

Book of abstracts

European Universities Initiative: 2nd Research and Practice Symposium

2–3 July 2026 Vienna, Austria

Thursday 2 July

Keynote Speech

Student agency and transformative effects of European Universities alliances on students

Dr. Manja Klemenčič

Student agency is becoming a central concept in educational policy and practice. It refers to the capabilities of students to navigate and influence their learning and education pathways and environments to improve student learning outcomes. European Universities alliances are funded on the premise that they establish a European inter-university 'campus' with various innovative, flexible learning opportunities and alternative learning paths. In other words, they are funded to bring about transformative effects on students by creating agentic opportunities and by nurturing students' agentic orientations. This keynote addresses the question how do we know if alliances are fulfilling this commitment and do they?

Parallel Paper Session A

Towards a Typology of Transnational Skills Initiatives: Mapping Governance Logics and Principal Actors

Alina Felder-Stindt

Transnational skills initiatives (TSIs) are increasingly used to address global challenges such as demographic change, digitalisation, and decarbonisation by organising education and workforce development across borders. Operating at the intersection of migration, education, and economic policy, they reflect a shift from nationally contained skill formation toward transnational governance involving states, firms, and international organisations. Despite their growing importance, research on TSIs remains fragmented. This paper proposes a conceptual typology distinguishing five governance regimes: extractive labour supply, developmental capacity-building, corporate talent pipelines, regional harmonisation, and geopolitical influence. It shows that TSIs are political instruments shaping how skills are produced, distributed, and valued globally.

Challenges as a Transnational Governance Means in European Education and Training. The cases of the European Universities Initiative and Centres of Vocational Excellence

Agata A. Lambrechts, Marcelo Marques and Lukas Graf

Grand challenges such as climate change, demographic shifts, political extremism, and social inequality have become central to EU education and training (E&T) policy. This paper examines how such challenges function as instruments of transnational governance through two Erasmus+ flagship initiatives: the European Universities initiative and the Centres of Vocational Excellence. Drawing on policy and governance scholarship, it conceptualises challenges as a distinct governance mechanism that combines resources, relationships, and authority. Analysis of EU policy and programme documents shows that challenges orient collective action, mobilise diverse stakeholders, and legitimise new multi-actor approaches. In doing so, they enable EU steering beyond competitiveness towards broader societal goals.

From Alliances to policy platforms: European University Alliances and the Joint European Degree Label as an implementation “stress test”

Fernando Galán and Laura Horward

European University Alliances are increasingly positioned as “policy implementation platforms” expected to scale EU-level initiatives. This paper examines this through the Joint European Degree label as an implementation “stress test”. Evidence includes document analysis and cross-alliance surveys to map bottlenecks. We hypothesise that alliances outperform individual institutions when they institutionalise cross-institutional decision rights for education and QA. Conversely, implementation falters where alliances remain project-layered or where legal fragmentation prevents student pathways.

Complement or Complication? Convergences and Divergences between the European Degree Label and the European Approach for QA of Joint Programmes

Aleksandar Šušnjar & Ana Tomaško Obradović

The European degree label (EDL) is being introduced as a transitional step toward a future European degree. Ahead of its 2026 rollout, the Operational Guide sets out its links with the European Approach for Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes (EA). This paper analyses substantive convergences and divergences between the EDL and the EA, exploring how this formal mapping works when applied to actual evaluation practices. Focusing on three selected EDL criteria, it examines where EA-based documentation makes EDL-relevant evidence visible, and where further operational input is needed. The findings aim to support consortia and evaluators in preparing for upcoming EDL evaluations.

Parallel Paper Session B

Developing Collective Actorhood: The Janus-Trimurti Paradigm in European University Alliances

Antonin Charret and Daniela Craciun

European University Alliances (EUAs) are increasingly expected to act as collective actors in European higher education governance, despite remaining only partially organized meta-organizations and project-based structures. Drawing on theories of organizational actorhood, meta-organizations, and EUAs, this presentation explores how alliances can develop collective actorhood under conditions of organizational incompleteness. Based on qualitative network analysis with 31 alliance coordinators, we propose the Janus–Trimurti paradigm. The Janus dimension highlights the need for internal and external legitimacy, while the Trimurti dimension emphasizes navigating policy, organizational, and project logics simultaneously. Together, these dimensions explain how EUAs gain recognition and capacity as collective actors.

