

*The process of building European university alliances: a rhizomatic analysis of the European Universities Initiative*

Antonin Charret, University of Oxford

Centre for Global Higher Education - December 2022



# The process of building European university alliances: *a rhizomatic analysis of the European Universities Initiative*

Charret, A., Chankseliani, M. The process of building European university alliances: a rhizomatic analysis of the European Universities Initiative. *High Educ* (2022).  
<https://doi.org/10.1007/s10734-022-00898-6>

# European Universities: In the Beginning

**‘I believe we should create European Universities – a network of universities across Europe with programs that have all their students study abroad and take classes in at least two languages. These European Universities will also be drivers of educational innovation and the quest for excellence. We should set for ourselves the goal of creating at least 20 of them by 2024. However, we must begin setting up the first of these universities as early as the next academic year, with real European semesters and real European diplomas.’**

E. Macron, Speech on a new initiative for Europe, 2017





# Obstacles towards transnational cooperation

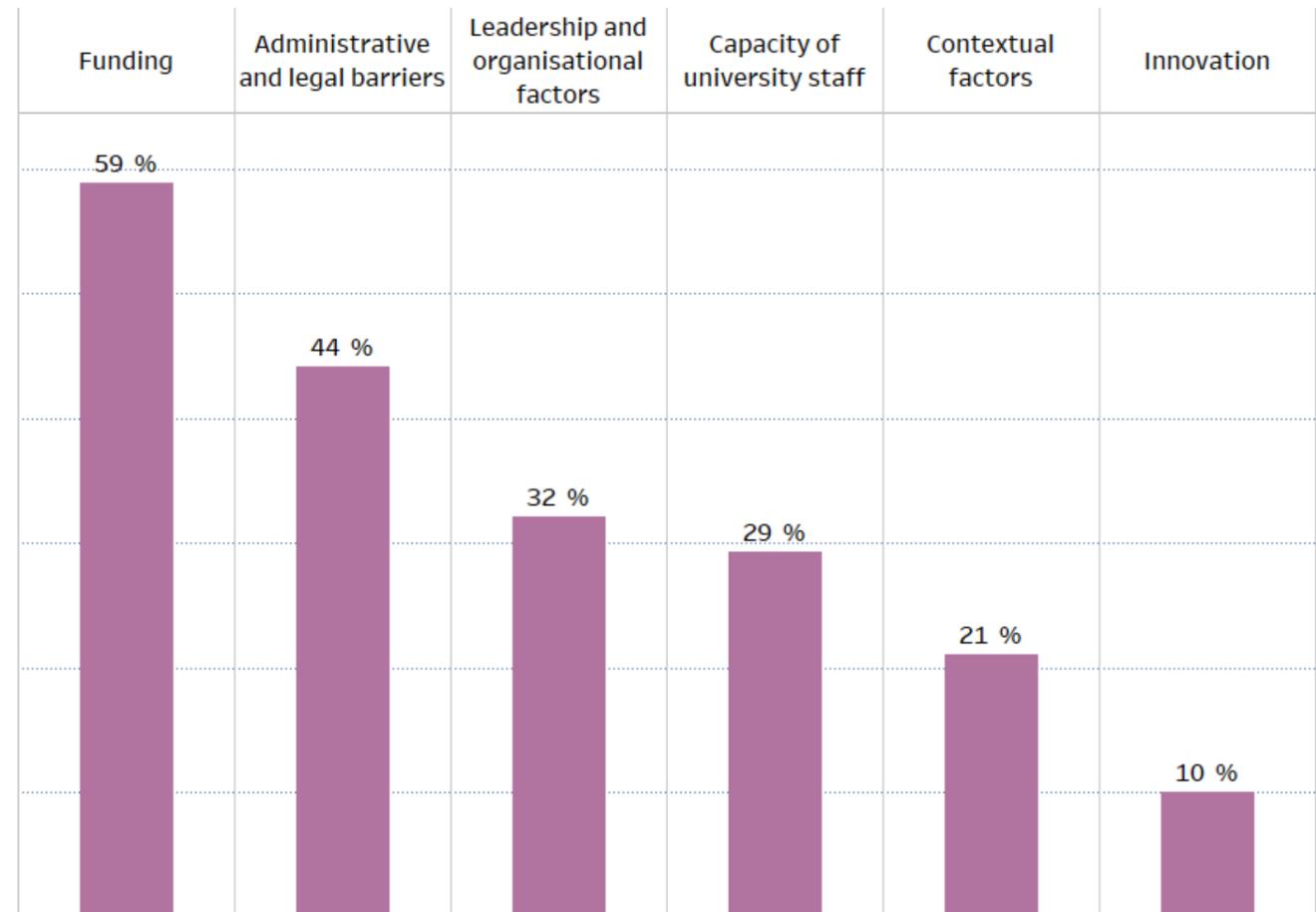
JRC report on the state of transnational cooperation

