UNITA QEB

2nd Self-Assessment Report on Good Practices

Quality and Evaluation Board

Turin, 15 February 2023

Project Acronym	UNITA
Project Title	UNITA - Universitas Montium
Document Author	QEB + Quality Ecosystem
Project Coordinator	Maurizio De Tullio
Project Duration	36 Months
Deliverable No.	
Dissemination level *	PP
Work Package	WP1
Task	1.5.3
Lead beneficiary	Università degli Studi di Torino
Due date of deliverable	31/01/2023
Actual submission date	15/02/2023
Document version	1.0

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Introduction

UNITA is a European Alliance born in November 2020 strongly committed to create a collaborative and innovative environment for teaching, learning and research, in the perspective of Quality Assurance and continuous improvement. From the very beginning, the Alliance focused on three educational and research areas: Cultural Heritage, Circular Economy, and Renewable Energies. The project is student-centred and aims to establish an increasingly close relationship with local stakeholders and to have a strong impact on mountain territories. Multilingualism (Romance languages) is a significant part of the project.

A detailed description of the activities, milestones and deliverables of the second year of the UNITA project can be found in the **Progress Report 2nd year** (link: https://datacloud.univ-unita.eu/index.php/apps/files/?dir=/3_U_Project_Documents/U_Progress_Reports/2nd_year_M24&openfile=1162402). That document informs on how the UNITA project is progressing, compared to the baseline and to the project plan; provides an overview on indicators, budget, milestones, deliverables, and main issues.

The Quality Reviews of UNITA and Re-UNITA projects of October 2022 contain other useful information on issues arisen while carrying out the Alliance activities and suggested actions to solve them (see the **QEB Meetings Report 2nd year**, link: https://datacloud.univ-unita.eu/index.php/apps/files/?dir=/2_Quality_Evaluation_Board/Reports&openfile=1075879).

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Summary

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1. Follow up of the QEB 1st Report

Some **good practices** identified by the QEB as promising in its 1ˢᵗ Self-assessment Report (2021; link) have been confirmed in the second year of the project implementation (2022), namely:

- Collaboration between the academic communities of the Alliance partners, showing dynamism and enthusiasm.
- Ongoing activities in the field of Quality Assurance, based on systematic benchmarking of the partners QA systems, involving members from all partners with expertise in QA.
- Collaborative approach and interaction between academic and professional world of the rural and mountain territories where the university partners are located regarding three thematic areas.
- Involvement of students in leadership and decision-making processes.
- Dedicated counsellors supporting the student's learning choice within the UNITA educational offer; updated cartography of courses and progressive creation of micro-credentials to ensure flexible study paths.
- Progressive personalization of international study paths through the designing and implementation of innovative mobility programs.
- Ongoing activities by the teaching and learning centres network, towards an integrated educational environment with innovative techniques.
- Consolidation of a collaborative research environment.
- Promotion of the Alliance existence and activities to the larger society.
- Integration of new ancillary projects within the UNITA constellation and enlargement to new associated partners for the continuation of the Alliance.

Some **suggestions for improvement** in areas which deserve attention, highlighted by the QEB in its 1ˢᵗ Report (2021), have been effectively addressed as described below:

- The hard impact of the tasks implementation on local human resources has been in some cases eased by increasing the number of dedicated and upskilled staff involved.
- For the management of the growing complexity of the UNITA constellation and the several Work Packages composing them, two solutions have been identified: a specific Project Management tool for tracking the tasks progress, risks, and issues status, and hiring of a Liaison Manager for the communication flow among work packages and bodies of all the Constellation projects. Also, the need for more tutorials is under consideration: to this end a Datacloud quick-guide with links to short videos and instructions is now available in the Datacloud dashboard (link: https://datacloud.univ-unita.eu/index.php/apps/collectives/Datacloud%20guide).
- Actions were taken to improve the participation and proactivity of the whole academic communities, boosting the awareness of the importance of the UNITA project's impact on the existing academic structures and activities, as well as to increase the number of students involved in the project.
- New strategies to promote mobility programs among students, involving different funding, were found.
- New strategies to promote the cartography of research to the business world were identified.
- A new approach to engage the Associated Partners and other interested parties has been tried, also strengthening external communication.

