



CIVIS

A European
Civic University

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A EUROPEAN CIVIC UNIVERSITY ALLIANCE

MISSION STATEMENT

We, Aix-Marseille Université (Aix-en-Provence and Marseille, France), National Kapodistrian University of Athens (Athens, Greece), Université Libre de Bruxelles (Brussels, Belgium), Universitatea din București (Bucharest, Romania), Universidad Autónoma de Madrid (Madrid, Spain), Sapienza Università di Roma (Rome, Italy), Stockholms universitet (Stockholm, Sweden), and Eberhard Karls Universität Tübingen (Germany) are joining forces to build a European University alliance under the name "CIVIS".

CIVIS stands for a transnational collaboration of civic universities. Based on the solid and innovative education and scientific activity in each institution, we shall unite efforts and experiences to develop an alliance with strong links to our local social and geographical environments and an orientation toward global challenges.



We are fully committed to address these from a European perspective by strengthening our shared and respective civic identities, integrating experiences and nurturing new initiatives. This alliance will bring together some 384.000 students and 55.000 staff members, fostering multilingualism and multiculturalism.

Thus, we envision our European Civic University as a space for innovative and responsible teaching, research, cultural exchanges and citizen action within Europe from the Baltic to the Mediterranean Sea, while engaging with the world, its inhabitants and its institutions.

The Mediterranean area and Africa will be at the core of our global strategy. We firmly believe that the future of Europe and Africa is interconnected. We will dedicate special effort to taking advantage of our experiences, involvements and geographical distribution within the Baltic-Mediterranean-Black seas axis for a deeper engagement with our southern neighbours, and thus to be the university alliance of reference for European connections with Mediterranean and African regions in research, education and innovation.

We want to develop our project in the long term by setting realistic goals. We will put our action in a timeframe with clear milestones up to 2025 and beyond, in order to have the necessary time to deepen our multilateral partnerships, to develop our exchanges, to adapt our usual academic and administrative practices and to improve the alliance by the constant evaluation of our joint actions.

1. OUR LONG-TERM ENGAGEMENT

We are committed to our European University project in the long term. In line with our respective capacities to contribute and while respecting the independence of each partner university, we will ensure that the project has the human, material and financial resources necessary for its concrete implementation.

While respecting each of our universities' specificities and identities, CIVIS will be forged through the pooling of our respective strengths. Our numerous existing collaborations will be scaled up as we embark on a long-term and multi-sectoral program of structural integration that goes beyond the usual collaborations between universities.

Step by step, we will develop a model for a European University alliance that is at once closely integrated, best adapted to our needs and in agreement with the necessarily different legal environments (at EU and national levels) in which we operate. Throughout our process of integration, we will analyse from both a legal and a political point of view the most appropriate institutional model to jointly assume our missions of education, research and commitment to socio-economic and cultural life, locally and globally.

2. OUR CIVIC IDENTITY

The CIVIS approach aims at supporting all eight universities in their mutually beneficial exchanges with the cities and regions in which they are rooted, fully assuming our social responsibility towards the local communities. This anchoring and the permanent local dialogue enable our civic European University alliance to meet the global challenges of our century and remain connected to the direct needs and concerns of communities.

We seek to build bridges between the academic world and the socio-economic and cultural worlds in which we live. We want to forge richer interactions and co-creation of knowledge and skills with citizens, schools, businesses, social and cultural associations and to adapt to current and future societal demands while preserving academic freedom and autonomy of research.

We want to share our experiences, connect with our respective local partners, and question our practices. For us, teaching, research and engagement form a continuum in which each element feeds the others. Our engagement offers new experiences to our students, by confronting them with real-life situations or by promoting their entrepreneurial initiatives. Through life-long learning, practical skills, culture, or intercultural exchanges, we are also in contact with different audiences, younger, older, active, unemployed or retired, or citizen science associations, which enrich our overall communities and activities.

Inclusiveness will permeate all our actions while developing these missions, as we commit ourselves fully to gender equality, non-discrimination and social equity. The involvement of our universities in this alliance will help reduce the gaps, strengthen access to quality education and create real chances of success for all our students.

By strengthening our profiles as civic universities, CIVIS has the ambition to promote the civic label for its own activities, while also benchmarking them with actions outside our alliance.

