

CIVIS

A European Civic University

BUILDING A BRIDGE TO AFRICA AND THE MEDITERRANEAN REGION

**BRIEFING PAPER ON THE CIVIS PROJECT TO DEVELOP
PARTNERSHIPS WITH AFRICAN/MEDITERRANEAN
UNIVERSITIES**



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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AMU	AIX-MARSEILLE UNIVERSITY
EC	EUROPEAN COMMISSION
EU	EUROPEAN UNION
EUI	EUROPEAN UNIVERSITY INITIATIVE
HEI	HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTION
NKUA	NATIONAL AND KAPODISTRIAN UNIVERSITY OF ATHENS
SU	STOCKHOLM UNIVERSITY
SUR	SAPIENZA UNIVERSITY OF ROME
TF	TASK FORCE
UAM	AUTONOMOUS UNIVERSITY OF MADRID
UB	UNIVERSITY OF BUCHAREST
UG	UNIVERSITY OF GLASGOW
ULB	UNIVERSITÉ LIBRE DE BRUXELLES
UT	UNIVERSITY OF TÜBINGEN
WP	WORK PACKAGE

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INTRODUCTION

Building partnerships with African and Mediterranean universities outside Europe is an important strategic aim of CIVIS and one of its distinct features as a European University alliance (1). By 2022, the end of CIVIS' "fabric phase", our alliance seeks to win at least one partner institution in the target regions for each of its established thematic Hubs (2). This implies initiating some first joint pilot projects as well as to prepare and adopt longer-term strategic partnership agreements between CIVIS and partner universities (CIVIS 2018: 40-42).

The briefing paper aims at introducing the CIVIS community to this sub-project of our alliance. After sketching the existing links of individual CIVIS universities to Africa and the Mediterranean area, it looks at the way a collective approach to partnership development may contribute to the profile of CIVIS and benefit potential partner institutions. Subsequently, the report outlines CIVIS' approach to building these partnerships, including an overview of possible partner institutions, and the planned activities in the process ahead.

(1) This paper is partly based on the report 'African and Mediterranean university partnerships in CIVIS' 'fabric phase' (2019-22) – from individual to joint collaborations', submitted by CIVIS Work Package 5 to the CIVIS Steering Committee in November 2020. Information provided here reflects the state of planning at the time of writing and may be subject to change.

(2) CIVIS thematic Hubs develop multidisciplinary education pathways for undergraduate and postgraduate students and connect them with research, innovation, and service-learning. Five Hubs will be developed, one for each of the themes in which CIVIS will address key societal challenges: Climate, Environment, Energy; Societies, Culture, Heritage; Health; Cities, Territories, Mobility; Digital and Technological Transformations.



BACKGROUND: CIVIS' EXISTING PARTNERSHIP PROFILE

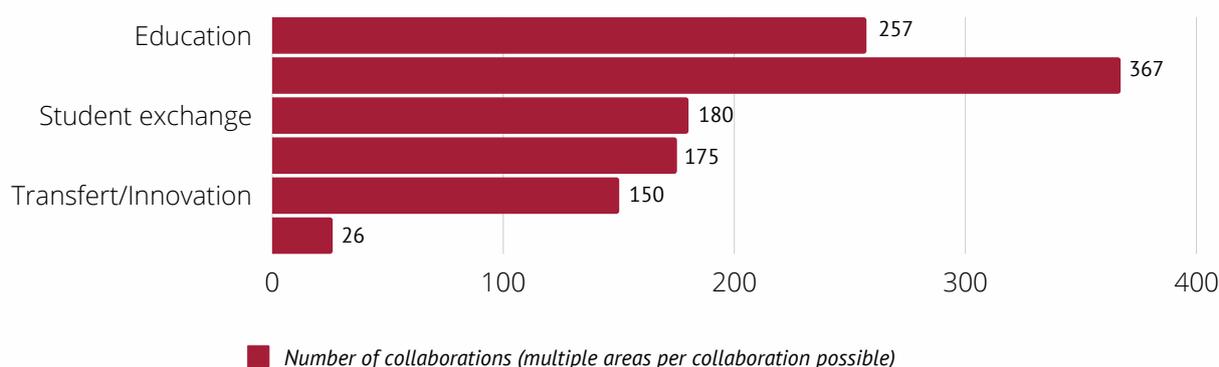
With four of nine CIVIS members located in the South of Europe, our alliance is not only geographically rooted in the nexus between Africa, the Near East and Europe. All CIVIS members also entertain often longstanding, close, and numerous collaborations with partners in Africa and the Mediterranean area, thereby providing our alliance already with a strong existing partnership profile in these regions (3).

