

FORTHEM Alliance

NEWSLETTER 2023-JUNE

IN THIS ISSUE



Presidency

FORTHEM Missions:

- Labs and Co-Creation
- European Campus
- Skills & Competences
- Research, Innovation & Transfer
- Service to Society

FIT FORTHEM



Fostering Outreach
within European Regions,
Transnational Higher Education
and Mobility



Co-funded by
the European Union

PRESIDENCY

For the second funding period, FORTHEM Alliance made some changes in its organizational structure and decision-making processes. As a part of this development, the FORTHEM Presidency was introduced in the beginning of the year 2023. This new group consists of the Rectors and Presidents of all nine partner universities, and the main goal is to further strengthen the institutional commitment to the Alliance on the very highest level of our partner universities. The Presidency discusses the strategic questions regarding the future development of the whole Alliance, ensures that the Alliance strategy is in line with the strategies of partner universities, and that the needed human and financial resources are allocated for this work in the partner universities.

The Presidency operates with a rotating chairing system; each university holds the position of the chair for one year at a time. The vice chair is nominated from another partner university, and the vice chair takes the position of the chair for the following year. For the first Presidency year, the Chair of the Presidency is the Rector of the University of Jyväskylä, Keijo Hämäläinen, until 20th April, and Marja-Leena Laakso from 21st April onwards. The position of the vice chair is held by the Rector of the University of Valencia, Maria Vicenta Mestre Escrivà.



The Chair of the Presidency has welcomed us all to the second funding period in the kick-off meeting in Palermo in February. Already before that, in the end of January, he represented FORTHEM Alliance in the joint meeting of the European Universities Alliances in Brussels, with EC Commissioner Mariya Gabriel. The main event for the year will be the FORTHEM Presidency meeting hosted by the University of Jyväskylä, on 5th 6th June 2023 at the JYU campus. During these two intensive days, the Rectors/Presidents will have the chance to get to know each other even better, to work on the FORTHEM strategy together with the Vice Rectors/Vice Presidents, and to plan their collaboration for the upcoming years.

LABS AND CO-CREATION



In the first six months of its existence, the Labs and Co-Creation Mission has been very productive. Within the Mission, two new labs were established in February, kick-offs for launching the new roll-out for all seven existing Labs were held in April, the structure for each lab was set up, and the Mission Board continued its work with new members.

Labs and Co-creation Mission now has two new Labs: The Art and Aesthetics in Contemporary Society Lab, hosted by the University of Agder, Norway, and the Cultural Heritage Lab which is led by Lucian Blaga University of Sibiu, Romania. Both Labs were approved by the Steering Committee in the meeting at Palermo in February 2023.

The Cultural Heritage Lab aims to localize and deconstruct the contemporary attitudes of local communities towards local cultural heritage in the age of globalization. The lab will focus on the ways in which tangible, intangible, and live cultural heritage are shaped and how it is constantly shaping identities, both individual and collective. By doing so, the Lab has a potential impact on societies that are greatly impacted by these identities, and on their evolution in certain places. Vlad Pojoga, from ULBS, will be the Administrative Coordinator of the Cultural Heritage Lab.

The Art & Aesthetics in Contemporary Society Lab aims to create new arenas for meaningful exchange through the arts and aesthetic approaches in society. In the Lab, people are enabled to interact through and with artistic forms, such as joint music-making, co-creating visual art, collaborating on local theatre productions, writing stories, and exploring together. In the Lab, the members are in dialogue with other human beings, their surroundings, their consciousness, and body. This will shake our perspectives on our surroundings, our relationships, and priorities, and will promote the expression of multiple voices. By doing so, the Lab will contribute to finding new solutions for societal challenges such as the polarization, the ecological breakdown, and the rising individual isolation. In this Lab, Marius Lønskog Igland from UiA, will act as an Academic Coordinator.

LABS AND CO-CREATION

KICK-OFF EVENTS

The seven kick-off events for all seven existing Labs were planned to promote activities for the next period and attract the competences needed in the activities/projects from other universities and relevant participants. The events were facilitated by the lab's academic, student, and contact person from each partner university. The participants involved contact persons from each university, students, and researchers related to the labs. The kick-offs were held digitally, open for all interested, and were announced on the FORTHEM event calendar. In the kick-offs, all partner universities had their representatives, and the continuation of collaboration was promoted vividly and constructively onwards. For empowering and enhancing the work towards co-creation projects within FORTHEM Labs, the Mission is proud to announce that the Lab Conference, which is dedicated to the co-creation aspect, will be held in Agder on week 43, on October 23rd – 27th, 2023.