Issues with legal barriers despite **Bologna Tools**:

Harmonization of degree structures

ECTS – European Credit Transfer System

European Approach for Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes



Source: JRC, Survey "Mapping of transnational collaborative partnerships", 2018

# European Universities Initiative

Seeks to strengthen:

- International visibility and competitiveness of European HEIs
- European culture, identity and solidarity
- Inter-institutional collaboration

Has the ambition of:

- Transforming the higher education landscape in the EU
- Creating European Universities



*The process of building European university alliances: a rhizomatic analysis of the European Universities Initiative*

Antonin Charret, University of Oxford

Centre for Global Higher Education - December 2022



# European Universities

What does the European Commission mean by  
'European Universities'?

# What do the Treaties say?

Education is only a **SUPPORTING COMPETENCE**

The Community shall contribute to the development of quality education by:

— **Encouraging** cooperation between Member States and, if necessary, by **supporting** and **supplementing** their action, while **fully respecting the responsibility of the Member States for the content of teaching and the organization of education systems and their cultural and linguistic diversity**

*- Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union*



# European Universities?

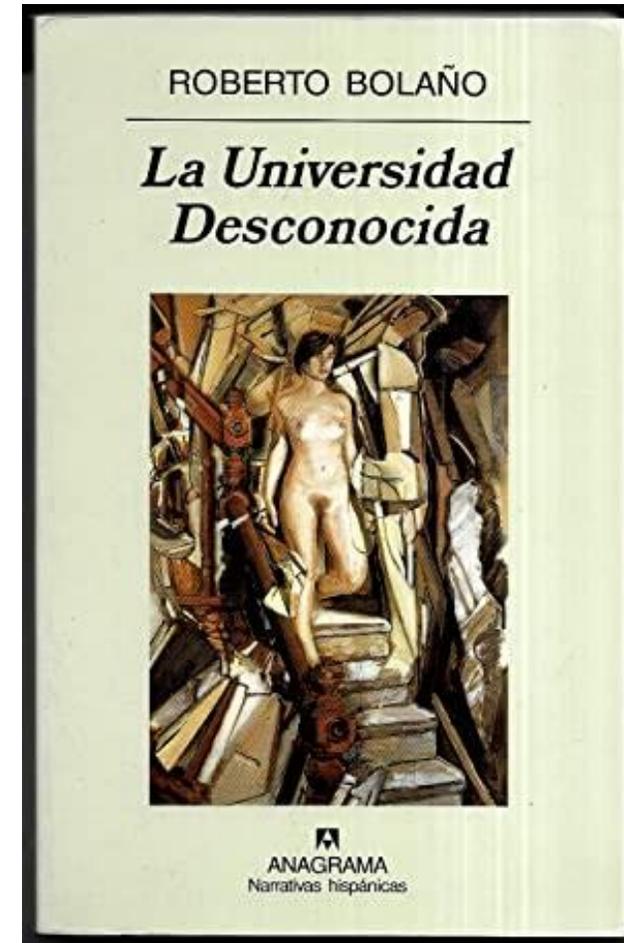
Debates on the formation of European Universities can be traced back to the origin of the European Community and the signature of the treaties of Rome

