



LIVIU MATEI &amp; JONATHAN BECKER



# Internationalization through Integration

THE TREND AND A CASE STUDY

This article identifies a new form of internationalization, which can be called “internationalization by integration”. It discusses this development as a possible new global trend and delves deeper into a particular case study. This form of internationalization has heretofore not been studied systematically. This new phenomenon can be considered on the international and global level as similar, although not identical, to the mergers of higher education institutions at the local and national level: stable international, some even global, networks of institutions strive to integrate to the point where they eventually might become a single institution of a new kind: a non-national, trans-national higher education institution. This new international mode is also different from the case of single universities that have established branches in multiple countries. The case study considered in this article, that of the Open Society University Network, helps to shed light on the rationales, actors, anticipated impact, and challenges faced by such novel initiatives.

<b>1. A new trend in the internationalization of higher education?</b>	46
<b>2. The European Universities Initiative</b>	47
<b>3. The Open Society University Network</b>	50
<b>4. Integration in OSUN</b>	52
<b>5. Conclusion</b>	57
<b>References</b>	58

---

# 1. A new trend in the internationalization of higher education?

## Internationalization by integration and the possible emergence of transnational higher education institutions

The internationalization of higher education is not a new phenomenon and has been studied extensively for a few decades now (see Craciun 2015, de Wit 2019 for comprehensive overviews). The use of network approaches in the practice and scholarship of internationalization is not a new phenomenon either (King 2010, Stockley & de Wit 2011, de Wot 2015, Larsen 2016). Yet, something possibly quite new is emerging in this area. Despite major challenges and breaks posed by the COVID-19 pandemic, we currently see a new, unprecedented form of internationalization emerging. Two different, but convergent, examples illustrating this trend are scrutinized in this article. Only one case, that of the Open Society University Network (OSUN), will be addressed in more detail. We do this for two reasons. First, a double case study would have required more space than allowable by the journal's editorial requirements. Second, and more importantly, the second case, the European Universities Initiative, is significantly more diverse and variegated in terms of scope of ambitions, activities, and institutional demography. This Initiative has resulted in a large number of separate networks, taking different paths and thus requiring a much more extended analysis with multiple case studies. For this article, we attempt to distill sufficient elements of the Initiative to illustrate common elements with OSUN that suggest a potential broader global trend. A bigger question is whether there are, in fact, many more examples than just these two. Moreover, do they constitute enough evidence for hypothesizing a major new global trend in the internationalization of higher education?

The European Universities Initiative (hereinafter EUI, not to be confused with the European University Institute<sup>1</sup>) is a recent trans-national endeavor, formally limited to a particular region, although in practice compelled to exceed it. It is initiated and supported financially, politically, and regulatorily by an inter-governmental organization, the European Union (EU).

The Open Society University Network (hereinafter OSUN, not to be confused with Osun State University Nigeria<sup>2</sup>) is an attempt to build a global, integrated university-network and then, eventually, a global network-university. OSUN was started by the Open Society Foundations (OSF) and is supported financially by it. OSF is a global non-governmental organization, or more accurately, a global network of non-governmental organizations in its own right.

---

1 <https://www.eui.eu/en/home>

2 A university in the Osun State of Nigeria, <https://www.uniosun.edu.ng/index.php/about-us.html>, accessed on 14 April 2022