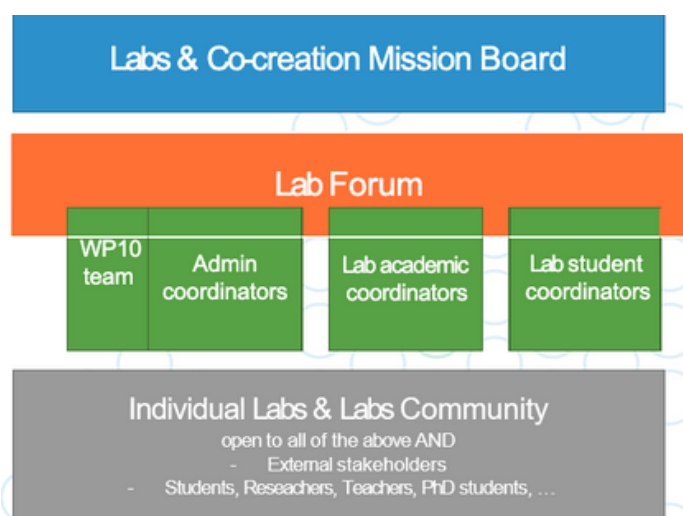
STRUCTURE

The Lab structure has also faced changes. The main change was the establishment of the Lab Forum. The forum will consist of the administrative, academic, and student coordinators from each of the nine labs. Additionally, the Labs and Co-creation Mission Board Manager, the WP10 Manager, and the task managers are actively involved. The Lab Forum is a grassroots decision-making body for the Labs, whose primary purpose is to foster interdisciplinarity and cross-Labs collaboration and ensure a smooth flow of information between Labs and the Mission Board. The Mission Board will be responsible for strategic decision-making, and the Lab Forum will rely on the Mission Board for strategic advice and decision-making.

MISSION

The Mission has been also very active in writing blog posts and newsletters for external users. In May, the new Labs were promoted on the FORTHEM website under the title "Two new labs: Art and Aesthetics in Contemporary Society Lab and Cultural Heritage Lab". The article was based on the interviews of Work Package 10 manager and two new administrative coordinators. On the FORTHEM website, we also authored a blog post on "Everything you ever wanted to know about the FORTHEM Labs (2022-2026)", authored by Katarzyna Molek-Kozakowska (UO), Tamás Péter Szabó (JYU), and Päivikki Lahtinen (UiA). This is a great continuation of Labs' strategy to disseminate information about Labs.

In spring, Work Package-10 in collaboration with the Mission Board also promoted the Lab activities by giving criteria for student-driven projects and guidelines for seed funding. In addition, the plan for launching a training program and a guidebook are good to go.



EUROPEAN CAMPUS

During the first Erasmus funding period, FORTHEM organised its activities under three “missions”: Mobility, Outreach and Labs. The foundation work of these missions, including the most promising of the many piloted activities, form the basis of the five new FORTHEM missions which have been established to reflect the significant number of activities within a European University. The Mobility mission has been transformed into the European Campus, where physical and hybrid mobility and the Digital Academy meet to include a much greater number of students in international opportunities.

The European Campus Mission will improve activities piloted in the first funding period and increase flexibility and access to mobility. The Mission enables students to study in any of the FORTHEM universities, physically or remotely. The universally accessible online Digital Academy provides international learning opportunities for students, while FORTHEM also implements plans to increase access to physical mobility for students by reducing barriers. The Digital Academy, which has been set up to facilitate virtual mobility and sharing of online teaching resources, will be further developed, and extended.

This new mission will strengthen the development of innovative pedagogy, which is seen in FORTHEM as a learner-centred pedagogical mindset that empowers teachers to experiment, expand and explore new ways of teaching and encourages students to take a more active role in their learning process. The European Campus Mission is characterised by environmental sustainability, diversity and inclusion, and multilingualism to cultivate truly European graduates.