Acting without agency? – Conceptualising university alliances as organisational actors

Oliver Vettori and Johanna Warm

European University Alliances offer a fascinating field for scholars of organisation. One key challenge lies in balancing meta-organisation and member organisation interests. However, there are still considerable gaps in conceptualising the alliances as a type of meta-organisation or collective actor, given the assumption that the alliances will become permanent or at least long-living institutions. The question addressed in this research is: in what way are these alliances able to act, and can be considered as actors in their own right – and to which extent have they been imbued with agency by their member organisations? The study comparatively examines fifteen different alliances following four dimensions: organisational accountability, the definition of goals, the elaboration of formal structures, and the professionalisation of management roles. The interpretive frame draws on meta-organisations as partial organisations as well as on agency theory.

From Platform to Incubator? The Governance of Engagement in (European) University Alliances

David Joshua Schröder

The paper reflects on (European) University Alliances as opportunity structures for transformations in academia and society by examining their self-understanding and governance of engagement. Drawing on qualitative interviews with alliance management staff, it develops a sensitizing typology of four modes of engagement: driver, platform, catalyst, and incubator. The paper argues that while many alliances increasingly experiment with incubator-oriented forms of governance, the platform mode remains the dominant way of organizing engagement. In this mode, alliances provide spaces, occasions, and infrastructures for others to use, while avoiding accountability for processes or outcomes. This dynamic is illustrated through a closer examination of a central field of action for engagement: transdisciplinarity. The paper then identifies a set of reasons for the persistence of the platform mode. It argues, among other things, that this mode is highly functional for alliances: it allows them to signal responsibility for academic and societal transformation while limiting the costs of commitment, coordination, and liability.

Balancing Institutional Autonomy and Transnational Cooperation: The Challenge of Adopting a Legal Entity for European University Alliances

Hedwig Unger

As more alliances adopt legal entities, critical questions arise regarding institutional autonomy. This paper examines the advantages of transitioning to a formal legal entity (such as an EGTC or EEIG) versus the challenges of administrative complexity and potential threats to autonomy. Using the Arqus Alliance as a case study, it proposes a phased approach to legal integration to preserve diversity. The adoption of a legal entity offers benefits such as streamlined decision-making and enhanced accountability, but these must be managed to avoid excessive bureaucratisation.

Parallel Paper Session C

From Fragile Cooperation to Institutional Ecosystems: An Ecological Model of European University Alliances

Patrícia Oliveira-Silva

This paper proposes an ecological model for alliance evolution through four stages: Establishment (seed dispersal), Germination (mycelium growth), Integration (ecosystem stabilisation), and Institutionalisation (mature ecosystem). Rather than treating alliances as static partnerships, the paper conceptualises them as living relational environments. Alliance maturity should be assessed by the extent to which collaborative interactions become ecologically self-reinforcing rather than by the number of activities launched. This framing moves beyond project logic toward sustainable interdependence.

From Project Coordination to Institutional Integration? Governance Logics within European Universities Initiative Alliances

Magdalena Sikorska

This paper examines governance approaches within European Universities Initiative (EUI) alliances and their implications for long-term institutional integration. Drawing on a doctoral study of 41 alliances established under the 2019 and 2020 Erasmus+ calls, the research combines document analysis with 16 interviews with alliance coordinators. Findings reveal significant variation in governance structures, including degrees of centralisation, student participation, and stakeholder involvement. While some alliances adopt strong executive coordination models, others rely on distributed, consensus-based arrangements. Despite ambitions for deeper integration, governance practices remain strongly shaped by Erasmus+ project management requirements. Consequently, alliances function as hybrid organisational forms, balancing aspirations for sustainable institutional consolidation with the constraints of temporary project-based frameworks.

Governing European University Alliances: The Hybridisation of Projects and Permanence

Kimberley Waechtler

European University Alliances are both long term strategic partnerships and projects with deliverables and deadlines. This means Universities involved in these Alliances must come up with a way to organise *between* permanence and temporality. As a conceptual contribution, we propose Temporary Meta-Organisations (TMOs) and Permanent Meta-Organisations (PMOs) as distinct

organisational types that capture these temporal dynamics. We then undertake a rubric-guided and discursive qualitative analysis on over 50 documents examining first cohort of seventeen European University Alliances. Empirically, by foregrounding temporality, the article shows how European University Alliances do not resolve the tension between project organisation and permanence, but in some ways, actively sustain it, revealing hybrid organisation as a distinctive governance response to contemporary European higher education policy.

A view from the outside: What eight years of supporting European University Alliances reveals

Eloi Bigas and Adriana Oliveres

Drawing on eight years and 78 projects with 26 European University Alliances, we offer a practitioner's reflection on when alliances reach out for external support, what they ask for, and what the pattern reveals. Letting categories surface from the data rather than testing a hypothesis, we trace a clear shift: from application support early in an alliance's life toward implementation work (strategy, evaluation, mediation) as it matures and institutionalises. The mix is shaped as much by the rhythm of the EUI calls as by where each alliance sits in its own life. We close by asking what this trajectory means: whether external support accelerates integration or defers harder internal work, and where capacity-building ends and dependency begins.

