Mission Statement

European Reform University Alliance - ERUA

Vision

We share a vision of universities as creative spaces, an awareness of the power of experimental approaches, and an understanding of the promises of diversity. To address the challenges and problems of today, we want to bring together academics from all of Europe and students from the top and bottom socio-economic deciles, from rural and urban settings, from local and global backgrounds. Together we aim to shape a more just, open and inclusive society.

Mission

As a European University Initiative we offer students a rich and diverse environment with a shared pedagogical approach focused on project-based learning, societal challenges and critical thinking. We develop personalised learning pathways in a multilingual, multicultural environment. We offer the framework and structures to allow students from different backgrounds to become part of a shared European experience.

We pursue excellence in research by promoting free thinking, a bottom-up approach and open science. We cover most disciplinary fields with a particularly strong profile in the Humanities, Social Sciences and Arts. This enables us to develop original interdisciplinary approaches and new answers and solutions to contemporary problems and challenges.

Our educational programmes and research projects are geared towards societal impact. To achieve this we work in close collaboration with a wide range of actors. As a European University we combine local engagement and global vision.

As Reform Universities we continuously question and transform our institutions. We foster the critical function of the modern university by reflecting upon, assessing and advancing alternatives to current models. We do so by drawing upon the diverse experiences and backgrounds of the university community, which embody the diversity of the society around us, and encourage and allow all to participate in shaping the future of the university.

ERUA

Our initiative

Shared identity

Our five universities embody change and share a common identity. They were created to experiment and propose alternative approaches to higher education and research.

University of Paris 8, University of Konstanz and Roskilde University are reform universities. They were established in the 1960s and 1970s when rigid higher education systems proved ill-prepared for broadening access to higher education as well as meeting the needs and addressing challenges of rapidly changing societies and the increasing importance of knowledge in economy and policy.

- The University of Konstanz proposed a new model combining *flattened hierarchy, flexible structure, interdisciplinary setup, excellent research* and *social responsibility*;

- Roskilde University became a pioneer in *problem-oriented* and *project-based* teaching and learning;

- The University of Paris 8 institutionalised various dimensions of *critical thinking* and *societal engagement*.

The two younger institutions were born in different contexts, but with similar ambitions.

- The University of the Aegean (UAegean) is an archipelago-border university with 6 campuses on 6 different Greek islands. Founded in the mid 1980s it introduced a *decentered organizational model* for higher education and implemented the idea of a *multi-insularity development* in the fragmented and culturally diverse Aegean region.

- The New Bulgarian University (NBU) was founded in 1991 as an autonomous private institution to propose an alternative to the predominant Soviet style Higher Education by emphasising *liberal entrepreneurial* and *student-centered approaches*.

Diversity of profiles

Each of our universities has developed along different lines, adapting to the needs and potential of different environments. As a result, our five universities harbor a remarkable diversity:

- of place

Paris 8 and NBU are situated in a metropolis, Roskilde in a semi-rural setting not far from Copenhagen, Konstanz in the woods overlooking an Alpine lake in close proximity to Switzerland, Austria and Liechtenstein and very much shaped by this border location, whereas the University of the Aegean is spread across an archipelago in a European border region.

ERUA

- of student bodies

Our environment has shaped the diversity of our student bodies. On the one side, Paris 8 is located in the poorest department in France and hosts a very diverse student body from all social backgrounds with 50% of students having roots in the Global South, whereas the UAaegean is targeting mainly students from the islands of the archipelago, an area with specific socio-economical and geographical characteristics and nowadays facing the new needs created by the migration flows. On the other, Konstanz is situated on the border to Switzerland in one of the more affluent regions of Germany and is an attractive destination for excellent international students and researchers, whereas many students at the NBU belong to the socio-cultural elite of the country. Finally, Roskilde draws students both from the Copenhagen elites and the rural regions around it.

- of organisational model and strategy

Paris 8 and Roskilde pride themselves on their past as experimental universities. They both questioned the very notion of a university as experimental university centres. The NBU, like a mirror in a radically different environment, was founded as a private university to enable the Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences to flourish in former communist Bulgaria. UAegean has been able to create a unified university, spanning six islands and two administrative regions through an appropriate and responsive organisation model. Konstanz created an alternative campus, bringing students and staff together in new ways and through this, recently has been one of the most successful universities in the German Exzellenzinitiative.

Common perspective

Our five universities all share a strong scientific perspective: that of the Social Sciences, the Humanities and the Arts. Seen from this angle, ERUA is deeply complementary.

- Paris 8 is strongly specialised in the SSH and especially in the Arts, where its main international visibility lies. Paris 8 also has some research in Computer Sciences and Mathematics, notably in relation with the SSH.

- We find this same focus on the SSH at Roskilde, but the Arts are less present and instead, we find a strong focus in the Environmental Sciences and a presence in the main Natural Sciences.

- Konstanz is the most comprehensive institution in the alliance. Still, it is also strongly specialised in the SSH, especially in the Humanities, Politics and Public Administration, and in Psychology. Outside this domain, it is also strong in Chemistry, Physics, Mathematics, Information Sciences and the Nano and Materials Sciences. As with Roskilde, all major disciplines of the Natural Sciences feature in their teaching portfolio.

