



Building Regional Interconnections
for the Development of a Greater Europe

A stylized map of Europe is rendered in a grey wireframe style, composed of interconnected triangles and dots, suggesting a network or infrastructure. It serves as the background for the upper half of the page.

Mission Statement



THE PARTNERS

BRIDGE is a consortium composed of the Universities of **Tours** (France), **Alcalá de Henares** (Spain), **Ferrara** (Italy), **Kristianstad** (Sweden), **Maria Curie-Skłodowska University** (Poland), and **Varna Free University** (Bulgaria). It has associated partners in **Montenegro** and **Ukraine**.



The University of Tours
Université de Tours



Kristianstad University
Högskolan Kristianstad



Universidad de Alcalá

The University of Alcalá
Universidad de Alcalá



The Marie Curie-Skłodowska University in Lublin
Uniwersytet Marii Curie-Skłodowskiej w Lublinie



UNIVERSITY
OF FERRARA
— EX SAPIENTIA FRUCTUS —

The University of Ferrara
Università degli Studi di Ferrara



The Varna Free University "Chernorizets Hrabar"
Варненският свободен университет "Черноризец Храбър"



6 partners from 6 partner countries
Bulgaria, Italy, France, Poland,
Spain, Sweden

2 associated partners
Ukraine, Montenegro

A total of 140,000 students
(average of 23,000) and
10,000 staff members
(average of 1,700)

SPECIFICITIES OF THE CONSORTIUM:

Mid-sized universities
Locally integrated campuses
Strong links with regions
Geographical diversity





A COMMON VISION

The European Universities initiative is primarily aimed at **fostering excellence, innovation and inclusion in higher education across Europe as well as reinforcing EU citizenship**. Yet, beyond this immediate goal, what is at stake is the need to rebuild Europe. We do believe that our Alliance can offer a significant contribution to the building of a new Europe. How?

An East-West Bridge

“BRIDGE” stands for “Building Regional Interconnections for the Development of a Greater Europe” and expresses the common will of its members to **support and renew the ideal of a unified Europe**.

Despite the reunification of Eastern and Western Europe – unquestionably one of the greatest successes of the European construction in the last decades – much remains to be done.

Academic collaboration since then has been engaged at a rather small scale and most often bilaterally. Furthermore, we know now that European political unity is facing many threats.

Many universities are eager to engage new and more intense East-West collaborations that stretches beyond the Erasmus+ student and staff mobilities schemes, but are hampered by linguistic, technical or financial obstacles. The same applies to

students and staff mobilities, which have a high and yet unexpressed potential.

To BRIDGE, enhancing the quality and relevance of learning and teaching is not just the main mission of the European Higher Education Area; it shall also set the conditions through which our students shall take their vital place in the European society as active citizens. While recalling the Yerevan Communiqué encouraging and supporting



higher education institutions and staff in promoting pedagogical innovation in student-centred learning environments and in fully exploiting the potential benefits of digital technologies for learning and teaching, BRIDGE thus declares its vocation to create a large scale and multidisciplinary collaboration around the partner universities, and the cities and regions where they are located.

But the reference to the Yerevan Communiqué is more than a mere coincidence, as BRIDGE pursues a more ambitious goal: that of **paving the way to academic cooperation with eastern universities from outside the European Union**. This is why the University of Montenegro and Yuriy Fedkovych Chernivtsi National University in Ukraine are included as associated partners. Whilst Montenegro is officially a candidate country, Ukraine has the status of

associate country and is considered as a strategic country of the Eastern Partnership.





Europe for All

Top-ranked universities have an important role to play in supporting the European ideal. Yet, Europe cannot be restricted to these universities nor to students and researchers coming exclusively from major and capital cities. **The European ideal must reach each and every citizen.**

BRIDGE is deliberately composed of mid-size universities located in peripheral areas and regions. In those areas, BRIDGE members play a key socio-economic role: not only as higher education institutions, but also as significant employers and shapers of their social life. This will enable our members to reach the diversity of our citizens who are further away from European institutions and their representations. Outermost regions seem to need additional and coordinated common actions to sustain and develop their European identity, sometimes battered by tendencies of detachment. BRIDGE will play a crucial role by putting those regions at **the centre of the European Higher Education Area.**



Our solid East-West balance (reinforced by the association of two partners from Montenegro and Ukraine) pursues the same objective, that of the European values reaching the largest number of people.