European Universities are: **‘Bottom-up networks of universities’**; **‘Transnational alliances’**; **‘Collaborative partnerships’** made up of 4 to 12 HEIs from the North, South, East and West of the European Union (and participating Erasmus+ and Horizon 2020 countries)

Two pilot phases:

- 41 alliances
- 284 higher education institutions
- Budget: €5 millions Erasmus+ and €2 million Horizon 2020

Third Pilot Phase – Results announced in July 2022





# European Universities



# Partnerships? Networks? Alliances!

Transnational collaborative partnerships being formed as part of the EUI do not correspond to a **‘one model fits all’** system.

European Commission promotes both pilot phases as **bottom-up processes**. ‘European Universities’ could vary in form, purposes and arise from different histories.

University alliances are to act as **‘test-beds’** and experiment what the universities of the future will look like (Council of the European Union, 2021)





# What is a Rhizome?

A Rhizome is found in the natural world

It is 'the thick stem of some plants, such as iris and mint, that grows along or under the ground and has roots and stems growing from it'

# What is a rhizome?



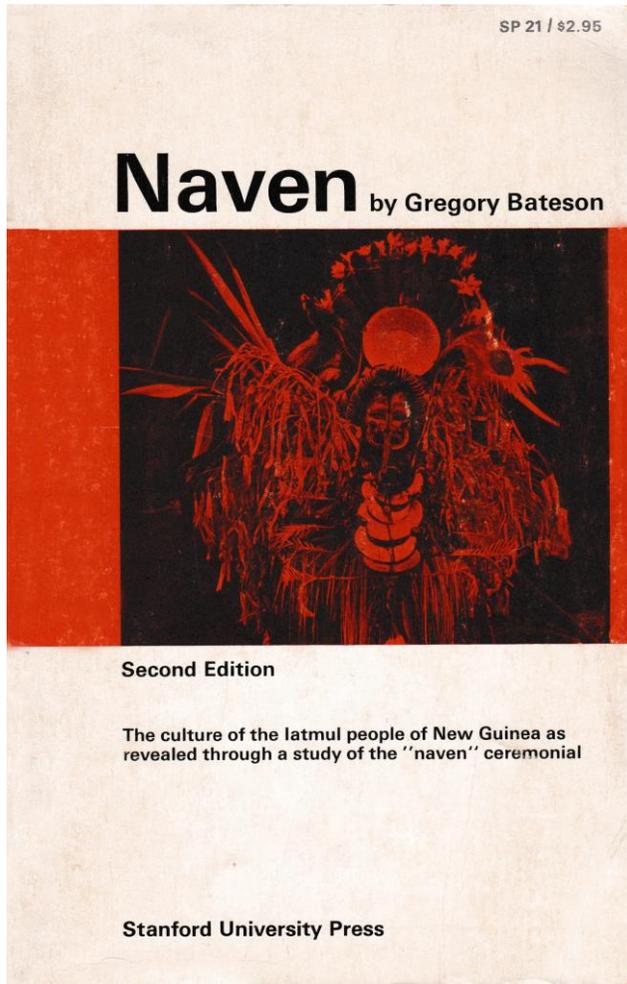


# What is a rhizome?

A philosophical concept created by  
Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari

‘Thinking about the world with the world’

# Iatmul social structures as ... Rhizomes



‘The natives see their community, not as a closed system, but as an infinitely proliferating and ramifying stock. A clan will grow big and it will subdivide; a village will grow big and it will send out colonies. The idea that a community is closed is probably incompatible with this idea of it as something which continually divides and sends out offspring ‘like the rhizome of a lotus’.