Parallel Paper Session D

Constructing Europe by Mobilising Diversity: Discourses of Equity and Inclusion in the European Universities Initiative

Daniel Schumann and Kathrin Zippel

This paper examines how diversity, equity and inclusion are discursively constructed in the European Universities Initiative. Drawing on discourse analysis and justification analysis, it examines the mission statements of 65 alliances. We show that DEI is highly salient and discursively mobilised in three different ways: as a resource for creating singular alliance identities; as a marker of excellence and competitiveness; and as an enactment of European values. We show how these mechanisms correspond with three forms of organizational distinction – horizontal, vertical, and global – and, taken together, serve to construct Europe as a distinctive actor in the global higher education landscape.

The talk-action inconsistency of European University Alliances: The Case of Public Portuguese Universities

Estela Cunha, P. Pereira and Teresa Carvalho

This paper explores how Portuguese public universities participating in European University Alliances understand and enact their relationship with society. Drawing on organised hypocrisy and legitimacy types, it analyses institutional strategic plans and interviews with 15 vice-rectors and alliance representatives. Findings show that societal engagement has become a prominent element of universities' mission discourse, although interpretations vary between economic, civic, cultural, and

sustainability-oriented perspectives. Alliances influence decision-making, particularly in pedagogical innovation and mobility, but have a weaker impact on research-related societal engagement. Despite ambitious rhetoric, tangible institutional change remains limited. The study argues that inconsistencies between discourse, decisions, and actions reflect adaptive responses to complex institutional environments rather than policy failure.

European University Alliances as drivers of Organisational Change: Structures and Professional Reconfigurations in Italy

Agata Mannino, Alberto Forte, Francesco Girotti, Francesca Valente

The European Universities Initiative (EUI) has introduced new organisational demands for Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) participating in alliances. This research explores how Italian universities organise alliance-related activities internally, how responsibilities are distributed between academic and administrative units, and how organisational arrangements interact with the competences required to sustain participation in European Universities Alliances. Particular attention is paid to emerging professional roles operating across traditional institutional boundaries. The Italian HE system, traditionally characterised by a strong separation of roles, serves as a critical setting to observe how alliances are enacted through organisational adaptation, competence recognition, and the work of staff acting as mediators, coordinators and boundary spanners.

The Role of University Alliances in Transforming Universities in the Western Balkans

Viktoria Menczel and Nikola Savic

This paper explores the potential impact of University Alliances on the institutional transformation of universities in the Western Balkans, focusing on the extent and levels of institutional involvement in these forms of transnational cooperation. Rather than addressing complex and long-term transformations at this stage, the study concentrates on more concrete and operational dimensions, such as the degree of participation of different university levels in alliance activities, the institutional anchoring of alliances (e.g. in strategic documents), perceived benefits, collaboration with state institutions, and potential internal organisational adjustments. Methodologically, the research is based on a survey using structured questionnaires distributed to university leaders, alliance coordinators, academic staff, and administrative personnel involved in alliance-related activities. Drawing on historical institutionalism as its theoretical lens, the study assesses the extent to which European University Alliances contribute to institutional development, and whether the changes observed reflect incremental adaptation within existing structures or signal more substantial strategic transformation.

Plenary Panel

Defining and assessing impact of European University Alliances - different perspectives

This panel explores how the impact of European University Alliances can be defined, measured, and communicated from policy, institutional, alliance, and research perspectives. Bringing together practitioners, policymakers, evaluators, consultants and scholars, the discussion examines tensions

between accountability requirements based on standardised indicators and the broader goal of long-term institutional transformation. Panelists will debate who should define meaningful alliance impact, the limitations of existing KPIs and mobility metrics, and the methodological approaches needed to capture organisational, educational, and societal change. The session will also consider how impact narratives are constructed and communicated, and how evidence can support both alliance development and policy learning.

Parallel interactive workshops

Interactive Workshop A

Democratic innovations in the EUAs: How to foster citizenship in diverse settings – co-creation, representation, education.

Timothy James Marshall, Karol Leja, Ryan Wakamiya, Michel Varelija and Tamar Chkhartishvili

This interactive workshop examines how European University Alliances foster democratic citizenship through co-creation, representation, and education. Recognising the growing expectation that alliances contribute to democratic values and civic engagement, the session explores how these goals are translated into everyday practices. Participants will discuss student involvement in alliance development, mechanisms for student representation in governance, and educational approaches that build democratic competencies such as critical thinking, collaboration, and active citizenship. Through facilitated discussions, collaborative mapping, and interactive voting, attendees will identify challenges, share best practices, and co-create a research agenda on democratic innovations, citizenship education, and participatory governance within European University Alliances.

