

Collaboration Guide



UNTRACEABLE UNIVERSITY

In 2029 the Untraceable University plans to start building a campus at a heavily degraded site. Our goal: to experiment with radical, large-scale ecological and social restoration.

Join one of the most ambitious yet grounded research and education projects. Our project is co-designed by its network of collaborators. We invite you to join our movement.



The Untraceable University

Project overview

In 2029 the Untraceable University plans to start building a campus at a heavily degraded site (such as an abandoned mining site). The mission of the campus is to restore the ecosystem at this site, while also building the physical infrastructure to house students and other residents in this campus-city. Both the restoration efforts and the lifestyle are part of a large-scale experiment into building socially and ecologically restorative systems. We invite people to question the structures and practices that we currently take for granted, and to collaboratively design a radically different place of learning and living.



From the start, the goal of the campus-city will be to reach 100,000 inhabitants within 15 years. Such a large settlement will have similar dynamics to a small city, and we specifically aim to inspire and impact urban design elsewhere. By establishing this project as a university campus, we can plan, experiment and grow in a more controlled manner, ensuring that the practices and approaches are only scaled after they have been tried and tested in practice.

Before actually building this alternative place of learning, we are embarking on a journey of research, planning, and co-design, with a group of collaborators.



This project draws from the idea that many great alternative social practices, lifestyles, technologies and cultures already exist, but their uptake is confined to isolated communities or niche audiences. We want to try applying those overlooked and undervalued indigenous, traditional, and modern practices at an urban scale, in a way that can be replicated in other places, and we want to ensure that knowledge gained from this experiment reaches elsewhere.

Locations currently under consideration

Project sites



01

Antioquia Colombia

With our Colombian partners, we are exploring **heavily degraded agricultural landscapes** in the department of Antioquia as a potential site.

02

Mpumalanga South Africa

With our South African partners, we are exploring the **abandoned coal mines** in the province of Mpumalanga as a potential site.

The sites

This project is an international collaboration, looking at sites in different locations. Analysing the suitability of these sites is part of our interdisciplinary research and preparation work. By investigating at least two and possibly more locations, we ensure that the resulting methodology can also be replicated elsewhere, instead of only being suitable for a single location.

Obtaining local community support is fundamental, and this project will actively seek community involvement and support before shortlisting specific sites.

Collaboration options

Ways for researchers, activists, students and lecturers to engage with us

We use an interdisciplinary approach built around the concept of pluriversality: embracing a participatory, collaborative, and situated method. For us, this means inviting a diverse network of collaborators and allowing everyone to tackle these questions from their own perspective, acknowledging that there is not a single "best" route.

Permaculture

Traditional Knowledge Systems

Regenerative Architecture

Ecological Restoration

Critical Ecology

Political Ecology

Regenerative Agriculture

Low-carbon Transit

Degrowth

Industrial Ecology

Conscious Food Systems

Decolonialism

Environmental Health

Water-sensitive Design

Well-being Economy

African Feminism

Thematic Action Committees

We invite people from any discipline and background to form a Thematic Action Committee. This network of committees form the core of our collaborations.

- Each committee should have a clear theme (such as Permaculture or African Eco-Feminism).
- Committees are tasked with organising activities and materials that position their theme within the context of the Untraceable University.
- We provide a framework and logistical support to the committees.

These are examples of themes we are interested in. We invite groups to suggest other themes.



Thematic Action Committees (TAC) Overview

Group composition

TACs should consist of people with a strong link to the topic at hand – be it from an academic or professional viewpoint. Members could all be part of a single university, or be based at different institutions, countries, or continents. Group compositions might change over time.

- Minimum 3 members to get started; maximum 5 members.
- At least 2 academics.
- Maximum 3 students (Masters or PhD level).
- At least 1 practitioner recommended.

What are your responsibilities?

TACs contribute to the Untraceable University by helping to roll out different education, outreach, and research activities. The TACs go at their own pace, and are expected to collaborate with peers, students, and other volunteers in their field to run these activities – they are not expected to do all this on their own. Cross-collaborations with other TACs is highly encouraged. The **Activity Framework** on the next page provides an overview of the types of activities that TACs are expected to help coordinate.


Duration

We are looking for long-term collaborators that are committed to the goals of this project. However, in order for all involved to evaluate if this collaboration is a good fit, we ask each TAC to work on the first three activities (inaugural workshop, recording of interviews, definition of research questions) over 6 months, followed by a mutual evaluation.

Funding and support

The Untraceable University Research Institute is a small non-profit at the centre of this project, providing logistical support to help TACs roll out their activities. We link different TACs and provide a central collation point for knowledge created during this exercise.

Our goal is for each TAC member to receive sufficient external funding in order to be able to spend approximately 1 day per week on this project. This funding is normally sought from relevant grants and funders, and we can help connect multiple TACs to seek interdisciplinary funding. Fundraising will take some time but we aim to start small and gradual with initial activities, which can be done alongside existing work.



Thematic Action Committees (TAC)

Activity Framework

The overview below provides the basic framework of the expected activities to be rolled out by the TACs over the course of a multi-year collaboration. This serves as a general guide.

Inaugural Workshop

An initial workshop with 3–5 experienced academics and practitioners, during which key people, organisations, projects, and questions are identified. This workshop kickstarts the other activities in both work streams: Education & Outreach, and Research.

Education & Outreach



Interviews

Written, audio, or video recordings of interviews with innovative thinkers in your field.



Blog Posts

Written opinion pieces by committee members or invited authors in which opportunities and challenges are framed.



Podcast episodes

Co-production of documentary-style podcast episodes with a clear narrative arc, produced together with our podcast team.



Lectures and webinars

Guest lectures and online webinar discussions for students, researchers and the general public.



Course Modules

Development of course modules that teach the theory, method, and vision for your subject in the context of the Untraceable University.

Research



Research questions

Write-up of the key research questions for your TAC.



Primer

Development of a background document that introduces your field to non-experts, and that frames the importance of the research question for the Untraceable University project.



Conversation articles

Write-up of existing academic insights and findings through an Untraceable University lens for publication on The Conversation.



Research projects

Development of new research projects, together with other partners and disciplines.



Academic papers

Publication of results in academic papers in relevant journals, with a synthesis of the results written up in a unified format that feeds into the Untraceable University library.



Keen to join?

Sign up now!

If you are interested in starting a TAC,
please schedule an initial discussion
with our team. E-mail us at:
info@untraceable-university.org

More information at:
www.untraceable-university.org/tac

