CIVIS HUBS

An overview of the first phase of CIVIS

CIVIS – a European Civic University

Erasmus+: European Universities
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What are the CIVIS Hubs?

CIVIS starts its activities in 2019 with everything to be done but with a clear direction. As stated in its joint mission statement, the main objective was "to unite efforts and experiences to develop an Alliance with strong links to their local social and geographical environments and an orientation toward global challenges". This is the framework that explains the creation of 5 interdisciplinary thematic Hubs, each with its own thematic focus and coordinated by different partner universities.

CIVIS Hubs are "academic collaboration spaces" to develop multinational and multi-disciplinary educational offers. Each of them is linked to one vital challenge facing our societies and our world: Climate, Environment Energy; Society, Culture Heritage; Health; Cities, Territories, Mobility; and Digital and Technological Transformation. In other words, it is where academics from across the CIVIS Alliance meet to develop collaborative, challenge-based educational opportunities, everything from standalone courses to full programs.

But what does it mean in concrete terms? Four elements must be highlighted:

1) The CIVIS Hubs are governed by representative councils of academics from all member universities, but **their activities are bottom-up and open to participation** from teachers and researchers across the Alliance

2) They develop concrete **challenge-based** educational offerings both in the short run and long run, including a range from webinars and seminars to full degree programmes

3) By involving **three or more CIVIS universities** in the development of any activity, they promote a cross-cultural and interdisciplinary educational approach

4) They often work together with **local stakeholders** and other partners outside university

The growing collaboration with our **6 African strategic partner universities** should be finally mentioned as a backbone of the CIVIS educational project, as they will be active actors of joint courses and programmes developed within the Alliance[1].

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[1] Makerere University (Uganda), Eduardo Mondlane University (Mozambique), Université Hassan II de Casablanca (Morocco), University of Sfax (Tunisia), Université Cheikh Anta Diop de Dakar (Senegal) and University of Witwatersrand of Johannesburg (South Africa)

A multidisciplinary perspective

CIVIS Hubs support academics willing to contribute to tackle these challenges together with other European colleagues and involve respective staff, faculty and researchers of all member universities to work in **multidisciplinary teams to develop joint degrees, educational programs and research projects, using innovative pedagogies**. During the first phase of CIVIS Alliance, Hubs developed a 'surge' of collaborations, which will be strategized during the consolidation phase beginning on October 2022.

The added value of being part of CIVIS Hubs means being included in nests to innovative educational programs linked to research and innovation, address issues from a multidisciplinary and complementary perspective, develop high-level and multidisciplinary research collaborations. CIVIS Hubs provide students access to a network of motivated lecturers and researchers from CIVIS universities ready to revolutionize the current higher education system and contribute to our societal challenges.

Developing challenge-driven study programmes around the UN sustainable development goals provides our students with new skills and knowledge, and support their entrepreneurial mind-set to better tackle society's biggest challenges locally and globally. During the last 3 years, and despite the difficulties encountered, the CIVIS Hubs have proven to be enormously fruitful: **more than 100 educational opportunities were developed within the Hubs so far**.

How did we get there?

It was not an easy road. All five Hubs were part of the initial CIVIS proposal, but we only committed to setting up three in our first phase. Building collaborative educational programs across so many universities is a hugely complex task. It requires a process of exploration, discovery and innovation which is as much about attitude as it is about process. Building the CIVIS Hubs took the courage to experiment, to recognise that some experiments will fail, and to learn from both failures and successes.

Innovation requires time. It can be fostered but not forced and it cannot be put on a fixed schedule. **True innovation which leads to meaningful change requires that existing structures and processes are open to modification and improvement** – and sometimes even elimination.

Taking risks, learning to fail and changing established systems. These are all approaches that will face hurdles, barriers and setbacks. But these challenges can reveal the positive potential

that was always there or bring forth inspiring new solutions. This is what we have leant from establishing our CIVIS Hubs.