The achievement of the aims of the European Campus Mission will be ensured by the implementation of the work packages 3 and 4 that support the expansion of international educational experiences, be they digital, physical, or blended.



EUROPEAN CAMPUS

RENEWAL OF ADMINISTRATION AND DIGITALISATION SERVICES FOR THE DIGITAL ACADEMY

Work package 3 is focused on the renewal of administration and digitalisation services for the Digital Academy. The main objectives are: efficiently manage the delivery of substantially increased content, at least 90 additional courses available by 2026 along with language mediation tools, on the Digital Academy; contribute to the implementation of the European Student Card Initiative; ensure Alliance alignment with EU policies on diversity and inclusion, and environmental sustainability.

During the first six months of the project, the Digital Academy office is coming to existence step by step.

The Digital Academy Office is an inter-university virtual structure where all issues pertaining to the management of virtual mobilities are dealt with. The Green and Sustainability Unit and the Diversity and Inclusion Unit have been launched with a list of activities to be carried out. The buddy programme student group has been established. The buddy programme allows to the students of partner universities to get in touch virtually to discover new cultures, new languages and new mobility opportunities.

SYSTEMIC AND STRUCTURAL INTERNATIONALISATION OF CURRICULA

Work package 4 aims to achieve systemic and structural internationalisation of curricula. The objective of the WP is to systematically set the structural basis to allow learners to compose their own flexible learning pathways by taking advantage of transparent and automatic credit recognition, joint teaching and learning units and the use of micro-credentials and open badges. The WP will allow the students to attend educational activities involving physical, hybrid and virtual mobility such as short-term mobility, joint and multiple degrees, FORTHEM Campus and guest lecturing.



During the first six months of the project, all tasks kicked off with the formation of working and expert groups. All tasks planned their activities and milestones throughout the whole duration of the funding period. The working groups of the different tasks started either with an evaluation of the first funding period or began their work with a mapping phase to analyse the status quo concerning their specific topic at each FORTHEM university.

SKILLS & COMPETENCES

The Skills and Competences Mission aims to systematically develop 21st century skills, also known as future skills. These skills include digital and green skills, critical and academic literacies and lifelong learning. This Mission seeks to create systematic pedagogical models that increase our ability to adapt to rapid changes in operational environments, such as when Covid-19 forced us to quickly switch to remote learning. Students and both academic and non-academic staff reflect on how to develop their personal skills and use a variety of learning spaces. The nine universities actively work together to enhance future-oriented pedagogies and individual development.

The Mission consists of two work packages:

- Work package 5: Enhancing future skills development through innovative pedagogy, led by University of Jyväskylä
- Work package 6: Enhancing professional development, career orientation and wellbeing, led by Johannes Gutenberg University Mainz



SKILLS & COMPETENCES

ENHANCING FUTURE SKILLS DEVELOPMENT THROUGH INNOVATIVE PEDAGOGY

This work package consists in a review of remote teaching challenges and solutions in all nine universities and a joint FORTHEM approach to innovative pedagogy. It will also create a FORTHEM Think Tank for innovative learning and teaching: one online and three hybrid symposia on innovative pedagogy and informal 'campfires' to reach more students and teachers. The team and experts will also develop pedagogical training for academics to develop digital competences in designing digital learning materials and teaching methods for a multicultural classroom. They will also set up joint recommendations & training to raise diversity and inclusion awareness of academic staff, shared course offerings enhancing students' green literacy and a compilation of different types of multimodal pedagogical models and networking and benchmarking events for academics. There will also be a FORTHEM Network for Entrepreneurship Teachers and four annual workshops in entrepreneurship training.

ENHANCING PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT, CAREER ORIENTATION AND WELLBEING

This Work package consists in different tasks such as implementing the Europa Forum: deeper cooperation between the language teaching units and offering increased language learning opportunities for students and staff. Another task will focus on career orientation and arranging tailor-made online workshops for FORTHEM students in career orientation, applications and soft skills.



RESEARCH, INNOVATION & TRANSFER



Research, Innovation & Transfer Mission facilitates the cross-institutional and cross-sectoral collaboration of researchers, at all stages of their careers, with local and regional business and economic stakeholders, especially Small and Medium Enterprises, public administration and the policy and cultural sectors. Policies, programmes and incentives provide a framework for academics to engage in research involving FORTHEM's regional innovation ecosystems.