Interactive Workshop B

Measuring What Matters? Co-designing a Framework for the Social Impact of European University Alliances in Non-EU Contexts

Adina Fodor, Can Yücesoy, Zuhail Okan and Hale İlkçakın

This interactive workshop explores how to measure the social impact of European University Alliances in non-EU contexts, where existing EU-normative evaluation frameworks may be less applicable due to asymmetric funding and institutional conditions. Focusing on civic, social, and regional development value—particularly in contexts such as Türkiye—the session brings together participants from alliances including NeurotechEU, UNIC, and EUPeace. Through evidence-based provocations, collaborative indicator design, and structured peer review, participants co-develop and test new assessment approaches. The workshop culminates in a co-authored draft framework and a comparative research design aimed at improving methodologies for capturing alliance impact beyond standard EU metrics.

Campfire session

Empowering Professional Staff for Alliance Transformation: The Strategic Contribution of HR Leadership

Juliana Velasquez Ochoa and Klaus Wiehl (Una Europa)

This session examines how professional staff empowerment became a governance priority within Una Europa. It highlights the establishment of a cross-alliance HR Directors Group as a turning point. Sustainable alliance integration depends on embedding professional staff mobility and upskilling within institutional strategies and reframing mobility as a strategic investment rather than an additional burden.

New Roles and Interactions in the Ecosystem of Teaching: CHARM Alliance Perspective

Nataliia Lazebna (CHARM-EU)

Transnational higher education demands new forms of collaboration. This session presents the teaching ecosystem in the CHARM-EU joint Master programmes, supported by inter-institutional roles: Module Coordinators and Educationalists. It discusses how shared digital platforms and hybrid co-teaching arrangements can reshape teaching ecosystems and drive integrated higher education.

CIVICA Service to Society: Impacts and Challenges of a European University Alliance

Dunja Milenkovic (CIVICA)

This session focuses on the Service to Society initiatives of CIVICA, demonstrating how joint actions advance inclusiveness beyond university walls. Activities include inclusiveness workshops and high-school outreach. It reflects on challenges, such as the difficulty of reaching refugee students without existing local connections, and the move toward a new Inclusiveness Initiative.

From Consultation to Co-Creation: Lessons from Living Labs for Meaningful Community Engagement in European University Alliances

Birgit Strotmann (EUPeace)

How can European University Alliances foster meaningful community engagement that is both locally embedded and transferable across diverse contexts? Drawing on experiences from the EUPeace Living Peace Lab, in particular the EnerPeace Living Lab project on energy poverty, this campfire session explores participatory approaches that engage students, academics, public authorities and civil society organisations in addressing societal challenges. Participants will discuss key building blocks of effective engagement—shared problem framing, co-creation, iterative feedback and collaborative governance—and reflect on challenges of power-sharing, sustainability and transferability. Through interactive dialogue, the session will generate practical insights for strengthening the societal role of European University Alliances.

From Experimentation to Consolidation: Evaluating Blended Intensive Programmes in the CIVIS Alliance

Alexandru Carțiș (CIVIS)

This session will discuss the roll out of BIPs within alliances. Analysing over 230 Blended Intensive Programmes (BIPs) in CIVIS, a recent CIVIS paper identifies high levels of maturity and quality in implementation. Findings indicate that BIPs are associated with strong pedagogical value, especially in interactive learning. However, structural bottlenecks persist, including documentation-heavy workflows and uneven ECTS recognition. These are systemic regulatory issues that require coordinated responses to improve digital-administrative interoperability for future joint educational provision.

Friday 3 July

Keynote speech

Alliances and the Metrics Trap

Dr. Jelena Branković

European University Alliances are complex and evolving institutional formations that resist easy measurement. This keynote examines what happens when assessment frameworks encounter objects they were not designed for—and argues that the mismatch is not merely methodological but structural, rooted in the architecture of European governance itself. Drawing on historical and contemporary evidence, it asks what the current assessment apparatus can and cannot see, and what is at stake in that difference.

Poster session

1. European Universities Alliances as Platforms for Research Collaboration

Anna Stina Sinisalo

While EUAs have focused on educational collaboration, research is vital for research-intensive universities. This poster addresses how alliances build their identity as research platforms. It presents best practices from the Una Europa alliance, including seed funding initiatives and researcher mobility pilots designed to create low-threshold opportunities.

