



EUTOPIA MORE Connected Communities: Process and Criteria

INTRODUCTION

The central aim of EUTOPIA MORE is to connect members of 10 universities across Europe. The participating universities set out to internationalise and further intertwine three key areas of academic life: learning, teaching, and researching. By creating so-called “Connected Communities,” the participants of EUTOPIA MORE share their strengths in selected fields to reach new levels of collaboration and interconnectedness.

EUTOPIA MORE aims to establish 30 Connected Communities by following a systematic and transparent process. The communities are designed on a value adding principle; their implementation starts from identifying existing best practices for challenge-based teaching and research in the home universities of the alliance.

Academic staff members that are nominated for being the initiator of a Connected Community take the responsibility, with the support of the central education and research team, for building a cross-campus thematic network with their colleagues in other EUTOPIA partner universities. Gradually they then start to share resources, exchange expertise, and move to cross-campus activities involving their teaching and research team/s, students, and stakeholders in society. Staff and students participating in the cross-campus activities stay embedded with respect to their status and registration in their home universities, whilst profiting from the inclusion in an international network.

Legend of Roles

WP3 Lead co/Lead:	Karin Vanderkerken (VUB), Luciana Radut-Gaghi (CY)
WP3 Coordinators:	Rosette S'Jegers (VUB), Andreea Maris (GU), Kristin Klein (TUD)
Central Monitor:	Karen Triquet (VUB)
Curriculum Developer:	Jo Angouri (UW)
Research-Based Learning Promoters:	Kate Meier (VUB) & Cătălin George Turcaş (BBU)
Local Facilitators:	see list of Local Facilitators (Link)

1. PROCESS

The process of establishing Connected Communities combines the strengths and strategic interests of all EUTOPIA MORE universities. It is organized in 3 phases: nomination, selection, and development.

As to reach the objective of implementing 30 Connected Communities, the Work Package ‘Empowering Knowledge’ will organize 3 rounds of the process described below (planned in 2023, 2024, and 2025). In each of these rounds 10 new Connected Communities will be started up allowing each partner university to take the lead for 3 new Connected Communities during the project period.

1.1 Nomination of candidates for leading a Connected Community

1st step intra university level a call is organized by the joint authorities for Education and Research represented in WP3. **Candidates initiating a Connected Community are invited to write a letter of commitment.** In this letter they indicate how they respond to the prerequisites / criteria for leading a Connected Community, and they present a first overview of outcomes expected from transnational cooperation for education and research with their EUTOPIA partners. The local facilitators in their home universities, under the overall supportive frame of the central WP3 team, can help candidates to gather information and reach out to potential partners across the alliance.

2nd step: At the end of the call period, each university shortlists a maximum of 3 candidates for nomination. The shortlist should then be handed over to the WP3 lead Karin Vanderkerken at least one month before the EUTOPIA WP3 meeting planned for selecting the Connected Communities.

To create this shortlist the representatives for education and research in each university take into account the following elements:

- the quality of the commitment letter,
- the overall merit and contribution to learning and research,
- the effort for connecting with EUTOPIA partners,
- the alignment of the CC proposal with internal strategic priorities.

By doing so, representatives create optimal chances for successful networking and for consolidation of deliverables that can easily be integrated in existing curriculum development and research strategies.

1.2 Selection of Connected Communities

1st step: The candidates on the shortlist of each partner university are the so-called nominees (maximum 30 = 10 x 3) in each selection year. These nominees and their letters of commitment will be handed over to the WP3 lead Karin Vanderkerken at least one month before the WP3 meeting intended for the cross-campus selection of the Connected Communities.

2nd step: Scenarios for selection are prepared by the WP3 coordinators and with the advice of curriculum developer and monitor. These scenarios are intended to find a good balance between the thematics/disciplines involved as well as making sure that a maximum of applicants and their partners will participate in the overall process.

3rd step: A WP3 meeting is scheduled for discussion and decision by WP3 representatives resulting in the selection of 10 Connected Communities. This meeting serves as an opportunity to hear the preferences from each home university representative, as well as provide a space for dialogue informed by the scenarios described above. By lack of consensus, the final selection decision resides with the representatives from the home university.

1.3 Developing and fostering selected Connected Communities

Drawing on the experience of the Pilot Project EUTOPIA 2050 and taking into account the improvement of the selection process in EUTOPIA MORE we expect that the integrated Connected Communities require an incubation period of 30 months from inception to integration. This incubation period covers 1) the selection and identification of leads and partners (3 months), 2) the exploration of shared resources and possible enlargement of the partnership (3 months) and 3) the testing and delivery of cross campus activities for learning and research (2 academic years = 24 months).

In the last semester of the second academic year the central EUTOPIA team helps the leads and partners to reflect on their activities and decide on the type of deliverables that are sustainable and can be integrated in (international) curricular development or research and innovation strategies of the home universities or at alliance level.

After this incubation period the Connected Communities do not cease to exist but their position in EUTOPIA changes and they move towards a more autonomous status as the EUTOPIA partners should be in a position to integrate their value added and/or use them as stepping stones for their ambitions with EUTOPIA colleges and EUTOPIA institutes.

