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# UNIVERSITY WITHOUT BORDERS KNOWLEDGE WITH NO LIMITS

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## **TECHNICAL SHEET**

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## **TABLE OF CONTENTS**

<b>5</b>	Preface
<b>10</b>	Introduction
<b>13</b>	CCDR-N
<b>17</b>	Regional Government of Galicia
<b>20</b>	CEER Foundation
<b>28</b>	University of A Coruña
<b>32</b>	University of Santiago de Compostela
<b>51</b>	University of Trás-os-Montes and Alto Douro
<b>72</b>	University of Vigo
<b>77</b>	University of Minho
<b>87</b>	University of Porto
<b>95</b>	Master in Cities Challenges
<b>103</b>	Master in Transnational Business and Digital Technologies Law
<b>110</b>	Doctorate in Social Sciences and Ageing
<b>119</b>	Doctorate in Mathematics and Applications

## PREFACE



**Elena de Miguel Gago**

Director of the Joint Secretariat of the Spain-Portugal Cross Border Cooperation Programme

***“Interreg is a programme that is close to my heart. As a unique cooperation instrument, supported by the cohesion funds, Interreg enables regions and countries to work together to overcome common challenges. Interreg projects are concrete examples of the fact that borders need not be barriers, but rather an opportunity for growth and fruitful cooperation. Over the last 30 years, and thanks to numerous EU-supported projects, Interreg has brought more than 170 million Europeans living in border regions closer together, improved their lives and created new opportunities for cooperation.*”**

This is how Elisa Ferreira, Commissioner for Cohesion and Reform, summed up the balance sheet of 30 years of Interreg programmes. Despite the milestone date, the COVID-19 pandemic situation did not allow the deserved celebration of the 30th anniversary of the Programmes, which marks a milestone in the history of Interreg. Even so, and at the risk of being too benevolent, we understand that the sentiment expressed by the Commissioner is shared by all those who every day strive to achieve the objectives that this Programme pursues.

In view of the above, it is quite natural that the Interreg Cross Border Cooperation Programme between Spain and Portugal is, in all its editions, the direct result of the favourable experience that since 1989 has involved cooperation on the border between the two countries. When it was created, still as a community initiative, and although we knew and strongly defended its potential, we were far from thinking that we would reach a sixth edition of the Programme, which took place in August 2022. Throughout all its editions, the main focus has always been one: to improve the quality of life of the inhabitants of the Cooperation Area that makes up the Programme. Indeed, the longest and oldest border of the European Union presents us with great challenges: 79% of the border region is rural; 1.6 million hectares are protected areas; around 16 million people live in the border region and much of the border involves river areas. At the same time, there are a wealth of opportunities for cooperation, many of them built on a history of cooperation between peoples and regions that pose great challenges to the National Authorities of both countries.

In fact, border regions cover a significant part of the territory of the European Union. In 2007, i.e. roughly halfway through the Interreg Programmes, taking all periods into account, several million people were already living in border regions, and it is known that, as a rule, these regions suffer from imbalances caused by their peripheral situation and condition: on average, per capita GDP is lower, unemployment is higher, and access to health and social services is more difficult. (Commission, 2010)<sup>1</sup>

It is not surprising, therefore, that successive Interreg Programmes have adapted to the challenges of the times and to the continuous search for a better quality of life for people living in border areas. In general, and although always coupled with important financial allocations, there have been some changes with regard to their focus of intervention. Indeed, in the early versions of Interreg, the focus was on accessibility, and in a later

phase, funds have been directed towards the socio-economic development of border regions, employment, and environmental and heritage concerns. This trend has been growing in the last two generations of the Programme. It is therefore no news that, far beyond monetary support, what successive generations of Interreg Programmes have achieved is to deepen and strengthen relationships between institutions on both sides of the border, promoting mutual adaptation and learning as well as capacity building. In fact, we could list several examples of good practices of cross-border cooperation, innovation and reinvention of strategies for the development of these Regions. However, we know that we must continue to work to eliminate the border effects that persist: cultural and linguistic differences, and above all, legislative differences that inevitably hinder cooperation. So much so that the diagnosis that served as the basis for the preparation of the 2021 - 2027 programme shows that, although the overall situation of the border area has improved in recent years, there are still weaknesses where cross-border cooperation can play a fundamental role in overcoming them.

The reactivation of the economy and the revival of employment, together with the provision of essential social and health services, are the main challenges to be tackled in the border area in the short and medium term. In addition, since this programme has a long implementation period, it must address other challenges and needs identified in areas such as demographic decline, business competitiveness, digitalisation, the environment, local development, and better governance. Given the persistence of these characteristics in the border regions of both countries, it is not surprising that in the 2014-2020 period, the UNISF – University Without Borders project, an emblematic and truly innovative cooperation project, was approved by the Spain-Portugal Cross Border Cooperation Programme.

Based in the Galicia and Northern Portugal Cooperation Area, this project draws on the consolidated experience and the institutional, formal and

informal relations of all the Region's actors, which began in 1991 as a Working Community and later evolved into EGTC – European Grouping for Territorial Cooperation.

Given the consolidation of these relations, it is only natural that in each Programming period the territorial development strategy of these two countries is based on a Joint Investment Plan, a document that sets the guidelines for the affected Regions. An analysis of Document 2 for the 2014-2020 programming period shows that the Plan's priorities are a focus on innovation, the transfer of scientific knowledge, stimulating new employment opportunities, protecting the environment and heritage, as well as strengthening institutional capacity building.

Given this context, it seems only natural that the UNISF – University Without Borders project should emerge, encompassing all public universities in the Euroregion (University of Minho, University of Porto, University of Santiago de Compostela, University of Vigo, University of A Coruña, University of Trás-os-Montes and Alto Douro), supported by the Galicia-Northern Portugal Foundation Centre for Euroregional Studies.

The vision, persistence, and resilience of these institutions have resulted in an innovative and challenging project for the Programme as it unites the efforts of all entities, with the ultimate goal of optimising public resources to create a training offer of excellence and paving the way for new challenging and innovative actions. As such, the valorisation of the institutional actors and the strategies associated with each of them, as well as the cooperation capacity already evidenced by the Euroregion Universities, and between them and the companies, should be known, recognised and disseminated.

Thus, based on the creation of joint degrees (Master in Cities Challenges; Master in Transnational Business and Digital Technologies Law; Doctorate in Social Sciences and Ageing and Doctorate in Mathematics

and Applications), some of which involve all teaching institutions simultaneously, something which, according to available information, is something unprecedented in the European Union, the UNISF – University Without Borders project defines strategies and tools to overcome geographical, administrative, legal and academic barriers between the six Universities participating in it. All this in order to offer any student, whether from the Euroregion or outside it, the possibility of obtaining a joint degree whose teaching model, work methodology, and relations between student and the University are the same, regardless of the University chosen.

A final word of appreciation and gratitude to all the Universities involved, namely to their Rectors, in recognition of the efforts they had to make to materialise this project and its objectives, succeeding in understanding that the global interest was much greater than the individual interest of each of the institutions. In the end, cooperation is also a balance between compromise and the defence of particular and common interests for the greater good.

We thank and wish the project, its stakeholders, and all those involved the greatest success. We are certain that it will serve as inspiration for new initiatives, and we count on everyone to explain how the main challenge, which is still to come, has been achieved: the maintenance of all the joint degrees now created in line with student demand.

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1 *Commission, C.-E. (2010). Investing in Europe's Future: Fifth Report on Economic, Social and Territorial Cohesion-The Future of Cohesion Policy.*

2 [https://www.ccdr-n.pt/storage/app/media/files/ficheiros\\_ccdrn/cooperacao/pic\\_vf2.pdf](https://www.ccdr-n.pt/storage/app/media/files/ficheiros_ccdrn/cooperacao/pic_vf2.pdf)

## INTRO

### **University Without Borders (UNISF): a commitment to the future of Higher Education in Northern Portugal and Galicia**

On 26 September 2017, the President of France, Emmanuel Macron, speaking at the Paris-Sorbonne University, proposed the creation of European universities and joint teaching-learning study cycles in at least two European languages, with real European diplomas, pedagogical innovation, and prime scientific research:

*I propose the creation of European universities as a network of universities from several European countries, setting up a pathway where each student will study abroad and take courses in at least two languages. European universities that will also be places of educational innovation and prime research. We must aim to build at least twenty by 2024. However, from the beginning of the next academic year, we must structure the first ones, with real European semesters and real European diplomas. (<https://www.pscp.tv/w/1OyKArDazAoGb>, 1:03:55–1:04:35)*

This speech sparked the birth of the European universities funded by the Erasmus+ programme, which will transform the landscape of the European higher education area in the coming decades. However, two years prior to this now famous speech, the rectors of the six universities

of the Galicia-Northern Portugal Euroregion – Universities of A Coruña (UdC), Santiago de Compostela (USC), Vigo (UVigo), Minho (UMinho), Trás-os-Montes and Alto Douro (UTAD) and Porto (U. Porto), and the management of the Foundation Centre for Euroregional Studies (FCEER) anticipated these ideas and idealised University Without Borders (UNISF), within which four study cycles would be born in association, namely two master’s degrees and two doctorates. The first application for funding, submitted in 2015, was not approved, but the second, submitted in 2018, obtained 75% co-funding from the European Regional Development Fund, through the INTERREG VA Spain-Portugal Cross-Border Cooperation Operational Programme (POCTEP) 2014-2020, with a total budget of around €2 million.

From the beginning, the University Without Borders (UNISF) project had as one of its main objectives to define strategies and tools that would allow overcoming the usual geographical, administrative, legal and academic barriers between the six Universities, so that study cycles in association could become a reality. At the time, this was, in fact, an unprecedented pioneering venture within the European Higher Education Area, which, if successful, could provide a model for the creation of joint degrees and/or joint study programmes in other regions of Europe.

Thus, on 11 July 2019, the representatives of the six universities and FCEER met at the University of Minho for a kick-off meeting of the project. The four study cycles in association were defined, to be developed within the scope of the consortium and, subsequently, to be submitted for accreditation in both countries: the Master in Legal Sciences should be centred around “International Law” and/or “European Union Law”; the Master in Smart Cities would be interdisciplinary in nature and include the perspective of the Sustainable Development Goals; the Doctoral programme in Exact Sciences would be centred on the field of mathematics; and the Doctoral Programme in Social Sciences would focus on a very relevant issue for the Euroregion, the ageing / longevity

of the population, a topic to be addressed from a multidisciplinary perspective within the social sciences, including different perspectives of analysis (e.g. economic, demographic, social).

After three years of work and an unparalleled intra and inter-institutional cooperation, the four study cycles in association offered by the UNISF consortium will begin operating in the 2022/2023 academic year, namely the Master in Cities Challenges, with the participation of the six universities; the Master in Transnational Business and Digital Technologies Law, by UMinho and USC; the Doctorate in Mathematics and Applications, with the participation of the six universities; and the Doctorate in Social Sciences and Ageing, integrating UdC, USC, UVigo, U. Porto and UTAD.

The purpose of this digital book is to disseminate the knowledge acquired during the development of “Universidade sem Fronteiras”, highlighting, among other things, the high degree of cooperation among partners, without which the success of this project would not have been possible, as well as the difficulties faced and solutions found.

Through the voices of the most diverse protagonists, from the rectors, vice-rectors and pro-rectors of the six universities, directors of the FCEER, governing bodies of the four study cycles in association, as well as the Director of the Joint Secretariat of the Spain-Portugal Cross-border Cooperation Programme, we share the story, as accurate as possible, of the virtues and vicissitudes of the UNISF project, hoping, with this initiative, to inspire and support new consortia for the creation of study cycles in association in the European space of higher education.

**Gonçalo Fernandes**, UTAD

**Carla Martins**, UMinho



# CCDR-N

Northern  
Portugal Regional  
Coordination  
and Development  
Commission



**António Cunha**

*President of CCRD-N Former*

*Rector of UMinho*

*Former President of the Board of*

*Trustees of the CEER Foundation*

***“Current challenges make regional and cross-border based cooperation ever more pressing”***

Historically, the development of knowledge has always relied on exchanges and interactions. The history of European universities bears witness to this. The highly integrated context of the North and Galicia, which share a Euroregional area of great social and economic metabolism, in addition to common cultural and geographical features, particularly favours such cooperation and exchange. It is not a unique case.

The IACOBUS programme of exchanges between the human resources of higher education institutions and technological centres in the Euroregion is another example. Here, however, we share common challenges, be it in the automotive industry, renewable energies or sustainable tourism. Connecting knowledge and advanced education offers around these common themes, sharing common languages, is natural in the case of our regions and a factor of positive differentiation.

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Science, research and technological development are now essential dimensions and tools for all our challenges. Whether we are talking about industrial digitalisation or precision agriculture; decarbonisation or rational water management; advanced healthcare or the protection of marine ecosystems. Science and innovation define the future and sustainability of an idea of quality of life and prosperity. Universities, and their institutions and laboratories, are essential to this process, especially as regards their ties with territories and businesses. Thus, these university alliances are one of the paths to follow, breaking down barriers, making Higher Education more open to society and even compelling universities to reinvent themselves. Of course, this should occur within a balance that ensures differentiation and diversification of the higher education and science system itself. Having schools with different traditions and different stakes is a strength and an advantage. Cooperation must not mean a dilution of the different teaching and research projects, but rather the complementarity of knowledge and its healthy competition.

The challenges we are facing make cooperation on a regional and cross-border basis ever more pressing, especially in the case of Northern Portugal and Galicia, which are highly integrated regional realities with a common cultural identity. Although the challenges are global, the responses are necessarily regional, adapted to the realities of each territory. This is not a situation where we can say that “one size fits all”. A uniform response to the different regional realities will end in failure. The regional matrix is essential to the success of public policies.

The integrated reality of Northern Portugal and Galicia is quite unique and it is this reality that justifies projects like this one. In the Iberian Peninsula, it is also an unparalleled case.

