CALL FOR REGISTRATION

ASTEROUSIA HYBRID UNIVERSITY 2024-2025:

Phase A (live): 21-25 October 2024

Integrated Management in Biosphere Reserves and other Designated Sites of South-East Europe and the Mediterranean

INTRODUCTION - HISTORY

This CALL concerns the organisation of a Hybrid University in Asterousia for post graduate students, young researchers, educators and junior managers of existing and candidate Biosphere Reserves (BRs) of the MAB/UNESCO Programme and other designated areas, such as Global Geoparks, Ecohydrology sites, World Heritage Sites (WHS), Protected Areas (PAs), Natura 2000 sites, etc., from South-Eastern European and Mediterranean countries.

The CALL builds on a long-standing collaboration and joint commitment between MIO-ECSDE, the UNESCO Regional Bureau for Science and Culture in Europe (Venice, Italy), the UNESCO Chair and Network on Sustainable Development Management and Education of the UoA, and in recent years, the Asterousia BR of Crete, as well as many international and national bodies and actors. It builds on previously run initiatives & projects, such as:

- the series of successful train-the-trainer events and summer universities on how to design and implement sustainable development management initiatives in Biosphere Reserves and other designated areas, specifically the Asterousia Hybrid (2023-2024), the Asterousia & Cyprus Hybrid (2022-2023), the Asterousia (Hybrid) (2021-2022), Asterousia (Hybrid) (2020); Central Balkan BR (2019); Parnon (2018); Sardinia (2017); Samothraki (2016); and Amfissa (2014).
- the joint UNESCO/MAB & MIO-ECSDE publication "Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) in Biosphere Reserves and other Designated Areas: A Resource Book for Educators in South-Eastern Europe and the Mediterranean" (2013).
- the Youth engagement in MAB Youth Forums (Po Delta BR, 2017; Changbaishan BR, China 2019) and other events (UNCC Conference, New York 2019).

This activity is a concrete contribution also to the work of the Mediterranean Committee on Education for Sustainable Development (MCESD), operating formally since 2016, which guides and monitors the implementation of the Mediterranean Strategy on Education for Sustainable Development (MSESD) and its revised Action Plan towards 2030 (Nicosia, 2022). UNESCO Regional Bureau for Science and Culture in Europe (UNESCO Venice Office) is an active member of MCESD while MIO-ECSDE / MEdIES facilitates the operation of its Secretariat.

THE GLOBAL AND THE REGIONAL CONTEXTS

Admittedly, progressing towards Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) through the **2030 Agenda** requires qualified professionals equipped with a broad interdisciplinary and intercultural understanding of the diverse development issues, local contexts, global interconnections and methodologies enabling them to identify needs, propose policies, apply and monitor measures.

To accelerate the kind of urgent, efficient, and effective action needed to achieve all the SDGs, it is crucial to address interconnectedness and holistic approaches. The key role of holistic management, education, and awareness in MAB BRs and other designated areas as a catalyst progress across all SDGs is widely recognised.

At a regional level, **South-East Europe and the Mediterranean** face significant challenges in sustainable development, including environmental degradation, biodiversity loss, unsustainable practices including agriculture and tourism, and of course, climate change. These difficulties, along with the fast industrialisation and urbanisation (particularly along the coast), put a lot of strain on terrestrial ecosystems, deplete natural resources, and endanger the quality of the air and water due to pollution. Unprecedented droughts, megafires and storms, caused by climate change, coupled with erosion, desertification and overexploitation of natural resources (e.g. water, land, fish stocks, etc.) increase ecosystems' vulnerability. Better governance, more efficient management at all levels (local, national, and transboundary), regional collaboration, and innovation are all necessary to address such complex challenges.

In addition to being home to 7% of all marine species worldwide and having one of the world's largest seas, the Mediterranean region is also one of the world's driest areas, coming second only to Antarctica, and is a hotspot for biodiversity. It is home to about 30,000 plant species, of which over 13,000 are endemic, and numerous endemic species of reptiles.

Moreover, the Mediterranean is the birthplace of some of the world's oldest and greatest civilizations, and forms to this day a mosaic of cultures with similarities in traditions, lifestyles, diets, and gestures. This combination of rich biodiversity and cultural heritage makes the Mediterranean an appealing touristic destination, receiving 32% of the world's tourists - 220 million per year. Despite the fact that tourism generates revenue for the area, there are sadly many instances of poor management, out of scale constructions, and overexploitation of important and fragile ecosystems (such as wetlands, coasts, mountains, forests, cultural sites).

On another level, all around the world Biosphere Reserves (BRs) are a core component of the UNESCO MAB (Man and the Biosphere) Programme, which is to test and implement a sustainable balance between the frequently at odds goals of "conserving biological diversity," "promoting human development," and "maintaining associated cultural values."