## 2. The European Universities Initiative<sup>3</sup>

The idea of creating transnational “European” universities was publicly launched by President Emmanuel Macron of France on 26 September 2017 in a speech about the future of Europe at Sorbonne University.<sup>4</sup> In this speech, he outlined new European initiatives in several areas, including higher education. Macron stated that “we should create European Universities – a network of universities across Europe” and that there should be at least 20 such European Universities by 2024.<sup>5</sup> The idea was debated in November 2017 by the leaders of 28 EU member states in the context of a larger discussion about the future of education at the “Gothenburg Social Summit” in Sweden. Consecutively, at the meeting of the heads of states and governments of EU member states (forming the European Council) on 14 December 2017, this idea was adopted as a formal project of the European Union.<sup>6</sup> It was usually referred to as the European Universities Initiative, on some other occasions as the European University Alliances, or just the European Universities. The project unfolded rapidly, its main parameters designed top-down with the forceful participation of key institutions of the European Union, in particular the European Commission<sup>7</sup> but also the Council of the EU<sup>8</sup> and the European Parliament<sup>9</sup>. The European Commission launched two calls for proposals in 2019 and 2020, as part of its Erasmus+ Programme 2021-2027.<sup>10</sup> As a result of these calls, 41 “European universities alliances” were selected for funding, comprising more than 280 universities (a minimum of three from three different countries in each alliance) from all 27 EU current member states (the UK eventually left the Union following Brexit) and a few other European countries (Serbia, Iceland, Norway, and the UK)<sup>11</sup>. These two calls were launched for the pilot phase of the project, lasting five years for each network, after which they can apply for new and significantly increased funding. New universities can be added to the existing networks and other networks can be formed and apply for funding as well in the next, post-pilot phase. The 41 European “alliances”, or “networks”, were funded for five years with up to 4 million EUR each from the EU program for educational cooperation (Erasmus+, a total initial budget of 272 million EUR was allocated through this funding

### The European Universities Initiative - Alliances and Networks

3 <https://education.ec.europa.eu/european-universities-initiative>, accessed on 1 January 2022

4 <https://www.elysee.fr/en/emmanuel-macron/2017/09/26/president-macron-gives-speech-on-new-initiative-for-europe>, accessed on 1 January 2022

5 Full speech available at <http://international.blogs.ouest-france.fr/archive/2017/09/29/macron-sorbonne-verbatim-europe-18583.html>, accessed on 1 January 2022

6 <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/media/32204/14-final-conclusions-rev1-en.pdf>, accessed on 1 January 2022

7 [https://ec.europa.eu/info/index\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/info/index_en), accessed on 1 January 2022

8 [https://european-union.europa.eu/institutions-law-budget/institutions-and-bodies/institutions-and-bodies-profiles/council-european-union\\_en#:~:text=Overview&text=In%20the%20Council%20of%20the,agreed%20on%20in%20the%20meetings](https://european-union.europa.eu/institutions-law-budget/institutions-and-bodies/institutions-and-bodies-profiles/council-european-union_en#:~:text=Overview&text=In%20the%20Council%20of%20the,agreed%20on%20in%20the%20meetings), accessed on 1 January 2022

9 <https://www.europarl.europa.eu/portal/en>, accessed on 1 January 2022

10 [https://www.eacea.ec.europa.eu/news-events/news/new-erasmus-programme-2021-2027-has-launched-2021-03-25\\_en](https://www.eacea.ec.europa.eu/news-events/news/new-erasmus-programme-2021-2027-has-launched-2021-03-25_en) accessed on 14 April 2022

11 <https://education.ec.europa.eu/european-universities-initiative>, accessed on 1 January 2022

instrument)<sup>12</sup>, they had to contribute each 1 million EUR, and were also invited to apply, after some back and forth, for another up to 2 million EUR per network from the EU's framework program for research (Horizon Europe)<sup>13</sup>. The exact funding frameworks and the names of the respective funding instruments are still evolving. What is clear is that, on the one hand, the total budget already allocated by the EU since the start of the project is significant: it exceeds 300 million EUR. This budget will be much further increased in the following years. On the other hand, the budget allocated per institution is marginal: a network with seven members, to take an example, received a total of 6 million EUR for five years, which represents only about 170,000 EUR per institution per year on average. This is, in itself, a small amount, really marginal for any higher education institution, whether rich or poor. And yet, European universities rushed to form alliances and pledged to align their strategies and operations to the point of making a single trans-national university out of any individual network.

Understanding fully the motivations of individual institutions in joining the initiative would require a longer analysis. They include some of the traditional rationales for internationalization: academic, economic, political, cultural, and social. But here, these are put in a new context and, more importantly, result in a new model of internationalization. This initiative illustrates the immense leverage an international, inter-governmental organization, such as the EU, has in triggering unprecedented changes in the internationalization of higher education and in higher education policy more broadly.

