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*Bridging Countries: the
Academic and Cultural
Importance of Engaging with the
Western Balkans*





Overview of regional educational and research collaboration goals.

Why Foster Research and Education?

- Strengthening innovation ecosystems
- Promoting peace, stability, and democratic values
- Enhancing youth employment and mobility
- Bridging the research gap between EU and non-EU countries

Venice and the Western Balkans

The relationship between Venice and the Western Balkans is multifaceted, rooted in a rich historical context and increasingly shaped by contemporary political and academic collaborations. This connection is not only based on proximity across the Adriatic Sea but also on shared interests in European integration, cultural diplomacy, and transnational research and education.



Historical Foundations of the Venetian–Balkan Relationship

The **Republic of Venice** (697–1797) exerted significant influence across the Balkan region:

- The Dalmatian Coast (present-day Croatia and Montenegro) was part of the Venetian maritime empire.
- Venetian Albania (including cities like Shkodër and Durrës) reflects long-standing historical and architectural ties.
- Venetian archives contain vast diplomatic and commercial documentation related to the Balkans, offering valuable research materials.

Venice as a Geopolitical and Academic Bridge

Venice's strategic location at the northern end of the Adriatic makes it a natural point of entry for engagement with the Western Balkans. In recent decades, this role has been enhanced through academic diplomacy.



Ca' Foscari University of Venice and the Western Balkans

- Active partnerships with Universities in Albania, Serbia, North Macedonia, Bosnia-Herzegovina, and Kosovo.
- Programs in Slavic and Balkan Studies, including language training and area research.



Ca' Foscari University of Venice and the Western Balkans

- Participation in Erasmus+, Horizon Europe, and Interreg IPA programs with Balkan institutions.
- The university's Center for Eastern and Balkan Studies and joint master's programs contribute to regional development and integration.

Trade and Maritime Infrastructure

- Venice maintains strong port connections with the Western Balkans:
- The Port of Venice serves as a logistical node for trade with Croatia, Albania, and Montenegro.
- Adriatic-Ionian transport corridors link the Italian northeast with inland Balkan regions.

Tourism and Cultural Industries

- Venetian tourism operators increasingly collaborate with partners in the Western Balkans to promote cultural itineraries, sustainable travel, and shared heritage tourism, including projects on UNESCO sites and Adriatic coastal cities.

Cultural Cooperation

- Programs such as EU4Culture, Interreg Italy–Albania–Montenegro, and Creative Europe support:
- Artist residencies
- Museum partnerships
- Restoration of shared heritage (e.g., Venetian fortifications in Kotor, Albania, and Dalmatia)

Mobility and Talent Development

- Erasmus+ and joint degrees (EUTOPIA)
- Student and staff mobility (EUTOPIA)
- Curriculum internationalization (EUTOPIA)
- Talent retention in the Balkans and in Italy, especially in economic, digital, environmental, and cultural sectors. (EUTOPIA)
- Capacity building for public administration

conclusions

The relationship between Italy and the Western Balkans is an evolving partnership grounded in a shared past and oriented towards a common European future. By combining historical ties with strategic engagement in research, education, culture and trade, we act as a gateway for integration, innovation, and mutual growth.