“Europe for all” also means that **European academic opportunities should be made accessible to the widest and most diverse number of students and staff members** – no matter their family situation, socio-economic and academic backgrounds, ethnicity, belief, sexual orientation or gender identity. BRIDGE members are already fully committed to the promotion of such inclusiveness; they also strongly believe that the creation of the alliance will enable them to share and improve their practices. Within this idea, a major aspect is to extend campus accessibility and mobilities to persons with disabilities – psychological and/or physical – in order to help them enjoy the same opportunities as every other student or staff member.

A Renewed European Ideal

How can we help European citizens **dream of Europe again?**
Answering this question is at the core of the BRIDGE project.

A first approach is of course that of **students (and staff) mobilities through Europe**.

No one can ignore how important the Erasmus programme has been in helping many young Europeans to become true European citizens. Nonetheless, only a relatively small number of students and staff have been involved in exchange. Through a strategy diversifying a common institutional mobility policy, flexible and scalable, BRIDGE members are confident and determined on their capability to boost ring-shaped mobilities within the alliance, as well as overcome the obstacles that have traditionally worked against mobility.

A second approach, directed especially to students, is to help them become protagonists in the European construction. At the scale of our Alliance, this will be achieved for instance through a **Students' Parliament** that will be summoned each academic year and issue ideas and recommendations to the Governing Council of the alliance. They will also have access to a participatory budget for the promotion of health and wellbeing on campuses.

A third approach is to raise the awareness of students and staff of their **common heritage, both cultural and natural**. All BRIDGE partners are located in exceptional cultural and/or natural areas, many of them included in the Unesco World Heritage list and/or located inside or near Unesco Biospheres. This heritage will be promoted through students and staff mobility. It will also be at the centre of common research and innovation projects, involving, where relevant, public and private entities dealing with cultural or natural heritage.

Last, the European ideal will be supported through the **promotion of European values** that everyone can be proud of. Although fully aware of the many technical difficulties they will have to address in order to fulfil their objectives, BRIDGE members do not want their project to be purely technical. They want to make the values they share a reality in every dimension of the project, with and for their students and staff.





BRIDGE 2030

BRIDGE is a long-term endeavour. Constantly implementing a realistic, step-by-step approach, we aim at completing the establishment of a fully integrated European University within 10 years.

In our vision, BRIDGE 2030 is:

- * A Consortium of Universities maintaining their identities but sharing the best educational, research and social standards. The best practices identified and exchanged in the pilot phase will have become common standards by 2030.
- * An organisation that offers a new quality of higher education and makes it accessible to the largest number of students, whatever their background. Every student enrolling in a partner University is fully aware of the possibility to customize his/her curriculum among all partners.
- * An entity visible at local, national and international level, able, as such, to create partnerships with third parties and to compete in European and international calls for projects.
- * A European reference in 4 excellence fields: one health, sustainable ecosystem, materials sciences, natural and cultural heritage, with ongoing common degrees and research programmes in these fields.



SHARED VALUES

BRIDGE is a **socially responsible alliance**. The three pillars of sustainability stated below, already governing each member's policy, have been at the centre of our project from our very first meetings.

Social equity

As pointed out, we have an obligation, as universities, to ensure that teaching, research and innovation reach all members of society to create a **more inclusive pro-European landscape**.

Yet, our social responsibility does not end within our city walls. The European Union also wants action to address social exclusion, discrimination and various forms of inequalities in the whole society. These actions should help reverse inequalities, develop human capital, increase equal opportunities across all areas. Research and innovation are a paramount vehicle to find solutions to these problems, and Universities have to ensure that their students have the skills and are empowered to find solutions to these societal challenges.