RESEARCH, INNOVATION & TRANSFER

FORTHEM ACADEMY FOR EARLY-STAGE-RESEARCHERS

When setting up the new FORTHEM Research, Innovation and Transfer Mission, based on experiences from the FIT FORTHEM project, it was commonly agreed that FORTHEM needs to get the researchers' community more involved. It appeared to be especially important to support FORTHEM's Early-Stage-Researchers and to help them establish their networks and to get them prepared for multiple demands in and outside the academic job market. After a lot of preparatory work done during the first months of the second funding period of FORTHEM, the FORTHEM Academy for Early-Stage-Researchers officially kicked off by launching a first call for a MasterClass dedicated to postdoctoral students wishing to apply for an MSCA Postdoctoral Fellowship ideally with one of the FORTHEM partner universities in 2023 or 2024.

In a three-day training course, they will learn about the funding scheme and proposal writing, and they will meet with experts acting for the European Commission as evaluators and with successful applicants sharing their experiences.

Action related to networking, joint supervision, training, mentoring, secondments, science communication and open science will follow soon and will offer doctoral and postdoctoral students with a broad range of possibilities upscaling their skills and getting directly involved in shaping strategies and policies for the alliance based on their needs.

FORTHEM RESEARCH AND INNOVATION SERVICES AND POLICY OFFICE

The FORTHEM Research and Innovation Services and Policy Office is based on the FIT FORTHEM project and will continue to serve as the central contact point for information, questions and services related to Research and Innovation within the FORTHEM Alliance.

During May 2023, a delegate on behalf of Latvia University met staff and researchers at Lucian Blaga University of Sibiu, Romania, to set up the Official Virtual Office on the Alliance website and to design specific tasks on FORTHEM Joint Research-Innovation-Transfer (RI&T) Services and Policy.

We consider cross-institutional collaboration and knowledge sharing to be vital for empowering initiatives undertaken within the FORTHEM Alliance. Close collaboration with the WP7 team facilitates a better understanding of different institutional approaches, cultures, and practices. This will lead to a more comprehensive and inclusive representation of WP7 content on the FORTHEM Alliance webpage and in all related communication means.

Text written by Nicole Birkle, Sylwia Frach and Delia Stefenel

SERVICE TO SOCIETY



The Service to Society Mission Board members met for the first time in November 2022, during a virtual kick-off meeting, where they introduced themselves and discussed basic topics such as the time-slot and frequency of their future meetings and the tasks to be tackled by them. Furthermore, the MB and WP managers were presented and all the activities to be developed under the umbrella of this Mission were described in detail. The meeting was chaired by Prof. Esteban Sanchis Kilders, former leader of the Outreach Mission and UV representative at the Coordination Commission.

Service to Society Work package:

The main tasks consist in providing possibilities for students to learn about civic engagement and project-related practices; supporting student idea creation, participating in the organisation of a Democracy Week: Fostering democratic practices among students within the alliance. One task is also meant to provide international interaction of teacher training students and teachers in the organisation of summer schools.

Also this work package will develop international employment possibilities: helping international students understand employment abroad. Another task will give the possibility to students to learn about entrepreneurship, entrepreneurial mindset and entrepreneurship as a career option among students. Finally, lifelong training will be developed by offering opportunities for lifelong learning involving organisations and people all ages in FORTHEM regions and beyond.



SERVICE TO SOCIETY

ONE OF THE ACTIVITIES THAT ARE LINKED TO THESE TASKS HAS ALREADY TAKEN PLACE:

UiA hosted the Democracy Week during the first week of May, where FORTHEM partners participated online in the events “Higher Education and Preserving Democracy” and “Academic Freedom Under Attack”.

The first online Startup Day was held on 25th May, hosted by JYU. Several FORTHEM community members (students, academic and administrative staff members, startupper and commentators) applied to participate and were actively engaged in learning about startup culture or presenting their ideas. The topic of this very first FORTHEM Startup Day was AI (Artificial Intelligence).

FURTHER ACTIVITIES WILL BE DEVELOPED SOON, WITH CALLS OPEN RIGHT NOW:

A Summer School on Entrepreneurship and Crowdfunding is being organised by UiA from the 21st to the 25th of August 2023. The FORTHEM students who are selected to take part in it will travel to Kristiansand, get comprehensive fundamentals on crowdfunding and experience an amazing Norwegian summer with lots of activities.



