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# CREATING ONLINE LANGUAGE OFFERINGS FOR A NEW EUROPEAN UNIVERSITY

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## Abstract

The aim of this paper is to present how offerings of online language courses for a new European university can be planned and created in co-operation between several universities and universities of applied sciences from different European countries.

The work is being done within the framework of Ulysseus European University Alliance. The aim is to provide the learners in the Ulysseus community and beyond two foreign languages in addition to one's mother tongue. Alongside the online language courses, there is an option to plan and offer other language related activities to support student and staff mobility.

Ulysseus European University Alliance is created by six universities and universities of applied sciences: Université Côte-d'Azur (France), Università di Genova (Italy), Universidad de Sevilla (Spain), Technical University of Košice (Slovakia), Haaga-Helia University of Applied Sciences (Finland) and Management Center Innsbruck (Austria).

This paper presents the language programme created by the partner universities as well as explains the process of how the work is being done. The paper also covers the advantages that the co-operation entails as well as potential concerns that might appear.

Keywords: online language offerings, European co-operation, European universities.

## 1 INTRODUCTION

In today's globalizing world, versatile language skills are sought after not just for personal needs but also for studies and working life. Within Europe, being able to speak each other's languages as well as understand the cultural differences enhances the possibilities and mobility in both studies and in working life.

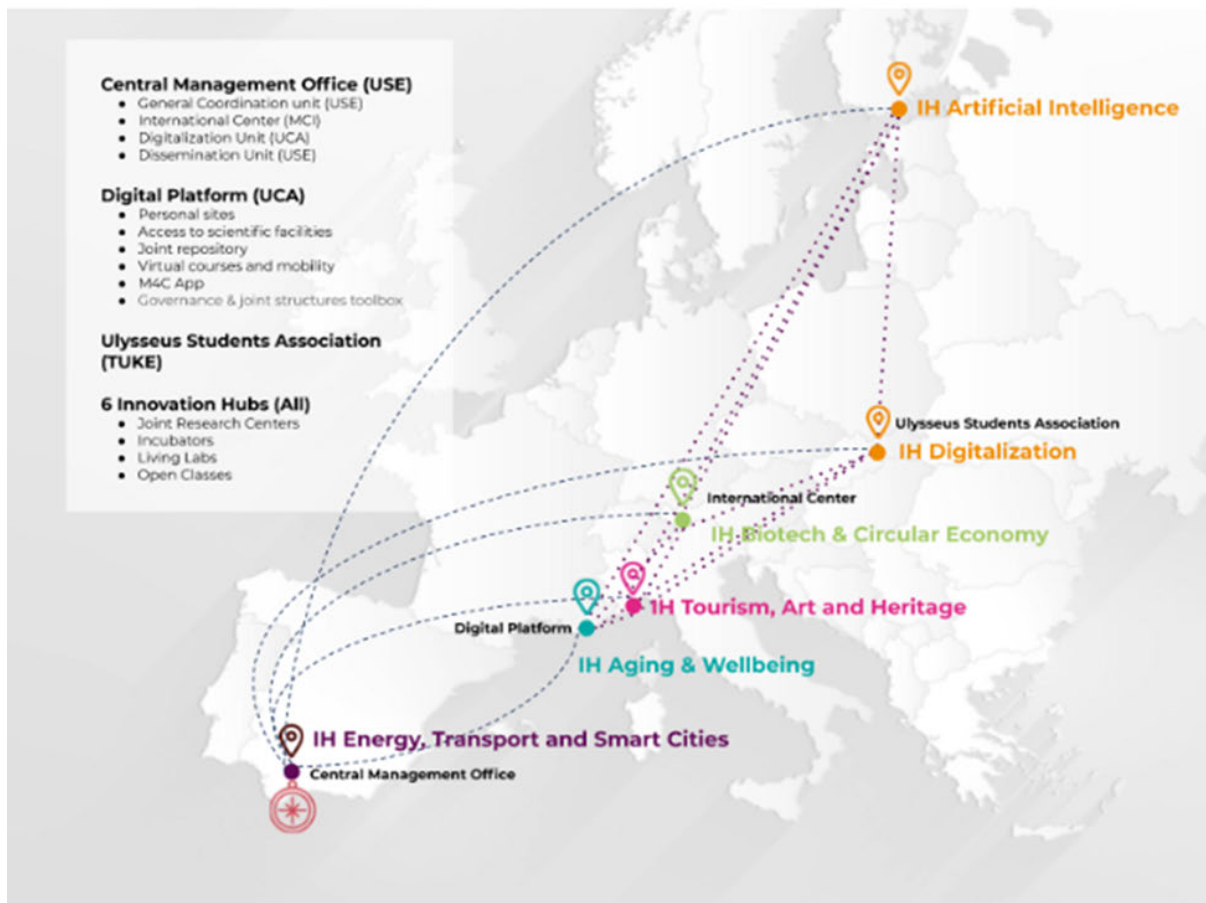
The covid-19 pandemic has concretely shown universities and universities of applied sciences how much need there is for online language courses, and how much flexibility they may offer for both students and universities during these peculiar times. Thus, the demand after online language courses has risen significantly, and the Ulysseus European University is responding to this need.

