acute for the targeted institutions, as participants in the first wave. At the time of writing, participants remain in the dark regarding, firstly, the possibility of further support from the French National Research Agency (ANR) via the PIA 4 program, and secondly, the European Commission's bridge funding to support EUA actions between 2026 and 2028, in

anticipation of the new Erasmus+ program. Participants unanimously praised the financial support of the ANR (French National Research Agency), without which the positions of European project managers/engineers could not have been funded. They also acknowledged the compensation for the limited funding from the European Commission for certain work packages, as well as **the fundamental importance of this funding for research**. Again, without ANR (French National Research Agency) funding, seed research projects could not have been supported. These seed funds are presented as one of the most efficient ways to scale up: by responding to more ambitious calls for proposals, in a secure manner, because it is based on previously proven cooperation, and even as a genuine springboard for launching into ERC (European Research Council) or other collaborative European projects.

► **Internal mobilization and appropriation:** Appropriation requires a lot of time to permeate the entire university community beyond the teams directly involved, a lack of clarity and visibility of actions despite massive communication plans, as well as difficulties in mobilizing teacher-researchers (high workload, language barrier, insufficient appreciation and recognition of commitment) are important human and cultural challenges.

► **Project mode:** The current project-based approach presents a challenge given the pace of an institution's operations, particularly considering the potential for a change of president every four years. If the EUA remains focused on projects, without a long-term vision, a new team may decide not to continue it in its current form. The risk then is that all partners and ongoing initiatives will be jeopardized, given the time required for their implementation.

► **Resistance to change and visibility:** The innovative nature of EUAs can generate resistance to change and make it difficult to understand and integrate these new structures into established university organizations. While communities of practice and the cross-func-

tionality they foster are certainly a powerful tool for transformation, they also generate interpersonal, and even interdepartmental, conflicts. As with any change management plan, modifying practices creates tension, compounded by increased workload, a faster pace, and a lack of prospects, which can lead to resignations. This is detrimental to the smooth continuation of activities and undermines hard-won stability.

- ▶ **Language barrier and skills:** The need to work in English and develop intercultural skills is a challenge for academic and administrative staff, requiring training and incentives. Gi-

ven the scale of the adjustments required to implement the activities of an EUA, participants reiterate that these adjustments cannot be rushed.

- ▶ **Engagement of socio-economic actors:** From the participants' perspective, the involvement of non-academic and local socio-economic actors is a promising area thanks to the EUA and should be further strengthened. However, given the numerous uncertainties surrounding the future of the EUAs, the development of relationships is hampered by a lack of more reliable prospects.

In summary

although EUAs are catalysts for transformation, they encounter institutional and national realities that require profound adjustments and continued support, at both national and European levels, to fully realize their potential for integration and innovation at the European level.

General Conclusion and Perspectives

The assessments carried out by the six French institutions that are members of a EUA, as well as the 12 additional contributions submitted freely, including that of the students, which should be highlighted, demonstrate concrete and positive transformative effects on the institutions in accordance with a European program.

Indeed, taking part in the creation of a EUA has consequently transformed the internal organization of the establishments, working practices and mentalities more than any other type of project of this ambition.

The EUA have enabled the emergence of **innovation governance** that fosters the creation of effective cooperation mechanisms to enhance **the European Higher Education and Research Area**. The Europeanization, or "**Euro-internationalization**", of institutions, practices, and the resulting ways of thinking, while respecting the sovereignty of Member States, is a source of creativity and collective intelligence to address the transformations currently facing higher education and research: AI, climate change, One Health, open science, respect for European values, and respect for sovereignty in collaboration, all of which must be structured within a combined dynamic.

The EUA therefore represents in this respect a real tool for harmony and efficiency in the accomplishment of the missions of the establishments.

Internally, the internationalization of governance and administrative services, by integrating dedicated staff within key business units/departments, has also **fostered effective interdepartmental collaboration**. Externally, the

creation of agile and shared decision-making structures lays the foundation for strong trust between partners through exchange and collaboration.

Educational innovation has been boosted by the development of **hybrid curricula (BIP), micro-certifications and challenge-based programs (CBL)**, thus enriching the training offer for students of all levels and offering new formats of continuing education, popular with the world of work.

Thanks to exceptional funding from PIA 3, the EUAs have been able to stimulate collaborative research by facilitating the emergence of **research hubs**, supporting doctoral students and optimizing access to European funding such as **Swafs, Horizons, MSCA**, and even the possibility of responding to more ambitious calls for projects, such as **the ERC, secured by seed projects thanks to France 2030 funding**.

Finally, they have **strengthened the mobility** of students and staff, creating this necessary feeling of belonging to a European higher education and research community conducive to the spread of a culture of European cooperation, which has thereby become attractive to countries outside the European continent.

The results presented, and the paths taken to achieve them, demonstrate the capacity of the EUAs to propose **a new model of University, for a realization of "the Europe of universities" or "European Universities"** and a solid springboard to move into the university of the 21st century which States, regions, Europe and society as a whole not only need but desire.

The EUI must therefore be considered as an innovation process, which, like any innovation process, has three phases: emergence, development and institutionalization.

While the development has proven its relevance, at this stage **the innovation process is awaiting its institutionalization**, that is to say its long-term sustainability, given the evidence of results actually achieved by the EUAs.

The new timeframe is therefore no longer experimentation but rather the integration of EUAs, establishing the Universities of the 21st century. To this end, the recommendations of Senators Le Gleut and Daniel (see Appendix 1, p.170), as well as those of Member of Parliament Farré (see Appendix 3, p.178), and the responses provided by institutions to the questionnaire on the Future of European University Alliances (see Appendix 2, p.174), offer future perspectives, including:

- ▶ **Sustainable financing:** It is imperative to guarantee sustainable, predictable, simplified and long-term financing, going beyond the strictly "project" logic to adopt a strategic vision of structural investment, involving the European Commission and the Member States;
- ▶ **Coordinated funding:** It is crucial to overcome the duality between the Horizon Europe and Erasmus+ funding windows by promoting better **coordination between training and research**, as well as strengthening the synergy between European, national and private financial instruments (Erasmus+, Horizon Europe, Cohesion Fund, businesses,

etc.). A strategic vision spanning at least a decade is necessary;

- ▶ **Establishing a legal framework:** the development of EUA requires structural transformations affecting **governance, work ethics, and the economic model, as well as intellectual property issues such as patent applications and the signing of scientific publications**. The creation of a legally defined entity at the European level for EUA should be explored. Such a status, if sufficiently flexible, could reduce administrative burdens, facilitate the use of funds, and allow for the awarding of degrees under the EU-based designation.

Consequently, this development will contribute directly to **the revitalization of the Bologna process**.

In just five years, the EUAs have managed to transform an idea into a reality, to redefine the centuries-old concept of University and to propose a new model adapted to face the national, regional and global challenges of our time.

Aiming for and achieving excellence requires performance, which is based on skills and motivation. Because the greatest strength of this new model, the EUAs, is that it constitutes **an unparalleled driver of motivation** for all those involved in building the European Higher Education and Research Area, let us hope that future political decisions will provide the EUAs with the conditions for institutionalization that they expect and deserve.

Reports produced by the six French member institutions of an EUA

Participation in a European University Alliance is an exceptional catalyst for transformation. It allows French universities to position themselves as key players in building the European Higher Education and Research Area, while profoundly revitalizing their governance, educational offerings, research strategies, and identity, despite persistent challenges related to regulatory frameworks and funding. The best evidence of these transformations can be found in the assessments carried out by each of the institutions listed below. These reports are the result of the support work based on contribution analysis and are

presented in two formats 29: a summary format and a more detailed format, depending on the interest of the readers.

All reported elements have been discussed and verified to assure readers that each transformation described is indeed attributable to participation in the EUA. The reports are presented in the exact format in which they were submitted by each institution.

Finally, this result would not have been possible without the tremendous involvement of each and every participant, to whom we extend our warmest thanks.

29 Regarding CHARM-EU, a detailed version and ECIU, a summary version, have been transmitted.

Summary reports of the six French institutions that are members of an EUA

Summary report of CIVICA

SciencesPo

CIVICA
THE EUROPEAN UNIVERSITY OF
SOCIAL SCIENCES

Evaluation, review, and outlook by the MESR of French operators involved in European universities

As a highly internationalized institution, Sciences Po seeks to attract the best students, faculty, and researchers and to forge partnerships with the most prestigious institutions. With this in mind, Sciences Po joined the European Universities Initiative in 2018 by founding CIVICA – The European University of Social Sciences. This project, supported by the Erasmus+ and Horizon Europe programs, as well as national research agencies such as the ANR (French National Research Agency), aims to create an integrated European inter-university campus and offer a wide range of activities to the student, teaching, research, and administrative communities. The initiative is leading to structural transformations in the way universities operate, in education and service to society, and in research and innovation.

1 Strengthening Sciences Po's international reach and European roots

Sciences Po, as coordinator of the CIVICA alliance, affirms its leadership within a network of excellence in the social sciences. The alliance brings together ten prestigious institutions, representing 72,000 students and 13,000 academics: CIVICA currently unites ten institutions renowned for their excellence: Bocconi University (Milan), Central European University (Vienna), European University Institute (Florence), Hertie School (Berlin), IE University (Madrid), Sciences Po (Paris), SGH (Warsaw), SNSPA (Bucharest), SSE (Stockholm), and LSE (London). CIVICA acts as a strategic lever for Sciences Po's internationalization and constitutes a stabilizing factor in an unstable geopolitical context.

CIVICA's governance is based on an agile, decentralized structure that respects the autonomy of its partners. Sciences Po coordinates activities at the alliance level through a CIVICA Secretariat and at the institutional level through an internal Steering Committee, fostering cross-functional collaboration and skills development within its teams. This governance model has enabled the structuring of activities while strengthening cooperation between departments that were previously less internationally involved (such as the Student Life Department and the Disability Support Service).

The alliance also acts as a catalyst for internal transformation, promoting the Europeanization of professions, inter-departmental cooperation, and the emergence of professional communities at the European level. Initiatives such as the Inclusion Workshops and the CIVICA Library illustrate this dynamic.

2. Training and teaching differently: a laboratory for pedagogical experimentation

CIVICA provides a space for educational innovation, allowing for the testing of new teaching formats. The programs are tailored to different levels of study, promoting mobility, interdisciplinarity, and civic engagement. Between 2019 and 2024, a total of 10,097 learners benefited from the training activities offered by CIVICA.

At the Bachelor level, the CIVICA Engage Track includes various complementary formats that allow students to combine field experience with exposure to social science research methods. These include labeled courses (Engage Courses), jointly developed training mobility programs (European Weeks), and individual introductory research projects (Showcase assignments).

At the Master's level, joint courses, multi-campus courses, and Honours Seminars are based on cooperation between faculty and students from partner institutions. The Digital Mobility Scheme, currently under development, aims to offer fully online teaching formats. These initiatives, which are proliferating within Sciences Po, are powerful drivers of innovation. They also foster scientific collaboration between faculty and researchers.

CIVICA offers doctoral students and young researchers a catalog of shared courses, summer schools, and a research network that facilitates international collaborations. Supporting teachers in the development of their teaching practices is also a key focus.

Initiatives such as the Sport and Culture Festival, the Student Engagement Fund, and the Student Associations Forum strengthen student cohesion and their sense of belonging to a European campus at all levels of study.

3. To propel ourselves to a European scale in order to produce research of excellence in the social sciences

CIVICA stands out for its commitment to structuring a shared research strategy. The CIVICA Research project, funded by Horizon Europe, has enabled the creation of shared scientific governance, a common research agenda, and an action plan for open science. Four priority themes structure the research activities: Data Technologies for the Social Sciences, Democracy in the 21st Century, Rethinking Europe, and Societies in Transition and Planetary Crises.

Since 2019, the seminars, conferences, and workshops organized by CIVICA for teachers and researchers have brought together 1,790 participants; 78 faculty members have undertaken short-term stays at partner institutions; and 28 collaborative research teams, involving 204 faculty members and early-career researchers, have responded to three calls for proposals. Tools such as the CIVICA Research Directory facilitate networking among researchers, particularly doctoral students seeking supervisors. The alliance acts as a springboard for young researchers, offering them opportunities for mobility and training, and providing access to a network of excellence. The CIVICA Research Centre, currently being established, will further develop the structuring of CIVICA's research areas and support researchers in submitting joint proposals (particularly Horizon Europe).

However, the sustainability of these actions depends on continued structural funding. The non-renewal of Horizon Europe funding and the uncertainty surrounding the level of future national support pose a risk to the continuity of projects. A sustainable funding model is essential, enabling alliances to develop a long-term strategy and consolidate their role within the European Higher Education and Research Area.



The transformative impact of INSA Group's membership in ECIU University

ECIU University and the INSA Group: a shared DNA and ambitions

The INSA Group, a public interest group of seven engineering schools, has resolutely committed to ECIU University, believing it will allow the group to transform **itself within a European dimension**. Membership in ECIU University is both **collective** (INSA Group) and **individual** (each INSA school).

The alliance is one of the structuring elements of the Group's **international strategy**, defined in 2023. It is the **first structuring European program** of the INSA Group, our European relations having until then consisted of a juxtaposition of bilateral Erasmus+ partnerships in each INSA, and a few collective partnerships (Key Action 2) at the INSA Group level.

The alliance is a powerful lever for enhancing our Group's **influence and attractiveness**, **already evident among our international partners**. It is also a **genuine political project** through which the seven INSA schools aim to contribute to the development of the European Higher Education and Research Area. Thanks to ECIU University, the INSA Group is more closely aligned with European higher education and research policies.

Belonging to ECIU University reflects our desire to develop a privileged network of **cross-cutting, deep and sustainable collaboration at the European level**, with **trusted partners chosen** because of distinctive traits and shared strategic axes (internationalization, interculturality, educational innovation, CSR issues in training and research, development of a European partnership ecosystem, impact research, interdisciplinarity).

1. Governance that supports aligned strategies and interconnected organizations

ECIU University is a **trusted network** that allows us, for the first time, to **quickly and effectively pool** expertise, in service of a **broader** (more staff involved), more **sustainable** and **deeper internationalization** (joint training and research projects, professional and practice communities, joint events, etc.).

Governance and organization of the INSA Group

The INSA Group transformed into a Public Interest Group at the end of 2024, to deploy its new strategy, particularly within the ECIU University alliance (currently, INSA Toulouse coordinates).

Dedicated governance and organization enable the effective deployment of ECIU University actions jointly in each INSA and in the ECIUn+ project: they are based on **central strategic and operational management**, articulated with **responsibilities distributed** among all the INSAs.

The **INSA Group** has created, in cross-functional interaction with its existing committees (research, training, international relations, business relations, DGS, information systems, etc.):

- The roles of VP and Deputy VP at ECIU University
- An operational project manager position
- A central steering committee (where students sit)

Each **INSA** has created, in cross-functional interaction with its councils (scientific and academic) and its functional departments:

- The role of the ECIU Local Institutional Coordinator (teacher or teacher-researcher)
- An operational project manager position
- The role of ECIU Student Ambassador (2 per INSA)

These roles and missions are all **closely intertwined** with those of the alliance, both in the project-based organization (ECIU 2019-22 and ECIUn+ 2022-26) and in strategic governance.

Strategic Governance of ECIU University

The **President of ECIU University** is elected every 3 years, from among the presidents of the member universities. The **Presidium** is composed of 3 members elected from among the presidents of the member universities. The **ECIU University Board** is the decision-making body composed of university presidents, institutional coordinators from each university, student representatives, and external members of civil society. It meets four times a year.

The **VP Education Committee** and the **VP Research Committee** are composed of the VPs of education and research from the member universities. They define the alliance's joint strategy regarding education, research, innovation, and partnerships. They meet monthly.

1. For student communities, new opportunities for learning, mobility, engagement and the building of European citizenship

ECIU University's core mission is to offer flexible lifelong **learning pathways based on micro-credentials** co-developed with our local, regional, and European ecosystems. The learning modules (challenges and micro-modules) are accessible via a new, high-performance, and secure platform connected to the information systems of all 12 member institutions.

more flexible (in the engineering degree programs), for greater interdisciplinarity and internationalization.

Diversification of mobility options, virtual and hybrid, in addition to the mandatory mobility semesters for engineering students.

Access to a wide range of challenges and micro-modules to **address societal issues** and provide concrete solutions to our external partners.

Development of entrepreneurial, intercultural, interdisciplinary and CSR (Cti) skills.

New opportunities for student engagement (Student Council, Ambassadors) and professional development (public speaking training; leadership...).

Creation and support of a genuine **European student community**.

Building a **European citizen identity**.

2. For university and administrative staff, new opportunities for collaboration, mobility and access to European communities of practice

ECIU University, with its 12 members spread across Europe, offers new **opportunities for European collaboration** to our faculty, researchers, and staff in the areas of education, research, innovation, and partnerships. For the INSA Group, this alliance represents a significant opportunity for the **internal and sustainable transformation** of our practices.

In training

New local and European *challenge-based learning courses*, an innovative pedagogy that stimulates local, regional and European ecosystems.

New European collaborations in training for the co-creation of challenges and micro-modules.

New opportunities to respond to **European calls for proposals** in training (Erasmus+ AC2).

New forms of partnership relations (regions, municipalities, companies; ...) around challenges, with the **Partnership Arenas**.

In search

Training in **innovative research approaches** (challenge-based research), with and for society (participatory science, public engagement in research).

Seed funding and scientific mobility to create **new networks**, particularly for doctoral students and young researchers.

New opportunities to respond to **European calls for proposals** in research and innovation, through **pooling of scientific expertise** and support for project development (ECIU Strategic European Office/SEPO).

Accelerating the filing and obtaining of European funding.

For all staff communities

mobility supported by international relations services.

Training through Staff Weeks at our alliance partners.

Opportunities for **cross-functional collaborations** (human resources, libraries, etc.).

Access to **European events** for sharing best practices.

Membership in **European communities** of practice.

Strengths/levers, constraints and evidence

Strengths and opportunities

Strong political support from the MESR, the President of the INSA Group and the directors of the INSA schools.

strategic alignment between the INSA Group and ECIU University.

ECIU University's inclusion in **the INSA Group's strategy**.

Additional national funding (France 2030) which enabled financial support for all INSA schools (Erasmus+ grants to alliance institutions reduced due to high central costs).

Recruitment of **new HR profiles**, combining European project management skills with facilitation and communication skills.

History of the operation of the INSA Group which facilitated the **network organization** of the alliance. **central leadership** of the alliance, with genuine network management.

Distribution of responsibilities that supports team engagement across all INSA schools.

High-performance information systems and tools, both within the INSA Group and the alliance.

Team cohesion is strengthened by a **sense of belonging** to the INSA Group and its **values**, which are aligned with those of ECIU University and, more broadly, European values.

A culture of educational innovation already embedded in the INSA model.

Brakes

Combining several project funding sources to deploy the alliance's actions: dispersing the energy of the staff involved to meet the requirements of each type of funding (H2020, Erasmus+, EIT, ANR).

Erasmus+ funding levels for the alliance are too low to recruit a sufficient payroll in each INSA: loss of efficiency and slowness.

Lack of synergy with "competing" national projects (e.g., AMI CMA), mobilizing many ECs who are too busy to also participate in the deployment of the alliance.

European University : a new entity, difficult for communities to understand and grasp. ECIU University is innovative and disruptive, which generates resistance to change.

Lack of recognition of some staff involved in the project, and difficulty in coordinating with existing local governance structures (VP, functional departments, councils, etc.).

cost (human and financial) / benefit ratio : very high workload for a solid but slow scaling up.

Evidence

Institutional documents

INSA Group Strategy

INSA Group's annual activity reports since 2020

INSA Toulouse Five-Year Plan 2020-25

Strategic and management dialogue / COMP, where applicable

Amended study regulations

Revised training plans

Institutional communication materials

Calls for mobility including ECIU University

EC job descriptions incorporating participation in ECIU

Documents and tools related to the project

engage.eciu platform (challenges; micromodules)

ECIU+ project dashboard of the INSA Group on TEAMS, with related indicators

ECIU+ Annual Action Plans of the INSA Group

Results of the internal qualitative survey (INSA Group self-assessment, January 2025)

ECIU and ECIU+ deliverables

Executive Agency Mid-Term Report (April 2025)

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EU-CONEXUS



The transformative impacts of the Alliance EU-CONEXUS at La Rochelle University

In 2019, as part of the Erasmus+ call for projects, La Rochelle University decided to build on its existing collaborations with its Spanish and Romanian partners to create the EU-CONEXUS European Alliance. Today, this Alliance brings together nine European coastal universities around a shared specialization: Smart Sustainable Urban Coastlines (LUDI). For La Rochelle University, EU-CONEXUS represents a unique opportunity to expand its network and its specialization on a European scale.

Indeed, EU-CONEXUS embodies the international ambition of La Rochelle University to build a holistic transnational university, integrating on a European scale all the missions of higher education, namely training programs, research activities, innovation and technology transfer mechanisms and a policy for disseminating scientific culture.

The EU-CONEXUS European Alliance aims to transform La Rochelle University into a key player in European higher education by promoting internationalization and interdisciplinarity around its "LUDI" specialization. It is part of an innovative and collaborative approach designed to strengthen ties between the university, society, and local communities. The objective is to create a dynamic and engaged academic community. The membership of La Rochelle University in EU-CONEXUS produces a structuring impact And internationalizing across all dimensions of the institution: governance, education, research, campus life, relations with territories and European citizenship.

Part I : Implementation of governance and management of joint projects on a large scale European by LRUniv, coordinator of the Alliance

La Rochelle University, coordinator of the EU-CONEXUS Alliance, has put in place a **structured European governance** :

- **On a global scale** : creation of joint bodies (*Governing Board, Academic/Research Councils, Executive Board* , etc.) and a legal entity (*AISBL EU-CONEXA*) to manage funds and projects.
- **At the local level** : appointment of a dedicated vice-president, Alliance missions integrated into the vice-presidencies linked to activities, structuring of a project team, deployment of staff in the services, and creation of a cross-functional steering committee.
- **Joint services** : project support, training development, Smart Campus, communication.

This integrated governance has enabled **effective coordination, pooling of skills** and scaling up of the project at all levels.

Part II: Internationalization of training through the structuring of an inter-university campus "LUDI"

The EU-CONEXUS Alliance has enabled La Rochelle University to **develop an international, interdisciplinary and personalized training offer**, focused on the Sustainable Smart Urban Coastline (LUDI).

- **Bachelor's degree** : creation of *minor* programs (30 ECTS), *micro-certifications* (1 ECTS) and *challenge-based projects*. Courses are offered in English with short and hybrid mobility options.
- **Master's programs** : launch of a *joint Master's program in marine biotechnology* and development of two other Master's programs. Difficulties related to accreditation and French legislation.
- **Teachers** : establishment of a *Teaching Academy* to train teachers in innovative teaching methods, and support for the creation of joint training courses via a dedicated office (*Office Development for Study Offers*).

Part III: Internationalization of research: establishing a research space

"LUDI" on a European scale

- **Interdisciplinarity** : The EU-CONEXUS Alliance promotes **interdisciplinary collaboration** focused on complex issues related to the coastline by bringing together experts from various fields.
- **Doctoral training** : Promoting **the Europeanization of research pathways** to train the next generation of researchers specializing in LUDI. Implementation of **European programs and EU-CONEXUS theses**, enabling doctoral students to benefit from a collaborative network, common thesis procedures across the nine Alliance partners, and cross-disciplinary training. Organization of a **PhD Summer School** : an annual event offering doctoral students opportunities for personal and academic development, creating a stimulating environment for exchange and networking.
- **Support for mobility and project development** : through pooled funding and the ***Project Development Support Office (PDSO – transnational office for submitting joint projects)***
- **Social commitment** : Promoting inclusion, equality, and social responsibility through research that is open to society. Implementing initiatives to promote gender equality and strengthen the link between science and society.

Part IV Internationalization of student life : facilitating campus activities and creation of a student community

- **Inter-campus cultural and artistic activities** : festivals, dance projects, poetry, scientific comics.
- **European student projects** : annual calls for projects promoting collaboration between students from partner universities.

- **Student governance** : creation of a representative *Student Board* in all bodies of the Alliance.
- **“Imstudent” project** : structuring a European student identity with the implementation of inter-campus activities and student congresses.

Part V Internationalization of links with territories : strengthening ties Science and society, training and networking of socio-economic actors

EU-CONEXUS has strengthened the links between **La Rochelle University and its surrounding areas** through:

- **Public awareness** : annual school competition *Think Smart, Create Green* on the challenges of sustainable coastlines, involving secondary school students and teachers from the region.
- **Training for socio-economic actors** : *Stakeholder Academy* for professionals in sustainable blue and urban growth.
- **Networking** : collaborative projects between students and companies (*challenge-based projects*) and co-construction of training programs (e.g., LUDI master's program).

These actions promote a **European openness of territories** , local innovation, and **science-society dialogue** .

Part VI Contribution to the strengthening of European citizenship

EU-CONEXUS strengthens European citizenship at La Rochelle University by:

- **Diverse mobility options** : hybrid, short, virtual and immersive for students and staff.
- **Sharing good practices** : collaborations between European universities at all levels.
- **Student engagement** : active participation in governance and transnational projects, strengthening the sense of belonging to a European community.
- These actions promote European integration, living together and the building of a common identity in higher education.

Strengths

- A structured and **integrated governance**
- Strong political support with **integration into institutional policy**
- Specialization in **Sustainable Smart Urban Coastal Development (LUDI)**
- **Human and organizational investment**, including the deployment of human resources in services and the pooling of skills through joint services
- **European financial support with the multiplication of funds from projects (Erasmus+ funding, Horizon Europe, MSCA COFUND, PIA-ANR)**
- **pooled funding and the *Project Development Support Office (PDSO)***
- **Synergies with major strategic projects of the PIA 4 establishment (DemoES – ExcellenceS – ASDESR) and University Innovation Hubs**
- collaboration **between partners** at all levels
 - Community engagement through scientific actions and citizen participation

Challenges / Obstacles

- **Structural** : rigidity of the French framework (accreditations, joint degrees), slowness of procedures.
- **Financial** : strong dependence on European and national funds, reduction of resources national factors that threaten the sustainability of actions, obstacles posed by the European Commission to research activities

Conclusion

In a context of geopolitical instability and major transitions, European alliances such as EU-CONEXUS constitute a strategic lever to strengthen the sovereignty, resilience and attractiveness of higher education and research in Europe.

The commitment of La Rochelle University, a founding member of the Alliance, has led to a profound and structuring transformation, both organizationally and in its academic strategy and international reach. This dynamic has fostered internationalization at all levels: shared governance, a more interdisciplinary and internationally oriented educational offering, strengthened collaborative research, and consolidated ties with local communities.

This development allows the university to fully participate in the construction of the European Higher Education and Research Area (ERA), while asserting its expertise on major issues such as the sustainable development of coastal areas.

The effects are already noticeable, with increasing adoption by the entire university community. This European cooperation is proving to be a key lever for opening up concrete future prospects, ensuring stability, and training students to become future European professionals and citizens, capable of innovating and collectively meeting the challenges ahead.



Evaluation, review, and outlook by the MESR of French operators involved in European universities

Contribution from the University of Burgundy Europe and FORTHEM

The University of Burgundy Europe (UBE) has made a strategic and systemic commitment to the FORTHEM alliance, which it currently coordinates. This alliance, bringing together nine public universities deeply rooted in their local communities, has played a decisive role in the institution's transformation. Its impact is evident in the structuring of governance, the evolution of administrative, teaching, and research practices, and even the integration of a European identity into the institution's name. FORTHEM thus constitutes a central lever for implementing the institution's strategic plan, in line with European objectives for the transformation of higher education.

1. Integrated governance and transformation of institutional practices

The integration of FORTHEM into the institution's strategy has resulted in the implementation of a **structured and cross-functional governance framework** : a steering committee (COPIL) regularly brings together the president, thematic vice-presidents, department heads, and FORTHEM project leaders. A **dedicated FORTHEM department** (8 FTEs) has been created within the international division, and other departments (research, digital, communications) have recruited staff specifically assigned to the alliance's activities. This distribution of responsibilities, supported by a deputy director general in charge of cross-functional initiatives, ensures the alliance's presence throughout all administrative departments.

Institutional communication about FORTHEM is highly visible, both in the university's public spaces (buildings, student forums, posters) and in digital environments (website, Microsoft Teams), contributing to forging a **shared European identity** . The alliance acts as a catalyst for administrative and managerial innovation, fostering interdepartmental cooperation, breaking down silos, and the Europeanization of professions. This dynamic is accompanied by a **significant investment in human resources** : involvement in the alliance is valued in internal evaluation procedures, job descriptions, and *through* the recognition of teaching hours completed at partner institutions.

These measures have generated increasing involvement from all staff (administrative, technical, and service staff, teaching and research staff), who have been encouraged to propose projects, participate in mobility programs, and engage in the alliance's bodies and activities. Three key service mobility programs (Documentation, Research, and Communication departments) in Jyväskylä and Palermo have fostered openness, cooperation, and the exchange of best practices.

2. Enrichment of training offerings and pedagogical innovation

The FORTHEM Alliance has enabled UBE to develop an enriched, open, and modular training program aligned with European standards. Student mobility, within the framework of multilateral agreements, has increased: **38% of long-term outgoing mobility** and **58% of incoming mobility** now take place within the Alliance. The **FORTHEM Campus** (30 ECTS credits), **short-term mobility programs** , and the **internship exchange** promote the internationalization of academic paths and the inclusion of students from all disciplines.

The **FORTHM Digital Academy** , interconnecting the partners' *LMSs* , facilitates access to transnational courses and contributes to internationalization *@home* . This system supports shared teaching, distance co-teaching, the issuance of *Open Badges* , and allows teachers to offer their courses to all partners.

Innovative regulatory mechanisms, such as the **FORTHM ECTS Passport** , adopted by the Board of Directors, allow for the recognition of credits earned outside of *Learning Agreements* and encourage the experimentation of **micro-accreditation** . This approach also informs the evolution of **lifelong learning practices** , through UBE's active participation in the Alliance's FULL network and the FOREU4ALL working group on lifelong learning. The **Center for Pedagogical Innovation (CIPE)** participates in the work of the FORTHM *Think Tank* , from which it benefits, particularly regarding *project-based learning* and co-teaching.

The alliance has enabled the development of **multiple joint degrees** (in translation, microbiology, and communication), with shared governance, pedagogical harmonization, and mutual recognition. The **Graduate Schools** , built around the themes of the FORTHM *Labs* , foster the integration of teaching and research, international openness, and interdisciplinary collaboration. Five graduate programs integrate students and instructors from the alliance, emphasizing instruction in English, mobility, and European cooperation. The involvement of all students is also supported by **specific calls for proposals** , facilitating their funded participation in international projects initiated by them.

3. Structuring a European research strategy

The FORTHM alliance is based on a shared research strategy, structured around the mission of "research, innovation, and technology transfer," inherited from the FIT FORTHM project (SwafS – Horizon 2020). Driven by its European strategy, the UBE (Union of Belgian Enterprises) has structured a **support system for European research** , with the creation of the **STRADA office** , funded through the ASDESR call for proposals, and the strengthening of its interface with the regional representation in Brussels and, through it, with networks such as UNILION. STRADA engineers work in conjunction with the alliance's virtual research office to identify consortia involving FORTHM researchers. These mechanisms enable strategic alignment between local priorities and European calls for proposals and enhance support for researchers applying for this funding.

Shared tools (expertise mapping, OpenAIRE repository, disciplinary matchmaking, virtual research office) facilitate the formation of **competitive consortia** . UBE is now a partner in several European projects funded under Horizon (PRIMA, ELABCHROM) or

Erasmus+ (KA220), directly linked to the alliance. Early-career researchers benefit from specific programs: summer schools, masterclasses, training for MSCA and ERC grant applications, short-term mobility opportunities, and science communication competitions (Grand Prix des chercheurs). All researchers can apply for funding of up to €5,000 to initiate collaborations within the alliance.

Finally, **research-training-society dynamics** are being developed *through* the FORTHEM *Labs* . These thematic spaces, open to socio-economic partners, promote the emergence of interdisciplinary projects and transnational collaborations around societal challenges, and contribute to the integration of students into a European scientific culture.

Conclusion

FORTHEM is now at the heart of UBE's transformation. The alliance acts as a platform for cooperation, mutual learning, and innovation, rooted in the institution's daily practices and strategic ambitions. It enables UBE to offer an integrated European pathway to its entire university community and contributes to achieving the objectives of the European Higher Education and Research Area by consolidating a shared, structuring, and sustainable **alliance culture**.



L'IMPACT TRANSFORMANT DE SORBONNE UNIVERSITÉ GRÂCE À L'ALLIANCE 4EU+

L'Alliance 4EU+ constitue un levier de transformation majeur pour Sorbonne Université. Elle soutient une approche intégrée et européenne de l'enseignement, de la recherche, de l'innovation et de la gouvernance. L'engagement de Sorbonne Université depuis 2019 s'est traduit par un renouvellement profond des pratiques pédagogiques, scientifiques et administratives, renforçant son ancrage européen.



FORMATION – MODULARITÉ, INNOVATION, INTERNATIONALISATION

L'alliance a été **un accélérateur de transformation pédagogique et d'innovation** dans l'offre de formation :

- Déploiement d'un **catalogue commun de formations**, incluant des micro-certifications, diplômes conjoints et formats hybrides et virtuels.
- **Des nouvelles formes de mobilités hybrides, virtuelles avec une pédagogie innovante** : intégration de cours conjoints et hybrides favorisant la citoyenneté européenne.
- Individualisation des parcours étudiants et complémentarité des offres de formation au sein de l'Alliance 4EU+.
- Intégration d'**approches pédagogiques innovantes** : Centre virtuel 4EU+ pour l'enseignement.
- Renforcement du multilinguisme et de la citoyenneté européenne via le Flagship 2 : 35 cours conjoints proposés par SU.
- Création de formations co-construites avec le monde socio-économique (DU entrepreneuriat européen).

RECHERCHE, DOCTORAT ET SCIENCE OUVERTE

L'initiative a fortement **contribué à l'intégration européenne de notre stratégie de recherche** :

- Développement de **projets phares** (Swealth, META-UN, 4Global+), ancrés dans les Objectifs de Développement Durable, grâce à des appels à projet internes 4EU+.
- **Mutualisation des infrastructures technologiques** (ex. Fablabs) et coordination de plateformes interuniversitaires.
- **Structuration des cotutelles doctorales** avec mobilité financée (7 lauréats, cadre harmonisé, projet d'accord-cadre 4EU+).
- **Implication dans les réseaux MSCA** – Doctoral Networks et dans l'interface diplomatie scientifique (OMS, Geneva Health Forum).
- **Promotion active de la science ouverte** : webinaires, outils mutualisés, sensibilisation des jeunes chercheurs.

GOVERNANCE PARTAGÉE ET STRUCTURATION ADMINISTRATIVE

L'implication de Sorbonne Université dans 4EU+ a permis d'expérimenter de **nouveaux modèles de gouvernance, plus collaboratifs et intégrés** :

- **Gouvernance collaborative** (présidence tournante, comités thématiques, participation aux instances européennes).
- **Participation active aux débats européens** : nos représentants prennent part à des discussions de haut niveau sur l'avenir de l'enseignement supérieur européen (financement, doctorat européen, European Degree Label, attractivité des post-docs).
- **Réorganisation administrative** : création d'un réseau européen interservices, évolution RH et montée en compétences.
- **Mise en place d'un campus numérique intégré** (Student Portal, uLMS, identifiants étudiants européens).
- **Simplification des processus** (Learning Agreements, suivi des mobilités, Grant Support Service).
- **Pilotage stratégique renforcé au niveau central** (DAIE, DSI, VP Recherche, Collège doctoral).

LEVIERS IDENTIFIÉS

- Une gouvernance fortement motrice pour la stratégie 4EU+.
- Maturité dans la coordination interservices.
- Capacités renforcées de réponse aux AAP européens.
- Sentiment d'appartenance renforcé à un espace académique européen.

FREINS ET LIMITES

- Charge administrative élevée liée à la gestion multi-financeurs.
- Besoin de reconnaissance accrue des personnels impliqués.
- Inadéquation entre les financements et les objectifs de mobilité de 50%.
- Difficulté d'adresser toutes les dimensions de l'université avec un programme Erasmus orienté formation.

CONCLUSION

L'appartenance à 4EU+ a profondément transformé Sorbonne Université, en renforçant sa capacité d'action, son attractivité et son rayonnement à l'échelle européenne. Cette dynamique s'inscrit désormais dans une stratégie d'intégration pérenne, orientée vers l'excellence, la coopération durable et l'innovation partagée.

Detailed reports of the six French institutions that are members of an EUA

Detailed report of CHARM-EU

Institutional impact of the University of Montpellier

The CHARM-EU alliance has had a transformative impact on the University of Montpellier and has introduced several key changes that have not only improved the university's internal functioning, but also its external relations and strategic objectives.

1 - Governance, integration, organization

1.1 The European University is internationalizing the operation of university services

Internationalization of departments: One of the most significant impacts of CHARM-EU at the University of Montpellier is the increased collaboration between the university's various departments. CHARM-EU is not considered an international project but rather a strategic driver of transformation and internationalization for the University of Montpellier. Instead of working in a single administrative department, all administrative staff recruited for CHARM-EU have been positioned within the university's main departments and services to facilitate joint actions and ensure that CHARM-EU activities are aligned with the university's objectives and practices. Therefore, CHARM-EU administrative staff are present in the following departments: International Relations, Research and Doctoral Studies, Innovation and Partnerships, Teaching, Information Technology, Lifelong Learning, Pedagogical Innovation, Disability and Diversity, and Communications.

See appendix: organizational chart of CHARM-EU administrative staff at the University of Montpellier and associated workload

The alliance affects everyone at the university, regardless of rank, grade, or status. It's quite rare to have projects developed so extensively. It's an investment that allows for a more tangible Europe, fostering citizenship and a sense of European belonging. At the University of

Montpellier, there's a need to refocus collaboration with our counterparts in Europe, and the European Integration Units (EIs) are the right tool to do this. It's a long-term process: CHARM-EU began in 2019, and it's only now that we're feeling the effects. We're funding a joint organization and integration.

People at universities now know each other, which makes collaboration much easier. The fact that the theme of the Alliances for Partnerships (AAPs) isn't specific allows us to experiment with necessary structural changes, something traditional AAPs can't do because they aren't long-term and don't allow for a diversification of activities. For example, we created joint offices because we felt we needed them (they weren't in the AAP). Hence the heterogeneity of approaches among the different alliances.

Interdepartmental Collaboration: Collaboration between the International Relations and Academic Affairs departments has led to the implementation of the first university degree program at the University of Montpellier (UM) that awards a Master's degree, enabling joint degrees within an experimental framework. This innovative approach gives the university greater autonomy regarding tuition fees and other administrative aspects. Similarly, collaboration between the International Affairs, Academic Affairs, and Lifelong Learning departments, along with participation in the CHARM-EIGHT and Digital FCU projects, has resulted in the creation of a new policy framework for the implementation of micro-credentials, approved by the Academic and Student Life Council (CFVU) in December 2024.

At the end of 2024, the University of Montpellier opened its "CHARM-EU space" in the Richter University Library. It comprises two hybrid classrooms, a meeting room, a professional development room, and offices for eleven staff members. This space is intended for use by all university staff and students, helping to disseminate the values, mission, and educational principles of CHARM-EU, such as hybrid learning. Future learning programs, professional development courses, and outreach events are planned to take place in these premises. This

was developed in collaboration with the University of Montpellier Library Services, which developed its internationalization strategy using CHARM-EU.

Internationalization Strategy: CHARM-EU has played a pivotal role in shifting the University of Montpellier's international strategy towards a more Europe-focused approach. For example, the staff week organized in November 2024 with partners from the Coimbra Group, including several CHARM-EU staff members, highlights the growing international reach of the university's initiatives. The call for proposals published by the University of Montpellier to fund the mobility of researchers, Master's and PhD students (EXPLORE program) clearly indicates that mobility to members of the CHARM-EU alliance is encouraged.

Staff mobility for training and teaching has increased considerably over the past two years, particularly to CHARM-EU partner universities. For the first time this year, applications exceeded funding opportunities.

The multilateral interinstitutional agreement has also contributed to increased student mobility. This is the first interfaculty mobility agreement signed by the University of Montpellier (UM), which has helped to develop student mobility to CHARM-EU partners in most of the UM's 17 faculties, schools, and institutes. The University of Montpellier (UM) initiated the "networking event" with the gathering of engineering schools in October 2023, which helped develop the model later used in other partner universities on various topics. This has had a positive impact on international collaboration among UM's engineering schools and programs.

The international representation of UM students has also increased thanks to the participation of the student vice-president in various CHARM-EU activities. The student representative for international affairs (Melvyn Sion) is the UM member of the Student Council, which strengthens international collaboration among UM students within CHARM-EU.

Professional Development: The impact of CHARM-EU is also evident in the empowerment of university staff. Many university staff members have benefited from training programs through CHARM-EU, enabling them to develop new skills and take on new roles, particularly in English-language communication

and international collaboration. For example, several staff members who participated in CHARM-EU activities are now able to apply their expertise to other areas within the university, thus contributing to the institution's overall professional development. The increased competence of staff members recruited for CHARM-EU, especially in multilingual communication, has helped to internalize new skills across the university's various departments, contributing to its internationalization. This is even more striking in services that participate in joint offices and international networks, such as JVAO and JVITO. This provides a way to share resources and best practices and empower staff involved in joint international missions.

