

European University for Smart Urban Coastal Sustainability EU-CONEXUS

Geography – Ecosystem – Specialisation

A : JOINT VISION AND MISSION

EU-CONEXUS promotes common European values and a strengthened European identity by bringing together a new generation of Europeans, who can cooperate and work within different European cultures, in different languages and across borders, sectors and academic disciplines. EU-CONEXUS is committed to creating a new institutional framework for higher education in Europe that allows for a truly European way of studying and carrying out research through institutional alignment and seamless mobility for all.

I. An integrated transnational higher education and research institution

The European University for Smart Urban Coastal Sustainability is an integrated transnational higher education and research institution.

The EU-CONEXUS inter-university campus is located in nine European countries:

EU-CONEXUS LRUUniv-La Rochelle
EU-CONEXUS AUA-Athens
EU-CONEXUS UTCB-Bucharest
EU-CONEXUS KU-Klaipeda
EU-CONEXUS UCV-Valencia
EU-CONEXUS UNIZD-Zadar
EU-CONEXUS SETU-Waterford
EU-CONEXUS UROS-Rostock
EU-CONEXUS FredU-Nikosia/Limassol

As an inclusive and comprehensive university model covering all university missions EU-CONEXUS aspires to create a comprehensive legal framework for a structured long-term partnership based on integrated strategic and operational institutional structures.

Perfectly distributed across Europe, the campus covers all European coasts. Students, teachers, researchers, and staff are studying, teaching, conducting their research activities, innovating and working on a European scale.

The partners of the Alliance have a similar institutional identity, especially due to their history and socio-economic environment. On the basis of these complementary partner profiles, the Alliance is exceptionally well positioned to create a thematically specialized

European university with distributed excellence in education and research on Smart Urban Coastal Sustainability (SmUCS).

II. A unique thematic focus on a global societal challenge: Smart Urban Coastal Sustainability

SmUCS is a unique thematic focus that concentrates all university missions on finding solutions to global societal challenges faced by urbanised and semi-urbanised coastal areas. This societal challenge is global in scope, since 60% of the global population lives within 100km of the coast, and the "land-sea" interface is the first area threatened by the climate transition and the rise of the oceans. The thematic focus creates a unique competitive advantage for EU-CONEXUS which is well positioned to assemble and build on thematic expertise from all its partners and regional ecosystems, through inter- and transdisciplinary based approaches. With this focused expertise EU-CONEXUS contributes to the achievement of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (UN SDGs), and to integrated holistic coastal zone management.

III. An internationally renowned quality of education

EU-CONEXUS provides inter-, trans- and cross-disciplinary research-informed and problem-based education on SmUCS themes. High quality education relies on innovative pedagogies, student-centred and flexible learning pathways with simplified access for a diverse learner community, industry informed and open course programmes, multilingual and multicultural learning and the use of innovative technologies. Transdisciplinary training programmes enables intellectual plasticity of students and prepares them to solve societal challenges in an open-minded way. A recognition of the critical significance of Green and Digital skills is reflected in the integration of these domains across the complete study cycle within the university.

IV. Challenge-driven excellent research on SmUCS themes

On the basis of its shared research infrastructures EU-CONEXUS provides complementary high-quality research and expertise on SmUCS across Europe. By leveraging the expertise of its 6800 staff and on its specialization on SmUCS on a global scale following holistic and interdisciplinary approaches, EU-CONEXUS creates a concentrated scientific potential on SmUCS which is unprecedented at the international level and allows the Alliance to become a world-class player.

V. An innovation-led service to society

EU-CONEXUS develops its research and education in close connection with local and regional ecosystems, informs public policies and contributes to regional socio-economic development. The socio-economic similarities (port economy, tourism, aquaculture, naval and maritime industry, etc.) of the territories where EU-CONEXUS partners are located creates favourable conditions for concentrated innovation, with a European scope, for the sustainable economic development of coastal territories. It provides innovative services and

solutions to public and private actors in the field of SmUCS through professionalising training, education and research.

EU-CONEXUS makes society at large better aware of SmUCS related societal challenges. More particularly, EU-CONEXUS has a clear ambition to act as role-model and contribute to the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (UN SDGs) and the green transition. By developing a “Green Campus” Action Plan and committing to implement its recommendations, the Alliance aims to become an exemplar in reducing the carbon footprint of all the alliances activities.

B : JOINT VALUES

EU-CONEXUS partners commit to a **common set of values and ethical principles** that are guiding their missions.

