EPICUR
EUROPEAN UNIVERSITY

2022
2023

ANNUAL REPORT

Université de Strasbourg

Adam Mickiewicz University Poznań

University of Amsterdam

Aristotle University of Thessaloniki

KIT Karlsruhe Institute of Technology

Universität für Bodenkultur Wien
University of Natural Resources and Life Sciences, Vienna

universität freiburg

Université Haute-Alsace

SDU University of Southern Denmark

Co-funded by the ERASMUS+ Programme of the European Union

This project has received funding from the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme under grant agreement No 101016926

EPICUR

EUROPEAN UNIVERSITY

EDITORIAL

Jean-Marc Planeix, EPICUR Alliance Strategic Coordinator

EPICUR is evolving and setting an example by taking a significant new step. The federal European university project gives shape to an alliance composed of 9 universities from 7 European countries. Let's shape it! After careful consideration and collaborative experimentation, we are now ready to build it together, gradually integrating it into our programmes, universities, and projects. What better venue to kick off this new phase than the European Parliament in Strasbourg? The task ahead is immense, but our resources and enthusiasm are up to the challenge. It's time to prove the strength and impact of our commitment to Europe and to convince that we are key players in its progress, its future, and its values!

Alison Garnier-Rivers, EPICUR Alliance Manager

When the EPICUR partners submitted the EPICUR Shaping Higher Education In Transition (EPICUR-SHAPE-IT) project back in March 2022, as a response to the European Commission call for deeper institutionalised transnational cooperation, we realised that the steps that we would need to take to achieve the goals of the renewed mission statement were going to be daunting. Moving from a project-based management approach to an institutional one would need a change of mind-set and the activation of deeper integration across our institutions. The academic year 2022 to 2023 has therefore been a year of transition. We have not only taken stock and started to build on our pilot achievements, but we have taken the time to foster collective understanding on how to manage the transformation and efficiently bring new colleagues on-board. With a community of now over 250 regular contributors to the alliance activities, this transformation is undoubtedly underway!

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MOBILITY, TEACHING & LEARNING

EPICUR's thrives to reinforce European connectivity and brain circulation by (re)shaping mobilities, by deploying and enhancing the combination of our unique digital collaborative infrastructure with new flexible formats for sharing teaching and learning across Europe. By doing so, EPICUR seeks to overcome the long-term hurdles to widening European participation in mobilities, equipping non-traditional learners for a successful mobility and closing the gap of the societal demand for high-level skills.

STUDENT MOBILITY

EPICUR's strategic advantage lies in the combination of its disruptive mobility approach and its unique digital infrastructure, the EPICUR Inter-University Campus (EIUC).

EPICUR's ambition for the full roll-out phase is to champion a radical increase of mobilities uptake and pursue the flipped mobility concept to become a European model for mainstreaming mobilities. In doing so, EPICUR will develop, test and pivot solutions for overcoming the mobility gap in Europe, as less than 10% of European students are currently participating in a mobility experience. For the alliance this means that by 2030 the majority of students graduating from an EPICUR partner university will have participated in an EPICUR mobility experience during their studies.

EPICUR has set itself ambitious objectives concerning student mobility, which cannot be achieved through traditional mobility: therefore EPICUR defined a mobility process, in which the perspectives are flipped. Instead of having students move to resources, the resources are now shared towards students. Flipped mobility opens-up institutional resources and facilitates new ways to participate in remote, blended and physical mobilities for all learners: every mobility could happen by the mobility of the student's ecosystem and not (always) the mobility of the learner.

EPICUR's educational offerings aim to provide inclusive access to diverse international higher education experiences. EPICUR's mobility offer encompasses blended, online, hybrid and physical courses within a range of different (short-term as full semester) mobility formats. Covering different societally relevant topics, **EPICUR's diverse curriculum attracted a total of 657 students** from across the Alliance during the three mobility windows (Autumn, Spring, and Summer) since September 2022.

These educational offerings have been implemented across various fields within EPICUR, including:

- Sustainable Transformations and European Values
- Language and Culture
- Entrepreneurship and Engagement
- Language Training for Mobility
- Key Competences

180 courses were offered across the alliance in the academic year 2022-23. This diverse portfolio enriched the academic landscape and fostered meaningful international exchange among students, allowing for unprecedented student mobility. These courses delved into pertinent topics essential for tackling the challenges of the 21st century. While EPICUR's multilingual offerings have broadened, it was particularly gratifying to observe the re-offering of numerous courses from previous years, ensuring continuity within the EPICUR programme.

The academic year 22-23 marked EPICUR's inaugural launch of a summer programme, primarily featuring short-term, in-person courses held at various EPICUR Universities. This initiative garnered significant interest across the EPICUR network: a total of 107 students had the opportunity to explore diverse subjects such as 'Cities and Climate Change' at the Campus of SDU, participate in Dutch Language courses at UvA in Amsterdam, or commence their EPIC Missions at BOKU in Vienna with a capstone at AMU in Poznan. In total, 22 schools were offered in the EPICUR summer programme.

