FOSTERING COLLABORATION: THE INFLUENCE OF EUROPEAN UNIVERSITY ALLIANCES ON ENTREPRENEURIAL AND INNOVATION ECOSYSTEMS – THE EELISA EXPERIENCE

ELENA BERGA
PETRA MOOG
JANIK WADLINGER
NINA WALKER
NIHAN YILDRIM

Collaboration in European higher education has a long-standing tradition (Gunn & Mintrom, 2013). Yet, with its European University Initiative (EUI), the EU introduces new dimensions by aiming to transition European university cooperation from project-based interactions to fully institutionalized, long-term partnerships through the establishment of European University Alliances (EUAs).

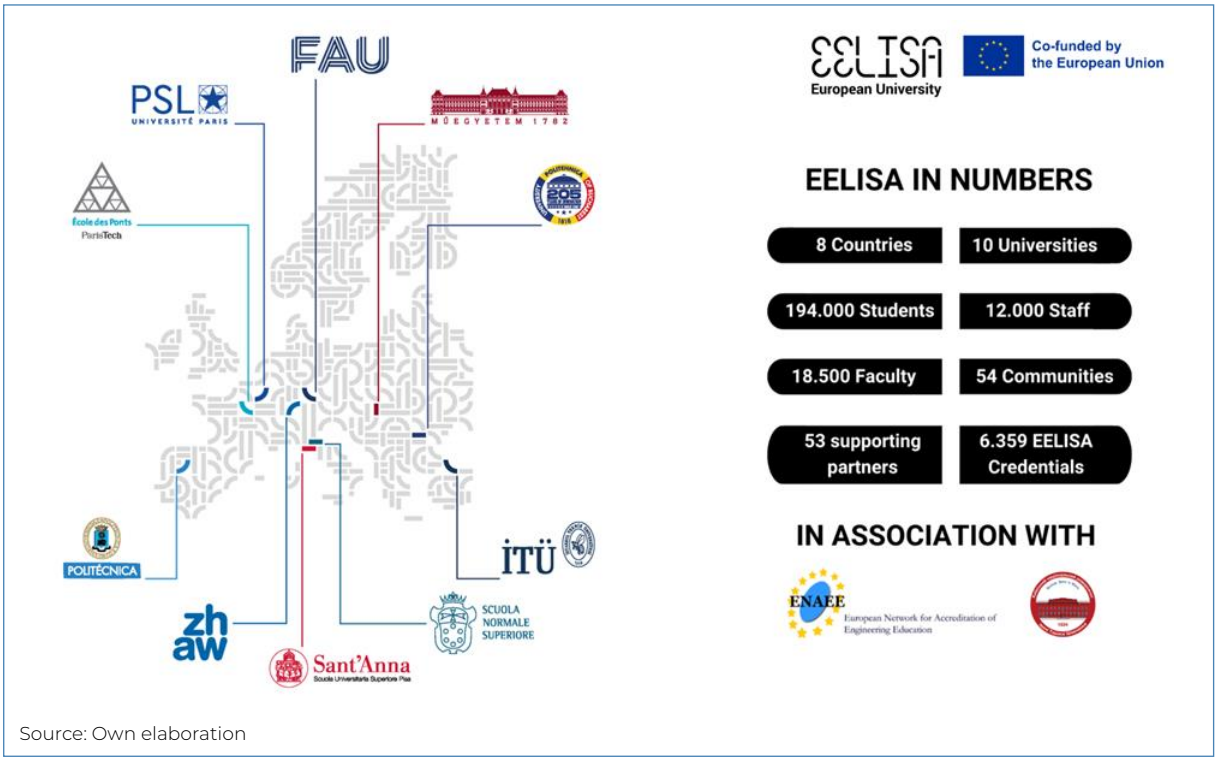
With a total budget of 1.1 billion EUR, the EUI has supported the formation of 64 EUAs, encompassing 560 Higher Education Institutes (HEI), by 2024. Bringing together the missions of the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) and European Research Area (ERA), the EUAs are tasked with two primary goals: 1) to promote shared European values and principles, and 2) to contribute to strengthening the European knowledge economy. The motivations behind creating such alliances include integrating diverse cultures, addressing critical societal challenges, and implementing reforms within the European innovation ecosystem. The geographical diversity required for these alliances reflects the EUI's role as an inclusive tool for fostering more equitable development in higher education and research across Europe (Brooks & Rensimer, 2023). According to the European Commission, these alliances are "transnational collaborations that will become the universities of the future, promoting European values and identity, and revolutionizing the quality and competitiveness of European higher education" (European Commission, 2022).