Internationalization of campuses and student initiatives:

- ▶ Student participation in governance bodies
- ▶ European universities are a way to internationalize campus and student life. Examples: local calls for projects.

- ▶ We facilitate their mobility, housing, accommodation, and logistical issues (public transport, etc.). They have a single point of contact that can answer their questions in nine establishments.

Example: 2 out of 6 networking event projects proposed by students in 2025

- ▶ Work in progress at the digital campus level: unique identifiers, digital work environment, European student card, etc.

- ▶ Working within a network of libraries within the alliance, accessing documentary resources

1.2 - The European University is a privileged framework for collaboration between academic actors.

Examples: joint offices

European Universities have a dedicated governance structure. This structure allows universities to define joint teaching and research guidelines at the highest level. It is a select group of university presidents working together to establish a common direction. Unlike a university network (EUA, Coimbra), this governance

can define priorities in terms of research and teaching (in CHARM-EU: the Strategic Board). This has never existed before. They present themselves as a united alliance to carry out a number of missions: international relations, education, and research. In particular, they undertake projects integrating both research and teaching by combining local and national funding sources and creating synergies between them. For example, seed funding for training at the CHARM-EU level to finance CHARMification through its own funds and other projects. Examples: the presidents together defined the priorities for the alliance's external relations, particularly regarding Africa. The consortium will, together, meet with African partners.

This type of central body can be found at the level of vice-presidents, directors, etc. (not only at the level of the presidency).

1.3 - The European University creates a framework for international collaboration with non-academic actors.

Strengthening external relations and bringing the university closer to non-academic stakeholders: CHARM-EU has also had a significant impact on the University of Montpellier's engagement with non-academic actors and the local community. Through initiatives such as the "Meet the Expert" sessions within the joint master's program, students have been able to engage with socio-economic stakeholders and gain a better understanding of the practical applications of their studies. This is part of a broader effort to integrate societal needs into university teaching, aligning academic programs with the requirements of industry, government, and other external partners. The CHARM-EU alliance is known to both the city council and regional authorities and positions the University of Montpellier as a gateway for international collaboration with other European regions.

The University of Montpellier (UM) has also played a leading role in developing field trips for students in the joint master's program within the framework of the Intensive Mixed Programs (IMPs). CHARM-EU organized two "MoXMo" (Montpellier Cross-thematic Mobility) sessions in Montpellier in April 2023 and 2024, where all students came together to tackle challenges in the Thau Lagoon region in collaboration with local socio-economic

stakeholders. This experience led to increased collaboration with these stakeholders. It was also an important step towards developing knowledge about IMPs and field trips, resulting in the production of a "Guide to Organizing Intensive Mixed Cross-thematic Programs," which is used to help organize IMPs across the various faculties of the UM—an activity that is currently expanding. This knowledge has been transferred to TCD, which will organize the 2025 field trip (called "XHIBIT"), which has been fully integrated into the new phase 3 of the 120 ECTS version of the master's program.

Collaboration with economic stakeholders was also developed through the CHARM-DEN initiative. This initiative helped link CHARM-EU with the University of Montpellier's (UM) University Innovation Hub, a national label that encompasses activities related to entrepreneurship, innovation, and technology transfer. The University of Montpellier successfully submitted a project proposal to the Agence universitaire de la Francophonie (AUF) to help fund future editions of the initiative.

The University of Montpellier's (UM) leadership in WP13 also contributed to strengthening international academic collaborations. In particular, collaboration with African partners was developed through partnerships in Capstone projects: UNCCD, the AWARD One Plant Fellowship, and especially the University of Pretoria, an existing UM partner, which hosted Capstone projects in Kruger National Park for three consecutive years. In June 2024, at the "South ActNao Seminar," members of the CHARM-EU team organized a workshop where CHARM-EU served as an example of the type of organizational structure that universities in the Global South could adopt and learn from. Strong collaboration was established between CHARM-EU and the UM's UNESCO Centre for Interdisciplinary Research on Aquatic Systems Dynamics (ICIREWARD), through the participation of CHARM-EU students in the Water-4Future Hackathon and the hosting of African students during MoXMo.

European universities are a strategic tool for Member States and the European Commission to address the challenges

The objective is to develop the challenge platform to enable responses to societal challenges, on a European scale, by several actors, through various means.

Example: Capstone projects

2 - Teaching / Training

2.1. Alliances are organized to set up international and interdisciplinary training programs.

They have structures and processes in place (joint offices, etc.) that allow for the mobility of top international specialists, regardless of their faculties and universities, and enable them to work together to develop programs that address global issues.

Example: the establishment of Knowledge Creation Teams: strategic requests came from the alliance, and from there we organized ourselves to support them in developing new teaching programs. This allows us to break down disciplinary silos and identify training needs arising from social, environmental, and other challenges. Universities are no longer alone in doing this.

CHARM-EU has brought about a significant shift in the management of interdisciplinarity at the University of Montpellier. For example, the CHARM-EU Master's program is the first at the university not to be managed by a specific faculty, allowing for greater flexibility and innovation in its implementation. Furthermore, new collaborative structures such as Knowledge Creation Teams (KCTs) have emerged, where interdisciplinary teams come together to develop educational content for the Master's program. These teams bring together staff from diverse fields and exemplify how the university is moving towards a more collaborative, flexible, and innovative approach to education.

Innovative teaching, student-centered programs and hybrid courses: Another transformative aspect of CHARM-EU's influence at UM is its impact on the university's approach to teaching.

First, the online course catalog (TOL) has been a huge success with UM students, even though the courses are only electives and cannot count towards their own program ECTS credits: in the last call for applications in spring 2024/2025, 123 UM applications were received. Interestingly, this has allowed UM students to access UM courses that were previously unavailable to them, demonstrating students' desire to choose their own modules and break down the silos between programs belonging to different faculties. In this way, CHARM-EU

is an important step towards greater flexibility and modularity in UM programs. The TOL has encouraged some instructors to switch their courses to a hybrid format and/or to English. CHARM-EU introduced Challenge-Based Learning (CBL), which has been integrated into various programs, primarily by faculty already involved in the CHARM-EU Joint Master's program. CHARM-EU staff organized training sessions for faculty members to implement this method effectively. This professional development training session will be further developed and offered again in 2025, in collaboration with an expert from the University of Burgundy (UiB) who will come to Montpellier through a staff mobility opportunity. In addition, the university is experimenting with new forms of assessment, including programmatic assessment and mentoring systems, which offer more personalized and competency-based learning experiences. Thanks to CHARM-EU, the University of Montpellier (UM) has also developed hybrid teaching models (blended learning) and the use of digital tools for teaching. In particular, CHARM-EU has led to the creation of several geolocated interactive field trips for training, which were developed in specific UM initiatives not directly linked to CHARM-EU.

Incubator

Alliances are organized to identify emerging training needs (through common governance and their interaction with the socio-economic world). They then act as incubators to develop new initial or continuing training programs that meet emerging needs, without resorting to calls for proposals or consulting firms.

Example: ENSCM and Abo Akademi have created a joint engineering degree.

These alliances allow for the creation of very high-quality programs that a single university could not have developed on its own. In this sense, they pool resources and do not compete for the same programs (e.g., engineering, sustainable chemical processes).

Example: Joint Master's program, hybrid classrooms, associated instructional designers

Alliances make it possible to create and bring together, in terms of HR, the infrastructures (including digital ones), and the skills necessary for training engineering.

Example: microcredential on responsible finance and challenge-based learning for educators.

https://www.linkedin.com/posts/julien-cambedouzou-606795b5_students-master-chemistry-activity-7267486294954381315-Vk-mT?utm_source=share&utm_medium=member_desktop&rcm=ACoAABe85QIB1IU8auC-kFPL3kzivsu6Q81aVXI

2.2 - European universities are a way to put in place the training models that will be needed in the future.

Alliances allow for the development of flexibility and responsiveness in training programs.

Example: microcredentials, student-centered training, lifelong learning

Alliances contribute to the evolution of national legislation.

Example: legislative changes in Spain and Hungary thanks to the joint master's program.

Appendix: Spanish Royal Decree

Example of lifelong learning: professional training with challenge-based learning accepted by Digital FCU. The person in charge at CHARM works in the Continuing Education Department.

Example: Master's degree evaluation, implementation of the eJournal portfolio, and mentoring

Alliances make it possible to implement the Bologna Process: customized pathways, skills blocks, ECTS credits, etc.

3 - Research and innovation

Alliances enable European competitiveness to be developed, allowing for rapid, agile responses to global issues with the best experts. This can be multi-scale, across several territories.

The fact that we are organized and that there is governance allows us to mobilize all the sovereign tools of a university, examples: funding of theses, field activity, continuing education,... We can mobilize human resources, technological platforms,... allows us to be more efficient in working together than during classic calls for projects.

European universities are the only places where it is possible to have integrated teaching and research programs. For example, thanks to Capstones (initially seen as educational tools), students launch research projects on transdisciplinary issues; therefore, it is a research ma-

nagement tool, linked to civil society.

Example: Scientific hubs: a joint master's module where students work with doctors, patient associations, and researchers on a disease. They work in groups to propose solutions, and then joint master's internships are funded. It's a way to guide research.

The collaboration with CHARM-EU helped develop the module "Tackling Health Challenges in Internationally Linked Research Hubs" in partnership with UU. It involves four different Master's programs at the University of Montpellier (UM) and three faculties, and is the first fully English-language, challenge-based module within these Master's programs. Internships shared between UM and UU laboratories help initiate new joint research programs. This initiative will be strengthened in the future with the possible participation of new partners such as the University of Bordeaux (UB).

European universities are creating hubs of experts who can be easily mobilized to respond to calls for proposals. For example, the Guide of Experts. Joint offices allow them to position themselves favorably.

National Networks - Ministry

At the national level, the University of Montpellier initiated the national network of alliances, "GT-UEFR," which now includes all French alliance members. This network facilitates the exchange of best practices, meeting virtually every month. They met once in person in 2024 in Toulouse, with approximately 30 participants. CHARM-EU is one of six alliances selected for an evaluation of the impact of alliances within French universities. The University of Montpellier team worked closely with the Ministry of Higher Education and Research to gather evidence of this impact in order to inform the French position on the future of alliances, their funding, and the European Diploma.



Assessment and outlook of the MESR French operators involved in European universities

Contribution from Sciences Po

Combining the agility of elite institutions focused on professionalizing students with the research excellence of leading national and international universities, Sciences Po employs an internationalization strategy designed to recruit the best students, faculty, and researchers in the social sciences. With 50% of its students from Europe and other countries, 567 academic partnerships with 445 institutions worldwide, and a mandatory year of study abroad for all undergraduate students, Sciences Po's influence extends far beyond national borders.

In 2018, the institution responded to the call from President Macron and the European Commission by submitting the Erasmus + project “*CIVICA - The European University of Social Sciences*,” followed by the Horizon project “*CIVICA Research*.” **The consortium then brought together seven trusted partners around Sciences Po, distinguished by... The excellence of their social science training, their capacity for agile innovation, and their European and international reach are highlighted by Bocconi (Milan), CEU (Budapest, then Vienna), EUI (Florence), Hertie School (Berlin), SNSPA (Bucharest), SSE (Stockholm), and LSE (London).** Some of these institutions already have dual degree programs, which contribute to their prestige. The implementation of joint activities within a dynamic social and political context strengthens the partnerships during the pilot phase, leading to the emergence of new avenues for cooperation. They are joined in 2022 by IE University (Madrid) and SGH (Warsaw), further enhancing the geographical representation and complementary expertise within CIVICA.

Assuming a societal responsibility towards several generations of Europeans, CIVICA brings together 72,000 students and 13,000 academics on an inter-university campus. Serving local and global communities, the alliance defends fundamental European values, builds bridges between academia and civil society, and supports decision-makers in their actions around four priority themes: societies in transition and planetary crises; challenges to democracy in the 21st century; rethinking Europe; and data technologies for the social sciences.

Through CIVICA, Sciences Po benefits from the first large-scale European program capable of funding, beyond individual mobility, **experimentation and collective transformation to define, develop, and strengthen a long-term European strategy within higher education institutions.** At Sciences Po, these transformations are structured around three main axes: strengthening international influence and European integration; innovation and the development of cooperation in the areas of education and student life; and the creation of a research network with structuring effects.

1. Strengthen Sciences Po's international reach and European roots through CIVICA

Sciences Po's coordinating role within CIVICA allows it to assert its leadership position within a European network of excellence, whose impact on the institution is structuring. This central role is supported by robust yet agile governance, implemented at different levels and across various fields of activity. It contributes to the cross-cutting Europeanization and internationalization of the professional communities involved.

1.1. To assert Sciences Po's leadership within a network of excellence, a vector of stability in an uncertain environment

Sciences Po and its partners are committed to making CIVICA an instrument of their international influence, contributing to the visibility and attractiveness of the European model of higher education and research. Through CIVICA, Sciences Po is asserting itself as a pioneering university ready to play a leading role within a network of excellence and openness, within a network of strong and recognized partners at the national, European, and international levels, in line with its objective of becoming the leading university in the European Union in the social sciences by 2030.

The CIVICA Global Forum, a space to amplify the voice of social sciences worldwide



The CIVICA Global Forum 2025 brought together leading European figures in Madrid in May 2025 on the theme “*Leveraging Social Sciences in Higher Education: Navigating Global Challenges and Complexities*”. Sciences Po was represented by a high-level delegation including Jean-Philippe Cointet, Director of the Open Institute for Digital Transformations and Associate Professor at the médialab, Arancha González, Dean of the Paris School of International

Affairs (PSIA) and former Spanish Minister of Foreign Affairs, Christine Musselin, Director of Research, Jeremy Perelman, Vice-President for International Affairs, Marie Azuelos, Deputy Vice-President for International Affairs, and Dina Waked, Dean of the School of Research.

Sciences Po's European dimension is reflected in the number of its dual degree programs and partnerships across Europe, as well as in the existence of two campuses dedicated to European issues: the Franco-German campus in Nancy and the Dijon campus focused on Central and Eastern Europe. Sciences Po's participation in the European Universities Initiative is accompanied by a **strengthened institutional commitment to European affairs and a desire to position itself as a key partner for European decision-makers.** CIVICA thus acts

as a catalyst for building closer ties, increasing influence, and showcasing Sciences Po's academic expertise to European institutions.

Strengthening Sciences Po's European ties is a strategic priority in a volatile and uncertain global environment¹, as evidenced, for example, by measures aimed at limiting international cooperation among North American institutions. The formation of strong alliances between recognized institutions allows them to combine their strengths in the face of the political and social crises facing the continent, such as Brexit, the Covid-19 pandemic, and the Hungarian law on foreign universities. For Sciences Po and its partners, CIVICA represents "a source of stability and an environment in which the values of autonomy and academic freedom can be defended, particularly in the face of evolving European political contexts."²

1.2. Strong and agile governance, respectful of institutional autonomy

To implement this strategy, **CIVICA has devised an agile and decentralized governance structure that respects the autonomy and complementarity of its partners and is based on shared responsibility for activities among the institutions.** As the coordinating institution, Sciences Po is the legal entity that links the consortium and the European Commission. For the sake of clarity and transparency, the coordination of activities across the alliance by the *CIVICA Secretariat* is separate from the internal management carried out by Sciences Po's CIVICA Steering Unit. The two teams align their work through bi-monthly coordination meetings and ongoing dialogue. This governance structure has proven its agility, efficiency, and stabilizing role for the alliance by ensuring the continuity of activities in a context where the teams naturally evolve.

At the alliance level, the *CIVICA Presidents Committee* is the decision-making body that brings together the presidents once a year at the headquarters of one of the member institutions, while the *CIVICA Steering Committee*, the executive body that meets monthly, is led by Sciences Po in a collegial manner. Operationally, the *CIVICA Managing Team* comprises the project managers from each member university. Since its creation, the governance structure has also been enhanced by an *Environmental Sustainability Board*, a *Student Board*, and a *CIVICA Library Steering Committee*, demonstrating a **cross-cutting structure for all activities across the alliance**. The location of the *CIVICA Secretariat* at Sciences Po, its role in leading the *Steering Committee*, and its leadership of the cross-cutting activities of WP1 (Governance) and WP2 (Inter-university Campus) make Sciences Po a pivotal institution for the alliance.

This governance structure is then implemented across Sciences Po to facilitate decision-making, information sharing, and collaboration among all the departments and teams involved. Sciences Po has a CIVICA Steering Committee, bringing together the Directors of the departments involved in deploying activities through work packages, and a CIVICA Operational Committee, which organizes their implementation. **This approach has positive effects on the institution's operations, helping to reduce siloed work and enabling teams to**

¹ Elouarghi Sandra and Maïna Marjany, "With CIVICA, Sciences Po is at the heart of European universities", *L'Emile*, no. 29, November 2023: [link](#).

² CIVICA Renewed Mission Statement – Vision for 2030, Sciences Po/DAI translation: [link](#).

develop their skills. Rather than centralizing responsibilities within a single team, Sciences Po has chosen to place project manager positions directly within the departments, dedicated entirely to CIVICA for the implementation of activities. This mechanism is accompanied by the recruitment and development of new professional profiles that combine an awareness of the subject matter, strong intercultural communication skills, expertise in managing European projects, and the ability to lead cross-departmental initiatives.

The combination of all these responsibilities represents for Sciences Po an exceptional opportunity but also a major institutional and financial commitment, which is only possible thanks to the support provided by the ANR.

1.3. A core of trust promoting the internationalization of professional communities at all levels of the institution

At Sciences Po, the European and international dimension is entrusted to the International Affairs Department, which notably manages the negotiation and implementation of over 460 partnerships worldwide, the recruitment and reception of international students, and the sending of Sciences Po students abroad. The involvement of all central departments and services, the seven campuses of the Undergraduate College, the seven schools, and the Academic Directorate in CIVICA is a cross-cutting phenomenon that is accompanied on the ground by a Europeanization of professions less traditionally exposed to international contexts. **CIVICA thus standardizes European cooperation at all levels and contributes to evolving the internal culture.** New professions or specializations within existing professions are developing in response to the specific needs generated by innovative European collaborations, both in the field of education and in other sectors. This is evidenced, for example, by the reorganization of the Student Life Department, which has chosen to assign, for the first time, a project manager to European relations.

The Inclusion Workshops and the development of a network of inclusion experts within CIVICA

Characterized by significant differences in national approaches, inclusion practices were chosen as a testing ground for developing a CIVICA professional community. Between 2019 and 2022, three *Inclusion Workshops* organized by Sciences Po, SNSPA, and LSE enabled 88 staff members to compare their practices on the themes of gender equality, social inclusion, and disability. A three-day *wrap-up session* was held in May 2022 at the CEU offices, the lead organization for the inclusion work package in phase 2 of the project.

Since 2022, the work package “CIVICA Service to Society: Promoting Diversity, Equity and Inclusion” has led to the creation of a repertoire of best practices, the development of partnerships with civil society organizations, and awareness-raising and training activities

for secondary school students and refugee students (CIVICA For All Platform). A feasibility study on the implementation of a First Generation program is currently underway.



*Participants in the “Disability” panel at the Wrap-up organised by the Central European University in Vienna in May 2022. Sciences Po is represented by Christina Daoulas, Head of Disability Policy*³.

All of these tools are integrated with existing structures at Sciences Po: CEP agreements, the Professional Certificate in Humanities and Social Sciences for young refugees, the gender equality officer, the secularism and anti-discrimination officer, the disability policy, etc. **CIVICA helps to connect the various services involved in inclusion issues and enables them to integrate their actions into international networks in order to better meet the needs of students and to support the transformations of the university.**

The exchange of best practices extends beyond the alliance framework to a well-established and expanding network of alliances and universities. Violette Toye, Secretary General of the PRESAGE program, had the opportunity to present CIVICA's achievements at a roundtable discussion entitled "EUA and the mainstreaming of GE and diversity: practices, challenges and reflections" during the RESET project's final conference in Porto on October 8, 2024. This example demonstrates the European Universities Initiative's ability to permeate professional networks, thereby extending its impact within the European Higher Education and Research Area, beyond the circle of alliances.

This movement is accompanied by the development of international professional networks that promote the strengthening of staff skills, Sciences Po having chosen to CIVICA promotes the mobility of staff members involved in its activities. This development is achieved through various mobility schemes open to all types of non-academic staff, such as *Staff Mobilities* and the CIVICA Library mobility program. CIVICA constitutes a trusted hub *within* which staff members benefit—sometimes for the very first time—from a genuine experience of European cooperation, fostering an unprecedented level of engagement. These collaborations encourage the emergence of professional communities where teams recognize each other's skills and develop together.

³ “CIVICA inclusion workshop kicks off in CEU Auditorium with roundtable discussion”, CIVICA website, 2022: [link](#) .

The CIVICA Library, a place for experimentation and skills development

Librarians and information specialists at Sciences Po are accustomed to working on projects both internally and within European networks, such as Nereus. However, none compare to what this alliance has created: **a solid and lasting trusted hub where professionals work and support each other in a context of trust and shared purpose.** Coordinated by Sciences Po, the CIVICA library network is experimenting with dynamic collaborative formats to foster staff professional development and improve the quality of service for users.

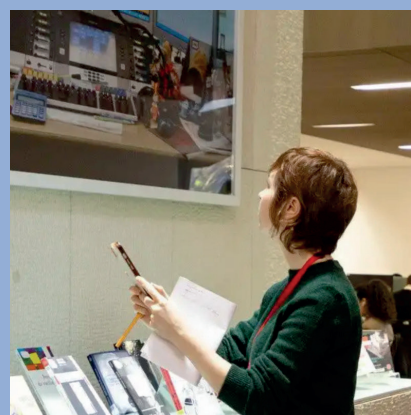


The 8 participants in the CIVICA Library Mobility Programme in December 2024. The educational engineering is entrusted to Cécile Touitou, Head of the Foresight Unit, Sciences Po Library.

As part of the CIVICA Library Mobility Program, Sciences Po tested training methods in December 2024 that fostered a high level of engagement. Eight representatives from partner universities participated, experiencing life as an international student at Sciences Po to assess campus spaces and suggest improvements in terms of signage, services for user communities, and physical reception. In the long term, these reflections should lead to actions that contribute to a sustainable policy of universal accessibility at Sciences Po.

“By comparing our library with their perceptions of international students at Sciences Po, our participants were actually projecting the image of their own students. By pointing out what they felt wasn't working at Sciences Po, they were reflecting on what wasn't working in their own institution either, and what they could improve to better welcome our students.”

Sophie Forcadell, Project Manager for the European University CIVICA program at the Sciences Po library



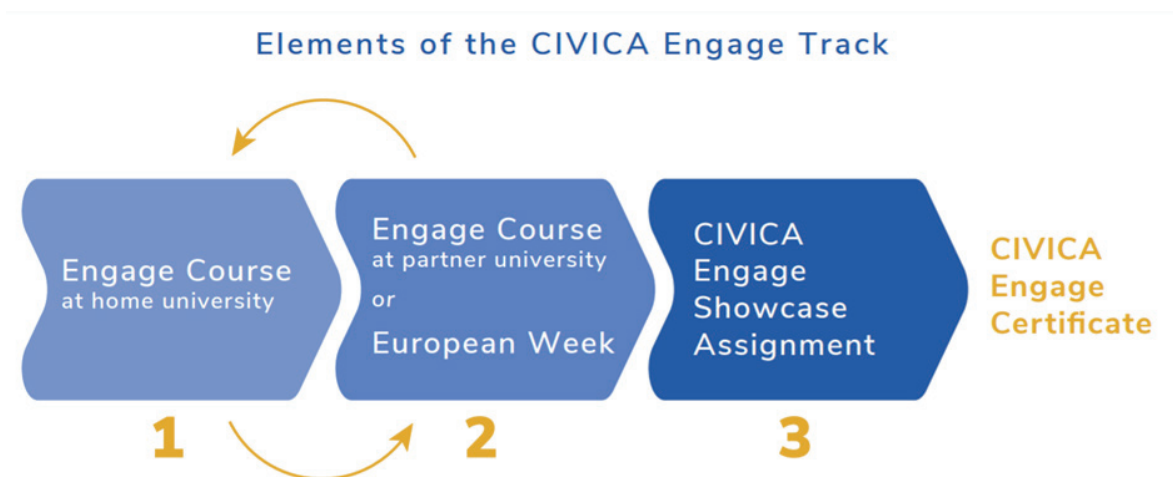
Finally, CIVICA serves as an instrument of influence, enabling higher education institutions to promote their model within professional networks. In the case of Sciences Po, this involves highlighting student engagement and international mobility during undergraduate studies, dual Master's degrees, the integration of academic research with high-level professional expertise, and more. This network dimension extends beyond alliances, thanks in particular to the structuring of the initiative within FOR EU, and subsequently within the FOREU4All Community of Practice since June 18, 2024. Sciences Po teams are thus heavily involved in leading the FOR EU IT and FOR EU Lib subgroups and actively participate in the groups dedicated to Communication and the European Degree. They also contribute to disseminating information and mobilizing national and European networks around the initiative.

2. Training and teaching differently: a laboratory for pedagogical experimentation

Within a constrained academic context, the European University provides a space for freedom, innovation, and the exchange of best practices, allowing for experimentation with new teaching and learning formats adapted to contemporary challenges. Within the CIVICA framework, activities are designed in such a way that the curriculum is differentiated according to the training cycles, allowing students to build a progressive and coherent learning path. Between 2019 and 2024, a total of 10,097 learners (high school students, university students, doctoral candidates, postdoctoral researchers, and participants in public conferences) benefited from the training activities offered by the European University. The digital campus is a key element of the CIVICA training program.⁴

2.1. Building an engaged student community, united by a shared sense of belonging to Europe

The first cycle represents for CIVICA the privileged framework for student engagement and the development of a sense of European belonging. It reflects CIVICA's ethos, focused on building a community united by the same values of commitment.



The three components of the "CIVICA Engage Track" form its backbone and reflect the strategic orientations of the European University at the Bachelor's level. The Engage Track is a pedagogical approach with innovative methods that, from the first year of undergraduate studies, combines encounters with practitioners in the field with an introduction to social science research methods. Its European dimension is based on the integration into the Certificate program of accredited courses taken in person at partner institutions, the *Engage Courses*, and a cooperative learning program in a foreign language, the *European Week*⁵. A total of 192 Engage Courses are offered by Sciences Po within the framework of the CIVICA Engage Track. These courses are credited with ECTS credits and are integrated into the curriculum.

⁴Sources: Questionnaire for an initial assessment of European alliances and their contribution to French partner institutions in the first wave, November 2022; EU Grants: Periodic report (ERASMUS): V1.0 – 01.12.2021,

⁵ "Cities & Ecological Transitions: 90 Students at CIVICA European Week 2023", Sciences Po website, July 10, 2023: [link](#). Last accessed on May 26, 2025.

A European career accelerator: Lidia Bilali's story



Lidia Bilali, a Bachelor's student at Sciences Po on the Paris campus, completed two internships as part of her mandatory Civic Engagement program: one at a priority education network (REP) high school in the 19th arrondissement of Paris and the other with the organization "Culture du Coeur." These experiences raised her awareness of the role of culture, education, and sport in the inclusion of marginalized individuals. CIVICA offered her the opportunity to explore these issues further by participating in the European Week organized by Bocconi University, focusing on the links between sport and disability. She concluded her CIVICA

Engage Track with a *showcase assignment* demonstrating how local, national, and international policies can contribute to making sport accessible and empower athletes as agents of change. **Successfully completing these three components earned her the Bachelor's level CIVICA Engage Certificate .**

This experience at Bocconi University offered her a different perspective on sport and inclusivity than that of Sciences Po, particularly due to the complementary nature of the social sciences and economics/business. It allowed her to meet Sciences Po students from various campuses and CIVICA partners. These interactions led her to request a gap year, during which she diligently attended public lectures at the Hertie School in Berlin and completed an internship at the European Parliament, before pursuing a dual Master's degree at Sciences Po and the London School of Economics (LSE). Of Italian and Albanian nationality, Lidia discovered through CIVICA a strong connection to French culture, in which she was immersed at Sciences Po. She laid the foundations for a truly European path.

At all levels of study, fostering a sense of belonging to a shared European community relies on a number of mechanisms that forge **strong links between students and student organizations, thereby giving substance to the European inter-university campus.** The *CIVICA Student Associations Forum* offers student organizations networking and cooperation opportunities, while the *Student Engagement Fund* finances inter-university student initiatives dedicated to European challenges ⁶. The *Sport and Culture Festival* , whose first edition was held in Paris to mark Sciences Po's 150th anniversary and whose second took place in Poland ⁷, contributes to creating a strong sense of commitment to the alliance.

Student engagement is finally manifesting itself at the inter-alliance level. Sciences Po, as a CIVICA partner, participated in the incubation of the European Student Assembly project, launched in the context of the French Presidency of the Council of the European Union and the Conference on the Future of Europe. Sciences Po helped bring the project to maturity so

⁶ "Sciences Po Students are Taking Part in Four Ambitious Cross-European Projects", Sciences Po website, March 7, 2025: [link](#).

⁷ "13 Sciences Po Students at SGH Warsaw School of Economics for a Sport and Culture Festival", Sciences Po website, June 25, 2024: [link](#)

that it could receive Erasmus+ funding in the form of a Cooperation Partnership. CIVICA is now represented within this partnership by SGH, the leader of the work package dedicated to student activities within CIVICA. Sciences Po students have thus been able to present their work in various settings, including member and non-member universities of the alliance, European institutions, and events open to businesses such as the VivaTech trade show.

Involving students in steering the alliance and building their future



Numbering two or three per institution, the CIVICA Ambassadors serve as a liaison between management teams and students. In addition to its three CIVICA Ambassadors, each representing a level of study, Sciences Po has chosen to appoint CIVICA Relays to ensure a CIVICA student presence on each of its campuses.

Meeting of CIVICA Ambassadors at Sciences Po, January 2024.

The alliance allows for the institutionalization of student participation through formal roles defined in the project, some of which are part of the consortium's governance. This is the case with the *CIVICA Student Board*, whose members are represented within CIVICA's decision-making bodies (Steering Committee and Managing Team).

2.2. Thinking together about educational innovation

At the Master's level, the partners have jointly developed a teaching program based on innovative formats to foster multidisciplinary learning with a strong European dimension. They provide a space for experimentation and a source of inspiration for the teaching teams at Sciences Po.

Joint and multi-campus courses offer a shared, synchronous, hybrid, and multi-site teaching approach, encompassing multiple disciplines. These courses rely on a collective of instructors with complementary expertise in the subject matter and employ active learning methods, particularly in assessment, through the creation of student groups from different institutions. Designed and led by researchers and instructors from two or more partner universities and open to students from these institutions, these courses encourage collaboration between students from different countries and lead to recognition in the form of ECTS credits. Often based on strong partnerships between faculty members, these courses require innovative

teaching formats that promote virtual or hybrid learning. This highly experimental model of collaborative courses has spread beyond CIVICA, notably in courses developed with international partners and within a framework of interdisciplinary openness to environmental and digital challenges. The joint academic curriculum for Master's programs in Artificial Intelligence now includes a course taught jointly by a sociologist and a mathematician.

The Honours Seminars are intensive seminars that bring together students from different institutions to discuss topics of shared interest. They aim to provide students with specific knowledge and skills that are both necessary and complementary to their academic programs. These seminars allow students from the ten participating universities to undertake short but highly valuable physical exchanges, during which they work collaboratively with leading researchers and professionals. The sessions hosted by Sciences Po are organized by the Urban School and focus on developing negotiation skills in the climate field ⁸. This highly specific format facilitates the involvement of professionals and the acquisition of skills that are not always easy to integrate into a rigid curriculum framework.

The Digital Mobility scheme, currently under development, encourages institutions to develop fully online formats, which constitutes a major challenge and innovation opportunity for institutions, and allows them to leverage the complementary expertise of institutions for the benefit of the student community.

2.3. Building a European academic community dedicated to education

One of CIVICA's strengths is creating a shared European academic space. **By facilitating collaboration between faculty and students, the alliance enables the development of multidisciplinary projects, leveraging the scientific expertise of each institution.** Several mechanisms implemented within the framework of the European University promote this cooperation.

By opening Sciences Po up to the disciplines, objects of study and teaching practices present among its partners, **CIVICA brings a complementary expertise that enriches teaching and research opportunities.**

At the Bachelor's level, the implementation of support to help students complete their *Showcase Assignments* leads instructors to adapt their teaching practices by integrating research methods from the undergraduate level. At the Master's level, some joint courses give rise to research projects, such as the course "*Ever-closer Union? The EU's developmental policies and their impact on EU integration*," which resulted in the EvalEU project. Conversely, some research collaborations lead to the creation of joint courses, such as "*Welfare States in Transition*" (three

"It was rewarding to guide the students through a process of articulation that combined, on the one hand, the intellectual, theoretical and conceptual approach to the public interest issue they were addressing, and on the other hand, its concrete implications."

Alexandra Ana, Bachelor level lecturer on the Reims campus

⁸ "Sciences Po Hosts a Climate Change Negotiations Seminar for European Students", Sciences Po website, February 26, 2025: [link](#).

editions: 2020, 2021, 2022) between Sciences Po and Hertie School. Reflecting this collaboration between instructors, students themselves form transnational teams within which they are assessed.

The programs designed for early-career researchers (doctoral and postdoctoral students) enable them to develop their professional skills and pursue international careers, setting them apart in a highly competitive environment. The ESR Course Catalogue has provided doctoral and postdoctoral students across the alliance with free access to 460 online and hybrid courses since 2019. Through CIVICA, early-career researchers have access to a vast network of leading European universities, notably represented by the *CIVICA Research Directory*. Numerous meetings offer researchers points of contact within these institutions and provide insight into their professional context. The Sciences Po CIVICA team provides significant support by highlighting opportunities for collaboration and mobility and assisting researchers with applications.

The implementation of shared training programs requires alignment of practices upstream, as well as support from management teams trained in higher education administration and European cooperation, and directly integrated into the Directorate of Training and Research. CIVICA fosters the emergence of a transnational community of practice whose role is to support in-depth interdisciplinary collaboration between faculty and students. From this perspective, work package meetings constitute an essential forum for dialogue and coordination between partner institutions, allowing for discussions on training challenges and the sharing of best academic and student practices. Topics discussed include, for example, teaching schedules, assessment methods, and ECTS credit practices. These exchanges have led, for instance, to a feasibility study on the development of a *First Generation Program*.

From teaching to research: the testimony of Jan Bogulawski



Jan Bogulawski, a doctoral student at the MaxPo Institute, is involved with CIVICA for the first time as a teaching assistant for the joint course "*Welfare States in Transition*," co-led by Bruno Palier (Sciences Po) and Anke Hassel (Hertie School). He has applied to the summer school organized at the University Institute of Florence (EUI) from July 11 to 15, 2022, on the theme: "*Reconstructing Europe after Crises*." This training, which brings together 26 doctoral students and researchers at Villa Vigoni, is something he describes as "The best experience of his doctoral studies," he said, provided him with unique intellectual stimulation and allowed him to forge valuable academic contacts for his research. One of the doctoral students he met there became a research partner. Jan Bogulawski also attended a conference organized by the Central European University (CEU) on the integration of researchers into the academic job market.

3. To propel ourselves to a European level in order to produce research of excellence in the social sciences

Considering research as a key element of university excellence, independence, and attractiveness, CIVICA is an alliance with significant scientific added value. The long-term cooperation enabled by these alliances offers universities an opportunity to move beyond ad hoc collaborations linked to project funding and **develop a genuine shared research and innovation strategy**. It fosters the emergence of multidisciplinary scientific networks, essential for addressing major contemporary challenges, but still faces a significant challenge in securing long-term funding.

3.1. Structuring research around a common strategy

CIVICA fully integrates scientific and educational dimensions, recognizing that in a world facing the risks of disinformation, the educational and social role of the university must be based on the production of robust scientific knowledge derived from research. *"CIVICA aims to give a European voice to social science research on the most pressing global challenges and to deepen research collaboration within and beyond the alliance. CIVICA's interdisciplinary approach to research influences and is influenced by synergies with its educational dimension, both focused on solving problems and creating structural and lasting impact. (...) By 2030, our vision is to have created a collaborative, sustainable, and world-class research and innovation ecosystem, where our cutting-edge research not only at the forefront of creating policy-oriented results, but also directly feeds into the educational dimension of our institutions."*⁹

The CIVICA Research project played a structuring role for the alliance by enabling institutions to develop a concerted strategy that draws on the strong involvement of the institutions and scientific teams associated with the project. This structuring notably involves the establishment of a common governance structure, the adoption of a shared research agenda, the identification of priority multidisciplinary themes designed to address societal challenges, and the development of a results dissemination strategy based in particular on the adoption of an Open Science Plan.

Research activities are supported by a shared governance structure with multiple hierarchical levels, linking research and training activities. The Permanent Design Team (PDT), composed of the Vice-Presidents for Research and Senior Professors, as well as the leaders of thematic research groups, oversees the strategic and scientific implementation of research activities. The Research Managing Team (RMT) brings together the managers responsible for the coordination and operational implementation of these activities. For the sake of simplicity and consistency, this governance structure was developed jointly for the Horizon Swafs project and the Erasmus+ project work package dedicated to researcher training. It was therefore maintained following the non-renewal of the Horizon Swafs project.

Research activities are structured around four priority themes whose relevance has been confirmed in light of global developments since 2019: Data-Driven Technologies for the Social Sciences; Democracy in the 21st Century; Europe Revisited; Societies in Transition; and Crises of Earth. These strategic priorities are championed at the institutional level by thematic groups that bring together at least one specialist researcher from each institution. **Regarding the dissemination of results, CIVICA's Permanent Design Team has adopted an Open**

⁹ CIVICA Renewed Mission Statement – Vision for 2030, Sciences Po/DAI translation: [link](#).

Science Action Plan that takes into account the specific characteristics of the humanities and social sciences sector and aims to familiarize research teams with these issues.

3.2. Establish a powerful research network capable of having a global impact

CIVICA has made a remarkable contribution to the development of a research community, bringing together the strengths of prestigious institutions whose cooperation had previously been more sporadic.

- 28 collaborative research teams, involving 204 faculty members and early career researchers (ESR), were involved in 3 calls for proposals,
- 78 faculty members undertook short-term stays at a partner institution to develop their professional network, give lectures, and organize workshops for students as part of 4 calls for applications.
- 140 faculty members and young researchers participated in the research conferences organized as part of CIVICA,
- 550 faculty members and young researchers participated in the workshops organized as part of CIVICA,
- 1100 faculty members and young researchers participated in the 4 series of seminars organised as part of CIVICA ¹⁰.

CIVICA Research Directory, OpenAire: making a network of excellence visible

The networking of researchers within CIVICA is exemplified by the *CIVICA Research Directory*. Initially designed to facilitate exchanges between doctoral students and researchers within the alliance, this tool, accessible on the mycivica.eu platform via an Edugain authentication protocol, offers a secure framework for exchanges between researchers at all stages of their careers. 648 researchers are listed by institution, research center, discipline, area of expertise, and working language. Among them, 264 are affiliated with Sciences Po.

CIVICA focuses on the professional development of researchers at all stages of their careers. Young researchers, in particular, benefit from exceptional career development opportunities in a variety of formats. Furthermore, CIVICA Research has enabled the piloting of a genuine continuing education program for the development of academic careers.

A launching pad for the most promising young researchers: the example of Renata Mustafina

¹⁰Draft Resolution on the CIVICA Research Centre, Meeting of Presidents & Rectors, Madrid, June 2024.



Renata Mustafina, a PhD associate at CERI and recipient of the 2024 Political Science Thesis Prize from the Chancellery of the Universities of Paris, was the first Sciences Po beneficiary of the *CIVICA Postdoctoral Mobility Scheme*. Her 10-month stay at the University Institute of Florence in 2023-2024 qualified her for a postdoctoral fellowship at the Harriman Institute in Columbia. Her article , ["A measure of justice: Citizen legal advocates, lay lawyering, and access to justice in Russia,"](#) published in June 2024 in *Sage Journals*, lists her as a CIVICA Postdoctoral Fellow.

The network is also a tool for action and solidarity in the face of crises affecting academic and scientific communities. Following Russia's aggression against Ukraine, the alliance reacted swiftly and effectively by launching the ["CIVICA for Ukraine" program in 2023](#) , supported by the National Agency for Academic Exchange in Poland (NAWA) and the CIVICA Erasmus+ project. The CIVICA for Ukraine network comprises five Ukrainian universities in the fields of social sciences, humanities, management, and public policy: Kyiv School of Economics (KSE), Kyiv National Economic University named after Vadym Hetman (KNEU), National University Kyiv-Mohyla Academy (NaUKMA), Ukrainian Catholic University in Lviv (UKU), and Vasyl' Stus Donetsk National University (DonNU). The project, which notably funds visits by professors and researchers, enables the academic communities of these partners to maintain and develop essential links with European research networks and to prepare for reconstruction.

