MISSION STATEMENT

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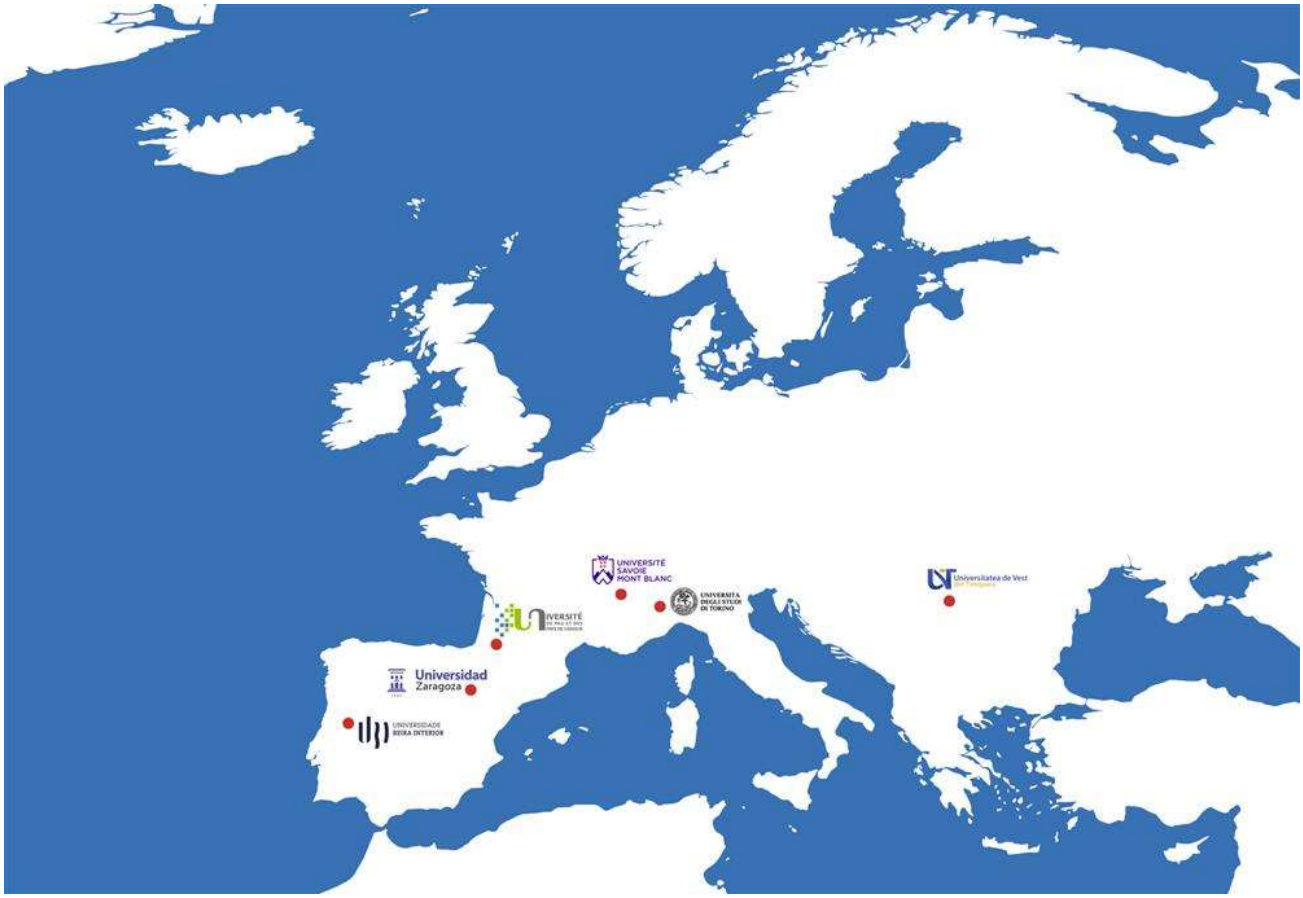
Who We Are



We are an alliance of six comprehensive research universities from five countries of different sizes and trajectories, gathering together more than 160.000 students and 15.000 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 rely on a solid background of experiences in strategic university networks and joint research, educational and innovation projects. We share a firm willingness to cooperate in a transformative project, aimed at establishing a new model of increasingly more collaborative and integrated teaching, research and innovation through enhanced mobility, strongly-connected to our territorial ecosystem.