EELISA (European Engineering Learning Innovation and Science Alliance) was established as part of the EUI to create a cross-border educational and research ecosystem, primarily focusing on engineering and technical disciplines. The alliance aims to foster collaboration between universities across Europe, developing a shared model for higher education that integrates academic learning, professional training, and research. In 2024, EELISA was composed of ten leading higher education institutions (for more details see Figure 1.):

- National University of Science and Technology POLITEHNICA Bucharest (NUST-PB), Romania
- Budapest University of Technology and Economics (BME), Hungary
- École des Ponts ParisTech (ENPC), France
- Friedrich-Alexander-Universität Erlangen-Nürnberg (FAU), Germany
- Istanbul Technical University (ITU), Türkiye
- Sant'Anna School of Advanced Studies (SSSA), Italy
- Scuola Normale Superiore di Pisa (SNS), Italy
- Université Paris Sciences et Lettres (PSL), France
- Universidad Politécnica de Madrid (UPM), Spain
- Zurich University of Applied Sciences (ZHAW), Switzerland
- Taras Shevchenko National University of Kyiv (KNU)

EELISA was among the second round of alliances formed by the EUI. During its first period, EELISA 1.0 (2020 - 2023) was mainly focused on training engineers to build future needed skills regarding innovation, impact and entrepreneurship. In the second period, EELISA 2.0 (2023-2027), the alliance successfully added a new member university (ZHAW) and continued efforts to grow its partnerships. In this new EELISA 2.0, the focus on engineering from EELISA 1.0 is enhanced to building multidisciplinary networks that generate skills and re-

FIGURE 1
MEMBERS OF EELISA



Source: Own elaboration

search to train all students with a focus on impact innovation and entrepreneurship in line with the UN SDGs. This shift is reflected with EELISAs new vision "Bridging Engineering, Sciences and Humanities for Equitable, Sustainable and Digital Societies". Thus, EELISA 2.0 is aiming to create a dynamic ecosystem empowering innovators and entrepreneurs through collaborative efforts and resource integration.

EELISA'S THIRD, FOURTH AND FIFTH MISSION

EELISA embodies the spirit of the "Third Mission" of universities, which extends the role of universities beyond traditional education and research to active societal engagement through innovation and knowledge transfer. Historically, universities primarily focused on basic research and technological advancements, with the understanding that these developments would eventually serve the public interest, particularly in areas like national defense or welfare. This approach, widely adopted after World War II, laid the groundwork for what would later be known as the "entrepreneurial university" (Etzkowitz, 2003). In this model, universities became key players in promoting economic growth through the commercialization of research, patent generation, and technological innovation.

In recent years, however, universities have been called to embrace a broader mission. It is no longer sufficient for them to contribute solely to economic growth or innovation and transfer into industry; they must also engage with societal challenges directly. Universities are now expected to foster societal resilience, offer relevant and high-quality education, and play a key role in cultural, social, political, technological, and economic development (Geschwind et al., 2019). This expanded role emphasizes the need for institutions of higher learning to work closely with external stakeholders, from industry and government to civil society, to co-create solutions for the most pressing global challenges.

EELISA, from its inception, has aligned itself with this broader vision of the "Third Mission" by fostering a culture of innovation and collaboration that extends far beyond the academic sphere. The alliance not only promotes research but actively encourages the transfer of knowledge and technological innovations into real-world applications. By building strong partnerships between universities, industries, and society, EELISA exemplifies how universities can assume greater responsibility in addressing societal issues. Thus, universities as well as the EELISA is entering the so-called "Fourth and Fifth" mission. Through its cross-disciplinary and international approach, EELISA facilitates the exchange of ideas, fostering innovation that is responsive to societal needs. Its initiatives focus on areas such as sustainability, digital transformation, and social inclusion, ensuring that technological and scientific advancements are leveraged to benefit society at large. In doing so, EELISA not only contributes to economic development but also addresses broader social challenges, from environmental sustainability to equity and inclusion.

EELISA exemplifies the modern university's expanded mission of societal engagement, demonstrating how knowledge and innovation can be harnessed for the public good. By aligning itself with the principles of the "Third, Fourth, and Fifth Mission," EELISA is a leading example of how universities today can drive both technological advancement and societal progress.