2. Data collection requires institutional transformation

Christine Marburger

Data collection in alliances is more than collecting numbers; it requires institutional transformation. Alliances require data that was not previously needed, such as differentiating participant numbers per university for collaborative courses to avoid double-counting. Successful data collection relies on

strategic support to implement professional data quality management across all partner institutions. The alliance process relies on a deeper institutional transformation and awareness of a wider scope of staff to implement data collection that supports impact assessment.

3.Designing A Multidimensional Impact Assessment Framework For Mission-Driven Research Clusters Within Higher Education Context: An Impact Analysis Of Eelisa Communities

Hale İlkçakın, Teresa Sánchez-Chaparro and Börte Köse Mutlu

The poster showcases a study that examines the role of EELISA Communities within European University Initiatives as emerging, mission-driven ecosystems that integrate education, research, innovation, and societal engagement. These interdisciplinary communities connect students, academics, researchers, and external partners to address societal challenges through challenge-based learning and collaboration. As they evolve from educational experiments into potential research clusters, questions arise about their long-term impact and sustainability. The research proposes a multidimensional impact assessment framework combining Social Impact Assessment, Theory of Change, and Social Return on Investment. Based on surveys, interviews, and case studies, it evaluates how activities translate into long-term outcomes aligned with SDGs and strategic research priorities.

4.Expand university cooperation and its impact on stakeholders (and strengthen funding options)

Francisco Mendes-Palma and Joao Cortez

How can cross-university collaboration through EU-funded innovation and entrepreneurship (I&E) projects evolve into sustainable alliance-level infrastructures? Drawing on the experience of the Transform4Europe (T4EU) alliance, we examine how projects like ELEVATE, B-KINETIC, BIKE, and LETSGROW contribute to building shared I&E infrastructures. The study explores mechanisms of capacity building, focusing on shared training and mentoring, intersectoral mobility, and emerging models for joint services. Findings suggest that intentionally aligned projects consolidate shared capacity and produce measurable outputs like trained talent and startup impacts.

5.Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes in European Universities Alliances: An Exploratory Analysis

Estela Cunha, Nathan Carvalho and Maria J. Rosa

Alliances are currently developing more than 150 joint programmes, yet nearly 40% lack a comprehensive quality assurance (QA) strategy. While the European Approach for QA of Joint Programmes was created to facilitate accreditation, its adoption varies by country. This work aims to analyse how alliances are coping with the external QA of their joint programmes by examining reports from EQAR-registered agencies. Content analysis revealed a contrast in assessments across different agencies, suggesting a need for mechanisms specifically tailored for alliance initiatives, such as the EuniQ project framework.

6. Entrepreneurship and Innovation in European Universities Alliances: Added Value and Challenges of Transnational Collaboration

Flavia Colus and Ieva Grumbinaite

This paper explores the entrepreneurship and innovation potential of European Universities alliances (EUAs) by examining 17 EUAs established in 2019. It uses the HEInnovate framework to assess dimensions like leadership and ecosystems. Findings reveal that while all alliances offer joint courses, entrepreneurial teaching and challenge-based learning are the most developed areas. However, governance remains largely informal. Impact assessment is the least developed dimension, relying on success stories rather than systematic methodologies.

7. Mapping Ecosystem-Oriented Alliances: A Cluster Analysis of Universities of Applied Sciences

Maria-Teresa Aceytuno and Brigitte Kürsteiner

The objective of the present study is to gain a deeper understanding of the specific forms and intensities of engagement of universities of applied sciences within European university alliances. More specifically, the study seeks to examine whether UAS are more strongly represented than research universities in alliances that prioritise clearly defined goals related to ecosystem development, stakeholder integration, and societal impact. The findings of this study are expected to provide evidence-based insights on whether specific funding instruments should prioritise the amplification of societal impact through the third mission or, alternatively, strengthen universities' positions within an increasingly competitive global academic landscape.

8. Who Shapes the Alliance? The Role of Academic Staff and Rectors in Constructing Organisational Identity

Alexandra Hashem-Wangler

This presentation examines how operational academic staff and university rectors across nine higher education institutions negotiate the identity of a European Universities Initiative (EUI) alliance in their daily work. In these meta-organisations, diverse institutional structures must be aligned into shared goals and a common organisational identity. Findings show that identity formation occurs primarily through bottom-up processes, both inward-facing (within the operational group) and outward-facing (towards inclusion and external perception), aimed at managing transformation and maximising institutional value. University leaders, by contrast, often play a mainly symbolic role, focusing on their own institutions while engaging less in alliance-level identity building. The study extends organisational identity research to sustainability and highlights the gap between institutional and meta-organisational governance.