## 2 ULYSSEUS EUROPEAN UNIVERSITY

Ulysseus European University is a new university for the citizens of the future. The vision of Ulysseus is to develop an excellency-recognized European University built upon the European values of social cohesion and respect for human rights. Within Ulysseus there is a strong belief that European Universities should be open-to-the-world, solidary institutions beyond European borders. [3]

Ulysseus has five key goals. With the cooperation the Ulysseus community aims: 1. to modernize the universities by developing a long-lasting Ulysseus territorial and digital Innovation Ecosystem, 2. to contribute to the development of the European regions and cities by implementing student-centered, flexible, work-based European Joint Programmes, 3. to reduce the competence gap through a combination of innovative learning and teaching activities, 4. to enhance the knowledge and practice of the European values by shaping a European citizen of the future, respectful to human rights, equality and inclusiveness and 5. to promote an open-to-the-world model of University by a combination of in-person and virtual mobility. [3]

Ulysseus aims to be an international, person-centered and entrepreneurial University that will shape Europe's future. Ulysseus will develop both joint and double degrees and promote research activities. The joint degrees and research activities are strongly connected to the six innovation hubs located in each partner university. [3]



Picture 1. Ulysseus Organization. [3]

Ulysseus European University Alliance is created by six universities and universities of applied sciences: Université Côte-d'Azur from France, Università di Genova from Italy, Universidad de Sevilla from Spain (Coordinator), Technical University of Košice from Slovakia, Haaga-Helia University of Applied Sciences from Finland and Management Center Innsbruck from Austria.

Table 1. Ulysseus European University Alliance in figures. [3]

Students	163 530
Faculties	87
Research centers	54
Patents and trademarks	636
Staff	199 171
Academic staff / researchers	8 499
Research groups	1 035
Science & technology-based companies & partnerships	235
Associated partners	99

### 3 +2 LANGUAGE PROGRAMME

The Ulysseus online language offering is being created in a work-package called Building up Competences for Future led by Haaga-Helia UAS. The aim is to prepare highly-skilled digital, multilingual, and entrepreneurial European citizens through a combination of innovative learning and teaching activities.

The language programme is called +2 Language Programme (+2LP) and its aim is to provide the learners in the Ulysseus community a possibility to know two foreign languages in addition to one's mother tongue, which is aligned with the vision of the European Commission. Thus, linguistic and cultural diversity will be exploited to promote plurilingualism, to enhance employability and mobility, to render other countries and their cultures accessible, and to strengthen intercultural understanding.

*“Foreign language skills play a vital role in enhancing employability and mobility. Multilingualism also improves the competitiveness of the EU economy.” [2]*

Alongside the online language courses, there is an option to plan and offer other language related activities to support student and staff mobility depending on the resources available after the demanded online language courses have been delivered.

The language courses offered by Ulysseus are meant to complete the selection of the language courses provided at each partner university. Within +2LP there will be offerings in ten different languages on several levels according to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages. [1] Totally, there will be 36 online courses available starting from beginners' level until proficient language users' level. The languages and the levels are presented in Table 2. [3]

*Table 2. Ulysseus +2 Language Programme Languages and Levels.*

<i>Language</i>	<i>Level</i>
English	A1 – A2 – B1 – B2
French	A1 – A2 – B1 – B2
German	A1 – A2 – B1 – B2
Italian	A1 – A2 – B1 – B2
Russian	A1 – A2 – B1 – B2
Spanish	A1 – A2 – B1 – B2
Arabic	A1 – A2 – B1
Chinese	A1 – A2 – B1
Slovak	A1 – A2 – B1
Finnish	A1 – A2 – B1

The A1 level [1] courses in English, French, German, Italian, Russian and Spanish will have open access to anyone interested. The openness supports and diversifies language reserve [4] in the European community.