*(Bateson, 1936, p. 249)*

These series of divisions and expansions create novel trajectories...

# Rhizomes ... secret(s) beyond the door

In the work of Kafka 'the choice of entrance is not important. The characters can enter by any point whatsoever; none matters more than another, and no entrance is more privileged even if it seems an impasse, a tight passage, a siphon. We will be trying only to discover what other points our entrance connects to, what crossroads and galleries one passes through to link two points, what the **map** of the rhizome is and how the **map** is modified if one enters by another point.'

*(Deleuze & Guattari, 1986, p. 3*

*Secret Beyond the Door (Lang, 1947)*



# Secret(s) beyond the door: cartographies



Henricus Martellus/Lazarus Project / Megavision / Rit / Emel,  
Courtesy Of The Beinecke Library, Yale University

The rhizome is not a finite cartography, it is situated ‘in the middle’ of a pre-existing cartography and an entirely new one in the making.

the practice of cartography is led through imagination and the imaginary (Antonioli, 2010)

Think of Christopher Columbus producing a map imagining new routes to India prior to embarking on his journey. By imagining these new routes, Columbus is imagining the world. This representation constructs an image which is in no way a mimesis... a tracing. A cartography is not a ‘representation but a tool for experimentation and creation’ (Antonioli, 2010, p. 4)

# Six principles of the rhizome

## 1. introduction : Rhizome



Nous avons écrit *l'Anti-Ceipe* à deux. Comme chacun de nous était plusieurs, ça faisait déjà beaucoup de monde. Ici nous avons utilisé tout ce qui nous approchait, le plus proche et le plus lointain. Nous avons distribué d'habiles pseudonymes, pour rendre méconnaissable. Pourquoi avons-nous gardé nos noms ? Par habitude, uniquement par habitude. Pour nous rendre méconnaissables à notre tour. Pour rendre imperceptible, non pas nous-mêmes, mais ce qui nous fait agir, éprouver ou penser. Et puis parce qu'il est agréable de parler comme tout le monde, et de dire le soleil se lève, quand tout le monde sait que c'est une manière de parler. Non pas en arriver au point où l'on ne dit plus je, mais au point où ça n'a plus aucune importance de dire ou de ne pas dire je. Nous ne sommes plus nous-mêmes. Chacun connaîtra les siens. Nous avons été aidés, aspirés, multipliés.

Un livre n'a pas d'objet ni de sujet, il est fait de matières diversement formées, de dates et de vitesses très différentes. Dès qu'on attribue le livre à un sujet, on néglige ce travail des matières, et l'extériorité de leurs relations. On fabrique un bon Dieu pour des mouvements géologiques. Dans un livre comme dans toute chose, il y a des lignes d'articulation ou de segmentarité, des strates, des territorialités ; mais aussi des lignes de fuite,

Connection  
Heterogeneity  
Multiplicity  
Asignifying rupture  
Cartography  
Decalcomania



# Connection & Heterogeneity

- Deleuze and Guattari present the rhizome as an ‘alliance, uniquely alliance (...) the fabric of the rhizome is the conjunction, “and. . . and.. . and. . .” (Deleuze & Guattari, 1988, p. 25).
- A rhizome can be composed of an infinite number of components that are meshed without relying on any sense of hierarchy.
- What counts is to continuously connect one point to the next. It perpetually draws new connections, collaborations, partnerships.
- A rhizome can be composed of people, institutions, concepts or physical spaces.



# Connection & Heterogeneity and EUI

A rhizome can be composed of heterogeneous components:

People, institutions, concepts or physical spaces.

