EU CONEXUS
European University for Smart Urban Coastal Sustainability

Co-funded by the European Union

Ref. Ares(2023)7961863 - 22/11/2023

Call for Innovation Contest "contest of ideas"

D13

T11.2 - Organisation of the annual innovation contests

Final version, WP11 - Transfer of Knowledge and Technologies

Delivery date : 6th of October 2023

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Dissemination level: public

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Executive summary/abstract:

Bringing people together, creating innovative ideas and finding solutions for challenges in the field of Smart Urban Costal Sustainability – the Innovation Contest “contest for ideas” aims for unlocking the entrepreneurial mindset. With the Call for the Innovation Contest, Master and PhD students and researchers are encouraged to apply and present their innovative ideas to a high-profile jury. There is a two-phase application process and during those two application deadline, the participants have the possibility to take part in workshops to improve their project idea and to gain more experience in the process of eventually founding a start-up or business. After the 2nd application deadline of handing in the final project proposal, the participants take part in the final pitch event, which is held online. The jury evaluates the project proposals and the pitches and awards the winners in both categories with prize money.

Besides fostering an entrepreneurial mindset, the Innovation Contest wants to inspire students and researcher to create innovative ideas beyond borders, get together in multinational teams and tackle the challenges of the regions of the Alliance.

Beginning of Call

Description: Call for the Innovation Contest “contest of ideas”

Let’s be inspired – your innovative ideas conquer the world of the EU-CONEXUS Alliance. If you have an idea in mind that might result in a start-up or founding a business, why not pitching it on the “big screen”?

You are looking for support and workshops that help you to develop your idea and you could imagine to take your idea beyond borders, we are here for you!

Take the chance and take the floor! Present your idea at the Innovation Contest in front of a high-profile jury. You can not only gain helpful insights and experience to start a business but you also have the chance to win prize money to push your idea forward.

Who can participate?

There will be two categories of participants.

1. Category: Students

Eligible in this category are Master and PhD students enrolled at one of the partner universities.

If there is a team, at least one member has to be a Master or PhD student enrolled at one of the partner universities. Additional team members / advisors can be university staff and professors.

2. Category: Researchers

Scientific and research assistants and professors who are employed at one of the partner universities. Additionally, research assistants of related research institution to one of the partner universities are also eligible in this category.

Post-docs and alums of one of the partner universities whose graduation does not exceed 5 years.

Requirements and conditions of participation

- The formal founding of a start-up or a business based on the handed in project idea for the innovation contest “contest of ideas” is not allowed.
- The idea has to be created and developed by the participants and shall not violate rights of any third person.
- Participants can take part as teams. Ideas can be created and developed in interdisciplinary/transdisciplinary teams.
- Teams can consist of members from different (partner) universities.
- The participation is confidential. The members of the jury sign a letter of confidentiality. Personal information of the participants as well as the project ideas will be kept confidential and not handed over to unauthorized third persons.
- The participants agree to present their ideas in case of the framework of a public award ceremony and assist in public relations. The participants also agree on the publication of pictures and videos taken during the award ceremony.
- The participants of the contest are obliged to handle contributed data confidential throughout the contest. Particularly, participants shall not distribute personal or sensitive data of other participating teams to third persons.
- With the participation in the competition, the contestants agree on the requirements and conditions for attending listed here.
- The decision made by the jury and the award donors are final.
- The legal recourse is excluded.

Teams and their project ideas

You are on your own – don’t hesitate to take part.

You created your ideas within a team – take the floor.

The EU-CONEXUS Alliance wants to foster multinational teams. So, if you are already working within a team that consist of members of the nine EU-CONEXUS partner universities, take the opportunity to present your idea to a wider audience.

But if you are individually working on a business idea or in a national team coming from one of the EU-CONEXUS partner universities, your proposal is very welcome, too!

Your ideas, and eventually your proposals, for the innovation contest can cover any innovative field. Although the EU-CONEXUS Alliance would encourage ideas with a reference to SmUCS (Smart Urban Costal Sustainability) related topics, there is no limitation of fields.

There is a two-step application process.

- 1st step – handing in your project idea on February 18, 2024 which is followed by workshops
- 2nd step – handing in your final project proposal on April 21, 2024
- Eventually pitching your idea in an online format to a high-profile jury in May (exact date tba, presumably May 23, 2024)

Why you should participate!