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2. Indicators and Budget

The indicators status at the end of the second year of the project (October 2022), in comparison with the previous ones at the end of the first year (October 2021), highlights general positive results although some issues still deserve attention (see Progress Report 2nd year, §1; EU Survey on mobility; internal monitoring indicators).

<u>**Mobility Indicators**</u>

The analysis of the set of indicators focusing on mobility reported in the European Universities Survey (June 2022) and their updated status in October 2022 for the second Progress Report shows the following key aspects.

In academic year 2020-21 out of the 160.000 UNITA students of all cycles (bachelor, master, PhD) 238 (0,15%) were mobile, and 235 out of the 15.500 academic and non-academic staff (1,5%).

In academic year 2021-22 mobility grew for the students (630) and diminished for the staff (145).

In the first two years of the alliance project, according to the updated indicators (end of October 2022), there was a noticeable increase and a total of 868 students (0,5% out of 165.000) and 380 staff (2,4% out of 16.000) were involved in mobility programmes thanks to the UNITA project.

Students' mobility

- Overall increase in students' mobility within the alliance:
  - ✓ The total number of students involved in mobility programs (physical + virtual + blended) shows a remarkable increase in a.y. 21/22 compared to the previous year
  - ✓ The majority of mobilities concerns bachelor students (65%) compared to master and PhD students
  - ✓ A significant increase in student physical mobility financed through other mobility schemes can been observed both at BA and MA level
  - ✓ While there were no blended mobilities in 20/21, at the end of the second year 161 overall were recorded
  - ✓ Funds other than the alliance have been destinated mainly to physical and blended mobility programs rather than virtual programs
  - ✓ Virtual mobility grew until involving 139 students (all cycles) at the end of the second year, representing 16% of overall students' mobility

Staff mobility

- Overall increase in staff mobility within the alliance:
  - ✓ Decrease of academic and non-academic staff mobilities funded by the alliance in a.y. 21/22 compared to the previous year and small increase of physical mobility funded by other programs
  - ✓ Almost no virtual mobility and very limited blended mobilities (15%) in both years
  - ✓ Physical mobility for management meetings of the alliance involved 186 people at the end of the second year.

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Specific Indicators of UNITA

About half of the indicators within the panel of UNITA specific indicators (October 2022) is under the target value with some of them far below the expected threshold. The value of some indicators suggests suboptimal involvement of stakeholders, students, and some difficulties in promoting UNITA services and opportunities.

More in detail, strong **positive results** are displayed by the following indicators:

Gender balance in UNITA Bodies (43% males vs target of >40% <60%)
Deliverables delivered in time (96% vs target 100%; 98% 1 month later)
UNITA members contributing to the participatory democratic process (almost 51.000 vs target 16.000; 438 members participate to the decisional and operational bodies)
Positive answers in the UNITA satisfaction barometer (90% vs target 66%)
Students consulting the UNITA Hubs of Success (more than 3.900 vs target of 3.000)
Teachers participating in workshops (838 vs target 100)
Positive answers in the students' evaluation of teaching (91% vs target 66%)
Researchers integrated in the R&I Thematic Hubs (138 vs target 30)
Stakeholders integrated in the R&I Thematic Hubs (77 vs target 9)
Inclusion of all the programs in the three fields in the Cartography (yes)
Students with a European Students Card (almost 81.000 vs target 80.000)
Mobilities inside UNITA: multiplied by 10 (1226 vs target 860)
Followers in all the channels (more than 18.000 vs target 2.500)
Downloads of UNITA documents (almost 95.000 vs target 7.500)
Universities and stakeholders present at UNITA presentations of its models (526 vs target 100; 131 presentations in external events).

The **best performance** concerns the indicators related to the project's organization and management, including QA.