### Unprecedented Changes in the Internationalization of Higher Education

This is a daring, major policy initiative that can change the face of internationalization, or perhaps the face of higher education altogether, at least in Europe. Overall, the official EU motivations and objectives for this initiative have been formulated quite transparently and with a good degree of clarity. They are not intended to stay hidden. However, there are questions that scholars and practitioners alike need to ask about the initiative, even at this early stage of implementation. For example, there is as of yet no scrutiny of the very suggestion to promote internationalization by integration, of creating single trans-national higher education institutions out of trans-national networks of existing separate institutions. Moreover, this suggestion is not formulated with sufficient clarity and transparency. The phrase itself, "internationalization by integration", is never used as such. This is a heuristic concept we are proposing, which we believe to capture the best the main thrust of the initiative and the emerging new trend in internationalization more broadly.

Other questions to ask are whether EUI will work and to what is it exactly leading. We are currently witnessing discussions about creating a new legal framework in Europe, one that would give these new alliances, or network-universities, juridic personalities outside any particular

---

<sup>12</sup> [https://www.eacea.ec.europa.eu/news-events/events/european-universities-information-session-2022-call-proposals\\_en](https://www.eacea.ec.europa.eu/news-events/events/european-universities-information-session-2022-call-proposals_en) accessed on 1 January 2022

<sup>13</sup> [https://ec.europa.eu/info/research-and-innovation/funding/funding-opportunities/funding-programmes-and-open-calls/horizon-europe\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/info/research-and-innovation/funding/funding-opportunities/funding-programmes-and-open-calls/horizon-europe_en) accessed on 14 April 2022

national jurisdiction.<sup>14</sup> This is proof, perhaps indirect, of how serious the initiative is and what it means to create trans-national universities, including from a legal perspective. But, again, will this work? How will the trans-national legal status of these networks influence internationalization and higher education practices more generally?

A document from the EU Commission, a “fact sheet on the initiative”, summarizes well the stated rationales and objectives<sup>15</sup>:

- Alliances need a joint long-term strategy for education with, where possible, links to research and innovation to drive systemic, structural and sustainable impact at all levels of their institutions.
- Alliances must create a European inter-university ‘campus’, where:
  - students, staff, and researchers enjoy seamless mobility (physical, virtual or blended) to study, train, teach, do research, work, or share services at cooperating partner institutions.
  - transdisciplinary and transnational teams of students, academics, and external stakeholders tackle big issues facing Europe (such as climate protection, democracy, health, big data, migration)
  - students can design their own flexible curricula, leading to a European Degree.
  - practical and/or work-based experience is provided to foster an entrepreneurial mind-set and develop civic engagement.

Although quite direct, the EUI official lexis is also relatively careful, making frequent use of quasi-euphemisms, thus understating to some extent the magnitude of ambitions: “alliances” is often preferred to “university networks”, and “university networks” often preferred to “European universities”. We would like to propose that the thrust of the initiative is clear: to create a new type of institution and get there through internationalization by integration. The term “trans-national integration,” or equivalent wording, is openly used, be it only occasionally: “European Universities are ambitious transnational alliances of higher education institutions developing long-term structural and strategic cooperation”.<sup>16</sup> Some European alliances are not hesitant in calling themselves, directly, European Universities, not just networks of European universities. One of these alliances, for example, is CIVICA, which calls itself

### Creating a New Type of Institution

<sup>14</sup> See, for example, the “Proposal for a Council Recommendation on building bridges for effective European higher education cooperation” available at <https://education.ec.europa.eu/document/proposal-for-a-council-recommendation-on-building-bridges-for-effective-european-higher-education-cooperation>, accessed on 14 April 2022; or the “Commission Communication on a European strategy for universities”, available at <https://education.ec.europa.eu/document/commission-communication-on-a-european-strategy-for-universities>, accessed on 14 April 2022.

<sup>15</sup> “Commission fact sheet on the initiative”, consulted at <https://education.ec.europa.eu/european-universities-initiative>, accessed on 1 January 2022

<sup>16</sup> Ibidem.

“The European University of Social Sciences”.<sup>17</sup> Moreover, as mentioned above, a discussion has started in Europe about the need to adopt legislation that would allow for establishing European universities with juridic personalities. At present, universities can only be established within particular national jurisdictions. Extremely rare exceptions include institutions in Europe and the world such as the United Nations University or the European University Institute.