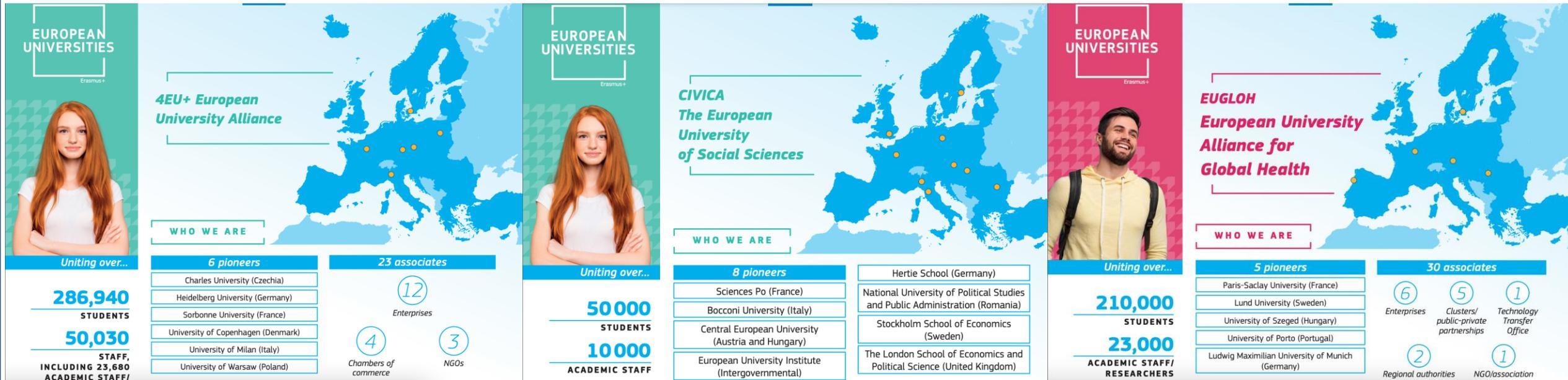
An alliance is composed of heterogeneous components :

Students, academics, higher education institutions, EU institutions, national governments, virtual and physical spaces.

The interaction between these heterogeneous components that make up an EUI alliance. The alliances are also each different and interconnected.



# Connection & Heterogeneity and EUI





# Assignifying Rupture → Assignifying Rupture and EUI

- The principle of ‘assignifying rupture’, refers to how the rhizome is capable of being ‘broken, shattered at a given spot, but it will start up again on one of its old lines, or on new lines. (...) These lines always tie back to one another’ (Deleuze & Guattari, 1988, p. 25).
- Deleuze and Guattari define the rhizome as having ‘no beginning or end; it is always in the middle, between things, interbeing, intermezzo’(Deleuze & Guattari, 1988, p. 25).