FOUNDATION OF COLLABORATION AS ANTECEDENTS OF THE SUCCESS OF THE MISSION

Collaboration in higher education can encompass the areas of education, research, entrepreneurship, and capacity building. They offer opportunities to address complex challenges by pooling resources, knowledge, and expertise, thereby enabling partners to achieve shared objectives, set educational standards, and deepen cooperation across various domains (Pinheiro et al., 2024). Recent studies have begun to explore important key themes related to these alliances, their alignment with Europe's economic competitiveness, and their ad-

herence to best practices (Fumasoli & Rossi, 2021). Current research in that field tries to examine how forming these alliances can facilitate closer collaboration, viewing them as learning networks where universities can exchange knowledge, define strategies, engage in ethical reflection, and build a competitive advantage to attract students and researchers in an attractive and innovative learning and research environment. It seems that varying levels of experience with innovative educational formats and stakeholder engagement create opportunities for exchange, and developing a common language for joint activities can help universities align their strategies and decision-making processes. This expansion of university roles aligns with evolving emphasis on the value of universities in achieving societal or economic objectives (Fuchs et al., 2023).

EELISA's vision for the future is centered on facilitating knowledge and technology transfer through innovative learning environments. This includes fostering entrepreneurship education, developing research-based solutions in partnership with end-users, and actively disseminating knowledge to both the private, public, and broader societal sectors.

EELISA's innovative structural model is built on an ecosystem of communities managed through vertical and horizontal bodies. This cooperation model transcends mere complementarity and support, creating a genuinely European model that leverages the strengths of its partners.

Within the dynamic ecosystem of EELISA Communities, problem owners, stakeholders, professionals, and entire universities collaborate to address societal challenges through interdisciplinary engineering solutions. A range of activities, including long and short courses, competitions, and capstone projects, engages stakeholders in a challenge-based approach. The effectiveness of these activities is assessed based on factors such as multidisciplinarity, participant diversity, team size, and alignment with Sustainable Development Goals.

The Communities are designed to transcend disciplinary boundaries, incorporating Innovation, Research, and Entrepreneurship agents from both within universities and external stakeholders. Each EELISA community is responsible for disseminating EELISA's achievements to diverse audiences, including through scientific channels (e.g., conferences), local entrepreneurs (e.g., impact hubs), and broader public outreach initiatives.

On the other hand, the EELISA innoCORE Project's Research, Innovation, and Strategy (R&I) component focused on facilitating interactions between researchers and innovators, fostering dialogue with citizens and non-academic stakeholders, and establishing a portfolio of shared scientific infrastructures. Additionally, the project aimed to promote and support collaborative R&I initiatives, creating new structures such as research groups, clusters, joint laboratories, startups, and scientific parks. These efforts were complemented by a strategic focus on optimizing the outreach of R&I activities, aligned with a shared open science approach that prioritizes gender equality, diversity, and citizen science.

Through EELISA, a range of complementary science-based activities empower the development of challenge-driven communities. These activities foster further interactions and synergies, organized through emergent "clusters" that catalyze areas of shared interest and research capabilities. This collaborative approach enables joint research initiatives involving students, researchers, faculty, and external stakeholders within the EELISA network.

In line with this development, EELISA built its collaboration on the following three building blocks:

- Creating transformative experiences through the EELISA Campus:To foster multi-layered, innovative and flexible learning opportunities that are easily accessible across the 10 partners of EELISA (seamless in-person, hybrid and digital mobility).
- Connecting Communities through unprecedented collaboration: To consolidate the shared ecosystem of EELISA Communities as the learning lab of sys-

temic, structural, and sustainable cooperation models.

– Building the university of the future with a holistic approach: To consolidate the EELISA European University as a sustainable alliance that progressively grows in its depth, scope, diversity, and ambition.

EELISA's future vision focuses on facilitating knowledge and technology transfer through an innovative learning environment, including fostering entrepreneurship education, developing research-based solutions in partnership with end-users, and actively disseminating knowledge to stakeholders in private, public, and broader societal sectors. EELISA initially prioritized challenge-based learning, interdisciplinary training, and then broadened its vision to a multidisciplinary EELISA campus. In this context, EELISA focus on the "I" for innovation through promoting mobility opportunities for students, researchers and staff, and converging the innovation and entrepreneurship ecosystems of its partner universities, hence establishing collaboration within the shared innovation ecosystem, to promote an entrepreneurial and innovative mindset for impactful, innovative entrepreneurship, within the alliance. The collaboration aims to run across the entire innovation and entrepreneurship lifecycle: from raising awareness, through education, to venture creation, incubation, acceleration, successful market implementation and growth. For this, EELISA leverages the strengths of each partner university to create a cohesive and dynamic allied ecosystem that supports the development of entrepreneurial skills and the commercialization of research outputs.