- You have the chance to present your start-up / business idea to a high-profile jury and get feedback for your upcoming business journey
- You get into contact with other future entrepreneurs and you can already work on your personal network
- You have the chance to take your business idea beyond regional borders
- You can take part in workshops that will help you to develop your idea and will provide useful information to found your own start-up /business

  Possible workshops:
  (the list is NOT complete - availability also depends on the offerings of the partner institutions):
  - Business model canvas
  - The Persona
  - Social Entrepreneurship
  - How to pitch your idea
  - How to write a business plan
  - Market-competition USPs
  - Introduction to different business models
  - Press-coaching for founders

- You have the possibility to work with students / researcher from other universities / European countries
- You can actually win prize money to push your idea forward

Criteria for selection

There will be a two-phase selection process. In the first phase, the jury selects a maximum of 12 ideas for each category. Do more than 12 proposals meet the prerequisites, the jury will make a pre-selection referring to the persuasiveness of the idea following equated criteria.

1. **Phase: evaluation of the project idea**
    1. **Phase: selection criteria**

- **Innovation, originality of the idea (10%)**
  How innovative is the presented idea? Which innovative products, procedures / services are the basis of the business idea? What is the USP of the idea? What makes the idea better than the alternatives?

- **Customer use – customer value (10%)**
  Who is the potential target group? Which problems will be solved or needs will be satisfied with that business idea? How detailed can the use be described? Which is the specific advantage of the idea compared to alternative products/ procedures / services on the market.

- **Market potential and perspectives (10%)**
  Are there real market possibilities and a target group for the idea? In how far are the market and the target group limited? Does the idea have a unique selling point? Referring to the customer perspective, what makes the idea unique?
  Which chances and risk do exist in this potential market and by implementing the idea? Are there direct or indirect competitors?

- **Degree of realization - practicability (10%)**
  How realistic is the implementation of the idea? Is there a real chance of founding a start-up / business? How probable is the practicability? Are there additional partners necessary to realize the project idea? Will there be more developing steps necessary before the realization of the project idea?

- **Motivation and competences of the participants / teams (10%)**
  What are the core competences of the participant / team? What motivates the participants to develop and implement the project idea? Which qualifications have the participants /teams to offer and which fields are covered by the potential start-up / business founders? Do the participants / teams have specific experience which is helpful for the ongoing process?

- **Structural importance**
  Does the idea deal with regional- and/or societal challenges (SmUCS, climate crises, demographic change)? Does the project idea have the potential to create jobs?

- **SmUCS relevance**
  Does the project idea cover areas (societal, economical, technical) related to the field of Smart Urban Coastal Sustainability? How does the project idea can be integrated into the field of SmUCS if the primary field differs?

Each jury member evaluates the presentations on their own and rank the ideas. This will be the basis for the discussion and final evaluation after the presentation pitch.

2. Phase: evaluation of the presentation pitch

The decision of the awarding of the best ideas in this second phase is carried out:

– on the basis of the proposal evaluated by the criteria of the first phase (50% weighting)

– a 5-minutes presentation pitch in front of the jury and 10-minutes question period in the second phase (50% weighting)

2. <u>Phase: selection criteria</u>

Pitch:

- Presentation / media use (25%)
- Q & A (25%)
- Entrepreneur personality

Award

Category: students
1st prize = 1,500€, 2nd prize = 1,000€, 3rd prize = 500€

Category: researchers
1st prize = 5,000€, 2nd prize = 2,500€, 3rd prize = 1,500€

- **Application forms**
  See Annex

All application must be sent to the following email address:
innovationcontest@eu-conexus.eu

Deadline: 1st step of application – project idea: February 18, 2024

Deadline: 2nd step of application – final project proposal: April 21, 2024

Online Pitch event: tba (presumably May 23, 2024)

End of Call

Additional Information

Introduction

The innovation contest “contest of ideas” should inspire students (PhD and Master students) and researchers alike to bring up their innovative ideas and use the offered support system through the EU-CONEXUS Alliance.

Education is still the key. Most of the Start-ups are founded with a strong relation to Higher Education Institutions or are spin-offs. Education and research foster the environment for innovations and entrepreneurial mindset. Education – research – innovation, as being part of the knowledge triangle, are the underlying idea not only of each institution in the EU-CONEXUS Alliance, but also of the innovation contest. Believing that the environment of the (partner) institutions creates a space in which students and researchers alike find possibilities and outlets for their innovative ideas, the innovation contest offers an opportunity to present their ideas to a greater community. Additionally, the support system created around the “contest of ideas” increases the chance to merge the idea into the founding of a start-up or business. The innovation contest not only wants people to present their ideas. In fact, it is also about connecting people from different fields and institutions. It is about fostering entrepreneurial mindsets and supporting and encouraging people in founding a start-up / business. And, with also having the knowledge triangle in mind, it is about facing the challenges of our time, finding solutions and boosting growth and jobs.