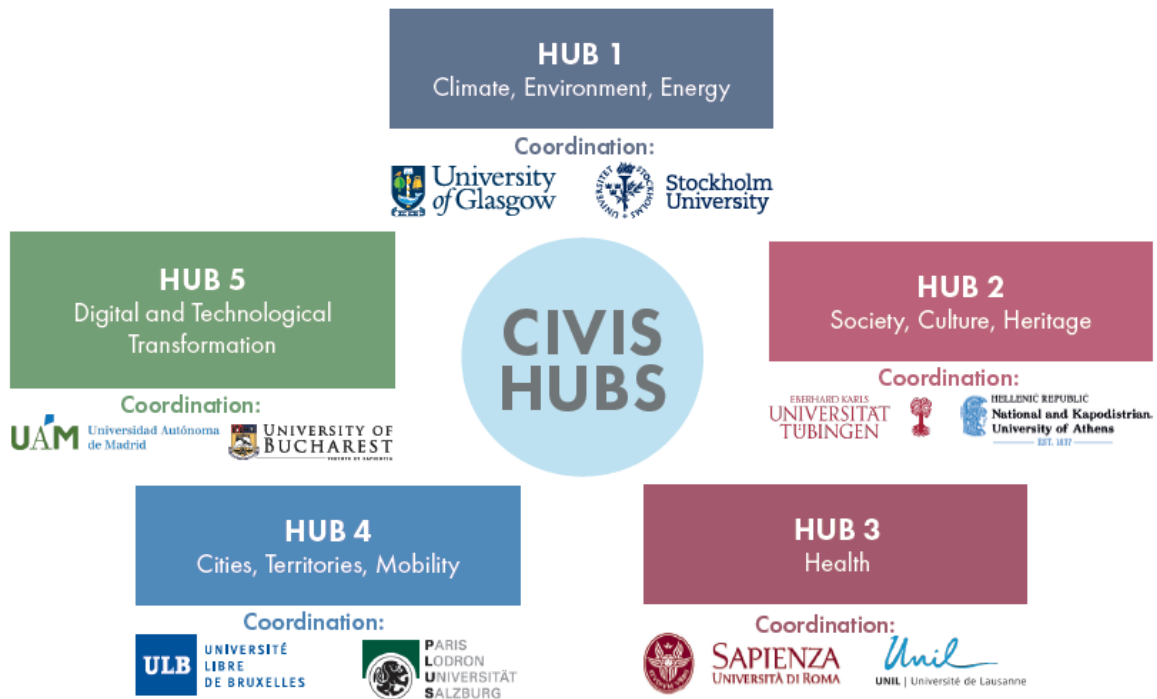Three years later, **all five Hubs are already established and working!**

Figure 1: The 5 CIVIS Hubs

The 5 CIVIS Hubs

All Hubs are driven by the same principle: to offer joint study programmes at the CIVIS member universities and foster multidisciplinary research projects through innovative pedagogies. Some common principles were established in order to ensure the active participation of all universities in the construction of the CIVIS educational offer:

- Each Hub is represented by a Hub council which is **chaired or co-chaired by one or two CIVIS universities**
- **All universities are represented in all Hub councils** with 1 to 3 members
- **Student and stakeholder representatives are included** in the Hub Council membership
- **Regular meetings are organized** by each Hub in order to define the strategy of the group, evaluate calls and proposals, mobilize resources and coordinate academic activities.

However, not all topics require the same academic organization. Therefore, each Hub defined a different way of working as a team, in order to adapt its educational offer to the particular challenge it faces.

Hub "Climate, Environment and Energy"

During the first two years of CIVIS, the main objective of the Hubs was to create a network of academics with similar interests but from different disciplines. To this end, project coordinators were encouraged to develop training activities in coordination with at least 3 partner universities. As a result, in the Hub Climate, environment and energy **24 activities** were launched in different formats: courses, summer schools, MOOCs…

Based on the expertise activated during these first years, the Hub proposed to develop **a Joint Master's in** *Climate, Environment and Energy*. To this end, a transdisciplinary team was created in order to start developing the structure of the Master, the contents, the pedagogical approaches and an administrative framework.