Projects like this, aimed at integrating offers of advanced education or broadband research dynamics, require common strategies, a shared culture of trust and work, and the recognition of the public and political powers of the parties involved. This exists in the Galicia-Northern Portugal Euroregion, extending to other projects such as IACOBUS, the Way of Saint James, and the automobile cluster. The possibility of broadening this cooperation logic is most welcome, particularly in the European context, but it must be based on a convergence of strategies and common interests.



# REGIONAL GOVERNMENT OF GALICIA



**Alfonso Rueda Valenzuela**

*President of the Regional  
Government of Galicia*

## ***“Cross-border cooperation is key to boosting innovation and socio-economic growth in the Euroregion”***

Working for cross-border cooperation in the Galicia-Northern Portugal Euroregion is a priority commitment of the Regional Government of Galicia. This has been the case for many years and will continue to be so in the future. The Galicia-Northern Portugal Euroregion is one of the most active cross-border regions in attracting European funds. The figures speak for themselves: the 2014-2020 POCTEP projects obtained more than 163 million euros for the financing of 85 cooperation projects, focused on areas as relevant to our social and economic development as research and innovation, competitiveness of small and medium-sized companies, adaptation to climate change, risk prevention, and protection of natural resources or improving the efficiency of public administration.

This constant cooperation allows us to share and optimise resources, to be more efficient and, at the same time, to create a common space that promotes innovation and socio-economic growth.

The UNISF project (University Without Borders), financed by the 2014-2020 POCTEP programme, is an example of this common strategy. In this case, the public universities of Galicia and Northern Portugal, together with the Foundation Centre for Euroregional Studies (FCEER), have come together to face common challenges in the Euroregion.

This collaborative work of academic institutions on both sides of the border offers numerous advantages, among others, it generates more efficient joint strategies and promotes the consolidation of a more united university space. In practice, this initiative has great benefits such as the creation of training programmes better adapted to citizenship and territorial needs; the strengthening of relations between universities and the business sector; overcoming the limitations that currently exist for the carrying out of common training programmes; and stimulating the mobility of workers, companies, and researchers.

In short, through efficient cross-border cooperation, we all succeed in stimulating business and growth in a climate of mutual trust. This is the way forward. Let us continue to make the Euroregion a reference for collaboration. Let us continue working together.



**FCEER**



**CEER Foundation**



**Ángel Miramontes***Director***Ana Paula Marques***Secretary-General*

## ***“UNISF will provide a benchmark and learning framework for future projects”***

The Foundation Centre for Euroregional Studies of Galicia and Northern Portugal (FCEER) is a non-profit entity formed by the six public universities of the Galicia and Northern Portugal region, namely the universities of Santiago de Compostela, Vigo, A Coruña, Porto, Minho, Trás-os-Montes and Alto Douro.

One of the main objectives inscribed in the founding protocol of the FCEER is the promotion of synergies and complementarities in the academic university axes of the Euroregion. As such, the University Without Borders (UNISF) project clearly expresses one of the purposes stated in the Foundation’s mission, which privileges territorial and institutional cooperation that is materialised through the offer of four joint post-graduate training degrees. It is an offer born from a cross-border matrix, conceived and implemented from the practice of a culture of partnership and collaborative learning among all the partners of the project consortium.

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The results of the UNISF project are frankly positive and stimulating for three fundamental reasons. First, we believe that the UNISF project will provide a benchmark and learning framework for future joint degree projects.

Secondly, due to the relevance of the curricular proposals of the degree offers materialised in masters and doctoral degrees, in alignment with the importance of digital technologies and the urgency of normative regulation in the framework of transnational company relations and main challenges of cities; as well as in the doctorate offers in mathematics and applications and in social sciences and ageing. The proposals of these four joint degrees mobilise different areas of knowledge, with an unmatched potential for the transferability of innovation and knowledge beyond the confines of the universities. Finally, this is a pioneering project towards the consolidation of a European Higher Education network that is competitive, differentiating, and relevant to today's challenges.

As a European region, the Peninsular Northwest faces common challenges that require joint intervention strategies. Cross-border cooperation is particularly important for enhancing the quality of the territory and its resources (physical, human, cultural, etc.). In this endeavour, the universities, in interaction with R&D centres, companies and various stakeholders, where FCEER is included, play a key role in the generation of knowledge, in the co-creation of innovations and changes, and in the maintenance of networks and partnerships, articulated among themselves, for the improvement of the territory and the local society.

The Galicia-Northern Portugal Euroregion benefits from the existence of six excellent public universities, characterised by their dynamism as regards their main missions: teaching, research, and community outreach. As mentioned, it is important that the knowledge produced in academia is

an accelerator of change towards a competitive, inclusive and sustainable higher education ecosystem.

All the investment and collective learning around the four joint degrees, with the involvement of institutional, administrative and teaching staff and students from each of the university institutions in the UNISF project consortium justify its consolidation over time. Allowing it to deliver more than one edition will surely be an indicator, among others, of the maturity of the project itself. Additionally, it will allow suggesting other areas or study cycles relevant to the development of the multidisciplinary training offer and inter-university research in the Galicia-Northern Portugal Euroregion.



**Rubén Camilo Lois González**

*Former Director of the CEER Foundation*

## **“We can envisage a University of Galicia and Northern Portugal”**



**Brais Estévez Vilariño**

*Predoctoral Researcher*

The University Without Borders project is very important for two main reasons. On the one hand, it is the first time that a network of euroregional universities, which is the network that articulates the CEER, can materialise an agreement in the form of a transnational programme of its own studies. This is a very valuable thing and should be highlighted. On the other hand, we are talking about two very different education systems, which are managing to coexist despite their differences. For example, the Portuguese university system has a 3+2 structure (three undergraduate and two postgraduate years) and this makes for a very demanding postgraduate degree. In the Galician system, all degrees are four years long.



**María Ángeles Piñeiro Antelo**

*Assistant Doctoral Professor*

This disparity creates particularities and differences between the two systems, but initiatives such as the Master in Cities Challenges at UNISF, for example, make an effort at this “unity in difference” between

two separate education systems. Thus, UNISF sets in motion an agreement between heterogeneous systems, while breaking down the borders in a field such as education, namely at the postgraduate level, where these borders are still very blatant.

The European Union determines, in its strategies, a very particular issue such as intelligent growth, and we cannot forget that the University is the institution that concentrates between 70 and 80% of the R&D+I in the Euroregion. In this sense, everything that has to do with technological competitiveness, such as the creation of patents and innovation, will take place, fundamentally, in a university environment. However, from another perspective, as the European Union is committed to the green economy and decarbonisation, in line with the Paris Agreements, universities are essential to the formulation of alternatives in the context of the climate crisis. Thus, in the same way that UNISF has crossed the border, it is very important that the University continues to open itself up to citizenship, taking on the role of promoter and mediator of innovative and experimental initiatives, such as those of open science and citizenship, where many of the actions and initiatives that envisage the inhabitable worlds of the future are rooted, especially in this time of climate emergency. Moreover, the Master in Cities Challenges has the merit of bringing together very heterogeneous profiles (from female engineers to male and female geographers), both in its teaching staff and in its student body. This type of exchange between heterogeneous forms of knowledge is essential for the formulation of ideas and alternatives for the future of the territories.

As far as internationalisation is concerned, it will be increasingly important to have institutions with the capacity to issue degrees valid in different States. In Southern Europe, we understand that study programmes have to be much more open to composition strategies, through which students create and project their degrees. In this regard, the Anglo-Saxon model

can be very inspiring, as it allows students to autonomously choose how to compose their education.

Evidently, and from an institutional point of view, these changes must be coupled with structural reforms. The areas of knowledge must open up.

In such a complex world as our contemporaneity, hit by a myriad of crises at the same time, it is extremely important to foster a dialogue between traditional technological knowledge and the social sciences, rather than specific areas of knowledge. For example, urban geography is rooted in city studies, and it is of great importance to promote the dialogue between Geography and the Engineering practised in Northern Portugal, as well as with schools of Architecture, as is the case of the School of Architecture of the University of A Coruña.

With regard to the effects of globalisation on our universities, the truth is that a certain historical institutional isolation must be overcome. Strategic agreements and alliances are needed. In the framework of the Euroregion, some Anglo-Saxon models of university governance, such as the Californian model, can be extremely inspiring. The University of Galicia and Northern Portugal can be similar to the University of California, except with campuses in A Coruña, Porto, Vigo and Vila Real instead of in Berkeley, Santa Barbara and San Diego. We would thus have more elements to compete in a more consistent way outside the world. These collaborative models can even be useful for other key infrastructures such as harbours and airports.

However, if we want continuity in projects like UNISF, we need two essential things: firstly, greater integration of the work teams and secondly, for the students graduating from our study programmes to be employable.

Admittedly, the signs are encouraging. Quite possibly, the place where cross-border cooperation works best in southern Europe is between Galicia and Northern Portugal. There are few examples where cross-border cooperation works so well. This is a pioneer example. The decision taken by the Portuguese and Spanish rectors' conference to invest in a merger of programmes, despite the enormous differences that exist, is very important.

In this respect, the advances that may be produced in CEER and UNISF can be inspirational for new alliances. For example, we think of possible alliances between Salamanca and Coimbra or Évora and the University of Extremadura. As regards the incorporation of other countries in this type of project, it would be very interesting to promote spaces beyond Southern Europe. It would be very stimulating to think about a Master of Atlantic Cities that would be able to integrate universities from the so-called Atlantic Arc, which is a space of communication and coexistence between Ireland and the Strait of Gibraltar.



**UdC**

**University  
of A Coruña**



**Julio Abalde Alondo**  
*Rector of UdC*



**Maria Pilar de la Torre**  
*Vice-Rector of UdC*

## ***“University partnerships like UNISF allow us to leverage our strengths”***

Nowadays, universities operate in a competitive context to attract the best professors, researchers, and students in order to secure sufficient financial resources, achieve a solid reputation, and attain broad international visibility.

For this reason, deepening institutional relations makes it possible to create an efficient cross-border cooperation network, which generates a climate of mutual trust that stimulates joint work. This UNISF value underpins the cooperation between the six public universities in the region, as it promotes the consolidation of a more united university area, with administrative and telematic coordination, joint academic action and a common outreach.

Creating a more competitive economy and a cohesive society with international outreach is the basis for generating a process of self-reliance and affirmation of the Euroregion’s capacities.

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On this basis, UNISF promotes the transfer of excellence in the knowledge generated by universities to the productive sector. The impact on business and job creation will encourage people to settle in the territory and apply their skills in favour of the economic growth of the Euroregion.

It seems reasonable to expect that the joint scientific and technological action of the universities of Galicia and Northern Portugal, as proposed in UNISF, will make it possible to reduce the productivity gap and contribute significantly to the economic prosperity (productivity) and social progress (tertiary education of the population) of the territorial areas, reaching levels that exceed the average levels of Spain and Portugal.

The exchange of resources and services between universities on both sides of the border, through UNISF, serves to bring human capital, R&D&I, infrastructure and planning strategies closer together. This leads to a firm commitment to intelligence, work, effort and inclusion, which are the foundations of a sustainable and resilient economy and the creation of a Euroregion of reference in the creation of value.

In a world increasingly determined by globalisation, we believe that cooperation and internationalisation are the main pillars for the implementation and the driving force of the project.

Institutional relationships at the international level result in a greater number of competitors for student recruitment for each single university. Therefore, one of the pillars of UNISF has been the creation of an alliance with a great potential that will benefit students, researchers and professors where, through academic and administrative integrations, the advantages of each institution and the added value of the alliance in the Euroregion can be taken advantage of.

We understand that in this continuity, sound academic and administrative coordination between the universities that make up UNISF is essential. This is evidenced by the creation of different commissions which will continue to work directly on the project and which will continue to develop the degrees in an appropriate manner once it is completed. An example of this is the involvement of the academic teams of each university, since in addition to participating in the design and implementation of the degrees, in the activities and meetings carried out by the project, their involvement will provide continuity to UNISF. This is a pioneering programme in the framework of the POCTEP projects, as it involves the creation of an alliance between six universities with the design of four innovative degrees in their fields, developed with optimal academic, teaching and research coordination.

It has always been the aim of the institutions participating in the consortium to develop advances in order to set a precedent with regard to new partnerships, as well as to share all the processes carried out, which may be useful to external universities interested in developing new partnerships within or outside the Galicia-Northern Portugal Euroregion. Therefore, extending this project to include new European partners, as well as the creation of new European alliances outside the Euroregion, but following in the footsteps of UNISF, would be fully justified.



USC

University  
of Santiago  
de Compostela



**António Lopez Diaz**  
*Rector of USC*

## ***“Internationalisation is an advantageous and positive factor for universities”***

The UNISF project aims to strengthen the relations of the Galicia-Northern Portugal Euroregion University Network (Universities of A Coruña, Santiago de Compostela, Vigo, Minho, Porto and Trás-os-Montes and Alto Douro) for the creation of joint degrees. To this end, UNISF proposes the development of tools to help minimise the geographical, administrative, legal and academic obstacles between the six universities of the Network, for the creation of joint cross-border training at master’s and doctorate level, with the support of the regional public administrations of Galicia and Northern Portugal with competences in Education.

From the outset, USC has shown great interest in participating in this project, as it connects with one of the academic drivers of the institution, such as degree management. Given the connections and links with the other Galician universities and with

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the universities of northern Portugal, with which it has long maintained important scientific and research links, it is of great interest to strengthen these links with the creation of a Euroregional area of university education that facilitates the joint offer, exchange and mobility of professors and students and to give visibility to these new training formulas.

With the aim of converging with the most developed regions of the European Union, Galicia and Northern Portugal have drawn up a common strategy based on the capacity for cross-border cooperation to overcome the problems faced by both territories, many of them common, in a more efficient way. The UNISF project contributes to strengthening relations between the public universities of the Euroregion and the CEER Foundation, sharing strategies and solutions to the common challenges they face.