ADDRESSING FRAGMENTATION

EELISA's mission to create a pan-European network is a response to the challenges posed by fragmented innovation ecosystems, where the potential for technological and scientific advancements is often hindered by geographical, cultural and institutional barriers. In Europe, academic research and innovation have often traditionally been isolated within national boundaries, limiting the full potential of cross-border collaboration and commercialization. This still in parts existing fragmentation has slowed the pace of innovation and restricted the ability of universities to efficiently transfer knowledge and technologies to industries and society across different regions.

To overcome these barriers, EELISA seeks to integrate diverse institutions, industries, and societal actors into a cohesive, collaborative network and alliance. By bringing together universities, research institutions, and companies from different European countries, the alliance facilitates the pooling of knowledge, resources, and expertise, thus creating a more robust and interconnected innovation ecosystem. This integration is essential not only for fostering groundbreaking research but also for accelerating the commercialization of academic research on a larger, more impactful scale, as well as an innovative, interdisciplinary teaching approach, offering all students the skills needed in today's labor market and society.

A key benefit of this pan-European approach is the enhanced ability to bridge the gap between research and the market. Academic discoveries, particularly in engineering and technology, often face significant hurdles in transitioning from the lab to real-world applications. The complex processes of patenting, prototyping, and product development require not only advanced technical knowledge but also a strong network of partners who can provide financial support, market access, and legal expertise. By fostering cross-border collaborations, EELISA helps to build these networks, creating an ecosystem where innovations can move more swiftly and efficiently from academic research to market-ready products and services, not only in regards to technology but as well making a change and delivering social impact.

Moreover, EELISA's approach to overcoming fragmented ecosystems includes a focus on aligning educational and innovation standards across Europe. This harmonization ensures that academic and research outputs from different countries can be more easily integrated and commercialized

across borders. By creating a shared framework for innovation and education, EELISA allows for smoother cooperation among member institutions and industries, making it easier for innovations developed in one country to be adapted and applied in another.

The creation of this unified ecosystem also holds the potential to address the uneven distribution of innovation capacities across Europe. Some regions, often those with fewer resources or less developed infrastructure, may struggle to commercialize research independently. EELISA's network provides these regions with access to a broader pool of resources, knowledge, and partners, thus leveling the playing field and promoting more equitable opportunities for innovation across Europe.

The EELISA Communities are designed to remove the collaboration challenges regarding disciplinary boundaries, incorporating Innovation, Research, and Entrepreneurship agents from both within universities and external stakeholders

EELISA's pan-European network is a vital mechanism for overcoming the fragmentation of innovation ecosystems in Europe. By facilitating cross-border collaboration, harmonizing educational and research standards, and ensuring that all regions have the opportunity to commercialize their academic research, EELISA is helping to create a more unified and dynamic European innovation landscape. This approach not only strengthens the commercialization of academic research but also accelerates Europe's capacity to address global challenges through technological and scientific advancements.

CONVERGING ENTREPRENEURIAL AND INNOVATION ECOSYSTEMS - AN ANALYSIS

In this article we set out to deliver insights on how collaboration, specifically within an EUA, influence and converge Entrepreneurial and Innovation Ecosystems in the case of EELISA. For this, we reviewed proposals, delivery documents, and reports from the EELISA database and websites to assess the goals and outcomes of EELISA UNFOLDS and InnoCORE, as well as, preliminary outputs of EELISA 2.0. By applying methodologies from Eisenhardt (2021) and Yin (2018), the study provided insights into the alliance's structure, success factors, and challenges, leading to more specific goals and improved management of the third mission in EELISA 2.0.

EELISA 1.0 did not initially include targeted strategies for innovation and entrepreneurship. Yet, the alliance quickly recognized the importance of building a comprehensive ecosystem that integrates research, innovation, and industry engagement. To address this, two major initiatives were launched: EELISA UNFOLDS and EELISA InnoCORE, both of which received external funding to support ecosystem development.