FIT FORTHEM

FIT FORTHEM collected data for FORTHEM to accelerate institutional integration

During the FORTHEM 2 Palermo kick-off meeting on 20-23 February 2023 it became clear that the Research Innovation and Transfer Mission and Labs and Co-Creation Mission can jump-start their activities by relying on work done in FIT FORTHEM.

CREATING INSTITUTIONAL MEMORY

In universities, coordination and support projects addressing a wide variety of issues come and go, and it is important to ensure the institutional knowledge and new competences they foster are kept alive. Surveys are made, working groups assembled, interviews conducted, results published and presented. These are not linear or even-paced operations in a consortium of nine universities, such as the FORTHEM Alliance. Priorities of each organization change even as the results are analyzed.



As FIT FORTHEM (H2020 project for 2021-2023) gradually draws to its close, hopefully, its records and reports are inherited by all FORTHEM Missions, especially the Research, Innovation and Transfer Mission and Labs and Co-creation Mission, which can exploit them in facilitating their actions planned for 2023-2026.

Besides all the data gathering and infrastructure that FIT FORTHEM has produced (tools, methods, datasets, recommendations, briefs, analyses and protocols), the role of dissemination and exploitation in building long-term impact and institutional memory is crucial. The alliance as a whole can profit from lessons learnt during the project and from the experiences of project leaders.

FIT FORTHEM

CONCRETE DATA POOLS TO BE REUSED

The catalogue of research strongholds, partners' shared repositories and their Cultural Heritage digital items will be accessible via the FIT FORTHEM Digital Platform. The reports on mappings of expert networks and good practices of each university can be used to bring researchers together to apply for ever ambitious joint projects. The surveys and focus groups that provided data on Open Science practices, internationalization of research priorities or science communication venues can serve to inform ever more aligned joint strategies, policies and implementation protocols. You can find more here <https://www.forthem-alliance.eu/fit-forthem/results>

The professionalization workshops (with their instructional materials and glossaries) can continue to help research project managers, administrators and researchers to remain attentive to the diversity of organizational cultures and to address the discrepancies in the services provided. Co-creation workshops and cascading funding calls were able to bring FORTHEM labs one step closer to collaborating with external entities, including business, public administration, schools or NGOs. You can find out more about them here <https://www.forthem-alliance.eu/fit-forthem/join-the-project>

WHAT'S NEXT

During the Palermo kick-off, the FIT FORTHEM project leaders and core team both presented the interim results in all work packages and asked for further recommendations from the General Assembly. They had a chance to discuss at length what to do to foster institutional transformation that would be directed towards a more synergic integration of alliance members in years to come. The discussion was focused on how to activate stakeholders and on remedying site-specific disadvantages. Through FIT FORTHEM the Alliance can become even more inclusive and accommodating, especially to new partners.



FIND US TO KNOW MORE

During the FORTHEM 2 kick-off, FIT FORTHEM core team Nicole Birkle (JGU), Frédéric Debeaufort (UB), Maria Dolores Pitarch (UVEG), Agnese Rusakova (UL), Timo Taskinen (JYU), Katarzyna Molek-Kozakowska (UO), Fabrizio D'Avenia (UNIPA), Isabel Mendoza (UVEG), Melanie Gross (JGU), Silvana DiBono (UNIPA), Laura Turunen (JYU), and Roberta Sollima (UNIPA) liaised actively with Mission Board members and decision-makers to advise, communicate and recommend findings from FIT FORTHEM that could help speed up FORTHEM transformational processes. These experts know much about partner institutions or can provide access to information that has been aggregated in FIT FORTHEM but would be harder to find or too sensitive to be publicized.

FORTHEM Alliance

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FORTHEM ALLIANCE PARTNER UNIVERSITIES:

University of Burgundy (France)
University of Johannes Gutenberg – Mainz (Germany)
University of Palermo (Italy)
University of Valencia (Spain)
University of Agder (Norway)
Lucian Blaga University of Sibiu (Romania)
University of Jyväskylä (Finland)
University of Opole (Poland)
University of Latvia (Latvia)

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