

THIRD STRATEGIC NOTE: LIFE CYCLE AND SUSTAINABILITY OF THE EUTOPIA CONNECTED COMMUNITIES

1 INTRODUCTION AND CONTEXT

This is the third, in a series of four, strategic reflections on the developments of the EUTOPIA educational model during the 2019-2022 pilot phase. It comes at an important moment for the alliance as it coincides with the third and last selection round of the EUTOPIA learning units that are to become the spill of cross campus connected learning and knowledge communities. The pilot communities of the third round will also open up to the new members of the enlarged EUTOPIA alliance and the latter will be invited to join the connected activities they are interested in.

At the same time, the current policy environment and the upcoming European university call, create an opportunity for consolidating our earlier efforts and for reflecting on the sustainability of the results of the EUTOPIA educational model. In this context, now that the communities emanating from the previous selection rounds (2019 and 2020) are developing deep connectedness, we gradually also start exploring the potential of new learning designs.

The rationale of this strategic note will enable us to reflect on our achievement and define the commitment and resources needed for supporting and motivating all actors involved in this innovative, and challenging, learning process.

Eutopia's Connected Learning Communities (CLC) are dynamic and thematically coherent spaces that bring together existing curriculum, research and placemaking activities. CLC enable the partner universities to capitalize on their potential for innovation and societal impact based on existing good practice. They provide the environment for connecting existing practice in all domains of activity.

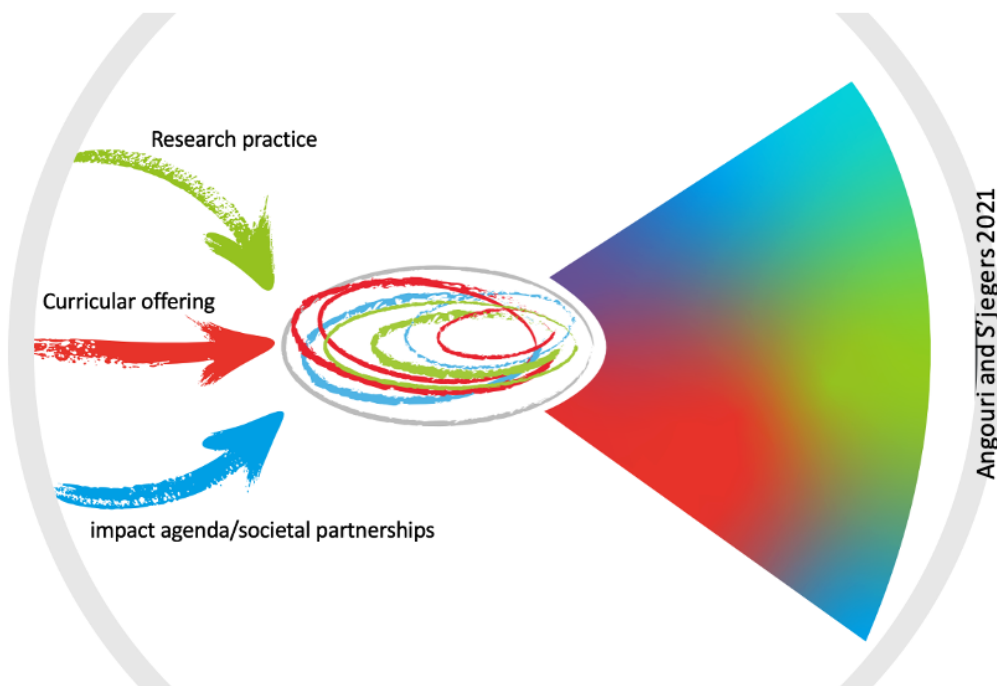


Fig1 CLCs amalgamation process

This note gives insight in the dynamics for building cross campus connectedness in the lifecycle of the communities and provides a framework for supporting the CLCs to reach their innovation potential.