- EELISA UNFOLDS (Unlocking Full innOvation capacity buiLDing and entrepreneurship), funded by the European Institute of Innovation & Technology (EIT), aimed to establish a shared innovation and entrepreneurship ecosystem. It involved students, academics, researchers, industry players, and startups, providing a platform for collaboration and the development of innovative solutions across the network of universities.
- EELISA InnoCORE (INNOvation and COmmon REsearch Strategy), funded through Horizon 2020, served as the research and innovation arm of the alliance. It tackled key challenges such as the creation of a common open science strategy, the development of a gender equality plan, and the analysis of barriers to collaboration. InnoCORE provided a structural framework for long-term research collaboration and innovation within the EELISA network.

While EELISA 1.0 laid the groundwork for academic collaboration, EELISA UNFOLDS and EELISA InnoCORE have extended the alliance's scope by promoting innovation, entrepreneurship, and research across borders. Due to the success and resonance of the two initiatives, the mission to build a EELISA Entrepreneurial and Innovation Ecosystems is now fully integrated into the

vision and structure of EELISA 2.0. This is, not only to educate engineering students to work on social problems and create impact, but to pave the ground for contributing and meaningful research and (technology or knowledge) transfer from all university disciplines into society.

Increasing Entrepreneurship

The EELISA Alliance has initiated several impactful entrepreneurial activities under the training pillar, significantly contributing to the entrepreneurial and innovation ecosystems within its member institutions. Two standout programs exemplify EELISA's commitment to fostering innovation and entrepreneurship one should be the ''EELISA Entrepreneurship School'' and the second one ''EELISA Next Level: Your Seed and Series A Funding Booster Event''. Therefore, this section will evaluate these previously mentionedentrepreneurial initiatives.

1. EELISA Entrepreneurship School**:**
   - Overview: The EELISA Entrepreneurship School, held in October 2023 at the Fraunhofer Research Campus in Waischenfeld, Germany, was designed for students and staff from all EELISA partners to help them develop their first business ideas into viable business models. Participants formed interdisciplinary teams, received training on business model generation, value proposition design, and pitching, and participated in interactive workshops such as Lego Serious Play and storytelling.
   - Results: The school attracted 165 applicants, with 26 participants ultimately selected from seven EELISA institutions. The program was highly successful, receiving excellent feedback from participants, who highlighted the value of the hands-on approach, the collaborative environment, and the opportunity to network with startups and experts. The school not only fostered entrepreneurial skills but also led to the creation of several startups by participants in the months following the event.
   - Feedback and Impact: Participant's feedback was overwhelmingly positive, with many expressing a desire for similar programs to be continued and expanded. The school was praised for its structured, immersive experience, and the opportunity it provided to build connections and gain practical entrepreneurial skills. Several participants have since founded startups, illustrating the program's impact on fostering new ventures.
2. EELISA Next Level: Your Seed and Series A Funding Booster Event:
   - Overview: Held in March 2024 at ZOLLHOF Tech Incubator in Nuremberg, Germany, this event aimed to provide advanced digital, tech, and deep-tech startups with the opportunity to pitch to investors and gain valuable feedback. The event included a pitch competition, networking sessions, and expert talks on seed and Series A funding.
   - Results: The event attracted 35 startup applications, of which 15 were selected to pitch to a jury of professional venture capital (VC) investors. The event was attended by over 120 participants, including investors, business angels, and external stakeholders. Startups benefited from the opportunity to network with European investors, receive feedback on their business models, and expand their visibility in the European VC ecosystem.
   - Feedback and Impact: The event was a resounding success, with positive feedback from both startups and investors. The jury awarded the EELISA Next Level Startup Awards to the top three startups: Syntonym (from ITU), Olivia (from SSSA), and Rayscape (from UPB). The event created a valuable platform for startups seeking to scale their busi-

nesses across Europe and demonstrated the strength of the EELISA network in bringing together high-quality startups and investors.

EELISA Startup support

Within EELISA InnoCORE, one of the main goals was to open up the startup support programmes of the individual universities to alliance members across borders. For this, the alliance started to map the startup support landscape that was available at three stages of the startup journey, namely Nucleation, Incubation and Acceleration. Figure 2 contains the 50 programmes, activities and institutions for startup support, out of which, nearly ¼ was opened up to the EELISA alliance by 2023. Barriers to opening up more programs were often local policies and regulation, as well as language barriers, since many university programmes are provided in the local language.