In the spirit of creating challenge-based education, the vision for this program is for scholars with a solid disciplinary background in either natural sciences, social sciences, law, or humanities to become transdisciplinary scholars capable of taking on the climate and ecological crisis. **This programme will offer something that has never been done in the field, as it will be open to students with a bachelor's degree in any subject**. The reason is double. On one side, because of accessibility reasons. This will allow students from scientific and non-scientific disciplines (perhaps less familiar with the subject) to access cutting-edge academic content on climate change, a challenge that affects us all equally as a society. On the other side, having students from different academic perspectives will benefit from a student-based approach following the principle that common challenges such us climate crisis require collective responses.

Hub "Society, Culture, Heritage"

This Hub, launched in October 2020, was the only Hub in CIVIS 1 **co-chaired by academics from two universities**, the Eberhard Karls University of Tübingen and the National and Kapodistrian University of Athens, who rotated in chairing the Hub[2].

In order to better define the perimeter of the Hub, five transdisciplinary "challenge-based" focus areas were identified:

- Mediterranean Studies: Diachronic and Intercultural Perspectives
- Heritage and Global Epistemologies
- Diverse Societies, Inequality and Social Change
- Multicultural and Multilingual Communication and Education

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[2] This idea, which was aimed at collegial work by universities, proved to be extremely useful, and will be therefore imitated by the rest of the Hubs during the second phase of CIVIS.

- Law, Norms, Ethics and Political Institutions.

At the end of the first three years, the **26 projects** that emerged from this Hub include online and blended courses, summer schools, and in person and online workshops of all academic levels, all for bachelor, master and Phd students.

Two Pilot MA projects were conceived during CIVIS 1 and will developed and implemented during the next four years:

1) *Master in Ancient Mediterranean Pottery Studies (MAMPS): From Excavations to Museums*, coordinated by Université Libre de Bruxelles, the National and Kapodistrian University of Athens and the Eberhard Karls University of Tübingen
2) *Palaeolithic Archaeology Master of Science (ART-W)*, a joint master coordinated by Sapienza Universitá di Roma, Aix-Marseille Université, the Eberhard Karls University of Tübingen and the University of Witwatersrand of Johannesburg

As shown in the second example, in the next phase of CIVIS this Hub will focus on strengthening links with the African partners, as wells as with the Open Labs and external stakeholders, such as the CIVIS museums network. All with the objective of progressing in the co-creation of academic activities.

Hub "Health"

The Hub Health has proven to be an enormously productive group, since a total of **68 academic activities** were developed within this area, involving **more than 500 academics** in the activities. To do so, **18 health-related domains were established**:

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- Aging and geriatric medicine
- Anaesthesiology, pain management and critical care medicine
- Biochemistry and Genetics, medical biotechnologies, diagnostics, and gene therapy, bioinformatics
- Diagnostic imaging, biomedical engineering, robotics in medicine, new medical devices and digital Health
- Mental health, psychology, psychiatry, drug/alcohol addiction, eating disorders
- Cancer medicine, immunology and immunotherapies
- Cardiovascular diseases, diabetes and metabolic diseases
- Chronic Inflammatory and autoimmune diseases
- Endocrinology, urology, reproductive and sexual health
- Gastroenterology, hepatology and microbioresearch
- Health Economics and healthcare management

- Immunity, microbiology, infectious diseases, public health, environmental health
- Medical humanities and innovative pedagogies
- Neonate and Children Health
- Neurophysiology, Neuroscience and neurodegenerative diseases
- Nursing, physical medicine, rehabilitation, disabilities, anatomy, physiology and motor sciences
- Oral Health
- Pharmacy, pharmacology, nutrition, nanosciences and nanoformulations

For the next phase of CIVIS, three main axes have been identified: continue to develop activities focused on HUB 3 18 domains, develop more activities crossing Hub domains and fostering activities between CIVIS Hubs.

Regarding the long-term initiatives, two innovative pilot projects will be also developed:

1) A **programme on** *Working together to co-produce better health*, aiming to develop and transfer new practical knowledge for the promotion of interprofessional and new models of good practice for implementing or developing interprofessional education and practice
2) A **programme on** *Patient involvement in health and medicine*, gathering activities carried *out with* or *by* patients rather *than to, about,* or *for* them, actively involving them in shaping the goals, design, and evaluation of research, care, and healthcare by sharing their specific experience with a disease

Although the concrete form of these programmes is still to be defined, they will be framed by the innovative drive of the Hub, which for the second phase of CIVIS will broaden the 18 domains to areas more closely linked to the social sciences in order to adopt an even more integrative vision of Health.