EPIC Missions

To incorporate the notion of challenge-based learning in international and interdisciplinary knowledge creation, EPICUR has developed in its pilot phase a groundbreaking educational format: EPIC Missions. EPIC Missions are group projects in which students from across Europe come together to solve real-world problems set by real-world stakeholders with the academic support of mission guides. Organised in blended mobility format, the EPIC Missions are opportunities that start with an in-person kick-off event, followed by online collaboration throughout the mission period. At the end of their EPIC Mission, students gain both unique experience and ECTS.

Started in 2021, EPIC Missions are now in their third round, with the latest kick-off that have taken place end of August 2023 at the Adam-Mickiewicz-University. During a 5-day on-site event, participants of the five different missions got the chance to get to know their mission crews, prepare for the first meeting with their stakeholders, and worked on defining and understanding their respective challenges.

The results of EPIC Missions 2023/2024 will be presented to the stakeholders in 2024.

Testimonials about mobilities

"The EPICUR Entrepreneurial Lab Summer School Edition in Thessaloniki was definitely the experience I was looking for. During one week we developed a sustainable business idea based on innovative technologies. I was surprised by our results after this week. Our progress has only been possible due to the personal connections we made. We exchanged experiences about our cultures, universities and lives, I never expected to connect on such levels during a university course."

"This experience has undoubtedly improved my skills in technology implementation, business modelling, decision-making, and presenting. But most importantly, I have made new friends with many inspiring people who all share a passion for technology, sustainability, and Greek food."

"The most beautiful part of this summer school is to have been with amazing human beings from 15+ nationalities, from 9 different European universities and with different expertise and experiences. We all learn so much from each other in a very nice atmosphere."

"EPICUR courses were a fantastic way for me to broaden my perspective and to explore fields of study that I couldn't have accessed otherwise. It is a very interesting way to study, and a great way to learn new languages. It's exciting to participate in the beginnings of what will be a very important European project!"

"A Greek language course offered by a teacher from Thessaloniki gave me a sense of authenticity. There were a lot of students from different EPICUR universities in this online course, and it was really designed for people who were planning to make a mobility. It was very concrete. I also like the cross-disciplinary aspect of the EPICUR courses: it's interesting to get to know people interested in the same topics, even if we come from different universities or disciplines."

TEACHING AND LEARNING

EPICUR Centre for International Teaching and Learning

EPICUR Centre for International Teaching and Learning aims to provide opportunities to empower teaching staff across the alliance to advance their teaching to be international, intercultural, interdisciplinary, innovative, inclusive, interactive and aligned with EPICUR educational principles.

So what was done during the academic year 2022-23?

Based on learnings from EPICUR's first funding phase, conceptualisation was started by University of Freiburg in November 2022. Succeeding in the competitive selection, the concepts were presented at the European University Association's Teaching & Learning Forum in Bilbao in February 2023, where international professional audience's feedback was gathered.

At the EPICUR SHAPE-IT kick-off in 2023, a workshop was conducted to collect input from across EPICUR regarding a joint teaching and learning centre's opportunities and challenges.

Then, the cross-institutional task team was created, comprising experts in (digital) higher education didactics, representing local teaching support structures across EPICUR. Through subsequent monthly meetings, the task team worked on the scoping of the EPICUR Joint TLC, and presented it to university stakeholders in June 2023. The start of a detailed needs analysis followed. The task team conceptualised the centre's virtual space located within the EPICUR Inter-University Campus and its offers, e.g., a repository of curated resources, a professionalisation concept, as well as events and collaboration opportunities for the Community of Practice of teaching (support) staff across the EPICUR alliance. Finally, the name "EPICUR Centre for International Teaching and Learning" was chosen.

The launch of the centre's virtual space is planned for early 2024, as well as the development of a framework for the professional teaching development in EPICUR.

Lifelong Learning

During this academic year, the partners have initiated activities within the field of lifelong learning. This includes developing the foundations for a common EPICUR Lifelong Learning Policy. The Policy seeks to establish a shared understanding of this concept among the partner universities, facilitate connections between experts, share expertise, and develop common quality standards for learning offers. Through its implementation EPICUR aims to empower the current workforce and citizens to adapt to the evolving job market and support the European Commission's European Skills Agenda. By integrating lifelong learning into its mission, EPICUR aims to become a driver of change, expanding its educational impact beyond traditional university boundaries and offering a truly European learning experience through innovative pathways and flexible education and training systems.

FOCI

In 2022, the European Commission launched an initiative to pilot the concept of a European degree label, as a first step in the exploration of how joint EU criteria might be used to recognise that certain international joint programmes deliver a distinct quality and European dimension for its students. Among the six funded projects, **FOCI (Future-proof Criteria for Innovative European Education)** consists of universities coming from three European Alliances: EPICUR, YUFE, ECIU. The end goal of the FOCI project is to produce reliable and applicable policy recommendations to the EU Commission, on how the European degree label can function, not only for joint degrees, but also for innovative models of education, such as micro-credentials and modular and flexible short programmes, etc. In order to achieve this goal, the FOCI project involved relevant stakeholders since the very beginning of its work in April 2023 and focused on the development of a strong methodology for the application of the EU criteria in which the EPICUR partners have been particularly involved. Hence, a "Stakeholder needs analysis" was published in May 2023, and a Digital Tool for Self-Assessment (against the criteria) was made available for pilot joint programmes in August 2023.