2 LIFE CYCLE OF THE CONNECTED LEARNING COMMUNITIES

Drawing on the experience of the pilot, CLCs require a period 3 years from inception to integration. After that development period, CLCs do not cease to exist but their position in EUTOPIA changes; they move to an autonomous status and EUTOPIA partners should be in a position to integrate them as conduits for continued connectedness and innovation.

Sustainable CLCs are the result of a bottom-up process of identifying areas of thematic coherence and existing activities in learning, research and impact making in the home universities of the alliance. Their development comes in four stages:

- Selection and identification
- Exploration of shared resources
- Testing of cross campus activities
- Consolidation of value added

Stage 1: Selection and identification: **months 1 to 4.**

Academic staff and students involved in organically coherent and complementary teaching and learning, and research activities are identified by the curriculum team, education and research leads in EUTOPIA institutions. This process is predominantly based on self-selection of staff who are interested and motivated in expanding current practice through cross campus contacts with academic partners working on similar topics across EUTOPIA.

The topics are identified through a selection of existing curriculum components (units) on the criteria of:

1. Societal impact: learning and knowledge activities are challenge driven and include academic and societal partners (business, public or third sector) addressing the complex problems of our century. During the pilot, the thematic orientation of these units has been open and exploratory, the intention is to align the process with the thematic priorities of the alliance in the future.
2. Interdisciplinarity and Active learning: the power of EUTOPIA 's model lies in value added created through connectedness between and across peers in the alliance universities. This connectedness is essential to prepare students in becoming truly European citizens and to offer a European scale for knowledge co creation between our home universities. For realising these aims CLCs need to operate across disciplines and break up the institutional divides between education, research, place making and internationalization
3. Inclusive and Dynamic: the demographics and needs of future learners are changing rapidly and universities have to create flexible offerings to a wide range of higher educated people looking for update of their competences. CLCs need to reach out to stakeholders in society open to cooperate with EUTOPIA. Interest or experience in lifelong learning processes becomes increasingly important in selecting leads and partners who can create innovative ecosystems and cooperate with scientists and experts outside academia.

In this first stage, the identified groups carry the potential of forming a community, with a collective identity and commitment to a common orientation and goals. They are not a community yet. Some groups will grow connectors and find a pathway to connectedness, and some will not. This becomes apparent from Stage 2.

Stage 2. Exploration of community potential-establishing connectors through shared resources: **months 4 to 8.**

Academic staff selected for leading and taking part in a new community development process, establish contact and start sharing resources in learning, research and impact.

This takes the form of a series of meetings organized by the central EUTOPIA team; the central team also connects the groups with avenues to other tools and funding (Examples are: Young Leaders Academy, Pair PhD Programs, (Post) doctoral programs and Mobility for learners and researchers)

In parallel, the EUTOPIA central team connects the new groups with established CLCs to facilitate the transfer of best practices.

By the end of this phase, groups will be en route to form communities. These new communities will have made a first selection of cross campus activities to be tested in the upcoming academic year.

In the process of establishing connectors, existing practices start acquiring value through the process of interaction which enhances each partner's individual offering. A visual metaphor is provided in Fig. 2 representing the enhancement process of curriculum units.

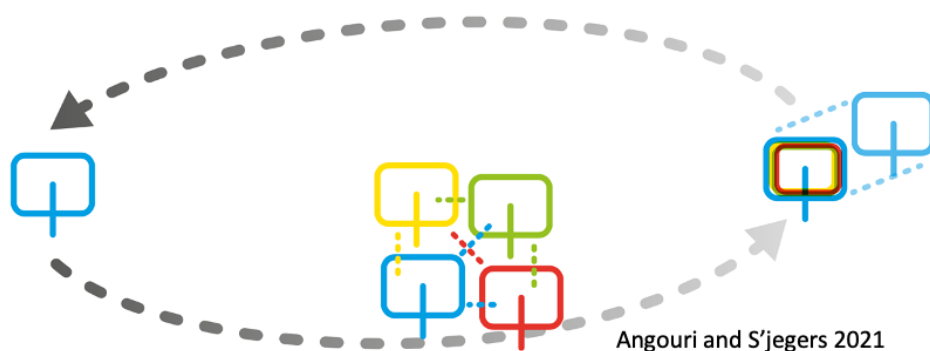


Fig 2 Existing curriculum components in interaction

Stage 3. Testing and Development of cross-campus connected activities in CLC: month 9 to 32 (including 2 full academic years and summer periods)

The partners in a CLC establish contacts with students and stakeholders (intra and extra academic) to be involved in the cross-campus activities. All activities are monitored and reported by the central team that closely collaborate with the Teaching Assistant (XX FTE) made available for each community in the first academic years of the development cycle.