The UNESCO Regional Bureau for Science and Culture in Europe and MIO-ECSDE, through various initiatives, and especially through the series of successful Summer (or Hybrid) Universities, have always stressed the importance of Biosphere Reserves (BRs) as "living laboratories" for sustainable development. They are perhaps the most appropriate settings to develop and test exemplary solutions to challenges that society faces, i.e. problems of land use, demographic changes, and resource management. Within a BR, environmental protection could be harmoniously, or at least

more easily combined with research, education, management, local development, and citizenship, thus 'modelling' and 'demonstrating' sustainable development in tangible ways.

Today (2024) there are 759 Biosphere Reserves in 136 countries across the planet, three of which are located in Greece: Olympus, Samaria Gorge (Crete), and most recently (2021) Asterousia (Crete).

THE LOCAL CONTEXT: ASTEROUSIA BIOSHERE RESERVE

In many ways, the relatively new Biosphere Reserve of Asterousia (2021) embodies the values, diversity, contrasts, and interlinks of a Biosphere Reserve. The BR combines coastal and mountainous features (Kofina peak is 1,231 meters high). The variety and richness of terrestrial ecosystems are remarkable. In recent years droughts are already noticeable in parts of them. The water cycle has always been essential to the development of their morphologies, ecosystems, local agricultural production, local economy, and local communities' cultural and social fabric.

The locals view the BR as an opportunity to preserve and enhance nature, link culture, environment, and economy, safeguard and enhance heritage, explore practical solutions, encourage the resilience of local communities, provide well-paying jobs for local youth, and foster a sense of pride in their region and local products. Read more at the "**Association of the Protection of Asterousia.**"

The local community has a strong commitment towards the BR and the opportunities it offers for international collaborations, networking, branding and sustainable development. Supported by Region of Crete since the BR's designation, the Asterousia Hybrid University offers a unique opportunity for young managers and researchers of BRs and other designated sites from SE Europe and the Mediterranean region to meet annually or biannually and exchange practices, methodologies on a specific topic of concern.

"The road to the development of the Asterousia Biosphere Reserve goes through the protection and strengthening of its natural and cultural capital. But the path of protecting the area also goes through its development."

Prof. Michael Scoullos,
Chair, Greek National Committee of MAB/UNESCO

YEARLY FOCUS

The main **theme** this year will be **SDG 15 'Life on Land' terrestrial (and aquatic) ecosystems** within the context of integrated management approaches such as the Water-Energy-Food-Ecosystems

(WEFE) nexus and the Source-to-Sea continuum approach. Specific sub-topics to be covered through the lectures, workshops, field-visits and peer learning activities are:

- How local actions in BRs and other sites could be good practices, can be monitored and could provide data that could be used as indicators to help meet the SDG 15 targets
- Biodiversity Assessments | Establishing Monitoring Systems to track progress
- Freshwater related challenges in BRs (e.g. land use, soil degradation, intensive agriculture, pollution, overexploitation, etc.) and solutions, including Non-Conventional Water Resources
- Good practices from Ecohydrology demonstration sites
- Degraded Habitat Restoration projects such as reforestation and wetland restoration.
- Sustainable eco / agro tourism practices
- The role of community engagement | Youth | Citizen Science approaches under the umbrella of Education for Sustainable Development (ESD)

ROLE OF ROMANIAN SCIENCE related UNESCO NETWORK

This year a strong engagement from the Romanian Science UNESCO network is encouraged (MAB focal point, BRs site managers and experts, Global Geopark site managers and experts, UNESCO Chairs representatives) in the co-organisation, bringing their expertise and knowledge in order to build a peer-learning experience.

DESCRIPTION

The 2024-2025 University will take place in a Hybrid Format with Phase A (live) taking place within and around Asterousia in Crete island (Greece), and Phase B online.

The **target group** of the 2024 Hybrid University includes post graduate students, educators, young scientists and managers, studying or working (or otherwise engaged) in existing, candidate or potential Biosphere Reserves, Geoparks, Ecohydrology demonstration sites, and connected Natura 2000 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, and exchanges with the knowledge, skills, and methodology tools that will inspire them in rendering their BRs living labs for sustainability.

The working language of both Phases will be **English**.

A symbolic **Registration Fee** of 100 EUR will apply for selected participants.

Phase A (live) is planned for five days including a **three full day compact event in October 2024** (Monday 21/10/24 arrivals to Friday 25/10/2024 /departures, 4 nights) to take place within and around the Asterousia Biosphere Reserve. It will entail lectures, field visits, and peer learning activities, from the attending professionals, associations and youth. All participants will be asked to present their Site (2-3 minutes) and are encouraged to hold an interactive peer learning exercise or workshop (30 min) in order to share a practice. Find the outline of the preliminary agenda below.

It will be designed **for up to 25 trainees** (**15 international including 5 from Romania and 10 Greek**). Priority will be given to participants from South-East European and Mediterranean countries.

