

CALL FOR APPLICATIONS

ASTEROUSIA HYBRID UNIVERSITY 2023:
18-24 September 2023

*Water Management in Biosphere Reserves
of the Mediterranean and beyond*



MEdIES



Αναπτυξιακή
Ηρακλείου
HERAKLION
DEVELOPMENT AGENCY



UNESCO Chair and Network on
Sustainable Development Management
and Education in the Mediterranean
National and Kapodistrian
University of Athens



BACKGROUND – SCOPE

The current Call concerns the organisation of a Hybrid University in Asterousia (Phase A live, Phase B online) and is a follow up to a series of [previous summer and hybrid universities](#).

The topic of this year's University is integrated water management, an issue closely linked with the SDGs, and the Climate Change agendas as they are manifested in the Mediterranean region, a valuable biodiversity hotspot, and rich cultural hotspot that is threatened by water scarcity and floods. Human-made pressures, such as water intensive agriculture, population growth, coastal urbanization, tourism and other sectors, together with unsustainable misuse, keep water demand increasing to the detriment of environmental ecosystems and behaviours. Unprecedented droughts and storms, caused by climate change, coupled with erosion, desertification and groundwater overexploitation increase vulnerability of social and natural systems and make urgent the need for better water management at all levels. The key role of water management as a catalyst for urgent and effective action and progress across all SDGs in the Mediterranean and beyond is widely recognised.

Biosphere Reserves (BRs), all around the world and in the Mediterranean, represent key sites for sustainable development of the MAB (Man and the Biosphere) Programme of UNESCO where a sustainable balance between the often-conflicting goals of “conserving biological diversity”, “promoting human development” and “maintaining associated cultural values” is promoted.

The UNESCO Regional Bureau for Science and Culture in Europe and MIO-ECSDE, through various initiatives, and especially through this series of Summer and more recently Hybrid Universities, have always stressed the importance of BRs as “living laboratories” for sustainable development. They are ideal settings to develop and test exemplary solutions to challenges that society faces, i.e. problems of land use, demographic changes, water ‘conflicts’ and water management. Today there are 748 BRs across the planet, three of which are located in Greece: the Olympus Mountain, the Samaria Gorge (Crete), and most recently (2021) Asterousia (Crete).

ASTEROUSIA HYBRID UNIVERSITY 2023 IN A NUTSHELL

PHASE A (LIVE): 18-24 SEPTEMBER 2023, FOR 30 INTERNATIONAL AS WELL AS NATIONAL & LOCAL PARTICIPANTS, IN ASTEROUSIA BR

PHASE B (ONLINE): DECEMBER 2023- FEBRUARY 2024, INCLUDING SYNCHRONOUS AND ASYNCHRONOUS LEARNING OPEN TO PARTICIPANTS FROM ALL OVER THE WORLD

MAIN TOPIC: WATER MANAGEMENT AS A CATALYST FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT & IN ACHIEVING ALL SDGS

TARGET AUDIENCE: POST GRADUATE STUDENTS, EDUCATORS, YOUNG SCIENTISTS AND JUNIOR MANAGERS, STUDYING OR WORKING IN EXISTING OR CANDIDATE BIOSHERE RESERVES, NATURA SITES & OTHER DESIGNATED SITES

PRIORITY: EURO MEDITERRANEAN COUNTRIES

CERTIFICATION: CERTIFICATE OF SUCCESSFUL PARTICIPATION PROVIDED BY THE UNESCO CHAIR ON SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT MANAGEMENT AND EDUCATION IN THE MEDITERRANEAN/UNIVERSITY OF ATHENS & UNESCO REGIONAL OFFICE IN VENICE.

LANGUAGE: ENGLISH



THE HOST SITE: ASTEROUSIA BR

The relatively recently (2021) established **Asterousia BR** represents in many ways the values, richness, contrasts and interlinkages of a MAB Biosphere Reserve. It combines mountainous and coastal characteristics where the water cycle has played a fundamental role for the formation of their morphologies, ecosystems and local communities and the culture they have developed. Water continues to play a critical role for the present productive activities. It is a somewhat isolated area with very rich biodiversity combined with important cultural assets, tangible and intangible, surviving to this day.

The BR has assisted the local community to better connect culture, nature and the economy on protecting and enhancing the natural and cultural heritage of the region. The BR encourages them to explore practical solutions, to inspire and strengthen the resilience of local communities, to support the local youth and create a sense of pride for their region and their local products. Read more on the host site at the [Association of the Protection of Asterousia](#).

The local community's strong commitment towards the new BR is also linked to the opportunities it offers for international collaborations, networking, branding, and sustainable development. The Asterousia Summer/Hybrid University, offers a unique opportunity for young managers and researchers of BRs from the Mediterranean region and beyond, to meet and exchange practices, methodologies and views on a specific topic of concern and experience the local conditions and initiatives.

DESCRIPTION

The 2023 Hybrid University will take place in a Hybrid Format with Phase A (live/Summer University) in Asterousia and Phase B online. The working language of both Phases will be **English**.

The **target group** includes post graduate students, educators, young scientists and managers, studying or working in existing or potential BRs, Natura 2000 sites and other designated areas with a priority given to participants from South-eastern Europe and Mediterranean countries.