Within EELISA 2.0, the push to map and connect the startup support structures to build an EELISA Innovation & Entrepreneurship Ecosystem continues. The goal is

FIGURE 2
STARTUP SUPPORT PROGRAMMES AND SERVICES IN THE EELISA INNOCORE PROJECT

Nucleation	Incubation	Acceleration
Open to EELISA Ecosystem		
UPM CAIT (UPM) FAU Startup Service (FAU)	Actúaupm Network of Investors and Experts (UPM) ZOLLHOF Tech Incubator (FAU) JOSEPHS – The Open Innovation Lab (FAU) Medical Valley (FAU) ITU Cekirdek (ITU)	ZOLLHOF Tech Incubator (FAU) JOSEPHS – The Open Innovation Lab (FAU) Medical Valley (FAU) JoTTO (SSSA) Third Mission Administrative Area (SSSA) EIT Climate KIC_accelerator (UPM) Venture Builder Incubation Program EIT Digital (UPMA
Not Open to EELISA or Not English-Speaking		
Entrepreneurship Group UPM (UPM) UPM Partnership with Banco Santander (UPM) Makerspace (ENPC) Fablab Descartes (ENPC) FAU Digital Tech Academy (FAU) ITU GINOVA (ITU) Knowledge Transfer Office (SNS) JoTTO Office (SNS) Contamination Lab (SNS) Start Cup Toscana 2023 (SSSA) UPBizz Entrepreneurship Center (UPB) BME US(3) (BME) Technology Transfer Services at PSL (PSL) Mines Paris – PSL coworking space (PSL) PSL-Lab (PSL coworking space) (PSL)	Stage 4 actúaupm (UPM) UPM2T Entrepreneurship Group UPM (UPM) UPM Partnership with Banco Santander (UPM) Incubateur Descartes (ENPC) d.school Paris (ENPC) Station F (ENPC) Co-Innovation Lab ENPC (ENPC) NKubator (FAU) LZE (FAU) EXISTENCY (FAU) Agreement and collaboration with POLO TECNOLOGICO NAVACCHIO (SNS) JUMP (SSSA) Innovation Labs (UPB) BME US(3) (BME) Incubateur Paris-Dauphine (PSL) PC Up (PSL) Chimie Paris Innov (PSL) PSL Tech Seed (PSL)	Inspiring women (UPM) EXISTENCY (UPM) ITU ARI teknokent (ITU) Innovation Labs (UPB) PSL Innovation Fund (PSL)

Source: Own elaboration

to offer an accessible, complementary, and comprehensive array of programs, infrastructure and services that foster innovation. For this, the first step was to get a border understanding of the startup support that form a local ecosystem by building a framework out of the following categories:

- Training: such as teaching (e.g. entrepreneurship classes) and events (e.g. startup competitions)
- Infrastructure: such as Entrepreneurship Centers, Incubators, Accelerator, Proof of Concept Labs, Science Parks
- Financing: such as internal grants by the university and external private and public funding opportunities
- Network: such as mentors and partners from the industry and region
- Support: such as legal founding support and tech transfer offices
- Research: such as research in innovation and patenting

With this comprehensive ecosystem perspective, EELISA now better accounts not only university activities, but also partnerships with local governments and the industry. The framework allows EELISA to better define the low-hanging fruits for collaboration where the universities best complement each other, as well as to set benchmark activities that can be broadened across the alliance to drive regional and European innovation.

EELISA Industrial Chair

The EELISA Industrial Chair bridges academia and industry by fostering collaboration, knowledge transfer, and commercialization of research. This prestigious position aligns academic research with industry needs, ensuring practical applications and innovation. By organizing activities like hackathons, joint research, and technology transfer initiatives, the Chair helps bring academic discoveries into the industrial sector.

The Chair leads research efforts that address industry challenges, focusing on applied research and technological advancements. Hackathons and innovation challenges bring together students, researchers, and industry professionals to solve real-world problems, fostering interdisciplinary cooperation and generating innovative solutions. Joint research symposia also promote cross-border collaboration, enabling the exchange of ideas and faster commercialization.

In addition to research, the Chair is involved in teaching and mentoring, offering specialized courses that blend academic knowledge with practical industry experience. This prepares students for industry careers and ensures their academic work is industry-relevant.