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

What Brings Us Together

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

- we are located in **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, particularly Bioeconomy**, which yield a considerable propagation impact, both in terms of the sustainability of the ecosystems, and in terms of the employability for students and citizens. Therefore, we will contribute to the **Smart Specialization Strategy** of our regions.

Our Values

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

Our vision

*The UNITA Alliance intends to build a **European inter-university campus** based on excellent education, research and innovation, and on civic engagement. Its goal is to promote excellence in the European Higher Education area and become attractive for students from other continents as well, especially Africa and America, with whom we share common languages.*

*UNITA students will benefit from a challenging **multilingual and student-centred environment**, closely connected to research and entrepreneurship. They will be able to build flexible personalized curricula across the universities of the Alliance, based on increased physical and virtual mobility, due to new tools and new digital spaces.*

*This European University will be built via a **step-by-step approach, involving students and staff** in a project with a long-term view to a closer integration.*

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

*UNITA aims at responding to societal challenges and encouraging its students and staff to act as **European and global citizens,** in accordance with the UN sustainable development goals and the European Green Deal.*

Our Mission

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

1. Contributing to strengthening a **European identity** (Citizenship & Values).

2. **Reducing inequalities** between core and non-central regions, through the **sustainable development of cross-border mountain areas**.

3. Developing **excellent research-driven and student-centred education**.

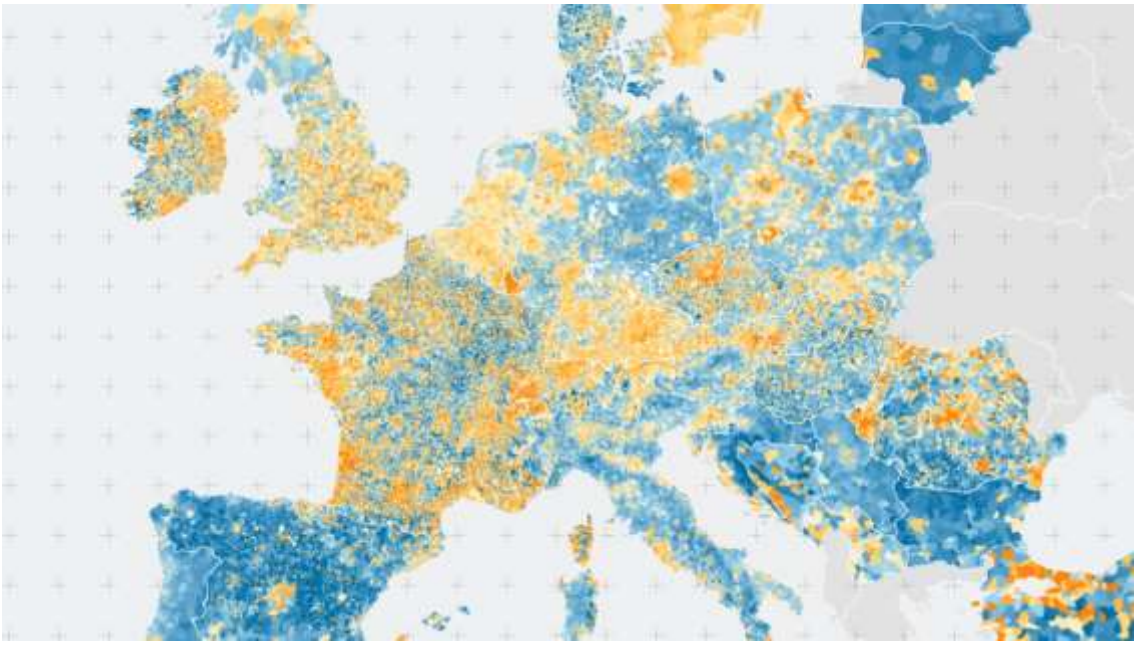
4. Promoting **multilingualism** and the diversity of languages in Europe.

5. Transforming universities, so as to become **more responsible models**.

6. Creating a **participative, open and inclusive European university**.

UNITA as a Driving Force in Cross-Border Mountain Territories

The six UNITA universities are located in heterogeneous cross-border mountain regions, affected by core-periphery dynamics. This factor causes a gradual isolation and a demographic decrease in the non-central areas, and may produce a weakening of the citizens' European sense of belonging.[1] Although some medium size cities of over 500.000 inhabitants, such as Torino and Zaragoza, are included in the Alliance, most of the regions where UNITA universities are located are undergoing heavy depopulation.