3.3. Ensuring the sustainability of funding: a key issue

The construction of a powerful research-oriented network generates ripple effects throughout the scientific community. This dynamism is particularly beneficial for Sciences Po, which has found in the alliance an opportunity to forge close partnerships with other leading European institutions in the humanities and social sciences. The CIVICA Research Centre, currently being established, will allow for a more in-depth structuring of CIVICA's research priorities and will support researchers in submitting joint proposals (particularly those related to Horizon Europe).

The Horizon Europe (SWAFS) funding that supported the CIVICA Research project from 2021 to 2023 played a central role in developing a shared research strategy , establishing agile and sustainable research governance, and developing iterative actions likely to lead to structural changes and synergies across the European University. **Developing a leading European research university requires addressing structural issues related to governance, collective practices, team dynamics, work ethics, and the economic model.** Building on the long-term research and innovation strategy developed within CIVICA Research, the alliance was able to find innovative solutions to explore and implement major

institutional transformations ¹¹. However, the non-renewal of funding raises questions about the sustainability of this work and the continued use of the jointly developed tools.

Through CIVICA, Sciences Po has embarked on an ambitious transformation strategy. A cross-cutting and long-term initiative, CIVICA fosters interdepartmental cooperation, the internationalization of higher education professions, and the emergence of professional communities. The alliance acts as a catalyst for cultural and organizational change that directly benefits teaching, research, and student life.

The assessment and future outlook conducted by Sciences Po's CIVICA Steering Committee in partnership with the Ministry of Higher Education and Research aims to document these transformations and inform future strategic and financial decisions. It highlights the exceptional involvement of Sciences Po teams in CIVICA, the depth of the organizational and structural changes brought about by the initiative, and CIVICA's strategic importance for Sciences Po.

¹¹ CIVICA Renewed Mission Statement – Vision for 2030, Sciences Po/DAI translation: [link](#).



EU CONEXUS



Cofinancé par
l'Union européenne

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The transformative impacts of the EU-Conexus alliance on La Rochelle University

A thematic alliance based on the major missions of universities

Introduction

Specificity of the European Alliance EU-CONEXUS

Created in 2019 as part of the first Erasmus+ call for projects, EU-CONEXUS embodies the international ambition of La Rochelle University to build a holistic transnational university, integrating on a European scale all the missions of higher education, namely training programs, research activities, innovation and technology transfer mechanisms and a policy for disseminating scientific culture.

The EU-CONEXUS European alliance was initiated by La Rochelle University, building on pre-existing collaborations between the institution and its European partners, particularly in Spain and Romania. This ambition to create a European alliance was also supported by the institution's developing specialization and the political will to expand it to a European level.

EU-CONEXUS is one of the 17 alliances in the first wave. It brings together 9 partners: La Rochelle University (France), the Agricultural University of Athens (Greece), the Catholic University of Valencia (Spain), the Technical University of Civil Engineering Bucharest (Romania), the University of Zadar (Croatia), the University of Klaipeda (Lithuania), the University of Rostock (Germany), the South-Eastern Technological University (Ireland) and Frederick University (Cyprus).

In line with the institutional project of La Rochelle University marked by a strong commitment to sustainable development, a structure around an Institute for Sustainable Smart Urban Coastline (LUDI) and a resolutely European orientation, EU-CONEXUS based its first years on common values: the personalization of pathways, the specialization of research, solidarity, innovation, collaboration with territories and openness to the world.

Leveraging a network of nine higher education institutions located in coastal areas, the European Alliance EU-CONEXUS is working to support the major ecological, societal, and economic transitions of the 21st century. This translates into a pursuit of excellence, resolutely focused on a strategic challenge: the Smart Sustainable Urban Coastline (LUDI).

In a context marked by the climate emergency, rising sea levels, and the constant evolution of regulatory frameworks, both national and European, EU-CONEXUS's unique positioning proves particularly timely. The Alliance dedicates its actions to the public interest, sustainable innovation, and its participation in the development of public policies, at both the local and European Union levels.

The EU-CONEXUS PLUS project (2022-2026), the second phase of the European Alliance, thus reinforces the momentum initiated since 2019, with a view to a systemic and more integrated model with the main objective of consolidating the activities of the pilot phase, by creating adequate centralized support systems, intensifying collaborations between socio-economic partners in the territories and bringing university campuses closer together.

EU-CONEXUS is committed to creating the conditions for a new framework for teaching and research in Europe, thereby contributing to the emergence of a real European identity through the establishment of synergies between all the partners of the Alliance.

The major achievements of the European Alliance EU-CONEXUS at N+5

Around the theme of the Sustainable Smart Urban Coastline (LUDI), EU-CONEXUS has deployed numerous actions based on the four essential missions of universities:

- The development of joint governance and services for the functioning of the Alliance and its community;
- Structuring an inter-university campus at the training level, including the implementation of the minors and micro-certifications program (Bachelor's level), the development of a joint Master's degree in marine biotechnology and two other interdisciplinary Master's programs currently under development, and the organization of training activities for doctoral students with online courses and interdisciplinary summer schools. EU-CONEXUS supports academic staff in the development of joint training programs and organizes a Teacher Training School;
- Development of a research space around the LUDI specialization with seminars, conferences, mobility, innovation competitions;
- Development of LUDI-related activities for society (annual competition in European secondary schools on the theme of LUDI, management of a blue growth school for researchers and professionals);
- Animating campus life through the funding of European student projects, sports and cultural activities, the organization of festivals, and professional development seminars for staff and students.

La Rochelle University's membership in the European Alliance EU-CONEXUS has had effects transforming all of its activities and has enabled internationalization at all levels : governance, training, research, student life, links with territories and has contributed to strengthening the European citizenship of the university community.

Part I: Establishing governance and management of joint projects on a large scale European Alliance by La Rochelle University, coordinator of the Alliance

- has. Institutional policy & strategy

At the national level, La Rochelle University is considered an innovative institution across all its activities: teaching, research, and interactions with the socio-economic environment. Its daily operations, structure, and governance reform demonstrate its capacity to create new initiatives and innovative concepts, and to revitalize public services closely linked to young people, who are eager for a modernization of higher education. Thus, the university's project, since its inception, has fully reflected the spirit of ambitious, multicultural European universities that respect the individual and are closely connected to society and its environment.

La Rochelle University played a leading role in the creation of the European Alliance, developing a LUDI (Learning, Digital and Industrial Development) specialization within the institution and demonstrating a political commitment to strengthening it at the European level and internationalizing the university around this theme. This initiative integrates the environmental, energy, digital, and societal transitions essential for a Europe subject to strong international pressures in these areas. This strong political ambition, championed by former President Jean-Marc Ogier, was incorporated into the university's strategic plan during his two successive terms, and subsequently into the institutional contract (performance and objectives contract, COMP) around four main strategic axes:

- Strengthen the university's scientific signature and its positioning as a center of excellence LUDI;
- Continue to implement new training models and support campus life for the benefit of the "student experience";
- To steer the university in line with its trajectory and objectives;
- Participate in site policy and accelerate the implementation of territorial and European cooperation.

EU-CONEXUS is also included in the objectives, resources and performance contract and the statutes of the institution.

Given the cross-cutting nature of EU-CONEXUS's activities, the implementation of the Alliance led to the establishment of a European University Vice-Presidency within the University. It is worth noting that all Vice-Presidencies related to the scope of EU-CONEXUS have integrated the Alliance's activities into their policy roadmaps.

In January 2025, Gérard Blanchard was elected President of La Rochelle University for a four-year term. To strengthen the internal integration of the Alliance's activities, a new Vice-President for International Relations was appointed; he was previously Director of the LUDI Research Federation, which brings together all the university's research units. The objective of this new appointment is to give fresh impetus to better integrate LUDI's teaching and research activities into the university's internationalization efforts, drawing on the EU-CONEXUS model of best practices.

As coordinator of EU-CONEXUS, La Rochelle University benefits from significantly increased visibility and capacity for action. Through this alliance, it leads a European university whose collective dimension surpasses that of the largest French institutions awarded the IDEX or I-SITE labels.

- 4,928 teacher-researchers
- 9,217 staff members
- 75,474 students
- 7,978 study programs
- 258 research units
- **b. La Rochelle University, global coordinator of the Alliance**

La Rochelle University recruited a project team at the start of phase 1, attached to the president's office, including:

- 1 director
- 2 project managers
- 1 project assistant
- 1 information systems engineer (internal promotion)

These staff members worked with the services of La Rochelle University (office, project engineering and agreements unit, information systems department, student services, etc.) to coordinate and implement the Erasmus project at the global and local level during the first years of the project.

A restructuring of the overall coordination was carried out during the second phase with:

- 1 director
- 1 Deputy Director
- 1 IT project manager
- 1 administrative and financial coordinator

In response to the increasing number of Alliance projects, positions have been reorganized to ensure the coordination and oversight of their implementation, relying on networking with the project managers of the nine EU-CONEXUS member universities. The directors and the administrative and financial coordinator are also responsible for managing the Belgian non-profit association, EU-CONEXUS AISBL, created by the Alliance to test a legal entity model and manage pooled funds.

These recruitments have increased the managerial potential of La Rochelle University by recruiting profiles with a wide range of skills: European project management, financial and HR management, coordination of activity coordinators in 9 countries, organization and development of structure, development of international relations, fluent English, intercultural skills, diplomacy, problem solving in complex and varied environments.

The project team worked closely with Jean-Marc Ogier, President of La Rochelle University (2016-2024), also appointed "Chair" of the Governing Board (governance body bringing together the rectors) for the implementation of the Alliance from 2019 to 2024 until the recent change of the presidency of the Governing Board (annual rotating presidency provided for in the statutes of EUConexus).

With the aim of building a stronger European university system, the European Alliance established, from the pilot phase (2019–2022), a comprehensive coordination mechanism supported by governance and steering bodies. During the second phase (2022–2026), areas for improvement were addressed to further consolidate and structure these mechanisms.

Below is a diagram highlighting the current governance (2022-2026) and its bodies:



Governing Board (GB): body composed of the rectors for overall strategic decisions (meeting every 2-3 months); **Academic Council (AC)** : composed of the Vice-Rectors for Education for decisions related to education (meeting once a month); **Research Council (RC)** : composed of the Vice-Rectors for Research for decisions related to research (meeting once a month); **Executive Council** for cross-

cutting issues (EC): composed of all the Chairs of the councils, i.e., the President and Vice-President of the Governing Board, the President of the **Student Board**, and the Chairs of the AC and RC, for cross-cutting issues that fall outside the purview of either the AC or the RC (meeting monthly); **Coordination Committee (CC)** : the overall coordination team, including the head of the **Joint Communication Unit** based in Lithuania, the Secretary of the Student Board, and the managers of other Alliance projects; **Management Board (MB)** : composed of the 9 institutional coordinators for operational matters (weekly meeting); **Work package leaders groups** : the activity coordinators of the different projects to exchange information on the issues/progress of the project(s).

It should be noted that the first five years of the Alliance's presidency were led by Jean-Marc Ogier, and that starting in November 2024, a rotating presidency with two-year terms was implemented. A president and vice-president are appointed. At the end of their two-year term, the vice-president becomes president. For the other AC and RC bodies, a president and vice-president are elected for one-year terms.

Beyond the steering bodies, joint services have been created to pool resources and enhance skills. The establishment of these services facilitates the sharing of best practices among European counterparts and the operational management of activities, aiming for harmonization of best practices. The services implemented are as follows:

Joint Communication Unit

- Project Development *Support Office*
- Office for the Development of Study *Offers*
- Service dedicated to student integration (*Career Network*)

Through its Information Systems Department (DSI), La Rochelle University was also responsible for laying the groundwork for a *Smart Campus*, creating a digital environment linked to joint training programs and research during the first phase. To strengthen the structure of the European Smart Campus, an IT project manager joined the overall coordination team at the start of the second phase, tasked with developing a digital environment that meets the various IT needs for joint activities and their implementation.

The major innovation of the second phase (2022-2026) was the creation of the legal entity EU-CONEXUS AISBL, or EU-CONEXA, in July 2022. This entity was established by the global coordination team and the nine partner universities of the Alliance. Of the 64 European Alliances, only 14 have a legal entity, making EU-CONEXUS a pioneer in its field. This legal entity is an International Non-Profit Association (AISBL) under Belgian law, allowing the Alliance to test a common instrument while awaiting its status as a "European university," which is currently under discussion. This tool currently manages the shared funds. It has a budget of €1.5 million over four years, supplemented by annual membership fees. The Association supports the activities of the EU-CONEXUS Plus project by funding the deployment of the smart campus across Europe, joint communication initiatives, European accreditations for joint degrees, mobility grants for researchers and student projects, prizes for competitions organized at the European level, and more. This achievement is transformative because it strengthens the governance structure through the development and implementation of a long-term partnership and cooperation strategy based on a shared vision and values related to the four missions of our European university (education, research, innovation, and service to society).

c. Establishment of local coordination

To strengthen the Alliance's coordination within the institution, a project manager/institutional coordinator position for the steering and implementation of activities at the local level was created and operationalized from January 2021. The position includes a wide range of missions and skills such as financial and HR management, project management with coordination of activities at the

local level, structuring of local coordination, management of a team with staff integrated into the services, working in an international environment in English, adaptation to the requirements of the project and the institution, and intercultural skills, diplomacy, problem-solving in complex and varied environments.

Local coordination for project management has been strengthened with the recruitment of a project manager whose mission is to coordinate research activities across La Rochelle University.

With a view to full integration and ownership by the university community, the strategy at the local level has been to infuse the project's activities into the relevant departments through the deployment of human resources:

- Recruitment of new agents to handle the implementation of activities,
- People already in post, who have integrated EU-CONEXUS missions into their scope.

Staff, funded by EU-CONEXUS, have therefore been deployed to various departments:

- 0.5 FTE in charge of administrative and financial management,
- 1 FTE in charge of communication,
- 1 FTE coordinator of cultural and artistic activities, within the Cultural Space/Student House and the Career Network and of science & society relations with secondary education establishments within the Guidance and Integration Department,
- 0.5 FTE International Relations Assistant for the management of student and staff mobility, based within the International Relations & Francophonie Directorate,
- 0.5 FTE Academic Administrator for Bachelor's Degree Programs,
- Four people from the information systems department are responsible for part of the implementation of the Alliance's Smart Campus.

Some departments/services have in their roadmap the operational implementation of EU-CONEXUS activities related to their scope:

- The head of the Project Engineering and Agreements Unit and a project manager from the same department are leading the establishment of a transnational office for submitting joint projects at the Alliance level.
- The head of cross-disciplinary studies at the Collegium (Bachelor's degree) has taken over the management of studies for minor programs since the project's launch.
- The director of innovative teaching methods and two members of her team are part of the working group and are deploying training locally for academic staff.
- The Director of International Relations and Francophonie supports the management of mobility flows and the evaluation of research mobility applications.
- The scientific coordinator, from the scientific support and coordination service, supports local coordination in the implementation of research activities.
- The coordinator of the COFUND project (another project won by the institution for the development of international joint doctoral supervision) is responsible for implementing the project's doctoral activities.
- The director of DIDEV, a continuing education engineer and a partnerships officer contributed to the implementation of activities related to the territory.

This integration within the services allows for better integration of activities by competent staff and a dissemination of the Alliance's activities within the institution. As an example, the testimony of our communications officer, Aurélie Idier, below, highlights these aspects: " *The integration of my*

position within the communications department of La Rochelle University allows me to coherently deploy the EU-CONEXUS communication strategy in line with European priorities (interdisciplinarity, sustainability, inclusion, innovation), while ensuring the visibility of the Alliance's actions among the student and teaching community, researchers, staff and partners. By directly accessing the university's communication tools and channels (Univ'infos (weekly newsletter), intranet, social networks, website, press, etc.), I can promote the institution's European projects (e.g., MSCA COFUND EU-DOCS for SmUCS), La Rochelle University's research related to the Alliance's theme (Sustainable Smart Urban Coastline), and effectively disseminate its initiatives, thus contributing to La Rochelle University's visibility at the European level.

Local coordination relied on the establishment of a steering committee bringing together all political and operational stakeholders in the project. This committee includes representatives of the governance (president, relevant vice-presidents), the university's strategic and functional departments, as well as the academic and administrative teams involved in the EU-CONEXUS working groups.

Beyond human resources, local coordination has been structured, notably with the establishment of a steering committee integrating the various political and operational actors involved in the project: President, VP European University, VP Training & Student Life, VP International Relations, VP Research, institutional coordinator and project manager, general management of services, management of international relations, management of innovative pedagogies, management of the development of vocational training, work-study and socio-economic relations, management of guidance and integration, management of training and university life, management of the LUDI institute (master/research), management of the doctoral school, management of innovation, teachers and contributors in the services involved in the working groups.

This innovative steering committee connects the president, vice-president, and the entire university community: administrative and academic staff contributing to the Alliance's activities. It thus unites stakeholders around a cross-cutting international project, championed by the university's leadership and aligned with institutional policy.

In order to further disseminate the project's activities within the community, information is distributed through thematic committees bringing together different departments, administrative and academic staff: student life and training committees, IDSE committee (Innovation, Socio-economic Development and Entrepreneurship) and international relations committee.

The institution's involvement in the project is also reflected in the participation of the president, and the vice-presidents of Education, Research and International in the bodies of the Alliance: Governing Board, Academic Council and Research Council with, on average, one meeting per month.

However, internal obstacles have arisen, notably limited ownership of the project by the university community beyond the staff directly involved. This is partly due to a lack of clarity regarding the scope of the proposed actions and insufficient visibility of the mechanisms and opportunities offered. The roadmap for the new presidency and vice-presidency will include discussions on further structuring local coordination to better integrate the project into the various departments and units, and to ensure its ownership by the entire university community.

Part II: Internationalization of training through the structuring of an inter-university campus a.

Student training: personalization and internationalization of study paths

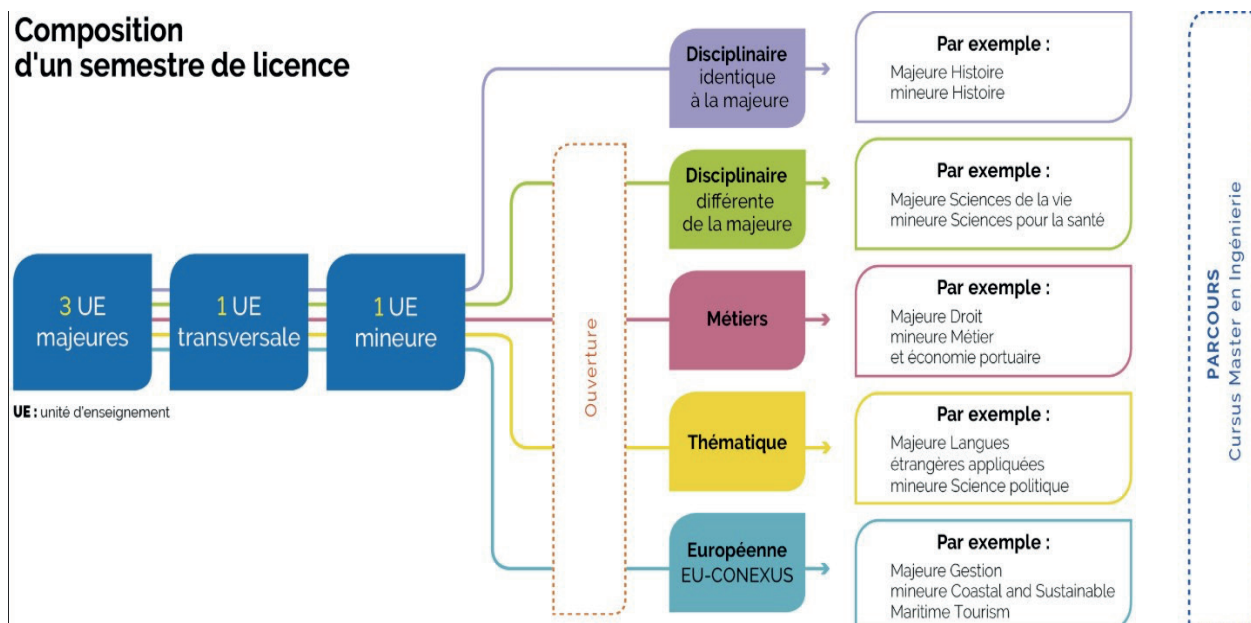
The European Alliance aims to enable the structuring of an inter-university campus at all levels (Bachelor's, Master's and Doctorate) around its area of specialization: the challenges of sustainable development in coastal areas.

At La Rochelle University, the development of academic programs has been part of a comprehensive political strategy from the outset, consistent with the main objectives of the 2022–2027 institutional contract. This dynamic aims to promote new teaching models, enrich campus life to improve the student experience, and strengthen local ties and European cooperation. It also contributes to the internationalization of the institution in close connection with the partnerships established through EU-CONEXUS.

At the undergraduate level, priority is given to strengthening and diversifying the English language training offered across the nine partner institutions. This translates into the implementation of **minors**, **micro-certifications**, and **challenge-based projects** that *place* students at the heart of a dynamic learning environment, open to European and global issues, and within a framework of personalized student pathways.

At La Rochelle University, these programs allow for the internationalization of students' academic paths through courses taught in English, intercultural experiences supported by blended learning, and opportunities for students to participate in short-term European mobility programs. Interdisciplinarity is also valued within these programs.

More specifically, La Rochelle University initiated the EU - [CONEXUS Minors Program](#), inspired by the Open Curriculum model of the “New Curricula at the University” (NCU) program, with the ambition of expanding it to the European university level. This open study program, supported by the French National Research Agency (ANR), promotes interdisciplinary teaching. The major/minor system allows for flexibility and personalization of curricula and the development of more attractive profiles for undergraduate employability. The EU-CONEXUS minors offer a European dimension to students' projects. These minors can support students' professional development by offering courses grounded in research and the professional world, starting in the first year of undergraduate studies.



A flagship program of the first phase, **two EU-CONEXUS minors** were developed around the themes of the Sustainable Smart Urban Coastline (LUDI). These programs allowed for experimentation with innovative teaching methods such as hybrid mobility, combining synchronous and asynchronous instruction with in-person modules over short periods (5 days). [Catalogues](#) Around thirty courses in English are offered to all undergraduate students from their first year. Students have the option of choosing two 6 ECTS courses per semester up to their third year of undergraduate studies in order to obtain the Alliance minor program certificate (30 ECTS).

Since the launch of the minors program in spring 2021, 225 registrations for 99 students have been recorded at our institution. La Rochelle University ranks third within the Alliance in terms of the number of registered students.

Among the courses developed by the Alliance for undergraduate students, the minors program is the most effective because it is integrated into the course structures from the first year of undergraduate studies.

However, it should be noted that internal obstacles have arisen related to the difficulty of synchronizing timetables, adapting administrative and academic monitoring procedures, implementing tools for hybrid courses, and mobilizing and retaining our 10 teachers offering courses within the framework of this program.

Other mechanisms are currently being developed within the Alliance:

- Micro - [credentials](#), also known as “micro-credentials” at the European level, are short courses strongly recommended by the European Commission. At the Alliance level, the [aim](#) is to complement undergraduate students' courses by offering a wide range of interdisciplinary courses worth 1 ECTS credit, allowing them to earn certificates recognizing their participation in the program. The implementation of this program has faced challenges, particularly due to the lack of an official national framework and a lack of formal integration into academic programs. Currently offered as an extracurricular activity, an institutional certificate is awarded for completed courses. At the European University level, certificates are

also issued via the European Commission's *European Digital Credentials platform* to enhance and Europeanize students' academic experience.

- *Challenge-based* projects are currently being developed through two mechanisms:
 - **BIPs (Blended Intensive Programmes)** in the form of summer schools combining online courses and short mobility periods, inter-campus collaborations between teachers around the LUDI theme;
 - **COIL (Collaborative Online International Learning) – Virtual exchanges, short inter-campus program** . These short inter-campus programs will be based on online challenges, always related to the same specialization. These courses will also increase the institution's international appeal by offering courses for incoming exchange students and diversifying the range of courses taught in English.

In terms of resources, the implementation of these activities has generated human and budgetary costs.

1. At the administrative staff level, the implementation of the undergraduate programs required integration into the cross-departmental student services department:
 - *Minors* : the head of the department has become a *Minor Officer*. This is in addition to her workload as head of department, with, initially, her position being partly funded by a project, then taken over by the institution; a student services manager is also involved in monitoring students' academic progress;
 - *Micro-certifications*: a part-time school management officer supported by project funds (PIA-ANR funds);
2. At the academic staff level, this has resulted in funding for model-making hours and recognition of contributions due to content creation and teaching in English:
 - 14 teachers involved in the programs at the bachelor's level;
 - The model hours and valuations were covered by the PIA-ANR funds, which, since the launch of the Alliance, represents an envelope of €40,925 consumed;
 - It should be noted that these valorization mechanisms have now been discontinued since the initial phase is already over;
 - However, incentive bonuses are possible to reward teachers' involvement in these training programs.

Master's level training offer , the first phase of the Alliance was marked by the creation of the Joint Master *program in Marine Biotechnology* between the 6 founding partners of the Alliance.

This international career path was developed thanks to the award on November 22, 2016 of a European project “ *A Blue Biotechnology Master for a Blue Career* ” (BBMBC) “ *Implementation of the European Maritime and Fisheries Fund Work Programme 2016 Action 1.2.1.2 – Blue Careers in Europe, A Blue Biotechnology Master for a Blue Career, Proposal N°EASME/EMFF/2016/1.2.1.2/052*. This year-long Master's program in *Applied Blue Biotechnology* met the expectations of industry and research organizations involved in marine biotechnology. The desire to continue this project within the Alliance led to the co-creation and securing of Erasmus Mundus funding for the development of the *Joint Master's Program in Marine Biotechnology* . Since September 2022, this Master's program has welcomed students who begin their studies in Spain, continue them in France, and then specialize at one of the other partner universities. The development of this Master's program generates significant educational benefits for students by fostering open-mindedness,

internationalizing their academic paths, and building academic and professional networks—all essential factors for their success.

This program also contributes to strengthening the international recognition and attractiveness of the Alliance's member institutions, thanks to Erasmus Mundus funding. It allows for a diversification of student profiles within this joint master's program through a 100% English-language curriculum.

Two other joint masters in cooperation with the 9 current members of the Alliance are being set up around the “LUDI” themes integrating micro-certifications.

However, numerous obstacles and risks have been identified:

- Double accreditation (joint master's degree under development) because of the new field of study: national accreditation with HCERES and European accreditation;
- Difficulties in creating joint interdisciplinary degrees, France has to deal with restrictions: accreditation given for a field of study;
- Registration fees exceeding the amounts set at the national level: blocking the awarding of a master's degree, the ministry directs students towards the awarding of a DU conferring a master's degree (not very attractive for our national students);
- French legislation does not allow the issuance of a joint diploma with a foreign institution if certain regulatory requirements, such as formal criteria like the quality of the paper support (authentic parchment), the registration number and the signature of the State representative, are not met;
- No regulatory framework for the issuance of micro-certifications (LUDI master);
- Lack of visibility at the territorial and national levels resulting from the application of the “Mundus” diploma rules;
- All costs for the existing master's program are covered solely by European funds (Erasmus Mundus program): approximately €110,000 per year => approximately €530,430 (2022-2027). The question of sustainability will be addressed at the end of the project.

The implementation of the European label is thanks to the work carried out by the consortium. [ED - POSTER](#) is not sufficient.

In order to strengthen the sustainability of joint diplomas at the national level, it would be desirable for the ministry to support institutions by:

- Allowing recognition of European accreditation without requiring a parallel application for national accreditation;
- Providing specific financial support to enhance the attractiveness of joint programs at the national level.

In general, several internal obstacles and challenges were observed: the sheer number of training programs offered, a lack of clarity and community ownership, difficulties in mobilizing the teaching staff (particularly due to an already high teaching load at the institution level), and the language barrier. Added to this are budgetary constraints linked to the external environment and national decisions made by the Ministry of Higher Education, Research and Innovation (MESR). With higher teaching costs, projects will be directly impacted, which will necessarily lead to prioritizing training programs developed by the Alliance and the institution's involvement.

Finally, the Alliance supports students in the professionalization of their career path through the development of a Career Center, a JobTeaser platform that centralizes international internship and

job offers as well as resources (CV creation, interview preparation, feedback on international experiences, etc.).

b. Teacher training and strengthening teacher collaborations for the development of training programs

On the one hand, in the second phase of the Alliance (2022-2026), a Teaching Academy was implemented, proposing nine training methodologies.

A strong demand for improved teaching skills was observed during the pilot phase, particularly regarding the evolving teaching and learning environment. Joint academic offerings, pedagogical collaboration, and virtual teaching have increased the demand for intercultural and digital skills.

EU-CONEXUS's long-term strategy defines new educational directions and student-centered teaching methodologies. It also places teachers at the heart of its continuous quality improvement strategy, in line with the now essential green and digital skills, while encouraging initiative, critical thinking, and creativity.

The *EU-CONEXUS Teaching Academy* is fully aligned with the alliance's curricula, training teachers in innovative new teaching methodologies. The "train the trainers" approach disseminates these practices throughout the academic community while strengthening the inclusive nature of the initiative.

In terms of human resources, this involved mobilizing the Innovative Pedagogy Department (University Pedagogy Service) and three team members: two instructional designers completed the "train-the-trainer" program at the alliance level and then implemented it locally within the teaching community, all under the supervision of the department director. These activities were integrated into their roadmap, particularly their training catalog.

This also facilitated team mobility across Europe, offering them opportunities to attend training courses and participate in *job shadowing programs* to meet their European counterparts. These experiences allowed for the exchange of best practices, the sharing of resources, and the development of new educational projects, particularly those related to the ecological transition.

Furthermore, to strengthen faculty collaboration in the development of joint programs, a dedicated support service ([Office for the Development of Study Offers](#)) has been established. This transnational office assists teaching teams in designing joint programs, accreditation processes, and more broadly, in structuring the educational offerings across the Alliance. Currently, two Master's programs involving La Rochelle University are benefiting from this support.

Part III: Internationalization of research: establishment of a research space “LUDI” at the European level

La Rochelle University (LRUniv) stands out for its commitment to the European EUCONEXUS initiative. This strategic alliance transcends the boundaries of mere academic collaboration. At a time when scientific research faces global challenges—geopolitical, environmental, and economic—the EUCONEXUS European University emerges as a structured and pragmatic response to contemporary issues. Growing tensions on the international stage, and in particular the increasing restrictions on research topics in many countries, notably the United States, underscore the growing importance of further structuring scientific alliances at the European level. In this context, EUCONEXUS, and more broadly, all European alliances, serve as bulwarks against scientific isolationism. By fostering structured, sustainable, and multidisciplinary cooperation among higher education institutions, these alliances offer a secure space for academic and scientific collaboration.

They thus make it possible to preserve the free flow of knowledge, to pool expertise and to respond collectively to major societal challenges at the European and international level.

For La Rochelle University, this alliance represents a major strategic lever for structuring and energizing its research by promoting interdisciplinarity, knowledge sharing, strengthening doctoral training, pooling expertise, and networking, paving the way for innovative scientific solutions to major societal challenges. It also offers the University the opportunity to consolidate its position as a leading academic player in research on sustainable and smart coastal zones and, ultimately, to become a European benchmark in these areas.

From this perspective, the impact of the EU-CONEXUS Alliance on research at La Rochelle University is explored through three main axes: interdisciplinarity around research related to the coastline, doctoral training and finally, responsibility and inclusivity in research.

- **has. An interdisciplinary alliance structured around a strong identity: the challenges of sustainable development in coastal areas**

One of the major contributions of the EU-CONEXUS Alliance to La Rochelle University is the creation of strong interdisciplinary collaboration to address the complex challenges related to urban coastal areas and the energy transition. Solutions to contemporary challenges can only emerge through a holistic approach, combining knowledge from diverse disciplines—a dynamic fully fostered by EU-CONEXUS. The LUDI Institute (Sustainable and Intelligent Urban Coast), a core component of La Rochelle University, embodies this approach by bringing together experts in social, environmental, technological, and engineering sciences. This specialization gives La Rochelle University a central position in scientific debates, developing innovative projects that address sustainability challenges in coastal areas. This alliance allows us to go even further and place this theme at the heart of current research, thereby giving our University a European dimension, recognizing it as a leading player in these issues.

The [ENABLES project](#) This is a concrete example of the success of this alliance focused on coastal issues. Funded by the Horizon Europe program (2024–2029), this project aims to intensify scientific and academic cooperation within the alliance by developing an innovative ecosystem that fosters synergies between higher education and local stakeholders (businesses, local authorities, society). The objective is to build upon the work of the European Research Area (ERA), particularly in the field of Sustainable Smart Urban Coastlines (LUDI), with an approach centered on digital twins—virtual replicas of real objects, systems, or processes that allow for the simulation, analysis, and optimization of their operation in real time. ENABLES has proposed two programs combining interactive workshops, training sessions, and mobility opportunities:

- ***Expanding Your Horizon***, designed to enhance the professional skills of early-career researchers, involved a total of 353 participants across a range of topics. Furthermore, the "*Expanding Your Horizon*" program was developed based on the needs identified among young researchers through a questionnaire completed by 367 people. This participatory approach enabled the creation of content tailored to the specific needs of the field.
- ***Research Management Administrator***, aimed at encouraging collaboration and knowledge exchange among those responsible for research management across the Alliance. Nearly 224 people attended the various training sessions, culminating in a mobility program at the Irish university South East Technological University - Waterford (SETU).

These two training programs, developed following consultations with young researchers, have facilitated the sharing of knowledge and best practices, fostering a culture of mutual support among

partners and strengthening the La Rochelle University network in Europe. They also provide recognition for the internal staff who contributed to the creation of these programs, which are being disseminated throughout Europe within the universities that comprise our alliance.

The creation of the PDSO ([Project Development Support Office](#)) is another example of success. Its members come from the various partner universities. It supports researchers in developing and submitting their research proposals to obtain European funding, ultimately strengthening collaborations and partnerships. For administrative staff, it is also a unique opportunity to exchange knowledge and develop their skills. Thanks to the PDSO, several projects have been launched, such as ENABLES, mentioned earlier, as well as the MSCA (Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions) COFUND (Horizon Europe) project, "[EU - DOCS for SmUCS](#)". The project, led by La Rochelle University, plans to recruit 17 doctoral students and aims to train the next generation of researchers working on Sustainable Smart Urban Coastlines (LUDI). Furthermore, the PDSO (PhD Support and Orientation Service) helps raise awareness within the community (particularly the research community) about European funding opportunities. PDSO members at La Rochelle University now incorporate webinars, information sessions, training (notably BIP), and networking opportunities for EU-CONEXUS into their activities. This dynamic is particularly relevant for the institution within the framework of the **ExcellR'H project** (a project stemming from the PIA call for proposals "Accelerating Development Strategies for Higher Education and Research Institutions"), for which a European funding strategy has been developed. From the initial awareness-raising stage, the aim is to connect partners and achieve economies of scale alongside other PDSO members, capitalize on each other's actions, and increase the momentum of project submissions. For example, the PDSO manages internal funding (*Seed Funding*) to financially support small-scale projects between at least two alliance partners. By the end of the current Erasmus+ funding period, approximately twenty projects will have received support.

Since joining the EU-CONEXUS European alliance, La Rochelle University has benefited from a structured cooperation framework at the European level, enabling it to significantly strengthen its actions in the areas of academic mobility, international visibility, and the development of collaborative projects. The EU-CONEXUS alliance offers two types of funding to support mobility:

- Budgets managed locally by each partner university are dedicated to research mobility between member institutions of the alliance. At the start of the project, each university was allocated its own budget. La Rochelle University has a budget of €37,844. To date, €28,521 has been committed, leaving a balance of €9,322, enough to fund approximately eight additional mobilities. However, this budget must also cover part of the costs of attending the annual EU-CONEXUS conference, which brings together an average of 10 members of the research community each year. The departmental budget (CD17) currently funds six mobilities (€7,000), requiring additional funding from EU-CONEXUS to cover the remaining four. Two research mobilities are planned for the 2025-2026 academic year. In addition, an unused PIA envelope of €48,000 is available to finance specific mobilities, in particular those of people carrying out a joint PhD and those of researchers who are involved in structuring projects.
- A shared budget, managed centrally by the Alliance, is intended to finance participation in international conferences and the invitation of external experts. Regarding the second mechanism, the initial budget is €209,148, of which nearly €60,000 has been spent to date. The remaining balance of approximately €150,000 must be used by October 2026, with an estimated 80 to 90 remaining mobility opportunities (participation in international conferences and invitations of experts).

Membership in EU-CONEXUS allows La Rochelle University to structure its international activities within a sustainable European framework, enhance the visibility of its research in high-level scientific networks, promote outgoing and incoming mobility through clearly defined funding mechanisms, support young researchers (particularly doctoral students) in their international professional development, and finally, embed the university within a dynamic of European projects, in line with the major priorities of the European Higher Education and Research Area. Thus, EU-CONEXUS constitutes a key strategic tool for strengthening the attractiveness of La Rochelle University, developing its international scientific network, and supporting the implementation of its regional development strategy.

The annual EU-CONEXUS conferences, mentioned above, are also highlights of the alliance's activities, bringing together all partners to discuss scientific advancements. They offer a valuable forum for exchange, visibility, and dissemination of collaborative projects conducted within the alliance. The latest edition, held from October 29 to 31, 2024, at the Bucharest University of Civil Engineering (UTCB), took place as part of the EENVIRO international scientific conference, on the theme of "*Sustainable Solutions for Energy and Environment* ." This event attracted over 300 participants, 20 invited speakers, and involved 50 universities and research institutions worldwide. The next conference will be held from October 21 to 23, 2025, at the Catholic University of Valencia (UCV), Spain, on the theme of "*Transformative Research for Urban Coastal Sustainability* ." It will aim to explore interdisciplinary solutions to the challenges facing coastal cities, with a focus on topics such as climate change, health, infrastructure, and sustainable economies. These conferences showcase research conducted at La Rochelle University, build bridges between disciplines, strengthen ties, and foster or initiate transnational collaborations.

Thus, the EU-CONEXUS alliance allows La Rochelle University to position itself at the forefront of interdisciplinary innovation, relying on a collaborative dynamic that transcends the traditional boundaries of academic and geographical disciplines. Through EU-CONEXUS, La Rochelle University is part of an innovative research model capable of responding efficiently and appropriately to contemporary challenges. Another major focus lies in doctoral training, with the aim of preparing tomorrow's researchers to collaborate within a shared European space.

b. Doctoral training: towards a Europeanization of career paths

One of the strategic dimensions of European alliances lies in doctoral training. Access to European doctoral training not only enriches the doctoral career path but also addresses the mobility challenges inherent in contemporary research. Thanks to EU-CONEXUS, doctoral candidates benefit from a European collaborative network and cross-disciplinary training provided by the alliance's various partners from the very beginning of their careers.

Joint PhD supervision grants promote collaborative projects between several European institutions, providing an essential international dimension to scientific careers. This is a valuable asset, as it allows doctoral candidates to enrich their scientific experience and offers them a crucial international perspective for their future careers. By facilitating their mobility, EU-CONEXUS enhances their experience and helps make La Rochelle University an attractive hub for young researchers, thereby strengthening its visibility.

Each year, a [PhD Summer School is offered](#) , a flagship initiative for the training of young researchers. This event allows doctoral candidates to meet, exchange ideas, and benefit from personal and academic development sessions. It creates a stimulating environment where they can not only deepen their disciplinary expertise but also develop skills in cross-cutting areas (project management, scientific communication, research ethics, etc.) within a framework conducive to exchange and building a European network to foster strong European research.

Within the framework of the ENABLES project, the EU-CONEXUS alliance has initiated joint doctoral supervision programs between its partner universities, thereby strengthening the internationalization of doctoral pathways. These programs allow for the joint supervision of theses by two institutions located in different countries, fostering cultural exchange, mobility, and the sharing of expertise. Furthermore, La Rochelle University coordinates the Horizon Europe MSCA COFUND project "*EU-DOCS for SmUCS*," which provides funding for 17 joint doctoral theses in the field of Sustainable and Smart Urban Coastlines (LUDI). This program aims to train a new generation of high-level scientists, grounded in cutting-edge European research dynamics. The EU-CONEXUS alliance provides strategic support to this project (as a program partner) by facilitating cooperation between partner universities and by facilitating the mobility and exchange of expertise necessary for the success of doctoral students. Thanks to this synergy, EU-CONEXUS helps to strengthen the visibility and attractiveness of La Rochelle University on the European and international stage.

These mechanisms contribute significantly to the prominence of La Rochelle University at the European level, reinforcing its leading role in collaborative research. They also represent a valuable asset for doctoral candidates, whose academic paths gain recognition and visibility, both within the scientific community and among institutional and socio-economic partners. However, the lack of a harmonized legal framework in Europe for joint doctoral supervision remains an obstacle. To facilitate their implementation, a framework document has been drafted within EU-CONEXUS. It defines the governance procedures, the selection of research topics, the language of thesis defense, and the recognition of degrees. This initiative ultimately aims to contribute to the European harmonization of doctoral programs.

c. Inclusion, equality, and social responsibility: research open to society. Inclusivity, equality, and the link between science and society in research are pillars we wish to strengthen within the alliance. In a global context where scientific research is sometimes questioned for its lack of transparency or social impact, acting collectively with nine partners gives greater scope to our actions.