Technology transfer is key, with the Chair establishing offices and initiatives to license new technologies and bring academic innovations to market. These efforts ensure research is applied in ways that benefit both academia and industry.

Cross-institutional collaboration is a central feature, enabling EELISA member institutions to tackle large-scale projects through shared expertise. By facilitating joint research labs, grants, and research clusters, the Chair drives innovation and ensures academic discoveries are commercially viable and impactful for industry.

In conclusion, the EELISA Industrial Chair connects academia and industry, promoting research, innovation, and technology transfer. Through collaboration and commercialization efforts, the Chair helps translate academic research into real-world industrial applications.

BROADER IMPACT AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS

The article highlights the significant strides made by the EELISA Alliance in fostering a pan-European entrepreneurial and innovation ecosystem, aligning with the “Third, Fourth and Fifth Mission” of universities. Through its initiatives, EELISA has established a robust framework for collaboration that extends beyond traditional academic boundaries, bringing together higher edu-

cation institutions, industry, and society to tackle pressing societal challenges. The joint entrepreneurial activities evaluated in this report have had a significant impact on the innovation and entrepreneurial ecosystem within EELISA. By opening up resources, creating new initiatives, and fostering collaboration across institutions, EELISA has successfully created a cross-border innovation and entrepreneurship ecosystem. The EELISA Entrepreneurship School and EELISA Next Level events are prime examples of how the alliance can leverage its diverse resources to support entrepreneurship and innovation across Europe.

Looking ahead, there is strong demand for these activities to continue and expand in EELISA 2.0. The success of these initiatives highlights the importance of cross-institutional collaboration in fostering entrepreneurship and suggests that future activities could build on this momentum by further integrating stakeholders, offering additional training opportunities, and expanding access to startup resources across Europe.

CONCLUSION

The evaluation of the EELISA InnoCORE, EELISA UNFOLDS and EELISA 2.0 joint innovation and entrepreneurial activities demonstrates that the alliance has made significant strides in building a pan-European entrepreneurial and innovation ecosystem that foster interdisciplinary cooperation. This ecosystem is developed to facilitate knowledge transfer, encourages startup creation, and integre research with real-world applications. As a first step, EELISA InnoCORE and EELISA UNFOLDS have not only contributed to bridging gaps between academic institutions and industries, e.g. with the introduction of an industrial chair, but have also helped to overcome the traditional fragmentation of Europe's innovation landscape. Both the EELISA Entrepreneurship School and the EELISA Next Level event have been instrumental in fostering innovation, supporting startups, and enhancing the visibility of EELISA's entrepreneurial efforts. As the alliance moves into its next phase, there is great potential to build on these successes and continue driving entrepreneurship and innovation across Europe.

Transition from EELISA 1.0 to EELISA 2.0 with a Focus on Innovation and Entrepreneurship Ecosystems

As EELISA transitions from EELISA 1.0 to EELISA 2.0, the alliance is taking a significant step towards enhancing its role in fostering innovation and entrepreneurship across Europe. While EELISA 1.0 focused on building a strong collaborative framework among European universities, EELISA 2.0 introduces a more targeted approach, with a dedicated work package aimed at creating innovation and entrepreneurship ecosystems. This shift marks a deeper commitment to supporting startups, fostering entrepreneurial mindsets, and connecting academic institutions with industry and society as well as working more interdisciplinary to solve current problems in societies.

The introduction of a new work package in EELISA 2.0 is designed to strengthen innovation and entrepreneurial efforts by establishing robust ecosystems where universities, startups, industry partners, and local communities can collaborate. This work package focuses on promoting entrepreneurship and innovation education, supporting startups through different stages (from idea generation to scaling), and creating a cross-institutional framework for innovation and entrepreneurship. By integrating these elements, EELISA 2.0 aims to provide its partners with the tools and networks needed to generate impactful solutions to real-world challenges.

The addition of the Zurich University of Applied Sciences (ZHAW) as a new partner in EELISA 2.0 brings valuable expertise and resources to the alliance. ZHAW's strong focus on applied research, innovation, and entrepreneurship, particularly in areas such as digital transformation and sustainability, complements the existing strengths of the EELISA network. ZHAW's participation will help expand EELISA's innovation ecosystem by connecting it to new industries and fostering a broader entrepreneurial culture across Europe.

