During its first major meeting this year, FORTHEM Alliance welcomed new partners and strengthened the network between its city administrations and chambers of commerce.

The European University Alliance FORTHEM gathered in Germany on September 22-24, 2021. Representatives of the FORTHEM partner cities and their chambers of commerce and industry were invited alongside the seven university partners from all over Europe so that they could meet one another in person and exchange ideas. "Because of the pandemic, the event became possible only now. We are thus all the more grateful to have had the opportunity to come together these past few days. We used this chance to welcome two new FORTHEM members while, at the same time, promoting interaction at the city administration and chamber of commerce level," said Professor Georg Krausch, President of Johannes Gutenberg University Mainz (JGU). Professor Stephan Jolie, Vice President for Learning and Teaching at JGU, emphasised: "No other project at our universities has ever brought so many people from across Europe into contact with each other – be it in summer schools, team teaching, online courses, internships, academic speed dating, or in cooperation at the administrative and technical level. We really do have offers for all our university members."
Education Unit of the European Commission emphasised that the implementation of the European University Initiative objectives can, in the long run, assist in building a new model of inter-university cooperation, setting an example which should inspire.

**Networking at the city and chamber of commerce level**

The joint Transnational Higher Education Strategy – namely, increasing the mobility of their students and staff while creating a virtual campus and merging their research programmes as well as the double or multiple degree programmes – lies at the heart of FORTHEM's activities. However, the Alliance also contributes to networking at the city administration and chamber of commerce and industry level in the respective university cities. During the in-person meeting in Mainz, the representatives seized the chance to discuss possible joint activities in specialised working groups. The plan is to build an internship network that will span all FORTHEM locations and provide students with professional skills, to establish various collaborative projects with local schools, and to promote voluntary work in the FORTHEM cities. A joint FORTHEM statement, signed by leaders of the FORTHEM Alliance partner universities, city councils and chambers of commerce, strengthened the agreement to strive for the implementation of the so-called knowledge square (Education, Research, Innovation and Service to Society).

**New FORTHEM partners in northern and southeastern Europe**

The FORTHEM meeting was also the first chance to get acquainted with two upcoming members ready to join the Alliance: the University of Agder in Norway and the Lucian Blaga University of Sibiu in Romania. Both universities gave a presentation on their institutions, immediately sparking ideas for joint projects. "We are very much looking forward to getting acquainted and working with our new partners in northern and southeastern Europe. We are taking great interest in the new perspective they will bring to our alliance," stated Jolie. In signing the letter of intent with the University of Agder in Norway and the Lucian Blaga University of Sibiu in Romania, FORTHEM took a step towards preparing their subsequent inclusion as full members. They were already integrated in the full-day workshop that concluded the meeting: university members discussed and evaluated various activities and structures, developing new ideas for a sustainable way forward.

The Alliance expresses deep gratitude to the German Federal Ministry of Education and Research (BMBF) and the German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD) for funding this highly productive FORTHEM network meeting.
Mobility Mission Board: latest developments

FORTHem Mobility Mission Board (MMB) meeting took place in Palermo on October 6-8, 2021.

The participants discussed the recent developments and the expected results regarding the Digital Academy and gave a detailed overview of the objectives and activity planner by the Mobility team. MMB also initiated several discussion sessions, focusing on Mobility and Digital Academy beyond 2022. The exchange of views provided the basis for a broader vision regarding the planning of mobility activities, organisational procedures, digitalisation for education and harmonisation of administrative processes, as well as using proper communication tools for the promotion of future joint activities within the FORTHem Alliance. The proposals for future governance structure of the alliance and the future of the Mobility Mission Board in it were also discussed, and the conclusions of the meetings demonstrated the progress of the activities and objectives within the WP 3 and 4. At the same time, it was a pleasant opportunity to finally hold a face-to-face discussions on important matters for the future development of the FORTHem Alliance.