In a survey conducted in July 2020, CIVIS counted more than 550 ongoing co-operations, involving about 250 academic institutions in 43 countries in all parts of Africa and around the Mediterranean (4).

Most collaborations exist with counterparts in the Maghreb (chief therein Morocco and to a lesser extent Algeria), primarily due to the numerous links of AMU, SUR, UAM, and ULB. The first three are also involved in various partnership networks with a regional focus on the Mediterranean (5). Other countries with a high density of existing partnerships are Israel, Turkey, and South Africa. Francophone CIVIS partners (AMU, ULB) and to a lesser, yet still noticeable degree the representatives of the other Romanic languages within CIVIS (SUR, UAM, UB), focus on partnerships with universities in francophone countries/regions. SU and UT entertain comparatively more contacts to English speaking countries.

The survey asked respondents also for the area(s) covered by the collaboration. As Figure 1 shows, most co-operations are research-oriented or have a research component. The relatively high number of transfer and/or innovation activities may not come as a surprise, considering factors as the focus of many funding institutions on this aspect especially in the African context.

Figure 1: Areas of collaboration



(3) CIVIS applies a common EU definition of the Mediterranean area outside the EU, which thus refers to the following non-African countries: Turkey, Syria, Lebanon, Israel (incl. Palestine), Jordan (see e.g. Union of the Mediterranean, <https://ufmsecretariat.org/who-we-are/member-states/> [accessed: 19 Oct 2020]).

(4) The survey did not yet include the University of Glasgow, which joined CIVIS later. UG further enriches CIVIS' partnership profile in the region through its existing relationships; see e.g. <https://www.gla.ac.uk/explore/internationalisation/ourpartners> [accessed: 19 May 2021].

(5) E.g. the Euro-Mediterranean Universities Network TETHYS (<https://tethys.univ-amu.fr/> [accessed 19 May 2021]) or the Jean Monnet Network 'The European Union, Mediterranean and Africa integration in the Global Age - AMENET' (www.amenet.eu [accessed: 19 May 2021]).



AIMS AND PRIORITIES IN DEVELOPING PARTNERSHIPS

What is now the potential value added of a collective approach to building partnerships? What are the objectives CIVIS pursues with this project?

First and foremost, developing partnerships between CIVIS and HEIs in Africa/the Mediterranean region may constitute an important **component of CIVIS' challenge based approach** to education, research, innovation and civic engagement actions. According to the CIVIS project description,

Mediterranean and African regions are at the core of key global challenges affecting our respective populations, stakeholders and social and economic developments. Historical and contemporary flows among our continents are forging a very special bridge between Europe and the Mediterranean and African regions, and if we seek solutions to address those key challenges, we need to face them together to find joint solutions (CIVIS 2018: 39) (8).

On the one hand, this implies to promote a focus of joint projects on **contributing to the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals** – the most important reference point in the contemporary, global discourse on societal issues.

On the other hand, since CIVIS Hubs are our main programmes for tackling grand challenges, African partnerships may help to ensure that these programmes address the global dimensions of their respective themes. Thus, CIVIS aims at promoting the **inclusion of new partners in programmes developed by CIVIS Hubs**, respectively **conceive new educational projects** on Hub themes together with African partners. Since Hubs currently focus on the development of joint educational pathways, the collaboration with African partners could ideally reflect this emphasis, at least in its initial stage, by encouraging collaborative teaching formats and student exchange, but also go beyond this and involve research, innovation, and/or outreach activities.

Just as CIVIS started by intensifying the exchange of persons, knowledge and resources among its member universities in order to create synergies and mutual benefits, our alliance sees a similar potential in partnerships with African institutions. Therefore, CIVIS will explore the possibility of an **inter-institutional collaboration** between partner universities and CIVIS (members) in the realms of capacity building as well as student/staff exchange.