With the new work package on entrepreneurship and innovation, and the inclusion

of ZHAW, EELISA 2.0 is well-positioned to create sustainable, transnational ecosystems that support innovation and entrepreneurship. This approach will empower students, researchers, and startups to access shared resources and expertise, fostering collaboration across borders. By strengthening these ecosystems, EELISA will not only advance entrepreneurial education but also contribute to solving societal challenges through innovation.

The EELISA Innovation & Entrepreneurship Ecosystems initiative aims to scrutinize and optimize ecosystem practices, cultivate robust relationships within the triple helix of academia, industry, and government, and empower innovators and entrepreneurs to leverage strategic alliances for societal impact. EELISA 2.0 prioritizes the formation of shared ecosystems through EELISA Communities, conceived as collaborative learning laboratories that promote systemic, structural, and sustainable cooperation. Key priorities of the EELISA Innovation & Entrepreneurship Ecosystems initiative are creating Knowledge Teams, digital platforms leveraged to enhance stakeholder engagement and facilitate knowledge and experience sharing, Joint open calls and challenge-oriented activities. The initiative aims to cultivate a robust innovation ecosystem, particularly in deep-tech, to attract talent, enhance the global competitiveness of European universities, and support researchers throughout the innovation lifecycle.

In conclusion, the transition to EELISA 2.0 represents a strategic evolution of the alliance, with a clear focus on developing innovation and entrepreneurship ecosystems. The combination of the new work package and the alliance of all ten partner universities sets the stage for EELISA to become a leading force in nurturing entrepreneurial talent and driving innovation across Europe.

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ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Elena Berga Tech&Knowledge transfer PHD student, studies in Business Administration and Sociology, with a Master's degree in Corporate Social Responsibility. She has a professional trajectory of over eighteen years, during which she has worked on advanced technology projects in the university setting and technology-based business models at the Universidad Politécnica de Madrid. Her experience extensively covers management and development of training in the field of innovation and entrepreneurship, as well as the creation of specific tools and methods to foster an entrepreneurial spirit. Currently, she holds the position of Program Leader at actúaupm, UPM Entrepreneurship Program, and WP10 Entrepreneurship UPM representative in the EELISA ALLIANCE. Additionally, she conducts training sessions on innovation and entrepreneurship.

Prof. Dr. Petra Moog is Director of the Institute for Innovation & Entrepreneurship (ZHAW, Switzerland) and before that she led the Chair for Family Business & Entrepreneurship, Siegen University for 15 years. There she was director of the PhD School & Master Program in SME Management. At ZHAW she is the work package leader in regards to Ecosystems in the EELISA Alliance. She studied economics at Cologne University and International CEMS/MIM at Universitá Bocconi, Milano. She was a research fellow at MIT and PostDoc at Zurich University. She worked at various universities (ITAM, UNEC). Petra is a member of STEP and Senior Research Fellow at SPEA/Indiana University. Petra`s research interests and teaching embrace Entrepreneurship (Academic Spinoffs, Ecosystems), Innovation, Family Business. She is Associated editor of the Journal of Technology Transfer.

Janik Wadlinger earned a Bachelor in Business Administration and Engineering at the Baden-Wuerttemberg Cooperative State University (DHBW) in Karlsruhe / Germany. During this time, he gained experiences in research at the Karlsruhe Institute of Technology / Germany and the Swansea University / UK. In 2019 he started his Master in Innovation and Product Management at the University of Applied Science Upper Austria / Austria. Since 2022, he is a doctoral student at the Chair of Information Systems, Innovation and Value Creation.

Nina Walker holds a B.Sc. in International Hospitality Management from Ecole Hôtelière de Lausanne and an M.Sc. in Management with a focus on Business Analytics from HEC at Université de Lausanne. Since 2023, Nina is working as a scientific associate at the ZHAW School of Management and Law in Zurich. In 2024, she became a doctoral student at the Chair of Information Systems, Innovation, and Value Creation at FAU Erlangen-Nürnberg. Her research focuses on entrepreneurial ecosystems, particularly within a university context.

Nihan Yıldırım is an Associate Professor of Management Engineering at Istanbul Technical University (ITU). Her research interests include technology and innovation management, entrepreneurship, project management, strategic management, digital transformation, and data analytics. With fifteen years of private sector experience, she also serves as a Board Member in ITU Social Innovation Center and is a researcher in EELISA InnoCORE and EELISA 2.0 projects funded by EU Horizon and Erasmus+.