### **The Challenges of Becoming a Single Integrated Trans-National Institution**

Despite sparse funding per institution/network, the EUI is a daring, transformational initiative in internationalization and higher education. It faces many challenges which are not discussed here in extenso: pedagogic, organizational, legal, or political. While it is too early to see where it is going exactly, there is no doubt that it is an attempt to promote, top-down as it is, a new form of internationalization. This form of internationalization goes beyond the traditional approaches in terms of integration: members of the trans-national European alliances or networks are supposed to become a single integrated trans-national institution.

---

## **3. The Open Society University Network<sup>18</sup>**

### **The Open Society University Network**

The Open Society University Network (OSUN) is a different example that illustrates a possible trend towards internationalization by integration.

The creation of OSUN was announced by the founder of the Open Society Foundations (OSF) at Davos, on 23 January 2020.<sup>19</sup> He pledged a significant amount to endow this initiative (1 billion USD) and invited other philanthropists to contribute. The establishment of OSUN proceeded at a very fast pace as well, despite the intervening COVID-19 crisis. The initiative was funded and managed by and large as a project of OSF. The academic and, more generally, operational parts have been ensured mainly by Central European University (first from Budapest, Hungary, then from Vienna, Austria) and Bard College (upstate New York, US), long term partners of OSF, who jointly house OSUN's administrative core. Within two years of the initial announcement, OSUN comprises more than 40 institutions from all continents except Australia, and its

---

<sup>17</sup> <https://www.civica.eu/who-we-are/about-civica/>, accessed on 1 January 2022

<sup>18</sup> <https://opensocietyuniversitynetwork.org/>, accessed on 1 January 2022

<sup>19</sup> <https://www.opensocietyfoundations.org/newsroom/george-soros-launches-global-network-to-transform-higher-education>, accessed on 1 January 2022

partners include not only colleges and universities, but research institutions, libraries, and archives.

Many of its educational, social, and political rationales and objectives are different from those of EUI and the geographical scope is different (genuinely global, not just European). However, OSUN bets in a similar way on internationalization through integration to achieve its ambitions: “The network, which will operate throughout the world, is named the Open Society University Network (OSUN). It will integrate teaching and research across higher education institutions worldwide. It will offer simultaneously taught network courses and joint degree programs and regularly bring students and faculty from different countries together with in-person and online discussions. The network aims to reach the students who need it the most and to promote the values of open society—including free expression and diversity of beliefs”.<sup>20</sup>

OSUN is distinguished by its shared values and the profile diversity of its partners. It has been fully aware of, and programmatic about, promoting a new model of internationalization and, eventually, creating a new type of higher education institution: “The Open Society University Network envisions a new model of global higher education—a long-lasting network with deep partnerships among diverse institutions committed to addressing global challenges collaboratively. The network is global in demographic and geographic scope and extends to places where it is needed most. It strives to integrate curricula and research across institutions in different countries and incorporate civic engagement into higher education”.<sup>21</sup> OSUN’s core members are expected to enjoy stable, long-term, committed relationships – “deep partnerships” that are based on reciprocity, mutual respect, and mutual values. Firstly, this is different from traditional “internationalization” efforts, which often translate into a single (dominant) institution that maintains subsidiary campuses or research centers abroad. Secondly, it also differs from traditional university partnership activities, which often are restricted to faculty and student exchanges and are otherwise transactional, limited in scope and ambition, or tied to specific grant opportunities. Within these traditional models, universities tend to build relationships with institutions with similar profiles and reputations. OSUN seeks to realize the value implicit in institutional diversity, recognizing that when institutions of very different scales, strengths, and geographies cooperate, it can provide access to qualified students who have been historically excluded due to poverty, discrimination, the constraints of tyranny, and economic underdevelopment. This aims to counter both the increasingly market-oriented and hyper-specialized education offered in many universities, especially in the US.