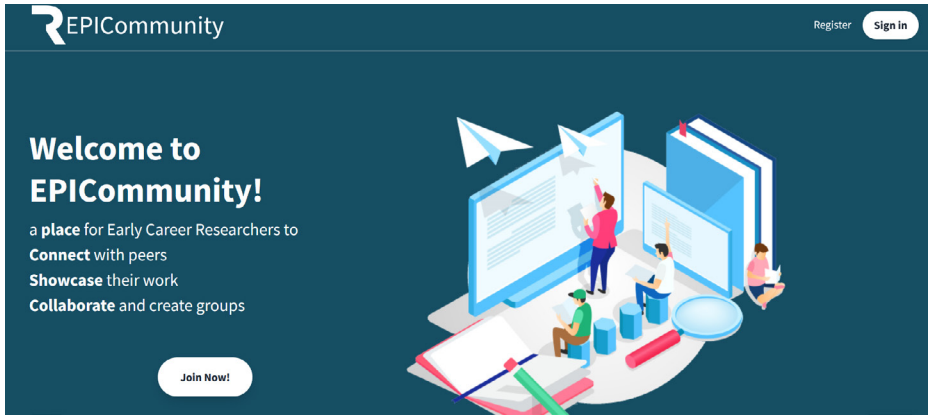
DIGITALISATION

One of the EU's main objectives for HEI is to support the digital path of internationalisation of higher education and vocational training institutes. Digitalisation has indeed the potential to become the key enabler for educational innovation and student mobility management. Accelerated by the pandemic, HEI are moving fast towards more flexible digital learning ecosystems, while students are expecting more digitalised processes in HEI. EPICUR has put in place dedicated knowledge teams to tackle these issues and develop, test and share digital solutions.

Towards "connected universities"

EPICUR's key strategic strength lies in the combination of its collaborative digital infrastructure (EPICUR Inter-University Campus) and its flexible learning formats (EPICUR Learning Pathways). EPICUR not only believes, but has also already shown during its pilot phase that digitalisation has the potential to become a key enabler for educational innovation and boosting student mobility across Europe.

Accelerated by the pandemic, EPICUR Alliance brought forward the creation of a flexible digital learning ecosystem, namely EPICUR Inter-University Campus (EIUC), very early on in its pilot. The EIUC integrates (a) a Centralised Campus Management System, and (b) a Learning Management System acting as gateway to local Learning Management Systems of the partners. All EPICUR members can enjoy its services smoothly by using their institutional account: all nine EPICUR partners are connected to the Centralised CMS, while six partners are currently connected to the LMS. The availability of the Inter-University Campus inspired and informed the development of innovative virtual and blended mobilities: the EPICUR Learning Pathways. By deploying these flexible learning pathways through its Inter-University Campus, EPICUR facilitated hundreds of European students to partake in mobility opportunities, even during periods of lock downs.



Join us on www.epicommunity.auth.gr

Inter-University Campus

The EPICUR Inter-University Campus (EIUC) is a central online gateway for supporting flexible virtual, physical and hybrid mobilities for all students and staff across the alliance. One of its unique features is its fully digitalised, paper-free process for student admissions that is supported by a secure, scalable and transparent solution based on free and open-source tech. Furthermore, EIUC offers innovative functionality to monitor mobilities, issue and recognise certifications (including ECTS and micro-credentials).

The main EIUC components are the following:

- **Single Sign On (SSO)** Services in order for the users to have access with their institutional account.
- **Virtual University Registrar System (VURS)**: Centralised Campus Management System/Student Information System (CMS/SIS) keeping the necessary information for the students' mobilities and services.
- **Virtual Campus Learning Platform (VCLP)**: The Learning Management System (LMS) of EPICUR along with a Decentralised LMS server acting as gateway to local LMSs of the partners.