As the maturity of the community grows over 2 consecutive academic years, the support from the central EUTOPIA team gradually moves from facilitating activities to creating links with other communities and partners interested in their ecosystem. The CLCs will have reached connectedness in multiple levels as represented in the visualization of the educational model below.

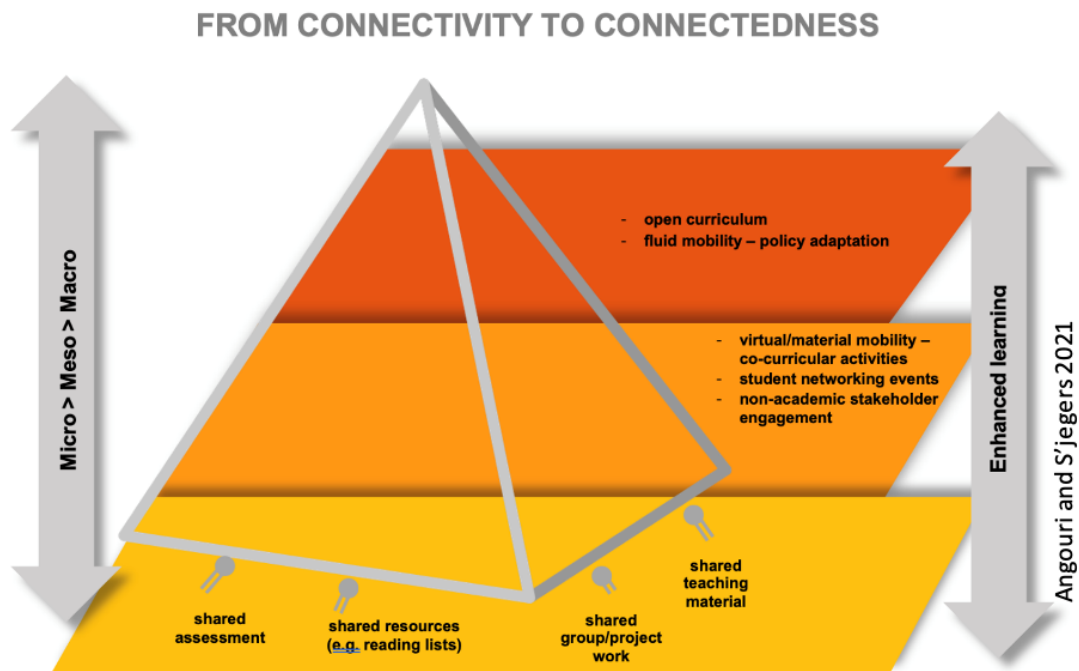


Fig. 3 Eutopia Learning model

In summary, CLC move from sharing resources to joint activities enabling students and staff to profit from the synergy within an international network. By doing so we create value added at personal and institutional level for academia and local/national/international partners: the results include a mix of internationalization at home opportunities such as internationally inspired pedagogies, complementary learning material, mutual access to data bases and collections ,shared experiences with state of the art methodology, cross campus teams of students involved in on line debates and simulations amongst others.

