



MISSION STATEMENT

The name UNITA – almost the same as Italian **unità** (unity) – evokes the strong links and commonalities that bring us together to create a groundbreaking and innovative alliance aiming at a closer integration.

The subtitle **Universitas Montium**, written in Latin, stresses that UNITA universities all speak Romance languages and are committed to fostering linguistic diversity and to the development of rural and cross-border mountain areas.



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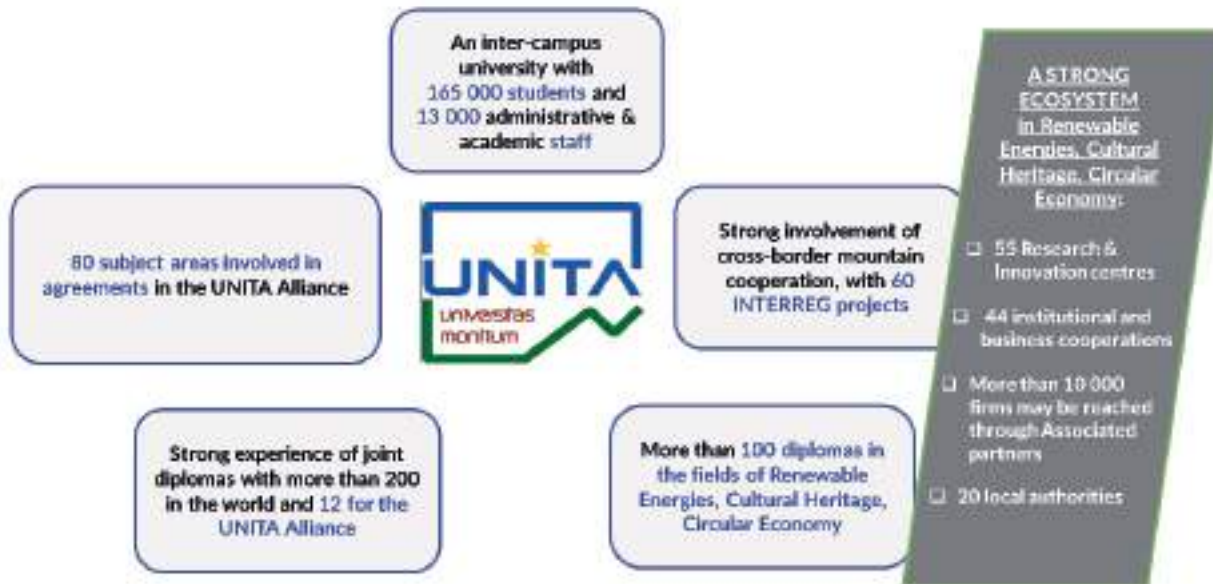


WHO WE ARE



We are an alliance of six comprehensive research universities from five countries with different sizes and trajectories gathering together more than 160 000 students and 13 000 staff members. From west to east: Universidade de **Beira Interior**, Universidad de **Zaragoza**, Université de **Pau et des Pays de l'Adour**, Université **Savoie Mont Blanc**, Università di **Torino**, and Universitatea de **Vest din Timisoara**.





We are based on a solid background of experience in strategic university networks and joint research, as well as in educational and innovation projects. We share a firm willingness to cooperate on the basis of mutual trust in a transformational project aiming at establishing a new model of increasingly collaborative and integrated teaching, research and innovation through enhanced mobility and with strong links to our ecosystems.

UNITA is not only composed of Universities, but also of relevant actors in each regional ecosystem represented by the socio-economic sector, public authorities, policy-makers and civil organizations which are included as associated partners. Together we constitute a unique ecosystem that will ensure the transformative impact and the sustainability of a new University model.