Collaboration with the business world is essential for the future of a research university. Aligning the research interests of universities with the needs of the market requires a smooth transfer. It is undoubtedly a challenge for the university environment, but it is also an advantage that results in the constant improvement of processes, as well as in greater student employability.

The challenges faced by the university in its process of adaptation and contribution to the European Higher Education Area and the European Research Area relate to the principles of excellence, mobility, specialisation, and competitiveness. The university's trends in this context are to enhance international attractiveness and to enable mobility of students and professors from other parts of the world, as well as to promote lifelong learning and to improve the quality of teaching and research.

Internationalisation is an advantageous and positive factor for universities, mainly because of the relation to quality, given that in today's interconnected and interdependent world, it is important that higher education, through an international dimension strengthened by teaching and research, contributes to the quality and relevance of the mission to serve the needs of individuals, communities, countries, and society at large.

By sharing knowledge, experiences, and resources through internationalisation processes, universities find opportunities to broaden their vision and capabilities, redefine their identity, affirm their authenticity, and act on the basis of criteria of relevance, equity, and quality, with global impact.

The creation of an innovative environment in the Galicia-Northern Portugal area is not easily reproducible and it is precisely the density of relations between the different territorial actors and the quality of these relations that gives this territory its potential as a circuit of interactions oriented towards business promotion, productive innovation, the qualification of human resources, and the quality of labour relations, and the promotion of the local culture of development, as crucial elements of competitiveness.

These complex interactions make up a system for uniting Science, Technology and Business, which articulates both the people, institutions, organisations, and entities involved in the generation, transmission, transformation, use and dissemination of knowledge, and the set of rules, norms, uses, and customs that govern their actions.

Another key factor is to have adequately trained and prepared human resources to carry out their functions without adaptation gaps. However, the distance between academic training and the world of work, as well as

the constant technological and organisational transformations of work, make it difficult to adapt training to the requirements of the productive system, maintaining mismatches between supply and demand.

In order to promote cross-border cooperation between public administrations as an effective tool to improve the quality of life of citizens, the UNISF project makes the relationship between the two territories more fluid and also the joint institutional work more efficient, as it simplifies the recognition of inter-university degrees. Similarly, there will be an effect on the access of the citizens of the Euroregion to the services and infrastructures offered by the six public universities, which will facilitate the processes for sharing facilities and make this access universal and common, regardless of the side of the border where the students are located.

Another point in favour of the continuity of this type of project lies in the fact that cooperation with national and international institutions strengthens the generation and application of knowledge and reinforces the training of professionals with global competences: multicultural, critical and sensitive to the environment, competitive in different environments.

The territory covered by the Interreg Spain Portugal programme faces common challenges related to the need to address high unemployment, the low competitiveness of enterprises, and the need to increase efficiency in the use of resources. These challenges are present in the construction of the UNISF project, which focuses on improving training and increasing employment opportunities for the population of the Galicia-Northern Portugal Euroregion in order to increase the transfer of R+D+i to the territory and the consequent improvement of economic competitiveness.

Taking into account the shared challenges between Galicia and Northern Portugal, the UNISF project integrates in its action model the development of mechanisms that, based on cooperation between public university institutions, will have an impact on the territory, helping to create the necessary competences for the Euroregion to be able to face these challenges. To this end, UNISF created the administrative and legal instruments that will serve to break down existing constraints to the creation of common university training programmes, enabling the beneficiary universities to implement cross-border training programmes adapted to the needs of the Euroregion. The experience gained in the development of the UNISF project will undoubtedly serve as a model to be followed by other projects focusing on the implementation of international inter-university degrees.



**María José López Couso**  
*Vice-Rector of USC*

***“A university’s role is not only to pass on knowledge, but also to generate it”***

The UNISF project is based on the understanding among all beneficiaries of the consortium of the need for a cross-border approach to training, which allows for a reinforced coordination of complementary skills. It is a project developed with the motivation of overcoming the existing barriers to the progress of a Science and Technology system at a more competitive Euroregional level. UNISF is an essential part of the process of bringing together the university systems that make up the Euroregion and results from the natural geographical proximity of the seven project partners, as well as the existence of multiple common elements (cultural, social, and economic) and a history of intense collaboration.

The creation of new cross-border degrees is one of the key points in the consolidation of USC’s internationalisation strategy, which aims to become

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a leading institution at national and international level as regards research and innovation and where the commitment to collaborations with external partners is crucial.

UNISF is based on university cooperation that brings together the six public universities of the Euroregion and a stable structure of territorial cooperation, thus promoting the consolidation of a stronger university space. This action implies the creation of a structure that works together to create training programmes more adapted to citizenship and territorial needs, strengthening the relationship between universities and the business sector and removing the current limitations to the implementation of joint training programmes.

In the context of a competitive Euroregion, UNISF is a highly relevant tool to foster the mobility of professors, students, administrative and research staff, as it allows universities to create joint training programmes and to facilitate the process of recognition of degrees by the education systems of the two countries. Bringing together research, innovation, internationalisation, and entrepreneurship is a commitment of the universities participating in UNISF, committed to boosting the economy and contributing to social progress and improving people's lives.

The challenges and needs posed by globalisation that need to be addressed in order to advance and achieve academic excellence imply the consolidation of cooperative ties and the stimulation of scientific growth within the global framework of knowledge. This is why it is essential to create university networks that are sustainable over time, fostered by the commitment of their members and with realistic objectives for quality improvement.

Nowadays, the internationalisation of higher education is not just a matter of student and faculty exchanges or the movement of people without major repercussions for the educational institution. This issue is now part of the institutional interest, as in the new educational policies, international collaboration becomes a powerful and strategic instrument to raise the quality of education, to prepare graduates for an increasingly interdependent and competitive world, and to create greater understanding and solidarity among peoples.

A university's role is not only to pass on knowledge, but also to generate it. It is not by chance that the most prestigious university institutions have an important commitment to research and the transfer of its results to society. Boosting university research is key to the advancement of a country, as well as to building the economy of the future. It should be noted that entrepreneurship, a true economic and social engine, goes hand in hand with innovation and research.

Cross-border cooperation should entail a reorganisation of the map of knowledge creation and dissemination agents, mainly universities, as well as of existing capacities in the Euroregion, favouring complementarities between lines of research, the pooling of existing infrastructures, and greater mobility of agents on both sides of the border. Just as important is the design of a partnership agenda in line with the values and priorities of the Galicia-Northern Portugal region and also in line with a global perspective. This will result in a better organisation of existing capacities and resources to increase the competitiveness of this area of cooperation.

The existence of an innovative culture, defined as the attitude and predisposition to change, is as necessary as the availability of resources for innovation to take place. This innovative culture can be improved by promoting real public-private collaboration, led by public administrations

in a decentralised environment and with the capacity to extend innovation applied to the business structure of the territories in order to compete in global markets, improve the productivity and competitiveness of the economy as a whole, and maintain and improve the quality of life of the population.

The fact that the territories with the highest productivity are also those with the highest levels of human capital and education, as well as a productive system focused on activities with the highest added value, motivates UNISF universities to continue developing common projects in areas considered fundamental for the future, such as biotechnology, artificial intelligence, information technologies, but also sustainable development and ageing.

UNISF aims to break down barriers such as the absence of specific regulations governing joint Spain-Portugal degrees and the incompatibility of IT and financial systems for joint student management between universities on both sides of the border.

The project prioritises the search for regulatory spaces in which consensus is reached between the partners on the basis of previous administrative experiences in which, despite the differences and singularities, the existence of a common regulatory substratum can be observed. The philosophy of the UNISF project is not to create an *ex novo*, specific and homogeneous regulatory framework to be applied to the design and management of the new degrees, but rather to take advantage of the regulatory synergies that already exist between the partners and to include only the essential elements for the articulation of the joint degrees. This approach of minimal but essential intervention is based on the evidence that the hypothetical adoption of a completely new set of rules, developed

in line with existing practices, would have high transaction costs in each of the universities and would constitute an obstacle to the cooperation process.

The UNISF project partners are a cohesive group with extensive experience in cross-border cooperation and are important actors in the joint work developed in the Galicia-Northern Portugal Euroregion.

The UNISF project aims to be a breakthrough in the way university institutions work together to contribute to the strengthening of cooperation in teaching and research in the Euroregion. Therefore, the main aim is to improve the capacity of universities and the creation of joint degrees between Galicia and Northern Portugal and the consolidation of the Cross-border Higher Education Area of the Euroregion. The project, which follows the European Union's policy of encouraging the creation of international partnerships, can be an inspiring example for other universities that are designing inter-university degrees in Europe, specifically in the context of the European Commission's European Universities initiative.



**Victor Arce**

*Former Vice-Rector of USC*

***“It is important to maintain this type of collaboration for the future”***

University Without Borders is a fundamental project, since coordinating the academic offers of the universities of Galicia and Northern Portugal will significantly increase the quality of the academic offer and the strength of the links that already exist.

Nowhere can scientific, technical or economic development be achieved without the university being a fundamental part of it. In the specific case of the Galicia-Northern Portugal Euroregion, the vast majority of knowledge is generated in its universities and should therefore be channelled to encourage and stimulate development.

This type of alliance is clearly one of the ways forward. The UNISF project was a major challenge, but it has made it possible to offer society a range of degrees that would have been difficult to implement in isolation from the participating universities.

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This represents an important improvement in opportunities for our students and also a magnet for students from other countries.

All areas of knowledge and innovation that are developed in the participating universities can benefit from this type of project, which is why it is important to maintain this type of collaboration in the future.

What is important to move forward in order for projects like University Without Borders to move beyond the pilot phase and become something secure and sustainable? Above all, improving the coordination of administrative and management aspects. In practice, there are many more difficulties than the strictly academic ones.

In the European Union, there are already projects involving universities in different countries. However, the main difference of UNISF is that the participating universities are part of a Euroregion, so, apart from improving the academic offer, the impact on society as a whole is much greater. In this sense, I do not think that incorporating universities from third countries would be beneficial to the philosophy of the project.



**Maria Victoria Otero Espinar**  
*Former Vice-Rector of USC*

## ***“The UNISF project favours the visibility of the Euroregion’s universities abroad”***

The internationalisation and exchange of knowledge between different disciplines and spaces that communicate with each other easily are key elements of the university education of the future.

This reality is well established at European level with a tradition of mobility programmes and the Bologna process, which aims to create a European Education Area that will improve the competitiveness of Europe’s universities and transform them into a centre of attraction and a source of continuous innovation.

At a time when European institutions are promoting the creation of university networks through the European Universities initiative, the universities of the Galicia-Northern Portugal Euroregion (Universities of A Coruña, Santiago de Compostela, Vigo, Minho, Porto and Trás-os-Montes and Alto

Douro), with the support of the CEER, decided to launch their own very ambitious project. The main objective of this project is the consolidation of a Cross-border Higher Education and Research Area of the Euroregion with joint degrees that will improve the capacities of the universities in the creation of innovative, cooperative and more creative study programmes with a cross-border and multidisciplinary component.

There is no doubt that, before the start of UNISF, there was already an intense collaboration between the six universities, a collaboration fostered by proximity and the sharing of cultural, social and economic elements. This project goes a step further, however, a much needed step to establish permanent and stable relations, to overcome the geographical, legal, administrative and academic barriers that hinder this cooperation and, in addition, to promote a systematic collaboration that institutionally favours the relationship between professors, researchers, students and administrative and service staff.

Combining the six universities allows students to benefit from the scientific knowledge of prestigious institutions and research centres in the Galicia-Northern Portugal region, through a strong critical body of teaching and research staff. It will also lead to closer collaboration between researchers in different fields in the two countries, creating a strong network among the excellent researchers at the six universities. In addition, the project favours the visibility of the Euroregion's universities abroad with the implementation of joint marketing strategies, which will help to attract students and teaching and research staff.

The university is the most powerful engine for the socio-economic and sustainable development of a region and the well-being of the people. We live in a complex and changing society in which transformations are taking place at great speed. In order to face these changes and major challenges,

we need universities to lead the way in training the professionals who will have to face these challenges now and in the future, carrying out quality basic research and also applied research that is transferred to the surrounding environment, providing innovation and generating added value for the productive system.

The UNISF project aims to develop mechanisms for the transfer of knowledge from universities to the productive sector. In the case of the Galicia-Northern Portugal Euroregion, the creation of this global network of universities, which brings together all the potential of each of them, multiplies the capacity to successfully address the training, innovation and transfer needs of the whole territory. This joint transmission and generation of knowledge will produce much more effective common results to accelerate the development of the Euroregion.

One of the hallmarks of universities over the centuries is their ability to transform themselves. Universities are always reinventing themselves, not only to adapt to the reality of each moment but also to anticipate the future and promote change and progress in society, assuming a leadership role.

This transformation can be achieved more quickly with certain drivers, and there is no doubt that this type of alliance is one of them.

UNISF is an innovative initiative that will position the Euroregion as an influential player at European level in university innovation and in the creation of new cross-border management tools. From the beginning and at the different stages of the project, we have met with university managers, administrative managers, teaching staff, and students. We have exchanged information on the different forms of management, and worked to find legal solutions for the application of the state regulations

of both countries and those specific to each university, for example, those related to the organisation of university education and the procedure for quality assurance in each country and those related to the academic organisation of universities. In the commissions that designed the joint degrees, the social needs for training have been analysed, and innovative programmes have been set up... We have made progress towards a more open and flexible higher education, but to achieve the proposed objective, in-depth work is still required in each university to achieve this convergence between the different university systems of the two countries and the differences in the management and organisation of the six universities. In addition to the efforts of each university, it is essential that the legislative framework does not hinder our efforts and is sufficiently flexible to allow us to compete on equal terms with international degrees.