3. A CHALLENGE-DRIVEN UNIVERSITY

As a civic European University alliance, one of our priorities will be to tackle major societal challenges of the 21st century. We will structure education activities connected with research and innovation around those challenges, link them to civic engagement actions and partnerships with Mediterranean and African counterparts.

CIVIS aims at being a vector of change and innovation with the following priorities: Health; Cities, Territories and Mobilities; Climate, Environment, Energy; Digital and Technological Transformations; Society, Cultures and Heritage.

We thus wish to promote a challenge-based approach, integrating education, research and innovation activities together, and relying on the Sustainable Development Goals defined by the United Nations.

Our excellence in research will be a key asset for building common research-based training and other innovative activities in these areas. CIVIS will reinforce the research links existing between our universities through interdisciplinarity, shared research infrastructures and incentive funding for joint projects.

With the current information revolution and the fast-changing pace of our societies and job-markets, we have to make radical changes to the way we teach, research and communicate. Developing CIVIS through global challenges (rather than along conventional disciplinary divides) stimulates a collaborative culture and requires innovative pedagogies fostering critical thinking, adaptability, resilience and forward-looking skills. To share and build knowledge among students, teachers, researchers and civil society, we will make educational, science and citizen science resources as open and accessible to all as possible in line with Open Science and Open Educational Resources frames.

In our first phase of development, we will build projects contributing to those challenges by creating transnational and transdisciplinary programs for our students and our staff, fuelled by our research and connected to society. It is also by confronting these essential challenges that we wish to build a network of partnerships with institutional, economic or social actors who will contribute both to training activities and to the co-creation of knowledge, but also to the dissemination of results. We will share our networks of collaborations, making CIVIS a more powerful contributor in an interconnected world.

4. OUR ENGAGEMENT WITH THE MEDITERRANEAN AREA AND AFRICA

Being a civic university means acting both locally and globally. Since our shared goal is to build a strong European University alliance for the benefit of a European community, we are fully aware that such a community can today no longer be conceived as disconnected from other parts of the world. Our alliance therefore wishes to be a European player who is part of a multipolar world.

Our alliance has strong links with the sea, in particular by our many member universities located in the immediate vicinity of the Mediterranean Sea, but also by our members facing the Baltic Sea or the Black Sea. As geographical and environmental realities, these seaward positions can lead to fruitful comparative approaches. But seas also play a social, economic and cultural role: they are channels of exchange and connect us with the other coastal areas. In this respect, the Mediterranean Sea is an interface zone between Europe and Africa. The African continent will be at the heart of world population growth in the 21st century and will be a key partner of the European Union. We have the ambition of positioning CIVIS as one of the main pillars for building this partnership of the future between Europe and our neighbouring continent.

Thus, the Mediterranean area and Africa will be at the core of our global strategy. Europe, the Mediterranean and Africa have entangled histories, and we need to address both our shared past and the future challenges together, through a constructive dialogue, joint production of knowledge and education of youth. The current relationships of our universities with Mediterranean and African partners are individually strong and deeply rooted in long-term collaborations. CIVIS will allow these to join forces and scale up their efforts together. With our shared ambition to face global challenges, CIVIS will assert itself as a bridge between Europe and the Mediterranean and Africa, with long-term commitment.

5. PARTICIPATIVE GOVERNANCE AND SUSTAINABLE COLLABORATION AT ALL LEVELS

CIVIS will have a governance structure based on a participative principle that ensures that each partner university has shared responsibility. Our governance structure will evolve through time in the various phases of the building of our alliance. The structures we envision should enable everyone to contribute to the definition of the alliance's orientations and activities. Thus, all the stakeholders involved in the life of our universities: students, academics, researchers, administrative staff, non-academic partners, etc. Permanent structures will be called upon to participate.

Furthermore, we will work with associated partners, both local and European, who will support our actions and participate in the development of new initiatives and involve them in these initiatives. The regions in which our universities are rooted will be associated in the dedicated bodies to enhance synergies between academic strategies and Smart Specialisation Strategies of the regions involved.

The participative principle means that each university becomes involved in the alliance or contributes to it via the submission of projects and via involvement in the governing bodies.

At a strategic level, CIVIS prioritizes its construction phase as a civic university alliance around a selection of global challenges as well as around its partnerships with the Mediterranean area and Africa. At the same time, CIVIS will give major opportunities for its members to systematize the exchanges of good practices at all levels, to develop new partnerships between its members, to review our existing educational programs by linking them together and by systematically including some form of mobility, to create research projects, to share scientific infrastructures, to link our respective partners, etc. Each member of the alliance has specificities, skills or tools, which by sharing will contribute to the progress of everyone on the path to excellence. Local identities and specificities will thus be able to coexist with unifying themes, in connection with the global context.