OSUN is also distinguished by the depth and breadth of engagement. Traditional university partnerships are limited in scope, often centering on faculty and student exchanges and/or a single project for which funds have been raised. In contrast, OSUN is committed to multiple projects that engage faculty, staff, and students from partner institutions and involve teaching, shared curricula, research, and co-curricular activities. This is not a set of one-off exchanges or convenient campuses abroad

### **Civic Engagement and Deep Partnerships**

### **Curriculum Integrated Across the Globe**

<sup>20</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>21</sup> <https://opensocietyuniversitynetwork.org/about/vision/> accessed on 1 January 2022

for wealthy institutions, but a vibrant network through which curricula are integrated, faculty from across the globe jointly develop courses and share virtual lectures, and classes allow the sharing of insights from leading teachers and researchers, including those outside the academy. As a result, students learn with and from others both within and outside of the classroom, including in non-traditional venues like museums and libraries, and through participation in numerous civic engagement projects and programs.

### The Ecosystem of Engagement

At its core, by connecting curricula, courses, and research initiatives with civic engagement, artistic production, and co-curricular activities, OSUN was designed to create vibrant transnational learning and research environments; foster intellectual innovation across national, institutional, and disciplinary boundaries; break through economic and cultural barriers; and, expand access to higher education for underserved populations. By providing multiple points of cooperation over many spheres of engagement amongst institutions with shared values and approaches to teaching and learning, the “deep partnerships” that are fundamental to the intended OSUN model are meant to be strengthened, creating an “ecosystem of engagement” (see Becker 2015). Ideas and practices cascade across the ecosystem, challenging and nourishing the network institutions, binding them together, and generating innovations and initiatives. The multiple touchpoints through which faculty, students and staff cooperate are designed to create virtuous circles: joint research projects lead to Network Collaborative Courses which lead to curricular innovation. Successful teaching practices leading to student-centered learning are adopted and adapted in different environments. Students graduate from an undergraduate institution, pass smoothly to an MA and PhD program at network institutions, and then return to their home institution or a network institution as post-docs to teach, already understanding the educational environment. Student mobility spreads innovative civic engagement projects across the network.

---

## 4. Integration in OSUN

OSUN foundational documents are transparent and direct about the nature of the initiative and its main thrust. They use the same language of stable networking and integration, of eventually creating one single transnational institution out of this network, despite what we can consider even more serious challenges than in the case of EUI.

Given the diversity of its membership in more than one dimension, network integration is a key challenge for OSUN. To address this challenge, OSUN has adopted a formal integration strategy, cutting across

its structures, operations, and thematic areas. The strategy focuses on teaching, curriculum development, research, and co-curricular activities.

**Specifically, it includes:**

- accepting transfer credit from OSUN partners and incorporating OSUN Network Collaborative Courses and OSUN Online Courses into its curricula;
- encouraging or incentivizing students and faculty to take part in OSUN programs;
- allowing Network Collaborative and OSUN Online Courses to count toward general education and/or major requirements;
- participating in OSUN certificate programs and including OSUN certificates on student transcripts;
- empowering faculty to contribute educational resources to shared OSUN repositories or to participate in OSUN-sponsored joint research activities, for example in the Global Institute of Advanced Study, Democracy Institute, or Global Research Advancement and Support Program;
- enabling faculty and staff take part in integrative OSUN programs such as the ExEd Hub;
- welcoming Threatened Scholars and providing them a pathway to teaching;
- working with access programs and refugee hubs to provide pathways to obtaining accredited university degrees;
- and encouraging or incentivizing students to participate in integrative co-curricular activities, including Civic Engagement, Student Life Initiatives, and Global Debate Network.<sup>22</sup>

**Network Collaborative Courses.**

A few key programs illustrate the depth and breadth of OSUN's integration efforts. Network Collaborative Courses (NCCs) are a core pillar of the integration that was envisioned in OSUN and are central to the planning for the future of OSUN as an integrated network. NCCs are co-designed by faculty from multiple OSUN institutions and offered simultaneously at several campuses. They represent genuine and cross-institutional collaboration: shared readings, assignments, and synchronous classes bring together students across different campuses into the same discussions. NCC's adapt mass technology

<sup>22</sup> Open Society University Network: Proposal for Greater Integration, Meeting of Presidents and Chief Academic Officers, July 30, 2021.

for meaningful faculty and student interaction. They challenge students to examine their ideas and practices by linking faculty and students across disciplines and across OSUN to examine conceptual and theoretical foundations of an array of topics where comparative approaches and experience matter. They also will serve as the basis of curricular integration through certificate development