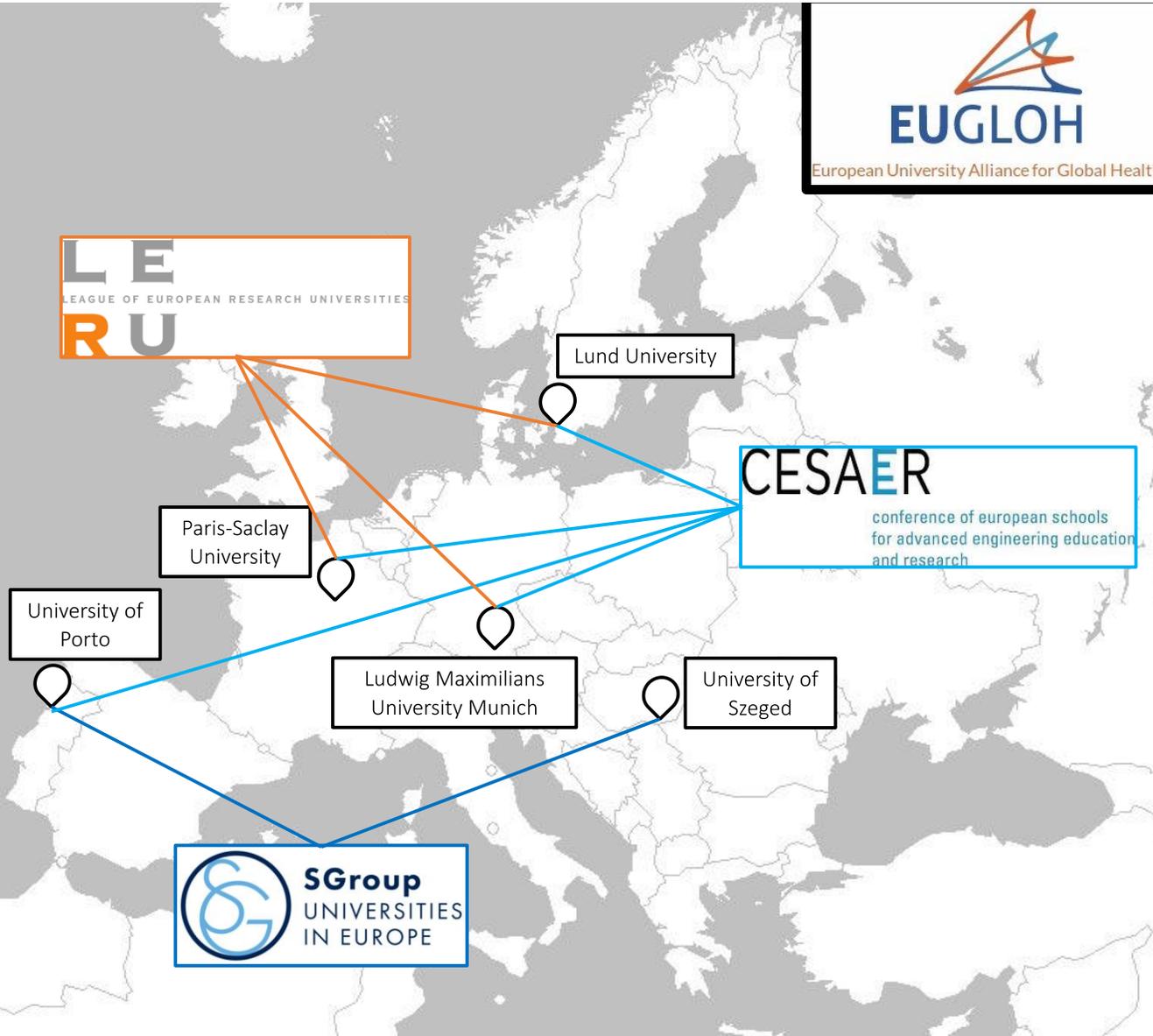
**Each alliance is connected to both pre-existing structures and entirely new ones**



# Previous Collaborations and Partnerships

- The European Universities Initiative:
  - comes **after previous partnerships**
  - **Comes before** the formation of novel networks that will be the European Universities.
- When discussing the origin of the alliances with participants, we discovered that most of them stemmed from previous collaborations:
  - Transnational University Networks
  - University-to-University partnerships
  - Research partnerships
  - Links between individual academics

Out of the 31 alliances interviewed – **15 came from past Networks**  
– **16 came from past Bilateral links**