While the following indicators show **weaknesses**:

Downloads of research papers, guidelines, and model (not available)
Digital badges for IC skills (290 vs target 5000)
Digital badges for competence in Romance languages with IC skills (0)
Rural internships (206 vs target 500)
Projects of sustainable mobility (3 vs target 24)
Queries made at the Liaison Services (0)
Students using co-working spaces (65 vs target 2700)
UNITA Diploma Supplements (43 issued vs target of 20000)
Europasses created (2019 vs target 20000)

The most **critical issues** concern the indicators of multilingualism and inter-comprehension.

Areas of good practices:
- The achievement of gender balance within the decision-making bodies is valuable and it is consistent with EU actions to promote equality.
- The schedule defined for the project's deliverables has been respected. This implies a more than satisfactory level of organization and project management.

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- Noteworthy activity of teachers' training consistent with teachers' needs and excellent evaluation of teaching activities.
- Increase in mobility not financed by UNITA suggests growing level of the Alliance appeal.
- The increase in alternative (virtual + blended) mobility programs suggests implementation of new, alternative approaches consolidated during the pandemic period.
- Implementation of an automatic recognition of ECTS credits for students undertaking their mobility at a partner institution.

Areas of improvement:

- The percentage of overall students' mobility due to the Alliance at the end of the second year does not reach 1%: it can be further improved.
- As outlined in the 2nd year Quality and Evaluation Board Meetings Report, the data collection system should be further improved.

Budget

A detailed budget implementation table is available in the Progress Report 2022 (see § 2, p. 5). It shows yearly reporting and provides an overview on the budget figures per item as approved in the Grant Agreement and actual costs incurred during the reporting period for each partner and in total for UNITA, including the budget expenditure in percentage at 31/12/2022.

Total average spending in the second year is almost 60% (from lowest ZAR 46% to highest TO 66%), centred on personnel cost and subsistence costs.
According to the data there is evidence of unspent amounts, particularly concerning travel costs (spent 34%) and equipment costs (spent 31,2%), and other costs (spent 24,2%).

In consideration of this, the UNITA Offices in collaboration with the WP Leaders are doing a budget review with a different allocation per item and will prepare a forecast for the 3rd year budget and for the future development of the project and present it in the Management Committee in February 2023.

3. Overview on UNITA activities: good practices and recommendations

In the following paragraphs there is a brief outline of the UNITA Alliance activities and related key actions (referring to UNITA and Re-UNITA tasks), highlighting the good practices, the existing issues, and the recommendations. The actions undertaken during the first year 2021 (see QEB 1st Report, § 1 link) have generally been strengthened during the second year 2022, as described below.

<u>Organizational aspects</u>: (U_WP1, ReU_WP1)

- A positive governance model that includes all partners and interacts with students and external stakeholders is fully operational. UNITA and Re-UNITA boards and working groups respect gender balance and engage both academic and technical staff. A large community of members (more than 50,000 people) participated to the Alliance events; more than 800 teachers participated in the workshops and more than 100 researchers to the thematic hubs; almost 4000 students consulted the Hubs of Success (teams of contact offices and teachers that support students in designing their international study paths with consistent UNITA experiences), and almost all (96%) the project deliverables were delivered on time.
- The management of the Alliance through the UNITA Offices (local coordination teams collecting inputs from their academic communities) is working, even if the budget expenditure is still lower than expected (less than 60%), and staff profiles have thus been more internationalized.
- The shared working platform (UNITA Datacloud) has become a reference for the tasks carried out, with a high number of downloads and the progressive use of its many tools.

Good Practice:

- ✓ Draft and use of the Communication Flow Chart and designation of a Liaison Manager, to increase the effectiveness of the coordination among all actors in the Constellation.

Recommendations:

- ✓ As already remarked after the first year, the need of upskilled people is still a crucial issue in some task forces and in the UNITA Offices.
- ✓ The suggested implementation of a project management tool for monitoring the real time status of task progress with risks and issues, and for delivering outputs on time is in progress.
- ✓ The opportunity of providing more structured quick instructions and tutorials on the Datacloud's tools has been taken in charge in January 2023, and their availability now need to be spread, to new members especially. An introductory brief guide on UNITA, explaining the Constellation tasks and the most relevant documents produced by its different boards, would be appreciated by all the new people involved in its activities, to better understand one's contribution to the project and be more effective.
- ✓ Attention to the improvement of the communication flow is still necessary, by applying the existing chart that has clarified the recipients of each kind of information.
- ✓ Considering the bureaucratic burden of many of the Alliance activities, sharing best practices in administrative services should be a priority.