At the beginning of this project, an in-depth analysis of the training needs and the existing offer in the Euroregion was carried out and the training demand of the companies was evaluated in order to identify the strategic training sectors to be prioritised. All of this information was used to choose degrees in fields considered to be strategic for the Euroregion and of international interest:

- A Doctorate in Mathematics and Applications, which brings together the great potential of all Galician and Portuguese universities in the different fields of mathematics, and which meets the great demand for professionals with mathematical knowledge to face current scientific and technological advances, among which are those arising from Artificial Intelligence and Data Science.
- An interdisciplinary doctorate that offers a space for advanced training in the field of demographic ageing and longevity through the scientific perspective in the area of Social Sciences. Understanding this

multidimensional phenomenon is a strategic matter not only for the Euroregion, but also at the international level.

- A Master in Transnational Business and Digital Technologies Law, which offers an innovative training offer in the field of International Law, promoting a common legal identity and a reflection on the legal problems, shared by the legal systems of Portuguese-speaking and Spanish-speaking countries, arising from the use of digital technologies.
- And finally, the Master in Cities Challenges in the field of Engineering and Architecture.

From my point of view, the choice was the right one, focusing on training in fundamental and key global issues and on innovation in the training of students. In addition, this collaboration has brought together academic training and research with the needs of the environment, trying to strengthen the impact of this on the productive and social structure through better-trained professionals and the transfer of knowledge and technology to the productive sectors in an effective and coordinated way.

This collaboration via the UNISF project will be an important test case for the success of the essential internationalisation that our degree programmes need and their involvement in the greater social and economic development of the surrounding area. Given today's societal challenges, it would certainly be important to further develop joint projects to address the challenges of our time in areas such as artificial intelligence, health, climate change, energy and sustainable development, and improving the quality of life of society in general.

This project has been carried out thanks to the co-funding by the INTERREG V-A Spain-Portugal Cooperation Programme (POCTEP). In order to ensure

the success of the work that has already been done so far and for the project to take root, good funding is needed to allow, among other things, the mobility of teaching and research staff, students and administrative and service staff.

For the future strategy, we must take advantage of the positive aspects that telematic media provide, but we must not be tempted, for economic reasons, not to encourage direct interaction between the agents involved, especially between students and research professors.

The Euroregion faces common challenges, in many cases also shared across Europe. The UNISF project was created with these challenges in mind and aims to implement a global innovation strategy that provides solutions through training and the generation of knowledge enhanced by the strategic union of its universities. I have no doubt that the generation of a strong university hub, positioned at the forefront of international knowledge creation and innovation, will have a positive impact on the scientific and technological progress, as well as the socio-economic development of the Euroregion.

Although UNISF was born as a project in the INTERREG Cooperation Programme for which only institutions from two countries are eligible, the importance and success of this project means that, once it is consolidated, it is a good future prospect to be exported to other types of programmes so that other European countries can join in.



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# UTAD

University of Trás-  
-os-Montes and  
Alto Douro

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**Emídio Gomes**  
*Rector of UTAD*

## ***“UNISF aims to remove administrative and bureaucratic barriers to the creation of joint degrees”***

University Without Borders (UNISF) is a partnership between the six public universities of the Galicia-Northern Portugal Euroregion, led by the University of Minho as the main beneficiary, and the Foundation Centre for Euroregional Studies (FCEER). University of A Coruña (UdC), University of Santiago de Compostela (USC), University of Vigo (UV), University of Minho (UM), University of Porto (U. Porto) and University of Trás-os-Montes and Alto Douro (UTAD). The rectors of these six universities make up the FCEER board. This project aims to remove administrative and bureaucratic barriers to the creation of joint degrees. University Without Borders aims to create tools that facilitate the creation of joint degrees, creating a bridge so that resources and strengths can be pooled and to promote the mobility of professors and students, as well as the creation of an innovative and excellent educational offer that provides its own Euroregional

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university offer, which can position itself as a hub of attraction and development on a national, Iberian and European level.

The objective of UNISF is to implement four pilot programmes of innovative, cooperative and more creative degrees, with a clear cross-border and multidisciplinary component, in which Universities of the Euroregion participate.

**Master in Cities Challenges:** University of A Coruña (UDC); University of Santiago de Compostela (USC); University of Trás-os-Montes and Alto Douro (UTAD); University of Vigo (UVIGO); University of Minho (UMinho), and University of Porto (U.Porto). The Master in Cities Challenges aims at analysing the challenges of today's cities and the corresponding solutions to transform them into sustainable, smart, efficient, resilient and inclusive cities.

**Master in Transnational Business and Digital Technologies Law:** University of Santiago de Compostela (USC) and University of Minho (UMinho) The Master in Transnational Business and Digital Technologies Law aims to provide an innovative training offer in the area of Private International Law, International Business Law, Business Law, European Union Law and within the scope of legal problems resulting from the use of digital technologies, which are studied across all subjects.

**Doctorate in Social Sciences and Ageing:** University of A Coruña (UDC); University of Santiago de Compostela (USC); University of Vigo (UVIGO); University of Trás-os-Montes and Alto Douro (UTAD) and University of Porto (U.Porto). This doctoral programme offers advanced training in the field of demographic ageing and longevity studies from the scientific point of view of the Social Sciences.

**Doctorate in Mathematics and Applications:** University of A Coruña (UDC); University of Santiago de Compostela (USC); University of Trás-

-os-Montes and Alto Douro (UTAD); University of Vigo (UVIGO); University of Minho (UMinho) and University of Porto (U. Porto). The doctorate provides training in the field of Mathematics and its applications, with an orientation towards both the academic career and the labour market, endowing students with several capacities: designing and developing original research, autonomously or in partnership; building a critical view of knowledge and reality; transferring knowledge to peers or society in general.

The UNISF project is a firm and significant step towards the consolidation of a strategic alliance between Portuguese and Galician public universities. After countless partnerships and joint projects in the fields of research, resource sharing and mobility of students, professors and staff, we have now reached a new level: the integrated offer of post-graduate and doctoral training programmes. Alongside new and important challenges, this shows the consistency and maturity of inter-institutional university cooperation in the Peninsular Northwest.

The future of the Galicia-Northern Portugal Euroregion, as well as the rest of the globe, depends to a large extent on our ability to face the challenges generated by the great societal and technological changes underway: demographic, ecological, energetic and digital. The role of universities, as agents for the (co)creation and sharing of knowledge or the training of qualified professionals and committed citizens, is decisive in overcoming the difficulties and seizing the opportunities raised by these transitions. This is a role that Galician and Portuguese universities have been taking on in full for a long time, having developed projects and initiatives in areas as diverse as nanotechnology, sustainable management of coastal areas and marine resources, precision agriculture and the automotive industry. It is therefore important to continue along this path, intensifying and diversifying the efforts and stakes to ensure not only greater competitiveness of the companies and

the economic structure, but also greater cohesion and sustainability of the territories.

The strategic alliance under the motto of a “university without borders” is a good example of how higher education institutions can and must adapt to an increasingly globalised world. It aims first of all to break down walls, both internal and external, since, as Miguel Torga wrote, “the universal is a place with no walls”, and to build bridges between institutions, territories and communities. It has multiple objectives: to adapt to the increasing diversity of people, cultures and languages; to provide new measures of teaching and learning that prepare students to live and work in a global world; and to strengthen collaborative dynamics and practices in the search for solutions to pressing world problems. None of this can be achieved without the permanent reinvention of universities, both in their organisational and operational models and in the ways of creating and sharing knowledge and know-how.

The success of a cross-border project such as the UNISF depends, in addition to the verification of some basic internal assumptions, on its social, economic and even political relevance and on the public recognition it will receive from the different entities and territorial actors in the Euro region. The areas of knowledge and innovation must therefore not only be based on the competences and resources of the universities, but must also prioritise the real needs and demands of the people and their communities. In a way, this is what happened with the first training offers that address, in the fields of urban sustainability, transnational business law, ageing or applied mathematics, the demands and priorities identified on the ground. A path that must be pursued and reinforced in the future, always ensuring a strong connection to local and regional problems and contributing, at the same time, to the construction of innovative social, environmental and economic solutions with high added value.

Strange as it may seem, or perhaps not, the greatest difficulties and obstacles we face in the implementation and consolidation of a project like UNISF are administrative and bureaucratic in nature. The diversity and discrepancy of administrative, legal and academic procedures are a continuous blockage to the achievement of the planned actions and goals and a permanent demobilising and discouraging factor for the several players involved in the project. As such, in order for it to survive and affirm itself after the current pilot phase, I believe three basic conditions are necessary: an unshakeable belief, I would even say faith, in the virtues and advantages of this strategic alliance of Portuguese and Galician universities; a great resilience, i.e. persistence, from the institutions and, above all, from the professors most directly involved in the process; a strong willingness to learn from mistakes and great creativity to circumvent and/or overcome obstacles.

The University Without Borders project is an undeniable testimony of the role of higher education institutions in the building of a free, supportive, inclusive and sustainable Europe. Its success will serve as an example and role model for other institutions and countries. Within the European Union itself, but also in its relationship with other geographies and continents, namely Africa and Latin America. It depends on us, on our commitment and our ability to make it happen.



**António Fontainhas Fernandes**

*Former Rector of UTAD*

*President of the Portuguese*

*Commission for Higher Education*

***“It is essential to encourage a student and faculty mobility programme for joint degrees”***

At a time when Europe has been encouraging the creation of networks and alliances between higher education institutions, the universities that make up the Foundation Centre for Euroregional Studies (FCEER) of the Galicia-Northern Portugal region have moved forward with the University Without Borders project. This investment aims to promote a joint educational project of a multidisciplinary nature to foster synergies and complementarities, as well as to strengthen relations between universities in the Northwest Peninsula within the development of a Euroregional framework. This is a pioneering project, of a plural, integrating and innovative nature for joint advanced training which, in the future, may become a reference for tackling common challenges in the Euroregion.

The country's challenge is to change its economic model in order to make it more complex, focusing on goods and services with greater intensity in

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technology and knowledge, broadening the industrial base on which the business structure is based, and greater integration in digital markets. This transformation requires a strong investment in deepening the skills and qualifications of the labour force and in productivity growth, based on innovation and people's qualifications. In this scenario, the role of the Universities of the Galicia-Northern Portugal Euroregion appears to be decisive to reinforce a space of strong social, economic and cultural interaction, with potential and opportunities to accelerate regional development.

The European regions call for the consolidation of collective dynamics of openness to society and innovation, access to and sharing of information, as well as participation in regional, national and international knowledge networks, enhancing the Galicia-Northern Portugal Euroregion brand. It also calls for solutions that promote the blurring of borders, the mobility of knowledge workers, the development of curricula and of digital and collaborative learning, participation in networks and creative interaction between global thinking and local action. It is in this context that the University Without Borders model was outlined.

Knowledge production and innovation tends to be preferably carried out in national and transnational consortia acting in tandem through multidisciplinary, interdisciplinary or system approaches, pursuing ambitious goals and attracting alternative sources of funding. It also requires mobilising multidisciplinary skills focused on developing innovation that contributes to the economic and social development of the surrounding territory, in a globally competitive environment.

In the first stages, it was essential to overcome bureaucratic and administrative barriers concerning the creation of joint degrees. In the consolidation stage, it is essential to encourage a student and faculty

mobility programme for joint degrees, and also to strengthen the involvement of member universities in joint university extension, cultural and sports programmes. The involvement of the academic communities is crucial for the Galicia-Northern Portugal Euroregion to assume a character of strong complementarity, but at the same time to turn this geographic space into a territorial platform in a context of increasing globalisation and internationalisation of the economy.

This project will consolidate a collaborative Euroregional network in the field of higher education and, at a later stage, it will involve regional innovative systems represented by R&D units, the business sector and other organisations. In this way, it will be possible to enhance research and industrial property, improve access to diversified and competitive funding, and take an active position in cross-border development. In the present era of globalisation, the cross-border area can also assert itself more widely, particularly in the field of knowledge in the European and Lusophone areas and the Ibero-American network.



**Jorge Ventura Cardoso**  
*Vice-Rector of UTAD*

***“It is a priority to strengthen existing relationships and develop new programmes”***

The UNISF project has made it possible to overcome the existing geographical and administrative limits of the network of universities in the Galicia-Northern Portugal Euroregion in order to create joint degrees. By identifying the main barriers to the creation of a joint university training offer, the aim was to create tools to intensify relations between the university systems of Galicia and Northern Portugal.

An intense work has been carried out to find solutions to the main administrative and legal problems existing in the creation of common study plans between the universities involved and the building of structures for the common management of these degrees, favouring the production of knowledge that contributes to the elimination of existing barriers between the university systems of the two countries, and the adoption of strategic solutions for the territorial development of this Euroregion.

I therefore consider it a priority to invest in the development of joint master's and doctoral programmes that take advantage of synergies, create economies of scale, and adapt university supply to the needs of Euroregional development.

It is important to foster the premises of the Bologna spirit as regards the need to link higher studies to the labour insertion of university graduates, particularly of masters and doctorates, which can be achieved with the involvement of the business sectors, incorporating them in the teaching processes themselves and in the research activities developed by students.

The future of our higher education depends on the implementation of models and tools that facilitate the creation of joint degrees involving inter-university networks that enable the pooling of efforts, the sharing of resources, and the promotion of faculty and student mobility, based on innovative study plans of excellence that provide a diversified university education of an inter and multidisciplinary nature that can position itself as a hub of attraction and development at national and international level.

This type of cross-border projects should become a common space for cooperation in teaching, research and knowledge transfer that is a key asset for the consolidation of the territory, based on knowledge and its international projection.

In the Galicia-Northern Portugal Euroregion, there is already a solid base for cooperation in this field. Significant work has been carried out by the universities of this Euroregion, resulting in collaboration agreements for mobility and joint training programmes, especially at the level of Human and Social Sciences and Science and Technology, and which should be extended to other areas of knowledge, namely Life and Environmental Sciences, Agricultural and Veterinary Sciences and even Health Sciences.

The level of mutual knowledge and previous experience between the academic communities on both sides of the border guarantee the efficiency of a project promoting cooperation and creating stronger networks between the universities of this Euroregion.

