

# FORTHEM

NEWSLETTER #3

*in this issue*



FORTHEM Week,  
June 7-10, 2021

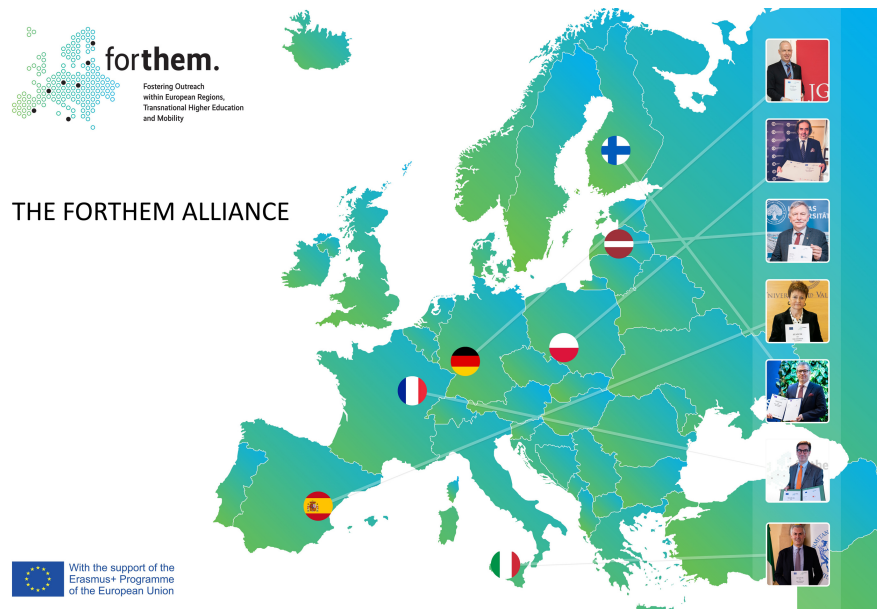
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## FORTHEM Week June 7-10, 2021

**FORTHEM Week, the annual meeting of the FORTHEM Alliance, has ended. During this week, many workshops and discussions were held with one main objective: to move towards one European University and spread the values of multicultural Europe in order to "bring Europe home".**

FORTHEM Week, a living example of inspiration for cooperation, united different stakeholders of our universities in various workshops and provided hands-on experience. Press officers of seven universities met with members of the Alliance responsible for dissemination of information in order to discover opportunities and solutions to enhance communication. To approach sustainability, representatives from our universities' quality assurance centres were brought together



in order to set up a system of reviewing and vetting the manifold FORTHEM activities. Our associated partners were involved in the workshop on regional impact to strengthen collaboration and co-creation within our regions; moreover, the Steering Committee of the FORTHEM Alliance had been exploring the matters regarding further development of the Alliance and, together with colleagues from EACEA (European Education and Culture Executive Agency) and DG EAC (Commission's Directorate General for Education and Culture), addressed future plans and possibilities.

Working groups devoted to quality assurance, regional impact, student involvement, dissemination and Open Badges had been focusing on the evaluation of progress of the FORTHEM Alliance regarding certain tasks; they concentrated on the following processes:

- development of approach to quality assurance;
- expanded involvement of external stakeholders and associated partners;
- intensification of internal and external communication in close collaboration with PR offices;
- enhancement of student participation in development and decision-making procedures;
- Open Badges as one element of an incentive system.

A joint FORTHEM and FIT FORTHEM session was devoted to discussing the shared structures and individual needs, aiming to gain different perspectives and ideas ensuring efficient communication and cooperation among projects and activities in order to strengthen and enhance the transformation of FORTHEM. Current and potential possibilities to support and develop research structures were also discussed from a strategic point of view.

Participants of the FORTHEM BEYOND 2020 session discussed the existing structure, current decision-making procedure, as well as operational and communication structures and processes. They gathered relevant questions and defined challenges to be considered for the further rollout of FORTHEM. Sumathi Subramaniam, DG EAC representative, and Caterina Valitutti, EACEA representative, reflected on the progress of the FORTHEM Alliance. Both demonstrated their deep interest in the Alliance's further development with a particular focus on quality assurance as well as education and teacher's education, dissemination of knowledge and development of skills appropriate for the region, and the implementation of micro-credentials.

After this year's FORTHEM Week, the members, stakeholders and supporters of the FORTHEM European University Alliance have gained plenty of new ideas and are ready to tackle the next stages of establishing one joint European Campus.