EPICommunity

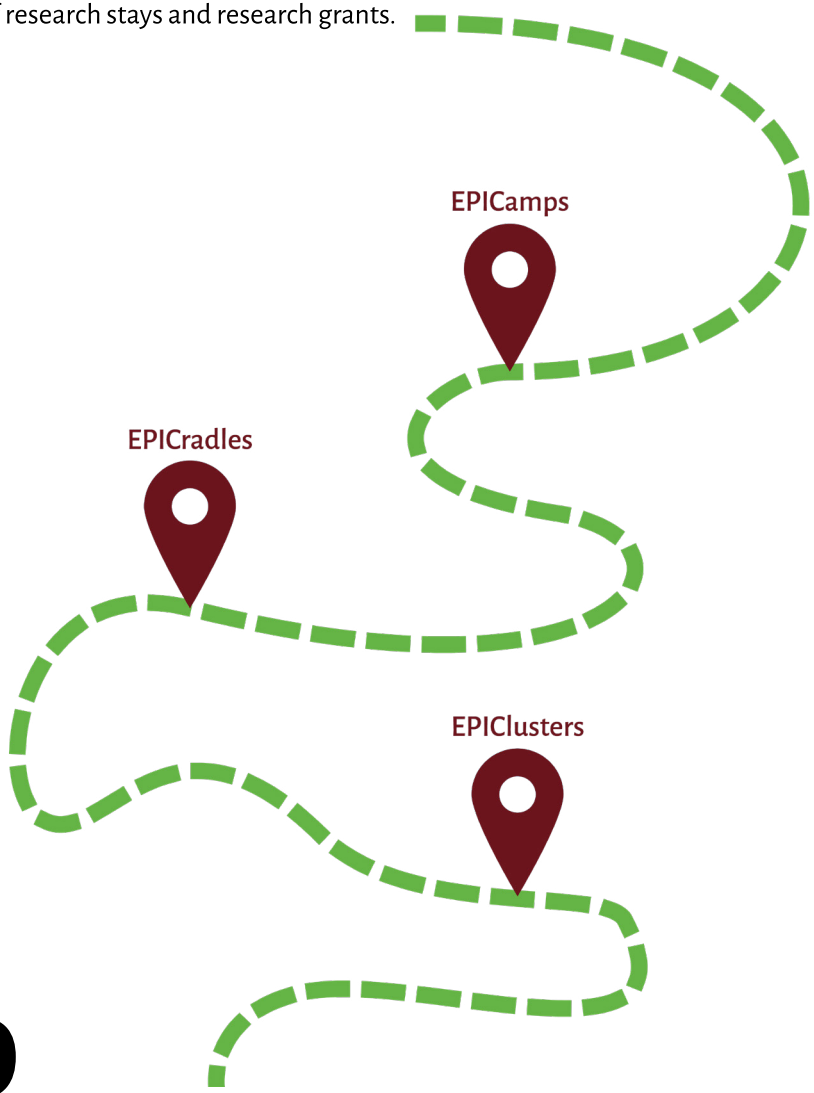
EPICommunity is a Social Network for Early Career Researchers (ECR's) to connect with peers, showcase their work, collaborate and create groups. It is an output of the alliance's EPICUR-Research project. Its design is based on solid frameworks developed by the alliance, namely EPICUR Researcher Assessment Framework (EPIQAssess) and EPICUR Researchers gamification framework (EPIGame). More specifically, EPIQAssess framework offers a multi-dimensional set of assessment criteria that fits the needs of today's researchers, including skills related to Open Science, green transition, leadership, entrepreneurship, and interculturality. EPIQAssess marries together both quantitative criteria as well as qualitative assessment practices. In addition, EPIGame gamification framework integrates inclusive gamification techniques and mechanics.

In EPICommunity, through gamification and analytics, the members can monitor their own progress, identify their personal strengths and weaknesses, as well as acquire the acknowledgement they desire.

RESEARCH AND TRANSFER

One of EPICUR's core missions is to boost research and innovation beyond borders and across disciplines. The alliance places a strong emphasis on empowering future and early career researchers to engage in international, trans-/interdisciplinary collaboration, tackle current societal challenges and develop the skills and competencies necessary for pursuing a successful career in research across a variety of sectors. Through the core projects EPICUR-Research and EPICUR SHAPE-IT the alliance endeavours to further these goals.

The EPICUR Alliance has developed and is currently testing bottom-up processes for emerging groups of early career researchers. The new collaborative formats are placed along a Pathway from EPICamps to EPIClusters, aiming at building interdisciplinary research communities and projects from the ground-up. The EPICUR Pathway to Research aims to support and engage early career researchers from across the Alliance and beyond with exciting new offers, including new modes of research stays and research grants.



EPICradles

EPICradles were launched in September 2022, in order to offer a short-term and hybrid mobility format enhancing European collaboration of ECRs by granting fellowships. In this first round, the format ran for approximately three months with two physical stays, during which the ECRs were able to jointly develop ideas. Four ECRs groups responded to the Call for Participation in April 2022 and were accepted by the selection committee. Interdisciplinarity within the EPICradle groups was reflected by the participants' primary field of research ranging from Sustainability & Agriculture to Economics. Since all research proposals were of high quality, the selection committee took the decision to award each participant with up to 1.000 Euro per month plus a 5.000 Euro group budget. In December 2022, the first round of EPICradles was wrapped up in an online closing event providing the opportunity for the EPICradle participants to share their interdisciplinary journeys, their hopes for future collaborations within the EPICUR Pathway to Research, as well as to reflect upon their experiences with the format, challenges and lessons learned.

EPIClusters

The EPIClusters are collaborative projects furthering international cooperation among researchers and external stakeholders aiming to tackle scientific and societal challenges and designed to support ECRs in realisation of innovative projects. EPIClusters offer tailor-made experiences in one of the EPICUR partner institutions and serve as a network for scientific exploration and ideas.
A call for applications published in late 2022, resulted in the selection of 4 projects bringing together 20 ECRs from across EPICUR partners. These four EPIClusters will receive up to 150.000 Euro funding per project:

- Seeking a new language: Narratives on home, (forced) migration and identity of newcoming Ukrainian youth to European cities;

- A sustainable and just renewable energy transition for Europe: exploring multidimensional barriers and potentials;

- CoCon Tomato – Co-Constructed early warning system against Tomato leafminer;

- ePiCNutrients – extracting nutrients from sewage deposits.