Shrinking (blue) and growing (yellow) municipalities in Europe, 2011-2017 [2]

The mountain territories which now appear forgotten have, nevertheless, major advantages for the construction and sustainability of the European Union. Mountains, due to their universality, can provide the means to achieve a virtuous development, providing new responses to the contemporary transitions and challenges. Thus, the commitment of UNITA universities to the development of their ecosystems aims at the promotion of research, innovation and entrepreneurial activities in close relation with local and regional institutions as well as companies. The universities in the UNITA Alliance, all with strong experiences in multidisciplinary activities, share three main innovative research areas, in which all have strengths or are complementary: Renewable Energies; Cultural Heritage; Bio and circular economy. These three areas are closely connected to environmental sustainability, green economy and alternative tourism, have a great economical potential, and will be essential in the future to the creation of job opportunities, thus helping to offset depopulation. Additionally, they are aligned

[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, Torino -0,8, Zaragoza -0,2) except Chambéry (+0,3) and Timisoara (+1,6).

with the European Green Deal, as proposed by the European Commission,[3] and with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)[4], as proposed by the United Nations, in particular to SDGs n. 7 (Affordable and clean energy), n. 11 (Sustainable cities and communities) as well as n. 12 (Responsible consumption and production). These three areas will be the core of the initial 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 hubs, envisaging to gradually increase the thematic coverage, as the structure and the institutional configuration become well-established.

Putting Our Mission into Practice

UNITA's trajectory towards reaching its objectives is based on several actions to be deployed, continuously monitored and updated.

1. Contributing to strengthening a European identity (Citizenship & Values), aware of the challenges linked to sustainability and climate change, and of the common European cultural heritage.

The construction of the European identity, citizenship and values is an ongoing process.

The common **European cultural** legacy is the basis upon which universal political values (rights of the human person, freedom, democracy, equality, the rule of law) have developed. Additionally, its enriching **diversity** must be enhanced and preserved as a key factor for European identity.
Moreover, in the process of building an updated European identity and citizenship we will focus on the **values of sustainable development,** taking into account sustainability in every UNITA activity, starting with mobility and initiatives to compensate its environmental impact.

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

[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).

- fostering **research activities** carried out in the universities of the Alliance, and funding jointly supervised PhDs on the construction of the concept of European citizenship;
- offering online and in situ **courses, training modules, workshops, contests and interactive forums** in order to promote active EU citizenship in the UNITA community and its local territories, especially in rural areas;
- triggering the civic engagement of students and staff by drawing upon the **research outcomes related to cultural heritage in the ecosystems** involved in the Alliance, thus fostering links between research and territorial necessity.

2. Reducing inequalities between core and non-central regions through the sustainable development of cross-border mountain areas, promoting territorial cohesion, fostering innovation and strengthening the links between universities and their ecosystems.

Civic engagement, continuous interaction with the associated partners, and strong connection to the territories in order to support their sustainable development are core objectives the UNITA alliance intends to pursue through different actions:

- sharing **best practices** to integrate UNITA students in their territories;
- developing **innovative projects,** particularly in the three specified research areas (Renewable energy, Cultural heritage, Bio and circular economy);
- setting up a network of **'Rural Erasmus'** exchanges in the form of internships in rural areas, to develop the above projects *in situ;*
- creating **common research hubs** to connect stakeholders to researchers;
- **connecting company associations** to share best practices in the development and management of mountain territories;
- **fostering life-long learning;**
- **promoting European values** through the presence of UNITA in rural areas;
- encouraging **cross-border entrepreneurship** among students and researchers.

3. Developing excellent education, student-centred and enriched by research, to enhance the attractiveness of the universities of the Alliance and of their territories.

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

- develop a **cartography of the common course offer,** as well as **new or multiple degrees** and **joint learning itineraries** on the topics of Renewable Energy, Cultural Heritage, Bio and circular economy. The thematic coverage of this cartography and of the joint learning process will be gradually extended;
- establish **automatic recognition of credits;**

- **connect its services dedicated to students**.

UNITA members commit to a **student-centred innovative pedagogy** through:

- **a challenge based approach** and **research oriented education**;
- the implementation of "**hubs of success**", monitoring and supporting the academic, professional and personal development of students.