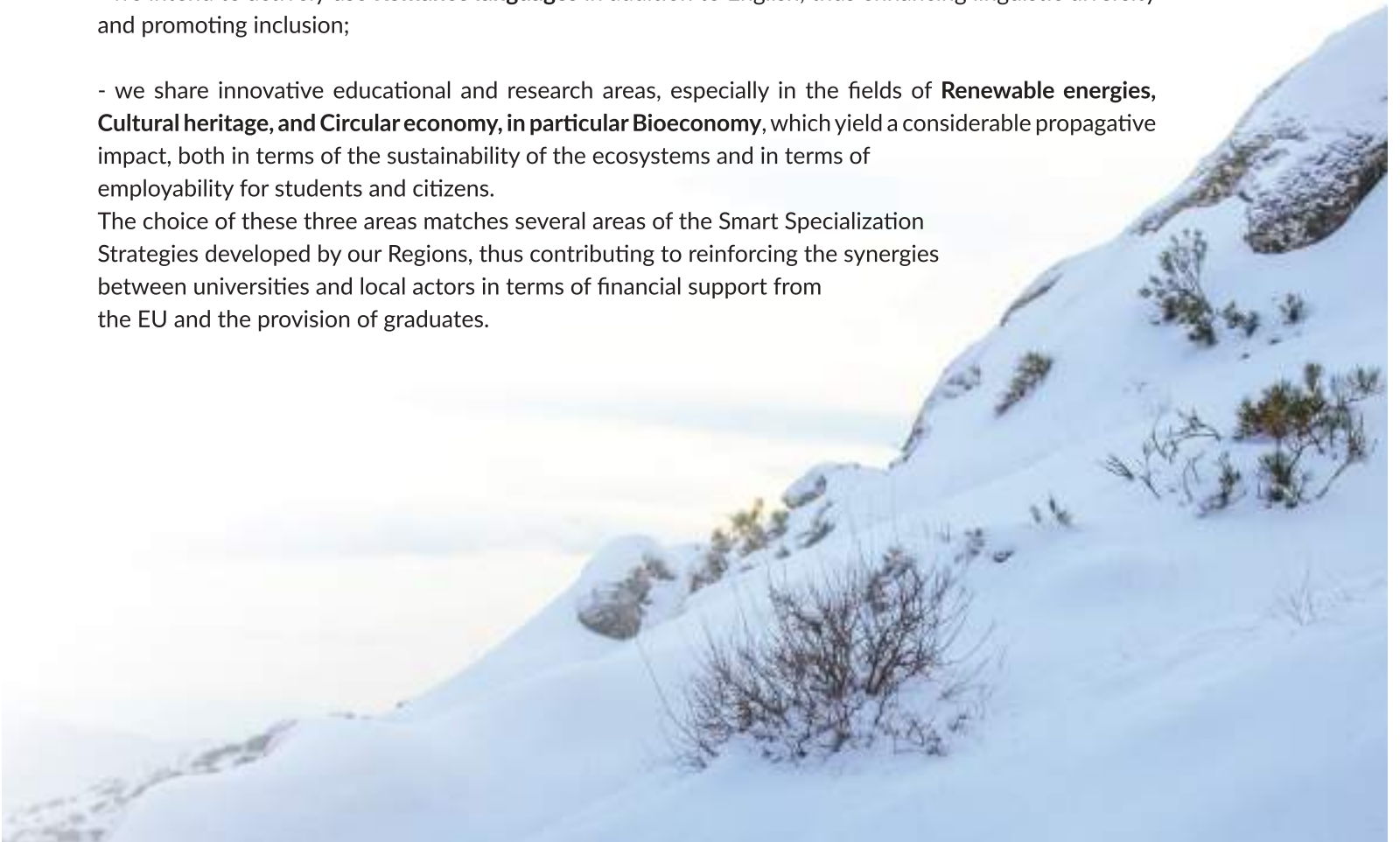
WHAT BRINGS US TOGETHER



Besides sharing the commitment to contribute to the **development of our societies and territories in a European dimension**, we also have in common three constitutive key features:

- we are located in **rural and cross-border mountain regions** across southern, central and eastern Europe: Serra da Estrela (Beira Interior), the Pyrenees (Pau and Zaragoza), the Alps (Savoie Mont Blanc and Torino), and the Banat Mountains (Timisoara), i.e. in ecosystems sharing similar challenges;
- we intend to actively use **Romance languages** in addition to English, thus enhancing linguistic diversity and promoting inclusion;
- we share innovative educational and research areas, especially in the fields of **Renewable energies, Cultural heritage, and Circular economy, in particular Bioeconomy**, which yield a considerable propagative impact, both in terms of the sustainability of the ecosystems and in terms of employability for students and citizens.