CIVIS favours a multilateral approach to joint activities whenever possible and useful - not only internally, but also in the context of **enhancing intra-African collaboration**. A network of African partner universities may facilitate initiatives for South-South cooperation between them and complement their existing international network with partners hitherto less integrated therein.

(8) This See also the 'Africa Task Force Strategic Report' of the European 'Strategic Forum for International Cooperation' (SFIC 2020: 4) on this point and how it relates to the European-African cooperation in science, innovation, and higher education.



As a socially engaged university alliance within the EU and a special relationship to African partners, CIVIS may contribute to the success and implementation of policies **fostering the collaboration between African countries and the EU** (members) more generally. Hence, CIVIS sees great potential in aligning joint activities with themes and initiatives formulated, e.g., in the Africa-Europe Alliance or the Joint Africa-European Union Strategy. In its preparatory note for the EU-African Union summit in 2021, for instance, the Council of the European Union (2020) explicitly defines key issues close to or identical with CIVIS Hubs as important for future partnerships, such as climate/environment, urbanisation, and digitalisation. Looking more concretely at the role of HEIs in EU-Africa relations, the EC's proposal for a 'comprehensive strategy with Africa' may also connect with CIVIS' partnership development and the commitment of our alliance to the 'knowledge-triangle' (9). The EC (2020b: 10) suggests as 'Action 5' in that strategy:

Partner with Africa to rapidly enhance learning, knowledge and skills, research and innovation capacities, particularly for women and youth, protecting and improving social rights, and eradicating child labour. It is proposed that the EU scales up EU-Africa academic and scientific cooperation, including on technical and vocational education and training, and enhancing skills development (also in association with EU businesses) with a view to creating a knowledge society and economy. The EU should facilitate the mobility of students, teachers, trainers, and researchers. The EU should also support capacity building within Africa; quality training for teachers; the development of research and innovation capacities; harnessing the interaction between education, science, technology and innovation for improved learning.

The civic profile of our alliance implies the **active collaboration with non-academic partners**, not only at the local/regional level in our Open Labs, but also inter-and transnationally when it comes to addressing global issues. Against this background, CIVIS envisions partnerships involving also NGOs, public authorities, hospitals, museums, companies etc., i.e. relevant external stakeholders or actors supporting us in addressing societal issues.

Many of our efforts in addressing global challenges in educational, research, innovation, and/or outreach projects will require significant **third-party funding**. So, an important aspect in partnerships will be to identify and approach - jointly or coordinated - funding programmes and organisations enabling us to conduct common activities. In turn, the strategic cooperation between African partners and CIVIS may facilitate access to relevant funding schemes - especially at the EU level.

(9) The 'knowledge triangle' refers to connecting the academic core activities of education and research more comprehensively to innovation, i.e. the development of new productive capacities, supplies and/or markets (see CIVIS 2018: 2, 5, passim). In its recent communication on the European Education Area, the EC (2020a: 10) now refers to a 'knowledge square', involving the dimension "service to society" – thus moving towards CIVIS' emphasis on societal/civic engagement in relation to education, research, innovation.



A collective approach to African/Med. partnership development may not at least **sharpen the profile of CIVIS as an alliance within the European University initiative**. In its recent communication on achieving the European Education Area (EEA) by 2025, for instance, the European Commission (2020a: 12, 19-20) refers to Africa and EU neighboring countries as key regions in the geopolitical dimension of this process. At the same time, it stresses the significance of 'European Universities' as a means for building the EEA, once more reiterated by the Council of the European Union (2021: 2-3) in its conclusions on the EUI. CIVIS' (2018: 39) ambition to develop European connections with Mediterranean and African regions may thus contribute to the EUI at large by exploring how members of European University alliances can collaborate in the realm of global engagement in general and with African partners in particular.



ADDITIONAL BENEFITS FOR PARTNER UNIVERSITIES

Except the last EUI internal aspect, the aims mentioned above would ideally match, at least partly, with the strategic objectives of our potential partners. Notwithstanding their specific considerations and identified priorities for international collaboration, entering a partnership with CIVIS could have some further, concrete advantages for African/Mediterranean institutions:

Students could join **online courses and short-term training programmes** offered either unilaterally by CIVIS (members) or jointly with African partners. In the mid- to long-run, they might benefit from a larger variety of **options for student exchanges**.