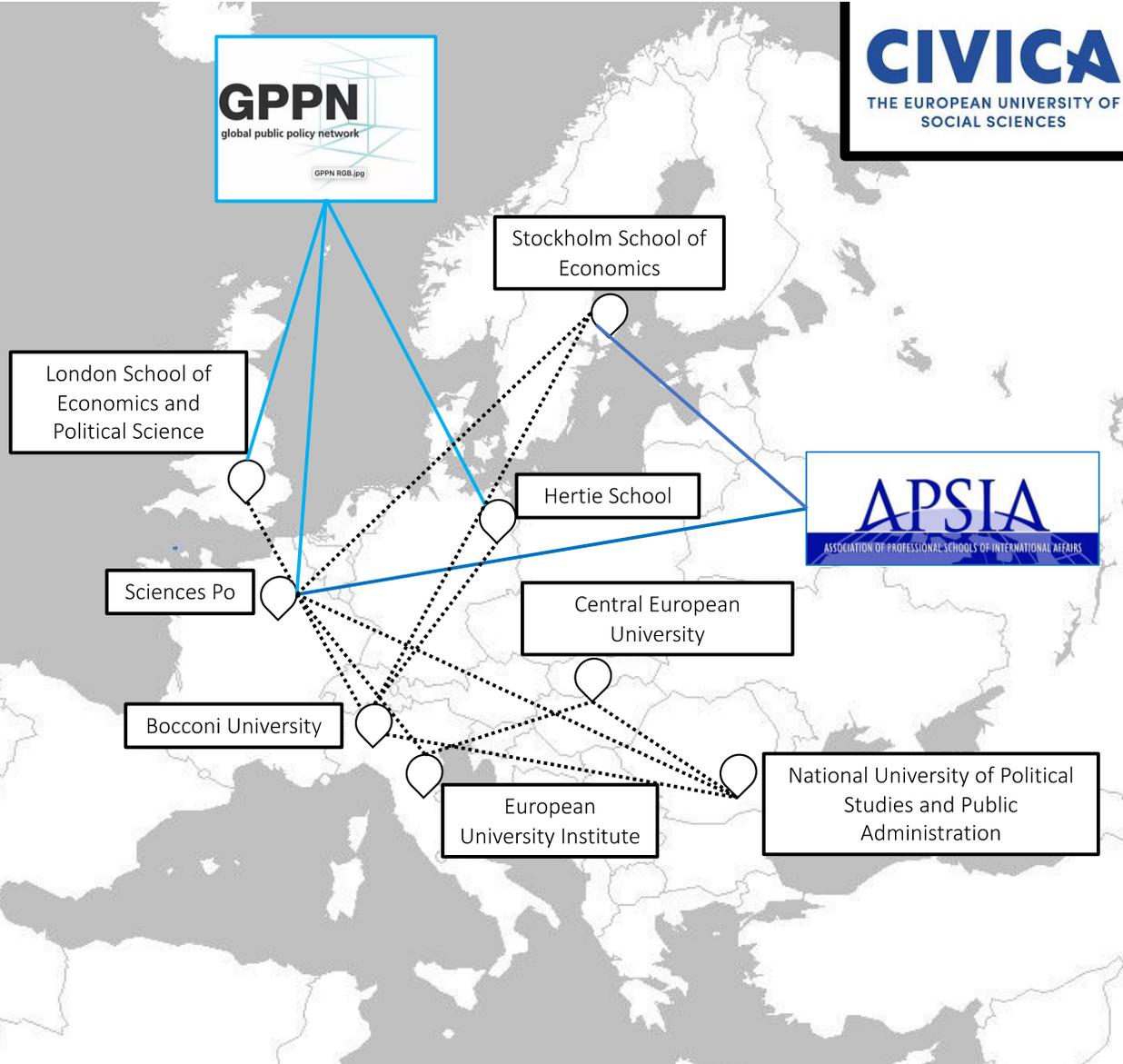
### *EUGLOH Alliance: Membership in Transnational University Networks*

- Interviewees highlighted the importance of participation in the League of European Research Universities and the Conference of European Schools for Advances Engineering Education and Research
- Analysis of the international strategy and past partnerships of members of the alliance revealed the participation in the Sgroup (formally known as Santander Group of Universities)

**CIVICA**  
THE EUROPEAN UNIVERSITY OF  
SOCIAL SCIENCES

**GPPN**  
global public policy network  
GPPN RGB.jpg

**APSIA**  
ASSOCIATION OF PROFESSIONAL SCHOOLS OF INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS



### *CIVICA Alliance: University-to-university Partnerships and Membership in Transnational University Networks*

- interviews and EUI related documents stressed the importance of previous collaborations such as joint degrees, exchange programmes, or staff exchanges
- Our research did reveal common membership in transnational higher education organisations such as the Global Public Policy Network (GPPN) or the Association of Professional Schools of International Affairs (APSIA).