Hub "Cities, Territories and Mobilities"

During this first period, the Hub Council conducted a mapping of relevant educational offer at the member universities, agreed on key priority themes for the Hub, and implemented two Calls for Projects (the first during spring/summer 2021, and the second during autumn/winter 2021). These calls, and the projects selected, provided a valuable opportunity to launch first interuniversity and interdisciplinary collaborations and to experiment on common topics important not only to the Hub Council members but also to all partner universities. At the end of the first phase the Hub Cities, territories and mobilities selected and developed **13 projects, some of which contained several educational activities**, have been developed.

For the next phase of CIVIS, the Hub Council members agreed to work collectively under an umbrella question: **How to make visible the invisibles (different publics, technologies, animals**

etc.) in participation processes / in cities / in territories? To further develop this question the Hub Council coordinated the development of 6 BIPs (Blended Intensive Programmes)[3] that will be open throughout 2023.

1. Circular economy in cities and territories
2. Fluxes in cities
3. Making Visible the Invisible: Giving voice to children, migrants and refugees for sustainable cities
4. Participatory tools for urban nature planning and management
5. Care, Agency, Repair, Engagement in Alternative Modern(c)ities (CARE)
6. Co-creating urban futures - citizen participation in local governance

Based on the experience of the Hub during the first phase of CIVIS and encouraged by the need to create bridges between the university and civil society, the future of the Hub will be framed by the broad thematic **"Making visible the invisibles in territories"**, which aims to develop **collaboration processes between civil society organizations, students and academics about citizen inclusion** in the policy cycle based on experimental methods.

Hub "Digital and technological transformation"

Although it was the last to be opened, the Hub Digital and Technological Transformation represents one of the main axes of CIVIS. Digital and technological transformations are a central feature of social contemporary processes that are unfolding at historically unprecedented speed, at global scope and at a time in which Europe and the world face critical challenges. It is part of CIVIS mission to actively participate in the conversation that shapes the response to these challenges and the work of this Hub should play a leading role in how Higher Education institutions define their own role for the future, as well as solutions to our changing world.

The Hub was officially born in August 2022 with the aim to reinforce the link between education and research by delivering research-based educational offerings with the aim of providing students and members of the CIVIS community with a basic understanding of **digitalization processes and technological transformations, irrespective of their disciplinary background and course of studies**.

Even most of the activities are still to be developed, this Hub sets as an **objective to produce coherent educational streams that explore and advance the implementation of digital technologies in different areas of life** (work, commerce, education, governance, etc.). It will also promote activities that help us deepen our understanding of how digital technologies are incorporated into cultural processes and transformations, including creative work, communication, social relations, our unfolding life-course, etc. The Hub should also be a space

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that facilitates a "critical gaze" on the social impact of digital technologies and transformations in society. In that sense, the Hub should monitor how digital technologies impact on personal liberties, civil rights, lead to new inequalities or pose challenges to tolerance and conviviality. In short, the Hub should provide an **infrastructure for ethical oversight and discussion of the social challenges posed by digital and technological transformations**.

What comes next?

As CIVIS enters a new phase of its development, we can be proud that the CIVIS Hubs have already come a long way in a short time. Still, there are some things that we would have liked to accomplish but did not yet manage. And there are some things we have learned along our journey that we want to note and share.

Here are our top recommendations for the future of the CIVIS Hubs:

- Hub councils should have more opportunities to exchange experiences and best practices.

- All of the Hubs encounter similar hurdles as they develop their educational programs, and we should build in ways to **share best practice and solutions** to these among the Hubs

- Push ahead with our ambition to **combine courses into full CIVIS educational programmes**

- Recognise that this will require both time and resources. **Commit for the long-term**

- Give local community stakeholders and African partner universities a great role in the development of our educational programs

- We are already working towards this goal, but we should **embed the African partners in the Hub** and mobilise the potential of connections with the CIVIS Open Labs