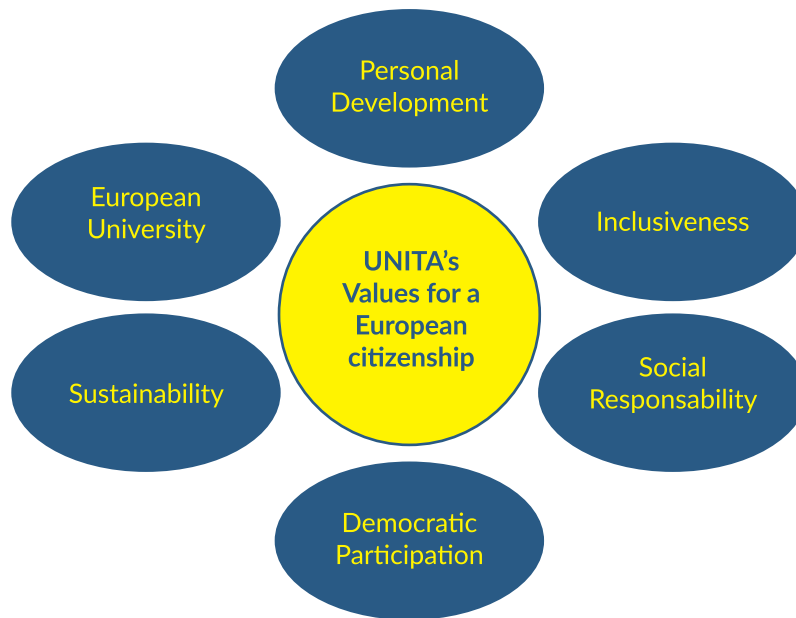
The choice of these three areas matches several areas of the Smart Specialization Strategies developed by our Regions, thus contributing to reinforcing the synergies between universities and local actors in terms of financial support from the EU and the provision of graduates.



OUR VALUES



The UNITA partners are strongly committed to sharing and implementing common values for an innovative, European and future-oriented university:



OUR VISION



The UNITA Alliance intends to build a **fully-fledged European inter-university campus** based on excellent teaching and learning, research and innovation, and on civic engagement. Its goal is to drive excellence in the European Higher Education area and become attractive also for students from other continents, especially Africa and the Americas, with whom we share common languages.

UNITA students will experience a challenging **multilingual and student-centred environment**, closely linked to research and entrepreneurship. They will be able to build flexible personalized curricula across the universities of the Alliance based on **increased mobility**, physical, blended and virtual, thanks to new tools and new digital spaces, and to the development of micro-credentials on **inter-comprehension** methods, especially among Romance languages.

This European University, committed to being open, inclusive and effective, will be developed through a **step-by-step approach, involving students and staff** in the project via participative governance, with a long-term vision leading to closer integration based on sustainability and aiming to become a model.

The Alliance is firmly committed to supporting the **development** of the societies and territories in which it is established, and particularly of those somewhat **peripheral areas such as rural and cross-border mountain regions**.

UNITA aims to respond to societal challenges and empower its students and staff to act as **European and global citizens** strongly committed to the UN sustainable development goals and the European Green Deal, and aware of cultural and linguistic diversity, and of the challenges facing rural and mountain territories.



OUR MISSION



Our shared vision and values drive us to pursue these key objectives:

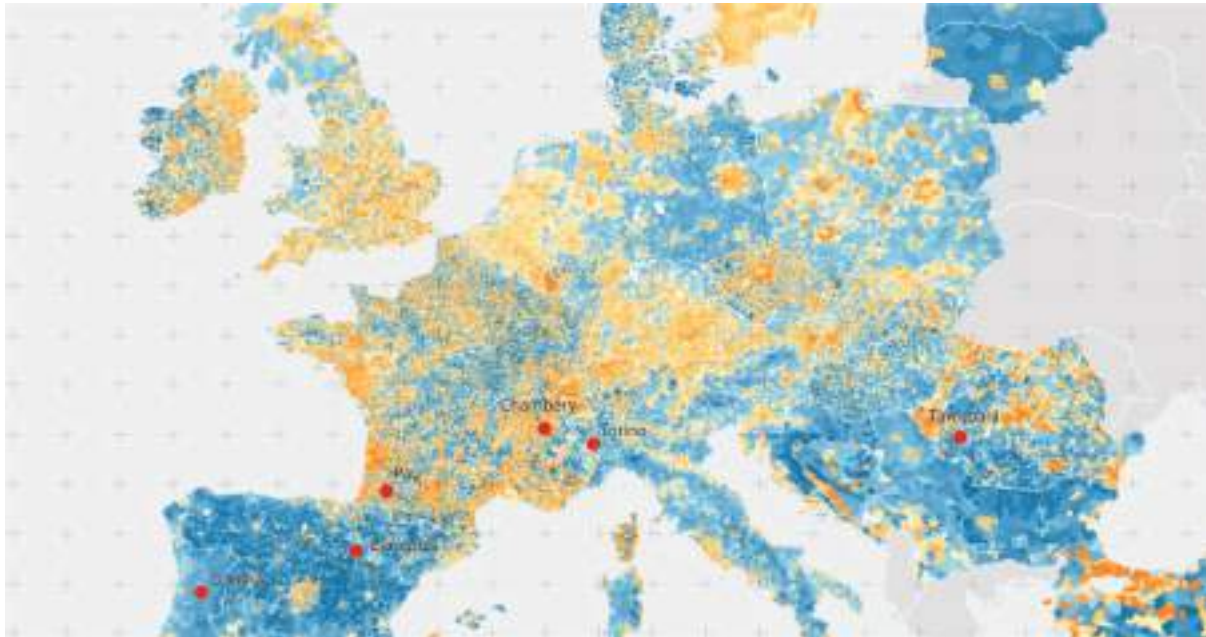
1. Creating a participative, open, inclusive and effective European university.
2. Developing excellent research-driven and student-centred education.
3. Promoting multilingualism and the diversity of languages in Europe.
4. Reducing inequalities between core and non-central regions through the sustainable development of rural and mountain areas.
5. Creating an inspiring learning environment.
6. Reaching Mobility 4 all.
7. Contributing to strengthening a European Identity.
8. Ensuring the continuity and uptake of the UNITA approach.



UNITA AS A DRIVING FORCE IN RURAL AND CROSS-BORDER MOUNTAIN TERRITORIES



The six UNITA universities are located in heterogeneous rural and cross-border mountain regions affected by core-periphery dynamics. This factor causes a gradual isolation and demographic decline in the non-central areas, and consequently may produce in them a weakening of the European sense of belonging.¹ Although certain medium-sized cities with over 500 000 inhabitants such as Turin and Zaragoza are included in the Alliance, depopulation is suffered heavily by most of the regions where UNITA universities are located.



Shrinking (blue) and growing (yellow) municipalities in Europe, 2011-2017²

1 - Economic inequalities and uneven development have been indicated as the main factors that are responsible for a loss of trust in the European Union. See A. Rodríguez-Pose, "The revenge of the places that don't matter", February 2018, (<https://voxeu.org/article/revenge-places-dont-matter>).

2 - <https://www.zeit.de/politik/ausland/2019-07/demographics-europe-map-cities-regions-inhabitants>. All main cities losing population (Covilhã -1.2; Pau -0.6; Turin -0.8; Zaragoza -0.2) except Chambéry (+0.3) and Timisoara (+1.6).

The mountain territories which now appear forgotten nevertheless have major strengths for the construction and sustainability of the European Union. Mountains, due to their universality, can be the means to achieve virtuous development providing new responses to contemporary transitions and challenges. Thus, the commitment of UNITA universities to the development of their ecosystems aims to promote research, innovation and entrepreneurial activities in close relation with local and regional institutions as well as companies. The universities in the UNITA Alliance, with strong experience in multidisciplinary activities, share three main innovative research areas in which all have strengths or are complementary: Renewable Energies; Cultural Heritage; the Circular economy, in particular the Bioeconomy. These three areas are closely connected to environmental sustainability, the green economy and alternative tourism, have great economical potential and will be essential in the near future in the creation of job opportunities, thus helping to offset depopulation. Additionally, they are aligned with the European Green Deal as proposed by the European Commission³, and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)⁴ as proposed by the United Nations, in particular SDGs n. 7 (Affordable and clean energy), n. 11 (Sustainable cities and communities) and n. 12 (Responsible consumption and production). These three areas will be the core of the starting activities of UNITA.