The intended high mobility of students and staff, the close combination of education, research and entrepreneurship, and the use of **Romance languages** (including the development of intercomprehension methods), besides English, will increase the quality of the education, provide equal opportunities for all students, and reinforce the **attractiveness of UNITA** not only in Europe, but also in other continents, especially in **Africa and the Americas.**

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

Through a proactive language policy based on **multilingualism,** UNITA promotes one of the cornerstones of the European project and strives to make the motto "Unity in diversity" come true.

UNITA students and staff will improve their language skills, develop empathy and achieve intercultural competence through:

- **intercomprehension training for students and staff;**
- **increased virtual and physical mobility** in different Romance speaking countries;
- the use of one or more **Romance languages** for academic and everyday communication, besides English as fast communication language when necessary.

A common starting point of the UNITA partners in order to promote multilingualism is the membership in 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. Transforming universities to become more responsible models and disseminate their good practices and the resources they produce.

The transforming power of UNITA is based on three trajectories:

- **sharing best practices, methods and tools** and their implementation in the fields of mobility, innovative teaching practices, multilingualism and intercomprehension;

- **setting up a strategic governance** which includes the Governance Board, as decision-making body in charge of the overall issues of the Alliance, the Students Committee and the Advisory Board, functioning as a think tank;
- **implementing operational governance bodies** in the key areas of education, mobility and research: Management Board, UNITA Offices, the Work packages teams and the UNITA Coordinator.

In order to make UNITA the reference European University in the field of Renewable energies, Cultural heritage, Bio and circular economy, and Intercomprehension, as well as to create an open and attractive UNITA community, we will set up a **powerful internal and external communication strategy,** aiming at disseminating research results and generating interaction with future students, researchers, local stakeholders and citizens.

6. Creating a participative, open and inclusive European university, by means of a virtual campus and high mobility, where students and staff can easily share experience and learn from each other

UNITA strives to create a cohesive, open students and staff community through **enhanced mobility** of different kinds**:**

- physical and virtual,
- short and long,
- in and off campus,
- to and from its territories.

The partners will share their proactive best practices for internationalization, in order to stimulate the physical and virtual mobility of students and promote **financial sustainability** of UNITA through:

- the **increase of Erasmus+** institutional grants
- the **support from regional and national institutions**.

Participative, **student-centred teaching methods** will be implemented through the UNITA virtual campus and the interconnection of the teaching and learning centres at each University.

Open online courses in the fields of Renewable energies, Cultural heritage, Bio and circular economy, Intercomprehension, and European citizenship will be available for virtual mobility and in life-long learning programmes, as well as open to citizens. Via dissemination activities in the UNITA virtual campus, a closer integration of cross-border mountain areas will be achieved. The virtual campus will also contribute to implementing fast recognition tracks and simplified administrative procedures.

UNITA firmly believes in **participative and inclusive methods** to design and implement a

model European university: from an early stage, both students and non-teaching staff have been involved in the drafting of the proposal through surveys, ideathons, staff and students' preparatory meetings. Moreover, during the three-year implementation of the project, the whole academic body will get actively involved in the decision-making process, through participation in the Students committee and in the Advisory board.

UNITA Governance and Sustainability

UNITA members are committed to reaching an increasing level of integration through sustainable cooperation at all levels, according to a joint strategy covering not only governance and education, but also research and innovation through the involvement of the local ecosystems.