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Quality Assurance: (U_WP1, ReU_WP1, ReU_WP2)

- The Quality Assurance Policy for UNITA, based on the partners' different QA systems, set during the first year by a specific board (QEB, Quality and Evaluation Board) with the involvement of a larger group of Quality experts (QES, Quality Ecosystem), after a public presentation has been applied providing guidelines and models for shared processes (e.g.: form for the teaching course outline of UNITA educational activities; student satisfaction survey on UNITA's teaching offer) and specific tools (guide to UNITA QA actors and roles and their communication flow in a flow-chart for its application, extended to all the Constellation projects; Quality review checklist for the self-assessment on the implementation of the projects).
- The benchmark on QA in teaching has been completed, and benchmarking on QA in research (to facilitate Re-UNITA tasks on HR services for researchers) and on management services with a quality certification label (aiming at selecting a Quality Management System for the Alliance) by ad hoc QES working groups has started.
- The satisfaction on the Alliance events and actions measured with the UNITA "satisfaction barometer" is very high (almost 90% of positive responses).
- The "Platform of indicators" has been developed and is now a useful operational tool.

Good Practice:

- ✓ Sharing information and best practices concerning Quality Assurance in Higher Education systems: UNITA has been invited to participate in conferences with other European Alliances and with Accreditation Agencies to present its QA system which attracted a lot of interest (Assessing European Universities between Social Impact and QA, promoted by AURORA Alliance; as a result of the interest aroused, UNITA was the only speaker at an online FOREU2 QA Meeting, attended by 19 universities).
- ✓ Strong involvement of student representatives and their proactive role within the Alliance.

Recommendations:

- ✓ The Quality Ecosystem work could have more impact on the Alliance if better defined in collaboration with the Work Packages, avoiding overlapping and repetitions.

Students' learning experience: (U_WP2, U_WP3, U_WP5)

- The cartography of courses, which is a digital matrix that tracks study programs (BA/MA) and subjects offered in the 6 partner Universities related to the three UNITA interest areas, has been updated to the new academic year and prototyped.
- Advancement in the enabling conditions and supporting activities fostering UNITA students international career paths with faster recognition (improvement of the "Hubs of Success" created in 2021, virtual teams of contacts in each partner of administrative and academic staff helping students to identify the UNITA activities best consistent with their study path; case-study of international successful paths), but further actions and improvements are still needed to reach the targets.

Good Practice:

- ✓ Personalization and internationalization of the study paths; Design and implementation of innovative mobility programs.

Recommendations:

- ✓ Increase in dedicated and specialized staff for realizing the Virtual Campus.

<u>Interuniversity campus:</u> (U_WP5 + ConnectU)

- The UNITA inter-university Virtual Campus represents the unified entry point for users to access digital services offered by the Alliance, as well as visitors interested in the Alliance. Tasks related to defining, developing, and testing services and the collaborative digital platform to be used have been finalized, while the mobile app task is in progress. However, because services are not fully available to students there is slow progress concerning the Virtual Campus visitors (8000 visitors instead of 40,000).
- 5 out of the 6 partners are issuing European Student Cards and the target related to this action (80.000 cards) has been reached in 2022.
- The contests in Campus environmental sustainability and connected events were organized with some delay, but efforts have been made to propose a new approach and calendar, involving the UNITA Offices and the Students Assembly. Actions are still in progress.

Good practice:

- ✓ The multi-language federative login, as well as the fact that 11 apps/services have been published and 9 vignette-based apps are in different phases of development is a best practice.