SOCIETAL ENGAGEMENT

EPICUR aims at creating impact for society and empowering our regions by establishing a highly dynamic and versatile, symbiotic system of exchange with our regional stakeholders. For EPICUR, the value of connecting citizens, society and science at the alliance level, will be to jointly engage citizens across Europe and thereby increase their understanding of the global challenges that unite us across the continent.

European Student Assembly

The European Student Assembly (ESA) is one of the flagship projects of the European Universities Community (EUC). #ESA23 (May 2023) took place at the European Parliament in Strasbourg and aimed at offering a platform for students from all over Europe, all academic levels and from various fields of study, to express their views on the challenges facing Europe. The event gathered 230 students from 44 European Universities Alliances to discuss on 10 different topics, leading to the drafting of 75 recommendations related to EU's strategic autonomy. Numerous dissemination activities took place following the event, including meetings with the European Commission Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture, France-Universités as well as at VivaTech. Since September 2023, ESA is part of the Erasmus+ project called EUC Voices (2023-2026) and UNISTRA has the lead on organising #ESA24 and the following editions.
9 EPICUR students took part in the first assembly's edition.

EPIDI

During the span of the EPIDI project which was finalised in March 2023, the collaborative efforts of EPIDI partners (Unistra, AMU, KIT) culminated in the development of e-learning modules. While still in the developmental phase, the e-learning modules were unveiled by each partner during national multiplier events in December 2022 which provided an opportunity for the target audience, comprising students, teachers, employers, and administrative staff, to actively engage with the content and contribute valuable feedback. Their insights played a pivotal role in refining the modules, ensuring a more polished and effective presentation.
The subsequent dissemination of the e-learning modules, complemented by the accompanying Best Practice Guide, took place at the final event - the European Conference held in March 2023 in Strasbourg. This final showcase not only marked the culmination of the EPIDI initiative but also served as a platform for sharing knowledge and insights derived from the project's outcomes.

Special initiatives for Ukraine

Adam Mickiewicz University, as one of polish universities belonging to alliances of European Universities, implemented the Polish National Agency for Academic Exchange programme "Solidarity with Ukraine". The programme, which ran from March 2022 until September 2023, allowed Ukrainian refugees to continue their studies, work on their dissertations or pursue any other form of education at Polish universities and institutes.

In December 2022, the Ministry of Education and Science broadened the scope of financial support opportunities for Polish universities in European University Alliances, and allocated additional funds for cooperation with partner universities in Ukraine.

The implementation of the project at AMU already occurred in February 2023 with the first Summer School, "Across disciplines: How to study in an interdisciplinary framework", prepared by a team attached to Interdisciplinary Individualised Studies in the Humanities and Social Sciences. By mid-June, a total of 10 thematic Summer Schools covering different scientific disciplines had been organised. Visitors were able to attend a range of lectures, workshops, meetings, cultural events and excursions around the university, Poznan and other parts of Poland.

Additionally, with the funding from AMU project "University of Tomorrow", a total of more than 20 Summer Schools will be organised on a variety of topics, where participants will not only acquire theoretical and practical knowledge but will also have the opportunity to familiarise themselves with the infrastructure of AMU and the city of Poznan, as well as Polish culture and history.

AMU Open University launched special courses for Ukrainian refugees offering free Polish language courses, lectures on Ukrainian culture and history and Polish-Ukrainian relations for Poznan residents. They also organised a special course "Polish as a Foreign Language in Polish School - a course for teachers teaching children and youth from Ukraine." - a training course addressed to teachers of Poznan schools who have little experience in teaching Polish as a foreign language and are now also teaching children from refugee families.
The university also organised humanitarian actions for those fleeing Russian aggression after February 24, 2022, and for those in need within Ukraine.

im. Adama
MICKIEWICZA

COLLEGIUM MINUS

GOVERNANCE

In order to become a full-fledged federation of universities by 2030, EPICUR must secure deepening and widening cooperation by moving from an ad hoc, project-based management approach in the pilot phase, to a structural integration of our members' policies and activities, paving the way for a sustainable long-term cooperation in a whole-of-institution approach.

The sustainability of the EPICUR pilot successes were guaranteed with the successful evaluation of the EPICUR-SHAPE-IT project that started on 1st November 2022. Its core ambition is to transform education, research and transfer practices and opportunities across member universities in order to develop original cutting-edge solutions and train new generations of European change makers able to shape a European society in transition and help overcome the formidable challenges.

To achieve this ambitious vision, EPICUR-SHAPE-IT aims to initiate a step-wise approach to secure deeper and wider cooperation, by moving from a pilot project-based management approach (phase 1), to a structural integration of policies and activities (phase 2), to more sustainable long-term cooperation in a whole-of-institution framework (phase 3).

Moving from a pilot project to a fully-fledged Federation of European Universities requires the governance model to adapt from a fast-paced experimental approach led by project teams to more methodical long-term structured cooperation that is embraced fully by each alliance partner institution as a whole. A significant revision of EPICUR's governance was therefore undertaken in order to achieve three main goals:

- **Combine** long-term strategic planning and short-term project management,
- **Integrate** EPICUR governance into each members' internal governance,
- **Facilitate** community participation and institutional engagement by developing a whole-of-institution approach.