In Academic Year 2021-2022, OSUN will offer a total of 19 NCCs, a 50% increase from Academic year 2020-2021 (OSUN's first year of operation), involving more than 100 faculty and close to 2,000 students from 22 OSUN partner institutions ranging from Brac University in Bangladesh to Al-Quds Bard College of Arts and Sciences in Palestine to Universidad de los Andes in Colombia. Courses range from Human Rights Advocacy to Lexicon of Migration to Global Citizenship to Feminism and Community. The courses are structured in a way as to enhance learning outcomes through the interaction of students from different geographies.

The NCCs are interlinked with other curricular initiatives in the form of certificates, which provide OSUN-sponsored microcredentials in areas such as Civic Engagement, Economic Inequality, and Global Education. OSUN envisions expanding certificates which will pave the way for degree programs and smooth transitions to graduate programs. They also promote integration by paving the way for faculty developing joint research projects related to the course materials and through the creation of open educational resources to support the courses.

### Similarities and differences between EUI and OSUN

EUI and OSUN both have a primary focus on education, teaching, and learning, although both strive to integrate research into the fabric of their trans-national structures and operations. Despite the similarities in approaches to integration, there are several key differences between EUI and OSUN. OSUN is a non-governmental initiative led hands on by a foundation (OSF) with two academic institutions as its co-founding members, the Central European University (Vienna) and Bard College (New York). EUI is a top-down European project, promoted, funded, and steered by the EU, which brings with it the support of a political and bureaucratic organization that can adapt or even create an enabling legal and regulatory framework for this initiative's (more limited) geographic scope of operation. OSUN is more explicitly based on academic and civil society values, rather than driven by political desiderata (ambitious and forward-looking as they are in the case of EUI) of a political and economic union of nation-states. OSUN seeks to reflect and foreground institutional commitment to civic values and such principles as open society and academic freedom, as well as the values of liberal education. Its programs reflect these values, with major concrete endeavors including a Threatened Scholars Integration Initiative, a Global Observatory of Academic Freedom, and a Democracy Institute. It also has wider geographic ambitions, openly envisioning itself as a global academic network with partners from every continent. EUI is designed to develop "strategic partnerships between institutions"<sup>23</sup> rooted in the geography

23 <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/media/32204/14-final-conclusions-rev1-en.pdf>, accessed on 1 January 2022

and identity of Europe/European Union and explicitly designed with two main goals in mind: promoting common European values and enhancing the competitiveness of the European higher educational space in the face of global competition. The “European Universities” envisioned in the EUI endeavor “will become the universities of the future, promoting European values and identity, and revolutionizing the quality and competitiveness of European higher education.”<sup>24</sup> There is an audibly neo-liberal and instrumentalist tone in the EUI discourse, with European Universities seen as “key drivers to boost the quality of higher education and where possible to strengthen its link to the research and innovation landscape in Europe and its outreach towards the society and economy.”<sup>25</sup>

Another important distinction between EUI and OSUN is the breadth and depth of memberships. EUI is divided into multiple discrete projects (President Macron envisaged up to 20 “alliances” by 2024, and more alliances than that have been already established) with clusters of members, normally three to nine now, which constitute separate alliances/networks that are, or will become, “European Universities”. OSUN has an expanding roster of more than forty members, including twenty-five partner universities. While there are projects in which a limited number of institutions participate, the core integrative activities are open to all and over time those who participate in such “integrative” activities will form the core of the network. OSUN is also distinguished by a diversity of non-university partners, such as think tanks, research institutions, and libraries, which participate in select OSUN projects and contribute to the intellectual depth and breadth of activities. Both EUI and OSUN profess aspirations for academic excellence. OSUN has a deeper and clearer commitment to promoting access to underserved communities, with major programs designed to work with populations as diverse as refugees, Roma, and incarcerated students.