The overall **aim** of the Hybrid University is to equip those that take part, through mutual learning, with the knowledge, skills, and methodology tools that will inspire them in rendering their BRs living labs for sustainability.

The umbrella-**theme** this year is **water management as a catalyst for sustainable development and in achieving all SDGs**. The Hybrid University will elaborate on state-of-the-art integrated approaches of water management without neglecting the water and culture aspects.

Specific **topics** to be covered through the lectures, workshops, and field-visits are:

- Freshwater related challenges in BRs (e.g. land use, soil degradation due to agriculture and grazing, pollution, conflicts among users, climate change impacts, etc.)
- The sea related challenges (e.g. pollution including marine litter, overfishing, alien species invasion etc.)
- Integrated water & coastal resources management (theory and lessons from practice)
- The Water-Energy-Food-Ecosystems (WEFE) nexus and the Source to Sea approaches
- Non-Conventional Water Resources (What are they? How can they be enhanced?)
- The role of water in culture (traditions, people's narratives, water heritage monuments, etc.)
- Educating about water aspects esp. through citizen/participatory science and ESD projects

Phase A (live) will take place in and around the Asterousia BR from **18 to 24 September 2023**. The draft daily agenda (under preparation) will entail lectures, workshops, field visits, exchange with local professionals, associations and youth. Phase A will be designed for up to 30 participants (20 international and 10 national and local). Priority will be given to participants from SE European and Mediterranean Countries.

Phase B (online) is scheduled for **December 2023 – February 2024**, as a four-week long event to provide learning opportunities to a wider international audience (around 100 participants are expected). It will build on previous e-courses, properly enriched with this year's topics and input from Phase A. The learning will include asynchronous content (video lectures; existing online videos, toolkits, presentations; recorded material from Phase A) but also synchronous (live sessions with experts). Phase A participants are expected to commit to participate also in Phase B.

PARTICIPANTS' PROFILE & SELECTION CRITERIA

Participants in phase A are expected to be:

- people actively working or involved within existing or candidate Biosphere Reserves;
- employees in management bodies or local authorities of BRs and/or other designated areas or in private/public organization working on Sustainable Development;
- young scientists, recent graduates, or researchers working on or genuinely interested in Sustainable Development and Management, Biosphere Reserves, Environmental Policies, Tourism, and/or Protected Areas.

Selection Criteria

Participants will be selected in order of priority while considering gender and geographical balance. Priority will be given to candidates:

- with an existing strong connection with a BR or applicant BR;
- with a compelling motivation letter presenting their reasons to apply to the Hybrid University, as well as how they intend to capitalize and use this experience in their professional activity;
- coming from Mediterranean and SE European countries;
- under the age of 35.

MILESTONES

The organisation of the 2023 Hybrid University follows the below timetable:

PHASE A

- **10 July 2023** Announcement circulation, Open call for applications
- **10 August 2023** Application deadline
- **20 August 2023** Selection of participants. (Following that participants will be in contact with the organisers to arrange tickets & accommodation)
- **18-24 September 2023:** Week-long Phase A event in Asterousia

PHASE B

- **October 2023** – collection of material on the e-platform of MIO-ESCDE
- **November 2023** Call for applications
- **December 2023 – February 2024** - Running the full Phase B in a four-week long format
- **February 2024** –Reporting

REGISTRATION PROCESS & FEES

Registration

Only online applications will be accepted.

Individuals interested to participate in the Hybrid University should complete the online application form, together with a short CV and a motivation letter to support their participation here <https://www.eventora.com/en/Events/summer-school-asterousia-2023> .

Fees

A symbolic registration fee of 100 EUR will apply for selected trainees. This fee should be deposited to the MIO-ECSDE bank account upon selection in order to confirm participation and proceed with ticket and hotel reservations.

Locals not requiring travel and accommodation will be exempt of fees.

Thanks to the support provided by the sponsors of the Hybrid University, the organization will cover:

- flights and local transportation;
- accommodation including breakfast (depending on the final number, participants may be accommodated in double rooms);
- lunches and coffee breaks;
- Wi-Fi equipped room, and meeting folder
- Guide and entrance for excursions and visits.

ORGANISERS | STAKEHOLDERS

The **main organisers & sponsors** of the 2023 Hybrid University are:

- The UNESCO Regional Bureau for Science and Culture in Europe (Venice Office)
- The Hellenic National Committee of MAB/UNESCO
- Region of Crete
- Heraklion Development Agency
- UNESCO Chair and Network on Sustainable Development Management and Education at the University of Athens (UoA)
- Greek National Committee of the MAB/UNESCO Programme
- Mediterranean Information Office for Environment, Culture and Sustainable Development (MIO-ECSDE) through the MEdIES initiative
- Association for the Protection of Asterousia
- Global Water Partnership – Mediterranean (GWP-Med)

Other contributors: The Hybrid University will bring together a series of actors involved with freshwater or marine water management in and around the Asterousia BR, including:

- Natural History Museum of Crete
- HCMR Hellenic Centre for Marine Research
- The Oceanographic Institute and Aquarium
- Local Associations of professionals