## Speed Dating Events

**As part of Speed Dating, FORTHEM universities organized events dedicated to a wide range of sciences.**

On April 29, the University of Jyväskylä hosted an event for experts in educational sciences and teacher education. Each FORTHEM university was represented, and the total number of attendees was 49. In addition, at least one initiative for a joint webinar series for PhD students was presented after the event, and 19 participants filled in the feedback form. The experience was mostly positive, and we also received valuable feedback and suggestions for future improvements of the event. Meanwhile, the University of Burgundy has hosted two “speed dating” meetings via the Zoom platform. The first one was dedicated to biology and environmental sciences, involving 35 academicians, PhDs and students from the 7 partner universities. The participants worked in different subgroups (Environmental Protection, Applied Environmental Science, Biology, Plant Physiology, Botany and Ecology, Human and Animal Physiology, Hydrobiology, Microbiology and Biotechnology, Molecular Biology, Zoology and Animal Ecology). In addition, a summer school project took shape during the meeting, along with other ideas that were also presented after the subgroup sessions.

The other event was dedicated to business and administration, with around 40 academicians from the 7 partners’ universities participating. After the initial plenum presentations, the participants worked in different subgroups (Sharing Economy, Economics, Finance and Accounting, Interdisciplinary Studies in Global Economics, Management Science, Human Resource Management (HRM), Management Accounting/Control – Finance, Marketing, Strategic Management and

Business Ethics). The participants were happy to meet their colleagues and to discuss cooperation possibilities together; a number of specific ideas were already presented after the subgroup sessions. Feedback on both events was very positive. The University of Valencia co-organised an event dedicated to chemistry and chemical engineering (together with the Faculty of Chemistry), as well as an event dedicated to physics and mathematics (together with the Faculty of Physics and the Faculty of Mathematics) during the past few weeks. Devised as virtual workshops dedicated to the exchange and search for academic synergies with a multidisciplinary character, the so-called “speed dating” events foster the achievement of FORTHEM goals, namely, the increase of student and staff member mobility, as well as cooperation with external actors and increase in student civic activities.

In this sense, the virtual meetings dedicated to chemistry (held on May 20), and to physics and mathematics (held on June 3), offered an opportunity to meet and get a glimpse of the possibilities of cooperating with other FORTHEM colleagues who carry out their academic work in a variety of fields, such as chemistry, physical chemistry, chemical engineering, environmental engineering, materials technology and biochemistry, as well as theoretical, nuclear and particle physics, applied physics and nanosciences, geophysics, astrophysics, algebra, geometry, mathematical analysis, and mobility coordination in mathematics and physics, statistics and topology. These meetings have helped to identify links for future research cooperation, as well as the integration of teaching initiatives through experience of virtual mobility and the internationalisation of undergraduate and Master's studies. Members of the seven FORTHEM universities remain in touch regarding future common proposals.



## Labs Expand and Pick up Speed

**In the past few months, much has happened regarding FORTHEM Labs. At the end of 2020, the last three of the seven Labs were officially launched.**

These Labs (Digital Transformation, Climate and Resources, and Resilience, Life Quality and Demographic Change) took off with great enthusiasm and have now all begun their activities in earnest. The new Labs are led by the partner universities in Valencia, Mainz, and Riga.

The Labs have participated in several calls for funding to finance their output development. Two of these calls were a fortunate side effect of the Covid-19 pandemic, since unused travel funding could be reallocated to support the Labs' grassroots level work. The first call was launched in December and closed in January; as a result, a total of 14 different outputs from four different Labs received extra funding for their work. A second call launched by the FORTHEM Digital Academy closed in April, and it provided teams of six Labs with funding for course development. A third call closed at the end of May and provided much needed resources for several output development teams. The awarded funding enhances the planning and implementation of outputs, spanning various forms and topics, including online seminars, lecture series, courses, academic publications, and more. The Covid-19 pandemic is a notable topic in many outputs, regarding, for example, its effects on migrants, research on the mechanisms of coping with pandemic-induced economic shocks, and post-Covid Europe in general. Other highlights of different Lab outputs include a citizen science pilot at local schools in Jyväskylä, Opole and Valencia, a look at whether virtual reality can be used to

improve aging people's motor activities, and a climate sustainability concept for the FORTHEM Alliance.