### Building resilience

A remarkable common trait between EUI and OSUN is the realization that internationalization by integration and integrated trans-national networks can contribute to building resilience in higher education, including but not limited to the time of a global pandemic. In turn, resilience in higher education is expected to contribute to building resilience in society, or societies. The resilience language is used explicitly

### Resilience in Higher Education

24 <https://education.ec.europa.eu/education-levels/higher-education/european-universities> accessed 31 January 2022

25 (EU Commission EU Commission (2018). Erasmus+ Programme Guide, Version 1 2019: 24-10-2018. [https://ec.europa.eu/programmes/erasmus-plus/sites/erasmusplus2/files/erasmus-plus-programme-guide-2019-version1\\_en.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/programmes/erasmus-plus/sites/erasmusplus2/files/erasmus-plus-programme-guide-2019-version1_en.pdf), p. 125). See also Gunn in European Higher Education Area, 2020, “The European Universities Initiative: A Study of Alliance Formation in Higher Education”, pp. 17-18. [https://link.springer.com/chapter/10.1007/978-3-030-56316-5\\_2](https://link.springer.com/chapter/10.1007/978-3-030-56316-5_2), accessed on 1 January 2022

in the documents of both initiatives.<sup>26</sup> OSUN, our main case study, has vibrantly and clearly illustrated this resilience.

In its first two years, OSUN demonstrated the resilience of the network approach in some of the most challenging conditions. OSUN was born in the crucible of COVID-19, with the pandemic emerging as a global phenomenon and closing college and university campuses a little more than a month after its official announcement at the end of January 2020. What was meant to have been a first half-year of steady planning and strategizing was transformed into collective planning to help institutions respond to the demands of COVID. In March 2020, an OSUN working group was convened of eight institutions by OSUN's Center for Liberal Arts and Sciences Pedagogy, with the explicit goal of helping institutions, most of which pride themselves on intimate teaching environments, adapt to the online demands of Covid. From April through August, they organized: 24 network-wide workshops and site-specific workshops at global majority institutions which attracted nearly 500 faculty from 16 institutions; two weekly "drop-in hours" for faculty across the network; and a teaching resources website, with a specially designed OSUN Blended & Connected Learning Toolkit. They also ran an OSUN Connected Learning Contest amongst faculty through which the 40 winning assignments were selected and then shared across the network. Through the end of the year, CLASP attracted nearly 300 additional faculty to workshops. Faculty who attended the workshops gave them high ratings, with an average evaluation of 4.65 out of 5, and were outspoken about the benefits, including the importance of collaborating with others from around the globe. As one participant put it: "Working with someone who so actively appreciated the group and all of its members equally has been one of the best training experiences I have ever had... no voice was unheard and the group (was encouraged) to take risks with each other they might never have taken." The workshops were also designed in such a way as to train trainers at multiple institutions to further strengthen OSUN and enhance its resilience.

OSUN took advantage of the online formats of Covid to create OSUN Online Courses, courses offered at one institution which were open to enrollment of students from other institutions in which credits would be honored. In 2020-21, OSUN offered more than 180 synchronous OSUN Online Courses across 25 campuses worldwide to nearly 3,000 students. These courses, which had not been envisioned when OSUN was created, helped institutions expand their offerings and offer unique educational opportunities in which students could learn with and from each other in the same virtual "classroom". Like NCCs, these have continued in 2021-2022, with expanded offerings and linkages to certificate programs. Such is the vibrancy of the learning environment that students consistently indicate that they learned more in OSUN Online Courses than if the course had been offered only at their home institution and nearly 100% of faculty who have taught OSUN courses would do so again.

---

26 For illustration, OSUN offers a network professional development program intended to develop resilience at the workplace in the member institutions (see <https://exed.ceu.edu/professional-certificate/resilience> accessed on 31 January 2022). Another project, launched in October 2021 aimed to "cover crucial topics such as women in leadership, diversity, equity & inclusion, the art of conflict mediation, communication and negotiation, building resilient and effective civil society campaigns and organizations" (accessed at <https://opensocietyuniversitynetwork.org/opportunities/call-for-proposals-osun-exed-hub-expert-insights-series> on 31 January 2022).