Promoting gender equality in research is a key lever in this area. Initiatives such as mentoring for female doctoral students aim to remove the structural barriers that limit their full participation in academia. At the same time, regular training on research ethics and scientific integrity is offered to all members to strengthen a culture of responsibility. The objective remains the sharing of knowledge and the creation of spaces for reflection and debate, in order to enhance skills within La Rochelle University while raising awareness among our European partners. Participatory science is also encouraged. By involving the community in projects, EU-CONEXUS fosters more open, democratic research that is rooted in local realities. Two emblematic initiatives illustrate this ambition:

- Within the ENABLES project, the creation of an ***Open Access Journal*** on the theme of Sustainable and Smart Urban Coastlines, freely accessible online to everyone, fosters connections between current research in Europe and European citizens. Several members of the research community from each partner university contribute to writing articles related to their research topics. This journal thus helps to make research accessible, promotes collaboration between researchers from diverse disciplines around a common theme, and showcases La Rochelle University and its research teams.
- Within the alliance, science outreach activities are regularly offered, such as the ***"Comic Strip in Science" project***, which aims to bring scientists and illustrators together to translate research projects into comic strips. The project seeks to raise public awareness and increase interest in science. It also aims to inform a non-expert audience about how EU-CONEXUS addresses coastal zone sustainability.

These initiatives are often difficult for a university the size of La Rochelle to implement. Thanks to EU-CONEXUS, we pool human and financial resources to carry out these ambitious projects.

Part IV: Internationalization of student life: fostering campus life and creating a student community

has. Transformative achievements at the level of Campus activities

Creating campus life is one of the strategic priorities of the alliance and La Rochelle University is leading the working group "Community engagement through arts and culture".

The objectives are multiple and aim to intensify the sharing of common European values, strengthen the EU-CONEXUS identity and the sense of belonging to the Alliance through arts and culture, and in particular through the organisation of a bi-annual festival, allow an opening and visibility of student projects to the general public in the territories, support and produce European student creation, promote the diversity of intercultural artistic expressions and finally facilitate inter-campus exchanges in these areas.

Various artistic and cultural projects, competitions or events are regularly organised: 4 festivals including 1 at La Rochelle University in March 2023, which welcomed 70 members of the Alliance and the last in Cyprus (May 2025) welcoming nearly 160 members of the Alliance including a delegation from La Rochelle of about thirty people (staff and students); an inter-campus dance project around LUDI (140 participants including 12 from La Rochelle University), a poetry competition on the feeling of belonging (84 participants including 6 from La Rochelle University) and an ongoing science popularisation project aimed at transposing 9 research projects (one per country) into comics.

In parallel, students are encouraged to develop inter-campus projects once a year through calls for proposals. A total of 5 students from La Rochelle University have participated in these calls for proposals since their launch in 2023.

In terms of human and budgetary resources, these activities were made possible thanks to the commitment of a part-time project manager, funded on a project basis. All activities were financed by European Commission funds (€30,000) supplemented by "European Universities" funding from the PIA-ANR (€40,650).

- b. Transformative achievements for the creation of a student community

In order to structure the EU-CONEXUS student community, a governance body was created: the *Student Board* (SB).

The Student Union (SB) is the representative body for students from all partner institutions. It participates in strategic decision-making at all levels and implements specific activities for students. SB members are represented on all governing bodies. It meets annually or regularly online.

In our institution, two representatives were elected under the following conditions: one representative from community life and one representative elected at the local level.

The structuring of the student community has been accentuated thanks to the implementation of an Erasmus+ side project. [*lamstudent*](#) aiming to create an EU-CONEXUS student identity through several activities led by La Rochelle University: creation of a "Student Life" logo, definition of the identity through a survey and focus groups with students enrolled in the European University's programs, and the organization of inter-campus activities. One of the flagship initiatives is the Student Congress, an event designed to bring together the EU-CONEXUS student community to formulate recommendations for the future of the Alliance and develop a roadmap for student life.

This initiative was also included in the program of the festival held in Cyprus in May 2025: six students from our institution participated.

The implementation of the " **lamstudent** " project was made possible thanks to the recruitment of a project manager, integrated into the student life department.

All these campus life activities represent real opportunities to raise awareness of the Alliance's cultural and linguistic diversity and to share European values with the student community, but they are not sufficiently visible or well-known beyond students enrolled in Alliance programs. Discussions are underway to further structure campus life and extend these opportunities to a wider audience.

Part V: Internationalizing links with territories: strengthening links between science and society, training and networking of socio-economic actors

has. Mission "Science and Society" of the European University: raising public awareness of "LUDI" themes

EU-CONEXUS also has in its roadmap the strengthening of "Science and Society" links with the aim of raising awareness among secondary school students about sustainable development issues and more specifically about LUDI, a specialty of the Alliance.

The flagship "science and society" initiative is the organization of an annual school competition [Think Smart, Create Green](#) ". To date, 5 editions have been held, an action that has continued since the start of the Alliance.

This competition has several objectives:

- raising awareness among secondary schools about issues related to the sustainability of coastal areas;
- to promote European consciousness/Euro-citizenship;
- strengthen links with secondary schools.

It is aimed at middle school students (12-14 years old) and high school students (14-17 years old) with two phases: a national final on site and a European hybrid final.

At the institutional level, it was decided to offer this action throughout the Poitiers academy in order to raise awareness among a wider public about sustainable development in coastal areas while highlighting the internationalization of the University and strengthening its visibility among potential future students.

The 4th ^{edition} (2023-2024) was a resounding success, with 11 teams (44 students) in the middle school category and 30 teams (120 students) in the high school category. In total, the five editions have seen participation from 60 middle school students and 256 high school students from the Poitiers academy who submitted a project, with 20 middle school students and 48 high school students participating in the national final, and 28 students competing in the European final in English.

Beyond the territorial impact, this competition also fostered the development of Erasmus+ partnerships between high schools in the EU-CONEXUS territories (Lycée Polyvalent du Pays d'Aunis in Surgères and the Klaipėdos universiteto Žemynos gimnazija high school in Klaipėda, Lithuania).

This achievement is transformative in that it allows for the internationalization, Europeanization, and diversification of services offered to secondary schools, with activities conducted in English and centered around "LUDI" (Learning, Innovation, and Diversity). It strengthens the local presence through innovative projects linked to major environmental challenges in coastal areas: it is therefore a further step towards La Rochelle University for the target audiences.

In terms of human and budgetary resources, this activity required on the one hand the mobilization of a part-time person, funded on a project basis and integrated within the Orientation and Integration Department and, on the other hand, the financial support of the Departmental Council of Charente-Maritime to finance organizational costs related to this action (coverage of transport to facilitate the participation of establishments in the national final on site).

To date, since the start of the project, a total budget of 13,532.94 euros has been consumed for this activity, of which 8,185.64 euros were financed by the Department (17) and 5,347.30 euros by the European Commission.

b. Training and networking of socio-economic actors in the territories of the Alliance The European Alliance also wishes to strengthen links with the territories and network territorial socio-economic actors.

EU-CONEXUS offers opportunities for the territory:

- **The stakeholder academy A space for leaders in the blue growth sector** . It is a transnational continuing education space for leaders in the blue growth sector.
 - **2023 Edition: Blue Economy** : to understand a An innovative approach to thriving in emerging blue economies, with 8 sessions of 8 hours each and 26 participants
 - **2024 Edition: Sustainable City and Sustainable Port** Supporting stakeholders in developing strategies for smart cities and sustainable ports, with 9 four-hour sessions. Final session in Valencia hosting 20 participants including the Valencia Port Foundation, the Valencia Port Authority and the Piraeus Port Authority → working on solutions to establish a better connection between the port and the citizens of the city of Valencia
- **Challenge -based projects : challenges to strengthen student/business collaboration** . These are innovative training projects centered around challenges set by socio-economic partners. Undergraduate students from the various partners will work together on these projects in a hybrid format (online and in-person). Plans are underway for a launch in 2025-2026.
- **The LUDI Master's program: a Master's program by and for socio-economic actors**
Course development is based on the needs of socio-economic partners: Skills Needs Survey – 537 participants from 9 partner countries. Skills needs were identified, particularly in the areas of sustainable development, carbon management, technologies for sustainable development, and responsible digital practices. Discussions are also underway regarding the micro-credentials that will comprise the master's program and will be available through continuing education.
- **The PDSO: support for joint applications to calls for projects**
The Project Development Support Office for Training, Research & Innovation is a support team dedicated to developing and professionalizing the submission of applications to European calls for projects. This is an additional asset for cross-application projects in Higher Education and Research (ESR) and/or other fields.
Local authorities.

- **Experience-sharing and networking events**

Scientific conferences, cultural projects, the EU-CONEXUS festival, the "Think Smart, Create Green" competition, and initiatives focused on innovation: these are opportunities to learn more about EU-CONEXUS and to develop and strengthen collaborations between universities and stakeholders in their respective territories.

Not many socio-economic actors at the local level have participated in these various actions, but discussions are underway to integrate them more into the activities and adapt them to their needs (continuing education in particular).

In terms of human resources, these links with the territories and their socio-economic actors were made possible with the involvement of human resources from the Directorate for the Development of Vocational Training, Apprenticeships and Socio-Economic Relations:

- the director ensured the dissemination to target audiences and his teams;
- The partnership development officer promoted the 2 editions of the *Stakeholder Academy* during these meetings with local stakeholders;
- The continuing education engineer participated in the first edition of the *Stakeholder Academy* and dedicated 64 hours of her time to this activity. Her skills were highly valued within the Alliance, as her expertise in developing continuing education programs proved beneficial for the implementation of the second edition.

Part VI: Contribution to the strengthening of European citizenship

has. New mobility formats for students in terms of training and campus life

The strengthening of European identity can be seen through training opportunities and student engagement.

In terms of training, short mobility courses (5 days) are offered to undergraduate students as part of the Minors Programme (13 LRUUniv students have benefited from this), micro-certifications (6 students will participate in July 2025) and *Blended-Intensive Programmes* in the form of winter and summer schools (under development).

New forms of mobility are being offered through hybrid courses: 99 LRUUniv students have participated in the minors program and have taken 225 courses since its launch in spring 2021. These courses represent 6 ECTS credits per semester, or 45 hours, during which students interact with professors and students from across the Alliance. Within this program, courses related to the "LUDI" initiative are offered through two main specializations: [a minor in Blue Economy and Growth](#), and [Minor in coastal development and Sustainable maritime tourism](#). 31 LRUUniv students took micro-certification courses related to this specialization. These interdisciplinary courses offer our students the opportunity to personalize and internationalize their academic path. They also provide a valuable opportunity to exchange ideas with their European counterparts on common societal issues related to their experience in coastal areas, while developing essential intercultural skills.

For the past three years (since March 2023), La Rochelle University has hosted around twenty students from the Alliance each year to participate in the entrepreneurship-focused mobility week within the framework of the EU-CONEXUS Minors: workshops and "innovative" team projects. This facilitates intercultural exchange, communication in English, and teamwork related to entrepreneurship and innovation.

[Summer schools](#) for [doctoral students](#) The alliance, which began in July 2021, brings together around thirty participants annually. They take part in workshops and personal and academic development sessions that emphasize exchange, facilitating the building of a European network with the aim of creating strong European research. The institution will host approximately sixty participants between July 21st and 25th, including faculty and doctoral students from the alliance. Doctoral students from La Rochelle University participate every year.

Beyond the European University's training programs, since the launch of EUCONEXUS, there has been a significant increase in outgoing European mobility to these destinations thanks to the implementation of an incentive scheme (supplementary scholarships via PIA-ANR funding). Combined with the Alliance's short-term mobility programs, 43 outgoing "physical" mobility experiences were recorded in 2023-2024, compared to zero before the project's launch (2018-2019).

It should also be noted that mobilities to European destinations outside EU-CONEXUS are also on the rise despite a slight decrease for 2022-2023, which indicates that the rise of EUCONEXUS is not simply a transfer of existing mobilities: 86 mobilities (outside the Alliance) in 2022-2023 compared to 71 in 2018-2019.

All these mobilities reinforce the sense of European belonging of the student community, facilitating encounters, exchanges and the sharing of cultures.

Students from LRUniv also participated in inter - [campus projects](#) around the "LUDI": creation of a mural " *European Augmented Reality Mural Project* ", sharing of European culinary cultures " *Taste EU-CONEXUS Project* ", reflections on environmental challenges in coastal tourist areas " *Coastal Conexus Project* " and implementation of training to raise awareness of ecology in coastal areas "Big Blue".

As part of campus life activities, and more specifically cultural and artistic projects, students were encouraged to participate in festivals to present their projects and in participatory workshops. This took place during the *Student Congress* at the [Festival in Cyprus](#). (May 2025), students were asked to reflect together on European values and the definition of European student identity. Following the Festival in Cyprus last May, LRUniv students shared their feedback. As examples, here are some excerpts from their testimonials: " *an enriching experience* ," " *creating connections with other students around common interests* ," " *broadening my vision on European issues* ," " *a feeling of belonging to a European student community united by common values of openness, cooperation and commitment* ," " *gained confidence in my ability to interact in a multicultural environment* ," " *a desire to become more involved in the alliance's activities* ," " *meeting other European students and expanding my network* ," " *an incredible opportunity to meet people from all over Europe* ," " *the atmosphere, the exchanges and the shared projects made this experience truly unique and unforgettable* ," " *I come away from it enriched, with a broader open-mindedness and a real sense of belonging to the European student community* ."

Representing the student community through the Student Board governance body allows everyone to get involved, define and strengthen student activity at the European university while developing this sense of European belonging and acquiring intercultural skills.

The institution also coordinated two other European projects, further strengthening this work around the sharing of European cultures and values. The [Student Engagement project](#) The aim was to establish a status for engaged students at the European level and to organize "debates" on social issues chosen by students representing partner institutions, held in public spaces in the various

countries involved. The [SHIE project](#) (*Sport Handicap Inclusive Experience*) aims to facilitate the mobility of students with disabilities through sport by means of sporting events and equipment.

b. Strengthening the mobility of academic and administrative staff

Since the launch of the undergraduate programs, 14 members of our teaching staff have been involved. The teaching team for the Joint Master Program in Marine Biotechnology has also gradually grown to include 14 faculty members from La Rochelle. The development of joint inter-campus training programs is co-created by faculty members of the Alliance (*Blended Intensive Programs* , *COIL-Virtual exchanges*, face-to-face micro-certifications, and joint master's programs). This fosters stronger faculty collaboration, interdisciplinarity, and the sharing of knowledge and best practices.

Research-related activities have enabled the Alliance's researchers to network, facilitating the creation of strong European research.

Staff mobility to Alliance partners is facilitated by the implementation of specific support through the *Job shadowing scheme* , which allows for the movement of approximately 5 administrative staff per year, with a peak of 12 mobilities in 2021-2022.

Since the launch of the second phase (2022-2026), 176 mobilities of administrative and academic staff have taken place, including 112 for administrative staff and 64 for teacher-researchers, within the framework of the project's activities/events.

These physical mobilities provided an opportunity for participants to exchange ideas and work on various projects, which greatly contributes to strengthening European identity.

Finally, English courses have been offered to all staff since 2021, funded by the PIA-ANR budget with an allocation of €10,000 per year. As a result, 15 to 20 people benefit from this training annually. These courses are attended by staff members involved in the Alliance's activities, whether directly or indirectly, demonstrating a commitment to improving their language skills and internationalizing their careers.

c. Collaborative work promoting cooperation and the sharing of good practices among European counterparts

The European University's activities are organized around 18 work packages. Within each work package, faculty and/or administrative staff from the institution are involved in the planning, support the project leaders in implementing the activities, and/or manage the setup. For work packages where the institution is the lead institution, dedicated resources coordinate actions at the global level and implement the projects locally.

These Alliance-level working groups enable internationalization of staff: participation in regular meetings in English, in governance bodies (president and vice-president), in travel and/or events.

Joint services have been established, including the Joint Communication Unit (JCU) and the Transnational Office for the Development of Joint Projects (PDSO). **The Joint Communication Unit** (WP18) plays a vital role in coordinating and promoting the Alliance's initiatives at the European level. It organizes a weekly videoconference meeting bringing together a representative from each member university, who presents the projects and initiatives undertaken by their institution within the Alliance. These representatives are also responsible for disseminating information about the opportunities and resources offered by EU-CONEXUS within their respective institutions. This structure thus fosters harmonized communication, effective information sharing, and strengthened

partner engagement, thereby contributing to the Alliance's visibility and collective impact at the European level.

Similar positions for operational management and academic administration have been harmonized: each partner has an institutional coordinator, project managers and *Minor and Micro-credentials officers* for monitoring the academic progress of undergraduate students.

All face-to-face and remote working groups, joint services, governance bodies and events enable collaborative work that promotes cooperation and the sharing of good practices among European counterparts, thereby strengthening membership in the EU-CONEXUS European University. As an example, the academic administrator in charge of micro-credentials testifies to the benefits she has gained from her involvement in the Alliance: "*Working on the academic aspects of the EU-CONEXUS micro-credential program offers an opportunity to explore other ways of working through relationships with my counterparts at partner universities, discover new tools, and see academics in a broader context. It allows for different relationships with the students I support, enabling me to provide more individualized support, as well as with the faculty who must adapt to the virtual format of the teaching modules. Finally, on a personal level, it allows for international career development while giving me a broader perspective on teaching and research at the European level.*" A second concrete example is the involvement of La Rochelle University in the PDSO, which offers numerous advantages, one of which is the ongoing exchange of best practices that benefits the members of this transnational office. The collaborative work established within this framework has notably led to increased acculturation and expertise in European project engineering within the alliance. Working daily with counterparts from across Europe enriches our work for La Rochelle University and adds a further dimension that strengthens our sense of belonging to Europe, and thus our European citizenship.

Conclusion

The European alliance EU-CONEXUS implements activities aligned with the major missions of a French university with European ambitions and enables the internationalization of the entire university community around 4 main axes: governance, training, research and links with territories while contributing to the strengthening of European citizenship.

The leadership of the EU-CONEXUS European alliance by La Rochelle University and the structuring of local coordination, as well as its integration into the institution's political strategy, are unique tools for internationalization and Europeanization for La Rochelle University. Indeed, membership in EU-CONEXUS has enabled a significant scaling up of all our activities, leading to the pooling of resources and the exchange of best practices, and also has an impact on the entire university community (students, faculty, researchers, and administrative staff), aiming for its overall internationalization.

The structuring of an inter-campus offering training programs around the "LUDI" (Learning, Innovation, and Development) approach was made possible through the implementation of joint training programs at the Bachelor's and Master's levels: Minors, Micro-certifications, and the joint interdisciplinary Master's in Marine Biotechnology. The range of joint training programs is being expanded with the ongoing development of other short, challenge-based programs for Bachelor's students through various initiatives. *Blended Intensive Programme* and *Collaborative Online International Learning*. Other interdisciplinary "LUDI" master's programs are currently being developed.

These programs are part of the institution's strategy to personalize and internationalize academic pathways. These initiatives are transformative for the institution, as they have a pedagogical impact on the student community by broadening and diversifying the range of courses offered and mobility opportunities, while simultaneously strengthening the university's international appeal.

Within the teaching community, participation in training programs contributes to the internationalization of careers, and the tools put in place by the alliance facilitate the support of teachers in the development of joint training programs.

The building of a European student life has begun since the start of the Alliance, campus life activities have been carried out, but the emphasis must be on its dissemination to reach more of the local student community and broaden its impact.

In a complex geopolitical context, where European scientific independence must be strengthened in the face of external pressures, the EU-CONEXUS alliance represents a model of unequal yet indispensable cooperation. La Rochelle University, by continuing to strengthen its commitment to this alliance, is contributing to the development of an inclusive, sustainable, and responsible scientific future. This European cooperation is essential to ensuring the continuity of research and its fundamental role in addressing the major global challenges of tomorrow.

The Alliance has also strengthened ties between the administrative, teaching, and research communities, as well as with students, by developing a shared space for dialogue and action. Even if some mechanisms are ineffective or not functioning properly, these exchanges have led to concrete changes, modernizations, and the creation of spaces for reflection, with a transformative effect on mindsets. Although some processes were cumbersome, the university quickly established more agile and cross-cutting procedures, involving the presidents of partner universities, despite the language barrier and the specific characteristics of each institution. A striking example is the implementation of a common framework *for a doctoral school*, harmonizing the rules for joint doctoral supervision within the alliance. This demonstrates that the university has a head start on legal aspects and the capacity to develop frameworks not only within the European Commission, but also in each of the participating countries.

The EU-CONEXUS alliance is profoundly transforming research at La Rochelle University. It strengthens our capacity to address global challenges through interdisciplinary research, a redesigned doctoral program at the European level, and an inclusive and responsible approach. Through this involvement, La Rochelle University actively contributes to building a stronger, more open, and more collaborative European Research Area. The European university also aims to internationalize and strengthen ties between territories through initiatives designed to raise public awareness of environmental issues in coastal areas and to network the alliance's socio-economic stakeholders.

The "Science-Society" mission has resulted in the establishment of an annual competition for secondary schools. The strong participation of middle and high schools in the Poitiers academy strengthens ties and highlights the internationalization of our activities in our region.

Various opportunities are also offered to the territories, however the emphasis will have to be placed on adapting activities to their needs by integrating them more into European collaborative thinking.

Finally, all of the Alliance's activities have contributed to strengthening the European citizenship of the university community. However, in order to increase its impact at the institutional level, work is currently underway to further its integration.



Evaluation, review, and outlook by the MESR of French operators involved in European universities

Contribution from the University of Burgundy Europe and FORTHEM

Introduction

The FORTHEM ¹ alliance has profoundly impacted the University of Burgundy Europe, even in its name, but also at every level of its strategy, in its structure, its HR procedures, the opportunities offered to students, young researchers, BIATSS staff, its training offer and its modularization, the links between training and research and the European dynamic around the funding of research, to list only the main points which will be developed here.

1 Governance and institutional strategy

FORTHEM is a cornerstone of UBE's strategy, not to support internationalization as an end in itself, but as a lever for implementing its institutional strategy in various areas: research, education, and societal engagement. Its European focus is reflected in the new **name of the EPE (European Partnership for Education)** ¹, created by the University of Burgundy and its constituent and associated partners in January 2025, through its European identification.

The alliance has allowed the institution to clearly position itself within this European framework, both with its local and regional partners and within its community. This positioning is made concrete through measures that affect the daily lives of students and staff (*see below*), and by the way the alliance serves as a catalyst for transformation in all areas.

¹ The FORTHEM alliance is currently coordinated by the University of Burgundy Europe, with its 8 partners: the [University of Agder](#) in Norway, the [Johannes Gutenberg University of Mainz](#) in Germany, the [University of Jyväskylä](#) in Finland, the [University of Latvia](#) in Riga, the [University of Opole](#) in Poland, the [University of Palermo](#) in Italy, the [University of Sibiu](#) in Romania and the [University of Valencia](#) in Spain. FORTHEM is among the 17 alliances of the "first wave," established in 2019. This alliance comprises public, multidisciplinary universities, most of which are located outside capital cities and are deeply embedded in regional socioeconomic fabrics. The alliance connects various regions of Europe, having developed from a strong historical partnership between Dijon and Mainz, in conjunction with Opole, another partner region of these two. It also includes four other partners whose international ties were already well-established with these three universities.

Initially, and striving for optimal regional coverage, the consortium of the first seven FORTHEM universities was formed during the winter of 2018/19. Ahead of the second funding phase of the initiative under the Erasmus+ program, the alliance decided to expand to nine partners in order to secure maximum financial support. Two additional partners, already connected to the member universities and enabling even greater regional coverage,

¹ The items in bold refer to evidence of the transformational impact of the alliance on the institution, found in the appendices.

were selected by the original seven. They officially joined the consortium in September 2021, contributing their own funds to certain activities while awaiting funding starting in November 2022.

Areas of expertise: operation of central services, pedagogy, research funding, innovation, lifelong learning (LLL)...

1.1 Communication about the alliance within the institution

The university's leadership has strongly advocated for the opportunity for everyone to get involved in the alliance, a point consistently emphasized in the **President's speeches**, both within and outside the university community. FORTHEM's visual identity is visible throughout the university campuses, physically, for example through flags **displayed** side-by-side in various locations: UBE and FORTHEM, and via a range of physical and digital communication materials (**posters** , **the monthly staff newsletter** , a 4-meter-long **banner** at the entrance to the main administration building, etc.).

The University of Western Brittany (UBE) has created a " **FORTHEM agora** ": a dedicated student workspace in the Dijon campus's *learning center* , featuring a large glass facade to maximize visibility. This reveals a large screen divided into nine sections, displaying images and videos of the cities and campuses of partner universities, captured by webcam in real time and visible to passersby and those using the space. This "window on Europe" embodies the connection between the alliance's campuses.

In terms of virtual communication, FORTHEM is featured at the top and bottom of every page of the **university website** , and each user has a **FORTHEM tab** directly accessible from the menu of their Microsoft Teams workspace, used for remote work. The FORTHEM tab contains information and links on all the alliance's activities, ensuring that users always know where to find and can easily access up-to-date information.

1.2 Restructuring and involvement of departments and services

The internal implementation of the alliance's activities, led by the UBE, resulted in a structure that connects the various departments and services of the central administration in a novel way (**see organizational chart**) . While the "FORTHEM Department" (8 FTEs) was created within the International Department, under the direction of a civil servant whose position was dedicated to the alliance, administrative colleagues were quickly recruited within the Digital Directorate (2 FTEs).

Research (1 FTE) and the Communications Department (2 FTE). ²The recruitment of these staff members involved both their functional reporting unit or department and the FORTHEM Service. Other colleagues already working in other units and departments (CFVU, FTLV, Finance Department) were assigned tasks that put them in weekly contact with their counterparts at partner universities. This decentralized distribution of roles integrates the alliance within each administrative unit and ensures that its European dimension is taken into account. A Deputy Director General of Services was appointed in charge of the university's cross-cutting initiatives, including the FORTHEM alliance, as well

²It should be noted that 2.5 of these FTEs at UBE are part of the "European" staff who work directly for the alliance. In total, 14 FTEs are thus distributed among the 9 partners.

as processes originating from the alliance: the adoption of the HRS4R label, the COARA approach, and the new "STRADA" office for supporting the development of European projects (*see below*).

The directors of most of these departments and services meet for the FORTHM **Steering Committee** (COPIL) approximately every six weeks, in the presence of the University President, the Director of ³Academic Services (DGSA), several Vice-Presidents, the FORTHM Institutional Coordinator, the UBE representatives for the five FORTHM missions, the FORTHM department head, and staff recruited using the alliance budget. The COPIL provides an opportunity to discuss, in particular, current events related to the alliance and the institution, and their potential strategic implications in various fields. It thus facilitates the coordination of different activities at the local and European levels.

The alliance's activities have strengthened and restructured the institution's operations in several areas. For example, the position of Vice-President for Sustainable Development and Social and Environmental Responsibility (DDRSE) was created for the first time in 2024. Staff working alongside the VP DDRSE participate in the alliance's *Green and Diversity Unit* , *benefiting from workshops and internships offered to the entire community, hosting interns* from partner universities, and winning an Erasmus+ KA220 " **Greenversity** " project in July 2024, focusing on green skills, in collaboration with other FORTHM partners and universities outside the alliance. Other examples of university restructuring driven by FORTHM, which will be detailed later, concern lifelong learning, *graduate schools* , and the European project development support office (STRADA).

The strong message delivered by the university president and echoed by the general services department, advocating for the involvement of all staff and students in the alliance, is resulting in projects that directly engage departments and services in unprecedented ways. The university administration sees this as an opportunity, through their participation in alliance activities, to open new horizons for volunteer staff who previously lacked a European or international dimension to their work. This fosters motivation and team cohesion around new projects, and potentially provides an opportunity to step back from established work routines, discover new practices, and assess what works well within their own organization. Departmental projects are encouraged, initially to meet counterparts virtually, exchange ideas, and then develop a formal exchange project, followed by a departmental mobility program, either individual or collective, and/or a *staff week* organized at UBE or a partner university. Language support is offered, typically in English for Specific Purposes, depending on the needs of the department or service, and mobility is jointly managed by the FORTHM Service (combination of E+ STT mobility and national budget) and the beneficiary department or service, when possible.

³The vice-presidents in charge of international affairs, research, training, the Board of Directors, scientific development, and sustainable development and social and environmental responsibility (SREER) are members of the Steering Committee. Other vice-presidents are invited according to their expertise, depending on the agenda.

Focus on two BIATSS service projects related to the alliance

The University of Jyväskylä (JYU), the Finnish partner of the FORTHEM alliance, hosted two impactful mobility programs for the University of Bern (UBE) in 2023, involving the University Library (SCD) and the communications department. These immersions proved to be true catalysts for transformation within the administrative and technical services (BIATSS).

In June 2023, 13 SCD staff members participated in a *staff week* dedicated to open science, information literacy training, and student well-being. The innovative organization of the Finnish library – the “*Open Science Center*” – directly inspired the creation of a research support service at UBE in September 2023, followed by the recruitment of a specialist in scientific data in 2024. Furthermore, information literacy training was redesigned and integrated into the undergraduate curriculum, focusing on literature searching, source citation, and information reliability.

In April 2023, six members of the communications department undertook a study trip to Jyväskylä to examine the workings of the communications and marketing department. This visit fostered strategic thinking on institutional identity and the evolution of university communications. Exchanges with their Finnish counterparts, who faced similar challenges, led to the identification of new avenues, particularly in the areas of branding, service structuring, and the management of promotional materials.

These two mobility experiences, which were greatly appreciated by the staff involved, helped to consolidate team spirit, broaden the horizons of the services in terms of breaking down silos between practices and strengthened working relationships with colleagues from JYU with whom exchanges continue bilaterally or through a *staff week* at UBE for the communication directors of the alliance in June 2025.

Since 2023, administrative and technical staff (BIATSS), as well as students and other staff categories, have been able to apply for ongoing (co-)funding for any type of project related to the alliance, up to €5,000. Funding applications are evaluated according to published criteria. They are processed by the FORTHEM Service and then, if applicable, reviewed by an appointed committee that decides on their funding. Thus, UBE staff and students know that they have the opportunity, by partnering with their counterparts at other alliance universities, to access funding. This **ongoing call for projects** aims to involve alliance partners in various types of projects while ensuring a European dimension, aligned with the institution's strategy.

1.3 FORTHEM integration into HR procedures

Integrating the alliance into the institution's strategy also involves incentive-based human resources policies. This translates into adding involvement in the FORTHEM alliance as an evaluation criterion in most applications submitted for internal review. Thus, this criterion appears in the evaluation **grids for local promotions** of faculty members, **applications for teaching leave**, and **CRCT (Research and Teaching Leave)**. It also applies to **the call for proposals for the creation of graduate programs** within the framework of the UBE *graduate schools* (*see below*).

A reference to the alliance now appears in all **job descriptions** (faculty and administrative/technical staff) published by UBE, both to raise awareness of FORTHM among new staff before their arrival and as an attractive feature of the institution. A **vote by the board of directors** in October 2021 formalized the inclusion of teaching hours completed at partner universities through the E+ STA mobility program in the calculation of teaching load for tenured faculty and researchers, up to a limit of 16 hours. This measure aims to reinforce the sense of belonging to a major "European campus" and to encourage faculty to undertake STA mobility within the alliance. In parallel, an **additional hours scheme** values the responsibilities taken by E/C in the establishment in favour of the alliance, including training or research oriented activities (*below*) but also responsibilities in the commissions (*Mission Boards*) of the alliance, in the FORTHM *Labs* , as a FORTHM correspondent within his component or research laboratory, etc.

Beyond these human resources initiatives, the alliance has enabled the institution to create a favorable environment for the emergence of projects with a European or international dimension, for example through **the funding of language training** , translation assistance, digital support for making courses available on the FORTHM digital academy, or through the European project support service linked to STRADA (see *below*). Within the framework of the SwafS FIT FORTHM project (2020-23), the best practices promoted by the partners encouraged UBE to **initiate the process of obtaining the HRS4R label** , with the help of those who have already received it, and to seek to quickly join the COARA coalition on research evaluation.

2 Training

The FORTHM alliance has impacted UBE's educational offerings on several levels. The latest **HCERES report** on the University of Burgundy highlighted the alliance's potential to strengthen the internationalization of its programs, and a **support system** has been established for academic leaders wishing to pursue this goal. But beyond internationalization as an end in itself, thanks to the alliance, the institution has been able to develop its educational offerings towards greater flexibility in study pathways, in conjunction with in-depth reflection on micro-accreditation, by developing support initiatives for teacher training, and by strengthening the links between teaching and research *through the FORTHM Labs and UBE's Graduate Schools , among other initiatives.*

2.1 An enriched and diversified training offer

The establishment of a **multilateral** , inter-institutional Erasmus+ agreement in 2020 facilitated student and staff exchanges within the alliance. For the 2023/2024 academic year, 38% of outgoing physical Erasmus+ mobility periods of one semester or more, and 58% of incoming European mobility periods, took place within the FORTHM alliance. The FORTHM Campus was introduced in 2021 as a new form of long-term, thematic mobility. This is a semester-long student mobility program worth 30 ECTS credits, which brings together students from the host university and FORTHM partners at various levels of study and with different disciplinary specializations. Students participate in both disciplinary training and elective courses related to the Campus theme, which is aligned with the themes of the FORTHM Labs. The two **FORTHM Campus events** in Dijon (autumn 2021, autumn 2024) brought together students and researchers from the alliance around the theme of "Food and Nutrition," with specialist lectures aimed at a broader audience, and students from fields such as management, languages, biology, viticulture, and more. Offering courses as electives to students enrolled in

programs at UBE fostered "internationalization at home" (*internationalisation@home/I@H*), with over 80 Burgundy students benefiting from these credited courses and an international learning experience, in addition to the international students present on the Dijon, Le Creusot, and Auxerre campuses. UBE students were able to have these credits recognized as part of their major, thanks to the **FORTHEM ECTS Passport program** (*see below*). The Campus also provides an opportunity to welcome teacher-researchers from partner universities to Burgundy on STA mobility programs, stimulating exchanges with their colleagues and around the corresponding FORTHEM *Lab* .

For those who cannot or do not wish to spend a whole semester abroad, the alliance enabled UBE to implement **short-term mobility programs starting in 2020**. These programs were developed within FORTHEM before their introduction into the Erasmus+ program in 2021. This initiative has a positive feedback rate exceeding 95% in **the post-stay satisfaction survey** . It allows students to spend a week on a partner campus with a group of European and local students. Although

Gradually replaced by the BIP (Budgetary Integration Program), the work undertaken to establish this program between 2019 and 2022, and its extension until 2026, has allowed a generation of students to benefit from their first European mobility experience, which often leads to longer-term mobility. This initiative also provided an opportunity to review mobility practices between partners and to develop a **FORTHEM Mobility Charter** , which helped to remove identified barriers (administrative, technical, psychological, etc.) both at UBE (University of Bern) and its partners. The alliance also makes it possible to award **mobility grants** to students undertaking internships of less than three months within the regions of FORTHEM partner universities, facilitated by an internship grant program organized within the alliance.

To achieve the ambitious goal of 50% mobility (physical, hybrid, or virtual), FORTHEM has implemented various tools accessible to UBE students and faculty. The FORTHEM digital academy connects the Moodle platforms of partner universities and offers students and staff of these institutions free courses, often awarding credit, which can be taken asynchronously (MOOC-style) or synchronously.

Focus on the transformative impact of the FORTHEM Digital Academy on UBE

Technically, the Digital Academy connects 10 Moodle *Learning Management Systems* (LMS) via a Python API. Its unified course catalog uses the European ESCO Classification and is based on the LTI standard to allow easy access to all courses.

The Digital Academy is transforming UBE practices in various ways:

- UBE instructors can now offer their courses to students at eight other European universities. The initiative has generated significant interest and resulted in regular requests for technical support: sharing existing courses on the [Moodle/Plubel platform](#), [UBE](#), shared teaching, issuing *Open Badges*, pre-course advice, etc.
- With just a few clicks, UBE students and staff can now access courses from eight other European universities. These courses are available to the entire UBE community through the Moodle platform. The multilingual catalog is constantly evolving and covers a wide range of topics, including cultural mediation, cybersecurity, language courses, and environmental studies.
- With just a few clicks, students and staff from other FORTHEM universities can now access UBE courses. Courses such as " *French kit* ", " *Language and Artificial Intelligence* " or " *Introduction to EU pharmaceutical law* " offer a showcase of the expertise of UBE teachers, and now benefit from a multilingual audience which enriches teaching practices.

Team teaching also takes place within the Digital Academy. It involves students working together remotely on similar courses offered at two institutions, or on courses or tutored projects co-developed by several partners. UBE recognizes the involvement of teachers in this type of activity by providing additional teaching hours, thus increasing the number of students benefiting from *I @H*. Without the supportive institutional framework of the alliance and the associated technical solutions, this type of activity would be far less developed within the institution today.

Finally, FORTHEM also offers a favorable institutional framework for the development of multiple and joint degrees. The alliance and the UBE are closely monitoring progress at the European level to reduce legal and administrative barriers to joint degrees, and the Faculty of Languages and Communication has been involved since 2021 in establishing a joint degree at the Bachelor's level, called the " *European Degree.* " in *language, communication and culture.* " This future degree offers students the opportunity to join an international cohort that will move between different universities over the three years of their bachelor's degree, depending on the options chosen, with the possibility to study for three years in three different countries. Less technically demanding to implement, UBE teaching staff have set up multiple degrees, in translation and then in microbiology, at the master's level.

Focus on two multiple degrees

In microbiology, the *ForTheMicrobes Master's program*, launched in 2022, is the result of a close partnership between UBE and the University of Mainz. FORTHM facilitated the formalization of this collaboration, enabling the joint development of the program, shared governance (admissions, assessments, juries), and the exchange of educational resources. Thanks to this alliance, students follow an integrated four-semester curriculum – Semester 1 in Mainz, Semester 2 in Dijon, Semester 3 consisting of short internships and lectures at partner universities, and Semester 4 dedicated to a six-month research internship in Germany or elsewhere. FORTHM also facilitated student internships at other partner institutions such as Valencia and Palermo.

In the field of translation, the UBE's *T2M Master's program* offers three double degrees. The first, launched in 2019 with the FTSK in Germersheim (University of Mainz), was made possible thanks to the coordination supported by FORTHM, which aimed to harmonize academic calendars, course content, and the arrangements for joint supervision of dissertations. This model served as the basis for subsequent double degrees: with the University of Palermo (2021) and the University of Valencia (2022). FORTHM's support proved essential in overcoming administrative hurdles related to differences between national systems. For example, the agreement with Valencia required specific adaptation due to the structure of the Spanish curriculum (four years of undergraduate studies followed by one year of master's studies).

Beyond student mobility, FORTHM has fostered academic synergies through joint research and teaching workshops, as evidenced by the contributions of researchers from Palermo to microbiology courses in Dijon. The alliance framework also allows for ambitious pedagogical developments, such as a customizable integrated degree program and joint PhD supervision projects. These initiatives contribute significantly to the internationalization of education and to a stronger connection between teaching and research at the European level.

2.2 Measures to promote educational innovation and the integration of FORTHM into study programs

Beyond the initiatives implemented by faculty, the alliance also allows UBE students to receive direct funding and support for projects they propose, introducing them to the selection process through European calls for proposals and giving them the opportunity to collaborate with other students across Europe on projects they are passionate about because they conceived them. Several student calls for proposals exist for this purpose, across the alliance, in the areas of **FORTHM Labs** (*see below*) and **civic engagement** . Furthermore, UBE also invites students to apply to its **ongoing call for proposals** (*see above*), which covers any project involving at least one other FORTHM partner university. For example, a group of students conducted workshops on intercultural competence between Dijon, Palermo, and Valencia. Another group of pharmacy students visited Spain to meet their counterparts. This unprecedented type of student project is made possible by the alliance, financially, but above all

thanks to the quality of the relationships between the members of FORTHEM, whose competent departments work together to set up such learning opportunities on a European scale.

The increase in training opportunities and activities available to students across Europe has been accompanied by UBE's commitment to making study pathways more flexible, following the example of its Scandinavian partner universities and through modules offered by the alliance (digital academy, short-term mobility programs, modules opening the UBE FORTHEM Campus, student-led projects, etc.). Unlike long-term mobility programs, these activities, even though they are credited, are not covered by a *learning agreement* (LA) and are therefore difficult to integrate into the structure of study programs. To address this issue, UBE has adopted, through its Board of Directors, a system for recognizing ECTS credits earned outside of an LA, called the "**FORTHEM ECTS Passport** ." Once 3 ECTS credits have been validated, students can request the opening of a "passport" *through* the FORTHEM office. Up to 12 credits can be recognized per study cycle. An academic committee in each department assesses the relevance of completed modules to the main curriculum and may propose partial or full equivalencies for future coursework. Credits thus validated will appear on the diploma supplement without affecting the overall GPA. This system encourages students to participate in supplementary training programs in collaboration with alliance partners, while maintaining coherence with their primary program. The text adopted by the Board of Directors has been shared with other French institutions in other alliances facing the same issue.