MMB also selected 18 new collective short-term mobility activities within the third round. Students will be able to choose from various multidisciplinary programmes that are going to be organised by partner universities between March 2022 and August 2022; and student applications for these activities will be open by the end of October. During the previous two rounds, 26 collective short-term mobility programmes were selected. Only a few of them had to be cancelled or moved to the next period due to COVID-19; some of them were also organised in virtual modality.

Here is some feedback from a student who has already participated in short-term mobility activities:

Alexis Gorce (University of Burgundy): “This mobility programme perfect for me since I am currently studying for a master’s degree in Food Science and also because I would like to pursue my studies in food microbiology. Improving my English was another motivating factor. In addition, I thought that a one week mobility period had less constraints than mobilities that last several months. When I arrived, I was put in a new student dorm: a well equipped room. I received a warm welcome from everyone there: teachers, other students and also the people who worked in the dorm. A number of students from the University of Valencia gave us a guided tour around the town, and showed us nice restaurants and bars to go to. Everything was well organised: my day could end at around 5pm which allowed me to have enough free time to enjoy and visit the city and also go out for a drink by the sea!”

More information on previous short-term mobility programmes, as well as additional testimonials can be found here.
FIT FORTHEM is a Horizon 2020-funded project that seeks to improve the collaboration and connections between the academic world and the society outside academia. The project aims, among other things, to encourage FORTHEM Labs to co-create with university-external stakeholders and support them in finding new partners and ways of collaboration with non-academic actors. In order to take this opportunity, four out of seven Labs (Multilingualism in Higher Education and Schools Lab, Digital Transformation Lab, Experiencing Europe Lab and Climate & Resources Lab) already organized matchmaking workshops during this year. The experiences from each matchmaking event are or are going to be posted on the FORTHEM blog for the benefit of those wish to find out more about them. During these events, FORTHEM Labs discussed their outputs and actions with their academic colleagues, students and external stakeholders, such as universities belonging to the European University Network, other universities, schools, NGOs, and private companies. They also mapped the interest of the workshop participants to develop their collaboration further in the future. Participants' feedback on the matchmaking events has been mainly positive, claiming that the topics of the workshops were relevant and interesting.

The last three matchmaking workshops are going to be held during the next five months with Resilience, Life Quality and Demographic Change Lab, Diversity and Migration Lab and Food Science Lab. Stay tuned for future FIT FORTHEM workshops here!

Labs networking with external partners

Now that the final year of the Alliance’s pilot funding period has started, the Labs are working hard to complete their projects.
Many Lab outputs have, in fact, already been completed during the summer: they include the Multilingualism Lab’s course on English as a medium of instruction, the collaborative writing project “Multimodality of academic genres in multilingual education”, and a summer school by the Resilience, Life Quality and Demographic Change Lab organised in Palermo. A significantly higher number of outputs by various Labs is expected to be completed in the ongoing academic year.

Labs were also represented in the FORTHEM for Regions conference in Mainz on September 22–23. During the event, representatives of the higher management of member universities, as well as the Mayors and the Chairs of chambers of commerce and industry discussed potential ways in which Labs and FORTHEM cities could collaborate. In addition, all Labs were introduced at poster presentations by their respective coordinators. FORTHEM’s upcoming member universities, the University of Agder (Norway) and Lucian Blaga University of Sibiu (Romania), also presented their vision of contributing to the Lab Mission in the near future.

In the past few months, Labs have gained new impetus from the FORTHEM Alliance’s spin-off project, FIT FORTHEM.
**News in Outreach**

Now that we are heading towards the last year of the first funding period, the good news is that the impact of the pandemic on our daily lives is lessening slowly.

It has to be noted that the pandemic has heavily affected our main Outreach activities, such as international internships in companies and schools, and international civic engagement projects: due to the mobility restrictions we all have suffered. We are noticing now that students are showing a greater interest in the aforementioned activities, supported by ERASMUS+ mobility funding; and some of them are funded directly by the alliance. Notably, the alliance has doubled the funds available for outreach projects of FORTHEM students and also covers the travelling expenses of at least one physical meeting of the student team undertaking these projects. In addition, more funding has also been made available for the international school internships, as some of them are planned to be shorter than 2 months and therefore cannot be subsidised by regular ERASMUS+ mobility funds. Moreover, short-term company internships (2-6 weeks) now receive financial aid from FORTHEM. Other activities, like online training courses, have been prepared and funded by the alliance; they have been made available to the school teachers in the alliance regions. Finally, the European Summer School for Teachers, an event that is going to take place in May 2022 in Valencia, will be launched. We expect to see many teachers from all our regions gathering, learning and networking in Valencia very soon!