1. As a European higher education and research institution **ACADEMIC FREEDOM** is a principle value to be upheld throughout all our activities.
2. **RESPONSIVENESS** (having impact) to societal challenges is the starting point for the design of all university missions.
3. The promotion of **DIVERSITY, INCLUSIVENESS, GENDER EQUALITY** and **NON-DISCRIMINATION** of any kind is a basic principle of our organizational behaviour.
4. We adhere totally to the principle of **SUSTAINABILITY** in all its aspects, as it is expressed globally in the United Nations **SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS** and as it particular defines our interaction with the natural environment.
5. The principal values guiding our partnership relations are **COOPERATION, COMPLEMENTARITY** and **SUBSIDIARITY**.
6. We adhere to a concept and quality of education which has the objective to create **RESPONSIBLE CITIZENS** in professional and individual terms.
7. **TRANSPARENCY** of decision-making and openness for assessment and **EVALUATION** are the main principles of governance and management.
8. **MULTICULTURALISM** and respect of differences are characteristic values of our geographically distributed cooperation. In this context we see science and education as essential tools to fight against prejudices and ignorance.

C : JOINT LONG-TERM STRATEGY

1. FOR GOVERNANCE AND MANAGEMENT:

In line with our joint vision and mission an ever-more integrated governance of the transnational higher education and research institution will be achieved by the following steps:

1.1 Institutional commitment

- 1.1.1 A non-profit association is established by all partners that will centralise operational procedures for joint activities.
- 1.1.2 All partners institutions include EU-CONEXUS in their strategic development documents (statutes, ...) and thereby create a formal institutionalized commitment that is not limited to a cooperation in a funded project and not limited to a certain funding period. Strategic decisions of the Alliance are validated by partner's institutional decision-making bodies.
- 1.1.3 The legal framework for European Universities which is under discussion by the European Union and should provide for an adapted legal status for a transnational university system will be examined for implementation.

1.2 Alliance presidency

- 1.2.1 The coordinators' rector keeps the Alliance presidency of the Governing Board for the 2 years of the pilot phase (2022-2024). After that a rotation sequence will be established by the Governing Board creating 2-year mandates for the presidency of the Alliance.
- 1.2.2 A vice-president of the Governing Board will be nominated in correspondence with the sequence of the rotation to prepare the follow-up presidency.
- 1.2.3 The leaving president continues to participate in Executive Board meetings as internal advisor.

1.3 Alliance Boards

- 1.3.1 The Alliance maintains a Strategic Council structure: Student, Academic and Research Council. The Council chairs will be elected and nominated by their peers every two years (aligned to the presidency mandate) and the nomination will be confirmed by the Governing Board.
- 1.3.2 In the longer term and in line with the development of integrated activities and joint staff, the creation of additional Councils may be foreseen (e.g. international relations, innovation, etc.)

1.4 External strategic guidance

- 1.4.1 The External Advisory Board continues to support strategic orientation. The Chair of the External Advisory Board will continue for at least two years, as will the composition of the Board.
- 1.4.2 In the medium-term, the establishment of a Stakeholder Board will be part of the conceptualization of a knowledge and innovation eco-system.

2. FOR STAFF AND STUDENTS

In line with the joint vision and mission an ever-more integrated staff and student community will be achieved by the following steps:

2.1 Coordination Staff

- 2.1.1 Coordination staff (Coordination Committee) is currently recruited at the Erasmus+ project coordinators level or delegated to a partner for other projects. For ensuring sustainability, transversality and stability of the Alliance, the Governing Board will discuss models of joint recruitment of coordination staff in the longer term. These models will be developed up to 2026 and tested from that date.
- 2.1.2 Institutional managers are recruited at the partner institutions.

2.2 Academic Staff

- 2.2.1 Teachers and Researchers are currently engaged into Alliance activities in the framework of joint activities (educational programmes), joint training and through the exchange of best practices through job shadowing mobilities or visiting teaching stays. These exchanges and mobilities will be further intensified to facilitate the steady growth and widening of joint educational and research activities.
- 2.2.2 In the medium-term teacher training will be intensified in particular with the aim of raising awareness of the thematic framework of the Alliance and enhancing the quality of educational offers.
- 2.2.3 In the longer term, joint PhD programmes and joint post-doc programmes will further strengthen the commitment of academic staff to the Alliance.
- 2.2.4 Up to 2026 it is foreseen that models of joint or shared recruitment of academic staff (e.g. joint chairs) will be explored.

2.3 Professional support staff

- 2.3.1 Currently professional and support staff are participating in job shadowing programmes for establishing personal contacts and exchanging institutional best practices in relevant fields. This activity will be maintained and strategically guided in order to promote institutional alignment in major areas affecting joint activities, such as administration

of student registration, mobility, financial procedures, quality assurance, etc.

- 2.3.2 Centralized services will also support distributed support staff in particular in IT, mobility, quality assurance, finances, project development, study programme development, and pedagogical methodologies, by providing targeted training.