Members of partner universities – students, academics, staff – could **access and contribute to the CIVIS ‘digital campus’**, in which courses, projects, and resources are shared.

Since CIVIS involves nine research-oriented, first-class universities in Europe, researchers from partner institutions may establish contacts to a large pool of **potential partners in Europe** for joint research activities, and they may jointly access **EU-related research funding** more easily.

CIVIS plans to constitute itself as a **non-profit international legal entity** by 2022. It not only provides a sustainable institutional form of our alliance independent of external (EU) funding. It will also facilitate the administration of common resources or the access to new funding sources. We will purposefully design that entity in such a way that our **African partners could join** it sooner or later as affiliated members and thereby benefit from its advantages for initiating and organising collaboration projects.

CIVIS is currently the only European University alliance actively promoting partnerships with African institutions. Hence, joining CIVIS may be a unique **strategic opportunity** for partner institutions **to actively shape the relationship between the African higher education landscape and the European Higher Education Area**, also given the latter’s explicitly geopolitical dimension mentioned above.



THE CIVIS APPROACH TO PARTNERSHIP DEVELOPMENT

Whatever the concrete contents and formats of the partnerships to be developed together with African institutions, some basic principles guide this CIVIS project:

- **Partnerships based on respect, equity, trust, and transparency:** Although CIVIS pursues a structured and target-oriented approach to developing strategic partnerships, it sees the process itself as a joint one, with priorities being identified and contextualised by African partners and then steered together in a respectful, equitable, trusting and transparent manner from the very beginning. Hence, the aims and ambitions of CIVIS outlined in this paper cannot be understood as an already set agenda, but rather as articulating the views and expectations our alliance brings into a common exploration of joint interests and perspectives, from which a possible path towards a long-term, mutually beneficial partnership could depart.
- **Furthering bottom-up initiatives:** Neither our partners nor CIVIS (member universities) can devise our possible partnership ‘top-down’ at the drawing table. An effective partnership development process needs to incorporate and at best actively relate to the ideas, preferences and interests of persons, units, and not at least individual universities, who entertain relevant collaborations already and could benefit from scaling them up, or for whom a partnership between African universities and CIVIS (members) may open up new research/educational/transfer opportunities.
- **Multilingualism:** CIVIS acknowledges the factual dominance and use of English as the *lingua franca* in international higher education affairs and beyond. Therefore, our alliance agreed on English as the internal common language. However, CIVIS is committed to promoting multilingualism in our joint research, education, and outreach activities. This implies working actively and creatively on overcoming language barriers in our partnerships with African universities, as well.
- **Pursuing universal values:** CIVIS actively promotes social values such as inclusiveness, gender equality, non-discrimination, and social equity, formulated already in the United Nation’s Declaration of Universal Human Rights and more recently underpinning the UN’s 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (10). This normative guideline of our alliance implies the task to respect and pursue universal values also jointly with our partners in common activities and agreements.

(10) See e.g. the UN Sustainable Development Group’s account of universal values (<https://unsdg.un.org/2030-agenda/universal-values> [accessed 27 May 2021]).



POSSIBLE PARTNER UNIVERSITIES

One central task of the CIVIS project team in charge of African/Med. partnerships was finding universities our alliance could invite to a joint exploration of a strategic partnership. In light of our ambition to reach first results in the partnership development process by 2022 already – the end of CIVIS’ ‘fabric phase’, it thereby concentrated on universities with which individual CIVIS members already entertain close and at best numerous relationships on which a collective CIVIS partnership could build. Moreover, the project team applied the following main criteria in its further search for potential partners (11):

- Existing academic profile in one or more of the Hub themes
- Demonstrated commitment to a high quality and socially engaged academy
- Regional and language distribution of partners

Even after considering these aspects, a choice had to be made among institutions CIVIS could possibly approach for exploring a strategic partnership. Among the currently invited universities are the Université Cheikh Anta Diop de Dakar (Senegal), the University of the Witwatersrand (South Africa), the Hassan II University of Casablanca (Morocco), Makerere University (Uganda), University of Sfax (Tunisia), and Eduardo Mondlane University (Mozambique).