Since the FORTHEM pilot funding period is already halfway complete, the Labs have also organised their first progress meetings. In these meetings, Labs took stock of the progress of their outputs so far and mapped their future plans. All Labs held their progress meetings during April and May, and they resulted in fruitful discussions between Lab members, as well as feedback, synergy among different outputs, and sharing of best practices. Another series of meetings focus on the expansion of collaboration with external stakeholders outside of academia. All in all, seven "matchmaking" workshops are being organized under the FIT FORTHEM project label, bringing together experts with different backgrounds and making them consider new openings and joint ventures with the Labs. The aim is to create new products and services that are based on the expertise of Labs' contributors, and serve various sectors of society.

Since the different Labs have now been operational for a while, they have developed several cooperative actions. Some outputs, such as a joint lecture series by the Diversity and Migration Lab and Experiencing Europe Lab, have already been completed, and the awarded funding allows the output development teams to speed up their work. Stay tuned – we will keep you updated about Labs' work on our recently launched FORTHEM Blog!



## FORTHEM in Brussels

**Wednesday, May 12, 2021, saw the digital kick-off of the first workshop with representatives of all seven Alliance regions upon the joint invitation of the Representation of the State of Rhineland-Palatinate to the Federal Government, as well as to the European Union and Johannes Gutenberg University Mainz.**

The event was co-organised by Martina Krebs (Department for European and International Cooperation of the Rhineland-Palatinate State Chancellery) and Nicole Birkle (FIT FORTHEM Managing Coordinator). Both welcome notes, namely, that of Dr. Johanna Becker-Strunk, Head of the Representation of the State of Rhineland-Palatinate to the EU in Brussels, and of Prof. Dr. Stefan Müller-Stach, FIT FORTHEM Coordinator and JGU Vice President for Research and Early Career Academics, highlighted the opportunities for the regional development of the partner universities and their environment by the establishment of the FORTHEM Alliance and the implementation of its first major flagship project: FIT FORTHEM. They also emphasised that this workshop should be considered only as a starting point for further intensive exchange with and among the regions in the future. During the workshop, the 32 participants enjoyed a highly informative overview on the topics “The European Higher Education Alliances: Linking the European Education Area” and “The European Research Area: Challenges, Opportunities, Development through Introductory Interventions”, given by Stijn Delauré (Directorate General for Research and Innovation) and Tine Delva (Directorate General for Education, Youth, Sport and

Culture). Discussions with both Commission representatives also provided important insights into future funding of the European Universities’ Networks and the opportunities for acquiring additional grants.

In their presentation on FORTHEM and FIT FORTHEM, Tanja Herrmann (FORTHEM team leader at JGU) and Nicole Birkle highlighted how the FORTHEM Alliance could possibly start joint activities with the regions; they also added some ideas regarding the potential benefits for both the Alliance and its partner regions.

In her closing remarks, Martina Krebs, the host and moderator of the event, invited all the participants to join the next digital and publicly open event on the new Framework Programme for Research and Innovation of the European Commission Horizon Europe in September 2021, also co-organised by the Representation of the State of Rhineland-Palatinate to the Federal Government and the European Union and the FIT FORTHEM team of JGU. We hope that in future all our regional representations in the countries involved, as well as in Brussels, will be interested in joint activities with FORTHEM and FIT FORTHEM, and consequently forge an in-depth partnership with us and each other.

As a first step to foster cooperation, the strong preparedness of the Representation of the State of Rhineland-Palatinate in Brussels to support the FORTHEM Alliance in future was expressed in a commitment letter signed by Johanna Becker-Strunk during the preparation stage for the workshop; the letter was sent to all workshop participants as a follow-up to the event.

# FIT FORTHEM on the Road Across the University

**JGU Mainz has launched a virtual roadshow throughout the university to inform about the current FORTHEM performance, as well as the new FIT FORTHEM project.**

For the last one-and-a-half years, the seven FORTHEM Alliance partner universities have been working on creating a lasting partnership: a real European University. The ongoing transformation can be followed on the FORTHEM website and social media; however, some faculty and staff members are still not aware of how FIT FORTHEM can enhance the day-to-day operations of their local departments, units and teams.

In Mainz, Dr. Tanja Herrmann (International Office) and Dr. Nicole Birkle (JGU Research Services) present the opportunities provided by the project to the individual departments and core committees, as well as facilities at JGU. Researchers and students already involved in various FORTHEM actions are invited to showcase their experience.

