

UNISUSTAINATHON: SUSTAINABILITY AS AN OPPORTUNITY.

UNIVERSITIES FOR EXPO 2020 DUBAI

English translation of the speech of Gaetano Manfredi, Minister of University and Research

It is very important that the fourth edition of Italian Sustainable Development Festival organized by ASviS include the **Unisustainathon event**, *Sustainability as an opportunity. Universities for Expo 2020 Dubai* - the very first international and digital hackathon on sustainability and the role of Universities. This special educational initiative marks the special joint effort of the University Network for Sustainable Development (RUS) and the Italian Commissioner's Office for Expo 2020. My thanks to these actors who have made this possible.

The Italian participation at Expo 2020 Dubai is committed to empowering young women and men and helping them work together to drive social innovation and change, participate fully in the development of their universities, and foster a culture of innovation. More than 400 students from 41 Italian universities and 18 international universities will be involved in the **Unisustainathon event** and they will compete in heterogeneous teams during a 3 day-long virtual marathon. Their aim is that of looking for and designing new solutions, models, processes, or innovative services related to 4 thematic areas of great importance for Higher Education.

Awareness, Spaces, Inclusion and Community represent the milestones on which I intend to focus the priorities of the Italian Ministry of University and Research regarding the future of the higher education:

- **Awareness:** there is a need for new skills (digital and technological first and foremost). Education is a process of human growth above all and then didactic and

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professional one. Knowledge is one and circular and, to find solutions to the complex challenges we face today, interconnected knowledge is fundamental. Only then will it be possible to be truly aware of what it means to live in a global world.

- **Spaces** makes me think of our universities, our classrooms, the sites of culture on our campuses. To experience them means to actively live culture, to educate towards knowledge.

Being present in a physical space together allows the strengthening of relations between students. This makes a big difference in their formation course and that is why, for the past 3 months, we have been making efforts to give students the possibility to get back to their university lives while guaranteeing safety and respected anti-covid health measures.

- **Inclusion:** no one should be left behind. Unite different experiences, like in the case of this virtual marathon involving 400 students that will challenge each other through their projects, you will be able to enrich your cultural baggage and life experience.
- **Community:** I have always thought of university as a community before than anything else. Teachers, technical-administrative staff, and students are not separate units, each of their own, rather, together they represent a system that must be interconnected to be virtuous. To be defined so, it must be interconnected both internally and with the outside world. To be a community means to know how to seize external inputs and provide expertise to the professional world, to make clear the importance and the social impact universities and research can have.

Italy's participation in Expo 2020 Dubai will be based on the valorization and promotion of Higher Education, of research, sustainability, and innovation.

We have the opportunity to place distinctive traits of our excellence in the field of research such as creativity and multidisciplinary skills on a level of international importance. Italy must have a leading cultural, scientific, and economic role in the Mediterranean area and in the so-called enlarged Mediterranean.

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Through a collaboration with the MIUR we are presenting scientifically and culturally high-valued projects that can be the drive to the internationalization of the Italian research system and can also attract students from abroad.

One of the top projects, created in collaboration with CIMEA (Information Centre on Academic Mobility and Equivalence), has the objective of bringing blockchain technology to Dubai and making it available to the visitors of the pavilion through the opening of a free Wallet, which is a pocketbook of all academic qualifications. Here, for free, visitors will be able to upload a “*Certificate of Higher Education Recognition*”, a digital attestation that will instantly be produced and that will certify the officiality of the university institution attended by the user through blockchain technology. This will facilitate students that want to access the Italian university system and furthermore the European system.

Technology, innovation, but also made in Italy, agri-food and textile are the sectors on which we want to leverage for relaunching research in Italy, also within the National Research Program 2021-2027.

And what a better occasion than Expo 2020 Dubai to show Italian excellence on the international level. The plan will focus in an innovative way on the thematic areas of: HEALTH, more important than ever in this era marked by the post-Covid-19 pandemic; HUMANISTIC CULTURE, CREATIVITY, SOCIAL TRANSFORMATIONS, SOCIETY OF INCLUSION, to enhance our immense cultural heritage and Made in Italy; SECURITY FOR SOCIAL SYSTEMS (Security of structures, infrastructures and networks; Natural systems security; Cybersecurity); COMPUTER SCIENCE, INDUSTRY, AEROSPACE (Digital Transition - 4.0; Big Data; Artificial Intelligence; Robotics; Quantum Technologies; Innovation for the manufacturing industry; Aerospace); CLIMATE, ENERGY, SUSTAINABLE MOBILITY (Sustainable mobility; Climate change and adaptation; Industrial energy; Environmental energy);

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(Green Technologies; Food technologies; Bioeconomy; Agricultural resources management;
Marine resources management).

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