The impact of EUTOPIA can be compared to that of a powerful wave of change. The students on our campuses increasingly benefit from choosing courses, modules and seminars that are part of a transnational CLC. In doing so a growing number of learners get access to learning material enhanced through European cooperation and can exchange their views on challenge-based assignments with their fellow students on EUTOPIA wide learning platforms created for each connected community. Moreover, the efforts for implementing the international connectedness in this way avoid the pitfalls of conventional exchange programs that are not equally accessible to all students and incur living costs that for some are prohibitive. The EUTOPIA educational model is designed to provide international learning for all without relying on physical travel only. Moving on, towards the end Stage 3, the central team organizes interviews, focus groups and undertakes SWOT analysis with each CLC to assess the development journey and outputs of the community. This results in the definition of the value added perceived by all partners and the

identification of cross campus activities that show a clear potential for becoming sustainable components in the academic offering of the lead and partner universities. Established methods (e.g., SIAMPI) are used to provide in depth understanding and constructive feedback to the community and the EUTOPIA teams.

Stage 4. Consolidation of value added: month 33 to 36

In this final phase of the 3-year period, LCL have a clear status and shared activities and the focus is on articulating the value added for all stakeholders involved. In the case of regular learning activities this means that the integration and of the networked activities in the curricula (ba /ma or phd) allows for national and EU funding to be used for European alliance initiatives in education. For research connected activities, access to competitive funding and European projects will be continued and supported by EUTOPIA's mechanisms. For implementation and place making connected activities, EUTOPIA will help to establish an appropriate business model enabling cooperation with interested stakeholders in the private and public sector.

3 SUSTAINABILITY AND FUTURE GROWTH

The EUTOPIA educational model explicitly aims to be a driving force for continuing internationalization of the curriculum development in the partner universities. EUTOPIA dynamics described above infiltrate in the existing offerings of the partner universities at all levels of the educational cycle.

As described, EUTOPIA starts from sharing resources and best practices before evolving towards joint activities enabling staff and students to profit from the synergy within a thematic international network. By doing so we create value added at both personal and institutional level: as illustrated in figure 3 the results include a mix of internationally inspired pedagogies, enriched learning material, mutual access to data bases and collections, shared experiences with state-of-the-art methodologies and cross campus teams of students involved in challenge driven assignments.

The pilot has shown that academics are found to be willing to take responsibility for starting up learning communities. Their efforts are facilitated by the central EUTOPIA curriculum team, and they are entitled to a temporary teaching assistance for organizing the cross-campus learning activities. However, this support is limited in volume and time as stipulated in the pilot project proposal and now that we are launching the third selection round for the learning units it is time to reflect on the formats and the resources for switching from the testbed phase to the post pilot period.

Taking into account the types of connected ness we see three types of possibilities for future growth:

- (i) integration of the connected activities in the present curricula
- (ii) development of international programs
- (iii) non curriculum related developments

- (i) Integration of connected activities: as described in stage 4 of the life cycle, successful results of connectedness can be incorporated in existing courses and/or organized as recurrent events in the academic offerings related to the thematic networks. This type of consolidation is the simplest one and results directly from the value added created at the level of the learning activities involved in the learning communities.

By the end of the pilot period in December 2022 we will have reached our target of 30 learning communities as promised in the original proposal. As explained above these 30 communities will be in different phase of their life cycle varying from stage 4 for the learning communities of the first round to stage 3 for the communities of the second and the third round.

By that time EUTOPIA will either receive extended support following a positive evaluation in the new European university call organized by the EU or will be faced with discontinuity in the EU funding of its educational model.

In the first situation the connected communities will be an essential component of the new EUTOPIA portfolio, and we will be able to support the continuing development of the connected communities that are in the pipeline as well as the startup of new ones (cf Fig 4).

In the second scenario however the further development of the connected in the communities emanating from the second and the third round is depending on the commitment of the alliance partners (a detailed note of the bridging fund need for this purpose is described in the attachment to this note).

(ii) Development of international programs

The connectedness between the partners in the learning communities results in a number of proposals for international curriculum building making use of the preferential contacts between colleagues in the EUTOPIA alliance.

This can be achieved by creating 'EUTOPIA windows' in existing programs giving students of the program organizer full access to a selection of courses in related programs of the EUTOPIA partner universities.