Recommendations:

- ✓ The Virtual Campus needs a permanent and skilled IT staff team, both at central level and in each partner university, in order to develop and manage the services and the co-working spaces. The current IT team is temporary, understaffed, with almost no full-time dedicated staff and facing constant resignations as the human resources dimension of the IT area is very volatile. The common structure for digitalization scenario agreed by the Rectors, consisting of a central UNITA IT Department included in the Legal Entity's structure and one IT staff in each university, seems to be a valuable action to deal with the problem and reach an effective and complete functioning of the Virtual Campus.

<u>Multilingualism:</u> (U_WP3)

- Micro-credentials to ensure flexible study paths and develop multilingualism and inter-comprehension in romance languages are offered to students in virtual mobility programs (4 versus a target of 16) but there are issues in the badge release for administrative reasons (290 badges vs target 5000). Now a process has been created after reaching a shared definition of micro-credential, but the original indicators remain low as they were ill-designed.
- The state-of-the-art described in 2021 and showing mainly the situation in one leading partner needs to be updated and completed, as recommended by the EU Commission, with the development of the inter-comprehension courses provided in 2022 in all 6 universities and the assessment of good practices. In 2022 some actions were accomplished towards the definition of the Alliance framework for Inter-Comprehension (syllabus for trainers in IC;

materials collected in one of the 3 fields for exchange students; some partners hired IC engineers to help develop IC activities).

Good Practice:

- ✓ Acknowledging the need for extra and competent staff, two partners hired specific pedagogical engineers to support the delivery of inter-comprehension courses.

Recommendations:

- ✓ Re-schedule and plan all activities based on a new rigorous feasibility analysis and on a thorough assessment of the different expertise on inter-comprehension within the Alliance and constantly monitor the effect of actions as they occur. Prioritize the production of guidelines and templates for IC initiatives, especially considering the strong need to align the partners, which initially was uneven.

<u>**Teaching staff development**</u>: (U_WP2)

- Reinforcement of the Teaching & Learning Centres network and continuity of its working groups. Participation in the workshops has exceeded expected indicator values.
- Enhancement of academic staff teaching skills, through workshops where good practices are shared, and through courses for trainers in inter-comprehension. The UNITA Collaborative International Learning initiative, based on the COIL method, has generated a lot of interest, in regard to joint courses development and events for training academic staff in this sense are planned for 2023 based on the observed needs.

Good Practice:

- ✓ Creation of a Teaching and Learning Centres network.

Recommendations:

- ✓ Develop the networking activities of the Teaching & Learning Centres with more periodic events.

<u>**Mobility programs**</u>: (U_WP6)

- Indicators related to UNITA diploma supplements and UNITA Europasses are out of reach although efforts have been made in this sense and some solutions have been found. Similar situation for projects related to sustainable mobilities. Actions related to the recognition of internationalization activities of staff have been postponed as processes related to this matter touch upon many and major institutional policies for each partner. Blended Intensive Programmes dedicated to staff who manages mobilities in UNITA will take place in February 2023 for the purpose of improving the situation and finding solutions, a better understanding of obstacles and looking forward to UNITA 2 in relation to mobilities.
- The targets of indicators related to mobility have been reached and UNITA's partners are currently working on improving them even more. In general mobility in UNITA exceeds expectations, but students following new learning paths are still around half target.

- While UNITA Virtual Mobility did not stir interest among students, UNITA rural mobility and the Erasmus+ Blended Intensive Programmes did. Sources for financing UNITA Rural Mobility need to be identified as this is now perceived as one of UNITA's flagship initiatives.

- UNITA Collaborative International Learning has garnered interest among academic staff wishing to develop joint courses and in 2023 it may extend to UNITA Geminae partners around the world.
- A template for UNITA Diploma supplement was developed, but very few were issued for administrative reasons.

Good practice:
- ✓ Overall coordination in UNITA regarding mobility (agreements, etc.) has allowed for an increase in the number of mobilities at Alliance level. UNITA's Rural Mobility has raised interest in the territories and beyond them as it is a unique initiative in European alliances. UNITA's Blended Intensive Programmes have fully integrated all new partners and they offered many students the opportunity to pursue a mobility in UNITA.