The UNISF project is based on the creation of pilot joint study cycles that could become the seedbed for a more integrated university ecosystem at all levels. I think that strengthening the existing relationships and developing new programmes that foster the formulation of new strategic lines is a priority. The result of these initiatives may lead to the construction of new solid joint projects that reinforce competitiveness in the international arena, as well as the possibility of accessing new funding channels.

The UNISF project seeks to contribute to the objectives of the Bologna Treaty and to break down the existing obstacles in the procedures for creating bilateral and multilateral joint educational offers with application in the Galicia-Northern Portugal territory. The results of this work may be useful and extendable to the rest of the Iberian Peninsula and Europe.

Indeed, this project is an investment in the future for the relationship between universities in the Galicia-Northern Portugal Euroregion, with all aiming to contribute to endow the academic space of this Euroregion with an image of efficiency of university cooperation, overcoming obstacles and territorial, academic, administrative and legal barriers, in order to create a real space of “Universities without Borders”.

This successful image will become a reference of international educational cooperation for the development of higher education of excellence, which may eventually cover other regions of Europe.



**Luís Leite Ramos**  
*Vice-Rector of UTAD*

***“UNISF’s success will serve as an example and role model for other institutions and countries”***

The UNISF project is a firm and significant step towards the consolidation of a strategic alliance between Portuguese and Galician public universities. After countless partnerships and joint projects in the fields of research, resource sharing and mobility of students, professors and staff, we have now reached a new level: the integrated offer of post-graduate and doctoral training programmes. Alongside new and important challenges, this shows the consistency and maturity of inter-institutional university cooperation in the Peninsular Northwest.

The future of the Galicia-Northern Portugal Euroregion, as well as the rest of the globe, depends to a large extent on our ability to face the challenges generated by the great societal and technological changes underway: demographic, ecological, energetic and digital. The role of universities, as agents for the (co)creation and sharing of knowledge or the training of qualified professionals and

committed citizens, is decisive in overcoming the difficulties and seizing the opportunities raised by these transitions. This is a role that Galician and Portuguese universities have been taking on in full for a long time, having developed projects and initiatives in areas as diverse as nanotechnology, sustainable management of coastal areas and marine resources, precision agriculture and the automotive industry. It is therefore important to continue along this path, intensifying and diversifying the efforts and stakes to ensure not only greater competitiveness of the companies and the economic structure, but also greater cohesion and sustainability of the territories.

The strategic alliance under the motto of a “university without borders” is a good example of how higher education institutions can and must adapt to an increasingly globalised world. It aims first of all to break down walls, both internal and external, since, as Miguel Torga wrote, “the universal is a place with no walls”, and to build bridges between institutions, territories and communities. It has multiple objectives: to adapt to the increasing diversity of people, cultures and languages; to provide new measures of teaching and learning that prepare students to live and work in a global world; and to strengthen collaborative dynamics and practices in the search for solutions to pressing world problems. None of this can be achieved without the permanent reinvention of universities, both in their organisational and operational models and in the ways of creating and sharing knowledge and know-how.

The success of a cross-border project such as the UNISF depends, in addition to the verification of some basic internal assumptions, on its social, economic and even political relevance and on the public recognition it will receive from the different entities and territorial actors in the Euro region. The areas of knowledge and innovation must therefore not only be based on the competences and resources of the universities, but

must also prioritise the real needs and demands of the people and their communities. In a way, this is what happened with the first training offers that address, in the fields of urban sustainability, transnational business law, ageing or applied mathematics, the demands and priorities identified on the ground. A path that must be pursued and reinforced in the future, always ensuring a strong connection to local and regional problems and contributing, at the same time, to the construction of innovative social, environmental and economic solutions with high added value.

Strange as it may seem, or perhaps not, the greatest difficulties and obstacles we face in the implementation and consolidation of a project like UNISF are administrative and bureaucratic in nature. The diversity and discrepancy of administrative, legal and academic procedures are a continuous blockage to the achievement of the planned actions and goals and a permanent demobilising and discouraging factor for the several players involved in the project. As such, in order for it to survive and affirm itself after the current pilot phase, I believe three basic conditions are necessary: an unshakeable belief, I would even say faith, in the virtues and advantages of this strategic alliance of Portuguese and Galician universities; a great resilience, i.e. persistence, from the institutions and, above all, from the professors most directly involved in the process; a strong willingness to learn from mistakes and great creativity to circumvent and/or overcome obstacles.

The University Without Borders project is an undeniable testimony of the role of higher education institutions in the building of a free, supportive, inclusive and sustainable Europe. Its success will serve as an example and role model for other institutions and countries. Within the European Union itself, but also in its relationship with other geographies and continents, namely Africa and Latin America. It depends on us, on our commitment and our ability to make it happen.

**Artur Cristóvão***Former Vice-Rector of UTAD*

***“It is possible to consolidate current degrees and open up new avenues of cooperation”***

Relationships and the NETWORK spirit are built and consolidated with joint projects, preferably challenging and structuring ones, as is the case of University without Borders. It was a project that did not succeed in the first application, which required more work and refinement, requiring the overcoming of several barriers, particularly some differences between the education systems in Portugal and Galicia, but also the particularities of each institution’s operation.

Universities have contributed and will continue to contribute with the results of their research, as well as with articulation and growing collaboration with the economy and society in general, at different levels. The central mission of universities is to create value for society, training citizens and professionals, creating and sharing knowledge, preferably in a logic of co-creation, and not of simple and linear transfer, as is often said. It is necessary to go from the

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knowledge (and technology) transfer model to a model of co-creation of knowledge and, above all, of innovation, with increased potential to impact the economy and promote development.

There is also no doubt that the University Without Borders model is in line with current trends towards internationalisation and multidisciplinary. First of all, it brings together universities from two countries, each with its own path of internationalisation, which may allow the crossing of contacts, creating a true international constellation. Thus, we can imagine that the degrees now offered have participants from different continents and countries. On the other hand, the degrees were built with the perspective of bringing together different subjects, the most emblematic examples being the Master in Cities Challenges, which aims to analyse the challenges of today's cities and the respective solutions to transform them into sustainable, smart, efficient, resilient and inclusive cities, requiring responses ranging from the technological to the social, economic, physical, environmental and governance dimensions, and the Doctorate in Social Sciences and Ageing presents itself as a space for advanced training in the field of studies on demographic ageing and longevity, from the scientific lens of the Social Sciences, bringing together various disciplinary areas.

In a world of enormous complexity and uncertainty, in high-risk societies like the ones we have today, all areas of knowledge are relevant. Today we tend to overvalue technologies and “hard sciences”, but we must not forget that society is made of people and social reactions, and is based on cultures and values. All dimensions of knowledge matter to build a more sustainable future, with more balance and more human happiness. The universities of Northern Portugal and Galicia, as far as I could see, are aware of the challenges of the planet and humanity, and in their matrix there is a logic of innovation and continuous reinvention. Universities today are quite different from what they were 40 or more years ago

when I started my academic career. More open, more articulated with the economy and society, more international, more focused on the challenges of sustainability.

This pilot experience was very important, namely to understand how to overcome legal and other obstacles linked to the differences between institutions. From now on I think we have, in addition to institutional and personal relations strengthened, collaboration protocols and regulations designed and ready to adjust to other circumstances. As long as there is a willingness on the part of the institutions, it is possible to consolidate current degrees and open up new avenues of cooperation. The mobilisation of the Schools or Faculties and their professors, although not always easy, is always more fluid when there is a firm political will. I believe, however, that this kind of cooperation can be born in different ways, from the top of the institutions or from the bottom, from the professors, in very different dynamics, which include, of course, the role of the CEER Foundation, fundamental in the UNISF project.

I am convinced that this project, if successful, will constitute a cooperation model for other scales, at national and European level and even in other contexts. I hope that there will be opportunities to share the University Without Borders experience, for example in the Council of Rectors of Portuguese Universities and in the Conference of Rectors of Spanish Universities, even on an Ibero-American scale. Some universities in Northern Portugal and Galicia are part of consortia of European universities and may become spokespersons for this project, perhaps taking it as an example of good practice. Much will depend on the will and initiative of UNISF partners, including the rectories, the CEER Foundation, the course directorates, and all the professors involved.



**Gonçalo Fernandes**

*Former Vice-Rector of UTAD*

## ***“Unprecedented pioneering spirit in European universities”***

This joint project, called University Without Borders, definitely brought the various structures of the six universities in the Galicia-Northern Portugal Euroregion closer together, as regards rectory teams, professors from various scientific and subject areas, specialised committees such as the technical and communication committee, etc. This represented a real revolution in institutional terms, as everyone worked for the success of all and not just for the success of their university.

As a result, students are trained by professors from all the universities involved in that degree and the final certificate bears the seal of the corresponding Euroregion universities.

The six universities have different histories and regional implantations, but by converging in joint training, they take with them all the training, experience, technical, pedagogical and scientific

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capacity of their professors, and all this learning will be fundamental for current students and future professionals.

University alliances, whether within the scope of European universities, Erasmus Mundus training programmes or others, such as University without Borders, naturally blur the differences that exist between the various institutions in favour of a common goal, the training of new and future professionals in each of the areas.

In the case of University Without Borders, the different training plans make it compulsory for the final theses and dissertations to be supervised by professors from at least two different institutions and from both countries. This sharing of knowledge and experience is an added value for masters and doctorate students.

I do not agree with the view that universities, in view of globalisation, are obsolete and have possibly anachronistic approaches. Universities are at the heart of knowledge creation and scientific research and the future will only be more beneficial to society as a whole with more and better research.

This is why universities are essential in all societies that look after the well-being and progress of their fellow citizens. However, with the joining of efforts between multiple institutions and the carrying out of joint projects, a greater scale of value is gained and weaknesses can become strengths, because there is a real complementarity between the different participants. And all scientific areas can benefit, from the arts to the humanities, from social, natural, physical, biological, life and applied sciences, etc. What globalisation has brought with it is the need to produce knowledge together, to establish more partnerships, not only in research, but also in teaching and learning.

The University Without Borders consortium has the great advantage of being pioneering, of opening the doors of universities, and of bringing empirical knowledge that is an added value to any joint teaching-learning training. This project has helped the structures of both countries and even the European Commission to rethink all the bureaucracy involved in creating, registering and implementing joint training courses. In the future, it will certainly be easier to have degrees approved and registered by the European entities responsible for the sector.

These universities will now and in the future be able to more easily implement new joint training courses under, for example, the European universities programme, namely with the creation of joint masters' and doctorate degrees from several European countries, and not only of mini-credentials, summer schools, short courses, etc. It will always be very difficult to move forward with programmes at first degree level, commonly known as undergraduate degrees, because the mobility of European students in the first years is very low, and many of them are still underage. And for those cases, we will continue to have mobility funding via the Erasmus+ programme. However, at the level of second and third cycles (masters and doctorates), the possibilities are endless and these universities have learnt to do this fundamentally with the University Without Borders project (UNISF).



**UVIGO**

University  
of Vigo



**Manuel Joaquín Reigosa Roger**  
*Rector*



**María Isabel Doval Ruiz**  
*Vice-Rector*



**Alfonso Lago**  
*Vice-Rector*

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## ***“The Peninsular Northwest is one of the reference labs in the EU”***

The overall objective of the University Without Borders project is to remove administrative and bureaucratic barriers to the creation of joint degrees at our universities, universities that were already good allies in many R&D&I projects but needed to get to know each other better and move towards harmonising their procedures and regulations in a way that would allow them to create joint degrees. As such, this project is of great importance.

The knowledge generated by higher education institutions promotes a more sustainable economic development. The power that is created when we join forces is helping to consolidate a highly competitive territorial platform in a context of increasing globalisation and internationalisation of the economy, but with a clear demographic challenge.

Higher education institutions are instruments of transnational economic and social development, through the generation of knowledge, the training of highly qualified resources, the evaluation of our research results and the constitution of platforms of tangible and intangible resources in the areas of scientific and technological differentiation. The Euroregion's university system as a system has much to contribute and is already doing so. Our idiosyncrasies make us a true area of inter-regional integration. Let us imagine that joint research teams and labs are already in operation, meeting the needs of cross-border cities, or that thanks to the transfer of knowledge we are providing the industry of Galicia and Northern Portugal with good tools to improve their competitiveness in a Spanish-speaking environment and at a global scale, or the economic impact generated by the mobility of students and research and management staff.

Even so, we would need to take further steps in the field of training, and we are achieving this also by designing and implementing postgraduate degrees (Master's and Doctorate) jointly with the UNISF project. At UVigo, we are also determined to move towards the creation of joint undergraduate degrees. The economic growth of any territory has a direct relation to the increase in the number of qualified people and their skills. Moreover, a significant proportion of the increase in labour productivity can be attributed to the increase in the number of people with a university education. Individually, the main benefits are increased employability, skills development, entrepreneurship, and productivity.

The Peninsular Northwest is one of the reference labs in the EU, and this common knowledge generated through R&D&I and also through our joint degrees is already one of the best levers for transformation and economic growth.

From the beginning of the project, it was clear to us that UNISF is perfectly aligned with the philosophy of European Universities, a programme promoted by the EU via Erasmus+. UNISF has been its forerunner and will be able to provide valuable results for present and future university partnerships and interact with them on the basis of its validated experience. The products or results obtained are not as important as what we have learned from each other during the process, from a huge effort to harmonise our procedures, protocols, and regulations. We are diverse institutions, but we are also flexible, and these harmonisation practices that we have promoted, with reasonable accommodation, are an excellent instrument of public management of such diversity.

All areas of knowledge and innovation are relevant, and the challenges of the Euroregion and of the world are wide and varied, so the answers have to come from all areas for their effects to be sustainable. The approach must be multilateral, also within each university. The key is to promote the exploitation of territorial synergies, both between and within universities and with other sectors, through collaboration and cohesion mechanisms. We are dynamic institutions in a vibrant Euroregion, so it is definitely important to deepen such partnerships, to engage effectively in cooperation based on shared values for an interconnected, innovative and inclusive Euroregional higher education.