International programs can also take the form of joint degrees. These programmes will follow the EUTOPIA pathway for building interinstitutional consensus for program characteristics such as registration fees, academic calendar, assessment criteria, rules for ECTS and others.

The development of joint provision entails a lengthy process of decision making at several governance levels in all institutions involved. It is hoped however that the strong basis of the CLCs will provide a fertile ground for these processes to be as straightforward as they can be.

(iii) Non curriculum related cooperation

The connectedness in the learning communities results into synergy between the educational objectives and the research activities of the participating academics and students. Academics involved in the CLCs are involved in the range of knowledge activities on the thematic of their learning communities. Simultaneously cross EUTOPIA cooperation strengthens their eligibility for national and international research funding and increases their attractiveness for societal stakeholders willing to act as partners in European innovation networks. In this way the EUTOPIA communities help to break down the conventional academic divides and competition between resources for education and research. Our framework therefore for the EUTOPIA communities is summarized in the graph below:

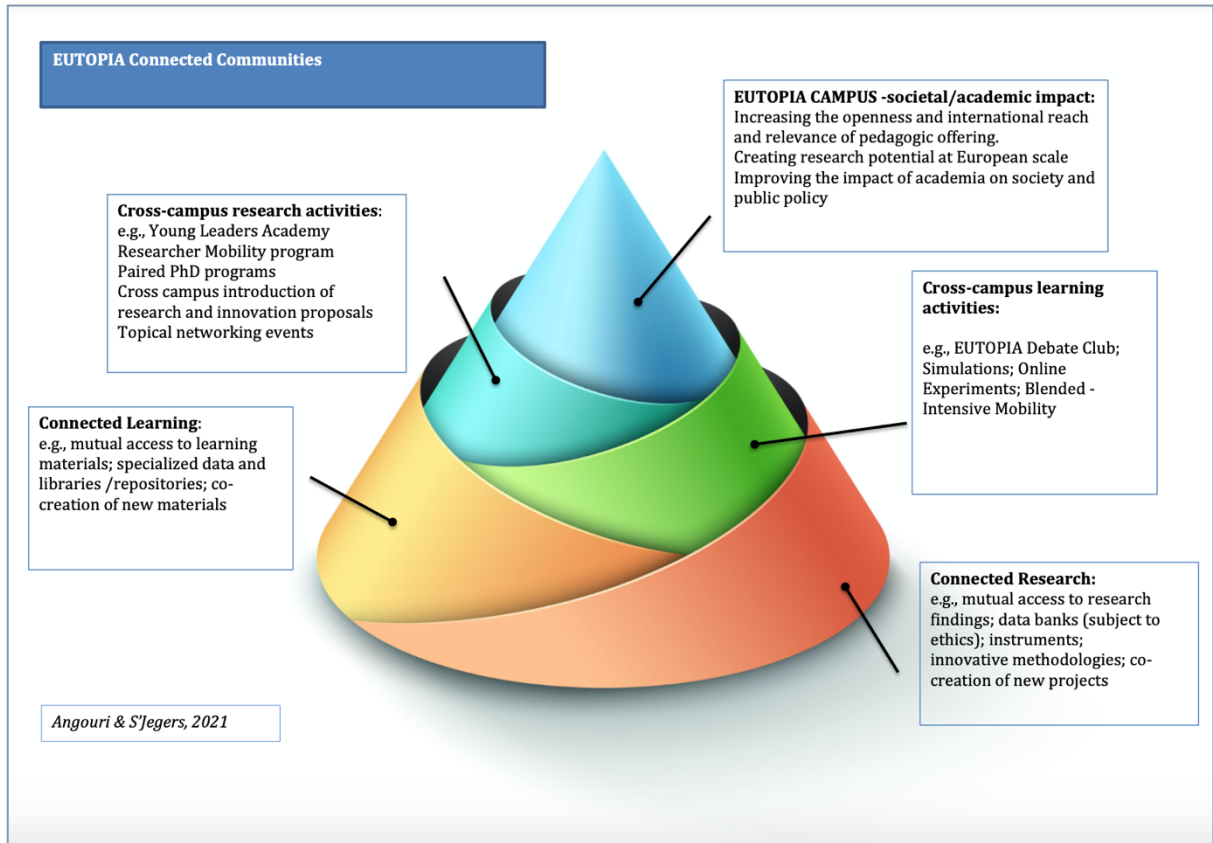


Figure 4. EUTOPIA Community model

4 COMMITMENTS

We have enumerated 3 pathways for future growth and sustainability:

- (i) the original idea of integrating the connected activities that proved to be successful and can be organized in a recurrent way,
- (ii) development of international programs making use of the connected ness developed in the communities,
- (iii) closer and more explicit cooperation with research funded resources in EUTOPIA and using the contacts in the thematic networks for attracting European R and I funding.

For each of these we need to reflect on our commitment in and through a series of questions:

- (i) The first approach needs no supplementary commitment if we are granted extension and related funding from the EU. However, in case of discontinuity in funding we need to bridge the period needed for bringing our communities of the second and the third round to maturity. Are the WP2 members ready to negotiate this additional funding with the authorities in their home universities?
- (ii) For the development of international programs we need their opinion on dealing with inquiries at this level; does the central team help facilitating these demands or do we discourage the participants in the connected communities that have these kind of ambitions? Do we put a cap on the number of initiatives per year? Will the WP2 members identify the administrators that are to handle these demands and will we deal with the proposals at the level of the EUTOPIA educational Board,
- (iii) For the cooperation with research are the WP2 members agreeing on evolving towards a double type of connectedness? do we feel that the learning communities and their thematic networks should have privileged access to EUTOPIA related research funding?

Annex: BRIDGING FUND FOR INTEGRATION OF CONNECTED ACTIVITIES (2023-2024)

By the end of the EUTOPIA pilot project (December 2022) the target of 30 learning communities will be reached. In December 2022 these communities will be in three different stages of development:

- (i) The 6 communities of the first round will be in stage 4 (consolidation of value added) and will leave the testbed cohort. The successful learning activities emanating from the development of these communities will have a clear and stable status integrated in the academic offerings of the home universities of leads and partners involved.
- (ii) The 12 communities of the second round are in their second academic year of stage 3 (testing and development of connected activities) and will need facilitation up till December 2023 before they arrive in the consolidation stage
- (iii) The 12 communities of the third round will be in the first months of stage 3 (Testing and development) and will need facilitation up till December 2024 before reaching consolidation

This means that in 2023 and 2024 we have on average 18 communities (24 in 2023 and 12 in 2024) that need the support of the central team for organization, curriculum development and administrative and technical support. This is the same number of communities as we were dealing with in the past year 2021 and by experience, we know that this brings us close to the limit of the central curriculum team. The capacity of the coordinator might be reduced as we do not need to follow up on other sub work packages in WP2 next to the pilot experiments; this also goes for the platform enabler as the virtual platforms now well in place. We need to continue the support for the communities by allocating a part time teaching assistant or similar to each community for following up the contacts with the students and practical support for the leads. The curriculum developer will organize assessment meeting with the leads and a selection of partners at the end of stage 3, involving costs for travel and short stay accommodation.

The cost estimation for the activities is listed underneath and is based on an extrapolation of the budget for WP2 (incl overhead contribution of the partner universities) in the original project proposal:

0,25 FTE coordinator (instead of 0,50) during 2 years = 75.000
0,50 FTE project officer during 2 years = 75 000
0,25 FTE platform enabler (instead of 0,25) during 2 years = 50.000
0,50 FTE curriculum developer during 2 years = 100.000

12 x 0.2 FTE teaching assistant during 6 months (second round of Learning Communities) = 72.000
12 x 0.2 FTE teaching assistant during 18 months (third round of L.C.) = 236.000

2 assessment meetings for an average of 40 participants (travel and 2-night stay = 48.000 plus catering costs for organisers = 12000) = 60.000

Total costs for 2023-2024 = 668 .000 or 33.500 per year per member university