9. Grassroots initiatives within a formal European University alliance: A case study of BioYUFE

Nicholas J. Bradshaw

While alliances tend to adopt a "top-down" character, several "bottom-up" initiatives have grown within the YUFE alliance, including BioYUFE. BioYUFE runs online elective courses and webinars in life sciences and humanities. This case study demonstrates that a small initial outlay for a live meeting can lead to dynamic international teaching initiatives. Alliances should prioritise seed funding for

similar grassroots initiatives to increase staff and student engagement and counteract "projectification".

Future Learning Experience Lab Tour

Corinna Stiefelbauer and Andrea Ghoneim

The Future Learning Experience Lab is part of the [Future Learning Experience Center \(FLEX\)](#), which serves as the central innovation hub for the use of state-of-the-art educational technologies in teaching and learning at WU. The tangible aspect of the center includes media studios where teachers can easily create various video formats without technical support. These range from lecture videos filmed in front of a green screen to more visually elaborate explainer videos using a lightboard. An audio studio supports the production of various audio formats, such as podcasts or supplemental voice recordings to enrich digital learning content. The FLEX Center is also utilized by students, primarily in groups, for audio or video assignments.

The Future Learning Experience Lab offers a variety of XR applications, including Virtual Rhetoric Training, Virtual Role Plays, and gamified spaces such as Escape Rooms. It is also the physical home for the Virtual Campus of the university alliance ENGAGE.EU (<https://www.wu.ac.at/en/engageeu-virtualcampus>). This Virtual Campus is a browser-based 3D interactive environment that enables learners and faculty across partner universities to create and share learning experiences beyond geographical boundaries.

The browser-based architecture of the ENGAGE.EU Virtual Campus eliminates technical barriers by not requiring specialized hardware or software installations—a crucial factor for accessibility. The Virtual Campus is accessible 24/7 and serves as a hub for meetings, group work, or simply socializing. It is designed to support shared learning activities across partner universities.

During the Future Learning Experience Lab Tours, participants will have the opportunity to explore the facilities of the FLEX Center on-site and gain insights into best practices within the ENGAGE.EU Virtual Campus.

Parallel Paper Session E

Pathways to successful bottom-up collaboration in European University Alliances: A Qualitative Comparative Analysis of Joint Call applications in the EELISA Alliance

Nina Walker

European University Alliances are a flagship EU initiative aimed at strengthening collaboration across education, research, and innovation among more than 550 universities. However, translating policy ambitions such as interdisciplinarity, challenge-based learning, and ecosystem engagement into

practice remains difficult within traditionally siloed and autonomous university structures. This study examines how the EELISA alliance fosters bottom-up collaboration through its Joint Calls funding scheme (2023–2027), which supports cross-disciplinary and multi-actor projects. Using 81 applications and crisp-set Qualitative Comparative Analysis, we explore which combinations of interdisciplinarity, stakeholder inclusion, interprofessional teams, CBL formats, and governance factors lead to funding success. Early results indicate that no single factor is sufficient; instead, specific configurations of conditions drive successful collaboration outcomes.

Fostering European Identity and Alliance Sense of Belonging through Research Outputs: The EUt+ Common Affiliation as an Integrative Governance Instrument

Emilija Sarma

How can an alliance strengthen its scientific visibility through a unified affiliation strategy? This paper analyses the European University of Technology (EUt+) case and its implementation of a Common Affiliation policy. The adoption of a standardised model resulted in the creation of an official EUt+ institutional profile in Scopus, leading to rapid growth in indexed outputs from 6 in 2024 to 126 in 2025. The Common Affiliation establishes a shared institutional identity and functions as an integrative governance tool that aggregates research outputs.

Transnational Doctoral Ecologies: Socialisation and Learning in European University Alliances

Que Anh Dang and Giovanna Del Gobbo

This study examines how European University Alliances contribute to the development of transnational doctoral learning ecologies and socialisation processes. Drawing on the concept of 'doctoral ecologies', it conceptualises doctoral education as a dynamic network of intellectual, relational, and institutional environments. Methodologically, the study uses a comparative case study design focusing on EUniWell and EUPeace. Preliminary analysis suggests that while alliances may foster transnational ecologies via shared training, some initiatives risk remaining episodic and mobility-driven.