The partners of the Alliance are La Rochelle Université, Agricultural University of Athens, Catholic University of Valencia, Klaipeda University, University of Zadar, Technical University of Civil Engineering Bucharest, South East Technological University, University of Rostock and Frederick University. All of them will engage in this task, promote the call and will actively take part in one or the other way.

The Innovation Contest

The challenges the partner universities tackle are very similar. It is encouraged that ideas and concepts are related to smart urban coastal sustainability. In order to include associate partners, companies could communicate specific challenges they are facing. Participants then could decide if they work on their own ideas or try to find solutions for those specific problems. Moreover, the innovation contest aims to connect participants from the partner universities, creating, developing and

presenting ideas together. For the first edition of the innovation contest, there will be no limitation to multinational teams. Teams do not necessarily need to have members from different partner universities. For the following editions, there may be the development of a matchmaking platform, in order to create an environment and space where possible team members can meet and exchange ideas.

With this innovation contest several goals are pursued. The overall aim is to inspire students and researchers to think beyond and create ideas that lead into projects and can eventually lead into the founding of a start-up or business. By elevating the two important aspects of education and research, fostering an entrepreneurial mindset and offer support, e.g., with workshops on how to write a business plan, pitch your idea and legal questions, it is expected to attract participants. With the matching of multinational team members, the goal is to create a better understanding of similar circumstances in the different regions and find transnational solutions. Additionally, the experience some partner universities have in supporting start-ups and spin-offs and offer acceleration, can help other institutions establishing similar programs. With this innovation contest, there will not only be a platform for participants to present their ideas. Challenges in all kinds of fields (environment, society, labor market etc.) will be faced and partner universities have the opportunity to get better insights in established programs that support the knowledge and technology transfer by focusing on the creation of an entrepreneurial mindset (including social entrepreneurship as well) and the support of start-ups in every phase of the process. Eventually, it should offer the participants the opportunity to create and develop ideas in a multi-national environment. Here, not only transnational problems can be solved, the participants have the great opportunity to present their ideas to a multinational jury from different countries. So, the challenge will also be to excite and satisfy a broader audience and fulfil divers needs. In addition, by succeeding the possible positive outcome and market launch of their ideas might not be limited to a specific region. With this innovation contest, the goal is not only to foster entrepreneurship, great ideas and select a winner – but bringing individuals from different European countries together, working on similar problems and creating ideas and developing solutions for comparable challenges in the respective regions. Moreover, there is the important intercultural aspect of working together by overcoming cultural differences and focusing on similarities. Herewith, different structures and mentalities will be brought closer together to spread the idea of being part of one European University.

Jury composition

The jury will be composed of representatives from each partner university. A high-profiled mixture of scientists, representatives from companies, entrepreneurs and maybe regional politics might be of consideration. This includes associate partners as well. Each partner institution is responsible to select suitable members for the jury.

The jury should have nine members, one of each partner university, with at least 3 members representing or associated to a company.

Application process – timeline



1. **Application process**
   All participants from all participating partner universities apply with a short description of their idea via the “Online Application Form”.
   Following information is necessary for the online application:

- Name of the idea / innovation
- Short description (max. 500 signs)
- Team leader
- Department / Institution
- Category
- Contact information
- Team members

After this first step of the application process, the participants get the offer to promote and improve their skills. There will be various workshops which will help the participants to enlarge their know-how and may increase their chances to win. The workshops are at no charge for the participants of the innovation contest. The support of the contest participants may be performed in general by the University of Rostock, with support of the partner institutions and additionally by our body of experts. Therefore, it is necessary and requested that the partner universities communicate their possible support referring to seminars, workshops or coaching. This includes also the information if the courses are held in the language of the home country or in English and are open for the participants and if the courses follow a specific time frame or if they can be offered when requested.
The workshops will be virtual and the participants should register in advance. The list of workshops will be released before the deadline of the first application phase. Questions referring to financing or legal matters can be raised at any time, but it is encouraged to raise these matters after the contest. Depending on the origin of the idea and the participant, there will be individual information, since these topics are too specific to apply to all.
Possible workshops will be (the list is NOT complete) Availability also depends on the offerings of the partner institutions:

- Business model canvas
- The Persona
- Social Entrepreneurship
- How to pitch your idea
- How to write a business plan
- Market-competition USPs
- Introduction to different business models
- Press-coaching for founders

In the next step, the participants hand in their final project idea proposal. Following documents should be handed in:

- Improved proposal of the idea
- If applicable, supporting documents of a mentor (business or science)

Subsequently, an independent jury, composed out of experienced scientists and entrepreneurs, will select the best ideas in each category.