Although these or other institutions may constitute future core partners of CIVIS and are at the focus of the partnership development process, the activities of our alliance might involve further institutions in three ways:

- Universities invited to exploring a CIVIS partnership can act as **academic hubs within Africa/the Mediterranean area**, thus involving further regional partners in joint activities with CIVIS.
- CIVIS intends to start collaborations with four to six partner universities in its initial ‘fabric phase’ until 2022. This does not exclude the **possibility to widen the network** by inviting further African/Mediterranean partners later on.
- According to the definition of a ‘CIVIS activity’, any initiative involving at least three member CIVIS universities and contributing to the aims of our alliance can be considered as such. So, the project to develop university partnerships leaves **room for potential CIVIS activities involving any academic or even non-academic partner in the target regions**. Due to the special focus of our alliance on Africa and the Mediterranean, CIVIS aims at remaining open to the development of such connections, as well as actively supporting it within the limits of its capacities.

(11) Since the partnerships may imply widened student and staff exchange, security considerations played also a role in the search for potential CIVIS partners.



ACTIVITIES

How can CIVIS concretely develop African university partnerships, pursue the aims, and help to create the benefits outlined in section 3 and 4 above? On the one hand, CIVIS' ambition is to initiate joint pilot projects and eventually agree on strategic partnerships by 2022. On the other hand, the process should build on the ideas and initiatives of the members of our universities (see above, CIVIS approach). For relating the implied 'top-down' to the equally necessary 'bottom-up' perspective in the partnership development process, CIVIS explores with its partners joint activities in the partly overlapping realms sketched in Table 1 below.

Those activities would ideally underpin or inform the joint drafting of long-term strategic partnership agreements, whose implementation would fall in CIVIS 'consolidation phase' from 2022 onwards.

In line with the mentioned non-exclusive focus on core partnerships, CIVIS also plans to launch a permanent call for proposals, respectively an 'offer of support', for co-operations between at least three CIVIS partners and any (non-) academic actor in the target region (Africa/Mediterranean area) if those are in line with CIVIS aims and principles. The features of this activity have yet to be elaborated.

Project category	Institutional collaboration	Including further CIVIS members in existing collaborations	Inclusion of partners in Hub activities	Initiatives proposed in response to a Call for proposals
Main purpose	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Strengthening the institutional links between African partners and CIVIS Developing a supportive framework for de-central connections between partner and CIVIS institutions Supporting intra-African exchange 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Strengthening the basis of the partnership First pilot projects could start relatively soon 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ensuring that African partnerships are at the core of Hubs, i.e. joint learning pathways (= CIVIS aim/priority) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Support of initiatives potentially leading to long-term, joint, third-party funded projects Reaching out to the CIVIS community
Possible types of projects	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Development of institutional support-structures for collaboration (e.g. inclusion in the digital campus, establishing joint information channels etc.) Fostering staff and student exchange Capacity-building Joint policy initiatives (e.g. in higher education, EU-African relationships) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Existing projects in all areas (education, research, transfer, innovation) - with potential priority on education, virtual mobilities and Hub themes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> New initiatives for joint learning pathways responding to a Hub call Existing Hub initiatives aiming at the inclusion of (an) African partner(s) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Activities for exploring or preparing a longer-term collaboration (research, education, transfer, innovation, capacity building) with ≥ 3 CIVIS partners and at least one African partner, i.e. meetings, workshops, drafting of a third-party funding application
Timeline	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Starts after partners have agreed to explore a strategic partnership (June/July 2021) Continuous process 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Starts after partners have agreed to explore a strategic partnership (June/July 2021) First inclusions of CIVIS partners completed by June 2022 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Can start after partners have agreed to explore a strategic partnership (June/July 2021) Depends on Hub-specific calls First successful inclusions of African partners, or important steps in that direction, completed by Sep. 2022 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Starts when all or a critical mass of invited partners have agreed to explore a strategic partnership (e.g. Aug.-Sep. 2021) Meetings/workshops/drafts completed by Sep. 2022

Table 1: Types of possible activities in the context of CIVIS WP5



CONTACT & INFORMATION

For more information and feedback, please contact the CIVIS project team ('Work Package') in charge of initiating African/Mediterranean partnerships:

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Table 2: Contact list of selected project team members (WP5 Task Force members)

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