In order to promote the three above-mentioned SDGs, UNITA will initially develop joint learning itineraries in these three fields as well as thematic research and innovation hubs, envisaging gradually increasing the thematic coverage, as the structure and institutional configuration become well-established.

3 - COM (2019) 640 final 11/12/2019 (<https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=COM%3A2019%3A640%3AFIN>).

4 - United Nations Economic and Social Council, Report of the Inter-Agency and Expert Group on Sustainable Development Goal Indicators, February 2016 (E/CN.3/2016/2/Rev.1).



The roadmap of UNITA to reach its objectives is based on several actions to be deployed, continuously monitored and updated.

1. Creating a participative, open, inclusive and effective European university

UNITA Management and Coordination

In order to efficiently manage and coordinate the project implementation involving users and beneficiaries, UNITA pursues a multi-level and collaborative governance structure. UNITA firmly believes in **participative and inclusive methods** to design and implement a model European university: in fact, from the early stages both students and non-teaching staff have been involved in the drafting of the proposal, through ideathons, staff and student preparatory meetings. Moreover, during the three-year implementation of the project, the whole academic body will be actively involved in the decision-making process through a platform approach and different means of participation: online discussion groups for UNITA offices and local officers, a students' collaborative platform and the Student assembly, Advisory board.

In particular, we intend:

- o To build an efficient framework to successfully steer the implementation of UNITA actions by means of:
 - the UNITA Governance Board and
 - the UNITA Agreement.

- o To set up, coordinate and improve UNITA Management, with vision over time by means of:
 - the UNITA Management Committee,
 - the UNITA Management guide,
 - UNITA Management Tools,
 - the coordination of WP activities and
 - the coordination of UNITA offices.

o To enhance the participation of students, staff and partners in shaping a powerful and inclusive community through:

- interaction with the autonomous UNITA Student Assembly,
- the Advisory Council and
- a series of UNITA Staff forums for all categories of students and staff.

o To ensure the Quality process of the project through

- the UNITA Quality Assurance policy,
- internal quality and evaluation,
- the Quality & Evaluation Board and
- the implementation of the QA recommendations.

Governance

<i>Decision-making body</i>	Governance Board
<i>Advisory bodies</i>	Student Assembly Advisory Council Quality & Evaluation Board
<i>Operational bodies</i>	Management Committee UNITA Coordinator UNITA Offices WP task forces



Governance scheme

2. Developing excellent research-driven and student-centred education

UNITA teaching and learning: flexible and student-centred

UNITA aims at **enhancing excellence and innovation in teaching and learning** through a student-centred and research-driven approach, starting from BA and MA degrees in the three focus areas of **renewable energies, cultural heritage and circular economy**. This approach will provide the Universities of the Alliance with vibrant learning environments and boost their general attractiveness in Europe and also in other continents, especially in **Africa and the Americas**. Moreover, the attractiveness of the UNITA higher education institutions aims at creating a spill-over effect on the **rural and mountain territories** of the Alliance through the positive effects on the territories of both student and staff mobility and internships.

In order to enable students, properly mentored, to **customize their curricula** and choose the most suitable courses and modules offered by the universities of the Alliance, UNITA intends to:

- develop faster recognition tracks by means of **an online matrix** matching recognizable activities and subjects;
- create **Hubs of Success** as digital spaces offering lists of contact persons and physical spaces offering educational and vocational counselling services, learning support and individual monitoring of students participating in physical mobility, including disabled students;
- promote **UNITA diploma supplements**, as part of new joint and flexible UNITA curricula;
- share **best practices** in digital learning and student-centred pedagogies, and network the innovative teaching and learning centres;
- **assess UNITA quality** of teaching and learning by means of benchmarking internal and external quality assurance approaches.