It is important to ensure the generation of multi- and intercultural competences within each university, but also stable funding to be able to spread this type of projects in the Spanish-speaking world. Projects such as UNISF should be strategic, and competent institutions should provide universities with a framework that facilitates the delivery of joint degrees, more flexible and modular lifelong learning opportunities, and more inclusive learning, to reach a more diverse student body. Under quality assurance, it is important that institutions and quality agencies promote

innovative and flexible models of teaching and learning that address the current challenges of the Euroregion; universities should emphasise student-centred learning, Euroregional values, multilingualism, academic excellence...

Programmes such as UNISF are set to play an important role as an expression of cross-border cooperation and will be recognised as an additional seal of quality to the degrees offered by each of our universities. In addition, however, there is also a fruitful field for cooperation with other

European inter-university programmes, such as Erasmus+ European Universities. As we said before, UNISF leaves a legacy of harmonisation methodologies and procedures that are valuable for current and future university alliances in which the six universities will be involved, and the knowledge acquired will surely also facilitate our participation in other projects with universities in the Spanish-Portuguese world.

A green-tinted photograph of a building and a fountain. The building is a multi-story stone structure with several windows, some with small balconies. To the right, there is a tall, ornate fountain with a statue on top. The entire image is overlaid with a semi-transparent green filter.

# UMINHO

University  
of Minho



**Rui Vieira de Castro**

*Rector of the University of Minho*

***“The interaction between faculty, services and rectories is an enriching experience”***



**Filomena Soares**

*Vice-Rector of UMinho*

The UNISF consortium has defined four study cycles on current themes of high interest for the Galicia-Northern Portugal cross-border region, as it will allow it to keep up with the changing times, taking into account:

- the ageing population in both regions and the growing concern for active ageing;
  - the need for cities and towns to develop in a way that enables them to keep pace with technological developments, respecting nature and meeting the needs of a population that is increasingly demanding and concerned about the environment, the consequences of their actions, and the impact of cities on pollution;
  - commercial relations between companies from both countries that increasingly require a general knowledge of the laws of both regions;
  - the need for developments in mathematics and applications, aimed at solving scientific problems and phenomena that arise in the daily context of relations between the two regions at various levels.
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The first edition of these four study cycles is a pilot edition that began operating on 3 October. The knowledge acquired in the development and implementation of these degrees undoubtedly paves the way for new teaching projects, and this has always been the intention of these six Higher Education institutions.

The participation in this project has always had the main objective of overcoming legal and administrative barriers and creating a methodology that will allow us, in the future, to join forces and create more joint study cycles, in a fast and simple way and above all unified, respecting the legislation of both countries. The interaction between professors, services and rectories was an enriching experience that we intend to continue to foster and even share so that other universities can benefit from this experience. In addition, the consortium is currently made up of these six institutions, but in the future it may grow or even derive into new consortia.

The University Without Borders consortium promotes the interaction and cooperation of partner Higher Education Institutions in the development of joint projects as well as allowing the transfer of knowledge from universities to the business sector of the Euroregion. The sharing and standardisation of administrative, legal and academic procedures between the universities of the consortium speeds up the building of a cooperative space without borders.



**Laurinda Leite**  
*Vice-Rector of UMinho*

## ***“Universities in the Galicia-Northern Portugal Euroregion have a recognised capacity to produce knowledge”***

The development of the UNISF project, in its initial phase, required a great deal of knowledge, not only of the legislation and rules of each of the countries, but also of the internal regulations and guidelines of each of the institutions. It was necessary to identify the similarities and find ways to overcome the differences, at times more imagined than real, and at other times profound and almost irreconcilable. This type of process, which is complex and depends a lot on the capacity for dialogue and the willingness of institutional representatives to cooperate, when successful, as in the case of UNISF, leads to a deepening of inter-institutional relations, based on true mutual understanding and driven by the sharing of common goals.

The universities of the Galicia-Northern Portugal Euroregion have a recognised capacity to produce knowledge, not only in several cutting-edge scientific and technological areas, but also in areas relevant

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for social and human development. This knowledge becomes available to society, in general, and to companies in the region, in particular.

Moreover, universities and companies have a close relationship that leads to cooperation in order to find solutions to problems or needs that both of them have.

Many companies in the Euroregion already act not only as an “extension” of university labs, allowing university students to have a first approach to the work market, but also as drivers of university research, when they request collaboration from universities, either in specialised or advanced training or in research, to solve more or less immediate problems. This type of collaboration allows universities, companies and institutions to give as well as take and thus contribute to mutual development.

The real problems of society are multidisciplinary, but it does not seem feasible to train specialists as multidisciplinary as the nature of the problems to be solved increasingly requires.

Solving these problems requires the cooperation of experts in several knowledge areas, sensitive to the multidisciplinary nature of today's real problems. Specialisation in a given area of knowledge is multifaceted, involving several subareas, and must be based on cutting-edge research, it being unlikely that a single higher education institution will excel in all of them.

Thus, inter-institutional cooperation makes it possible to build study programmes with more selected and better qualified teaching teams – the best in each institution – and to provide students with prime training. On the other hand, the training process must increasingly rely on partners from the labour market – companies and institutions – not only for the

purpose of practice contexts, but also for the purpose of specialists who combine academic knowledge (there are already many masters and doctors in companies and institutions) with practical, professional knowledge. This university-company/institution link is an aspect in which universities need to continue to invest.

It is important to deepen this type of collaboration whenever it brings added value, that is, whenever it allows doing what a university alone could not do or whenever it allows doing in a better way what a given university was already doing. This condition, combined with existing or foreseeable social, technological and scientific needs, should be the key factors in defining the areas in which cooperation should take place. To be successful, these projects cannot be imposed; they have to be regarded as a necessity and an added value. However, once the project ends, the funding for students ends as well. A threat to affirmation in the post-pilot (funded) phase has to do with the lack of Master's scholarships and the shortage of Doctorate scholarships, which hinders mobility between partner institutions and countries.

The use of b-learning can help minimise financial and availability problems, especially for working students without a scholarship, but only physical mobility allows them to get to know the environment of other institutions.

Another threat to this type of project are the differences in the regulations applicable to post-graduate degrees between the two countries, namely with regard to fees (tuition fees), differences that are greater in the case of doctorates and may lead to a "flight" to the country where these fees are lower, thus undermining the operation of the partnership. Moreover, subsequent legal changes in the various countries and institutional regulations will require constant attention and capacity for negotiation in

order to prevent students and programmes from being affected by times of uncertainty.

his project certainly gives rise to relevant knowledge for other similar projects. Transfer of knowledge will be easier within the European area than to other geographies, whose institutions are governed by different legislation, regarding the structuring and assessment of study cycles, as well as training accreditation, quality assessment, and training certification.

However, even within Europe, and despite Bologna, there are countries with organisational and operational principles that are different from those of Portugal and Spain, so possible extension will require further work which could, however, benefit from other bilateral experiences.

**Carla Martins***Former Pro-Rector of UMinho*

## ***“University alliances make it possible to take a step further towards an innovative educational offer”***

A project such as the University Without Borders (UNISF) is key to deepening inter-institutional relations as it involves several levels, such as: (i) firstly, the highest institutional level – a project of this nature only happens when the Rectors identify it as strategic and the respective rectory teams assume it as a priority in their agendas; (ii) at the level of the Organic Units and respective teaching teams, which interpret the joint degrees as essential in their educational offer portfolio due to the importance they will have, both in the field of shared research and for the development of the region (iii) at the level of academic services, which have to align their references to make the joint degrees that are born out of the University Without Borders happen, in the administrative field; (iv) at the level of computer services and platforms, the basis from which the joint degrees are able to operate. In other words, a successful UNISF project is transformative of its member institutions because of the deep cooperation it necessarily entails.

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Universities can offer academic and scientific preparation to professionals who, within the framework of joint cross-border degrees, are exposed to innovative and, as far as possible, transdisciplinary knowledge, which must be based on an assessment of the region's needs. In fact, any region, not just the Galicia-Northern Portugal Euroregion, will benefit from a project of this nature if it is built and developed as UNISF has been.

Is this type of university alliance the way forward, breaking down barriers and making higher education more open to society and compelling universities to reinvent themselves in different fields? Undoubtedly. It would add to internationalisation and multidisciplinary – the inter- and intra-institutional cooperation that has to be the foundation of a project with these characteristics. Indeed, university alliances allow to go beyond as regards an innovative educational offer, anchored in a strong constitution of universities, offering students new cutting-edge knowledge relevant to society, on the one hand, and the experience of enjoying different institutional cultures and ways of being, on the other hand.

It should also be noted that it is only possible to identify innovative areas of knowledge within a given temporal and spatial framework. What is innovative today may no longer be so tomorrow, and what is relevant for the Euroregion may not be so for another geographical area. If the starting point is the needs of the region and the know-how of the various institutions, surely it will be possible to design educational and scientific projects suitable for the community, be it regional, cross-border or even global.

For the future, institutional will is needed from the outset. The path to the creation of joint cross-border degrees has been cleared at UNISF at the legal and administrative levels, etc. The barriers that have been overcome apply to other degrees that may be developed between universities in

the Euroregion, and may also serve as a model for the removal of other barriers existing in other geographical contexts. The model of intra and inter-institutional cooperation that was deepened in this consortium of six universities remains as a legacy of UNISF and as a platform for future developments.

What has been achieved in this project in little more than three years between two countries is reproducible on the European scene and even in consortia involving more than two countries. Once again, if there is institutional will from the universities involved, what seems impossible at first sight will materialise. Certainly, with a great deal of effort and flexibility, what, in my opinion, has enabled this consortium to achieve what it set out to do was the creation of a University Without Borders where knowledge and expertise are co-built and offered as joint degrees that are placed at the service of the Galicia-Northern Portugal Euroregion.

The image shows the grand facade of the University of Porto building, featuring classical architectural elements like columns and arches. Three large posters are displayed on the upper level. The central poster is titled 'ESPACO, CORPO É BEM-ESTAR' and mentions dates from 2014 to 2015. The left poster says 'UNIVERSIDADE DO PORTO'. The right poster is partially visible. In the foreground, a group of people is gathered near the entrance. The entire image is overlaid with a green color scheme and a white grid pattern.

# U PORTO

University  
of Porto



**António de Sousa Pereira**  
*Rector of the University of Porto*



**José Castro Lopes**  
*Vice-Rector of the University of Porto*

## ***“Universities can and should be a driver for the development of their regions and countries”***

As a pioneer project in the creation of joint study cycles involving up to six universities from two countries, in which there is a clear will for convergence and harmonisation of administrative, management and operational procedures, the UNISF project reflects the will of the institutions involved to improve relations between them and their higher education systems in Portugal and Spain.

In fact, setting this project in motion implies an extraordinary dedication of the various institutions involved to adapt their procedures to a common management of these study cycles up to the limit imposed by the legislation in force in each country. In addition, it is a collaboration that does not end with the demands imposed by the project, but seeks to give it continuity, since there are still some obstacles to overcome and possibilities to explore.

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Universities can and should be a driver for the development of their regions and countries. Through the sharing of knowledge, resources and strategies needed to set up a joint training offer, the UNISF project could further enhance this development factor.

The diversity that the UNISF experience provides to institutions has the potential to result in the production of richer knowledge and research, with a greater impact on the economy of Galicia and Northern Portugal, as well as in the training of professionals with skills that provide the labour market with a more complete knowledge and a set of competencies better suited to its needs.

The interest already shown by several companies in taking on interns from the study cycles created by the UNISF consortium, for example, is evidence of the value they represent for the Euroregion's business sector.

Internationalisation and multidisciplinary, in training and scientific research, have been part of the strategic objectives and mission of the University of Porto for several years. They are therefore not issues of the future, but already present obligations for any university.

Alliances between institutions can make an important contribution to achieving these goals, but they will certainly not be the only possible way. Internationalisation should play a key role in the development strategy of a sustainable university, but it could do so by attracting international students or by exploiting opportunities for international exchange of professors and students, for example.

In turn, the multidisciplinary in the training offer, in research, and in the skills of the graduates is precisely the added value that motivates this internationalisation effort. This results in a more complete critical mass

at the level of human capital, in research and, indirectly, in the business sector. In this sense, we believe that the effort to break down barriers should be continued, not necessarily with a reinvention in different domains, but by combining knowledge and experience.

It is important to continue collaborations of this nature, since, despite all the efforts of the consortium, there are still some challenges associated with the specificities of the governance models of the entities involved, especially when it comes to countries with profound differences at this level.

The areas of knowledge fundamental to the development of the region and of the institutions themselves are not exhausted in the ones explored in this project. Naturally, and in a weighted way, the areas of health, digital transition, and economy are those that currently stand out.

In the previous studies developed by the UNISF project, it was possible to identify that areas such as “economics, international relations, public and foreign policy, in a perspective applied to the local, regional and European context, are valued. A common concern to several proposals, not only in the area of Social Sciences, is the need to integrate the concept of sustainability in the reflection on regional development, encompassing economic growth, human rights, and environmental responsibility.”

Worthy of note is the importance of global health in “defining programmes in the area of Life Sciences, Engineering and Environmental Protection, which aim at a balance between human populations and ecosystems capable of responding to contemporary challenges. (...) In an interdisciplinary logic, references to microbiology, clinical biology, industrial biochemistry, biotechnology or even bioinformatics reinforce the interest of respondents in programmes oriented not only to research, but also to the clinical, business or industrial environment, following the

rapid technological and scientific development that supports these areas. (...) Other suggestions are based on the interaction of Business Science, Computer Science, Mathematics and Statistics, proposing training courses that link management, data analysis and programming. Notable is the attention to the ongoing digital transformation, with reference to artificial intelligence and digital games, but also to actuarial science, quality control and business or human resources management.”