Recommendations:
- ✓ The Flexibility Window faces strong obstacles for being institutionally accepted from the Educational Rules point of view: a lighter version can be proposed, to maintain the aim of the initiative, but with less strong implication at the institutional level in the partner Universities.
- ✓ The Diploma Supplement is not yet established among most of the partners. In addition, as only students having realized UNITA activities can receive it, there is a need for an increased involvement of students in the training activities offered by the Alliance. It is therefore recommended to consider increasing the staff involved in the Diploma Supplement issuing, as it implies an active administrative process, on one side; and to increase the number of students involved in UNITA activities on the other side, for example by promoting UNITA's Students Assembly recruitment in the partners' student communities.
- ✓ Recognizing staff internationalization did not start and was postponed due to local institutional policies related to human resources. Other related tasks have been postponed. A renewed effort in the work on recognizing staff internationalization is needed, maybe in relation to Human Resources departments/vice-rectors; as well it would be useful identify opportunities for collaborating with the UNITA Students Assembly and Erasmus offices in UNITA to support green mobilities.
- ✓ The indicator related to Europass is probably unreachable and will most likely remain at a suboptimal value. It is necessary to identify new actions to support the issuing of Europasses for as many students as possible (connected to mobility applications, inclusion in curricula of courses related to entrepreneurship or career orientation, eligibility criteria for competitions with prizes, etc.).
- ✓ UNITA rural mobility has become a flagship initiative for UNITA, but stakeholders' involvement for mobility offers remains suboptimal, implementation within UNITA is heterogeneous with various models adopted in different partner universities and additional funding for mobility grants is necessary (mobility offers which did not include a grant were not attractive to students). A possible path is working towards a unique approach to rural mobility within UNITA or at most have two models for implementation, with grants associated to these mobilities, identifying sources of funding and stakeholders who understand the added value of UNITA rural mobility.

Research and Innovation: (U_WP4, ReU_WP3, ReU_WP4, ReU_WP5, ReU_WP6 + InnoU)

- Consolidation of the created cartography of ongoing research projects within the Alliance.
- Consolidation of the Research & Innovation Hubs on the three interest areas to share results and good practices and to reinforce the connections with socio-economic actors in the related regions, but very understaffed.
- Promotion of UNITA research activities through PhD thesis cotutelles and training programmes.
- Creation of a database for sharing scientific infrastructures, services, and equipment available in the university partners. The database is frequently updated, and it is being disseminated as a web resource, to be not only shared among partners, but opening that possibility to society, industries, and other stakeholders.
- Procedures to provide access to the equipment and infrastructures were created and uniformly agreed by all partners, also providing a form for the "Report on Sharing Infrastructures" after each exchange.
- Implementation of activities within the scope of the HRS4R process (Human Resources Strategy for Researchers), which aims to standardize human resources procedures among the European research institutions, praising the best practices and making the universities more attractive and valued by research professionals, students, and the entire academic community. The 2 partners who already have this label and another one who is making this commitment, are sharing their experiences, also involving internal and external stakeholders' groups.
- Pursuing the gender equality policy set by the European Commission, establishing a gender balance in decision-making, aiming at overcoming the pay gap and ending the gender-based violence in the partner universities of the Alliance.
- The cooperation with business and other non-academic actors was strengthened in 2022 with the launch of an Innovation prize, 2 spin-offs awarded, a forum organized in September and an Entrepreneur School in October.
- Activities to reinforce Open Science and promote Open Data, pursuing the EU policy in the context of research and innovation have been planned for the second half-term of ReUNITA project. Spreading the latest knowledge and data resulting from the research process not only improves quality and efficiency of research, but it also increases the creativity and trust in science, as it involves the civil society (industries, public authorities, and citizen groups) in its process.

Good Practice:

✓ The report "Cooperation between UNITA universities and Innovation Ecosystem" that identifies 30 good practices from the 6 member universities within the ReUNITA project, to demonstrate how they are acting to build up appropriate answers to the Sustainable Development Goals established by the United Nations. It also explains how the universities are working to build bridges between education, research, entrepreneurship, and the private sector.