OSUN was also able to demonstrate resilience in the face of another major crisis, the Taliban takeover of Afghanistan in August 2022 and the subsequent disruption in educational opportunities, particularly for women, and the closure of OSUN partner, the American University of Afghanistan. OSUN worked together with the Open Society Foundation to help evacuate hundreds of students and alumni from the American University of Afghanistan and find places of study for them within the network, at the American University of Beirut, the American University of Central Asia in Kyrgyzstan, the Central European University and Bard College (Becker, 2022). OSUN also provides online classes for displaced students in various countries and refugee camps and provides teaching opportunities for displaced faculty within its Threatened Scholars Integration Initiative.<sup>27</sup> Efforts are ongoing, but it is clear that an integrated network opens numerous and unique opportunities to serve the broader network community even in times of the most acute crises.

---

## 5. Conclusion

EUI and OSUN represent what appear to be an emerging new model of networked and integrated approaches to higher education. It is perhaps too early to tell what the lasting impact will be, but they both represent an ambitious shift in international education. With their integration strategies, they represent more than simply new types of inter-institutional partnerships: a new type of higher education institution that is neither constrained by geography nor traditional learning places, one that can bring diverse populations together, create new opportunities for study and research, and foster resilience that can help partners withstand the most acute educational challenges.

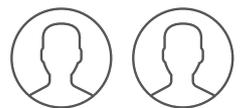
---

<sup>27</sup> The Threatened Scholars Integration Initiative offers Fellowships in OSUN institutions for scholars who have lost their academic positions or cannot remain in their home countries due to threats or actions from authoritarian regimes, persecution for their views or identities, or other risks. Fellowship activities can include teaching, research, writing and other creative activities, and participating in the scholarly and cultural life of host institutions and the broader OSUN community. <https://opensocietyuniversitynetwork.org/education/threatened-scholars-initiative/>, accessed April 15, 2022.

---

## References

- [1] **Becker, J. (2015):** Bard College, an Ecosystem of Engagement. *Journal of Community Engagement and Higher Education*. Vol. 11, no. 1, 2019: 38-52.
- [2] **Becker, J. (2022):** It Takes a Higher Ed Network. *Liberal Education*. April 13, 2022, <https://www.aacu.org/article/it-takes-a-higher-ed-network>.
- [3] **Craciun, D. (2015):** Systematizing internationalization policy in higher education: towards a typology. *Perspectives of Innovations, Economics & Business*. 2015, Vol. 15 Issue 1, 49-56.
- [4] **King, R. (2010):** Policy internationalization, national variety and governance: global models and network power in higher education states. *Higher Education*. 60(6):583-594
- [5] **Larsen, M. (2016):** Internationalization of higher education: an analysis through spatial, network, and mobilities theories. New York, NY: Nature America INC.
- [6] **Stockley, D. & de Wit, H. (2011):** Global Trends in Higher Education and the Significance of International Networks. In: de Wit, H (ed.) *Trends, Issues and Challenges in Internationalisation of Higher Education*. Amsterdam: CAREM. 45-58.
- [7] **de Wit, H. (2015):** Partnerships for the Future: Trends, Challenges and Opportunities. In: Jooste, N., de Wit, H. and Heleta, S. (Eds). *Higher Education, Partnerships for the Future. Unit for Higher Education Internationalisation in the Developing World Nelson Mandela Metropolitan*. 95-101
- [8] **de Wit, H. (2019):** Internationalization in higher education: A critical review. *SFU Educational Review*, 12(3), 9–17.

**Authors**

**Liviu Matei** is a Professor of Higher Education and Public Policy, and Head of the School of Education, Communication and Society at King's College London. He has taught at universities in Europe and the U.S, consulted extensively in the area of higher education policy, and conducted applied policy research projects for the World Bank, UNESCO, OSCE, the Council of Europe, the European Commission, other international intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations, as well as national authorities and universities from Europe and Asia. He is the founder of the Global Observatory on Academic Freedom.

**Jonathan Becker** is Executive Vice President, Vice President for Academic Affairs, and Professor of Political Studies at Bard College, in Annandale-on-Hudson, New York, and Vice Chancellor of the Open Society University Network. He has overseen Bard's international dual degree partnerships with St. Petersburg State University in Russia (Smolny College), Al-Quds University in Palestine, and the American University of Central Asia in Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan, where in academic year 2021-2022, he has served as interim president. He has written extensively on international educational partnerships, liberal arts and sciences education, and the role of colleges and universities as civic actors.