We all hope that this new mobility boom is here to stay and that many of our students will gain additional trans-European experience by meeting each other. Please follow our website to find out more about the new activities coming up in the next academic year!

**“FIT for EUROPE”**

“FIT for EUROPE – The Podcast of FIT FORTHEM” will disseminate knowledge and foster cooperation within the FORTHEM Alliance and beyond.

The first episode has already been recorded and presents the interview with FIT FORTHEM coordinator Prof. Stefan Müller-Stach at the University of Mainz. You can find it here!

Professor Müller-Stach highlights the importance of the European Higher Education Alliances, their impact on the future orientation of universities and the resulting opportunities for students, researchers, academic staff and external stakeholders. In addition, he summarises the first six months of the project and the work done so far.

The podcast will be hosted by Podigee and soon it will be available on a range of popular platforms, including Spotify and Google. Look for this icon and stay tuned!
Nine months of FIT FORTHEM – the first overview

FIT FORTHEM launched in January 2021, with a series of intensive meetings in seven work packages nearly on a daily basis. The objective was to manage the joint work on tasks, deliverables and milestones.

In July, on the occasion of our six-month meeting of the General Assembly (GA), we made our first assessment. What had been planned? What has been done? What was successful? What went wrong?

The External Advisory Board members, who participated in the GA, confirmed our hunch that many actions had really worked out well, and that our start-up phase was highly successful. Below are some facts and figures that illustrate what we have done:

- **Approximately 80 person months** have been spent on work for FIT FORTHEM already.
- **Approximately 120 hours** have been spent by core team members in virtual work package meetings and work package leader meetings, as well as on FORTHEM – FIT FORTHEM joint activities.
- **6 local focus group meetings** (and numerous interviews) have been organized to analyse the partner universities’ practices in (a) internationalisation of research, (b) open science, (c) human resources, (d) science communication, and (e) co-creation of knowledge with external stakeholders.
- **3 matchmaking workshops** for FORTHEM Labs were organized to connect with university-external actors: (a) Science as a Civic Skill – Citizen Science in schools; (b) Digital Transformation in Societies; (c) Experiencing Faces of Europe.
- A **workshop series** dedicated to better intercultural understanding and to professionalisation in research and research management had been planned along with 2 events organised by JGU and UNIPA already; there are more to come in autumn.
- One informal meeting with the regional representations to the EU in Brussels in May and one jointly organised online event in September with **120 participants** on “Horizon Europe, What’s in it for the European University Networks?” with interventions from EU officials. These are the first results of **7 Commitment Letters** signed by regional representations to support FORTHEM.
- **13 key documents** have been prepared and submitted to the European Commission. Among them are several highly important documents, such as as Dissemination and Communication Plans that include our social media strategy, the Networking and Membership Agenda, the SWOT Analysis of Alliance Research and Innovation Capacities, and the compilation of Partners’ Priorities for EU-funding.
- **Over 300 people** have been involved in FIT FORTHEM activities at our institutions, as well as a number of externals who have participated in our online events, workshops or discussions.
- A network of **experts grouped in 12 thematic areas** related to FIT FORTHEM has been established. They are going to support the core activities within the project; however they can also set up mutual exchanges to facilitate better understanding of common practices and barriers to cooperation. All the experts met once during a virtual joint kick-off meeting in June 2021.

In addition, FIT FORTHEM has found its home on the FORTHEM website, and constantly contributes to the activities and to the visibility of FORTHEM by adding its own posts and entries to the FORTHEM blog and events calendar. It increases mobility and collaboration between the partners by setting up tandems and additional thematic working groups.