To support this development during the period of incubation the following resources are allocated to each Connected Community:

- i) Each selected Connected Community is seed-funded with the amount of up to 10.000 Euro as a starting point for mobility and to be able to organize different formats to stimulate exchange and collaboration (WP3 coordination will propose suggestions/guidelines making use of these funds and complementary tools/resources at alliance and EU level). The amount of 10.000 Euro is allocated to the lead of the community and will be spent considering the joint needs/priorities of all partners in the CC.
- ii) The central team sets up regular meetings with leads and partners in each CC. They continuously motivate staff and students to participate in the development and testing of cross campus learning and knowledge activities. The curriculum developer is especially qualified to give advice on the formats for joint activities and the tools for recognizing the efforts from staff and students. In cooperation with the coordinators, and with support from the central monitor, the curriculum developer works on arrangements ensuring the sustainability of the value added created in the in CCs reaching maturity.
- iii) The local facilitators act as the interface between the central EUTOPIA team and the participants (staff and students) in the CC. They are expected to help maintaining and creating access to shared online platforms. They are especially important for facilitating the work of leads and partners in setting up meetings and cross campus learning and research activities involving students, researchers, and staff.
- iv) The central monitor sets up a monitoring and evaluation system for CCs in all phases of their life cycle. The monitor creates an online space where local facilitators and CCs will be connected and work in ongoing collaboration. The information gathered in this monitoring process helps to underpin the needs for recognizing the international cooperation of staff and students, and for communicating on the deliverables and impact of the CC.
- v) The research-based learning promotors will support the design and set up of workshops intended to bridge the divide between education and research. By offering these workshops, the leads and partners of each CC reach out to their students and make them aware of the latest developments and methodologies, thereby fostering the student's ambition for a scientific career in academia or beyond. The initiative can be further supported by the members of the Young Leaders Academy (YLA) and the doctoral schools in all home universities.
- vi) The team of WP3 coordinators will continuously control the implementation of central support measures. These measures aim at creating productive surroundings and practical formats to increase the connectedness between all universities. In strategic reports they will make sure to report on the outcomes of the CC and on their alignment with the priorities for a new model of European universities, thereby making sure that these efforts are recognized and supported by the authorities in the home universities and at alliance level

2. LETTER OF COMMITMENT

The letter of commitment (template attached) summarizes the willingness of a member of academic staff to be involved in EUTOPIA MORE and take the responsibility for leading a Connected Community. In the concise document the candidate leads demonstrate how they fulfil the prerequisites for this position and explain the compatibility of present teaching and research activities with the EUTOPIA criteria of openness, indicate the efforts for reaching out to potential partners in the EUTOPIA alliance, and give a first overview of expected outcomes and cross-campus activities for teaching, research, and learning.

2.1 Prerequisites

Applicants must be permanent members of academic staff in their home university having responsibilities both for teaching (BA or MA level) and Research and Development.

Applicants are asked to give an overview of the teaching and research activities defined in their mandate and to highlight those activities that will be at the heart of their engagement for a Connected Community. Specifically, applicants identify existing credit bearing learning formats and research activities that could serve as a conduit for connecting partners and research activities.

2.2 Criteria for openness

Aligned with the criteria applied for the Connected Learning and Connected Research Communities in the pilot project, the new Connected Communities in EUTOPIA MORE will respond to the criteria of openness that are characteristic for the EUTOPIA Alliance. The candidates are therefore asked to explain the nature of the teaching and research activities that will be the building blocks of their planned cooperation with the EUTOPIA partners. Specific attention goes to the bridging capacity expected from the Connected Communities:

- i) **Connecting academia and society:** eligible learning and research activities are driven by key societal challenges and include local partners emanating from business, the public sector or cultural organizations. The thematics are by nature crossing the academic disciplines and aligned with the priorities of the alliance for improving the sustainability of our societies.
- ii) **Combining teaching and research processes:** teachers, students and researchers cooperate in active learning processes. Students (BA, MA or PhD) move away from being absorbers to being active participants in the knowledge creation. Typical formats for such an approach include problem solving assignments, research-based learning and co-creation between students, teachers, researchers, and experts. Applicants confirm their willingness to bridge the divide between education and research by offering their students a research-based learning workshop with the support of the EUTOPIA central team.
- iii) **Inclusive approach:** the knowledge activities in a Connected Community are expected to create flexible and innovative offerings for a wide range of higher educated people working to update their competences and/or cooperate with scientists to solve the challenges they are confronted with in professional and personal context/s.

2.3 Cooperation with EUTOPIA Partners

Candidates support their commitment by reaching out to potential partners for their thematic network in at least 2 EUTOPIA partner universities. These preparatory contacts will facilitate the starting up of the community and enable them to apply for EU funding in a range of calls. Applicants thereby demonstrate their willingness to jointly achieve the aims defined in their letter of commitment.

In a later phase after being nominated and selected the leads and partners of the Connected Community can open up to supplementary partners in other EUTOPIA universities or in Global partners of the alliance.

2.4 Outcomes

Finally, the candidate for a lead position in a new Connected Community lists a number of outcomes expected to result from the development of the thematic networks. Outcomes can be defined in terms of impact or value added expected for the participants of the Connected Community (students, staff, stakeholders in society). The outcomes can also specify the formats for joint or cross-campus learning and research activities.

Extensive descriptions of these outcomes can be found in the final reports for the CLC and CRC. In the template provided for the letter of commitment some examples and explanations are given. However, these examples are meant to be an illustration rather than a restriction limiting the innovative potential of the Connected Communities.