The alliance commenced the experimentation with this renewed EPICUR governance architecture beginning of 2023, which is headed by an Executive Board, Management Board and thematic committees that are guided by five key principles: **Agility, Inclusiveness, Efficiency, Transparency, Consent.**

	Phase 1 ESTABLISH (2019-2022)	Phase 2 DEEPEN & BROADEN (2022-2025)	Phase 3 INTENSIFY (2025-2030)
Cooperation style	**Widespread** regular daily cooperation among alliance members	**Structural** deeper integration through integrated governance, shared structures and common policies and procedures	**Sustainable** long-term cooperation through a "Federation of universities"
Level	Small number of thematic **pilot** areas	**Gradual scale-up** across all university missions and activity areas	**Whole-institutional approach** with seamless governance and participation
Governance	**Project-based** management and governance structures	First joint **institutionally integrated** boards, committees and offices	Solid **legal basis** through agreements and legal instruments

Governance Week in Poznan

The first EPICUR Governance Week was held in June 2023, at the Adam Mickiewicz University. It was an important step in piloting a new governance format where the main decision-making bodies come together during several days for face-to-face meetings.

Executive Board in Odense

In March 2023, EPICUR held in Odense its first Executive Board. The rectors and presidents of the alliance's institutions discussed its future plans, with a particular focus on synergies between Teaching & Learning and research. The meeting provided a productive platform for the exchange of ideas and perspectives and many important strategic points were discussed. One key decision was the idea to set up a seed money scheme for research.

Policy developments

With a growing alliance and increasing solicitation to foster and develop ever closer collaborations between our university communities, it became increasingly apparent that a clear strategic policy was necessary to structure how the Alliance manages its members participation in parallel external projects, while at the same time respecting institutional autonomy. The EPICUR Executive Board consequently signed off a policy in March 2023 that lays down the main guidelines defining EPICUR's third-party funding strategy. EPICUR has outlined three levels of projects: alliance-wide inner core projects, outer circle satellite projects, and additional external projects. The project types are classified according to three criteria: 1) Relation with the EPICUR vision including the link to the EPICUR Ambition & Mission statement and level of institutionalisation, 2) Cooperation arrangements, 3) Typology of calls for funding. The key difference between core projects compared to satellite or additional external projects is that the core projects are fully integrated into the renewed EPICUR governance structures and follow its rules and procedures. At the end of the 2022-2023 academic year, EPICUR runs two core projects (EPICUR-SHAPE-IT and EPICUR-Research) and participates in two satellite projects (EPIDI and FOCI).

Associated Partners

After the successful associated partnership with ECOLAS during the pilot phase, EPICUR identified the following regional academic networks as associated partners: the Black Sea University Network, Eucor-the European Campus as well as ICA-Casee. In addition, the Erasmus Student Network and the Assembly of European Regions were invited to participate as associate partners.
EPICUR has agreed on two steps to initiate cooperation with its associate partnerships:
- A Letter of intent, signed at the end of 2022 between all associate partners and EPICUR to build a meta-network,
- Bilateral partnership agreements between each associate partner and EPICUR.
EPICUR's decision-making bodies as well as the legal department of the University of Strasbourg have agreed upon the bilateral partnership agreements, which are set to be signed in November 2023.

Student Board

The Student Board (SB) embarked on another year within EPICUR by setting up a Yearly Action Plan with concrete steps and clear goals assessed during an internal workshop about the SB's vision for the future of EPICUR. The SB strives for active participation and strong student involvement in EPICUR Governance and operational structures, as well as within work packages. The acknowledgement of students' contribution highlights the need for fully integrating the SB in highest-level decision-making bodies in the next years.

The SB priorities for 2022-23 included shaping an inclusive EPICUR Community for students and enhancing the SB's connections with local associations and society. Thus, increasing the visibility of EPICUR and the SB by means of continuous interactions and workshops on the topics of multicultural teamwork in international communities, students' active citizenship and communication.

Early Career Researchers Board

The Early Career Researchers (ECRs) are recognised by EPICUR as a particularly important target group, emphasising the alliance's belief that the new generation of European research leaders will be instrumental in driving institutional transformation. ECRs played a vital role in shaping the initiatives of EPICUR-Research and were instrumental in testing the EPICUR Pathway to Research, an experimental open-research format facilitating research mobility, competency development, and inter-regional exchanges for tackling the EPIChallenges. With the Student Board, the ECRs are actively participating in high-level decision-making bodies.

In May 2023, the ECR Board held a meeting at the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki. It was a pivotal event during which representatives from partner institutions were particularly focused on defining the role of the Board in this new phase of EPICUR. The development of the Graduate Hubs and the utilisation of the EPICommunity were also subject of fruitful discussions.

HOW IS EPICUR CHANGING YOUR UNIVERSITY?

AMU

EPICUR is changing Adam Mickiewicz University by giving the new oportunities to develop a modern, intercultural, green and digital university of the future. These include sustainable development, new mobility formats available for every member of the academic community, new possibilities for interdisciplinary and crosscultural collaboration in education and research areas and support with and for digital transformation.