Author: Nicole Birkle, FIT FORTHEM managing coordinator
Get connected! A Call for tandems and working groups

Working together in an international and European environment can be very productive and stimulating if there is awareness of the institutional and cultural differences and how to bridge them.

And what better way is there to promote understanding of how things work in other organisations and countries than mutual exchange with your international colleagues?

By forming trans-sectoral and trans-institutional tandems and working groups of experts in the same or complementary fields, for example, in research and innovation management, we can build a strong and resilient network to face upcoming challenges in future.

The FIT FORTHEm team offers a support service to assist the formation of transnational tandems and working groups. If you are looking for a tandem-partner or if you want to offer a job shadowing opportunity, please contact us by writing to fitforthem@uni-mainz.de

Silvana Di Bono (UNIPA) describes her tandem with Nicole Birkle (JGU), which culminated in a recent visit to Mainz: “The staff training week in Mainz at JGU was extremely useful and fascinating and allowed me to talk with a number of colleagues performing similar tasks and with others committed to complementary activities.

I had the chance to present the research support services at UNIPA to my hosts and compare our experiences. The academic environment was quite stimulating, I have learned a lot and developed ideas for the forthcoming steps.”

Target groups for the call are project managers, Heads of departments, core facilities, research infrastructure or international offices at one of the FORTHEm partner organizations, and researchers interested in R&I activities. Stakeholders in industry or society who want to gain a better understanding of work processes and the way of thinking of their international partners, as well as students that are e.g. looking for a chance to polish their language skills and experience the European spirit, are also welcome.

Groups/tandems should be active for at least 6 months. Staff members may apply for ERASMUS+ short term mobility funds. Find out more on how to arrange a tandem or a working group.
Physical meetings in Jyväskylä

After a long period of online meetings, University of Jyväskylä was very happy to welcome some live visitors in September 2021.

Four experts from the University of Bourgogne participated in the Staff week for language teachers, organized by the Center for Multilingual Academic Communication - Movi. Vice-rector Grégory Wegmann, Professor Alexander Frame, Dr. Frédérique Drevey and Dr. Pierre Ferrey participated in the Staff Week and also met several colleagues of the University of Jyväskylä during their 3-day visit.

In addition, JYU was pleased to welcome Arnis Voitkans to discuss the details of Digital Academy. Merja Laamanen and Jussi Talaskivi hosted this visit, and it was a joy for all three of them to be able to meet in person.

It goes without saying that live meetings are one of the key elements in strategic and intensive collaboration. For FORTHEM Alliance especially, the “new normal” is going to be really important, because most of time together has been defined by the covid-19. We are truly looking forward to the increasing possibilities to meet each other in the real life.
Upcoming Activities

- **Erasmus Days 2021**
  To join Erasmus Days 2021, the FORTHEM Alliance proposes to students and staff the created FORTHEM QUIZ “Experiencing Europe”. It consists of two parts: the first one - questions with possible one answer out of the several proposed, the second one – open questions where you are asked to give a more detailed answer! The most interesting answers to the open questions will be published within the FORTHEM Alliance web page and social media.
  You can find the Quiz [here](#).

- **Speed Dating in Social Sciences 3.11**
  Registration link available [here](#)!

---

**FORTHEM partner universities**

- Johannes Gutenberg University of Mainz (Johannes Gutenberg-Universität Mainz), Germany
- University of Burgundy (Université de Bourgogne), France
- University of Jyväskylä (Jyväskylän yliopisto), Finland
- University of Opole (Uniwersytet Opolski), Poland
- University of Palermo (Università degli Studi di Palermo), Italy
- University of Latvia (Latvijas Universitāte), Latvia
- University of Valencia (Universitat de Valencia), Spain

---

With the support of the Erasmus+ Programme of the European Union

---

[@forthemalliance](#)
[@forthem-alliance](#)
[@forthem_alliance](#)
[@forthemalliance](#)
[www.forthem-alliance.eu](#)