# Multiplicity



# Multiplicity and EUI

- A rhizome is made up of multiplicities: lines rather of points (Deleuze & Guattari, 1988).
- Network are made up of a series of nodes and edges. The lines of a rhizome are not edges connecting node A to node B. Multiplicities are the routes taken by all of the components found within a rhizome.
- A rhizomatic analysis offers the possibility to explore the trajectories being used and how they function. Multiplicities are the 'structure of spaces of possibilities' (De Landa, 2002, p.3).

How is an alliance constructed by being articulated around different objectives ?

# New instruments or reinforcing existing ones?



The Commission, Member States, the alliances and participating HEIs all agree that the Bologna tools – such as the European Approach to Degree Accreditation - are not fully implemented in most participating countries

Alliances that have attempted to set up a joint degree told me they did not have a single accreditation agency that was willing to implement the European approach and go ahead with the degree

The Commission, with the support of the Commission have therefore suggested the cration of two new instruments:

- A **legal statute for the alliances**
- A **European Degree Label**

# What is a European Degree Label?

Different perspectives on what a **European Degree Label** could:

Should it involve the **mobility** of students in multiple HEIs of the alliance?

Should it certify students received classes **from academics from all over the alliance** (without necessarily having to leave their home institution)?

Should the label reflect **Quality** or **Europeanness**?

Is it a **hunting tool** to attract non-European/international students and facilitate access to the European labour market?

Other alliances do not see degrees as the future of HE and are most focused on the development of **micro-credentials**?



# A legal entity for these European Universities?

The alliances do not currently possess the capacity to deliver degrees, mutualize resources and personnel, directly receive funding

Alliances have been experimenting with existing national legal frameworks:

- Foundations under Dutch Law
- Associations under Belgian Law
- Associations under German Law

Possible existing EU legal instruments:

- **European Economic Interest Group**
- **European Grouping of Territorial Cooperation**





# Cartography



# Cartography and EU

- The rhizome is a 'map' in which many itineraries, or multiplicities, are possible to connect heterogeneous components
- The map needs to be constructed as a fresh surface upon which all the different heterogeneous components of the rhizome can create their connections, express their multiplicities, and display their origin
- The map does not mimic anything else. A rhizome is different to 'the graphic arts, drawing, or photography, unlike tracings, the rhizome pertains to a map that must be produced, constructed, a map that is always detachable, connectable, reversible, modifiable, and has multiple entryways' (Deleuze & Guattari, 1988, p. 21).

How does each alliance reveal a process of experimentation in its construction ?



# Decalcomania



# Decalcomania and EUI

- The mania of calques – tracings
- Deleuze and Guattari reject dichotomies`
- Cartographies and tracings are not completely opposite and can exist in a state of complementarity.
- Although the authors strongly advocate for maps to be built, they admit that rhizomes might contain some elements of tracings, with ‘knots of arborescence in rhizomes, and rhizomatic offshoots in roots’ (Deleuze & Guattari, 1988, p. 20).

How are the alliances creating models that could be reproduced ?

# Questions ???



# Pillars of the European Education Area

Difference between the **EHEA** and the higher education dimension of the **EEA**?

The EEA is:

- An EU initiative focused on core European values and identities
- Dedicated to institutional integration, going beyond project collaboration.

It could give EU institutions the potential to become more involved in (higher) education issues.



# What do Member States Think ?

## A blend of support ... and caution

Interviewed ministerial staff from France, Germany, Spain, Netherlands, Finland, Lithuania, Romania, Italy

Some member states are more focused on quality and excellence whereas others are focused on inclusivity

All MS agree that they would like to be more consulted by the European Commission, particularly when it offers proposals for a council recommendation that may lead to an evolution/modification of national legislation