The ECTS passport touches on the issue of micro-accreditation, on which the FORTHEM alliance contributes significantly to the internal discussions at UBE. As is often the case, the alliance's micro-accreditation working group provided an opportunity to identify and connect internal UBE groups that had previously been working separately on this innovation-related issue, pedagogical for some and related to the FTLV (French as a Foreign Language) for others. The workshops conducted at the alliance level now contribute to a more structured and general reflection within the institution on this subject. FORTHEM chairs **the European working group on FTLV** within the alliance community of practice, FOREU4ALL. Colleagues from the Continuing Education and Apprenticeship Service (SEFCA) actively participate, notably with reciprocal service visits between Mainz and Dijon in 2023 and 2025. This has added a new European dimension to UBE's FTLV offering, making it possible to meet new demands for specialized foreign language courses, for example. Thanks to the network established by FORTHEM **Universities' Lifelong Learning Network (FULL)**, the alliance thus allows the institution to be responsive to continuing education requests on a European scale, by mobilizing experts in different countries.

Focus on the impact of the alliance on educational innovation at UBE

The UBE's Center for Pedagogical Innovation and Evaluation (CIPE) organizes, among other missions, training workshops for the institution's teachers to enhance their professional pedagogical development. In this context, it greatly benefits from the work of the alliance. Firstly, the institution's membership in FORTHEM has enabled the implementation of an "international" component in the annual co-teaching training, which previously only had a local component (now entitled "Co-teaching Locally or Internationally"). A second major benefit for teacher training is the organization by the *FORTHEM Think Tank for Innovative Learning and Teaching* of the " *Project-Based Learning* " symposium in Mainz in November 2023. This symposium allowed CIPE team members to bring back information and processes related to this topic, which they can then incorporate into the training sessions organized for teachers. Previously, training on *project-based learning* was provided by an external instructor. However, since the symposium, a training course entitled "Discovering Two Active Learning Methods" has been offered. The "problem-based approach and project-based approach" is organized by members of the department. This represents a skills development initiative for the institution's staff, enabling the internalization of a major training theme at a time when competency-based training is prompting a rethinking of teaching practices.

2.3 Strengthening the links between training and research

At the intersection of education and research, the FORTHEM *Labs* bring together students, faculty, and socio-economic partners to address societal challenges. UBE is active in all nine *Labs* of the alliance. This has facilitated the integration of the new EPE components into FORTHEM, which are particularly interested in the "Cultural Heritage" and "Art and Aesthetics in Contemporary Societies" *Labs*. The co-creation approach promoted by the *Labs* is conducive to the emergence of **student projects** (funded by two specific calls for projects, at the alliance and institutional levels) and scientific and technological collaborations between specialists and partners across the different universities. The FORTHEM Campus is designed in each university around the theme of its *Lab* – "food and nutrition" for UBE, which addresses the challenge of "feeding the planet" – further strengthening this dynamic through the physical exchange of students and faculty researchers.

Encompassing the themes of the *Labs*, the new UBE *Graduate Schools* have been structured around societal challenges chosen by the alliance. Their objective is to facilitate the connection between education and research, enabling graduate students to gain research experience with a view to pursuing doctoral studies and broadening their horizons through transdisciplinary and international graduate programs. Since the *Labs themes* structure certain activities of the alliance partners, based on current societal challenges, the *Graduate Schools* prepare students to easily participate in these activities. In addition to this initial structure, **the call for proposals for graduate programs** includes a European or international dimension in its evaluation criteria.

Focus on the impact of the alliance on "graduate programs" at UBE

The FORTHEM component was included in the evaluation criteria for selecting graduate programs from the outset. It appears on the evaluation **grid** sent to the educational and scientific community in the AMI-GP call for proposals of October 7, 2024. The document mentions several elements: openness to students from the alliance, invitation of researchers from the alliance, and a request for co-financing. Graduate programs, as a structuring project, find in the FORTHEM alliance a fertile ground for seeking partners with a view to internationalizing training programs.

In the first wave of selected graduate programs, five out of fifteen clearly reflect this approach by offering their courses in English. All emphasized their desire to attract students from the Alliance Française, and the most concrete example is the selection of ten Alliance students to participate in the "Movement Signals and AI" graduate program. The academic director reported that nine students from Sibiu and one from Mainz were among those enrolled.

Three other graduate programs— *Radiopharmaceutical Chemistry* , *Research in Sustainable Management Seminar* , and *Numerical Climate* —which are offered as summer or spring schools, have expressed their desire to have at least one speaker from the alliance during their training week. Details are still being finalized at the time of writing. It should be noted that other graduate programs, such as Humanity and Vulnerabilities in Healthcare, organize a summer school if offered in French. Students are encouraged to inquire about the speakers they would like to see, and FORTHEM has, of course, been highlighted as the primary source of non-French-speaking speakers by the academic director.

The last session, focused on Optimizing Performance and Human Potential, indicated that one element of the program, specifically the summer school, takes place at a training center. The possibility of holding this component in one of the alliance countries was raised and could represent an excellent approach to diversifying cooperation methods, as previously discussed.

3 Research

Research forms the foundation of FORTHEM's alliance-building strategy, as international collaborations, including in the field of education, traditionally arise from research among colleagues who share common scientific interests. This is achieved through its "research, innovation, and transfer" mission, which follows the project Horizon 2020 SwafS "FIT FORTHEM," the alliance, focuses particularly on early-career researchers building their networks, and UBE is fully committed to this strategy and these actions. Under the influence of the alliance, the institution has structured its European research project support service "STRADA" to foster the emergence of intra-alliance teams, and benefits from international comparisons, best practices, and shared experiences with partners to advance on various strategic initiatives (HRS4R, CoARA, Junior Professorships, etc.).

3.1 Building and training a community of researchers through the alliance

Many opportunities are already available to UBE researchers, thanks to the institution's membership in the FORTHM alliance, whether through training courses offered by the alliance or in supporting the construction of research networks.

To identify colleagues from partner universities working on similar or specific topics, UBE researchers have several tools at their disposal. Online **matchmaking sessions** are offered by broad disciplinary field, allowing everyone to connect with peers based on their specializations or research interests. The **alliance's virtual research office** also offers assistance in identifying potential partners, either upon request or as part of developing research projects. Finally, the **OpenAire FORTHM repository** lists and indexes all works published in *Open Access* under the name of one of the alliance's institutions, making it easy to identify partners and access their publications through simple keyword searches.

Researchers and research support staff have the opportunity to undertake mobility within collective mobility programs, which are also offered several times a year; networking events sometimes involving external partners of the alliance, such as the "Biotechnology in FORTHM" conference in Mainz in April 2025, and intensive training *bootcamps* for preparation for European Commission calls for projects, such as the ERC calls in February 2025.

The ongoing call for proposals (*see above*) includes a dedicated "research" section, allowing faculty members, doctoral students, research support staff working on the platforms, and others to access funding of up to €5,000, based on a *seed funding model* , to contribute to the implementation of new projects involving FORTHM partners. These projects may also involve partners outside the alliance, provided that at least one other FORTHM partner is involved. This encourages connections between researchers and other research staff within the alliance, while also facilitating the development of links with pre-existing networks or with strategically important partners for a given project.

In addition to those already mentioned, numerous additional opportunities are offered specifically to early-career researchers (Master's students, doctoral candidates, postdocs, research assistants, and those with tenure of less than five years). Information sessions on doctoral studies within the consortium promote research-related mobility. Among the opportunities offered are summer schools, workshops, and online *masterclasses* regularly organized to train young researchers with the help of experts from various partner universities. For example, FORTHM has offered workshops on MSCA calls for proposals and on scientific communication and research funding in alliance countries. UBE doctoral students can also benefit from short-term mobility programs. On average, two group mobility programs per call for applications are offered to post-Master's students.

Finally, the alliance is committed to developing initiatives to promote open science and scientific communication. It offers a " **Researcher Grand Prize** " for doctoral students, modeled after the "My Thesis in 180 Seconds" competition. Following its inaugural edition, won by a doctoral student from UBE in 2024, the event will take place in Burgundy in November 2025. Another event that helps showcase the breadth of research activities within the alliance is an annual online conference, which brought together between 150 and 200 online participants for its first two editions in 2024 and 2025. This conference, along with online matchmaking sessions, *contributes* to the goal of *internationalization@home* for researchers.

3.2 Restructuring of research support services around European projects

In addition to the actions undertaken to implement the HRS4R label (*see above*), UBE also drew inspiration from the best practices of other alliance partners in order to extend and the restructuring of the European project development support service “STRADA” and the strengthening of its links with its regional representation in Brussels. While there were simply no direct interactions between the latter and the institution before 2019, the example of the relationships maintained by certain partner institutions with their Brussels regional representations, revealed through **a study of European project development support mechanisms** within the FIT FORTHEM project, provided an opportunity to develop this link. UBE was able to raise awareness within the regional representation of its research strategy and that of other alliance partners, so that the regional representation could, in turn, take this into account in its interactions within Brussels networks structured around different themes. The alliance also made it possible, in some cases, to raise awareness of, or in others, to strengthen relationships with the regional representations of FORTHEM partners. The **“FORTHEM for the Regions” series of events** , Coordinated by the UBE, this initiative aims to bring together regional representatives from the FORTHEM alliance regions and universities to inform them about ongoing activities and to identify synergies between regional strategies and the Alliance's strategy in research and innovation. Several hybrid and/or online meetings have been organized. since the FIT FORTHEM project, creating a space for partner universities and their regional representations to exchange, for example on research priorities from one region to another, or to talk about networking innovation ecosystems between regions, *via* the alliance.

Focus on the "STRADA" service, which assists in setting up European projects.

The STRADA project, which was funded in 2023 under the ASDESR call for proposals, has two axes: axis 1 which aims to increase participation and success rate in European research programs, and axis 2 which aims to further develop short FTLV actions.

While the development of a support unit for European project development was already identified by UBE's governance as a necessary action, the information gathered and shared among the members of the FORTHEM Alliance proved invaluable in providing factual data to compare UBE's success rates in the Horizon 2020 program with those of other Alliance universities of comparable size. A comparison with the support mechanisms for European research project development at other Alliance universities also highlighted the inadequacy of the existing unit at UBE, thus reinforcing the development strategy envisioned in the STRADA project.

Axis 1 of the STRADA project is structured around two components. The first component aims to provide support to researchers in the development and drafting of grant proposals, working closely with them. This support involves recruiting four engineers, each dedicated to a major thematic area. The responsibilities of these four engineers range from identifying potential researchers within laboratories and raising awareness and providing training to researchers, to conducting personalized monitoring of calls for proposals, identifying partners, and assisting with proposal writing. Some of these actions, working directly with researchers, build upon and complement those already implemented within FORTHEM, such as the recent " *Bootcamp on ERC grants* " held in Palermo. The engineers recruited for the STRADA project can also leverage the research area mapping developed within the Alliance to find European partners necessary for projects under Pillar 2, for example, or Pillar 4.

The second component of Axis 1 aims to further align European priority themes and expectations with the strengths of the UBE. The recruitment of a fifth ^{engineer} based in Brussels was planned within the STRADA project, dedicated to lobbying efforts to include local themes in future calls for proposals and to assist researchers wishing to join a consortium or seeking partners. This initiative took place throughout 2024 and leveraged the virtual representation office in Brussels already established for the entire Alliance (the Joint Virtual Research Policy and Services Office) by FORTHEM. The physical presence of an engineer in Brussels opened up opportunities to join certain networks, such as the UNILION network, and thus access important information regarding the upcoming FP10 framework program and future projects. In particular, the engineer on site was able in June 2024 to support the organisation of meetings with the FORTHEM regional representatives in Brussels, from a logistical point of view but also through the privileged link maintained with the representation of the BFC region office.

Thanks to this networking, UBE participates or has participated in several projects that have received European funding and are linked to the virtual office and the various actions implemented during the FIT FORTHEM project and the first phase of Alliance funding. Within the Horizon Europe program, UBE was a recipient of the program PRIMA with the MEDIET4ALL project, carried out with three partner universities of the Alliance and six external partners. Since 2023, UBE has also been a partner in a Widening project coordinated by the Romanian partner of the alliance – Lucian Blaga University – named ELABCHROM, with the aim of establishing a laboratory on cultural heritage, linked to the activities of the FORTHEM *Labs & Co - creation* mission. In the Erasmus+ KA220 VET program, UBE and X other universities of the alliance, with X external partners, were awarded the GREENVERSITY project (*see above*), which aims to prepare the university community in FORTHEM and non-FORTHEM institutions for the challenges of climate change and green skills. Beyond these successes, the alliance now allows UBE researchers to benefit from a network effect which makes it much easier to form consortia in order to respond to calls for projects, to produce international expertise on a given subject, and to find easy access to research infrastructures among the alliance partners.

Conclusion

The numerous transformations at UBE under the influence of activities within the FORTHEM alliance are now difficult to isolate, as they directly affect the institution's structure, internal procedures, teaching services, initial and lifelong learning programs, internal training initiatives, research support services, communication, student life, libraries, and the way its community sees itself as "European," as ⁴evidenced by the flags flying on campuses. Hardly a week goes by during the academic year, and much of the summer break, without one or more physical events taking place somewhere in Europe, bringing together students and/or staff from the alliance's universities. Digital activities further multiply these contacts, as do long-term student mobility programs, which reinforce the effect of "internationalization at home . "

Thanks to the relationship of trust that exists between partners, from the highest level of governance of the institutions to individual services, research laboratories and training programs, FORTHEM constitutes for UBE a formidable platform to learn from others, to quickly launch new initiatives in different fields, to integrate an international dimension into all university courses.

⁴This sense of belonging was demonstrated, for example, during the floods in Valence at the end of 2024, *through* messages of support expressed by the community and solidarity actions put in place by students and staff in support of the city of their partner university.



Key transformations for Sorbonne University via the 4EU+ Alliance

Origin of 4EU+ for Sorbonne University:

The 4EU+ Alliance originated from a shared vision of deepening European academic cooperation, a vision that predated the official creation of the European Universities Initiative. Following Emmanuel Macron's speech at the Sorbonne in 2017, which called for the creation of European universities in the form of transnational networks, four universities – Charles University in Prague (Czech Republic), Heidelberg University (Germany), Sorbonne University (France), and the University of Warsaw (Poland) – decided to join forces to form the 4EU Alliance, with the ambition of building an integrated and transformative European academic space. These institutions, already linked by collaborations within networks such as LERU and CE7, share similar characteristics: research-intensive public universities, anchored in major European cities, facing the same challenges in education, research and innovation, and advocating East-West engagement as a major objective within Europe.

On March 10, 2018, the rectors of the four founding universities met in Paris to sign a joint declaration affirming their commitment. In it, they expressed their desire to create "a new quality of collaboration in research, teaching, training and administration," emphasizing the importance of interdisciplinary approaches, student and faculty mobility, and the sharing of academic resources.

In an effort to broaden the alliance's geographical and strategic reach, the University of Copenhagen (Denmark) and the University of Milan (Italy) joined 4EU in 2018, transforming the alliance into 4EU+. This expansion, balanced along East-West and North-South axes, strengthens the alliance's diversity while maintaining institutional and values-based coherence. In 2019, 4EU+ secured its first Erasmus+ funding with the EUP project.

In 2022, as part of the second call for proposals of the European Universities Initiative, the Alliance chose to consolidate itself around a controlled growth strategy. It then welcomed two new partner universities: the University of Geneva (Switzerland), which brings an international perspective and strong links with NGOs, and Paris-Panthéon-Assas University, which complements Sorbonne University, particularly in law and humanities. With six members, the Alliance launched the 1CORE project, funded by Erasmus+, which aims to strengthen an integrated university ecosystem that fosters inter-institutional collaboration.

In 2024, the Alliance adopted its 2025–2035 strategy, reaffirming its ambition to build a comprehensive, research-intensive European university focused on major societal challenges.

4EU+ remains particularly committed to key interdisciplinary areas such as health and demographic change, sustainable development, and the impact of digital technologies on society.

About 4EU+ and its mission

4EU+ is a transnational alliance of eight European universities collaborating to promote education, research and innovation beyond national borders. Its mission is based on academic freedom, inclusivity, excellence and social responsibility.

Strategic directions

[The 4EU+ 2025–2035 strategy](#)¹ is based on four pillars:

- **Education** : common programs, mobility, student-centered learning
- **Research** : interdisciplinary collaboration, shared infrastructures
- **Innovation** : partnerships with industry, support for start-ups
- **International openness** : cultural exchanges, global partnerships

Governance structure

- **Governance Council** : composed of the rectors/presidents of the universities; defines the strategy and makes the final decisions. The chairmanship rotates annually.
- **Management Committee, Board of Directors** : oversees implementation and coordinates work with working groups. (Composed of vice-rectors/presidents or advisors)
- **Academic Council, External Advisory Council, Student Committee** : provide consultative, strategic and representative contributions (double parity).
- **4EU+ General Secretariat** (non-profit legal entity): based in Brussels, it coordinates the activities of the entire Alliance.

Synergies and Added Value thanks to 4EU+ in training

1. Innovative international training programs:

Faced with the challenges of rapidly evolving skills, innovative international training pathways offer a flexible and inclusive response. By leveraging micro-credentials, they encourage lifelong learning while facilitating upskilling and reskilling. These initiatives also allow for experimentation with new pedagogical approaches and strengthen the sharing of best practices among institutions. The development of a common course catalog, ranging from short modules to joint degrees, promotes the mutual recognition of prior learning and stimulates academic mobility. This agile framework constitutes a strategic lever for the internationalization of higher education and the building of a more integrated educational space.

A strengthened dynamic at Sorbonne University around joint master's programs thanks to the impetus of the 4EU+ Alliance

The 4EU+ Alliance plays a leading role in developing **joint programs** between its member universities, notably through the preparation of joint European Master's programs and

¹<https://4euplus.eu/4EU-1001.html>

applications to initiatives such as Erasmus Mundus. These projects aim to offer integrated, innovative, and interdisciplinary training programs, co-developed by several institutions, and addressing major European societal and scientific challenges.

Until recently, SU's participation in Erasmus Mundus applications remained limited. Involvement in 4EU+ is gradually changing this dynamic. Thanks to the synergies created within the Alliance, coordination efforts, and support offered in thematic working groups, a growing involvement of SU's teaching staff is now observable.

The Alliance has therefore made it possible to question, within SU but also at the national level, the existing obstacles (particularly administrative, legal or academic recognition) which have so far hindered this type of initiative, and to better inform, mobilize and equip project leaders within SU.

Several collaborations are currently being studied with 4EU+ partners with a view to preparing applications for Erasmus Mundus or other formats of joint European masters, in a logic of structural transformation of the training offer.

Furthermore, the "curriculum comparison workshops" organised within the framework of the Alliance allow educational leaders from different disciplines to meet and work together to develop common pathways, in order to co-construct programmes on a European scale.

This development marks an important step in the European openness of Sorbonne University, which, thanks to 4EU+, is positioning itself more and more actively in the construction of a truly integrated, inclusive and interconnected higher education space.

Tools and resources to support educational innovation

To support the quality of shared teaching, the 4EU+ Alliance's "Education" working group has developed concrete teaching tools: syllabus templates, methodological guides, and satisfaction questionnaires. In parallel, Sorbonne University has invested in suitable hybrid teaching spaces, promoting student engagement both in person and remotely.

The Alliance has also created a **Virtual Centre for Teaching and Learning**. This centre brings together the pedagogical expertise of the eight partners around common principles: student-centred pedagogy, research-based innovation, and the thoughtful use of digital technologies. It encourages the professional development of teachers, the sharing of content, and the collaborative development of training programs.

This center aims to be a collaborative, inclusive and sustainable European platform, responding to the current challenges of higher education and strengthening the agility of academic communities in the face of pedagogical changes.

" [DETERMINANT](https://4euplus.eu/4EU-707.html?) ²": Development of an integrated 4EU+ pharmacoepidemiology and pharmacovigilance educational program

The DETERMINANT project (Development of an integrated 4EU+ Pharmacoepidemiology and Pharmacovigilance Educational Program) aims to structure a joint European program in pharmacoepidemiology and pharmacovigilance, building on the initial collaborations of the 4EU+PharmacoEpi project. It lays the foundation for a future Joint Master's Degree, with transdisciplinary training grounded in research, focused on the analysis of multinational data and collaborative work.

In a context where these disciplines are becoming key to public health, training opportunities remain fragmented in Europe. Each 4EU+ university possesses specific expertise, often linked

²<https://4euplus.eu/4EU-707.html?>

to its local databases. DETERMINANT proposes to integrate these strengths into a coherent offering across the Alliance.

The project pursues two objectives:

- **To establish a permanent Joint Master Degree** between the partner universities.
- **To develop a continuing education program** for professionals, in conjunction with major players such as Sanofi, Novo Nordisk, and EMA.

Based on research-based pedagogy, DETERMINANT actively involves Master's and doctoral students in the analysis of real-world data and the development of protocols. Coordinated by Sorbonne University, this project illustrates how a transnational initiative can fill a structural gap in education while strengthening academic excellence, mobility, and employability .

BioMS Project ³: **SU partner in the Joint Master's program currently being prepared**

BioMS is a collaborative initiative led by the University of Warsaw in partnership with members of the 4EU+ Alliance: the University of Copenhagen, Sorbonne University, Charles University, the University of Geneva, and the University of Milan. The joint Master's program is designed to address the growing need for integrated biodiversity studies and advanced digital skills.

Understanding biodiversity changes, developing effective monitoring tools, and implementing effective conservation measures require high-quality biodiversity data and expertise in big data analysis and modeling. However, existing infrastructures for biodiversity conservation are often fragmented, country-specific, and incomplete. A shortage of specialists in key disciplines and a lack of analytical expertise further hinder biodiversity research and monitoring efforts.

Despite the need, no official program in Europe currently combines these fields; biodiversity and computer science are rarely taught together at the undergraduate level, leaving a critical gap in education. By pooling expertise and resources, this program aims to overcome existing limitations in biodiversity studies and train the next generation of experts who will shape the future of conservation internationally.

ProFood Project

Developed within the framework of Key Action 3 (Strategic Partnerships and Cooperation), this project was proactively initiated by the Faculty of Science & Engineering at Sorbonne University, in partnership with two Alliance partners (Copenhagen and Milan) and Agro Paris-Tech. It illustrates the dynamism of the Alliance within our community.

IBD ⁴: **Micro-credentials promoting lifelong learning and skills development**

MICI – Micro Credential Integration project marks a pivotal step for Sorbonne University in its strategy for educational innovation and adaptation to major contemporary transitions. By developing a common European framework for the design, delivery, and recognition of micro-credentials, MICI enables our university to respond effectively to emerging needs for digital and sustainable skills, directly linked to the realities of the job market. The diversity of partners who have shown interest in joining this project, including government agencies, demonstrates its strategic importance, further highlighted by the Union of Skills ⁵.

³<https://4euplus.eu/4EU-707.html?>

⁴<https://4euplus.eu/4EU-1124.html?>

⁵https://commission.europa.eu/topics/eu-competitiveness/union-skills_fr

This project acts as a catalyst for profound transformation at Sorbonne University on several levels. It accelerates the evolution of our teaching practices towards more flexible, modular, and learner-centered formats, promoting blended learning pathways, the inclusion of non-traditional student populations, and openness to lifelong learning. By integrating micro-credentials into our curricula or as independent supplements, we will offer concrete solutions to the need for rapid skills development, particularly in constantly evolving fields such as artificial intelligence, health data, and sustainable practices.

Thanks to the IBD project, born within the 4EU+ Alliance, we are fostering an unprecedented strategic dialogue between universities, the socio-economic fabric, and public decision-makers, by aligning our training programs more closely with the concrete needs of the professional world. This strengthens our role as a committed European university, capable of structuring dynamic educational pathways that are recognized internationally.

This transformation would not have been possible without the cooperation framework offered by the 4EU+ Alliance. It is by pooling expertise, jointly experimenting with interoperable educational solutions, and relying on shared governance that this ambitious project can come to fruition. The transnational approach championed by the Alliance is the very condition for the project's legitimacy and impact at the European level .

2. New forms of hybrid and virtual mobility facilitated and strengthened.

Through the implementation of innovative programs such as shared courses and joint training, the university fosters international openness, resource sharing, and the experimentation of new teaching methods. These initiatives enable inclusive and flexible internationalization, while strengthening research-based learning and the mutual recognition of prior learning. Furthermore, the 4EU+ Alliance is fundamentally renewing the approach to European mobility by developing hybrid and collaborative formats that enrich the experience of both students and faculty. Finally, particular attention is paid to raising awareness of European issues and developing European and intercultural understanding through a multilingual curriculum and projects rooted in the contemporary realities of the continent.

Sorbonne University's integration into the 4EU+ Alliance marks a major evolution in its educational ecosystem, thanks to the implementation of innovative mechanisms such as **shared courses** and **joint** courses/joint programs. These formats broaden access to teaching, break down disciplinary barriers, and strengthen research-based training.

Shared courses ⁶: towards inclusive and flexible internationalization:

The shared courses scheme *consists* of opening up courses integrated into the official offering of each partner university to Alliance students who follow the courses remotely, allowing virtual mobility .

Since the implementation of this program, Sorbonne University (SU) has launched around fifty courses, enabling 821 students from partner universities to participate in our programs. The number of courses offered each year is steadily increasing, as teaching teams recognize the skills students gain through this internationalization. Similarly, Sorbonne University students can take courses remotely, taught by instructors from partner universities, thanks to easy access via a comprehensive shared catalog on the Student Portal, ⁷which offers hundreds of

⁶<https://www.sorbonne-universite.fr/actualites/inscrivez-vous-aux-cours-partages-de-4eu>

⁷<https://sp.4euplus.eu/home>

courses annually across all disciplines. These courses, with their European dimension, are grounded in the core competencies promoted by the Alliance: critical thinking, social engagement, multilingualism, data literacy, and entrepreneurship. This expanded offering and initial internationalization would not be possible without SU's commitment to the 4EU+ Alliance. Students taking these shared courses can earn ECTS credits towards their degree program, provided their home institution agrees. To this end, the 4EU+ Alliance has established a common framework with the creation of a simplified joint learning contract addressed to students who wish to take shared courses.

Joint educational activities to go further:

Joint educational activities (joint courses and joint programs) go further: they are co-developed by transnational teaching teams, aligned with European quality standards, and structured around flexible pathways integrating shared modules, joint activities (projects, seminars, peer assessments), and even joint degrees. They pave the way for structured European training programs, supported by a logic of co-accreditation and blended learning. These joint courses also have a strong research focus, which informs the content taught and strengthens the link between teaching and research, enabling, among other things, the development of research-based training programs. Students are directly exposed to innovative scientific approaches, current research challenges, and actively participate in interdisciplinary projects with a European dimension.

For Sorbonne University, these initiatives act as a catalyst for profound transformation: they promote resource sharing, stimulate cooperation among faculty, and allow for the testing of innovative teaching formats, all while offering research-based content. They also pave the way for smoother mutual recognition of prior learning and prepare the ground for the implementation of truly integrated European degrees, serving a more international, inclusive university that is open to the major challenges of the 21st century.

A new approach to European mobility:

The 4EU+ Alliance has profoundly renewed the approach to mobility in higher education, going far beyond the traditional bilateral arrangements of the Erasmus+ program. At Sorbonne University, this dynamic has enabled the development of a new generation of mobility opportunities that are more diverse, more integrated, and more transformative for students.

Short-term, blended (hybrid) virtual mobility formats allow a greater number of students to gain concrete European experience, even without leaving for an entire semester. As these mobility opportunities are an integral part of joint courses, they enable students from multiple universities and nationalities to collaborate actively and as a team on various projects.

This collective and multinational dimension **adds a new depth to mobility**, making it far richer than a simple Erasmus+ exchange between two institutions. It fosters a sense of belonging to a European learning community, promotes **intercultural skills**, and strengthens students' engagement in their academic journey. Furthermore, the formal recognition of credits and acquired skills, integrated into the agreements between partner universities, provides security for students' academic paths.

Finally, these new mobilities are based on common tools developed by the Alliance (simplified apprenticeship contract, 4EU+ mobility charter, common virtual portal), which allow for smooth and equitable implementation in all partner universities.

Thus, for Sorbonne University, mobility within 4EU+ is no longer a simple individual journey: it becomes a collective, integrated, and educational system, bringing about a real paradigm shift in the way international training is conceived, enabling the **development of multiculturalism and allowing for greater inclusivity through its short-distance travel format.**

Number of mobilities by type between 2022 and 2024:

The full opening of student and faculty mobility was facilitated by the signing of a multilateral Erasmus+ agreement specifically dedicated to the 4EU+ Alliance, without the need for reciprocity. This agreement allows for simplified and better-integrated mobility for students.

As the internship mobility data is partial, the table below is underestimated.

		Academic staff	Non-academic staff	Student	Total général
22/23	Blended			50	50
	Physical	10	27	147	184
	Virtual	1	7	8	16
	Total 22/23	11	34	205	250
23/24	Blended	11		121	132
	Physical	10	35	163	208
	Virtual			8	8
	Total 23-24	21	36	292	349

“Physical” corresponds to outgoing Erasmus+ AC131 mobilities to other member institutions of the 4eu+ Alliance.

An opening towards intensive hybrid BIP programs

The Alliance's joint courses have, for the first time, enabled participation in BIPs (Broad Exchange Programs). A [call for proposals for BIPs](#)⁸ is currently underway within 4EU+ to ensure the sustainability of hybrid joint course activities. Sorbonne University will be undertaking the management of such mobility programs for the first time.

3. Raising awareness of European issues :

The 4EU+ alliance promotes intercultural exchange and education for European citizenship. It exposes students, teachers and administrative staff to the contemporary challenges of the European Union and fosters the emergence of a generation aware of European values, better prepared for the expectations of the international professional world.

Flagship [2](#)⁹ (“Europeanity: Multilingualism, Pluralities, Citizenship”) plays a leading role in raising awareness. Of the 661 joint courses offered within the Alliance, 332 fall under Flagship 2, including 35 at Sorbonne University out of the 55 courses offered. The Foreign Language Departments, unique in France in their structure, offer content designed by teacher-

⁸<https://4euplus.eu/4EU-1088.html?test=1&>

⁹<https://4euplus.eu/4EU-418.html?test=1&>

researchers, linking language teaching with reflection on contemporary issues (geopolitics, literature, argumentation, culture).

Language courses exemplify this approach: B1 level English through British literature, B2 level English focusing on academic argumentation, C1 level English on geopolitical issues; and French as a Foreign Language (FLE) with a modernized corpus for better alignment with contemporary global challenges. Courses offered by the Department of Slavic Studies on Central Europe are also enhanced in light of the current geopolitical context.

The course '*Displaced Creations: Artists, Writers, and Filmmakers of Central Europe*', led by Clara Royer (UMR Eur'ORBEM), exemplifies this dynamic. It brings together Prague, Milan, and Warsaw in a hybrid, co-modal format, with the ambition of creating an international Master's program on Central Europe. Originating from a previous research program, it was funded by a SEED4EU+ grant (see section: **Thematic structuring and support for collaborative research**) and combines seminars, international workshops, and the active participation of young researchers. It contributes to a critical redefinition of the concept of the West based on Central European writing.

4. Individualization of student pathways and complementarity of training offers within the 4EU+ Alliance.

4EU+ alliance , of which Sorbonne University is a founding member, is developing an integrated European higher education area based on **complementary educational offerings** , **inter-university cooperation** , and individualized **student pathways** . This dynamic aims to offer students flexible, international, and interconnected curricula.

One of the key features is the [flexible route](#)¹⁰ A modular set of thematic courses offered by several partner universities. Each student can create a **personalized learning path** by choosing from different modules, often available online or in a hybrid format, with **mutual recognition of credits** . This promotes **flexible academic mobility** and the acquisition of transferable skills within a European framework.

For example, **Flagship 2** focuses on the transformation of European societies in a context of globalization, digital transition, and the reshaping of identities. Within this framework, Sorbonne University participates in the development of a **flexible program** , co-created with its partners, which addresses the ethical, social, and cultural challenges linked to emerging technologies in Europe.

These initiatives enhance the **flexibility of curricula** , encourage **individualized and multicultural pathways** , and position Sorbonne University as a key player in innovative European education within the 4EU+ alliance.

¹⁰<https://4euplus.eu/4EU-643.html?>

Synergies and added value thanks to 4EU+ in Research and Innovation:

The European Universities initiative has profoundly changed our approach to structuring research, strengthening the integration of collaborations, optimizing funding applications, and developing the pooling of scientific infrastructure. As research-intensive universities, we have benefited from a strengthened framework for structuring our projects and improving our competitiveness at the European and international levels.

1. Towards more integrated and strategic research at the European level

The European Universities Initiative acts as a powerful lever for transforming our research policy. It fosters a **more integrated, proactive, and collaborative approach**, with tangible benefits for the structure, attractiveness, and scientific visibility of our activities. Thanks to this dynamic, we are developing **coordinated response strategies to European calls for proposals**, consolidating **shared research areas**, **strengthening transdisciplinary collaborations**, and facilitating **the identification of complementary expertise**. The Alliance also allows us to better promote research through **enhanced dissemination activities**, grounded in a logic of **scientific diplomacy and intersectoral partnerships**.

Large collaborative projects and scientific diplomacy

Since the University of Geneva joined the 4EU+ Alliance, Sorbonne University has benefited from enhanced access to international Geneva. This strategic opening allows us to consolidate our role as a key player in developing innovative solutions aligned with the European Union's political priorities, particularly in the areas of health, the environment, and public policy.

- **Public health : The [Swealth](#) project** ¹¹stemming from the internal SEED4EU+ call for proposals, focuses on wastewater analysis for public health purposes. It perfectly illustrates the potential of alliances to link research, training, and policy impact. The WBE conference, organized by Sorbonne University in Paris at the end of 2024, with the WHO and the Geneva Health Forum, was a concrete demonstration of this: it brought together more than 100 participants in person and 1,000 online.
- **Environment and sustainable development** : the projects carried out within the framework of the Alliance actively contribute to the European ecological transition. Sorbonne University is notably participating in a summer school dedicated to the study of microplastics, which is fully aligned with the objectives of reducing plastics.
- **Science and public policy** : the 4EU+ alliance plays a structuring role in strengthening the link between science and public decision-making. Thanks to close collaboration with the University of Geneva, international organizations, and Geneva-based NGOs, SU is fully engaged in the science diplomacy interface. This dynamic makes it possible to transform research results into concrete recommendations for policymakers, thereby strengthening its European science diplomacy.

Scientific actions with an international reach and increased visibility for the Alliance:

¹¹<https://4euplus.eu/4EU-858.html>

[META-UN](#) ¹²project, initiated by the 4EU+ academic alliance, is designed for researchers and students in the social sciences, humanities, and law to engage in both scholarly and political dialogue with the United Nations. The project covers a range of themes, from the history and heritage of the UN to contemporary challenges of global governance related to policy development and the Sustainable Development Goals, and finally, discussions on the future reform of UN decision-making processes.

As part of the activities of Flagship 1, discussions were held in January 2024 to refocus certain actions around the concept of "**Global Health**." In this context, SU, along with Geneva, Warsaw, Milan, Heidelberg, and Prague, responded to the "Minigrants" program led by Charles University (4Global+ project). Following the awarding of funding, two meetings were organized, one in Prague and the other in Warsaw. These meetings allowed for the initial expansion of the project to Copenhagen and the definition of a key theme that the Alliance members wished to pursue, taking into account the identified priorities as well as the sometimes heightened political context surrounding the health of migrant populations in Europe. Migration is indeed a poorly studied determinant of health, accompanied by an identity crisis in many of our democracies, fueled by the populist exploitation of fears and unfounded myths within public opinion. This strategic initiative, deliberately positioning itself at the heart of a societal debate affecting all European countries, led to an initial series of meetings held in Geneva in November 2024 ¹³with the Health Directorate of the International Organization for Migration (IOM), the Migration Department of the World Health Organization (WHO), and The Lancet Migration, whose mission is to provide evidence-based information to foster cooperation and action on the health issues of migrant populations. This initiative also provided an opportunity to conduct a comprehensive assessment of existing resources on this topic within the Alliance, both in terms of training ¹⁴and research.

In May 2025, on the sidelines of the World Health Assembly in Geneva, a new private meeting of the 4EU+ Alliance and the WHO will take place, followed by a public session organized by the Geneva Health Forum in collaboration with the 4EU+ Alliance. Other meetings, such as those with the Society of Refugee Healthcare Providers and the Shanghai University School of Public Health, are also scheduled during this week. These meetings have been made possible by the Alliance's increased visibility on the topic of Global Health. This networking effort among practitioners, researchers, trainers, and policymakers aims to place this theme at the heart of the Alliance's activities. Finally, this structuring initiative will continue in June 2025 with a conference in Prague, "[Migration and Health Days](#)" ¹⁵, organized around four plenary sessions and three parallel workshops.

This action demonstrates **the possibilities now offered by the Alliance to quickly structure a collaborative network that institutions can use to position themselves on the major challenges of the 21st century**.

European university alliances are much more than academic groupings. They are strategic and operational actors in the implementation of the European Union's sectoral policies. Thanks to their capacity for innovation, for building bridges between science and public policy, and for

¹²<https://4euplus.eu/4EU-1016.html?test=1&>

¹³ (<https://4euplus.eu/4EU-12.html?newsID=24301>)

¹⁴ <https://4euplus.eu/4EU-705.html> ; <https://4euplus.eu/4EU-705.html> ?; <https://migrationhealth.org/regional-hubs/europe/mooc/> ; <https://www.unimi.it/en/education/master-programme/migration-studies-and-new-societies>

¹⁵<https://4euplus.eu/4EU-1084.html>

playing a role in science diplomacy, they contribute to shaping a more competitive, sustainable, and influential Europe on the international stage. A general partnership agreement between the WHO and the 4EU+ Alliance is currently being formalized, which is strategically important for Sorbonne University.

In 2024, Sorbonne University was also represented at the UNECE *Summit of the Future to contribute to the redefinition of the Sustainable Development Goals*. **These commitments underscore the growing role of university alliances as platforms for scientific diplomacy and European influence.**

Promoting open science in Europe

Open science is a strategic priority for the 4EU+ Alliance, which is committed to promoting more transparent, ethical, and accessible research. It is fully aligned with the goal of building a European Research Area based on knowledge sharing and scientific integrity. Sorbonne University is deeply committed to this dynamic and actively contributes to the Alliance's work, notably through the organization of training courses, participation in inter-university working groups, and the development of tools to support researchers. Initiatives such as the [Open for You! webinar series](#)¹⁶ and the development of guidelines on scientific publications illustrate this commitment. By fostering the professional development of doctoral students and early-career researchers, 4EU+ creates an environment conducive to the sustainable adoption of open science principles.

2. Doctorate: towards the development of joint supervision and the creation of specific training programs for doctoral students

Joint doctoral supervision is often hampered by complex administrative hurdles, many of which are specific to individual institutions. The existence of the 4EU+ Alliance has significantly facilitated its implementation by establishing shared mechanisms and a dynamic of trust between partners. Initiated within the 4EU+ framework, these [joint supervisions](#)¹⁷ have expanded to other international partnerships, reflecting an institutional commitment to structuring and harmonizing doctoral collaborations, particularly through the following initiatives:

- The establishment **of a common framework** promoting the joint recognition of degrees and the international visibility of doctoral candidates.
- One-year **mobility integrated into the doctoral contract, accompanied by specific financial support**.
- **The deployment of shared doctoral workshops and training programs** supporting transferable skills.
- **Towards a 4EU+ framework agreement for joint supervision**, in order to secure and simplify administrative procedures.

For the third consecutive year, Sorbonne University has launched a call for proposals for international joint doctoral supervisions funded by 4EU+. This program, open to all disciplines, funds three-year contracts that include a mandatory one-year research stay at the co-supervisor's university. The call for proposals is developed in close collaboration with the

¹⁶<https://4euplus.eu/4EU-770.html>

¹⁷<https://www.sorbonne-universite.fr/actualites/appele-candidatures-programmes-doctoraux-politique-scientifique>

Doctoral College of Sorbonne University, the Vice Presidents of Research and Education, and representatives from the partner universities.

To date, 7 doctoral students have been awarded this program.

A dedicated working group is also working to accelerate the development of MSCA – Doctoral Networks projects, thereby strengthening the European ambition of doctoral training within the Alliance.

[Call for applications - 4EU+ doctoral projects | Sorbonne University | Sorbonne University](#)
[Results 4EU+ | Sorbonne University | Sorbonne University](#)

MSCA Doctoral Network – SEED 4EU+ “Inclusive cities” project¹⁸

The SEED project dedicated to "Inclusive Cities" provides a concrete illustration of the facilitating role that the 4EU+ alliance can play in the appropriation of European research funding mechanisms. This project, initiated by the University of Copenhagen, benefited from SEED funding awarded by the 4EU+ alliance, which served as seed funding for the creation of a pan-European consortium in order to respond to the *Doctoral Networks call for proposals under the Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions (MSCA)* program of the European Commission.

The offices of the 4EU+ Alliance at partner universities were contacted to identify researchers and faculty members who could contribute to this theme within their respective institutions. During the first six months of the SEED project, efforts focused on mobilizing the most relevant expertise for project implementation. It was decided to develop a strong application for the *Doctoral Networks call for proposals*, centered on the major challenges facing contemporary cities: resource management, infrastructure, mobility, and social cohesion.