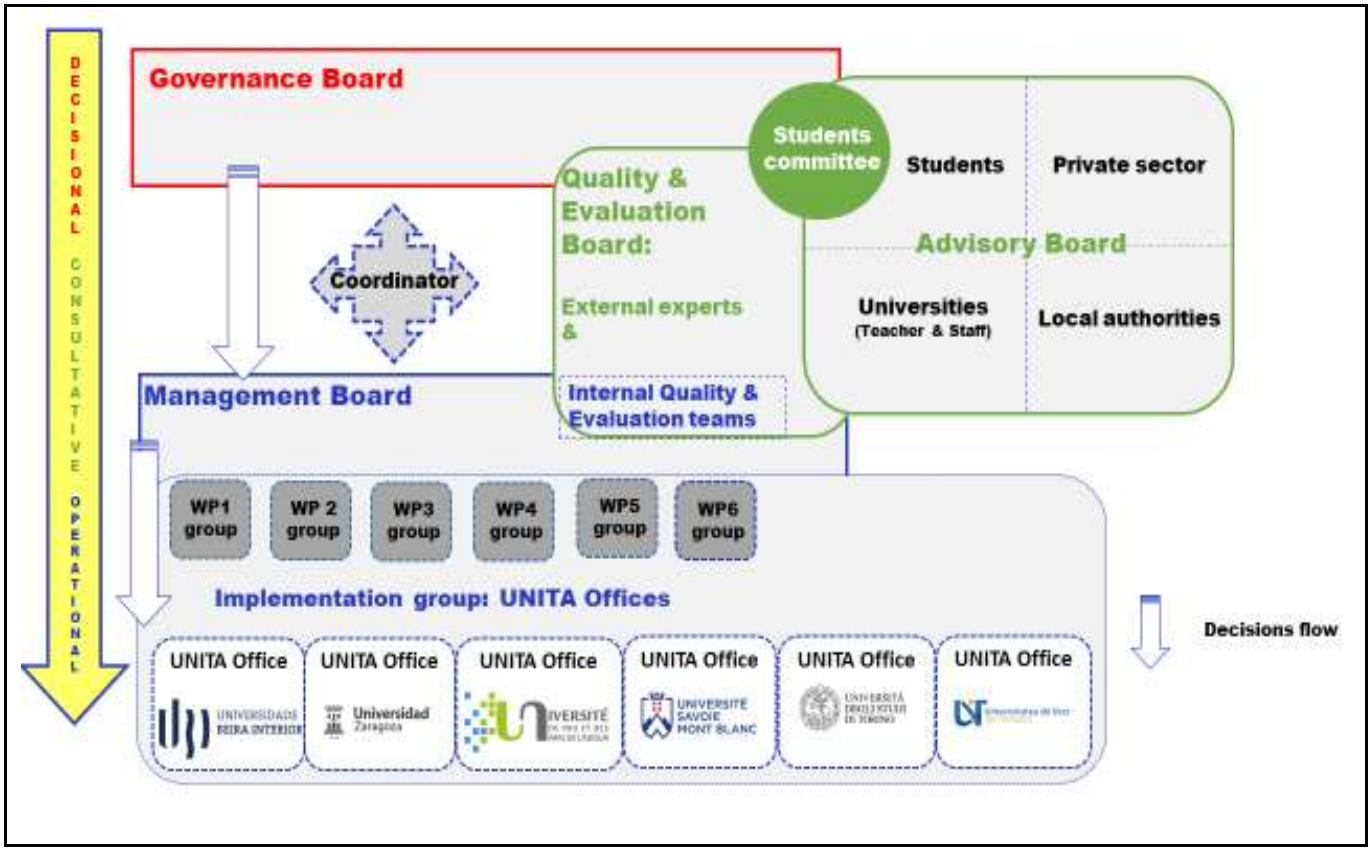
This new and ambitious integration model will be based on the **experience** gained from the first years of collaboration, as well as the willingness of the partners to go beyond the usual models. The **experiment** will last for three years and will be evaluated based on several key criteria, including transparency, sustainability, transferability and impact of activities developed by UNITA. As part of this experimental pilot study, a continuous and structured in-depth reflection around UNITA's governance will be conducted to identify the best paths for a stronger integration, with three objectives:

- the search for **long-term leverage effects** through the sharing of objectives, results, means and shared management;
- the generalization of **best practices** in terms of innovative pedagogical practices, teaching, research, innovation, civic engagement;
- the contribution to strengthening **European integration and identity**.

Moreover, with a view to evolving as a European University, the **creation of a legal entity of the six UNITA universities** will provide cohesion and sustainability to the common project.

Governance	
Decision-making body	**Governance Board**
Advisory bodies	**Students Committee**

	Advisory Board
	Quality & Evaluation Board
Operational bodies	**Management Board**
	UNITA Coordinator
	UNITA Offices
	Work Packages Teams



Governance scheme

WHY UNITA?

Excellence in education strongly committed to our cross-border mountain territories

Multilingualism promoting Romance languages as inclusive instruments

Sustainability: Research and innovation in

Renewal energies, Cultural heritage, Bio and circular economy to strengthen our local communities;

European citizenship aware of the challenges of climate change and of the importance of diversity in our common cultural heritage

Participation: students and staff involvement for responsible institutions, fostering personal development

Aprobat în Ședința Senatului din 21.02.2020.