The emerging creation of joint training contradicts the premise that universities in Northern Portugal and Galicia are taking an obsolete approach to these areas, motivated by globalisation, focusing instead on a logic of inter-institutional approximation that values addressing areas of knowledge in a multidisciplinary way.

The experience of the UNISF project has made it clear that, regarding the creation of joint study cycles between Portuguese and Spanish institutions, there are still unsolved and intractable aspects that depend on the discussion at the central power level. I am referring, specifically, to issues related to the different legal frameworks of both countries. Steps are already being taken in that direction, for example, in the harmonisation of criteria for accreditation of study cycles and of the procedures for requests for creation of new joint degrees, applicable to European countries and considered by the evaluation and accreditation agencies operating in Europe, which seem to us to deserve due support in order to achieve a “banalisation”, in the positive sense of the term, in the offer of this type of training.

From the analysis of the results of the two application phases of these study cycles, the interest of students, workers and top business people in this training offer, characterised by a strong multidisciplinary and international component, is evident.

The creation of a training offer between two or more institutions from different countries is nothing new. The University of Porto, for example, already has several study cycles in association with European universities. The particularity of the UNISF project lies in the high number of higher education institutions involved. Therefore, it is widely proven that there is openness to explore the creation of training resulting from cooperation between higher education institutions located in a wider geographical area, which complement each other as regards training, resources, and experiences. On the other hand, due to its particularity, the experience of the UNISF project has made it possible to identify the obstacles of a normative and institutional management nature that still exist in this field, but also the solutions found to be able to harmonise part of the management and operation of the study cycles. Thus, other programmes can be leveraged through this experience and solutions can be found within UNISF.



**Maria de Lurdes Fernandes**

*Former Vice-Rector of UPorto*

## ***“Internationalisation is now an essential dynamic in any institution”***

The proximity between the different higher education institutions involved will be fundamentally at the level of teaching and research in the scientific areas involved, allowing mutual knowledge of professors and researchers and, above all, complementarity and deepening of the respective scientific specialities. This approach may result in future joint scientific and academic initiatives that go beyond the ones now taking place.

Regarding the Galicia-Northern Portugal Euroregion, universities can contribute to the knowledge of the different realities and of the distinct specialties, promote complementarities and synergies of researchers and their projects, develop greater awareness of the similarities and differences and of the benefits of mutual knowledge and cooperation for this development.

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Internationalisation is now a key dynamic in any institution/entity/company and it is in valuing multidisciplinary that innovation will be strengthened.

All areas of knowledge and innovation are important in cross-border projects, because collaboration between areas of knowledge is essential for the integral development of any society – and even more so in societies with similar cultures and economies, such as cross-border societies. Globalisation has made some traditional approaches obsolete, but this does not only apply to universities in Northern Portugal. What is important is the ability to cooperate and work together with an understanding of the different institutional cultures. If the will to cooperate is real, differences will have to be overcome and, consequently, the advantages of that cooperation will have to be valued, so that the steps of shared development are solid and effective (in any area of cooperation, because all of them are important, as long as they are focused not only on economic development, but also on social and cultural development).

Hence, it is of utmost importance to support professors and researchers so that new cooperation and joint or shared work projects may emerge from this pilot programme phase. In these programmes, the most important aspect is people and the dynamics of cooperation they can create, if they have the necessary and appropriate institutional support.

Therefore, it is crucial to stabilise and deepen the cooperation of the UNISF project, and support the professors and researchers involved, so that from the results obtained, new cooperation and other types of projects can be promoted or supported. Without the solidity of the current project, and subsequent positive results, it will be difficult to scale up this type of project to other geographies.

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# MASTER IN CITIES CHALLENGES

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**Luís Bragança***Director**University of Minho***Fernando Bessa Ribeiro***Doctorate in Social Sciences  
from the University of Minho*

## ***“Portugal and Spain have non-coincident levels of development and well-being”***

I do not intend to discuss here the paradigm of change, a recurrent topic in our society, namely in sociology, education, economics, engineering, architecture and many other areas of knowledge, as well as concepts such as the “new digital age”, but the answer to the issue raised must consider that today the majority of the human population lives in cities, a fact that constitutes an event of remarkable relevance. Considering that cities are not immune, nor could they be, to the effects of the social, cultural, economic and technological inequalities that characterise our present time, making themselves especially keenly felt in them, in the form of significant differentiations in the use of urban spaces, namely housing, the main challenge, after all, is old: to define urban policies that can mitigate the effects of inequalities in our society.

Confronted with the increasing slumisation of the world, to paraphrase the recently departed American Mike Davis, the challenge for policy

makers, urban planners and other experts interested in the issues of living in cities is immense, challenging the possibilities of public policies to produce more inclusive and radically more sustainable cities. Having a strong impact on cities, climate change requires policies based on sustainability – absolutely imperative in fact, as they are the only chance we have left, as a human society, to stop the race towards collective suicide, as rightly underlined by António Guterres, Secretary-General of the United Nations – requiring heavy public investment in the field of energy performance, in collective and soft mobility, and in the reorganisation of work and leisure spaces oriented towards another way of living the city, necessarily committed to conviviality and to slowing down the pace of work, travel, and consumption.

Sustainability and efficiency do not necessarily have to be placed in opposition to economic and social development. In this regard, we must clarify what we mean by economic and social development: if we are talking about the currently dominant one, the one that has prevailed since the dawn of the first industrial revolution, which has brought us to a present marked by climate change, mass extinction of species, and irreversible damage to nature, with social inequalities whose dimensions are only matched by those that existed in the middle of the second half of the 19th century, as Thomas Piketty shows, then we must say that it is no good. However, if we take into account other perspectives, even mobilising the contributions produced by the degrowth theoretical field, then we can try to outline alternative paths based on sustainability, which does not imply living worse but living differently, necessarily consuming less.

We undoubtedly find ourselves in the field of politics, requiring citizens to choose between different political positions and agendas for cities that imply questioning and finding a solution to aspects such as gentrification, car-based mobility, energy efficiency of buildings, and the role of tourism

and new residents captured through very favourable tax regimes, to name only the most relevant that demand our urgent attention.

Putting this discussion in a cross-border perspective has obvious but, above all, pertinent reasons: Portugal and Spain are countries with very strong economic and social ties, and in some regions, such as Entre Douro e Minho and Galicia, there are cultural, economic and social continuums that the border does not interrupt. Thus, the deepening of cross-border action in the urban field, strengthening the knowledge of problems and the design of solutions, namely those related to mobility between the various urban centres, is, whatever the theoretical and political point of view, a relevant step to move towards more sustainable and user-friendly cities, where people can feel fulfilled from a human point of view.

Portugal and Spain do not have the same levels of development and welfare, to Portugal's disadvantage, the latter clearly lagging behind in rail-based mobility, which is absolutely crucial to promote links between cities and therefore urban sustainability. On the other hand, the economic and financial resources at our disposal are inferior to those of our neighbouring country. However, there are many problems that we share and we must therefore seek solutions where the example of one region can be useful to another region and vice versa, in a permanent dialogue involving political decision-makers, parties and social movements, in short, organised civil society.

The challenge lies in defining common agendas to find solutions that respond to the legitimate concerns of citizens, specifically those who live and work in our cities, without diluting the particularities of each country and its problems. In other words, we must tackle old problems – housing, work, security, public services such as schools and hospitals – to which new problems are added, dictated by the climate change underway.



**Cándido Jaime González**

*Assistant Director of University  
of A Coruña*

## ***“We need to question the model of a functional city”***

Urban life develops through a series of interconnected systems. Consequently, the challenges faced by cities today are diverse. For a first overview, we need only consider three areas: the environmental, the economic, and the social. As regards the first area, environmental pollution caused by CO<sub>2</sub> emissions and the quality of the air we breathe are identified as two serious problems that require our immediate attention. In view of this, there is no doubt that incorporating nature in balancing the paradigm shift process seems inevitable. Likewise, even if the versions of shared mobility and remote working that we know are still evolving, it seems that they are here to stay. As regards economy, the ability to locate critical or conflictive points in real time and to bring together the information, which can be captured through digitalisation, allows a control centre to process it and issue the necessary orders. Improving investment in existing urban development networks

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is envisaged as actions to rationalise consumption, both public and private, of electricity, water, or the recycling of waste water or solid urban waste. Therefore, a partnership between a public administration with more efficient governance and private companies is an undeniable management framework. Finally, in the social field, both the improvement of inequalities in access to certain urban services and the quality of the urban environment in the most vulnerable neighbourhoods, including mitigating the well-known heat island effect, suggest the path of decisions to be taken. In any case, the proposed measures are not airtight. An action in any one of the above-mentioned areas leads to synergies in the others, denoting a complex interrelationship.

It is clear that addressing the challenges of achieving friendly, liveable and safe cities must include the productive dynamics of society. However, reproductive issues and the needs of the weaker segments of society – of women, children and the elderly – also need to be addressed. Cities must not only respond to a productive model that places economic performance above the rest of the urban components, but must also balance productivity with attention to people. It is therefore necessary to question the model of a functional city, divided by sectors: residence, work, leisure, etc., which adopts the male of productive age as its model. The solution is not simple; it requires a collective will, both from those who govern and those who are governed. In both groups, there is a need to activate awareness from a collective point of view, leaving personal interests on the back burner. Awareness of different urban players is a relevant matter to establish frameworks for coexistence in which difference and diversity are presented as values that enrich the social environment.

A strategy for a city model, both in the short and long term, which the community has to set and take on board. To this end, citizen participation is key.

In the case of Galicia and the Northern Portugal, the initial situation on both sides is similar: depopulation of the countryside, abandonment of agricultural activities and forest fires, weak industry, scarce urban services, housing problems, unequal access to technology, ageing population, young people leaving for more attractive labour markets... To name but a few. Given this similarity of problems, it is of vital importance for both regions to adopt coordinated measures to improve the living conditions of the population.

The need to exploit natural resources, reach a minimum population threshold, reverse inequalities, and develop an adequate scale of the productive sector by combining the areas of the two countries in the peninsular northwest are clear necessities. Likewise, the setting up of an integrated model that promotes the continuity, as opposed to the rupture, of cities and their associated territory would favour an overall approach to overcome the localisms that are so present in our culture. In the current international context, the creation of a cohesive scenario is extremely important for both regions: Galicia and Northern Portugal. Addressing the current problems means working together in one direction, with short, firm steps, optimising the means and tools available.

Those projects that cross the conventionally adopted boundaries of each country's administrations undoubtedly have the capacity to act as a kaleidoscope. Undoubtedly, they behave as tools that, by decomposing the whole, offer multiple views of the same urban manufacture or of different cities. As tools that identify the different parts of the whole through analytical dismemberment. Identifying the essential components is the first step in a process of re-composition that makes it possible to characterise various sites.

This implies recognising the singularities of each reality to classify the problems that arise in the different territories. In some cases, the issues will be similar in scale. In other cases, they will be specific and unique. There is no set rule. This systematisation allows us to think about the possibility of creating platforms and development agencies, which can coordinate their efforts to meet the demands raised.

These institutions should promote specific complementary actions, despite the fact that in each territorial area they identify their own degree of disadvantages. These concrete actions would not be understood without a high level of complicity and synergies in a complex environment.

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**MASTER IN  
TRANSNATIONAL  
BUSINESS  
AND DIGITAL  
TECHNOLOGIES  
LAW**

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**Anabela Gonçalves***Director**University of Minho*

## ***“Consolidating the cross-border area for higher education and research in the Galicia-Northern Portugal Euroregion”***

The Master in Transnational Business and Digital Technologies Law aims to articulate a solid knowledge of the Portuguese, Spanish, European and international legal system, preparing lawyers for the most advanced areas of technology, covering areas such as private international law, company law, civil liability in the digital economy, transnational public law and data protection; international taxation of the digital economy, competition law and intellectual property. As it covers contents of international, European, Portuguese and Spanish law, it aims to give law graduates the skills to exercise a legal profession, in general, in the international labour market and, specifically, in Portugal and Spain. By allowing the understanding of contents, legal institutes and solutions of the different legal systems, it enables the approximation between professionals who work in the different legal systems.

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The great challenge posed to law by technological developments is precisely the challenge of regulating new realities. With the development of technology, such as artificial intelligence, on the one hand, it is necessary for law to move towards its legal regulation, because disruptive technologies are often at stake, easily affecting subjective rights and sometimes fundamental rights. On the other hand, such regulation must not paralyse the evolution of technology itself. The difficulty of law is to find a balance between these two vectors.

For example, the mobility of workers and companies who carry out their activities in the Galicia-Northern Portugal Euroregion has as its main challenge the mastery of the contents of the Portuguese and Spanish legal systems and of the legal system that regulates transnational legal relations, some of which are from European Union and international sources. This legal regime presents some complexity, which justifies an in-depth study of it.

The cooperation established through the Master in Transnational Business and Digital Technologies Law aims to strengthen the ties between the Law School of the University of Minho and the Law School of the University of Santiago, with teachers and students from the Galicia-Northern Portugal Euroregion,

deepening cross-border cooperation between these two regions. In this way, it also aims to consolidate the Border Area of Higher Education and Research of the Northern Portugal-Galicia Euroregion and between Portugal and Spain. This master's degree aims to be an innovation as regards cross-border cooperation, allowing to assist in rethinking and strengthening the development of the Galicia-Northern Portugal Euroregion, and between Portugal and Spain, through the qualification of human resources that master the legal specificities of cross-border

activities, allowing to leverage the advantages of those activities. It also has a strong international component, which aims to include students from Portuguese-speaking countries and Hispanic countries, promoting a common legal identity and reflection on the legal problems shared by the legal systems that make up this universe.

Finally, the Master in Transnational Business and Digital Technologies Law also aims to endow students with skills for scientific research in Law, combined with a strong practical component, by placing students in an internship environment, in companies, public entities and private organisations, under faculty supervision, allowing students to integrate an employment context with the contents taught in the degree.