AUTH

AUTH's participation in EPICUR focuses in its deep involvement in the separate projects that take place within, which demands an adamant institutional involvement. In particular, substantial institutional involvement is secured via the constitution of an internal EPICUR team, which involves all the relevant experts, almost exclusively Professors, that account for the different tasks, as well as those responsible for the seamless running of administrative affairs. The team also involves student representatives, who offer a much valuable insight. On a larger scale, EPICUR departmental coordinators have been appointed in all faculties, who in later stages of the project will facilitate the scale-up of the learning offer.

BOKU

The collaboration within EPICUR and the need for flexible solutions has resulted in a pilot in Austria to allow online admission for exchange students, therefore breaking barriers and fostering international mobilities. The EPICUR alliance and its ambitions are a corner stone for BOKU's future development and are therefore anchored in the universities long-term strategy. Through the engagement of BOKU's administrative staff, EPICUR has already been embedded in most of the support structures of the universities. With the future hybrid classroom, EPICUR will also contribute to innovation in teaching, fostering internationalisation in education and beyond.

KIT

In the last 12 months, EPICUR was decisive in starting to frame a KIT position towards topics such as Micro Credentials, and European degrees. The Liberal Arts and Sciences (LAS) study course that originates from the first EPICUR project was formally accepted within the KIT department council. For the first time ever at KIT, a study course was described using major and minor tracks, demonstrating the influence of EPICUR and its partners. KIT's rulebook for online exams was also revised and now includes EPICUR requirements. Since 2023, four of the five KIT vice presidents are now directly involved with regard to contents in EPICUR activities.

SDU

EPICUR serves as a catalyst for advancing the internationalisation efforts at SDU. By being a part of an alliance with such prestigious universities, EPICUR aligns with SDU's new strategy, which aims for even higher quality in people, education, and researchers.
EPICUR has prompted SDU to think about its approach to internationalisation and has initiated a process to incorporate even more internationalisation elements. In EPICUR, we have discovered an alliance that positively impacts all facets of SDU. All academic faculties can identify peer institutions within the alliance, and all service units will be influenced by the work within EPICUR.

UFR

EPICUR supports key UFR internationalisation, societal engagement, and instructional goals. EPICUR's challenge-based and transversally-oriented offers fully align with UFR's commitment to developing instructional experiences that foster societal engagement and cross-disciplinary competence development. The emerging, UFR-led EPICUR Teaching & Learning Centre (TLC) already shows promise as a hub for instructional collaboration, creativity, and adaptivity leading to a more intercultural, international, interdisciplinary, innovative, interactive and inclusive education. The TLC and EPICUR Inter-University Campus help advance UFR's effort to digitise and internationalise teaching for a more European learning experience.

UHA

EPICUR-SHAPE-IT is one of the flagship projects of UHA. In the 2022-23 academic year, UHA increased the size of the EPICUR team who doubled its effort to work closer with specialists from the university's administrative and support services, governance members, and faculties in order to anchor the project within the establishment on the long term. EPICUR is consistently taken into account in the construction of the establishment (multi-year project, training courses, etc.) and the closer collaboration with a sharing of resources and expertise among EPICUR partners contributed to an enriched academic environment and an increased international perspective within the university.

UNISTRA

The University of Strasbourg used the opportunity of the start of EPICUR-SHAPE-IT to establish the position of institutional coordinator and to strengthen Unistra's representation in the Management Board through separating the institutional voice from the strategic coordination of the overall alliance. Considerable work was also undertaken to strengthen institutional anchoring of EPICUR through ensuring vice-presidency representation in the key alliance mission areas, and building relays to the central EPICUR team. The next step is the increased involvement of support services and faculties in line with the university's international policy.

UVA

Since the foundations put in place during EPICUR's pilot phase, progress has continued with the institutionalisation of EPICUR across UvA. As such, the Executive Board is fully committed in advocating EPICUR as a strategic vehicle for broadening participation in student mobility. This is also permeating through at faculty level, with increased recognition of the added value of EPICUR's shorter term non-traditional mobilities. Whilst UvA outbound student mobility has so far been relatively modest, it's anticipated that an enhanced effort to promote EPICUR's visibility, will further accelerate student engagement and EPICUR's wider impact within UvA during the EPICUR's SHAPE-IT phase and beyond.

COMMUNICATION AND DISSEMINATION

Achieving impact within European areas of Research and Education requires both the continuation and strengthening of traditional communication and dissemination activities, and the development of a comprehensive plan to exploit key outputs produced by EPICUR. At the same time, it is of most importance to be in constant dialogue with other alliances and the European Commission as to share good practices and advancements.

DIALOGUE WITH ALLIANCES AND THE EUROPEAN COMMISSION

FOR-EU -Forum of European Universities

Since 2020, the European Alliances have developed together an informal cooperation network to share experiences, challenges and good practices both on a coordinator level and within specific topical subgroups to facilite mutual learning and exchange in a non-competitive environment. As coordinator of the EPICUR alliance, Unistra has been fully involved in FOREU1, the group of first generation alliances, for the past three years, in particular as co-leader of the coordinators' group which meets monthly. Experts from AUTh, KIT, UFR, UvA and UNISTRA currently lead or participate in several FOR-EU subgroups such as multilingualism, research and innovation, European degrees, digitalisation, project management and communication. This has helped to raise EPICUR's profile, including with the Commission and key players in the European higher education sector.