Recommendations:

✓ The Research and Innovation Hubs are understaffed and overloaded, so it is necessary to hire Managers for them, to develop efficient tools for collaboration, and to promote physical meetings between researchers.

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✓ Internships are half the expected number and the tasks of connection of stakeholders, transferring research results for life-long learners and generalizing the cartography for all programs in the three thematic areas have been postponed. A larger investment in human resources seems crucial to solve these issues. As recommended by the European Commission, a follow-up should be ensured for the milestones not achieved on time due to pandemic restrictions.

European Identity: (U_WP7)

- Administration of the multi-lingual survey on perception on European Identity to different target groups (students, university staff, civil society).
- Organization of workshops on European Citizenship, of an audio-visual contest open to UNITA communities and awarding of a prize for degree dissertation on the topic.
- Consolidation of the dedicated forum to disseminate awareness of European Identity and Citizenship and establishment of PhD positions in European Citizenship from the perspective of mountain regions inhabitants.
- As recommended by the European Commission, a follow-up should be ensured for the milestones not achieved on time due to pandemic restrictions.

Dissemination: (U_WP8, ReU_WP7)

- Creation of a dissemination strategy, a communication plan, a visual identity with a style manual to present UNITA in a uniform way.
- Calendar of public events, available on the UNITA website and monthly reported to the Communication Officers, a team dedicated to managing dissemination, made up of a communication expert from each partner who supports the UNITA Offices in a coordinated way.
- Monthly Podcast and Newsletters managed in rotation every month by a different university of the consortium.
- Maintaining the communications teams at each University is sometimes difficult, as its composition changes frequently. There are occasional failures in communication due to language misunderstanding.

Expansion of the project: (U_WP1, U_WP8, ReU_WP1, ReU_WP7)

- Expansion of the Alliance for the next EU call from 6 to 10 partners (2 for each UNITA country), plus 2 new associated partners (HES-SO in Switzerland and Chernivtsi National University in Ukraine). To ensure the continuity and uptake of the UNITA approach a Sustainability Plan was created by the working group on sustainability.
- Consolidation and full operativity of the three projects stemming from UNITA and funded in 2021, strengthening the ties with the core project.
- Consolidation of the international cooperation project *Geminae*, which includes 30 partners from Latin and North America, Africa and Asia and aims to share good practices with other universities.

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- Submitting a project for the European Commission call Erasmus+ European policy experimentation in higher education: institutionalized EU cooperation instruments, possible European legal status for alliances of higher education institutions.
- Developing inter-alliance collaborations: joint UNITA-CIVIS event at the 5th international conference on Communication and Education in Knowledge Society: Changing Landscapes in European Higher Education (mediated by Universitatea de Vest din Timisoara of UNITA and Universitatea din Bucuresti of CIVIS, with panellists from partner universities of both alliances); joint application with UNITA universities as associated partners in the SMARTT project, coordinated by CIVIS and involving associated partners from NeurotechEU and EUTOPIA, for the European Commission call Erasmus+ European policy experimentation in higher education: piloting a European joint degree label.

4. Conclusion

Considering the Alliances higher goal of transforming the European higher education panorama with the creation of European Universities, UNITA with its constellation projects has taken steps in the right direction (as also recognised by the interim assessment made by the EU Commission). To involve more people, with the right skills, still represents a challenge.

Tangible objectives have been achieved and best practices have been implemented and consolidated in the second year. It is worth of note that some results were obtained despite obstacles posed by the pandemic to the development of global cooperation.

The inspiring pedagogical environment created by the Teaching and Learning network and the strong commitment to Quality Assurance within the Alliance are commendable. Successful partnership is confirmed by the widening of the Alliance perimeter and by the mutual desire and efforts to apply for new projects.

On the other hand, accurate self-evaluation and reflection activities have out lighted some weaknesses and areas for improvement. From this point of view mitigation measures have already been identified. Further community engagement in the Alliance is a priority. This includes academic staff, students, and stakeholders. Furthermore, strategic budget review could allow to overcome, or at least mitigate, organizational and management issues.