2.4 Students

- 2.4.1 Students are currently most directly confronted with the Alliance when following joint study programmes, participating in joint cultural and sport activities or being members of the Student Board.
- 2.4.2 Study programmes with built-in mobilities within the Alliances will continue to make the inter-university campus life a reality for students.
- 2.4.3 In a next step the mainstreaming of study offers at the Bachelor level will reach out to a wider student community and intensify the identity of the student community as being part of a transnational European University. This will be achieved by opening up study programmes at the institutional level at partner universities, strengthening complementarities of study offers, creating short courses (microcredentials) and open courses and thereby students will have a multitude of opportunities to include courses from Alliance partners in their curricula.
- 2.4.4 At the Master level, a first cohort of students will be “joint students” of the Master programme in Marine Biotechnology from September 2022. The development of more joint Master programmes will further enhance this Master student community in the medium- to long-term. Additionally, the opening up of Master programmes at partner universities by providing opportunities to integrate short courses or modules from partners will enhance further complementarities at Master level.
- 2.4.5 Bilateral or multilateral PhD theses will be promoted and will create opportunities for doctoral candidates to get the best supervision for their doctoral studies building on the distributed excellence available within the Alliance and at the same time enhance the coherence and complementarity of the thematic framework of the Alliance.
- 2.4.6 A stepwise introduction of an “eu-conexus.eu” email address and of a trans-institutional student card will make the European University student identity visible and will have practical value for all students.
- 2.4.7 In the long-term, building on these structures, each student will realise that he or she is studying at a European University and not at a partner university only.

3. FOR UNIVERSITY MISSIONS

In line with the joint vision and mission, enhanced integration of activities across all university communities will be achieved by the following steps:

3.1 Education

- 3.1.1 The development of joint study programmes will continue at all levels. The Alliance is committed to engage in the development of a European Degree and jointly delivered degrees at all levels (BSc, MSc, PhD) based on the accreditation of joint programmes following the European approach.
- 3.1.2 In the long term and following suggestions of the External Advisory Board, EU-CONEXUS will construct a set of global and complementary study programmes, aligned with market needs and in response to the evolution of society in coastal areas.
- 3.1.3 More emphasis will be laid on the exploitation of complementarities of study offers at all levels.
- 3.1.4 Centralised services will promote the quality assurance of educational offers and services.
- 3.1.5 Teacher exchange and job shadowing will improve complementarities and promote the application of best practices in teaching and learning.
- 3.1.6 In the long-term teacher exchange programmes and shared or joint recruitment will provide for a shared pool of expertise and talent for all partners.

3.2 Research

- 3.2.1 The Joint Research Area will develop around societal challenges included into the thematic framework of the Alliance. In the long term, a global scientific policy will be defined for the whole EU-CONEXUS ecosystem, in order to boost the visibility of the research area.
- 3.2.2 Collaboration, network and team-building will be supported by research mobility funds and joint scientific conferences.
- 3.2.3 Joint research projects will be supported by project development funds and seed-funding for small projects.
- 3.2.4 Joint Research Institutes will promote networking of EU-CONEXUS researchers and submission of joint research projects to calls of funding programmes, such as Horizon Europe.

- 3.2.5 Joint PhD programmes/thesis, summer schools, conferences and courses will strengthen community building and provide more focus for research initiatives on the thematic framework.
- 3.2.6 In the long term, EU-CONEXUS members will investigate the opportunity to increase their international visibility through a common publication policy.
- 3.2.7 The opening of access to research infrastructures and the alignment of investment strategies with regard to research infrastructure is foreseen in the longer term.
- 3.2.8 In the longer term the application of joint recruitment models for researchers will further strengthen the Joint Research Area.

3.3 Innovation

- 3.3.1 A stakeholder community is set up around cities and ports where Alliance partners are located.
- 3.3.2 Associated partnerships (primarily coming from identified main stakeholder communities) will be strengthened by attaching roles (Stakeholder Board) to and providing specific offers to associated partners (Stakeholder Academy, PhD thesis projects, mentorships, educational programme design, seed-funding for small-scale innovation projects).
- 3.3.3 The promotion of entrepreneurship skills will be a focus in training programmes at all levels and for all staff categories.
- 3.3.4 A transnational knowledge and innovation eco-system will develop continuous interaction between regions and cities for innovation and economic and social development guided by sustainability concerns.

3.4 Service to Society

- 3.4.1 The visibility of the Alliance in its local, regional, national and international context will continue to grow with the organization of annual cultural festivals for local communities, national and international events and the engagement in policy development at all levels supported by the transnational knowledge and innovation network.
- 3.4.2 Specific attention is laid on establishing enduring contacts with schools for raising awareness of the thematic focus and attracting future students to higher education and research in general and in particular for Alliance study programmes.
- 3.4.3 The thematic focus of the Alliance is set out to benefit specifically the local communities in coastal areas, but solutions found in the transnational

ecosystem for education, research and innovation will be transferable internationally in similar contexts.

3.4.4 The international outreach of Alliance activities will in turn benefit the local socio-economic environment.

3.4.5 Participation and interaction with society is supported by the promotion of open science and participatory science projects.

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