**Cesar García Nova**

*Assistant Director University  
of Santiago de Compostela*

## ***“Technological changes are a permanent challenge in Law”***

Language is the prime means of communication and, therefore, the main tool for dialogue and understanding. And the university is, by essence, a space for debate, tolerance and the exchange of opinions. Language has a semiotic dimension, but when it comes to studying reality from the legal point of view, it also has an obvious epistemological dimension. The norm, as the first object of approaching the scientific knowledge of Law, is defined on the basis of a singular form of language, which is legal language. Legal language is an expression of language, but it is also part of the formal and logical object of legal knowledge. And legal language, like Law itself, is the result of many conditioning factors. Moreover, we include the respective legal cultures, since Law cannot be limited to the expression of the rule, but is interwoven with the values of the different cultures. The production of positive legislation is not the result of a contingency of the legislator, but is conditioned

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by a multitude of factors, although we sometimes forget this when the function of the legislator in European Union member states is reduced to transposing Community Directives. UNISIF promotes the connection between different legal cultures, through a comparative but also integrative methodology. This is manifested in many dimensions. Among them, that of the pure expression of legal language. The contribution is therefore extremely important. Technological changes are a permanent challenge in Law. It is a cliché (which, as always, hides a half-truth) to say that Law always follows reality. And that challenge is exacerbated when technological change is part of what are known as disruptive technologies. Any disruptive technological change implies a paradigm shift. Think of the use of the blockchain for contracting, or the legally relevant activities carried out in the metaverse, or the use of artificial intelligence elements to control illegal or unlawful activities of citizens, or the qualification and appropriate treatment in Law of the different tokens, including cryptocurrencies. In my opinion, these challenges in Law require three dimensions. Firstly, the need to deal with legal regulation regarding sectors of reality that do not exist for the Law. A very dangerous no-law / Unrecht-zone must be prevented from expanding, because it would become immune to the legal system. Secondly, the challenge of adapting traditional citizens' rights to a new digital environment. And thirdly, the recognition of new rights, such as those related to privacy, the prohibition of scoring and unacceptable biases, and the right to public disclosure of algorithms – a challenge that we jurists of this era have to face.

The free movement of workers and the implementation of the Schengen area has been a major achievement in consolidating one of the essential factors of the European Union, namely the possibility of working, with equal rights, in any country of the Union. And it is especially significant in cross-border areas.

The phenomenon of cross-border workers generates specific administrative, labour and fiscal problems. Tackling them within European Law is essential. Beyond their administrative recognition, in many areas but namely in universities, the Euroregions can deal with these problems in a way that is fully in line with reality. Any teaching experience, especially at postgraduate level, is extremely positive because it serves to deepen the values and principles of the European Union.

The role of the University in the dissemination, generation and transfer of knowledge is essential for the consolidation of a European educational area. And so is inter-university cooperation in the Galicia-Northern Portugal Euroregion. The Euroregion allows the European vocation to be combined with the singularities at local level, which must be cherished.

Promoting such cooperation in the field of postgraduate Law studies, through quality Master's programmes, is part of the solid construction of a European university education area.

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# **DOCTORATE IN SOCIAL SCIENCES AND AGEING**

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**Alexandra Lopes***Director**University of Porto*

## ***“Territorial borders do not have to be borders for the production of scientific knowledge”***

Portugal and Spain are among the world’s oldest countries. By January 2022, one in five Spaniards was aged 65 or over (20.0% of the population). As of the same date, almost one in every four individuals in Portugal was of that age (23.4% of the population). With these national contexts, the Galicia-Northern Portugal Euroregion also faces a demographic scenario marked by the ageing of its population. In fact, some of the oldest municipalities in the two countries are located precisely in this region.

While it is true that the increase in average life expectancy is one of the factors that explains this ageing of the population, a fact that deserves to be celebrated, it is its combination with other demographic dynamics, namely the falling birth rate and the growing emigration, especially of young people, that presents the Euroregion with a set of challenges that should be known in depth.

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Demographic recomposition, meaning a fundamental change in the weight of the different age groups in the population, has several impacts on different social systems: on the quantity and composition of the labour force; the occupation of territories; the demand for health care; and the composition of families, to name but a few. Facing these changes head on, looking for opportunities that can translate into socio-economic development for the region, is the major challenge that motivates the creation of the Doctorate in Social Sciences and Ageing.

The Galicia-Northern Portugal Euroregion covers a territorial and social space that has elements of similarity, but also elements of specificity. Moreover, even at a more local level, it would be difficult to defend the theory that Galicia or Northern Portugal are homogeneous regions regarding their territorial organisation and social structure. Therefore, this is not a study programme that aims to develop some kind of standardised template approach. On the contrary, the programme aims to extract knowledge of the potential and obstacles inherent to the different modes of social organisation found in the territory of reference, but above all to build the argument that social phenomena can only be fully understood if approached in context.

The Doctorate students who come to us are people who are particularly motivated by the challenges of demographic ageing and are essentially looking for a space for in-depth reflection on the phenomenon. In this space, they seek contact with the cutting edge scientific literature that defines the broad field of ageing studies, but also with the most robust methodological references for research. They also seek to compare perspectives and proposals to build action plans.

Thus, at the heart of the creation of this doctorate lies the recognition that the social phenomenon of demographic ageing is complex and

multidimensional. Despite this, we can state that some theoretical frameworks will be more striking in how the programme is structured and how the approach to the challenges and opportunities of demographic ageing will be promoted. On the one hand, we have the Sociology of Ageing. On the other, and with a contribution just as important, the Economics of Ageing. In addition to these, there are the basic contributions of Social Psychology and Social Politics.

In fact, if we wish to understand the complex social phenomenon that is demographic ageing in all its determinants and consequences, we must convene a multidisciplinary framework, but also a broad alliance that welcomes and involves a broad range of stakeholders at the same table. The magnitude of the changes required in the different social subsystems (health, education, social welfare, housing, transport, among many others) is not compatible with mono-focused readings and fragmented interventions. The great social issue of demographic ageing, especially if we as a society want to reap the possible dividends of longevity, will require holistic and integrative approaches, based on broad-based partnerships between academia and the various social, public and private players who are the drivers of social change itself.

Finally, there is a broad consensus in the scientific community on the added value of working in extended teams and of exchanging disciplinary experiences and proposals. The political borders that mark territories do not have to be borders for the production of scientific knowledge, especially when the objects of study are themselves shared. To a large extent, UNISF embodies just that: the recognition that borders in knowledge production need not be sharp.

The Doctorate in Social Sciences and Ageing comes at a particularly happy moment for the partner institutions as it allows them all, without

exception, to take the next step in consolidating the expertise they have been accumulating. On the other hand, and given the intrinsic connection of the UNISF project to the social and business structure of the Euroregion, it offers a unique opportunity to transfer and share knowledge with the community. At the start of this project, we remain extremely optimistic and believe that the disruption inherent to the UNISF project and its study cycles will result in dividends with high relevance for the region and its communities.



**José Maria Faílde Garrido**

*Assistant Director of  
University of Vigo*

## ***“Universities have a great responsibility towards society”***

Although there have been older people in all time periods, the percentage of people over 65 years of age has increased significantly in recent decades. This is unprecedented in human history. By 2050, 21% of the world’s population will be over 60 years old. The justification for carrying out this programme between universities in Northern Portugal and the University System of Galicia (SUG) lies in the existence of a shared reality between Portugal and Spain. In fact, Portugal and Spain are among the group of countries with a highly ageing population, in a dynamic that has increased in recent years.

Immersed in a process of demographic transition, Galicia shares a similar demographic reality to that of the northern regions of Portugal. Galicia is one of the three most ageing autonomous communities in Spain. The percentage of people over 65 years of age in Spain will be 20.1% in 2022, with an ageing

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rate of 133.48%. In the case of Galicia, this percentage rises to 26.1% and the ageing rate is 213.5%. Furthermore, Galicia is home to two of the three most aged provinces in Spain, with an average age of over 50 years, Orense and Lugo, with 50.97 and 50.14 years respectively. Thus, the current demographic reality of the Galician community and the northern region of Portugal is very similar to what is expected for the European Union as a whole by 2050.

The high levels of life expectancy in Galicia and the northern regions of Portugal, with an increasing number of long-lived and centenarian people, are undoubtedly a great health achievement and a benefit for society as a whole. This is also an opportunity to act proactively and to test bold policies that contribute to improving the health and quality of life of older people. However, addressing the challenges posed by ageing requires greater political commitment, which must be coupled with increased resources to enable active and healthy ageing. In summary, and in line with the United Nations' proposal, The Decade of Healthy Ageing (2021-2030), this takes the form of four actions – Action 1: Changing how we think, feel and act in the face of ageing; Action 2: Creating environments and communities that enhance the capabilities of older people; Action 3: People-centred care services, with health and social integration, strengthening primary care; and Action 4: Providing long-term care (LTC) to older people when they need it. 4: Offer

Research on ageing currently accounts for 2.4% of all scientific publications worldwide. In the case of Spain, it is slightly higher, at 2.7% of its total scientific output. In the last decade, there has been an exponential growth in the number of scientific publications, which is also the case in Portugal.

With this doctoral programme we aim to bring students closer to scientific knowledge and guide them so that, through their research (doctoral

theses), they can contribute to increasing this knowledge and transfer it to social and health policy planners, geriatrics and gerontology professionals and the whole of civil society, with the clear aim of improving the quality of life and health of the elderly.

The social sciences are fundamental to the approach and study of ageing and their contribution is decisive in central issues such as, to name but a few: the promotion of health and active ageing, the fight against social isolation and unwanted loneliness, and the eradication of stereotypes, prejudices and ageist discrimination. At the same time, they also provide solutions to important issues such as the sustainability of the welfare state, retirement benefits, demographic ageing, social participation of the elderly, etc.

The Doctoral Programme in Social Sciences and Ageing has a multidisciplinary approach and is structured around five main lines of research: i) Population ageing: demographic aspects; ii) Quality of Life and Active Ageing; iii) Functional diversity in ageing, social and technological innovation; iv) Gender, social inequalities and ageing; and v) Socio-economic impact of ageing, social organisation of care and public policies. These address central topics in the study of ageing.

Universities play a fundamental role in teaching, research, and cultural dissemination. In this sense, the development of professional competences is a fundamental axis in university education and teaching.

Universities also have a great responsibility towards society, getting involved in challenges aimed at meeting the needs, urgencies, and environmental problems related to the ageing of the population. In order to achieve their aims, they must establish links of understanding with leaders, with the social and business sectors, and seek solutions

to the specific problems posed by ageing. Thus, university institutions are an essential element for dynamising and guaranteeing the scientific and technological development of a country, since they are the main generators of knowledge in this field.

The University Without Borders project, and specifically the Doctoral Programme in Social Sciences and Ageing, is an opportunity to join forces and establish synergies between universities in Northern Portugal and the Galician University System (SUG) to address the challenges arising from the ageing of the population. This is a subject that requires complementary solutions with a multidisciplinary approach from geriatrics and gerontology, in order to raise awareness of issues such as: prolonging life and its value; achieving inclusive, integrating and fairer societies; raising awareness and eradicating stereotypes, prejudices and ageist discrimination; and developing policies aimed at improving the quality of life of older people.

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# **DOCTORATE IN MATHEMATICS AND APPLICATIONS**

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**Manuel Ladra**

*Director*

*University of Santiago de Compostela*



**Alberto Pinto**

*Assistant Director of the University of Porto*



**Ramón González**

*Ramón González Full Professor at the University of Vigo*

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## ***“Developing strong and durable scientific collaborations”***

In addition to the specific competences of each field of mathematics, this programme provides competences that go beyond the exclusively mathematical field and have to do with developing the capacity for abstraction, synthesis and analysis. Therefore, it means training to face complex problems in the field.

We also have a strong component in Applications of Mathematics to Physics, Economics, Biology and Sociology, Statistics, Artificial Intelligence, Optimisation and Game Theory.

In this first year of the Doctoral Programme in Mathematics and Applications at University Without Borders, we have received a considerable number of applications for participation, both from students more interested in an academic life and from students more interested in a business life.

The establishment of new cross-border relations and the provision of the existing ones imply the expansion of the capacities that the two regions have separately. In a context where the problems being tackled increasingly require interdisciplinary teams, having a collaboration framework between the two reactions increases the chances of success in the face of new challenges.

The doctoral programme in which each student has a supervisor in Portugal and another in Spain will boost scientific collaboration between these two regions.

To bring the academic and business worlds closer together requires an effort on the part of Universities to be aware of the new social and technological changes that are being demanded in order to contribute to the development of applied technology and scientific progress oriented towards the challenges that are required. Furthermore, the business world should recognise the work done by the Universities and, in particular, the costly training of the staff that achieves high-level qualifications through hard work.

In particular, students with a more entrepreneurial profile, by developing their thesis with their supervisors, will potentialise the approach between the academic and the business world.

Through the Doctorate in Mathematics and Applications, a network of cross-border relations is being created that provides existing capacities and favours the exchange of information, experiences, training and knowledge among a large group of professionals in the field of Mathematics.

Mathematics has always been the core and foundation of scientific and technological development. This is why we can consider it as a science whose influence covers all the great challenges of modern society.

In today's world it is very clear that mathematical theories provide practical applications, thanks to which the most relevant scientific and technological advances are achieved. Taking this into account, the Doctorate in Mathematics and Applications, in addition to promoting the development of advanced mathematical theory, will focus much of its efforts on taking advantage of these new knowledge to increase the technical expertise of the Portuguese-Galician community, its economy and its social advancement.

The UNISF project has created the opportunity to bring together a large and highly qualified faculty with extensive research experience in a broad spectrum of specialties of mathematics and its applications. The cross-border co-supervisions that take place in the framework of the Doctorate in Mathematics and Applications will contribute to the strengthening and development of solid and lasting scientific collaborations between the participating universities. They will also give rise, in addition to the doctorates themselves, to new joint research projects between researchers and doctorate students from these universities.