3. Promoting multilingualism and the diversity of languages in Europe, in particular the Romance languages

UNITA multilingualism

Through a proactive language policy based on **multilingualism**, UNITA promotes one of the cornerstones of the European project and strives to help make the motto “United in diversity” come true. The envisaged virtual and physical mobility in the **Romance-speaking countries** of the Alliance represents a real challenge for students, teachers and staff. In order to effectively support study paths and overall communication in an English-friendly Romance-speaking environment, UNITA will develop a linguistic strategy based on **inter-comprehension**⁵, through:

- o extensive **inter-comprehension training** for all UNITA actors, including:
 - a research project supervised by experts at UNITA universities and associated partner APICAD, and
 - micro-credentials on inter-comprehension;
- o an **inter-comprehension-based Romance language-learning programme**, including:
 - micro-credentials for Romance language learning with inter-comprehension.

A common starting point of the UNITA partners in order to promote multilingualism is membership of the Agence Universitaire de la Francophonie (AUF) and the active use of languages such as Portuguese and Spanish, which may enhance attractiveness and inclusiveness for non-EU students.

⁵ - Inter-comprehension refers to a relationship between languages in which speakers of different but related languages can readily understand each other without intentional study or extraordinary effort.



4. Reducing inequalities between core and non-central regions through the sustainable development of rural and mountain areas, especially in cross-border regions.

UNITA R&I focusing on rural and mountain territories needs in Renewable Energies, Cultural Heritage and the Circular Economy

Rural and mountain regions, especially cross-border areas, are deeply affected by core-periphery dynamics. This factor causes a gradual isolation and demographic decline in non-central areas, which are suffering significantly from a **depopulation process**. The UNITA universities, which are solidly anchored in their territories, propose to set up an experimental model in order to define a framework for action shared by all the public or private stakeholders of the territories wishing to be involved under the UNITA leadership, contributing in this way to reinforcing Smart Specialization Strategies and to building a model of **sustainable development for rural areas** aligned with the European Green Deal and the Sustainable Development Goals.

In order to achieve this objective, UNITA aims at:

o Formalizing research and innovation projects in the three thematic areas in connection with the local ecosystems through:

- **an online cartography** of researchers, facilities, partners, projects and research lines;
- **three Research & Innovation Hubs** comprising research teams and stakeholders (companies and regional institutions);
- a five-year **strategic Research & Innovation plan**.

o Embodying the research results in the teaching at all learning levels by means of:

- **micro-credentials** for bachelor students, where possible with short stays in the rural and mountain territories;
- **multidisciplinary research-based summer / winter schools** for master students and life-long learners;
- **doctoral itineraries and PhDs in the co-tutelle** modality in the research activities of the Hubs

o Revitalising the rural and mountain areas through life-long learning and entrepreneurship thanks to:

- online and face-to-face **micro-credentials**
- **Liaison Services**, including a common database of internship offers, to ensure the link between students and researchers and all the public and private stakeholders;
- **co-working spaces** in close interaction with the pre-existing Business Incubators to foster training for entrepreneurship tools and help students, companies, institutions and researchers to connect and work together.

5. Creating an inspiring learning environment

UNITA Inter-University Campus

In order to ensure greater flexibility in the learning experience and the elimination of geographical barriers, promote collaborative learning, give access to online open resources, and boost the mobility and exchange of students as well as paperless administrative processes, an **Inter-University Campus, digital and physical**, is created on the basis of existing facilities. Step by step, it becomes the unique entry-point for UNITA students and for anybody interested in UNITA activities.

The UNITA Virtual Campus, among other features,

- is **accessible through a mobile application** and
- contains a **cartography of all programmes** in the three thematic areas of UNITA.

The **European student card** is generalized, progressively and according to its development at a European level, and includes various services for students.

In order to develop the 'physical part' of the UNITA Inter-University Campus, among other actions:

- **UNITA welcome services** are built, and
- **UNITA contests linked to the environmental sustainability** of the Campus' development are launched.