The SEED framework proved particularly well-suited to the consortium's structuring phase and the incubation of the European application. Following an initial meeting in Copenhagen, two writing workshops were organized: one in Heidelberg in November 2024, and the other in Paris in May 2025. These meetings facilitated collaborative progress on the application dossier. The inter-institutional coordination made possible by the 4EU+ alliance brought together researchers from Sorbonne University, the University of Copenhagen, the University of Geneva, the University of Heidelberg, the University of Milan, and the University of Warsaw. Furthermore, the existence of joint doctoral programs within the alliance strengthens the training opportunities that can be leveraged within the project.

In conclusion, this experience highlights that **belonging to a European alliance like 4EU+ is a strategic lever for facilitating access to and structuring responses to European calls for projects**, particularly within the framework of the Horizon Europe program and MSCA actions.

[AIPHY \(Marie Skłodowska-Curie Action\)¹⁹](#) **Interdisciplinary Network of PhD Students on the Advancement of AI Methods for Data Analysis in the Field of Particle Physics.**

An environment conducive to the training of doctoral students

The 4EU+ Alliance establishes an integrated and structured environment to foster doctoral training. Through coordinated actions around four strategic axes (Flagships), it supports the development of innovative and transdisciplinary training activities, the organization of

¹⁸<https://4euplus.eu/4EU-699.html>

¹⁹<https://www.sorbonne-universite.fr/actualites/une-equipe-rassemblant-les-membres-de-lalliance-4eu-obtient-une-bourse-marie-sklodowska>

doctoral workshops and conferences, and networking opportunities for early-career researchers with experienced faculty. Common tools are created to strengthen the harmonization of procedures for accessing doctoral training. Doctoral students also benefit from awareness-raising activities related to research methods, open science, and transferable skills through shared guides and resources. Finally, the Alliance encourages the mobility of early-career researchers, in connection with joint research program projects currently under development. Together, these initiatives create a stimulating, inclusive, and sustainable European space for doctoral research.

3. Industrial partnerships and technology transfer:

Another added value of European Universities that we have identified at Sorbonne University is the high potential for developing trust among researchers: more than through a single project, the 4EU+ Alliance facilitates collaborative research at the innovation level; it is strengthened by the pooling of expertise, and innovation will be reinforced by this collaboration. Companies are already European companies, and they have a real interest in recruiting students who have worked with others in several different countries. This is a clear advantage for our students, but also for our staff, because the university now has an international strategy offering a structured and broad professional playing field, and therefore a more attractive one.

" [University Diploma in Entrepreneurial and Intrapreneurial Project Management 4EU+](https://4euplus.eu/4EU-1146.html) ²⁰"

Between 2022 and 2025, the 4EU+ alliance enabled Sorbonne University to undertake a concrete and structuring experiment in its teaching and partnership practices in the field of responsible innovation training. Three successive cohorts benefited from an unprecedented inter-university project-based training program, involving more than 150 students, 70% of whom were doctoral candidates, from 30 nationalities and disciplines as varied as neuroscience, law, biomedicine, physics, artificial intelligence, and public policy.

In total, 18 real-world innovation projects were entrusted to students by major industrial and public partners, such as the City of Warsaw, CERN, Bayer, Safran, LVMH, Renault, SAP, Roche, and Carrefour. These projects covered major contemporary challenges related to ecological, digital, and social transformations: regenerative agriculture and carbon sequestration, neuroscientific measurement of emotions, a strategic hackathon in quantum computing, circularity in aeronautics, and the reduction of noise pollution linked to urban mobility.

The program is structured around inter-university bootcamps (Paris 2022 and 2023, Milan 2024, Heidelberg 2024, Warsaw 2025), combined with weekly academic support provided by a European network of tutors from six partner universities. Students work entirely in English, in multidisciplinary teams of 6 to 8 people, using an entrepreneurial approach that combines agile methodologies, mid-term project reviews, and a final assessment through an oral presentation before a mixed jury.

Each team is also supported by an industry ambassador, an active contact throughout the semester: meetings every six weeks, validation of strategic hypotheses, career guidance, and participation in juries. Deliverables are shared and distributed via an inter-university Moodle platform that also integrates resources, tools, and digital badges.

In three years, this program has not only enabled Sorbonne University to fundamentally adapt its teaching practices, but has also laid the foundations for a replicable model of European

²⁰<https://4euplus.eu/4EU-1146.html>

collaboration, bringing together universities, businesses, researchers, and students around a shared vision of innovation as a driver of societal transformation. During the last edition in 2023-2024, the student team working on the challenge proposed by Roche received support in setting up a startup.

[Gain expertise in project management with our 4EU+ academic diploma!](#)²¹

[4 EU + DU Entrepreneurship and Intrapreneurship: Time Management skills](#)²²

4. Networking of technological infrastructures and platforms between European partners

Traditionally a localized activity, the pooling of research infrastructure is now finding renewed relevance at the European level. The 4EU+ Alliance promotes the networking of **technological platforms and experimental zones**, optimizing **investments** and **facilitating access to cutting-edge equipment** among partners. This approach is based on:

- the **harmonisation of practices** and the development of models for sharing equipment and data;
- interoperability **of systems** to open access to technical resources to all establishments;
- concrete initiatives such as the European [Fablabs](#)²³ **network**, which emerged from a SEED project.

This approach strengthens the complementarity of existing mechanisms and promotes more open, collaborative and efficient research.

Thematic structuring and support for collaborative research

To encourage synergies between research teams, 4EU+ is organized around four key thematic areas (Urban health and demographic changes; Europeanness: multilingualism, pluralities, citizenship; Digitalization, modeling, transformations; Environmental transitions), which serve as catalysts for scientific collaboration.

An internal call for research proposals, [SEED4EU+](#)²⁴, is launched annually by the Alliance to fund emerging projects. It is financed by the partner universities' own funds. Sorbonne University is actively involved in several of these projects, both in research and teaching, serving as project coordinator or co-coordinator.

Support for post-doctoral and doctoral students

The 4EU+ Alliance pays particular attention to postdoctoral researchers and doctoral students, key players in European scientific cooperation. Several mechanisms have been put in place to strengthen their involvement through the establishment of joint doctoral schools and interdisciplinary seminars, such as the Collegio Futuro and 4EU+ against Cancer, or the Workshop on AI organized last year at SU and in 2025 the workshop on AI in medicine: Machine learning for multi-modal data will be held at the University of Heidelberg, to give just a few examples.

²¹<https://youtu.be/qW9XWO2Jf2M>

²²<https://youtu.be/p4hQVeAZnbo>

²³ <https://fablab.sorbonne-universite.fr/actualites-fablab/un-nouveau-fablab-linternational>

²⁴<https://4euplus.eu/4EU-670.html?>

Train4EU+” ²⁵project : Transforming ReseArch & INnovation agendas and support in the Alliance

This project (2021-2023) was funded under the Horizon 2020 program in support of European universities. It aims to contribute to the development of the Research and Innovation component of the 4EU+ alliance. The six 4EU+ universities (SU, UHEI, UCPH, CU, WU, UMIL) participated in the project, with a budget of €2 million, of which €377,000 was allocated to Sorbonne University.

Objectives: To improve support structures to develop the quality and impact of our R&I; to compare practices, co-learning & co-innovation; to focus on pilot projects; to identify obstacles and facilitators; to link with partners, other European universities and communicate the results to policymakers and socio-economic stakeholders.

The process was carried out through working groups comprising the relevant departments across the six universities. The IT and Digital Development Department (DR&I) of Sorbonne University participated in several work packages. For example, a mapping and analysis of university strategies was proposed, along with a comparison between departments and organizational structures (centralized, decentralized, etc.). We then defined thematic case studies (the organization of research support services, sustainable development and digital transformation, interdisciplinarity) through a detailed analysis of the departments, focus groups, and bilateral meetings. Finally, we proposed pilot transformation initiatives in this sector.

RM Framework ²⁶ Project

This ongoing project (2025-2027) is funded by Horizon Europe's WIDERA program. It aims to establish a certification system and training modules for Research Managers, combining training (microcredits, accreditation) and the theme of using and integrating AI in the research management sector.

The project stems from Action 17 of the European Research Area and is therefore closely linked to activities related to the recognition of research management and administration at the European level. It complements and follows on from the RM ROADMAP and CARDEA projects, the first projects funded under the WIDERA instrument on research management in Europe.

8 partners are participating in the project, including 4EU+ (with Sorbonne University, Charles University in Prague and the University of Warsaw as affiliated entities) for a budget of €1M, of which €34k is for Sorbonne University.

²⁵<https://4euplus.eu/4EU-572.html?test=1&>

²⁶<https://earma.org/news/announcement-rm-framework/>

Synergies and Added Value through 4EU+: Governance and Organization

1. Breaking down silos between administrative services, upskilling university staff for greater adaptability and efficiency

A structured and progressive implementation within SU

Although the Faculty of Science and Engineering has some experience in similar consortia, the 4EU+ initiative stands out for its level of integration. Under the coordination of the 4EU+ Alliance Hub, inter-faculty work has been carried out to formalize procedures and adapt tools for joint and shared courses (e.g., a specific course structure in Apogee).

Ongoing efforts are underway to simplify the registration process for incoming students and to facilitate the work of staff. This constant dialogue between departments – international relations, student services, IT – is a concrete illustration of the transformation dynamic triggered by 4EU+.

International working groups

Involvement in the 4EU+ Alliance has profoundly transformed the administrative practices of Sorbonne University. Mobility, quality, standardization, and networking of services have enabled the evolution of roles and strengthened the collaborative approach at all levels. Mobility of administrative staff has been initiated, notably through periods of professional observation and skills exchanges between partner universities.

Project-based work is no longer limited to teaching and research staff; it has expanded to encompass the entire administrative apparatus. An active international network has emerged, involving strategic departments such as university libraries and university presses. This dynamic has fostered gradual resource sharing, in line with shared commitments such as open data, as outlined in the Barcelona Declaration.

Furthermore, the IT department of Sorbonne University played a leading role in coordinating the development of a digital inter-university campus, bringing together IT infrastructure, shared services and collaborative tools for the entire Alliance.

Concrete actions have been implemented to simplify processes: streamlining of Learning Agreements specific to 4EU+, optimization of information systems for monitoring student mobility, and promotion of good administrative practices among partners. These developments reflect a profound structural transformation, serving effective and sustainable European collaboration.

Implementation of mobility measures

One of the working groups within the 4EU+ Alliance is the Mobility Experts Group. This working group meets every two weeks to exchange information. It is composed of experts

from all the universities within the 4EU+ Alliance. Its objective is to better coordinate the respective activities of its members in order to facilitate intra-alliance mobility. To this end, an inter-institutional Erasmus+ agreement has been signed between our institutions.

The working group's activities are numerous and include, in particular, the development of framework documents for simplified registration procedures within institutions' information systems (virtual mobility). It also leads working groups on curriculum comparison, bringing together teachers from the same discipline. The objective of these groups is not only to verify the compatibility of course offerings but also to develop new ways of collaborating, exchanging students and staff, and developing joint course programs. Another example of its activity is the publication this year of a joint call for proposals concerning Erasmus+ Intensive Hybrid Programmes ([BIPs](#) ²⁷). This working group contributes to increasing mobility within the Alliance. A recent example is the inclusion of mobility in medicine within the scope of the multilateral agreement, which is one of the most regulated fields.

Finally, this working group is a mobility observatory that allows us to monitor indicators, manage activity and reflect on obstacles encountered in the implementation of mobility and actions to be taken to overcome them.

[4EU+ Grant Support Service](#)²⁸

The Grant Support Service is a continuation of the VDO or Virtual Development Office which was already offered from the first Erasmus+ 4EU+ EUP1 project.

This is a team of project managers and team leaders within the Research or International Relations Offices who support the academic staff of 4EU+ member universities with any questions regarding funding opportunities within the 4EU+ network. The GSS acts as the entry point for researchers' inquiries about relevant calls for proposals within the Alliance. Researchers, faculty, and doctoral students are encouraged to consult the selection of calls for proposals in the proposed categories and to contact the team with any questions. The GSS closely monitors significant developments in 4EU+ and in research, innovation, and education in Europe, in conjunction with the 4EU+ units at each institution. It is coordinated by the University of Heidelberg.

Human Resources: An Evolution of Professions

Belonging to an Alliance has impacted the HR profiles we recruit. We've needed to hire new profiles: for example, EU Finance Project Officers are difficult to recruit in higher education, especially since they must have expertise in European and national regulations and work in English; similarly, IT Project Managers need in-depth knowledge of the field within a European context. We've also had to adapt existing profiles: staff must work both with the internal communities of their institutions, whom they must convince and gain support for the project, and with a network of Alliance member institutions, which requires strong diplomatic and coordination skills.

²⁷<https://4euplus.eu/4EU-415.html?newsID=24910>

²⁸<https://4euplus.eu/4EU-738.html?>

2. A powerful network that offers a lever for rapid and effective action

Direct access to European discussions:

Our leaders are now participating in strategic exchanges with other European rectors in our alliance, profoundly changing our capacity for influence and decision-making at the European level. This fundamentally alters how we address current issues and challenges. It has enabled swift decisions during these turbulent times, as Sorbonne University mobilizes to welcome researchers currently based in the United States or awaiting placement. We give particular priority to young researchers: doctoral candidates and postdoctoral fellows in fields especially impacted by American funding cuts, or who wish to come to or return to France and conduct their research in an environment of academic freedom. We are currently working with our colleagues in the 4EU+ European alliance to offer joint doctoral and postdoctoral positions within this same framework. We have championed the idea of a Cofund Alliance call for proposals. We are also awaiting information regarding the Choose Europe for Science - Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions call, which is expected to open on October 1, 2025 and close on December 3, 2025.

Our governance bodies meet every two weeks for the management committee, and once a month for the governing board of rectors. This allows us to conduct lobbying activities, and discussions between presidents take place directly at the European level. By surveying our European Alliance, we can thus easily and quickly obtain the perspective of seven different countries.

“EDAFFICHE” project: [European Degree label pilot project](#)²⁹

ED-AFFICHE is a joint initiative of six European university alliances, launched in April 2023 in response to the European Commission's 2022 call for proposals concerning the implementation of a common European degree label. Coordinated by Una Europa, the project brings together the alliances 4EU+, CHARM-EU, EC2U, EU-CONEXUS, and Unite!, representing 51 higher education institutions from 22 countries, with the support of 18 national and regional ministries of higher education.

The objective was to overcome obstacles to transnational cooperation by facilitating the awarding of joint degrees in Europe.

The "European diploma" label is an initiative approved by the European Commission to facilitate the awarding of joint diplomas, titles and certificates throughout the European Higher Education Area, by overcoming existing obstacles to transnational cooperation and disseminating universal criteria linked to the corresponding joint programs.

This work has led to changes in the regulatory framework for European diplomas, resulting in the adoption on [May 12, 2025 by the EU Council](#)³⁰ of two texts: a recommendation on a system of quality and recognition of higher education and a resolution on the creation of a common European diploma label, as well as the next steps towards a joint European diploma.

²⁹<https://4euplus.eu/4EU-726.html>

³⁰<https://4euplus.eu/4EU-12.html?newsID=25919>

3. Easier access to financing thanks to a strong and trusted partnership network:

A European alliance as a catalyst for innovation and partnership strength

In just five years, we have consolidated a network of trusted partners, thereby reducing the time required to develop new academic and scientific projects. For example, organizing three research missions to three global health institutes in just four weeks illustrates the speed and efficiency of this cooperation. Similarly, the success of responses to calls for proposals (CFPs) such as the [PostGenAI AI cluster or the SPHINX heritage](#) project, for which 4EU+ partners supported and integrated the application, testifies to the strength of these collaborations.

More generally, responses to requests for partner searches or intra-university collaboration within the Alliance are greatly facilitated and always prioritized by the administrative teams. In addition, our internationalization policy has been strengthened through new partnerships in Eastern Europe, notably the "[Eastern Partnership University Cluster](#)"³¹, developed with the 4EU+ universities (Charles University, University of Warsaw) and other institutions such as Eötvös Loránd University (Hungary), Taras Shevchenko National University of Kyiv (Ukraine), and other institutions in Ukraine, Moldova and Georgia.

Within Sorbonne University, thanks to better structuring, we have been able to align our internal funding (Idex) with that of the ANR and European structural funds (Erasmus+, SwafS, Horizon Europe) thus creating synergies (see our document concerning our economic model).

4. European Student Life: participation in building the Alliance and in governance bodies

Student committee and Student Assembly

SU's entry into 4EU+ allows its students to participate in the [European Student Assembly](#),³² which brings together more than 250 students each year to develop proposals on the future of Europe across a range of topics, including democratic participation, education and research, and inclusion. Applications are evaluated both by peers at the ESA level and by the alliances, which play a major role in organizing the project, notably by participating in a forum to present their activities to the participants.

The [Student Committee](#)³³ (SC) is the student representative body of the Alliance. Chaired by a Chair and a Vice Chair elected from among the members, its role is to ensure student participation, both in the governance of the Alliance and in the projects implemented.

To strengthen the legitimacy of its representatives and increase the Alliance's visibility at the local level, SU chose to appoint student representatives from university councils to the Student Council (SC), as these representatives are best placed to disseminate information and understand students' needs. The SC's responsibilities encompass an interface that alternates between the local level, through the 4EU+ hub (supporting project development, communication materials, and disseminating opportunities for the community), and the European level (collaborative projects with other students; the General Secretariat; and other political bodies within the Alliance on strategic matters). The SC is central to the new [4EU+](#)

³¹<https://eapuc.eu/EAPUC-1.html>

³²<https://4euplus.eu/4EU-1005.html>

³³<https://4euplus.eu/4EU-595.html>

[Student Climate Action Network project](#) ³⁴, which aims to connect students involved in the ecological transition across the eight universities to develop initiatives and contribute to the environmental dialogue at the EU level.

The SC also facilitates networking among local student representatives from the eight universities, who share their experiences and exchange best practices. SU aims to be a leader in student integration and advocates for strengthening their role in the Alliance's governance, given the successful collaboration at the local level. This is the case for the IBD project, led by SU, where the Chair sits on the steering committee. The establishment of the 4EU+ Alliance has thus enabled the integration of students into SU's European and international policy, where collaboration with students had previously been very limited, if not nonexistent.

5. Development of an integrated digital environment: Student portal and uLMS

The 4EU+ Alliance aims to build a European research university by creating an **integrated**, sustainable, interoperable, and user-centric digital environment. This transformation involves implementing a shared digital campus, the result of interdisciplinary collaboration between mobility, education, and IT experts from partner universities. Priorities include the creation of a common information system, the introduction of a **European student identifier** integrated into information systems, and data governance compliant with the GDPR, in order to facilitate a seamless and borderless experience for students. In this capacity, Sorbonne University coordinates Work Package 5 on the *Inter-University Campus: Infrastructure and Services*.

Two flagship projects illustrate this ambition:

The [Student Portal](#) ³⁵, a central platform dedicated to students, brings together essential services for education, mobility (both physical and virtual), integration, and the development of transferable skills. Its development is based on a collaborative approach grounded in Design Thinking, involving experts, teachers, and students. The portal aims to strengthen student autonomy and showcase courses shared between universities.

- The [uLMS](#) ³⁶ (Umbrella Learning Management System), the educational component of the digital campus, provides unified and secure access to the learning platforms of member universities via institutional credentials. Based on the EduGain and ESI standards, it promotes the sharing of educational resources, simplifies inter-university cooperation, and structures the shared educational offering over the long term.

These initiatives embody a profound transformation of digital services and pedagogy within the Alliance. For Sorbonne University, as coordinator, this project represents a strategic lever, strengthening its role in digital governance, pedagogical innovation, and the development of joint degrees and modular lifelong learning programs. These actions reflect a strong commitment to building an inclusive, agile, and resilient European higher education area.

³⁴<https://4euplus.eu/4EU-877.html>

³⁵<https://sp.4euplus.eu/home>

³⁶<https://pp-elearning.4euplus.sorbonne-universite.fr/auth/saml/login.php>

IV Additional reports from other actors, members of EUA

Following the national seminar Future of European University Alliances organised by the DAEI (January 2025) and the presentation of the ongoing evaluation work made by the six target institutions of the qualitative evaluation, some actors spontaneously offered to contribute.

Each contribution is reported in the exact form in which it was submitted. As this is a non-participant observation in the contribution analysis, while the reported elements have not been verified, they demonstrate the importance of the EUI for the various stakeholders and offer valuable additions to previous assessments.

Proposed report for ENGAGE

*Success, challenge, progress in change management, or research results: the aim is to concretely illustrate **the impact of alliances on institutions** and to better understand their role, both in terms of European cooperation and internal development.*

Through its commitment to **the European alliance ENGAGE.EU**, Toulouse Capitole University (UT Capitole) has made significant progress in the internationalization of its programs, demonstrating concrete success in aligning with its strategy. This drive towards internationalization has resulted in a significant increase in student and staff mobility and a structural transformation of the institution.

Since its involvement in the ENGAGE.EU Alliance, UT Capitole has observed a steady increase in student mobility.

First, the alliance's impact on student mobility is particularly noteworthy. By developing and launching diverse mobility programs, such as short-term and virtual exchanges within the ENGAGE.EU alliance, UT Capitole has seen a 25% increase in outgoing student mobility

through ENGAGE.EU programs compared to traditional international mobility. Furthermore, for the 2023/2024 academic year, there was a 50% increase in UT Capitole student mobility facilitated by the ENGAGE.EU alliance compared to the previous year. In fact, since the alliance's inception, the number of student exchanges within the alliance has grown steadily each year.

This increase reflects UT Capitole students' access to a more diverse and innovative "ENGAGE.EU" training offer.

The increase in student mobility is due to a comprehensive and growing international educational offering, with nearly 500 courses offered in 2023/2024, in both online and in-person formats. These are primarily courses from partner universities, made available online for ENGAGE.EU students, or courses co-created with instructors from partner universities. The accelerated development of dual degree programs and the creation of the "ENGAGE.EU Joint Programme" also contribute to the expansion of international educational opportunities.

UT Capitole has successfully transformed itself to contribute significantly to this ENGAGE.EU training program.

UT Capitole contributes significantly to the creation of this Alliance training program through structural changes at our university, such as:

- ▶ The integration of criteria for the career development of teaching and research staff, such as their involvement in the alliance's international activities
- ▶ Proficiency in English is included in the new job descriptions for administrative staff and teaching and research staff.
- ▶ The university's governing board has been internationalized by including two members from the governance of the ENGAGE partner institutions.
- ▶ For administrative staff, the "ENGAGE with English" training program was implemented and mobility programs such as Job Shadowing and Staff week were encouraged.
- ▶ The transformation of training program structures, with the integration of a bonus system for participation in Alliance courses. Furthermore, work is underway to better integrate and recognize the ECTS credits of ENGAGE.EU courses within the program structures in anticipation of the new accreditation.
- ▶ The investment in creating innovative teaching spaces, equipped with cutting-edge digital tools and designed to support the hybrid and collaborative teaching formats offered within the alliance, has allowed instructional designers to develop their skills in this "digitalization" to better support teachers.

The financial resources made available to UT Capitole as part of this initiative were a significant lever in initiating this transformation.

During its transformation into a state-owned enterprise (EPE), one of UT Capitole's strategic objectives was to develop its international presence. UT Capitole's involvement in the ENGAGE alliance has enabled it to achieve this objective thanks to the resources made available within the Alliance, such as:

- ▶ Securing funding to finance teachers' additional hours for the creation of hybrid courses
- ▶ Obtaining the appropriate digital tools (room staff with ceiling microphones, mobile screens with cameras, etc.)
- ▶ Recruit human resources (approximately 5 FTEs) for the implementation of this new training offer in order to ensure, for example, administrative monitoring, academic monitoring, communication, educational support or multimedia technical support.

It should also be noted that the strengthened exchanges with partners, the definition of a common "2035 strategy", the exchange of good practices, and the facilitated networking between teachers and administrative staff were other important levers that UT Capitole was able to benefit from to strengthen its internationalization.

These structural transformations were therefore made possible thanks to the financial resources provided through this initiative, coupled with the political commitment of our leadership. While UT Capitole has benefited, through its participation in the ENGAGE.EU Alliance, from tools to drive genuine change, both academically and structurally, strengthening its international standing while modernizing its internal practices, these transformations cannot continue without the maintenance of this financial support.

Reinventing the university on a European scale: Sorbonne Nouvelle in the YUFE alliance

A strategic Europeanization

Over the past few decades, the concept of internationalization in French universities has sometimes been reduced to a supply-side policy: attracting more international students, diversifying their geographical origins, and showcasing statistical indicators as proof of openness. In *Les Universités françaises* (2012: 109-110), Frédéric Forest highlighted the limitations of this approach, emphasizing that it overlooked fundamental transformations: curriculum overhauls, adapted teaching and administrative practices, and a redefinition of the relationship between the institution and its students. While all French universities must contend with a genuine lack of resources to assume increased responsibilities and manage the growth and diversification of their student bodies, this criticism of "superficial" internationalization seems less applicable to universities involved in European alliances.

Sorbonne Nouvelle University (USN) exemplifies this evolution. Since its full integration into YUFE, a network of ten universities across ten countries (*Young Universities for the Future of Europe*: <https://www.yufe.eu>), in March 2023, and with its highly international student body (30-40% at the undergraduate and graduate levels, 50% at the doctoral level), USN, which focuses on Arts, Humanities, Languages, and Social Sciences, is making a decisive shift towards a more comprehensive and assertive Europeanization. It is fully leveraging its strengths, particularly the diversity of its languages and cultures, and drawing especially on its departments of European Studies, Languages, Literature and Linguistics, Arts and Media, as well as its two prestigious institutes (ESIT, IHEAL) and research laboratories. **For the first time in its history, our university has established a vice-presidency specifically dedicated to Europe, a sign of a strong political commitment.** Thanks to the collective work of the entire presidential team, this internal structure has enabled it to **develop a clear and visible strategy both internally and externally, affecting training, research, governance and partnerships.**

Obstacles to overcome

It was initially necessary to overcome, gradually and cautiously, internal resistance as well as external difficulties in addressing the obstacles to European integration. Internally, the university generally faced fears of a loss of academic or disciplinary identity, and of a distortion of its teaching and research content (see Maassen, P., & Stensaker, B., 2023). The use of English as a *lingua franca*, in particular, poses a challenge for engaging all staff and for offering the full range of courses and scientific publications to non-French-speaking students and academics (Chaplier, 2016). Furthermore, the siloed structure of the university's disciplinary fields, with their diverse teaching and research practices, coupled with a still limited tradition of interdisciplinarity or the development of European projects in certain areas, hinders the strategic coordination required by the logic of alliances. This makes strong institutional support all the more necessary to foster cross-functional synergies and skills development within teams. Added to this is the administrative complexity of European projects, which requires specialized internal services that are growing but still under-resourced due to a lack of resources. Regarding external resistance and pressures specific to Arts, Humanities, and Languages, activities such as project development, participation in networks, and partnership management remain largely unrecognized in promotion and evaluation criteria, even though they are central to the dynamics fostered by European alliances. Furthermore, the major disciplines at Sorbonne Nouvelle continue to receive very little attention in national and European funding priorities, which limits competitive access to necessary additional funding.

A committed dynamic

However, by leveraging its diverse educational and scientific culture, its multilingualism, the English proficiency of many of its academics, and a dynamic and dedicated bilingual YUFE team, Sorbonne Nouvelle has successfully met these challenges. **It actively participates in all**

12 work packages of the alliance. It implements a wide range of innovative initiatives: physical, virtual, and hybrid mobility programs; blended intensive programs (BIPs); integration of YUFE teaching units into course structures; participation in a *bachelor's degree in urban sustainability studies* (<https://www.yufe.eu/yufe-bachelor/>); sharing of best practices in language teaching; innovative doctoral and postdoctoral training; involvement in collaborative research projects; development of disciplinary scientific networks; encouragement of civic engagement; strengthening of links between science and society; and the progressive mobilization of all staff. The impact of this dynamic will be quantifiable in a few years thanks to the alliance's efforts to equip itself with the necessary tools in the medium term. For Sorbonne Nouvelle, this translates into stronger **integration and increased recognition within European and national networks: UNICA, EUA, EASSH, CoARA**, as well as the representation of the European Parliament in France, the Jacques Delors Institute, and the networks of International and European Vice-Presidents. Our university acts as a proactive force within these networks, particularly in the humanities and social sciences, **strengthening its influence and contributing, at its level, to the structuring of the European Higher Education Area.**

Europeanization in action

Beyond mere strategic positioning, integration into YUFE has allowed Sorbonne Nouvelle to embed its actions within a framework of European co-construction. This alliance promotes a profoundly inclusive university model, centered around the student. It aims to move beyond the traditional framework of individual mobility to build a distributed (collaborative and transnational) European university, **in which students, researchers, and staff share the same values and principles, circulate, cooperate, and innovate together.** In concrete terms, Sorbonne Nouvelle now benefits from a European budget of over €1 million over three years, supplemented by **€800,000 in national co-financing, without which it would not be possible to strengthen projects in digital technology, innovative pedagogy, and scientific openness.** This support translates, in particular, into intensified cooperation between European institutions, a deeper reflection on pedagogical alignment, and an expansion of professional and academic networks. This

is accompanied by a sustained effort to reconcile linguistic and cultural diversity with the construction of shared values and references, thus contributing to the emergence of a European Higher Education Area based on a shared heritage and democratic principles. It will be necessary to strengthen this effort to guarantee lasting effectiveness and move beyond a purely project-based approach.

In parallel, the university, in synergy with the international affairs department, has developed a proactive policy for welcoming international students and forging closer ties with regions that receive less national or European funding (Africa, South America, Eastern and Southern Europe). This policy aims to progressively enhance the visibility of its courses taught in English, its multilingualism, its bi-national programs (particularly thanks to the support of the Franco-German University), and its ambitious undergraduate, master's, and doctoral programs. **This openness is accompanied by a strong commitment to inclusion, environmental responsibility, and lifelong learning initiatives.** Mobility is approached in a flexible and responsible manner: short-term programs are added to the offerings, hybrid study abroad options are available, and partnerships are strengthened in key cooperation areas.

Far from being limited to a logic of attraction, **the governance of Sorbonne Nouvelle actively projects itself at the European level in its emerging projects related to artificial intelligence** (response to a call for proposals), **disability** (a demonstration inclusive university), cultural heritage (the HERMES AMI SHS project), **and its collaboration with local partners** (Sorbonne Alliance, Condorcet, the city hall, schools and social and medical institutions, and cultural institutions). **This synergy between local roots and European openness is now a central driver of its institutional development. It is thus part of a genuine dynamic of European integration.**

Focus on the transformations linked to European universities University of Western Brittany European University Alliance SEA-EU

General remarks:

The most visible and effective transformative effect took place within the framework of the Blended intensive programs (BIP) and the staff week, respectively intended for students and staff (teaching and administrative), which made it possible to raise awareness throughout the university community of the existence and opportunities offered by the alliance in terms of training, interculturality and personal and professional development.

UBO was also a pioneer in TEDs training programs developing in universities, through a teaching unit set up by UBO as part of the alliance. Regarding long-term staff recruited for the alliance's operation, there remains one lever to pull to ensure that alliances have a truly transformative effect by leading to dedicated recruitment and the increased value placed on strategic positions (such as project manager). SEA-EU has, however, facilitated the recruitment of temporary support staff (for example, an instructional designer to support shared UBO training programs for the SEA-EU teaching community).

Overall, we also observe an increase in English language skills through participation in the staff weeks offered at UBO.

In addition to a vice-president specifically dedicated to the alliance, we will also highlight the involvement of two vice-presidents and presidents of UBO in the alliance (Innovation and Transitions), which helps to spread the values and activities in the university from the governance stage and to drive the transformative effect within the institution.

In support of these preliminary remarks, several examples of transformative effects observed through the SEA-EU alliance are presented thematically:

RESEARCH IN TERMS:

- ▶ **Boost within research governance** (better coordination for European projects, new support mechanisms, strengthened services, etc.)
- ▶ **New dynamics for the mobility** (incoming and outgoing) of doctoral students / researchers (joint supervision, short research stays, etc.)
- ▶ **Emergence of joint European projects** (e.g., the LBCM project with Kiel (and many others => joint responses to Horizon Europe, construction of thematic networks...)
- ▶ **Increased expertise in setting up European projects** (e.g., DRIVE's European services even more active, more experienced researchers...); link between the UBO European Project Platform (2PE) and central services (Research, Innovation and Economic Development Department, International Affairs Department)
- ▶ **UBO's new European strategic positioning on research** (e.g., privileged partnerships, increased visibility, etc.)

IN THE AREA OF INNOVATION AND DIGITAL TECHNOLOGY:

Note on innovation: Establishing and operating the alliance requires an investment of time to understand the various tasks and grasp how they intersect. This network is built over time, but also through regular exchanges (both in person and online) to forge genuine connections. Ultimately, it's a true network of trust for long-term collaboration.

- ▶ **Mobility:** increased network creation and professional exchanges - physical and virtual mobility.

- ▶ **Added value of Staff weeks:** Development of educational innovation within the alliance, harmonization of practices.
- ▶ **Increased training opportunities:** Two courses for SEA-EU are under development (on transitions and on digital tools); there is a prospect of developing a BIP (Business Information Program) for doctoral students on innovative teaching methods.
- ▶ **Digital platform:** Development of a common Moodle platform at the SEA-EU level (initiated via the implementation of a joint diploma within the alliance (diploma equivalent to a STORM Master's degree))
- ▶ **Network:** Creation of a Moodle expert network at SEA-EU level

ON THE TERMS OF TRANSITIONS (Going Greener):

- ▶ **Network:** SEA-EU and related projects (developed through SEA-EU) have enabled UBO Open Factory (interdisciplinary creation and experimentation laboratory) to benefit from a long-term European network of partners for carrying out joint activities (responding to European projects like CHIC, sharing our innovation methodologies).
- ▶ **Development of new practices and inspiration for the Directorate:** New practices on the governance of transitions. Inspiration for the creation of the future Sustainable Development and Social Responsibility (SDSR) Directorate.

IN TERMS OF INCLUSIVE APPROACHES, EQUALITY AND THE FIGHT AGAINST GENDER-BASED AND SEXUAL VIOLENCE (GBV):

- ▶ **Equality:** Acceleration and dynamism of events and actions in favor of equality (organization and support of a week against VSS in November 2024 and equality week in March 2025 or Equality, film screenings, distribution of books...).
- ▶ **SEA-EU representation in the bodies:** The presence of members of the SEA-EU UBO team within the Equality Commission makes it possible to build bridges with actions which are taking place elsewhere, it is a link with the Universities of the alliance, with the international community.

- ▶ **Impact of the activities planned in the tasks of the SEA-EU WPs:** Initiation of a charter promoting multicultural and inclusive values - Driving force on egalitarian writing, the charter even in English has an important incentive value and to take writing as a mode of communication first without remaining focused on the writing method and the French language.

IN TERMS OF STUDENT LIFE:

- ▶ **European and international mobility:** SEA-EU enables an increase in incoming and outgoing student mobility, which is fruitful for opening up to the world and promoting diversity and interculturality.
- ▶ **Digital:** SEA-EU has enabled us to work on adapting digital resources and making them accessible to our French and international students (Atypie Friendly charter)
- ▶ **Signage:** Developing visibility for UBO within the city, in an inclusive way, but also internally within the university to facilitate movement within its components, and this not only for French students but also international students.

Proposed balance sheet for UNITA

UNITA Focus: Savoie Mont Blanc University and the University of Pau and the Adour Region - At the heart of a European alliance and its internationalization

Introduction: UNITA's political ambition and the vision of a European confederal university

The commitment of Savoie Mont Blanc University (USMB) and the University of Pau and the Adour Region (UPPA) within the UNITA - Universitas Montium alliance goes beyond mere participation in a European project. It is rooted in a strong political ambition and an innovative vision: the construction of a **truly European confederal university**. This vision aims to create an integrated and dynamic space where teaching, research, and innovation transcend national borders. At the heart of this ambition, the sharing of essential commons forms the basis of UNITA's identity and actions. These commons include:

- ▶ **A specific territorial anchoring:** UNITA's member institutions are located in mountainous and rural areas, with a rich natural and cultural heritage, strongly influencing their expertise in training and research.
- ▶ **Promoting multilingualism:** the promotion of Romance languages and mutual intelligibility is a strong element of UNITA's identity, recognizing the importance of linguistic and cultural diversity for a united Europe. It allows for broader internationalization, beyond English.
- ▶ **A commitment to sustainable development:** environmental and social challenges are central to UNITA, which promotes sustainable and responsible practices in all its activities.

USMB and UPPA fully recognize themselves in these shared values and actively contribute to the realization of UNITA's vision. As a confederation of universities, UNITA must define and implement its **own international relations policy**, one that is not simply a collection of the policies of each of the alliance partners. USMB and UPPA play their full part in fostering synergies between their own international policies and those of the alliance.

A strategic international relations policy: building on affinity and trust with GEMINAE

UNITA's international relations policy is distinguished by a strategic approach that notably includes networking with institutions **outside Europe that share a common identity**, based on the use of Romance languages and, to a lesser extent, a presence in mountainous regions. This identity allows us to differentiate ourselves from other European alliances and to offer an **alternative to the exclusive use of English** to non-English-speaking partners. More broadly, this approach is based on the conviction that fruitful and lasting collaborations emerge more naturally between partners who understand each other, share common values, and pursue similar objectives. A network of partner institutions, named **GEMINAE**, has thus been established:

- ▶ **The GEMINAE network** was built through co-option, based on **proposals from the six original partners** of the alliance. Five institutions per partner were thus proposed in the first phase of the "European Universities" initiative, resulting in a network of around thirty members. This method ensured strong commitment to UNITA's objectives and fostered **solid relationships built on trust and mutual understanding**.
- ▶ **GEMINAE Monitoring:** To ensure the network's effectiveness and sustainability, USMB and UPPA actively monitor the engagement of alliance partners and network institutions. The concept of an active partner is central to this approach; it translates into **regular participation in alliance activities and concrete involvement in teaching and research projects**. To facilitate this monitoring, a graph-based visualization tool is used, allowing for the mapping of existing connections, the identification of geographical areas and themes of strong interaction, and the pinpointing of potential develop-

ment opportunities. Furthermore, the potential involvement of GEMINAE partners is considered in every action developed by the UNITA alliance. Several GEMINAE universities have therefore been offering virtual mobility courses within the UNITA alliance since the 2024-2025 academic year.

- ▶ **The development and expansion of GEMINAE is driven** by the regular analysis of the existing network, combined with the integration of new partner institutions within the alliance, particularly through the second phase of the "European Universities" initiative. **This policy** prioritizes the quality over the quantity of relationships and aims to enrich the GEMINAE network by integrating institutions that bring **complementary expertise, share UNITA's values, and contribute to achieving its strategic objectives**. Priority is given to Romance-language regions not currently covered by GEMINAE, such as Chile. Other universities located in non-Romance-language territories, but which have Romance languages at the heart of their strategies, are also being considered, whether they are located in the United States, Canada, or Vietnam.

Multiple exchanges and collaborations: serving teaching, research and innovation

The UNITA alliance and its GEMINAE network provide a fertile framework for the **development of exchanges and collaborations** that benefit all partners and contribute to achieving the alliance's strategic objectives:

- ▶ **Exchanges between alliance partners and network members:** beyond the creation of new relationships between alliance partners and network members, existing bilateral relationships between UNITA partners and GEMINAE members are revitalized and given a new dimension thanks to UNITA's structuring framework. The alliance facilitates the **implementation of joint research projects** (seed funding, joint PhD supervision funding through Horizon Europe Marie Skłodowska Curie grants), the **sharing of online courses** (by the alliance as well as by the network), and the **development of joint study programs** (with Erasmus Mundus-type targets). and the **increase in mobility of teachers, researchers and students via Erasmus+ KA171 funds**.

- ▶ **The driving role of GEMINAE conferences:** The GEMINAE conferences, organized online in 2021, then by USMB in 2022 and by UPPA in 2023, are a concrete example of networking and **fostering collaboration**. These regular events offer a **platform for exchanging and sharing experiences**, promote the identification of potential synergies, and stimulate the emergence of new research, innovation, and teaching projects. The organization of a **Best Practice Awards** within the framework of these conferences recognizes the most innovative and effective initiatives, thus encouraging the continuous improvement of collaborative practices. The next GEMINAE conference will take place in September 2025 in Zaragoza.
- ▶ **Exchanges between network members:** USMB and UPPA are also engaged in a forward-looking approach aimed at developing exchanges between members of the GEMINAE network. USMB has submitted a **European project proposal aimed at developing mobility between African GEMINAE members in order to create cross-cutting cooperation dynamics**, strengthen the sense of belonging to the GEMINAE network, and extend UNITA's reach beyond European borders.

Impact and benefits for the University of Savoie Mont Blanc and the University of Pau and the Adour Region

The commitment of USMB and UPPA to the UNITA alliance and its internationalization efforts generates a significant impact and numerous benefits for our institutions:

- ▶ **Facilitating engagement with new partners:** involvement in UNITA gives USMB and UPPA increased visibility and legitimacy on the European and international stage. This greatly facilitates establishing contacts and engaging in discussions with **potential new partners**, whether they are members of GEMINAE or **attracted by the dynamism and ambition of the alliance and its GEMINAE network**.
- ▶ **Securing strategic funding:** GEMINAE is an important lever for obtaining strategic funding. USMB has notably benefited from **KA171 funding for Africa**, which has enabled

the development of inbound and outbound faculty and student mobility programs with African GEMINAE members, thus opening up new prospects for international cooperation.