A Conceptual Framework for Rethinking Doctoral Learning within European Universities

Margaux Kersschot

This paper presents a conceptual framework for rethinking doctoral learning within European Universities, based on the DIOSI Model piloted in the YUFE alliance. Across Europe, doctoral candidates (DCs) occupy markedly different legal and institutional positions—variously classified as students, employees, or hybrid figures. The paper argues for treating DCs as a distinct strategic group within the governance of alliances. The framework advances a holistic approach integrating research, personal development, and diverse training formats. Core arguments include placing DC development centrally and supporting them via supervisory teams including mentors for career development.

Parallel Paper Session F

Theoretically informed analyses of European Universities Initiative: exploring the value policy theory

Andrew Gunn and Marina Cino Pagliarello

The European Universities Initiative (EUI) represents one of the most ambitious policy developments in European higher education in recent decades. Considering the complexity of the initiative - spanning multiple governance levels, diverse institutional actors, and evolving policy objectives - this paper considers the value of viewing the EUI through the various lenses provided by policy theory. This paper seeks to illustrate how theoretically informed approaches can deepen our understanding of the origins, development, and implementation of the EUI and the alliances it has fostered. The paper draws on a series of key theories of the policy process and unpacks their applicability to an analysis of the EUI. The paper argues that theory-driven approaches enhance analytical clarity, allow researchers to move beyond case-specific description, and enable comparison across policy sectors and political systems. Moreover, theoretical frameworks help illuminate how policy learning and experimentation occur within the initiative, as universities and policymakers adapt over time.

European Universities as emerging legal actors: multi-level legal innovation in transnational higher education governance

Juan Ramón Real Buhigas

The European Universities Initiative is reshaping higher education in Europe and influencing policy and legal reform across multiple governance levels. This study examines whether alliances can be understood as emerging legal actors that actively shape regulatory frameworks at European, national, and regional levels. Adopting a hermeneutical approach to law-making and legal interpretation, key dimensions of legal actorhood are identified in the framework of contemporary EU governance. Networks in which Spanish and Andalusian universities participate are mapped, and the cases of the European Degree Label and recent Spanish legal reforms are analysed. This study provides an understanding of alliances as mediated legal actors, able to set out common horizons and normative expectations in a network-based European higher education system.

European University Alliances as political actors in the 3rd wave of Europeanisation

Nadia Manzoni

This paper examines whether the European Universities Initiative is driving a new wave of Europeanisation in higher education through its influence on national policy development. While European University Alliances have become a significant force for transnational collaboration, little is known about their impact on domestic policymaking. Drawing on interviews, policy analysis, and case studies from Austria, Romania, and Spain, the study investigates how alliances shape national reforms supporting internationalisation. It proposes that alliances act as policy entrepreneurs, facilitating policy diffusion, social learning, and integration across higher education systems. The research offers a framework for understanding how EU-level initiatives translate into national-level policy change and ultimately, European integration.

An evidence-based analysis of the impact of European Universities Alliances in Romania

Andra Stan-Dragotesc

Twenty-two Romanian higher education institutions are members of European University Alliances, and four hold Seals of Excellence — together representing over 70% of the national student body. This presentation draws on a national-level analysis of the opportunities and challenges encountered by these institutions through their participation in European University Alliances. It examines both the institutional impact of the European Universities Initiative on participating Romanian universities and the ways in which the Initiative is shaping national dialogue and policy across key areas of higher education. Findings point to immediate positive outcomes at the institutional level, notably in the areas of mobility and international reputation, while identified institutional needs centre on financial predictability and the professional development of staff. The report's conclusions are intended to inform policy development at the national level.

Parallel Paper Session G

Student Participation in European University Alliances: a realistic diagnosis

Giulia Rebecca Conte

Despite remarks on the importance of student participation, significant issues prevent involvement from being concretely impactful. This paper diagnoses limits focusing on less visible barriers, such as asymmetric structures and inadequate bylaws. Intra-alliance, representatives are often burdened with unpaid roles alongside academic loads. Methodologically, the paper draws on a survey conducted among Alliance representatives and University representatives. It focuses on diagnosing the key problems that limit student participation, rather than presenting it as merely formal or procedural.

Where are the students in “student-centred” alliances? Governance design and the structural limits of institutional anchoring

Tea Tóth and Jo Angouri

Student-centredness is a defining principle of the EUI, yet its institutional realisation remains under-examined. This paper approaches student-centredness as a governance and design principle. Preliminary findings show that misalignments occur because only a limited circle of students is actively engaged. The paper proposes a framework to evaluate student-centredness along three dimensions: formal representation, institutional anchoring, and distribution of voice. The core challenge is embedding student voice within complex transnational governance systems.