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6. Reaching Mobility 4 all

UNITA Mobility4all

Besides its benefits for students and staff, mobility is also an excellent way to **strengthen the links between institutions**. UNITA aims at developing facilities and 'tools' to encourage and support student and staff mobility in order to reach its **long-term objective of 50% of mobility** between the partners.

For this purpose, UNITA aims at:

o overcoming the barriers to long-term physical mobility, through:

- **flexibility windows** allowing students to choose in the host curriculum a number of credits even if they do not exactly correspond to their home curriculum,

- **virtual classes**, whilst remaining physically in a classroom of the home institution, ensuring interaction between teachers and learners, and involving students in collaborative projects to ensure the development of inter-cultural skills, and
- **staff internationalization recognition.**

o experimenting new forms of mobility, physical, blended and virtual; short and long; in and off campus; to and from its territories, especially:

- **virtual mobility** and
- rural internships ("**Rural Erasmus**").

o digitalizing management processes to support and enhance mobility through:

- **diploma supplements** adapted to the UNITA context, and
- **Europass** promotion

o establishing a UNITA Green Deal for mobility

- more sustainable and **green mobility.**

7. Contributing to strengthening European identity, citizenship & values

UNITA: The highlander perspective on European identity.

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The building of European identity, citizenship and values is an on-going process. UNITA is committed to contributing to this process by emphasizing relevant key factors in the updating of European identity, especially:

- **social and cultural diversity**, including languages and cultural heritage, and
- the awareness of the **challenges linked to sustainability and climate change.**

In this process, the perspective on European citizenship and identity of **specific social groups** such as migrants and refugees, non-EU Europeans, and citizens from other continents is particularly meaningful, especially in increasing the inclusivity of these notions. Particular attention has to be paid to **people living in rural areas** (spec. **highlanders**) since the isolation and demographic decline they are suffering may produce a weakening of their European sense of belonging.

We will contribute to the construction of an updated European citizenship by:

- carrying out a **large survey** in order to compile the different perceptions of European citizenship among UNITA students and staff and rural populations through workshops (including rural workshops), interactive forums and contests;
- promoting a **line of research** on European Citizenship stressing in particular the three above-mentioned factors.
- designing and implementing on this basis **courses on European citizenship** for UNITA students and staff and also open to society, and encouraging the UNITA students and staff attending them to disseminate their contents to specific target groups such as high school students, migrants, refugees and rural (esp. highlander) populations.

8. Ensuring the continuity and uptake of the UNITA approach

UNITA sustainability and dissemination

UNITA as a European multiverse university must be strongly connected to its financial viability, which will come from **follow-up future projects**, from **private associated members**, and from **teaching-research-innovation services** provided by UNITA to its public. This is ensured through the connection of UNITA to a large set of overseas universities with Romance mother languages. The connection with the Americas and Africa will ensure a worldwide presence for the UNITA European university and will also contribute to its sustainability. Furthermore, each member university commits to ensure by its own means financial support on a yearly basis for the 3-years pilot and beyond.

To embody UNITA as a sustainable European university:

- an analysis of **national and European regulations** confronting European universities is carried out;
- a UNITA **long-term sustainability plan** from friend-raising to fund-raising is established;
- and a **European common legal entity** is constituted.

To be visible, well-known and attractive for students, researchers, stakeholders and financial supporters is the biggest challenge for UNITA. To achieve its goals, UNITA needs to have an external dissemination plan that includes the appropriate contents and channels for all actors: future students, teachers, researchers, policy-makers and citizens interested in UNITA subjects. First of all, UNITA needs to involve around 150 000 students and 16 000 staff members in the project, creating a sense of belonging to the alliance with a community which builds a comprehensive ecosystem to disseminate UNITA's achievements.

The UNITA **Identity and communication plan** needs to:

- build a participative **UNITA dissemination strategy**,
- create a **visual identity**,
- implement the **communication plan** and
- develop **contents** for the press and UNITA channels.

The UNITA **publication policy** is based on:

- setting up the **UNITA publisher** and
- developing the **UNITA Open Access Library**.

To act as a **partner and role model**, it is necessary to:

- collect **UNITA best practices**,
- share them within **Europe, Africa and the Americas**, and
- **disseminate** them.