- ▶ **Fruitful synergies with other networks:** USMB's involvement in UNITA creates natural synergies with other existing networks, such as the **RELIEF network** (a network for exchange and liaison between French-speaking educational institutions), which shares a common interest in sustainable development with UNITA, and whose two other members are a UNITA partner (HES-SO) and a GEMINAE member (UQTR). These synergies multiply opportunities for collaboration.

Conclusion: a shared vision for increased international influence

UNITA's confederal approach, which values the specific strengths of each member while fostering integration and collaboration, represents a major asset for the development of the

University of Savoie Mont Blanc (USMB) and the University of Pau and the Adour Region (UPPA), as well as for building a European Higher Education, Research and Innovation Area. This approach, applied to national relations, has resulted in the **creation of a network of UNITA's international partners**, the **GEMINAE network**. This network revitalizes **historical relationships between alliance partners and network members**, and also **fosters new relationships**, including among network members themselves. The momentum generated by the alliance and its network is demonstrated by the regular organization of **GEMINAE conferences**, where the best examples of collaboration, in both research and innovation as well as teaching, are highlighted and recognized. For USMB and UPPA, this network represents an opportunity to amplify their collaborations with some historical partners, to be more visible internationally, to consider new fruitful collaborations, to obtain the necessary funding and to synergize their own networks.

Proposed report for UNITA: Research focus

Research, innovation and knowledge transfer in an international context within the UNITA Alliance: Sharing good practices for a transformation of the European university landscape

Introduction

In a context where the globalization of knowledge and skills poses new challenges to university systems, international collaboration in research and higher education has become a strategic imperative for Europe. Since the creation of the European Research Area, the objective has been to overcome institutional fragmentation, promote scientific excellence, and stimulate innovation across the continent. The UNITA Alliance, bringing together twelve universities and more than 250,000 students, is central to this ambition. It structures synergies around six major thematic areas, encourages the pooling of resources, and offers innovative programs to welcome and train young teacher-researchers. UNITA aims to make higher

education not only more inclusive and adaptable to local realities, but also more attractive internationally. This model embodies the recent transformations of European universities, which are called upon to combine scientific excellence, openness, and social responsibility.

1 - Joint research to address the challenges of our territories

1.1 - Context

Scientific research within the European continent has been characterized by a high degree of mobility of knowledge, a sharing of resources and initiatives that transcend national borders. In 2000, the European Union formalized its commitment to establishing a European re-

search policy through the concept of the "European Research Area." The main objective is to prevent the fragmentation of research efforts by fostering cooperation among European scientists. Various programs contribute to this scientific cooperation, which is based on excellence and collaboration.

Within the framework of the European Universities Initiative, the UNITA Alliance represents a tremendous opportunity to contribute to the structuring and development of the European research area.

The six institutions, now twelve, of the UNITA Alliance wish to contribute to the excellence of European research, by collectively connecting their scientific strengths to the economic, technical, environmental and societal challenges of the territories that make it up.

UNITA's ambition for research and innovation is ensured by integrated strategic management assumed at the highest institutional level, in order to contribute to the Alliance model promoted by UNITA.

1.2 - Objectives

1.2.1 - To build a clear scientific identity around six thematic areas:

The UNITA Alliance has chosen to [define priority thematic areas](#), in which scientific communities are encouraged to collaborate and innovate.

Initially, three themes were defined, now expanded to six:

- ▶ Cultural Heritage
- ▶ Green energy
- ▶ Circular economy and the environment
- ▶ Overall health
- ▶ Digital transition
- ▶ Inclusive societies

These research themes are based on recognized local capabilities, in line with the major scientific missions defined at the European level.

1.2.2 - Structuring European research hubs

Based on the six identified scientific themes, the UNITA Alliance has established research "Hubs" designed to structure and coordinate scientific and academic collaborations within the Alliance. Each research hub is coordinated by two universities and managed by a coordinating committee comprising a representative from each institution.

Dedicated funding helps to encourage the emergence of new collaborative projects (min. 3 partners) within these hubs, as well as networking and exchange events.

These hubs, associated with the socio-economic partners of our territories, are able to respond to contemporary challenges specific to our common characteristics, benefiting from expertise and research results from all of our institutions.

The UNITA Alliance aims for the long-term sustainability of its research and innovation activities, structured around research institutes benefiting from a financial, legal, and governance framework. These hubs are working to diversify their funding sources to achieve this sustainability, particularly through European programs (Horizon Europe).

In the context of the MSCA projects obtained by the Alliance (U*NIGHT (MSCA & Citizens), CHORAL (COFUND)), we have already been able to observe the capacity of the UNITA Alliance to solicit funding in the context of comparative calls for projects.

1.2.3 - Pooling our research resources to serve excellence and new collaborations

The European Research Area's ambition for excellence requires ensuring easy access to cutting-edge equipment and services, thereby increasing the impact of investments made in research infrastructure.

In line with [Action 8 of the ERA agenda](#), UNITA partners have agreed, since 2022, on common principles for sharing research infrastructure, based on preferential pricing and a [shared catalog](#) of accessible infrastructure. The principles governing the use of this system were compiled in an agreement signed by the rectors of the alliance. The creation of the platform enabling alliance researchers to identify relevant infrastructure was carried out within the framework of the Re-UNITA project (Horizon Europe, SWAFs component).

Since 2022, dedicated funding has enabled the Alliance's scientific community to take advantage of equipment hosted by other UNITA institutions, allowing them to achieve new results and explore new scientific directions.

1;2.4 - Contributing to Europe's attractiveness to young researchers

European University Alliances have many advantages that enable them to offer an environment of excellence to researchers.

Within UNITA, numerous initiatives aim to facilitate the reception and support of young researchers, particularly at the doctoral level. Thus, the UNITA doctoral school network has made it possible to develop and formalize a common framework for welcoming doctoral students in joint supervision, signed by the rectors of the Alliance institutions, and the recruitment, from 2021, of more than 52 doctoral students in joint supervision within the UNITA Alliance hubs.

MSCA-COFUND CHORAL project began, enabling the hosting of 42 doctoral students in joint supervision within UNITA universities, in the field of cultural heritage.

In addition to funding and recruiting these doctoral students, the UNITA Alliance offers a range of training and opportunities to these young researchers, enabling them to benefit from a wealth of resources crucial to supporting them in their early career years.

In many European countries, we are seeing a lack of appeal of doctoral studies and scientific careers, particularly among master's students.

Since 2024, UNITA has aimed to offer an integrated Master's-Doctorate program across all of the Alliance's hubs. These Graduate Schools will include a continuum of research training, mobility opportunities, and facilitate preparation for a doctoral program from the first year of the Master's program, across the UNITA Alliance.

2. International collaboration in higher education.

2.1. Context

The internationalization of higher education is today a major lever for innovation, academic mobility and pedagogical transformation, in response to the globalization of knowledge and skills.

Alliances such as UNITA **demonstrate** the strategic importance of multilingualism, digital innovation and co-construction of teaching methods to build open, inclusive and adapted training for rural and cross-border areas.

This dynamic also promotes greater equity of access and integration into the knowledge society.

2.2. Obstacles

Despite these advances, many structural obstacles persist in international academic collaboration:

- ▶ **Geographical barriers:** The remoteness and dispersion of institutions, especially in rural areas, limit access to mobility and effective participation in joint projects.
- ▶ **Time barriers:** Differences in academic calendar and time zone pose challenges for the organization and synchronization of shared activities.
- ▶ **Language barriers:** The diversity of languages and varying levels of proficiency make it difficult to produce shared educational content, facilitate international exchange, and actively integrate students and teachers.
- ▶ **Technological and organizational barriers:** The heterogeneity of digital platforms and the fragmentation of tools limit the effectiveness and sustainability of collaborations.
- ▶ **Cultural and institutional barriers:** Differences in educational and organizational standards sometimes hinder the implementation of integrated solutions.

2.3 - UNITA's proposals

To address these obstacles, UNITA and its partners have implemented a range of innovative solutions:

- ▶ **Shared digital ecosystem:** A federating platform connects university learning spaces, enabling synchronous and asynchronous access to resources, courses, and multilingual virtual mobility.
- ▶ **Collaborative design of learning paths:** Teachers and instructional designers co-create modules, learning objects and multilingual micro-certifications, adaptable in formats, durations and content.
- ▶ **Multilingualism and machine translation:** Production of content in several Romance languages and in English, supported by computer-assisted translation and language support devices.
- ▶ **Educational Analytics and Process Mining:** Analyzing learning traces (learning analytics) and process mining allows us to visualize learning paths, optimize student support, and adapt teaching methods.
- ▶ **International openness and dissemination:** Integration into networks such as GEMINAE (more than 30 non-European universities) and open source dissemination of resources strengthen the transferability and sustainability of the model.

2.4 - Impact

To date, [Connect-UNITA's Living Learning Lab](#) has created more than 12 multilingual courses, around 30 innovative learning paths, and nearly 100 reusable learning resources. In addition, dissemination seminars are held regularly, bringing together more than 100 participants and boasting satisfaction rates exceeding 70%.

The effects observed are numerous:

- ▶ **Accessibility and equity:** Digital pooling and multilingualism allow for broader participation, including areas traditionally excluded from international exposure.
- ▶ **Pedagogical renewal:** Collaborative design, advanced use of learning analytics and the circulation of resources stimulate innovation and adaptation of practices.
- ▶ **International reach and sustainability:** Openness, dissemination of productions and integration into networks broaden the impact and ensure the transferability of the UNITA model.

The UNITA model shows that it is possible to overcome traditional barriers to international academic collaboration through digital pooling, multilingualism, co-design of teaching materials and the use of advanced learning data analytics.

Conclusion

The UNITA Alliance's experience exemplifies the capacity of European higher education to meet the challenges of international collaboration and scientific excellence. Through the structuring of thematic research hubs, the integration of shared digital tools for education, and the promotion of multilingualism, UNITA demonstrates that it is possible to overcome the geographical, linguistic, and institutional barriers that still too often limit the scope of academic collaborations. The UNITA Alliance not only contributes to building a more unified and effective European research and education area, but also offers an adaptable model that can inspire other initiatives on the international stage. By placing cooperation, innovation, and openness at the heart of its strategy, UNITA is paving the way for a European university resolutely committed to the 21st century knowledge society.



Co-funded by
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UNIVERSEH – The success of student engagement in the Alliance

Contribution to the evaluation of the Alliances by the MESRI 24/03/2025

UNIVERSEH (European Space University for Earth and Humanity, <https://universeh.eu/>) is a "European University" Alliance coordinated by the Comue of Toulouse for 5 of its members, and bringing together the University of Luxembourg, HHU University in Düsseldorf in Germany, AGH University in Krakow in Poland, LTU University in Luleå in Sweden, University of Namur in Belgium and Rome II Tor Vergata University in Italy.

Launched in 2020, UNIVERSEH aims to become the only European university in a rapidly changing space sector, offering an innovative, interdisciplinary, multilingual, multicultural, inclusive, research-based and sustainable learning environment.

Student involvement in the co-creation of the European Space University has been central to the UNIVERSEH Alliance's philosophy since its inception, and has gradually become more structured, driven by the very active Toulouse student community and a person specifically recruited to support student engagement within the ComUE coordination team. Students are thus integrated into all aspects of the project's governance and implementation, contributing to the Alliance's visibility in Europe and beyond. This involvement provides them with unique opportunities to acquire and develop transferable skills, thereby becoming essential agents of societal change.

1. Students present at all levels of the Alliance's governance

Student participation in the co-construction of UNIVERSEH is structured on **two levels** : on the one hand, at the **European level**, with participation in the governance of the Alliance and in the implementation of work packages, and on the other hand locally through **student clubs** in each of the partner universities.

This strong commitment is supported by a **dedicated student engagement officer** within the Alliance's coordinating office (Toulouse University Community), who coordinates the network of its partners through the Alliance. Furthermore, each partner has a **budget allocated to local student activities**.

a. Governance and project management

Students are primarily represented within the **Student Council**, which comprises three representatives from each partner institution and coordinates student engagement across the Alliance. The Student Council elects a chairperson and appoints its representatives to the other governing bodies: the **Governing Board**, which brings together the rectors of the partner institutions and defines the main strategic directions; the **Steering Committee**, which monitors the implementation of the project; and the **Academic Council**, which validates the Alliance's training offer; the **Quality Assurance Committee**, which puts in implements the Alliance's quality processes. In all these bodies, student representatives are **full members**, and therefore have **voting rights**.

Beyond the governance of the Alliance, students are fully engaged in the implementation of the Alliance's activities, firstly by being represented in each of the **work packages** and secondly through **dedicated activities** : conferences on diversity and inclusion organised by and for students, mentoring programmes with professionals, production of innovative educational content by students, etc.



b. Local student groups

The Student Council relies on a **local student club** in each of the partner universities. Initially initiated by students from Toulouse, these local clubs develop their own program of activities: a series of conferences with space professionals (organised locally in turn), study visits (visits to European Space Agency centres...), participation in local events (Toulouse Space Festival...), support for local UNIVERSEH activities (preparation for mobility...).

These local UNIVERSEH Clubs develop links with other student clubs at partner universities through the exchange of expertise and the organization of joint activities. For example, at the University of Namur, the UNIVERSEH Student Club participates in the General Assembly of Students through the student housing project program.

2. Student representatives, ambassadors for the visibility of the Alliance

Through their strong involvement in the governance and implementation of the Alliance, student representatives contribute to the dissemination of UNIVERSEH's results and its visibility in Europe and beyond.

a. European student initiatives

UNIVERSEH students are heavily involved in initiatives such as the EUC voices project - **European Student Assembly** or **Ambassadors' Forum** and **Alumni Network**. Alongside other European students, they participate in formulating policy recommendations for the European Parliament concerning higher education and major societal challenges.

They are also involved in other **inter-Alliance initiatives** such as the thematic group "Student-led community on Sustainable and Democratic Student participation".

b. Opportunities related to UNIVERSEH

UNIVERSEH students represent the Alliance at **various space-related trade shows**, such as the annual International Astronautical Congress (IAC), which brings together all public and private stakeholders in the space sector. Thus, in 2022, the president of the Student Council was appointed among the [30 "Emerging Space Leaders"](#) from the IAC, which represented an excellent career development opportunity for her. UNIVERSEH also benefited from increased visibility, paving the way for new collaborations with space companies.

Opportunities also exist for student representatives to promote the alliance at **diplomatic events**, as was the case in 2024 for the State visit of the King and Queen of the Belgians to France.

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Detailed presentation of ENLIGHT “Open Space”

The **ENLIGHT Open Space** represents an ambitious transformation of European higher education. Its goal is to **create an integrated European university system**, offering all students, learners, teachers, researchers, and staff an environment where learning, teaching, collaborating, creating, and innovating become possible without institutional borders. This “open space” thus fosters a deep integration of ENLIGHT principles at the very heart of partner universities.

From its inception, ENLIGHT embarked on a process to establish this space as a **sustainable European model**. The pilot phase focused on students, resulting in a major outcome: the development of a common competency framework and a quality approach. This framework ensures comparable standards, mutually recognized institutional practices, and equivalent value for degrees and programs, enabling automatic recognition among member institutions.

The second phase expands this open space to encompass all aspects of university life. It now aims to include access to all infrastructure and services (libraries, sports and cultural facilities, student associations), as well as a shared set of tools (research support, international outreach, talent recruitment, IT systems, research infrastructure). This integrated strategy extends the open space of education to all university missions, marking a shift towards a systemic and sustainable partnership.

ENLIGHT is not merely a cooperation project; it embodies a **long-term structural transformation**. To achieve this, systemic change is necessary, both at the alliance level and within each member university. This involves integrating European principles and the ENLIGHT vision into key internal processes, such as education, knowledge creation, course catalogs, recruitment, mobility, and quality assurance. Each university council reaffirmed this commitment during the alliance renewal process for the 2023 Erasmus+ call. Furthermore, on September 22, 2022, the ENLIGHT Governing Board endorsed the joint ‘System’ vision concept and defined the building blocks of its architecture (see figure: “the ENLIGHT Open Space architecture”). To complement the open space architecture, ENLIGHT is establishing a separate legal entity (AISBL ENLIGHT)

to facilitate and sustain our governance processes for our joint governance structure, and to serve as a clear external point of contact for our alliance.

For each of its dimensions—education, research, societal engagement, human resources and funding, governance, and information and digital technologies—ENLIGHT is developing concrete integration methods, complete with operational scenarios and timelines. **This approach thus transcends the traditional project-based model, embracing a process of continuous transformation that impacts the core missions of each partner.** These integration methods will be formalized in an “ENLIGHT Alliance Cooperation Agreement,” scheduled for November 2027. This document will structure not only the areas of cooperation between the universities, but also the relationship between the universities and the AISBL, thereby ensuring unified and sustainable governance.

ENLIGHT’s long-term ambition is to **sustainably reinvent higher education** by creating a **permanent, open European academic space** where students, academics, and staff become engaged citizens, capable of addressing the major challenges of the 21st century. The alliance’s sustainability rests on a holistic approach: it is not limited to financial considerations but also relies on structural and organizational integration, both at the alliance level and within each institution. All members have committed to embedding and internalizing the ENLIGHT structure, supporting the alliance through calls for proposals, and investing beyond 2028, thus ensuring the continuity of this transformative vision.

Proposed report for EC2U



The University of Poitiers has been coordinating the EC2U Alliance since 2020. Its acronym stands for “**European Campus of City-Universities**” (<https://ec2u.eu/>). In 2025, the Alliance is composed of 10 universities, including 9 “**full partners**” (Poitiers, France; Coimbra, Portugal; Salamanca, Spain; Pavia, Italy; Jena, Germany; Linz, Austria; Iasi, Romania; Turku, Finland; Umeå, Sweden) and 1 “**associated partner**” university (Lviv, Ukraine).

The EC2U Alliance also collaborates with more than 60 associated partners, who are at the heart of the EC2U vision for the university of the future. These partners create an essential link between the universities and their local ecosystems: municipalities, student associations, actors from the socio-economic world (including SMEs and large industrial groups), as well as university hospitals.

The activities of the EC2U Alliance revolve around the following objectives:

- ▶ **Joint governance and shared resources.**
- ▶ An **EC2U Connect Center** offering a digital infrastructure for fluid collaboration within the Alliance.
- ▶ **4 multidisciplinary EC2U Joint Master Programs**, based on a selection of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).
- ▶ The **EC2U Forum**, an annual event that brings together academics, citizens, and political decision-makers to co-create the European campus.
- ▶ The **active participation of students in the governance** of the EC2U Alliance and support for student civic engagement.
- ▶ **Inclusive and sustainable mobility**: the Alliance promotes physical, virtual, and hybrid mobility opportunities that are accessible, ecological, and geographically balanced.

▶ **Academic impact and social innovation**, through joint projects and entrepreneurial initiatives. EC2U thus builds a solid reputation based on scientific excellence and social relevance.

▶ Joint cultural and sports events, and a common commitment to **sustainable development**, make EC2U a dynamic and welcoming environment for students.

This note focuses on one of the most innovative activities of the EC2U Alliance, the Virtual Institutes (VIs), whose *raison d'être* is to link education, research, innovation, and service to society.

1 - The EC2U Virtual Institutes: A Generic Framework

1.1 - Mission and Objectives of the EC2U Virtual Institutes

Centered around the SDGs, the EC2U Virtual Institutes (VIs) are joint “**wall-less**” institutes hosting interdisciplinary teams of students, lecturers, researchers, and innovators from the EC2U Alliance universities.

The activities of the VIs encompass all aspects of the **Knowledge Square**, including education, research, innovation, and service to society. EC2U VIs stimulate collaboration around common areas of interest. They create new collaboration opportunities across Europe and enable EC2U universities to be **pioneers in the Knowledge Square**, for example by integrating research and innovation into education.

The vision associated with the VIs is to build a sustainable ecosystem of interdisciplinary teams that aim for excellence in research and training, as well as knowledge transfer and Open and Citizen Science. The intended impact concerns student employability, research excellence, high-quality education, innovative learning and research methods (for example, through interdisciplinarity), and responding to societal needs.

1.1 - Activities of the EC2U Virtual Institutes

Activities include (non-exhaustive list):

- ▶ The EC2U Joint Master Programs, which offer internship opportunities and research-oriented semesters.
- ▶ Short-term training activities for students and researchers, including Summer and Winter Schools, and the EC2U Doctoral Networks.
- ▶ Jointly supervised (Cotutelle) doctoral theses.
- ▶ Joint research projects.
- ▶ Living Labs.

2 - The 7 EC2U Virtual Institutes

- ▶ **Good Health and Wellbeing** (SDG 3)
- ▶ **Quality Education – Modern Languages** (SDG 4)
- ▶ **Quality Education – Education Sciences** (SDG 4)
- ▶ **Sustainable Cities and Communities** (SDG 11)
- ▶ **Life on Land** (SDG 15)
- ▶ **Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions** (SDG 16)
- ▶ **Materials & Methods for a Sustainable Future** (inter-SDG)

Details of the VI activities are available on the website: <https://ec2u.eu/researchers>.

Assessment proposed by the VP RI-Europe network concerning the role of research in the EUA

Research in European University Alliances: Between Ambitions and Constraints

Since their inception, the Alliances of European Universities have embodied a strong ambition to transform the European Higher Education and Research Area. The objective is clear: to strengthen transnational cooperation, stimulate academic excellence, and increase Europe's competitiveness on the world stage. While student mobility and the development of integrated study pathways initially formed the core of the project, **research is now playing an increasingly important role in the Alliances' concerns.** However, the resources deployed to date remain uneven, fragmented, and often insufficient to foster a genuine European-wide research strategy.

Diverse but fragmented sources of funding

The main lever used so far to support research within the Alliances is the Erasmus+ program, whose initial focus, however, is mobility through training. **Two main approaches have been identified: firstly, the integration of research into specific work packages, as done by YUFE with one work package dedicated to collaborative research and another to doctoral training; secondly, the use of seed funding, which allows for the initial financing of innovative projects.** This second approach, however, remains marginal and difficult to implement, as it must be formulated in close connection with training objectives in order to avoid any conflict with the Education and Culture Executive Agency (EACEA). Despite these efforts, Erasmus+ funds are primarily allocated to administrative management, the diversification of transnational training programs, and mobility. **Direct funding for collaborative research, which should form the basis of a European scientific strategy, remains very limited.** This deficiency has led some alliances, which have legal personality, to use their own funds to support research. This

is the case with Una Europa, which funds staff and calls for proposals using contributions from its members. Other institutions, such as Université Côte d'Azur (within Ulysseus), use national funding (IDEX) to invest in priority themes, in this case, aging.

In France, additional support comes from the Ministry of Higher Education and Research through the ANR 2030 co-financing program. This mechanism has enabled several French universities to fund collaborative research projects, create postdoctoral positions, and support scientific conferences. However, this uniquely French approach creates imbalances among European partners: other countries, such as Germany and Austria, do not benefit from similar mechanisms, **which undermines fairness within the alliances and threatens their cohesion.**

Finally, some alliances have successfully responded to Horizon Europe calls for proposals to secure dedicated research funding. These successes illustrate existing initiatives but cannot, on their own, meet the growing need for scientific structuring. A more ambitious response would be the introduction, **in the European Commission's next multiannual financial framework, of a specific budget line dedicated to research within the Alliances.**

Structuring research: hubs as catalysts

The alliances do not seek to replace national research structures, but rather to **offer them new transnational perspectives.** In this context, the establishment of *academic hubs* represents a key tool. These flexible and collaborative thematic centers structure researchers' activities around broad themes, **fostering interdisciplinary projects.** Their number varies depending on the alliance (from 3 to 6), such as the five thematic hubs of Una Europa or the *Virtual Institutes* of EC2U.

These hubs function as spaces for innovation, but their effectiveness remains contingent on the regularity of exchanges and the resources allocated to them. **Their potential is significant:**

they enable communities to unite, projects to be initiated, research and teaching to intersect, and new training programs to emerge. However, the lack of a clear and sustainable financial framework limits their impact.

Furthermore, the pooling of digital tools for research (networking platforms, *matchmaking tools*) is a strong expectation. However, no common strategy currently exists, at the national or European level, to secure scientific exchanges and facilitate virtual collaboration. The question of a common *scientific signature* for the Alliances also remains unresolved. No mechanism has yet been defined to promote publications from these networks, even though such a label would enhance the visibility and impact of European research.

Essential support structures, but still needing strengthening.

The success of research projects also depends on support mechanisms. A non-competitive European program (SWAFS/R&I, Horizon Europe) enabled the establishment of support structures (Grant Offices, Research Support Services) in most Alliances between 2021 and 2024. These services monitor calls for proposals, assist faculty members in developing European projects, and facilitate networking. Some Alliances have signed framework agreements for sharing research infrastructure, including clauses on intellectual property and confidentiality. Others are organizing networking between project engineering services.

These initiatives reflect an ongoing movement towards greater professionalization and integration of research at the European level.

The formation of *communities of practice* within alliances is also crucial. This must extend to all university services (education, mobility, IT, communication). **Enhanced support is expected to encourage more project submissions and facilitate their success.**

However, despite these efforts, a lack of resources remains an obstacle. Potentially useful resources such as the *surrounding research chairs* are still underutilized.

Conclusion: a strategic potential to be consolidated

The integration of research within the European Alliances remains at an intermediate stage. Numerous initiatives exist, and real momentum is building, but resources remain limited, strategies fragmented, and support unequal between countries. It is urgent that the next European programming period recognize this dimension by providing the Alliances with research-specific funding on a stable and equitable basis.

Building a truly integrated European research area requires a close link between research, training, and innovation. The Alliances are ready to play this leading role. However, they need to be given the necessary resources.

Aliyah Morgenstern, Fabienne Peraldi Leneuf,
Martin Schwell and Sébastien Le Picard



Detailed summary of the INVEST Centre of Excellence concept

The European INVEST Alliance is a strategic collaboration between seven European universities with the aim of creating a unified area for higher education, research, and innovation. These universities possess expertise in crucial sectors such as sustainable agriculture, renewable energy, the bioeconomy, digitalization, and regional entrepreneurship. Together, they are dedicated to developing joint training programs, promoting student and researcher mobility, and supporting interdisciplinary research for the benefit of European regions and their socio-economic resilience.

One of the Alliance's pillars is the establishment of the INVEST Centre of Excellence (CoE), a structure designed to strengthen collaborative research, sustainable innovation, and local development initiatives. As a research center, the CoE connects researchers, policymakers, businesses, and local communities. Through interdisciplinary approaches, the Centre explores solutions to critical challenges such as sustainable agriculture, renewable energy, water management, urban-rural interactions, the circular economy, and smart technologies. By leveraging digital innovation, advanced research, and cross-sectoral collaborations, it strives to enhance the economic, social, and environmental resilience of the regions in which it operates.

The CoE is based on three strategic objectives, each accompanied by distinct research priorities. The initial objective is to create a common research framework for collaborative excellence by establishing interdisciplinary research teams within partner universities. These groups aim to integrate research into EU sustainability policies and generate concrete results. A key objective is to cultivate a research-oriented culture, encouraging top-tier academic publications, the submission of collaborative proposals, and the establishment of infrastructure for developing research skills through doctoral programs, joint degrees, and researcher mobility.

The second strategic goal is to foster a "culture of innovation" by strengthening collaborations with governments, businesses, civil society, and end users. This requires increasing public involvement through participatory workshops, which serve as concrete testing grounds for sustainable solutions. By integrating local stakeholders from the earliest stages of research, the Centre for Innovation (CdE) ensures that innovations meet community needs and that recent technologies and policies are developed with practical relevance. Furthermore, the Centre emphasizes knowledge transfer, support for young entrepreneurs, and go-to-market approaches to translate scientific advances into solutions tailored to market demands.

The third objective focuses on establishing networks and pooling infrastructure within the INVEST Alliance and in other contexts. The Centre of Excellence (CoE) is committed to forging strategic alliances with other European research institutions,



Co-funded by
the European Union



innovation hubs, and major industry players to intensify research cooperation and increase its influence on the European and even international stage. INVEST also aims to promote open science, ensuring that research results are available, transparent, and reproducible. Through the use of digital platforms and shared facilities, the CoE seeks to optimize the sustainable use of research infrastructure, including laboratories, databases, and cutting-edge technological tools.

The CdE organizes its research activities into seven thematic groups, each focusing on a crucial aspect of regional sustainability:

1. Sustainable and smart agriculture: Developing precise farming methods, strengthening food security, and improving agricultural supply chains for climate-smart food production.
2. Energy transition and renewable energies: Progress in green energy solutions, study of new energy storage technologies, to support a low carbon emission economy.
3. Water management: Encouraging sustainable water use, preserving aquatic ecosystems and strengthening climate resilience in water governance.
4. Training and skills development: Innovation in higher education models, merging research and teaching, and preparing the next generation of leaders in science and sustainable innovation.
5. Urban-rural relations: Addressing regional development challenges, promoting smart cities and ensuring inclusive economic opportunities in urban and rural areas.
6. Circular and bio-based economy: Application of strategies aimed at minimizing waste, encouraging progress in biotechnology and developing circular economic models.
7. Innovative business models and smart technologies: Promoting entrepreneurship, implementing Industry 4.0 solutions, and advancing innovations based on artificial intelligence.

The Centre of Excellence (CoE) operates with a three-tiered structure to ensure optimal governance. i) The Steering Committee of the Centre of Excellence (CoESB), which provides strategic direction, aligning research priorities with European directives. ii) The Executive Committee of the Centre of Excellence (CoEEC), which manages day-to-day operations, implements strategies, and monitors the progress of the various research groups. iii) The advisory committee, composed of representatives from academia, industry, and students, ensures that the CoE remains aligned with the needs and requirements of its stakeholders.

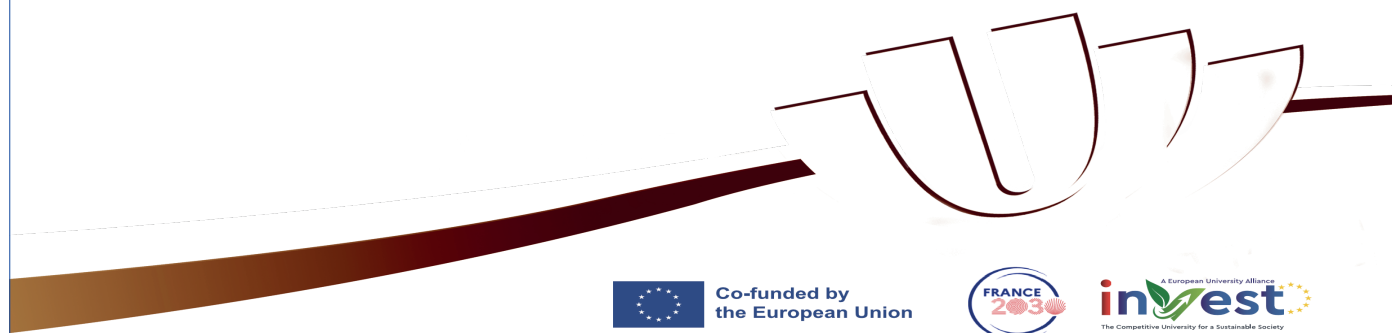
By 2030, the Centre for European Studies (CoE) aims to achieve several milestones, including an annual increase in funding applications through Horizon Europe, the publication of high-impact collaborative research articles, the establishment of joint doctoral supervision programs between partners, and increased researcher mobility. It also plans to deploy Living Labs in partner universities and foster the creation of research-driven startups to boost innovation ecosystems.

As the lead institution for the Work Package dedicated to the creation and implementation of the CdE (Centre for Excellence), the University of Reims Champagne Ardenne ensures its



operational and strategic coordination. The CdE is therefore fully integrated into the university's strategy and complements other major projects of the institution, such as its International Institute for Bioeconomy and Environment, Exebio (France 2030 – ExcellencES), and its University Innovation Hub, InnoRem (France 2030).

In conclusion, the RDI INVEST Centre of Excellence presents itself as a driver of regional and European change focused on research, development, and innovation. It aims to build a more sustainable and knowledge-based future, relying on interdisciplinary research.



European university alliances: what are they for? students?

The primary goal of European universities is to unite and harmonize the higher education systems of the European Union member states. The objective is to offer international opportunities to all relevant communities, both in education and research. The student community, as the main beneficiary of education as a whole, is therefore a crucial stakeholder to consider and listen to when building a European university area.

In order to ensure the diagnostic findings of this study are comprehensive and to include all relevant communities, a survey was conducted among students involved in their European university. This survey consisted of an online questionnaire, and all questions and answers were saved and are available as an appendix to this document. The questionnaire was sent to 10 students from higher education institutions affiliated with and actively involved in European university alliances. All students contacted agreed to complete the questionnaire. The questions were written in English, and students were advised that they could answer in their preferred language. All but one responded in French. In this analysis, we will first examine the impact that European university alliances have had on students' academic and future professional lives, before considering their transformative effect on their personal lives. We will conclude with identified areas for improvement and suggestions for establishing a sustainable and effective European university system.

The impact of the European university on student life and future professional life

European university alliances benefit students in several ways. First, they complement the higher education institutions where students are pursuing their main course of study. Through their international and original approach to teaching methods, they encourage the development of soft skills in addition to the hard skills acquired in class. Indeed, through their contact with European universities, students who responded to the survey reported developing their communication and public speaking skills, teamwork, management and leadership abilities, and making significant progress in English, the main language used for international communication in the EU. For all these skills, they also reported developing their intercultural intelligence. This allows them to approach different situations by taking into account the cultural differences between European and global countries, with the aim of bringing out the best in each individual in every situation. An ECIU student mentioned that, through the activities he undertook with his alliance, he understood that “it was better to be 70% right and 100% understood than to be 100% right and 70% understood.” This illustrates the importance of intercultural intelligence in exchanges within an international context.

Through their European university alliance, the students also applied the knowledge and skills acquired in their curriculum with the help of European universities, using the challenge-based learning model adopted by the alliances. The projects undertaken address real-world situations and concrete problems faced by institutions, businesses, and universities, and the students apply the theory learned in class to these issues. They say that the combined perspectives of the partners in this project have transformed their understanding of their own discipline, which they spend several years studying, making it more practical.

In addition to developing their skills and knowledge in their main field of study, respondents indicated that the opportunities offered by European university alliances allowed them to discover and deepen their knowledge of other subjects and disciplines. This materialized in two distinct ways: the choice of

courses/offerings from the university alliances, and teamwork with individuals possessing very different academic backgrounds and expertise. Higher education in France and the European Union is indeed organized in silos, which leave little room for interdisciplinarity. However, several studies demonstrate the effectiveness of this educational approach, showing that it fosters greater development of critical thinking and complex problem-solving skills among students. This allows them to develop multiple forms of intelligence, enabling them to use several different perspectives to solve a problem, whereas a student who has followed a single-discipline curriculum will only have a partial view of the problem (Ashby, Exter 2019; Didham, Fujii, Torkar 2024; Rafiq 2024). This interdisciplinary approach is therefore valuable and stimulating for students, who rarely benefit from it within their traditional university curriculum.

Through their project-based learning approach, European universities also facilitate connections between students and individuals from institutions and businesses related to their fields of interest—a unique feature at the European level. A member of the Unite! alliance stated that, thanks to their European alliance, they have worked with "political decision-makers, experts, and committed students to build the future of Europe," and have established "an initial international professional network to draw upon in the future." Students thus become aware of the importance of the European dimension, which opens up new international career opportunities for them, and can focus their studies, internship or job searches, or even their thesis topic within this context.

However, not all European alliances are equally appreciated by their students. One in ten students who responded to the survey regretted that their alliance did not do more for students, stating that "no one was aware of the existence of the university alliance and no programs, experiences, or assistance were offered by it."

The impact of the European university on the personal lives of students

The students who responded to the survey also noted that their experiences with the European Alliances offered them opportunities for personal growth. For example, they were able to develop their self-confidence through public speaking and communication exercises.

They were also encouraged to be open-minded and to discover cultures with which they were unfamiliar, as well as disciplines and subjects they wouldn't have considered on their own. Some of these topics allowed them to grow in their self-awareness: a student from the EURECA PRO alliance mentioned that by working on the topic of mental health for the European Student Assembly 2025 (an assembly of representatives from European university alliances), he "became more aware of [his] own well-being." This work led him to ask himself questions about his health, to "take it more seriously, and to normalize discussions about stress, anxiety, or the pressure of studies."

A recurring theme in many survey responses was that participants had developed a network of "extraordinary friendships" and "people they enjoy talking to regularly" throughout the EU and the world, making them "feel at home anywhere in Europe." Students, through the activities they participated in, also felt included in a European student community that shared their ideas, values, and ambitions.

These networks and this growing sense of belonging are fundamental and confirm that European alliances are fulfilling one of their primary missions: to bring people together.

Beyond this European student federation, there is a general feeling of being heard, particularly within the boards to which students have been massively involved, and that their voice matters and can make

a real difference. Through events and throughout the year, involved students feel listened to, and this gives meaning to their studies. Indeed, the student voice is usually little considered or sought after, and most European university alliances build their model with students, who are the primary beneficiaries. Some events, such as the ESA, allow students to express themselves at the political level and draft proposals for European policies, which are then sent to the European Commission.

Areas for improvement and work identified by the students

Survey respondents also identified operational issues within European universities and suggested ways to improve university alliances. Firstly, most students involved in their European university alliance regret that their actions and commitments are not systematically recognized by their home university. They do not always have the option of replacing courses in their regular curriculum with courses offered by their alliance (even if the course has equivalent ECTS credits and is related to their field of study), and very few universities/schools recognize student involvement and allow for course exemptions or reduced class schedules. This makes things complicated for students, who have to balance their studies and coursework with their extracurricular activities, and for some, a part-time job. For example, they might have to retake exams because their university or professor has scheduled them for an event they were supposed to attend. One respondent mentioned that they could have "dedicated more time and finished their studies faster" if they hadn't been involved in their European Alliance. The improvement suggested by students here would be to systematically value student engagement and implement systems for attendance waivers, recognition of engagement through the awarding of ECTS credits, the possibility of replacing courses with equivalent ECTS credits, and support for students involved in their European university. This request, on a broader scale, aligns with what students are asking for regarding extracurricular and volunteer work.

Another area for improvement raised concerns funding for mobility programs. Grants awarded for mobility are not always sufficient, forcing some students to forgo courses or learning opportunities they were accepted into due to a lack of funds. One student also mentioned the difficulty of paying upfront for mobility, even though the university reimburses the funds afterward. Based on the feedback from this survey, it is essential to ensure that funding is adequate for student mobility and their participation in events or programs offered by their European Alliance.

Furthermore, as mentioned previously, some alliances do not offer enough opportunities for their students. One student recommends offering more opportunities in a wider range of areas, rather than just participation in specific events throughout the year. Another suggests establishing and supporting ongoing engagement, not just one-off events. This would create a dynamic that would involve more and more people from all communities (faculty, students, and staff).

While much progress has been made in considering student opinions, there is still a long way to go regarding the involvement of the direct beneficiaries of the European Universities Initiative in the co-construction processes of the European Higher Education Area—namely, the students themselves. One student spoke of a difficulty he encountered and that he saw other involved students face: the need for people employed by universities and alliances to maintain control over certain issues, leaving no freedom for students to implement measures on which they have worked voluntarily. He also stated that "students are at the heart of learning and education," and that "the European Universities Initiative and its associated projects tend to forget this."

Two main general recommendations regarding European university alliances were proposed by the respondents. Half of the respondents themselves mentioned that they would like their alliance to have greater visibility among students and to enable more people to benefit from all that it can offer, as

they believe in the transformative potential of the European university. They therefore suggest making more resources available for direct communication with students. Some alliances have implemented measures to address this communication barrier, such as student ambassadors in their respective universities to foster peer-to-peer communication, which could be beneficial to implement across all universities. This leads to the second area for improvement: communication between European alliances. All the alliances have implemented measures that could be beneficial if intelligently applied in other alliances, but few alliances are aware of these possibilities. It is advisable to set up a communication and collaboration platform that allows for the exchange of best practices so that all alliances can benefit from the progress made in some.

Conclusions and perspectives

According to the study conducted in this document, the transformative aspect of European university alliances for the student community is confirmed, and it takes several forms.

European university alliances are transforming students' lives and future professional lives by helping them develop the soft skills necessary for entering the workforce, discovering aspects of their field of study that traditional course formats don't allow, and also exploring other fields, from theoretical, practical, and personal perspectives through interaction with diverse environments (faculty, students, and professionals). This exposure fosters interdisciplinarity and further develops their critical thinking skills. Alliances provide students with the opportunity to build a professional network open to the world, and Europe in particular, which inspires aspirations to work in an international context on multicultural topics. These European university alliances also create an interpersonal environment that cultivates the intercultural intelligence essential for the successful implementation of any project involving multiple individuals with diverse backgrounds.

Students, through European universities and this framework that promotes open-mindedness, develop personal traits such as self-confidence and are encouraged to reflect on themselves and on crucial, yet sometimes overlooked, topics like their mental health. Beyond the professional network they build, they also develop a network of friendships that allows them to feel at home throughout Europe. By participating in events with other students, as well as events with administrative staff or employees of universities or companies, professors, researchers, directors, and rectors, they finally feel heard and supported in their academic journey and professional future, and feel that their voice matters in building this European university. The European university experiment as conceived by the European Commission is an unprecedented opportunity for students to experience firsthand what a "European university" means, to be proud to participate in it and to develop a real European identity.