FIT FORTHEM offers opportunities for self-development and participation in international activities for researchers, teachers, students and staff in all partner universities; the activities include, for example:

- innovative teaching initiatives devoted to joint course development and shared supervision, often via the alliance-wide Digital Academy;
- matching and team-building activities as foundations for cooperation, pilots and grants;
- mobilities, tandems, job shadowing for staff; internships and study visits for students;

- international expert support groups and workshops aimed at professional skill development;
- lab-based thematic webinars and outputs (multilingualism, European integration, digital transformation, diversity and migration, food science, social and economic resilience, climate change) addressing highly topical global challenges, as defined by Horizon Europe and the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals.

Notably, FIT FORTHEM is going to enhance the possibilities for exchange and cooperation with non-academic partners; in addition, it will tackle the challenge of coordinating research agendas for the Alliance and develop ways to connect and share human and infrastructural resources. The funding is provided by Horizon 2020, and it complements the original backing the alliance received from ERASMUS+ in 2019. The JGU roadshow through the departments started on April 21, 2021, and it is going to last until July. It creates a great opportunity to boost the popularity of the FORTHEM Alliance even more and, above all, to enhance the visibility of the appropriate go-to managers and coordinators for staff who consider getting involved in the ongoing FORTHEM actions.

Dr. Nicole Birkle notes, "To ensure that the roadshow meets everybody's expectations, we consistently try to bring the presentation as close to the audience as possible by providing space to the department members who are already involved. We hope to share the enthusiasm for collaboration and promote the spirit of the Alliance. In addition, we wish to avoid filling the presentation with excessive technical details and explanations on how FORTHEM and FIT FORTHEM are related; instead, we focus on the benefits and how to get involved and seek information."

A similar "roadshow" initiative is being considered at JYU.





## **FIT FORTHEM** provides tandem and job shadowing opportunities

**Are you looking for a partner or a prospective co-worker at another FORTHEM university? Find out how to reach them!**

Working together in an international and European environment can be very productive and stimulating if one is aware of the cultural differences and how to bridge them. What better way is there for gaining a good understanding of how things work in other organisations and countries than peer exchange on an international level?

By forming cross-institutional and cross-sectoral tandems and working groups of experts in the same or complementary fields in Research & Innovation (management), we can build a strong and resilient network capable of taking on upcoming challenges in the future.

Target group: project managers, managers of departments, core facilities, research infrastructure or international offices at one of the FORTHEM partner universities, and researchers interested in R&I activities. In addition, industry or society stakeholders who want to get a better understanding of work processes and the mindset of their international partners are also welcome, as well as students who are looking for a chance to improve their language skills and experience the European spirit.

If you are looking for a tandem-partner or if you want to offer a job shadowing opportunity, please get in contact with us ([fitforthem@uni-mainz.de](mailto:fitforthem@uni-mainz.de)) – any form of cooperation and interaction is welcome! Groups/tandems should be active for at least 6 months. Staff members may apply for ERASMUS+ short term mobility funds.

## **FORTHEM training** on digital competences

**FORTHEM alliance will offer three trainings on digital competences for the alliance staff as part of the Digital Academy.**

University of Jyväskylä organised the first training in spring 2021. The trainers of the course, Merja Laamanen and Liisa Kallio, had a short presentation of the training in an international conference organized by EUNIS. EUNIS is a European University Information Systems organisation. Their mission is to help member institutions to develop their IT landscape by sharing experiences and working together. The conference was organized fully online. The title of the presentation was "Developing teaching professionals' digital competences in European higher education in the time of corona pandemic". Merja and Liisa introduced the challenges and lessons learned of the project that focuses on different ways of internationalization. They discussed how the plans were affected by the lockdown caused by the COVID-19 pandemic around Europe and how they eventually managed to create a successful interdisciplinary online training for seven partner universities. They also presented the training in a nutshell as well as the tips for the next round. They had an audience of 154 participants all around Europe in their online presentation.

# FORTHEM partner universities

Johannes Gutenberg University of Mainz (Johannes Gutenberg-Universität Mainz), Germany

University of Burgundy (Université de Bourgogne), France

University of Jyväskylä (Jyväskylän yliopisto), Finland

University of Opole (Uniwersytet Opolski), Poland

University of Palermo (Università degli Studi di Palermo), Italy

University of Latvia (Latvijas Universitāte), Latvia

University of Valencia (Universitat de Valencia), Spain



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