There will be a guideline to structure the proposal in the annex.

2. **Presentation pitch**
   The best 12 project ideas of teams or individuals have the opportunity to present their ideas to an expert jury. The event will be held virtually. Each team/individual has five minutes to present their project idea. Afterwards, the jury has ten minutes to ask questions to get a better understanding or clear open issues. After all project ideas were presented, the jury discusses and evaluates the proposals to select the winning ideas.
   Optional: Award ceremony – streamed online and open to public. Each participant/team has the opportunity to present their idea in a 30 seconds pitch to give the audience a taste of their proposal. Then, the winners of each category will be announced.
   The final contest will virtually be held presumably May 23, 2024.

Follow-up care

Depending on the idea and the origin of the participant / team, there can be a follow-up care in regards to the further development of the idea. Specific questions referring to the actual process of founding a start-up/business can be discussed – respectively with the support of the partner university in which the founding should take place.

Limitations

So far, not every partner university has organized an innovation contest, yet do they have structures or an office that could offer the extensive work that comes along with

the contest referring to the workshop and coaching phase as well as a possible follow up care. With the EU-CONEXUS wide innovation contest, these institutions can take part and profit from existing structures of the various other partners. So, new structures may be developed and the implementation of an entrepreneurial mindset within the university which may result in the support and founding of start-ups and spin-off may increase.

Many students and researchers have good ideas that could lead to the founding of a start-up/business. No matter what field the idea fits in, it is still difficult, even with the best support system, to eventually go from idea to start-up within a specific region. Though, some ideas are not limited to a specific region, usually the participants are. Therefore, the need to have multinational teams might be a limitation, referring to the creation and development of the idea as well as to the actual process of founding. It is to mention, target groups and needs might differ and regions request a different stage of development. With the goal of eventually creating a start-up/business, the question remains in which country this will happen if team members come from different countries.

Having this in mind, it might be difficult to attract multinational teams, especially in the category of Master students and PhD students. It is probably easier for researchers and professors to find partners within their network. Therefore, it will be important to find ways and create tools with which students can communicate their ideas and find a matching partner. With this pilot event, we hope to get a better insight in the collaboration of the teams (esp. the student teams).

Annex

Proposal innovation contest 2023-2024

Personal information

Participants

Please give personal information of all participants in the project and assign a team leader who will be contacted during the phase of the contest

Team leader		
Title, pre name, name		
Category	student	researcher
	Enrolled since:	graduated in:
Faculty / institution		
Department / field of study		
Highest degree		
Date of birth		
Gender		
Address		
Telephone		
Email		

Further team members
(title, pre name, name
Status
Email)

Project description

Title and short term

Description of the business idea and the innovation

What is the idea behind the business and what is special and new about it? Which innovative products, procedures / services are the basis of your business idea? What is the USP of your idea? (max. 2 pages)

Customer use

Who is your target group? Which problems do you solve or needs will you satisfy with your business idea? (1/2 page)

Market potential and perspectives

Are there real market possibilities for your idea? Which chances and risk do exist in this potential market and by implementing your idea? Are direct or indirect competitors? (1/2 page)

Degree of development of your product / procedure / service

In which phase of development are you and how long do you think it is going to take? When could your product / procedure / service ready for the market? How do you plan on securing your competitive advantage? (1/2 page)

Capital needs and implementation

How do you estimate the capital needs to implement your idea? How much should your product / service cost? (1/2 page)

Marketing

How will potential customers know about your product / service? Which distribution channels do you want to use?

Personal motivation

What motivates you to follow this idea and implement it? What are your qualifications / job experience / industry knowledge?

Additional information

A) mentor from science and / or business sector

Are you supported by a mentor? Please give a name and field of work.

……

B) participation in other innovation contests

Did you already take part in other innovation contests with your idea? If yes, which one? Was your idea awarded?

Contact

General Contact: innovationcontest@eu-conexus.eu