This is why the governance and management structures of the alliance will be designed from the outset to allow a mutual fertilization of ideas and projects emanating from all or some of our universities and from all those who learn, work and innovate there.

Each of the projects within CIVIS will be the subject of intense efforts to disseminate results to the widest possible audience. Our impact and sustainability will also find their source in the remarkable breadth of this pool of talents and skills, which will benefit from CIVIS actions and then bring back to CIVIS, through an extensive network of alumni, new partnerships, new ideas and new opportunities, reinforced by our link with society through Open Education, Open Access, Open Science..

6. DEVELOPING THE BOLOGNA PROCESS AND THE NEW EUROPEAN EDUCATION AREA PRINCIPLES

Globalization in a multipolar world makes linguistic diversity a central issue and weakens the model of the all-dominant English language. We see this as an opportunity for Europe, which has favoured multilingualism. With seven major languages spoken in the alliance and English as lingua franca, CIVIS will invest in linguistic diversity, a key issue in the globalization process. We set the objective for ourselves to enable by 2025 most of our students, researchers and staff to master at least two foreign languages beside their mother tongue after completing their training at a CIVIS university.

To achieve this goal, the alliance will develop a multidisciplinary methodology and use innovative pedagogies and frontline technologies. In parallel, CIVIS will train its mobile students and researchers in order to secure their fluency in the native language of the country they are moving to. Through these linguistic exchanges, we will encourage cultural exchanges and the promotion of both our specificities and the values that bring us together.

As CIVIS member universities, we acknowledge the foremost importance of the Bologna process principles to increase mobility among ourselves and with other partner universities in Europe, and in the end, to help create a European higher education area. To this end, we envision a CIVIS I.D.-card (for students, researchers and staff), full recognition of credits obtained within the alliance, diploma supplements, measures supporting the social dimension of mobility, quality assurance processes etc.

Through this mission statement, we commit ourselves to implementing these principles within our universities. During the first phase of the project, we will increase our structured mobility (physical or virtual in a sustainable way). We will define priorities and a fundraising strategy that will allow any higher-education student, whatever her or his background, to benefit from mobility. We will strengthen quality assurance as a shared thread and facilitate the recognition of qualifications and periods of study in order to increase compatibility between our education systems to make it easier for students to move within Europe.

We will also develop a lobbying strategy towards our national governments and the European commission to remove existing and remaining barriers from this coherent and fluid European higher education area.

7. A STEP-BY-STEP APPROACH

CIVIS will not be built in a day. That is why we call the first three years of the alliance the «CIVIS fabric». During this period:

- We will progressively set up and test our first structures of governance, management and stakeholder participation and we will manage a CIVIS budget together.
- We will multiply meetings and new collaborations to strengthen our links and encourage shared projects in the three missions of the European University alliance (education, research and civic engagement) , focused on the global challenges and building collaboration with Mediterranean and African partners.
- We will approve a joint charter on sustainability and develop virtual meetings and rules on physical mobility in collaborative projects in order to minimize our carbon footprint.
- Student mobility will be supported taking into account the inequality of means of our students by developing tools for low-cost mobility.
- We will pave the way for new shared initiatives of all types by encouraging bottom-up, fully open and participatory processes.
- Systematic evaluation of each project will allow us to measure the added value of the CIVIS labelling of our actions and to correct weaknesses in our processes.
- We will analyse the regulatory and legal issues that affect the construction and the future of our alliance, both at a national and European level, and we will engage in a constructive dialogue with the relevant bodies in charge of these matters.
- We will promote the shared spirit of CIVIS by organizing annual events to boost our links, spread the word among all students that they are part of a greater entity, and encourage the participation of all.

This implementation period will allow us to test, evaluate and adjust the different dimensions of this ambitious alliance.

During the third year, an overall assessment will take place and will allow us to plan the next phase of our joint construction. This will initiate phase 2, which we call “CIVIS construction”, followed by phase 3 (2025 to 2030), the “CIVIS consolidation”.

Thus, CIVIS will evolve over the next decade in three phases ensuring participative inputs during the entire process, so that our European University alliance may become a reality.