There will be both asynchronous and synchronous courses in the Ulysseus language offerings; the courses vary from self-paced ones to ones, which have online lessons taught by the teacher.

There is a +2LP task force which is responsible for delivering the language courses offered within Ulysseus. Each partner university has a representative in the task force.

The task force work began in March 2021 by starting the co-operation and mapping out the already existing courses provided by the partner universities. The partner universities have a different number of online courses to offer for the co-operation. In April 2021 the task force submitted the first deliverable which was “Ulysseus +2 Language Programme Framework and Design Handbook” consisting of a process description for the work to be done including the deliverables and the schedule for the work. The next step was to ensure that the already existing online language courses provided by the partner universities matched the Ulysseus needs and criterion. This benchmarking work started in May 2021 and is still under way. The task force is divided into two groups and each of them benchmarks courses offered by other universities in the same group. After the benchmarking, some changes might be needed in order to make the courses match the Ulysseus needs and criterion. Furthermore, new courses are being planned, developed and benchmarked for the Ulysseus needs.

Table 3. The +2LP schedule.

TIMING	TASK
March 2021	Starting the co-operation, mapping out the already existing courses provided by the partner universities
April 2021	Delivering a handbook for +2 Language Programme
May – July 2021	Benchmarking of the already existing courses
October 2021 – March 2022	Benchmarking of the already existing courses
August 2021 – April 2022	Modifying and adjusting the already existing courses
August 2021 – April 2022	Creating new courses

## 4 ADVANTAGES

As mentioned above, the Ulysseus +2LP aims to offer a wide variety of language training to the Ulysseus community and beyond, the aim being that 75% of the community should be able to learn two languages in addition to the mother tongue by 2030.

To make this goal, the language courses offered by the +2LP are meant to complement the selection of the language courses of the partner universities. Therefore, the meaning is not to substitute the already existing language courses offered by the partner universities, but to give them a possibility to widen their course offerings through co-operation.

The +2LP program offers the students from different universities possibilities to study languages that their home institution does not offer. In addition to this, there is a chance to reach more advanced language skills by taking higher-level courses that might not be available at the students' home universities. Of course, the benefit is reciprocal: some +2LP universities might offer basic level language courses, which are not available at some of the other universities. Either way, students' possibilities to choose courses expands, and their chances to gain new language skills expand.

In addition to learning new language skills, +2LP provides the people in Ulysseus community and beyond a possibility to get and enhance transferable skills for international mobility and co-operation. Also, participating the Ulysseus online courses lets the students get more international experience and contacts than their own institution might offer, gives chances to meet and study with an international group of students and teaches them different ways of doing things. This overall competence for internationalization is important not only during the years at university, but even later during the students' careers, as well. Getting international experience and cultural competence at home, without leaving the home country and home institution, is a big benefit for many people.

For language teachers, the Ulysseus co-operation offers new options. There are new colleagues and chances to work on course offerings with them. Also, especially teachers of the so called less studied languages might get more courses and students when teaching internationally – there might be more need for language courses within the Ulysseus community than just at one university. This is a benefit thinking about the employment of the teachers. The Ulysseus co-operation also offers teachers a possibility to learn new skills and practice their online pedagogical skills.

## 5 POTENTIAL CONCERNS

All Ulysseus universities share the common goal to offer new language courses to +2LP students and to others in the community. However, some practicalities and differences in ways of doing things might challenge this plan.

For example, scheduling courses might cause some concerns within the +2LP since the academic schedules are asynchronous, and the timing of holidays and vacations varies in different areas in Europe.

In addition to timing, different online platforms used by the partner universities might cause some surprises. Technically, moving material from one platform to the Moodle platform, which is created for Ulysseus use, takes effort and time, as does modifying the material to have it match the other Ulysseus courses. In order to make the process proceed there is ICT-support available.

Online teaching is still quite new in some areas in Europe, and some guidance and training might be needed to modify their traditional classroom taught courses into online ones. This takes time, as does making new online material and learning new digipedagogical skills to conduct online courses.

## 6 CONCLUSIONS

As a whole the +2LP is a very interesting and inspiring way of co-operating with universities from other countries in Europe. Despite some concerns and adjustments needed, the co-operation will provide the participating universities new and unique ways of developing their operations and activities – something they could not reach working by themselves only.

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