OUR LONG-TERM STRATEGY



After the 3-year funding period, UNITA – Universitas Montium will have developed into a well-established European University, founded on Sustainable Development (especially in rural and mountain areas), Inclusiveness, and the Highlander perspective on European Citizenship. It will be a unique Alliance thanks to the extensive use of Inter-comprehension. This disruptive approach to Europe’s linguistic diversity will have a systemic impact on the linguistic policies of the Universities of the Alliance and on their ecosystems. It will promote active multilingualism in students, staff, citizens and local actors, thus contributing to enhancing awareness and the acceptance of diversity in the territories and in a European dimension.

In order to be a recognizable change agent in the European Education Area, UNITA – *Universitas Montium* will be substantiated in a **European legal entity**, with a sustainable strategy, including a financial plan, for the next 10 years. The Alliance will ensure the **long-term financial sustainability** of the project, by seeking funding synergies at EU base-funding level as well as at regional and national levels, with the help of the associated partners and through exchanges with other Alliances of European Universities. **A first step towards this model of co-funding is the commitment of the Banking Foundation Compagnia di San Paolo (Turin, Italy)** to give substantial financial support to UNITA – Universitas Montium at the end of the EU grant. This first support will have a triggering effect for the involvement of similar contributors from the UNITA ecosystems.

Beyond 2023, UNITA – Universitas Montium will adopt the **Inter-University Campus**, digital and physical, as **the unique entry-point for UNITA students and for anybody interested in UNITA**. With a view to 2025, the Inter-University platform will support more and more services and allow students to enrol in UNITA. After the three-year phase, the **cartography of common teaching activities** (online, blended, classroom-based), the cartography of common research as well as the R&I Hubs in the three focus areas (renewable energies, cultural heritage, the circular economy) can be further expanded to other thematic areas, whilst taking into account the needs detected in our territories and the policies of the territories (e.g. the Smart Specialization Strategies of the UNITA regions in further fields).

In the long term, the objective is to extend the coverage to all the thematic areas that can be addressed through the coordinated collaboration of all public and private actors, in order to strengthen the links between education and research & innovation, and to promote the societal engagement of staff and students as well as their entrepreneurial competences with the help of tools such as **Liaison Services** and **Co-working spaces**. As a natural prosecution of the cartography, new multiple **inter-university UNITA degrees** will be designed, firstly in the three thematic areas, then in further fields, whilst taking into account the employability of students and the Smart Specialization Strategies of the Regions. An important milestone in this post-EU funding period will be the adoption of the European Diploma, if developed at central EU level. In this context, UNITA will promote teaching-staff pooling and recognition of teaching hours undertaken in the Universities of the Alliance. Furthermore, UNITA will detect new learning needs and co-design **new micro-credentials/staff weeks/summer schools** using the skills and teaching staff from the different universities, thus sharing human resources and equipment, and becoming more sustainable.

The cartography model will be applied to other joint actions such as the cartography of the **UNITA mobility offers** (as the union of all the mobility offers of the UNITA partners) and the cartography of **work placement opportunities** (internships for students and training options for staff members), thus contributing to enhancing relations regarding competence needs and innovation projects with the regional socio-economic environment, opening the regional context to the World. Furthermore, the **community of domestic and international alumni** will be activated in order to develop the cartography of UNITA alumni career pathways.

The **attractiveness of UNITA** will be boosted through its connection to a large set of overseas universities in Romance language-speaking areas, based on existing bilateral agreements and networks between the member universities and overseas HEIs. In particular, the connection with the **Americas** and **Africa** will ensure a worldwide presence for the UNITA European university and will also contribute to its sustainability.



WHY UNITA?



- ★ Excellence in teaching and learning strongly committed to our rural and cross-border mountain territories
- ★ Multilingualism promoting Romance languages and Inter-comprehension as inclusive instruments
- ★ Sustainability: Research and innovation in Renewable energies, Cultural heritage, Circular economy, in particular Bioeconomy, to strengthen our rural communities
- ★ European citizenship awareness of the challenges of climate change and of the importance of diversity in our common cultural heritage
- ★ Participation: student and staff involvement for responsible institutions fostering personal development