Economic development

As major – if not the only – higher education institutions in their respective metropolitan areas, BRIDGE members have a **key role to play in the economic development of these areas**. They are mid-size universities which all have strong links with their municipalities and/or regional authorities and partnerships with socio-economic and cultural actors, many of which actually joined the alliance as associate partners. This position enables BRIDGE to help those areas face the specific challenges they can be confronted with: remoteness from major economic centres, economic changes, adaptation to technological advancements.

From a broader perspective, the progression of education and training is also considered crucial to driving both economic and social progress forward; this is mainly the case in a globalised and knowledge-driven economy, where a highly-skilled workforce is necessary to compete in terms of productivity and innovation.

Therefore, BRIDGE has a strategy until 2030 on how not only focus on the students and the staff, but another paramount aspect is the collaboration of establishing research platforms, innovation and entrepreneurial skills as well as create mentorships for children and youth to promote the knowledge of what education at university level means.

These objectives will enhance regional and European connectedness by active campuses in the BRIDGE consortium that promotes European inclusiveness via the mobility exchanges as well as the enhancement of education, research and social responsibilities.

Environmental protection

BRIDGE supports the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Rio+20 outcome document “The future we want” and will contribute to the principles inspiring the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development by:

- * Helping its members to **optimise their own practices**. Many environmental initiatives already exist among BRIDGE members; exchanging our best practices will help us in our journey towards a comprehensive and efficient environmental policy.
- * Adopting the **best environmental practices**. The creation of an international alliance creates considerable challenges to be addressed. This applies of course to students and staff mobilities, but also to the institutional functioning of the alliance (for instance, meetings of our Students’ Parliament).
- * Placing **environmental protection at the centre of our teaching and research**, as well as informing our behaviour as responsible actors in our regions. Some BRIDGE members have strong experience in this field, related in particular to UN Biosphere Reserves or National Parks and nature reserves in which or close to which they are located.



THEMATIC PRIORITIES

Being all comprehensive universities, we choose not to create a mono thematic Alliance, but prioritize academic areas in which the Alliance excels, also in relation to the Smart Specialisation Strategies (S3) of each region. Our ambition is to enhance our collaboration in these fields, through co-publications, the establishment of joint research teams, short-term programmes and, in the 2030 perspective, the creation of common degrees.

One Health

The need to intensify research at the intersection of human health and animal health, veterinary and human medicine, has been dramatically highlighted recently. Several BRIDGE partners have been working on this topic for many years, offering curricula and leading research in infectious diseases. Environmental health, the third component of “One Health”, is also a focus topic for us. Intensifying our activity on these topics would also meet the S3 priorities of our regions, like “Healthy and Safe Food” for Emilia Romagna or “Medicine and Health” for the Lubelskie region.

Sustainable ecosystem

Sustainability is a major concern for BRIDGE partners, especially concerning wellbeing, inclusiveness and sustainable environment on campuses. As regards education, each partner offers specific curricula in relation to these topics (e.g. Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services in Kristianstad or Circular Economy in Ferrara and Varna). Some prominent research programmes also exist, sometimes at the crossroads with One Health (Man & Biosphere Health – MABH – research programme in Kristianstad). Taking advantage of these strengths and of our outstanding natural environment, we are determined to intensify our work and cooperation in this field.



Materials sciences and energy

Materials science is a hybrid, rather new discipline. It is at the heart of many scientific challenges humanity is currently facing, especially in the fields of energy and available material resources. Some regions covered by BRIDGE have already made it a S3 priority. Some partners have concentrated many resources on it. The University of Tours, for instance, has 3 laboratories involved, 3 public-private platforms and important regional investments.

Natural and cultural heritage

All members of the Alliance are located in areas that are unique in terms of natural and/or cultural heritage. For instance, Unesco biospheres are located near project partners' location such as Alcalà, Ferrara, Kristianstad and Lublin. This has naturally led all of us to embark upon many pedagogical and/or research programmes in these fields. Both hard and human sciences are involved and some programmes actually combine them, like the "Intelligence des Patrimoines" (heritage intelligence) programme in Tours. Building upon the expertise acquired by its members, BRIDGE's ambition is to become a reference in protection and enhancement of natural and cultural heritage, and to boost heritage-related economy in its regions.

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