Phase B (online) is scheduled **to start within January 2025**, as a 3-week long event to capitalise and broaden the outcomes of Phase A and to provide learning opportunities to a wider audience. The content of Phase B will build on previous e-courses, properly adapted and enriched with this year's thematic priorities. The learning content will include: video lectures from invited experts; existing online videos, toolkits, presentations; three (3) live sessions with experts (once a week, each lasting 60 – 90 min); recorded material and interviews from Phase A.

It is expected that approximately 100 international practitioners will apply to take part in Phase B, and those who successfully complete tests and exercise will receive a certificate of successful completion by the UNESCO Regional Bureau and the UNESCO Chair of the University of Athens.

EXPECTED RESULTS

The participants of the 2024-2025 Hybrid University (Phase A and B) are expected to:

- Become aware of the global, UN, EU and Mediterranean policy agendas, on sustainable development and climate change;
- Understand the importance of sustainable/integrated management for all SDGs;
- Exchange on the key challenges related to terrestrial and freshwater aquatic ecosystems (e.g. pollution, water shortage, erosion, soil degradation,) and opportunities (e.g. sustainable tourism) in the management of designated areas;
- Be familiarised with principles, methods, tools and cases of BR management (e.g. success stories of sustainable development);
- Discuss Climate Change adaptation and mitigation measures already or potentially applicable in their regions;
- Contribute in discussions, group work and peer learning with actors from different climatic zones.

- Be introduced to cases of Non-Conventional Water Resources (NCWR), esp. of Crete;
- Interact with stakeholders and professionals of the Asterousia BR;
- Develop their own proposals for the sustainable management of their own designated sites;
- Design Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) or citizen science activities.

APPLICATION

Only online applications will be accepted at this LINK

DAILY AGENDA - PHASE A

The outline of the 3-day event is presented below:

- Day 1 will focus on integrated management approaches and practices,
- Day 2 on Monitoring practices and tools,
- Day 3 on Education, Communication and Citizen Science.

Each day will start with some key lectures and presentations, continue with workshops and peer learning activities, and end with a synthetic group-work session. On day 3 a visit to Mesara and consultation with local stakeholders of the Asterousia BR is foreseen. Although the presentations are for systematic reasons 'separated', the three days constitute a continuous event, and undoubtedly this will be generated in the discussions.

	Mon 21 Oct	Tue 22 Oct- FOCUS ON MANAGEMENT	Wed 23 Oct FOCUS ON ASPECTS OF MONITORING	Thu 24 Oct FOCUS ON AWARENESS EDUCATION	Fri 25 Oct
MORNING 0900-1300	ARRIVALS – (Informal welcome dinner)	Welcome, Scope, Overview of challenges Overview of ways to address the challenges through integrated management	What we monitor lecture Workshops or peer learning exercises, using best practices, & examples	Visit to Mesara | Meeting the local stakeholders | citizen science	DEPARTURES
		LUNCH BREAK 13:00-14:30	*LUNCH BREAK 13:00-14:30*	*LUNCH BREAK 13:00-14:30*	
AFTER NOON 1430-1600		Getting to know the sites represented – Peer learning exercises & Workshops, using best practices, & examples of integrated management	Workshops or peer learning exercises, using best practices, & examples	Group work on ESD | citizen science approaches	
SYNTHESIS 1600-1700		Group work to synthesise key learnings of Day 1	Group work to synthesise key learnings of Day 2	Evaluation and Certificates	

ORGANISERS | STAKEHOLDERS

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

- UNESCO Regional Bureau for Science and Culture in Europe based in Venice Italy
- Region of Crete
- Heracklion Development Agency
- Asterousia MAB Local Committee (TEDA)
- Romanian Science related UNESCO network
- UNESCO Chair and Network on Sustainable Development Management and Education at the University of Athens (UoA)
- Mediterranean Information Office for Environment, Culture and Sustainable Development (MIO-ECSDE) through the MEdIES initiative

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

- Association for the Protection of Asterousia
- Natural History Museum of Crete
- HCMR Hellenic Centre for Marine Research
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ACRONYMS

BR(s) Biosphere Reserve(s)

CC Climate Change

ESD Education for Sustainable Development

ICZM Integrated Coastal Zone Management

IWRM Integrated Water Resources Management

MSESD Mediterranean Strategy on Education for Sustainable Development

NCWR(s) Non-Conventional Water Resource(s)

SDGs Sustainable Development Goals

WEFE Water-Energy-Food-Ecosystems nexus approach

WNBRs World Network of Biosphere Reserves

Links to older versions

- 2023- 2024 edition
    - https://www.unesco.org/en/articles/asterousia-hybrid-university-2023-water-management-biosphere-reserves-mediterranean-and-beyond
    - https://www.unesco.org/en/articles/asterousia-hybrid-university-explores-water-management-catalyst-sustainable-development
    - https://medies.net/asterousia-hybrid-university-2023/
    - https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cc2wNOYFNfk
- 2022-2023 edition
    - https://medies.net/project/2022-cyprus-hybrid-university/