Dissemination related to the EPICUR Inter-University Campus

The "EPICUR Inter-University Campus – EIUC" implemented by AUTH, is a working ecosystem with a centralised CMS-Campus Management System (called VURS-Virtual University Registrar System) and a decentralised learning management system network. The possibilities offered by VURS and its' advantages were further disseminated this year via presentations given in meetings held with representatives from the DG EAC (March and April 2023) as well as in a specific EUA workshop on Digital Transformation held in Thessaloniki, Greece (March 2023). During these events, the function advantages of VURS were communicated to key stakeholders from the education sector.

Moreover an exploratory meeting took place on 21st April 2023 in Brussels to present the EPICUR Inter-University Campus (EIUC) digital solutions deployed by the Alliance and to discuss possible further opportunities of EPICUR to be a role-model in the digital domain. The discussions included a state-of-play on the implementation of Erasmus Without Paper (EWP), a live demo of the EPICUR Inter-University Campus (EIUC), establishing links to the networks Géant and EduGAIN to pilot the use of MyAcademicID, and establishing links to national initiatives such as SMILE (FR), and SURF (NL).

Meeting of the European Universities alliances Rectors

On 30-31 January 2023, the European Commission set up a meeting of the European Universities alliances Rectors, which was an important chance to exchange on the good practices implemented in their respective alliances. The EPICUR alliance was represented by Jens Ringsmose, the Rector of the University of Southern Denmark. Throughout different sessions and discussions, Jens Ringsmose had the opportunity to talk about revision of EPICUR's governance, EPICUR successes and good practices regarding mobility, and EPICUR long-term cooperation models. Moreover, EPICUR's cooperation with other alliances (for example, for the FOCI project) and its commitment for exchanging with other alliances on a constant basis is already by itself the realisation of the European Higher Education cooperation's objective.

European Commission dialogue with the Alliance coordinators

Several meetings were organised by the European Commission with the coordinators of European Universities to provide updates on policy initiatives and to gather valuable feed back from the alliances on this flagship initiative in the Higher Education Area. The main themes covered during the consultations were the future of the European Universities Initiative through the Monitoring framework and the Post-2027 investment pathway, as well as the policy experimentation initiative on the European Degree Label and a legal entity for alliances. In addition to online meetings in January and June 2023, a first physical meeting since the pandemic period,bringing together the coordinators of all alliances, took place in March 2023, which proved to be an excellent opportunity for alliances to co-design the agenda for the future of the initiative.

Spreading innovative results from European University Alliances to other higher education institutions, 3-5 May 2023

BOKU presented in Bergen (Norway) EPICUR's outreach and dissemination activities and engaged in valuable discussions about the future of European University Alliances with representatives from over 40 alliances, 37 additional HEIs, national and European representatives, as well as different stakeholders. The statement creating European Universities – "so simple, but so difficult". by a representative of the European Commission showed the importance of role models, and in this respect EPICUR's representation was especially useful to new alliances and interested universities.

MAIN EVENTS

On 14-16 September 2022, EPICUR celebrated its third Annual Forum with a diverse and exciting programme. Organised by the University of Freiburg, this Forum was the first one to take place physically and enabled more than 150 participants from all over the alliance and beyond to come together. Aiming primarily at EPICUR staff members, rectors, researchers and students from the nine partner institutions, the Forum was organised as a public event providing an opportunity to connect, to share experiences and to jointly develop ideas for the roll-out phase of EPICUR. Starting off with the first ever EPICUR Science Slam, offering the stage for Early Career Researchers from the EPICUR partners, the Forum featured different formats including panel discussions, roundtables, a posterwalk and plenaries. An online-keynote speech by Vanessa Debiais-Sainton and greetings from the EU-Commissioner Mariya Gabriel opened this year's EPICUR Forum. The third day was dedicated to EPICUR internal meetings.

On 8-10 February 2023, the EPICUR alliance organised the kick-off of its new phase "EPICUR-SHAPE-IT" at the European Parliament in Strasbourg. The event brought together over 100 people - students, researchers, teachers, members of the associated partners, - with the ultimate goal of developing the EPICUR 2022-2026 action plan.

During the first day, the participants of the plenary sessions had the opportunity to recall the objectives and means of action to be developed within the roll-out phase, whilst the university representatives were able to detail the vision and commitment of their institution within the alliance.

The next two days were dedicated to the strategic orientations, the means to be mobilised, the new challenges and the distribution of missions between the EPICUR teams and the associated partners.

A YEAR IN THE LIFE OF EPICUR

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p. 45 (from the top left to the bottom right) - Unistra (Alexandre Tatay), UFR, Margarita Ialtyr, Katharina Kiefel, UFR (Markus Schwerer), BOKU.

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Print:
department of internal logistics
of University of Strasbourg.
Printed on 100% recycled paper
in March, 2024

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Funded by the European Union. Views and opinions expressed are however those of the author(s) only and do not reflect those of the European Union or European Education and Culture Executive Agency (EACEA). Neither the European Union nor the granting authority can be held responsible for them.