All these elements foster a sense of belonging, first and foremost to a community that shares the same values and ambitions for the European higher education ecosystem, but also, and more broadly, to the European community. This sense of European belonging fulfills the main objective of this initiative and makes this European Universities Initiative a success for students who now feel like full-fledged European citizens.

However, to ensure this initiative is not merely a fleeting success, it is essential that its operation be sustained. This system requires human, material, and financial resources to deliver its full potential for educating tomorrow's leaders and providing them with all the opportunities that will benefit their learning. Therefore, it is crucial to secure long-term funding for this initiative. Several avenues were explored in this study to further enhance the impact and reach of European university alliances, such

as communication among them regarding existing programs, standardizing the recognition of courses taken through alliances (replacing certain courses rather than adding to an already demanding curriculum), recognizing student engagement, and establishing sufficient mobility grants to cover the costs of short-term exchanges for students. Some of these proposals are achievable at a lower cost, but require time, will and unwavering institutional support, both national and European, to be implemented.

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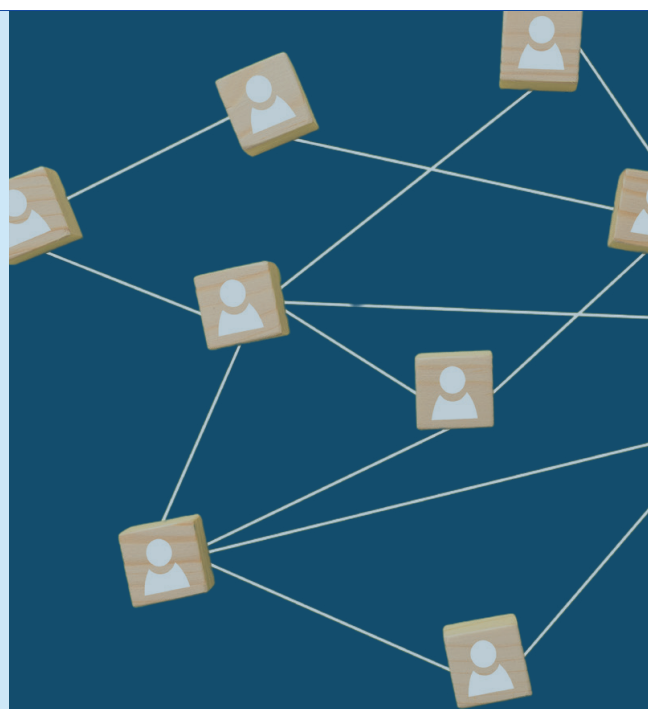
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TRANSFERABLE RESULTS

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In addition to the alliances, FOREU4ALL **engages key stakeholders to take part** in its governance, several topical groups and policy learning labs to enrich discussions and decision-making.



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Through proactive engagement with European, national, and regional policy makers, FOREU4ALL also ensures a strong voice for European alliances to **engage in policy dialogue for the benefit of the whole higher education sector.**

20 topical groups

Bringing together **2.000 experts.**

Inclusive governance

Including an external advisory board with key organisations and students at the very heart.

Proactive engagement

Participation in **20+ meetings and events** during the first 10 months of the project.

APPENDIXES

Appendix 1: Summary of the Senate information report, Senators Le Gleut and Daniel (2024)

L'ESSENTIEL SUR...

Commission des
AFFAIRES EUROPÉENNES



...le bilan et les perspectives de l'initiative des

UNIVERSITÉS EUROPÉENNES : VERS UN ACTE II



L'initiative « universités européennes » – qui fait suite au discours de la Sorbonne prononcé par le président de la République en septembre 2017 - a été lancée officiellement par la Commission européenne en 2018, par le biais d'un premier appel à projet.

Depuis lors, quatre appels à projet supplémentaires ont été lancés permettant de financer au total **64 alliances d'établissements**

d'enseignement supérieur européens, un résultat dépassant l'objectif de la Commission européenne fixé à 60 alliances d'ici mi-2024.

Afin notamment de consolider ces alliances, la **Commission européenne a publié, le 27 mars 2024, trois textes visant à lever certains obstacles rencontrés par les établissements** : une communication sur un schéma directeur pour un diplôme européen¹, ainsi que deux propositions de recommandation relatives à l'assurance qualité² et aux carrières universitaires³.

Six ans après le lancement de cette initiative, et au vu de ces textes récemment publiés, la **commission des affaires européennes du Sénat a confié aux rapporteurs Ronan Le Gleut et Karine Daniel le soin de conduire une première évaluation de ce dispositif**. Après une vingtaine d'auditions, un déplacement à Bruxelles et le retour de près de 50 établissements d'enseignement supérieur français, auditionnés et/ou sollicités via des questionnaires écrits, les rapporteurs ont pu établir le bilan et les recommandations suivantes.

A. LES UNIVERSITÉS EUROPÉENNES, UNE « RÉVOLUTION » EN COURS ?

Qualifiée par certains de « **deuxième révolution** » après le programme Erasmus, l'**initiative des universités européennes constitue indéniablement un vecteur de transformation** de l'enseignement supérieur français et européen. Plus de 500 établissements représentant 35 pays sont impliqués dans ces 64 universités européennes.

Le **premier bilan qui peut être fait de ce dispositif se révèle globalement très positif** – sur le fondement **principalement des retours des établissements d'enseignement supérieur français**, mais également d'autres acteurs européens auditionnés par les rapporteurs. La **vertu « transformatrice »** de ces alliances apparaît indéniable (cf. encadré *infra*), et se

¹ Communication de la Commission européenne sur un schéma directeur pour un diplôme européen commun (COM (2024) 144 final).

² Proposition de recommandation du Conseil pour un système européen d'assurance et de reconnaissance de la qualité dans l'enseignement supérieur (COM (2024) 147 final).

³ Proposition de recommandation du Conseil relative à des carrières attrayantes et durables dans l'enseignement supérieur (COM (2024) 145 final).

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constate un engouement pour cette initiative dans les établissements, qu'ils soient ou non membres d'alliances. Si ce premier bilan s'avère encourageant, **des évaluations complémentaires devront certainement être menées**, certaines alliances n'ayant vu le jour que récemment.

Les rapporteurs se félicitent de la part active prise par les établissements français dans cette initiative : 64 d'entre eux sont représentés dans 55 universités européennes, et bénéficient dans ce cadre d'un financement national complémentaire essentiel, de l'ordre de 100 millions d'euros.

Un effet « transformateur » pour les établissements, membres des alliances

1. Les alliances, un outil unique d'internationalisation et d'eupéanisation des établissements, permettant :

- un changement d'échelle conduisant à une mutualisation des ressources et un échange de bonnes pratiques saluaires ;
- une internationalisation qui concerne toute la communauté universitaire : étudiants, enseignants et personnel administratif.

2. Des effets indéniables sur le plan pédagogique pour les étudiants : une croissance et une diversification de l'offre de formation et des mobilités.

3. De nouvelles opportunités de coopération scientifique malgré la faiblesse du volet recherche de l'initiative des alliances.

4. Une amélioration de la reconnaissance internationale et de l'attractivité des établissements, membres des alliances.

5. Le développement d'un écosystème territorial à l'échelle locale ou européenne.

6. La promotion des valeurs et de l'identité européenne.

B....MAIS DES OBSTACLES ET DES RISQUES PERSISTANTS

1/Un financement incertain qui questionne le modèle économique des alliances et leur pérennité, une organisation « en silo » contraignante et un sous-financement du volet recherche.

2/ Une gouvernance fragile : l'absence de structure ou de statut juridique adapté.

3/ Une mise en œuvre complexe des programmes et diplômes conjoints, non résolue par le processus de Bologne. Cas d'école : les difficultés rencontrées par les Universités de Montpellier et de la Rochelle dans la création de diplômes conjoints au sein de leur alliance.

4/ D'autres obstacles cumulés : une reconnaissance insuffisante de l'engagement du personnel universitaire, une implication différente des partenaires de l'alliance, une mobilisation parfois difficile de la communauté universitaire, une non-adaptation de certains équipements informatiques ou une compétence en anglais lacunaire.

5/ Des objectifs inatteignables dans le délai imparti

C. INSTITUTIONNALISER LES ALLIANCES EUROPÉENNES POUR LES INSCRIRE DANS LE TEMPS LONG ET Y INCLURE À TERME TOUS LES ÉTABLISSEMENTS VOLONTAIRES

1. Pérenniser et simplifier le modèle de financement des alliances

L'enjeu, dans les années à venir, est de consolider le **modèle économique des alliances, afin d'en assurer la pérennité et de mettre fin à la fragmentation des financements**. Cette consolidation pourrait se traduire notamment par un allongement de la durée des financements, à caler sur celle du cadre financier pluriannuel de l'UE, et/ou d'un contrat pluriannuel entre les alliances, les États membres et l'Union européenne.

2. Mieux prendre en compte le volet recherche : l'initiative des universités européennes doit « marcher sur ses deux jambes »

Le renforcement de cette dimension est indispensable pour que les établissements d'enseignement supérieur **jouent pleinement leur rôle dans le développement de l'espace européen de la recherche**. Il devrait se traduire par un **nécessaire décloisonnement des missions recherche et formation**, et par un **meilleur accès aux financements** pour les établissements.

3. Revoir la gouvernance et le statut : la nécessité d'une structure plus adaptée mais également d'un cadre réglementaire flexible

Si les rapporteurs appellent à mettre en place **un mode de gouvernance et/ou un statut juridique pour le développement des alliances**, ils soulignent la nécessité d'opter pour un **cadre réglementaire adapté aux objectifs et spécificités de chacune d'entre elles**, et de garantir systématiquement une représentation étudiante au sein de leurs instances dirigeantes.

4. Encourager la mise en œuvre de programmes et diplômes conjoints (dans le cadre du processus de Bologne)

Selon les rapporteurs, la **mise en place des programmes et diplômes conjoints doit être encouragée**, dans le cadre du processus de Bologne, d'une part **via un recours accru à l'approche européenne d'assurance qualité et une réforme des lignes directrices** (ESG - *European Standards and Guidelines*) pour y inclure une dimension recherche et employabilité, et d'autre part **via une simplification des réglementations nationales**, sur la base d'une coopération entre États membres, en veillant au respect de certaines spécificités nationales.

5. Miser sur le label / diplôme européen, un outil nécessaire pour encourager la mise en place de diplômes conjoints

Les rapporteurs soutiennent l'approche progressive proposée par la Commission européenne dans sa communication sur le **diplôme européen commun** (COM (2024) 144 final) consistant à passer d'abord par une phase intermédiaire couverte par l'attribution d'un label, pour mener à un diplôme conjoint européen. Toutefois, si ce label constitue un premier pas utile, l'objectif final doit demeurer celui d'un diplôme européen, **seul outil à même de mettre fin ou tout du moins de limiter grandement les obstacles existants à la création de diplômes conjoints**.

Ils saluent également la proposition de la Commission de faire reposer ce label/diplôme européen sur **des critères européens communs** (sans ajout de critères nationaux) **et une procédure d'accréditation simplifiée**. Ils invitent néanmoins à **compléter ces critères afin de garantir le niveau de qualité** des futurs diplômes européens, notamment par les deux critères utilisés dans le cadre du processus d'accréditation en France, à savoir l'adossement à la recherche et l'insertion professionnelle.

Les rapporteurs soutiennent, par ailleurs, la proposition de recommandation de la Commission sur l'assurance qualité (COM (2024) 147 final) prévoyant de confier l'évaluation des programmes conjoints à une agence nationale accréditée, qui conduirait à une reconnaissance automatique du label ou du diplôme européen dans le cadre des alliances. Cette reconnaissance permettrait de faciliter la mise en place des diplômes européens, ce d'autant qu'elle reposerait sur des outils déjà existants du processus de Bologne, évitant ainsi une complexification administrative pour les établissements. Les rapporteurs saluent également le choix de faire reposer cette évaluation sur des agences nationales existantes et non sur une agence européenne.

Pour avancer vers un label et surtout vers un diplôme européen, les rapporteurs considèrent néanmoins indispensable une action coordonnée des États membres, au risque de voir persister les divergences nationales, qui constituent autant de blocages à l'élaboration de diplômes conjoints. Ils appellent, en parallèle, à veiller **au respect du principe de subsidiarité et des spécificités des États membres**.

6. Encourager d'autres formes de coopérations européennes que les diplômes conjoints

Les alliances constituent, en effet, un **cadre idéal de mise en œuvre d'approches alternatives de formations et de coopérations universitaires européennes**, telles que l'internationalisation des programmes nationaux, la pratique des micro-certifications, ou le développement des mobilités virtuelles ou hybrides.

7. Mieux reconnaître l'engagement du personnel dans les projets de coopérations transnationales et notamment les programmes conjoints

Les rapporteurs soutiennent ainsi la proposition de recommandation du Conseil de l'UE relative à des carrières attrayantes et durables dans l'enseignement supérieur (COM (2024) 145 final) qui contribuera à une meilleure reconnaissance de l'engagement du personnel universitaire dans des activités de coopération transnationale, et notamment dans les alliances. Cette meilleure reconnaissance pourrait se traduire, au niveau national, par des dotations spécifiques aux établissements, ou des politiques de primes.

8. Généraliser le modèle des alliances

Pour les rapporteurs, **la possibilité doit être donnée à tous les établissements qui le souhaitent de rejoindre une alliance**. Il importe, en parallèle, de **miser sur les autres outils de la coopération européenne en matière d'enseignement supérieur**, en ne réservant pas les projets de label et de diplôme européen aux établissements membres des alliances ou encore en encourageant les autres manières de collaborer, comme la coopération bilatérale ou les alliances transfrontalières existantes.



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Consulter le rapport d'information : <https://www.senat.fr/travaux-parlementaires/commissions/commission-des-affaires-europeennes/universites-europeennes-bilan-et-perspectives.html>



Appendix 2: Summary of feedback on the EUI Future survey for the development of the French position, DAEI

Source: online survey of French institutions that are members of a European University.

In order to establish the French position regarding the future of European Universities, the DAEI launched an online survey on November 29, 2024, among the 54 French institutions that are members of an EUI, representing 369 people involved in their operation: Presidents, VPs of Training, VPs of Research, VPs of International Relations, VPs of Europe, Project Managers, Executive Directors, students, etc. This survey totaled 49 responses (35 collective responses, 14 individual responses), i.e. 38 EUA FR respondents out of the 54 EUAs with at least 1 French establishment, hence **a participation rate of 70.4%**.

With online survey campaigns typically achieving a response rate of 20-25%, the participation observed is therefore unprecedented. **This particularly high participation rate is commendable and demonstrates the importance of the EUI for French institutions.**

The first 5 questions aimed to gather the views of institutions regarding the 4 pillars decided by the EC, namely the objectives of the EUI. Based on the responses, the EUI framework effectively implements the four pillars as decided by the European Commission and generally achieves their objectives, with one reservation concerning the implementation of a common research strategy. However, while adjustments are still needed for two of the pillars, particularly regarding research and mobility, **the EUI can be considered a success in increasing the attractiveness and competitiveness of European higher education and research (75% agree) and as a catalyst for transformation within the institution (75.5%).**

The responses to these four pillars, along with the answers to the open-ended questions, demonstrate strong support for the initiative, and deeply rooted motivation and enthusiasm. Taken together, these responses constitute a highly positive result, supporting the transition from experimentation to the permanent establishment of the European Universities program. However, To fully exploit the potential of EUIs, a combined approach is needed: **in-depth**

work on national accreditation frameworks, increased financial support, and above all, effective administrative support for universities from national authorities. Finally, it is essential to fully integrate research alongside teaching, including continuing education. These points are crucial to improve so that European universities are the true driving force behind inter-university, inclusive campuses, vectors of profound social and academic transformation, **necessary for the consolidation of the European higher education and research area of the 21st century.**

Presented at the Sorbonne in 2017 and reaffirmed in 2024, the French position remains that "Europe must train even more talent" and become "a major power in innovation and research." This is why France (Ministry of Higher Education, Research and Innovation?) aims to be at the forefront of transitioning from the European Universities initiative to the realization of European universities.

The trajectory of the EUIs, the results obtained by the French institutions that are members of an EUI, are unequivocal as to the need to turn this into a success in order to push the logic of the Bologna Process further and open the doors of the University of the 21st century, in order to complete the construction of the European Higher Education and Research Area. Serving the emblematic missions of knowledge transfer and research, the EUI, a true spearhead of Europe's motto "United in Diversity", has acted as a powerful lever for:

- ▶ to make effective the openness to interculturality, to the mastery of foreign languages and to transversality, in conditions of cooperation and no longer of competition;
- ▶ to develop student engagement, European identity and citizenship, by teaching and spreading European values through education, research and their dissemination to society;
- ▶ to establish a favorable framework for building relationships of trust between partners (trusted hubs) necessary for experimenting with collective transformations, in a changing and uncertain climate;

- ▶ to provide a tool for action and solidarity in the face of crises affecting academic and scientific communities;
- ▶ to guarantee a source of stability and an environment in which the values of autonomy and academic freedom can be defended, particularly in the face of evolving and often difficult European political contexts;
- ▶ to structure transnational multi-actor and multi-level networks (scientists, businesses, political leaders, non-governmental organizations, etc.) facilitating the emergence of collaborative projects capable of responding to increasingly complex, interconnected and multidimensional contemporary societal challenges;
- ▶ to promote public-private partnerships at the European, or even international, level through EUIs, ideally located at the heart of the territories, forming a relevant European network combining all the activities of the knowledge square, i.e. an ideal continuum of activities and expertise for the development of national and European sectoral policies;
- ▶ to bring together institutions with varied operations, profiles and expertise (specialized universities, multidisciplinary universities, professional/applied science universities, "research" universities, etc.) allowing for unprecedented combinations to meet the challenges posed by the ecological transition, social inclusion, global health, digitalization, artificial intelligence...
- ▶ to overcome, in addition to geographical boundaries, disciplinary boundaries through interdisciplinarity in order to transcend traditional university approaches by relying on principles of integration, innovation and sustainability;
- ▶ to offer new opportunities for networking skills, infrastructure and methodological approaches between research teams and to generate a real paradigm shift in research strategies;
- ▶ to enhance the attractiveness and retention of European and international talent, whether scientific, administrative or student staff;
- ▶ to catalyze the transformations already underway in higher education and research, by multiplying their potential through the discovery of other ways of working and the development of capacities, through the sharing of good practices;
- ▶ to increase the visibility and the crucial importance, at this moment in our history, of building the European area of higher education and research for our time and future generations.

Through a feedback loop, the EUI provides evidence of another transformation: that of the internal functioning of institutions. Because membership in a European University leads to reflection on one's own practices, each institution is prompted to revisit its processes as a result of internationalization. This dynamic constitutes a privileged avenue for continuous improvement, even modernization, and for empowering all staff involved in the initiative, to the benefit of all stakeholders within the institution, including students and, more broadly, the socio-economic world.

Because EUI constitutes a multi-scale enrichment that contributes to training better-informed citizens and workers ready to meet the challenges of tomorrow's jobs, across all Member States.

Because by linking education and research on a transnational scale, the EUI creates a collaborative and holistic ecosystem, essential for addressing major global challenges, as well as an unprecedented tool to enable higher education institutions to integrate into strategic networks, with a view to strengthening the attractiveness and competitiveness of their educational offerings and research activities on a European or even global scale, the EUI model is viewed with envy by non-EU higher education and research actors.

Because scientific sovereignty must now be considered at the European level and no longer at the national level, because strengthening transnational cooperation, ensuring the added value of the European University and overcoming administrative, logistical and financial challenges take time.

Because investing in the European University means investing in a more integrated, ambitious and competitive Europe, France (the MESR?) will support the transition from the EUI to the European University and, more specifically, the following objectives.

Going further with training: Revitalizing the Bologna Process

- ▶ A simplified accreditation process: joint study programs require evaluation and accreditation by several national agencies, a lengthy and complex process. Promote European harmonization in this area;
- ▶ A system of mutual recognition: developing mechanisms allowing automatic recognition of joint programs by all member countries of a European University, reducing administrative barriers;
- ▶ Better integration of new internationalization tools, better consideration of interdisciplinary and innovative pathways, such as microcredits, digital certifications and hybrid programs, challenge-based learning....
- ▶ Better consideration of the European approach for Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes;
- ▶ To ensure the strengthening of academic cooperation and inter-university research in synergy with training to overcome the separation between training and research in previous calls for projects;
- ▶ Integrate continuing education into the discussion. European Universities are stakeholders in the discussion on skills portability as outlined in the European Commission's Skills Agenda. As such, they could play a leading role, given their transnational knowledge of skills pathways in in-demand professions, in supporting professionals whose jobs are rapidly evolving or disappearing. European Universities do not simply focus on upskilling/reskilling in a changing professional sector, but also break down barriers to employment by facilitating European mobility. European universities have a major role to play here because they possess the necessary networks, unlike most vocational training institutions. Beyond the educational benefits, the economic aspect of developing lifelong learning should be given greater consideration, alongside the preservation of European sovereignty in in-demand professions.

Going further for research: fully integrating research into the European University

- ▶ Fully integrate research into European Universities and provide them with the necessary resources. Developing a European-level research university requires structural transformations affecting governance, collective practices, team dynamics, work ethic, and the economic model. Hence the need for human and financial resources commensurate with these ambitions, without which the very future of the European University will be jeopardized. (*Verbatim: The non-renewal of European funding for a European University Institute (EUI) to structure its research resulted in a loss of momentum in the implementation of its strategy and the interruption of several pilot projects designed as levers for long-term change.*)
- ▶ Develop a stable, dedicated funding framework for a convergence of research policies within the framework of European Universities;
- ▶ Promote targeted funding for the implementation of joint research programs;
- ▶ To present stable strategic orientations because rich, diversified and active cooperation is built over a long period, at least 10 years;
- ▶ Develop seed funding to secure the development of more ambitious projects;
- ▶ To support the ripple effect on scientific communities that use the European University structure to position themselves dynamically and reactively on calls for projects, at least European, and win funding collectively;
- ▶ Support the development of a results dissemination strategy based in particular on the adoption of an Open Science Plan;
- ▶ Overcome the duality of the service counters and the lack of coordination between Horizon Europe (DG RTD) and Erasmus+ (DG EAC).

Going further in the construction of European Universities

- ▶ The EUI represents an opportunity for France to assert itself as a leader of change and as a provider of solutions to the major obstacles that higher education institutions are currently encountering in their efforts toward international cooperation;
- ▶ To define concretely the missions, vision, objectives and values of the European University: at the national level, between Member States and with the vision of the European Commission;
- ▶ Define a genuine long-term strategy for European universities;
- ▶ In the longer term, the question arises of a sustainable funding of the European University on the model, for example, of European research infrastructures, which promotes the stabilization of human resources, lightens the considerable burden of reporting and project development and allows a real development strategy, currently hampered by short-term work in project mode;
- ▶ To use European Universities constitute think tanks supporting the sectoral policies of the European Union, as described in the policy guidelines shared by President Von der Leyen on July 18, 2024 in Strasbourg. They are spaces for analysis and experimentation on major societal issues;
- ▶ To consider European Universities as major players in the informal diplomacy of the European Union, while respecting the autonomy of institutions and academic freedom;
- ▶ Strengthening the development of support functions for mobility will be fundamental given the needs of mobility, whether physical, virtual or hybrid. Consideration must be given to funding tools for short-term mobility. The current lack of such tools represents a detrimental gap/obstacle in both training and research, for students as well as all staff, as they are prerequisites for larger-scale projects;
- ▶ Supporting the digital innovations essential for the development of true digital campuses;
- ▶ Capitalize on the exchange of practices facilitated by the EUI to share them among the EUIs so that they spread and consolidate them. Consider a bridge between the EUIs and institutions outside the EUIs so that these good practices are not limited to the EUIs alone and benefit the European Higher Education and Research Area more broadly;
- ▶ To fulfill the promise of a specific point of contact for European projects for all staff, both scientific and administrative, belonging to European Universities.
- ▶ Develop strategic partnerships with other European ministries for smoother mutual recognition;
- ▶ Align calls for projects or funding dedicated to European Universities, better articulate national strategies, strategies between Member States and these strategies with the European strategy. Define the missions, vision and values of the European University.
- ▶ To work towards a clear definition of mobility within the framework of the European University to take into account the challenges of sustainable transition but also the new teaching methods which do not all involve physical mobility but are nonetheless devoid of effects;
- ▶ To value, in careers, involvement in EUI as genuine professional development opportunities bringing real and concrete added value to all professional paths;
- ▶ Strengthen/support communication to further promote European Universities, targeting the entire academic community and especially professionals, to raise employers' awareness of the skills acquired: increased open-mindedness, a proven ability to grasp the complexity of global issues, better preparation for the world of work, and better adaptation to the rapid evolution of professions and societal needs. Emphasize that students who have benefited from the EUI report a profound shift in their vision of the practice of their future profession, which they now consider on a European rather than a national scale;
- ▶ Use the EUI to combat the fragmentation of the European education area highlighted by Enrico Letta in his report on the reform of the single market.

Appendix 3: Summary of the European Parliament resolution report following the report by MEP Laurence Farreng: A new vision for the “European universities” Alliances, 11 September 2025

The European Parliament resolution of 11 September 2025 presents a new vision for “European universities” alliances, highlighting their crucial role for the future competitiveness and sovereignty of the European Union in the current context of globalization of higher education and research.

Context and strategic importance

University alliances are considered prerequisites for achieving **EU strategic autonomy**, promoting its values, and strengthening its global competitiveness. They aim to counter the fragmentation of higher education and research in Europe, which weakens the Union’s position on the international stage. Supported by the flagship Erasmus+ program, these alliances aim to create inter-university campuses, thereby fostering the mobility of students, researchers, and staff. They are also essential for realizing the “fifth freedom”—the freedom of research, innovation, and higher education within the single market.

Current situation: Successes and challenges

The initiative has been a great success, exceeding expectations with the creation of **65 alliances involving more than 570 universities** and 2,200 external partners, well beyond the initial target of 20 alliances. These alliances are distinguished by their diversity in terms of governance, themes, and geographical location, including universities in rural areas or outermost regions, making it an inclusive initiative. However, the alliances face **major challenges**:

- ▶ **Obstacles to transnational collaboration:** Institutions face difficulties related to funding, divergences in national legislation, legal status and the harmonization of higher education systems.

- ▶ **Funding and mobility:** The target of 50% student mobility is not being met, and its achievement is jeopardized without appropriate funding mechanisms. There is concern about competition for limited Erasmus+ funds between alliance mobility programs and general mobility.
- ▶ **Research and innovation:** The document expresses concern about the **lack of pillars dedicated to research and innovation** in the current framework, which prevents alliances from expressing their full potential.
- ▶ **Awareness of the initiative:** The initiative remains little known to the general public and students, which necessitates more effective information campaigns.

Key recommendations from the European Parliament

To maximize the potential of alliances, Parliament makes several recommendations:

- ▶ **Ensuring sustainable and predictable funding:** It is crucial to move from a “project-based approach” to long-term cooperation. Parliament calls for coordinated and predictable funding and suggests considering a tailored solution for alliances within the post-2027 multiannual financial framework, potentially through a separate program. It also calls on Member States to co-finance alliances from their national budgets and to create synergies with other EU programs such as Horizon Europe.
- ▶ **Strengthening the link between training and research:** Alliances are encouraged to deepen the integration between teaching and research in order to create cross-border networks of excellence for researchers.

- ▶ **Establishing a legal status and a European diploma:** Parliament welcomes the pilot projects aimed at creating a clear legal status for alliances, which would facilitate the pooling of resources and reduce the administrative burden. It also supports the creation of a European diploma, which would improve mobility, the quality of education, and the global competitiveness of European higher education.
 - ▶ **Developing digital infrastructure:** Investing in secure digital infrastructure is necessary to create truly inter-university virtual campuses and to strengthen initiatives such as the European Student Card. The use of micro-credentials is also encouraged to modernize degrees.
 - ▶ **Alignment with strategic priorities and the labor market:** Alliances should be closely aligned with the labor market to address skills shortages and contribute to the EU's strategic autonomy in areas such as energy, digital technology, and defense. Closer collaboration with the private sector is also encouraged.
- Finally, the resolution emphasizes the importance of European University Alliances for defending EU values, academic freedom, and democracy, made possible by the strength of the partnerships forged through the European Universities Initiative. Given the unprecedented results of this Initiative, it is now necessary to move beyond the experimental phase and establish European University Alliances as a permanent feature of the European higher education and research landscape.

Appendix 4: Magna Charta Universitatum 2020

Preamble

The Magna Charta Universitatum, a declaration and affirmation of the fundamental principles upon which the missions of universities must be based, was signed in 1988 on the occasion of the 900th anniversary of the University of Bologna. The first principle it affirms is independence: research and teaching must be intellectually and morally independent of all political influence and economic interests. The second stipulates that teaching and research must be inseparable, with students engaged in the pursuit of knowledge and a better understanding of the world. The third principle defines the university as a place of freedom in inquiry and debate, characterized by its openness to dialogue and its rejection of intolerance.

This declaration thus recognizes that universities supporting these principles could take many forms under the combined influence of culture, geography, and history. Although explicitly the product of a specific moment in European development, the Magna Charta Universitatum already envisioned a networked world in which knowledge and influence would transcend cultural boundaries in pursuit of greater mutual understanding.

Since then, the world has become interconnected in ways unimaginable at the time. Universities have proliferated worldwide, diversifying dramatically, particularly in terms of their scope and the breadth of their missions. Globally, the number, diversity, and motivations of students aspiring to university education have increased considerably, as have the expectations of families and society. Simultaneously, the number of scientific publications has exploded, while trust in academia has eroded, especially due to a loss of confidence in expertise. Under the influence of new technologies, learning, teaching, and research methods are evolving rapidly; universities are both at the forefront of these developments and grappling with them.

Despite these upheavals, higher education remains a major driver of change and social transformation. The principles set forth in the

Magna Charta Universitatum are as relevant today as they were in 1988, and they constitute the necessary prerequisites for human progress through research, analysis, and informed action. The dramatic changes described above require the academic world to identify the responsibilities and commitments that, in the signatories' view, are essential for universities worldwide in the 21st century: This is the ambition of this declaration.

Principles, Values and Responsibilities

Universities recognize that they have a responsibility to engage with and respond to the aspirations and challenges of the world and the communities they are meant to serve, for the benefit of humanity and to contribute to sustainable development.

Intellectual and moral autonomy is the cornerstone of any university; it is the necessary condition enabling it to fulfill its responsibilities to society. This independence must be recognized and guaranteed by governments as well as by society as a whole. It must be defended resolutely by the institutions themselves.

To reach their full potential, universities need a reliable and robust social contract with civil society. This contract must enable them to produce academic work of the highest possible quality while fully respecting their institutional autonomy.

By creating and disseminating knowledge, universities challenge established dogmas and theories; they thus stimulate critical thinking among all students and academics. Academic freedom is their lifeblood; free research and dialogue sustain them.

Universities fully assume their duty to teach and conduct research ethically and with integrity, producing reliable, trustworthy and accessible results.

Universities have civic functions and responsibilities. They are part of and contribute to the development of global collegial networks of

scientific research and knowledge, which are based on shared bodies of knowledge. They are also rooted in local cultures and play a crucial role in their development and enrichment. While immersed in global dynamics and important players within them, they are fully engaged in local communities and ecosystems, holding a leading role there.

Universities are spaces of tolerance and respect for diverse viewpoints, banishing all discrimination and exclusion, where the principles of equity and justice prevail. They are therefore committed to advancing equity and justice in all aspects of university life, including admission, hiring, and promotion processes.

Education is a human right, a public good, and must be accessible to all. Universities reaffirm that learning is a lifelong activity and that higher education is part of a continuum. Within this continuum, universities serve diverse categories of learners at all stages of life.

Universities are aware that, all too often, due to inequalities, different social groups have difficulty accessing higher education or influencing the practices and/or content of university studies. To fully develop human potential, universities actively seek to identify the diversity of opinions and to benefit from differing perspectives.

By signing the Magna Charta Universitatum 2020, universities affirm their adherence to the original declaration and their willingness to support and advance the principles, values and responsibilities set forth above, thereby aiming to strengthen their role in promoting well-being, preserving the planet, prosperity and knowledge throughout the world.

Approved by the Board of Directors
on March 12, 2020

Appendix 5: Excerpt from de Sousa's article (2012): Two visions, one choice: between dystopia and hope

"In my opinion, a decade after the start of the Bologna process, we have so far only provided weak answers to these serious questions.

The weakest of all is that of silence: the absence of response, the taking for granted this new common vision of the university's mission. This is a situation we must overcome as quickly as possible.

The danger is to transform mediocre achievements into brilliant advances, to mask resignation behind apparent consensus, and to steer the university towards a future... where there is no future for it.

According to complexity scientists, we are at a crossroads: small movements in one direction or another can lead to major and irreversible changes. Such is the magnitude of our responsibility. We all know that we do not act on the future, but on the present, guided by our anticipations or visions of what that future will be. These profound questions demonstrate that there is no universally accepted vision to be taken for granted. This is why they invite deep reflection.

I propose that we are faced with two alternative visions. Their coexistence is the source of current tensions in the university system. They lead to two imaginary and opposing interpretations of the ongoing reforms, as if we were looking at our present from the perspective of the future.

In the first vision, our reform efforts will have been a true reform, because they will have made it possible to prepare the university to face the challenges of the 21st century: by diversifying its mission without giving up its authenticity, by strengthening institutional autonomy, academic freedom and social responsibility in a complex European and global context.

The European university will thus have rebuilt its humanist ideal in a new internationalist, solidarity-based and intercultural perspective.

In the second view, on the contrary, the Bologna Process will appear as a counter-reform. It will have blocked the reforms that universities were already undertaking, each according to its own conditions, to meet the aforementioned challenges. It will have forced excessive

convergence, with the aim of disarming the university in the face of market imperatives, just as it once had to resist religious, and later state, pressures.

The dystopian vision: the counter-reform

In order not to conclude my intervention on a pessimistic note, I will begin by briefly detailing the second retrospective vision (that of the counter-reformation) before returning to the first.

This dystopian vision presents the following scenario. With the realization that the financial crisis has revealed the dangers of a single currency without common fiscal and budgetary policies, it is quite possible that in the long term, the Bologna Process will become for European universities what the euro has been for the European economy.

Here are the foreseeable consequences:

- ▶ The principles of international solidarity in universities and respect for cultural diversity will be disregarded in the name of the efficiency of the European university market and competition.
- ▶ The weakest universities (located in the weakest countries) will be relegated to the dustbin of the rankings by the evaluation agencies.
- ▶ Although claiming methodological rigor, university rankings will be largely arbitrary and subjective.
- ▶ Most universities will face significant cuts in public funding; many will have to close. As is already the case at other levels of education, wealthy students and their parents will search across countries for the best value for money, just as they do in the shopping malls that universities are becoming.
- ▶ Poor students, on the other hand, will be assigned to poor universities in their countries or poor neighborhoods.

- ▶ The internal impact will be devastating. The relationship between research and teaching, so highly praised by Bologna, will be a paradise for top-ranked universities (a minority), and a hell for the majority of universities and their teachers.
- ▶ Market criteria will reduce the value of different disciplines to their market price. Latin, poetry, or philosophy will only survive if some kind of digital McDonald's finds a use for them. University administrators will be the first to internalize the ranking frenzy, becoming obsessed with metrics. They will excel at generating revenue by squeezing families or depriving teachers of personal life and leisure. All their creativity will be used to destroy academic creativity, to standardize everything that can be standardized, and to discredit or eliminate the rest. The teaching staff will be proletarianized by the very tools of educational production they are supposed to own—namely: teaching, assessment, research. They will end up mummified by forms, objectives, and evaluations of impeccable formal rigor but devoid of content: "work packages," "deliverables," "milestones," cross-citation agreements to inflate scores, evaluations based on where you publish, not what you publish.
- ▶ Careers will be conceived as exhilarating, but crushed at the bottom for most. For young teachers, academic freedom will be a cruel joke.
- ▶ Students will be masters of their learning, just as much as they will be slaves to their lifelong debt. They will have autonomy and free choice in programs, without understanding the logic or limitations of the available options, guided towards a mass alternative between professional employment... or professional unemployment.
- ▶ Finally, higher education will be liberalized, in accordance with the rules of the World Trade Organization.

The vision of genuine reform

As I said, none of this is inevitable.

There is another retrospective vision, and in our hearts and minds, we fervently hope that it will prevail. But for it to become a reality, we must first recognize and denounce that the supposed new normal described earlier is in fact a moral aberration, and that it would mean the end of the university as we know it. Let us now look at this other retrospective view – that of a genuine reform process, which would have profoundly transformed the European university for the better.

This vision highlights the following elements.

The Bologna Process was able to identify and resolve the majority of problems that pre-Bologna universities were unable to address:

- ▶ the deep-rooted inertia that paralyzed any attempt at reform,
- ▶ endogamous preferences that blocked innovation,
- ▶ institutional authoritarianism disguised as scholarly authority,
- ▶ Nepotism under the guise of merit,
- ▶ elitism presented as excellence,
- ▶ political control disguised as democratic participation,
- ▶ neo-feudalism disguised as the autonomy of departments or schools,
- ▶ the fear of being evaluated in the name of academic freedom,
- ▶ the low scientific output justified as a heroic resistance to the stupidities of calls for tenders or evaluators, and the widespread administrative inefficiency camouflaged under respect for traditions.

This process did not discredit the self-assessment and reform efforts undertaken by the most committed and innovative teachers and administrators. On the contrary, it provided them with a new framework and strong institutional support, enabling the Bologna Process to become an endogenous force rather than an external imposition.

To achieve this, he has been able to combine convergence and diversity, developing positive discrimination mechanisms that allow national university systems to cooperate and compete on a level playing field.

The Bologna Process did not allow itself to be captured by the "international experts in higher education" capable of transforming subjective and arbitrary preferences into self-evident truths and supposedly inevitable public policies. It relied on two major intellectual conceptions of the university's mission formulated at the beginning of the 20th century, and clearly chose one of them: that of Ortega y Gasset and Bertrand Russell, who denounced the politicization of the university, as opposed to that of Martin Heidegger, in his inaugural address as rector of the University of Freiburg in 1933, where he called upon the university to preserve the Germanic forces of blood and soil.

The Bologna Process clearly adopted the first vision and rejected the second.

University reform: responsibility, diversity and equality

The reformers never confused the market with civil society or the community. They encouraged universities to adopt a broad conception of social responsibility, promoting action research and extension projects aimed at improving the lives of the most vulnerable social groups caught in systems of inequality and structural discrimination: women, the unemployed, young and old people, migrant workers, ethnic and religious minorities, etc.

The Bologna Process clearly affirmed that universities are centers for the production of knowledge in the broadest sense.

He therefore promoted interculturality, heterodoxy, and critical engagement, in the best liberal tradition, which the pre-Bologna university had abandoned in the name of political or economic correctness. In this same spirit, he encouraged internal scientific pluralism and, above all, granted equal dignity to knowledge with market value and to knowledge without. The reformers also understood that in the field of research and development, cost-benefit analysis is a rudimentary tool that can stifle innovation instead of stimulating it. Indeed, the

history of technology shows that the most useful innovations have often been made possible without concern for immediate profitability.

The Bologna Process strengthened the relationship between teaching and research. While valuing excellence, it avoided a social divide between: a small elite of first-class teaching and research staff (with funding, low teaching loads and good conditions), and a majority of second-class academics (overburdened with teaching and deprived of access to research), simply because they work in the "bad" universities or on subjects deemed "unrelevant".

He was able to combine: increased selectivity in recruitment, strict accountability in the use of teaching time and research funds, with genuine equality of opportunity.

Rankings were conceived as salt in a dish: too little, and the dish is bland; too much, and it destroys all the flavors. At some point, it was decided that what had happened in international rankings could also be applied to universities: just as we have GDP and the UNDP's Human Development Index, the Bologna Process succeeded in introducing internal pluralism into ranking systems.

A humanist, public and internationalist university

The Bologna Process eventually abandoned the fashionable concept of "human capital," having concluded that universities should produce complete human beings and full-fledged citizens, not mere human capital subject to market fluctuations, like any other form of capital.

This had a decisive impact: on curricula, on performance evaluation methods.

Furthermore, the Bologna Process has convinced the European Union and European states that they must increase their financial support for public universities, not under corporate pressure, but because investing in a public university system of excellence is probably the best way to invest in the future of a Europe of ideas, and the only way for Europe to remain truly European.

Finally, the Bologna Process has exponentially expanded the internationalization of the European university, but taking care to promote forms of internationalism other than pure commercial internationalism.

In doing so, the European Higher Education Area ceased to be a threat to academic freedom and the intellectual autonomy of universities worldwide.

It has become a loyal and powerful ally in defending the values of: academic freedom, institutional autonomy, diversity of knowledge, in a world threatened by the single way of thinking imposed by the imperatives of the market.

Two visions, one choice: between dystopia and hope.

I have presented you with two alternative visions of our future.

I have no doubt that we all want our future to be shaped by the second retrospective vision I have just described.

It is in our hands to make this happen.”

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