Alliances as Enablers and Beneficiaries of Pedagogical Innovation: Evidence from the EUC Voices Initiative

Marina Auclair and Constance Chevallier-Govers

How can alliances enable large-scale pedagogical innovation? This paper uses EUC Voices as a case study, a pedagogical ecosystem composed of the European Student Assembly (ESA), the European Universities Student Ambassadors' Forum (EUSAF), and the EUC Voices Network. EUAs provide the organisational infrastructure necessary to scale such initiatives. Key findings show that alliances enable scaling by providing access to students from nearly 650 institutions. In turn, EUC Voices transforms how students experience alliances, turning distant institutional structures into tangible educational experiences, generating visibility, engagement, and meaning for students.

From Performance to Practice: Democracy is not a Learning Outcome

Niki Kasis and Julia Carvalho

European higher education policy increasingly calls on universities to become student-centred institutions that contribute to democratic resilience. However, bottom-up engagement is often requested through top-down strategies. Drawing on experiences from the European Reform University Alliance (ERUA), we argue that engagement risks becoming performative if students experience a gap between rhetoric and influence. ERUA's approach involves shared leadership and democratic governance, resulting in structural impacts like a Student Engagement Recognition Framework.

Parallel Paper Session H

1. Beyond Bologna: Do European University Alliances Constitute a New Layer of EU Governance?

Tamiris Amangeldi

While the Bologna Process facilitated academic mobility, its capacity for deepening integration has plateaued. In response, the European Universities Initiative promotes transnational alliances that raise a fundamental question: do EUAs constitute an emerging layer of supranational governance? This paper conceptualises them as "experimentalist" institutional arrangements capable of producing autonomous coordination and rule-setting. Authority arises not from formal legal sovereignty, but from sustained interaction and shared infrastructure. This development illustrates a shift toward practice-based governance in the EHEA.

2. Classifying European University Alliances using Missions, Visions and Focus Areas

Sri Keerthan Tokala

What can we learn about European University Alliances (EUAs) by analysing how they articulate their missions, visions, and focus areas? Are there any patterns in how EUAs define their purpose and activities? If yes, can such patterns be used to classify and evaluate EUAs? This presentation reports on the results of attempts to answer these questions using various text analysis methods.

3. Research Plan for PhD Study on European University Alliances and the Entrepreneurial Transformation of Universities

Anne-Maria Mäkelä

There is limited empirical evidence on how alliances influence the entrepreneurial orientation of member universities. This research examines how participation in the HEROES Alliance contributes to innovation capability across partner universities. Using a mixed-methods embedded case study design, the study investigates how alliance participation influences strategic orientations and organisational practices.

4. Institutional Habitus and Sensemaking of Alliance Membership: Perspectives from Different Institutional Contexts in Türkiye

Pelin Yuce

This study examines how intra-national centre-periphery contexts shape the way alliances are experienced. Using Bourdieu's concept of habitus, the analysis compares an elite metropolitan research university and a regionally embedded university. Thematic analysis explores how distinct institutional habitus frame the sensemaking, motivations, and navigation of structural constraints within EUA membership.

5. Student Participation in European University Alliance's Governance

Jorge Pereira

Neoliberal reforms have often curtailed students' participatory rights in governance, positioning them as consumers. Despite the EUI emphasising student participation, evidence remains limited. This paper addresses the gap by examining student participation in EUA governance through documentary analysis. Preliminary analysis suggests three forms of participation: informer, adviser, and member (with voting rights). The findings highlight convergences and divergences in how the right to participate is recognised across different alliances.

6. 'The waiting field' and ethnographic research on university professionals and European university alliances (EUAs)

Maija Hirvonen

This presentation uses the notion of 'the waiting field' (Mannay and Morgan 2015) to reflect upon recent ethnographic fieldwork among university professionals. The fieldwork contributes to doctoral research on the everyday, ongoing realities of university professionals and how involvement in alliance activities affects their daily routines. The presentation discusses the insights gained from and adjustments made in response to the discontinuous nature of research encounters and the scattered features of the field.

Plenary Panel

Beyond the event horizon: Future policy & research perspectives

The closing panel examines future policy and research perspectives on transnational higher education cooperation, with a focus on European Universities alliances and their evolving role in a rapidly changing global landscape. Drawing on global trends in cross-border collaboration, Matej Bilik situates developments in broader international policy shifts identified by the OECD. From a European governance and institutional perspective, Jo Angouri (EUTOPIA) and Romiță Iucu (CIVIS) reflect on how university alliances are reshaping collaboration, identity, and becoming increasingly reflexive institutions in formation. Complementing these perspectives, Enora Bennetot Pruvot of the European University Association addresses strategies for ensuring the financial sustainability of these alliances, while Elmar Pichl highlights the viewpoint of national authorities on their long-term development.