- UAegean shares with Konstanz the profile of an SSH-heavy institution with some strong disciplines in the Natural Sciences, such as Computer Sciences, Engineering and Mathematics, Environmental Sciences and the Earth and Marine

Life Sciences. This portfolio quite logically mirrors the local situation of an archipelago university - and the issues the archipelago and its university face with a focus on local social priorities and each island hosting a different faculty.

- NBU is the most specialised institution. Like Paris 8, it focuses almost exclusively on the SSH and especially the Arts, with only the Computer Sciences being a true point of specialisation outside of the SSH and Arts. However, NBUs profile differs in that whilst Paris 8 focuses on contemporary arts practice, NBU is exceptionally strong in the applied arts and design.

This combination of profiles and portfolios provides the opportunity of designing new original interaction. As a result, the profile of the alliance as a whole can be described as follows:

ERUA (a) has a common core competence in the SSH on top of which (b) its members are active in domains of Natural Sciences, Computer Sciences and Engineering (via competences notably of Konstanz, UAegean and Roskilde) and (c) to the Arts (via Paris 8 and NBU).

A common future

Our shared identity and the complementarity of our profiles are perfectly suited to our ambition of building a European University.

A different university

All five of our universities have an impressive track record of encouraging interdisciplinarity among the Social Sciences, the Humanities and the Arts, as well as between them and the natural sciences.

This approach reflects ERUA's understanding of what a European University should look like. It concerns the ERUA's members both as educational institutions and as research centers. The European University we are attempting to build will provide a critical policy and broad societal assessment of all areas of expertise we cover, including fields of natural sciences, such as physics, which are rarely viewed in terms of their relevance to societal implications and even less often from the perspective of the SSH and Arts.

This distinguishes us from specialised institutions and STEM focused comprehensive universities. It makes us especially well qualified to address the challenges of higher education today.

Transforming higher education

Twentieth-century reform universities emphasized the need for interdisciplinary research and education, student-centered learning and social engagement. These ideals are more relevant than ever and they have been partially embraced by many mainstream institutions. However, it is imperative to reconsider what these ideals mean under 21st century conditions. ERUA will promote experiments within higher education and research. All universities within ERUA already have several initiatives that encourage experimentation. The alliance brings these initiatives into a productive dialogue with one another, bearing in mind that the secret of their success is not to create a blueprint for reform and then put it into practice, but to nurture a critical attitude towards new challenges from both within and beyond Higher Education.

The main transformations which higher education institutions undergo are non-technological in nature. They follow from broader societal conditions. ERUA is based on a critical assessment of how changes in higher education relate to wider societal crisis, risk processes, but also opportunities, etc.

- *Opening*. In recent decades, the number of students in higher education has increased dramatically all over the world. This has put new economic pressures on

governments and public university systems. It has also led universities to include new types of students and to introduce new educational practices.

- *Migration*. The demographics of Europe, as well as other parts of the world, are changing. This not only results in new kinds of students, but also opens up new possibilities for the rest of society while also posing risks and new demands.

- *Communication*. These changes are not only happening through the movement of people, but also through increasing communication. Students, researchers and the general public are increasingly connected to other cultures across the world. There is now truly a global market of knowledge with the potential and the dangers that this implies.

- *Participation*. The increasing number and different backgrounds of students also questions the societal role of universities. As a larger percentage of the population enters university, it may no longer be enough just to educate specialists. Universities also need to engage in educating active citizens, who can navigate not only in a national context, but also on a European and global level. Universities may therefore also be important venues for addressing the current crisis of participation and the rise of populism in the European Union and beyond.

- *Sustainability*. The global dissemination of science and technology has not only transformed higher education, but also cultures, societies and the natural environment. Science and technology have both created many of our problems whilst enabling possible solutions. As venues of science and technology, universities are in a unique position to address dynamic global changes in a rational and sustainable fashion but they need input from the humanities and social sciences.

We wish to build an institution that shows in an exemplary manner how these transformations can be tackled and what a genuinely international, critical and European university should look like. Within the critical reflections on these conditions we are determined to innovate and experiment with new approaches to all central university activities such as curricula development, governance models, etc.

As a long term goal is to create a shared identity among students, staff and faculty within ERUA as belonging to a special group of European experimental institutions. By experimental institutions, we mean institutions that have a special responsibility for the critical reevaluation and continuous development of the structures of higher education and research and that offer new models for other institutions of higher education to follow.

The creation of models for other European institutions of higher education is thus a key function of our initiative.

Engaging Europe

Together, we will keep a strong **focus on societal impact**. Whatever we concern ourselves with we will do it from the critical perspective of what it means for society. We also look at ourselves from this same angle. We are continuously concerned with

how we must transform our institutions to be able play a vital societal role through excellent scholarship and decisive action. It is from this point of view that we define for ourselves what we intend to contribute to society.

Secondly, we will **perpetually reflect critically upon and reinvent ourselves** so as to keep our critical edge. A long-term perspective to achieve this is to increase the diversity of our institutions. They need to represent a bundle of perspectives larger than that of one country and its usual partners. This is a key function of our initiative.

Thirdly, we will **scale up dissemination at European and global level**. Despite being internationalized, as long as we remain dependent on national policies, sources of revenue, accreditation rules, etc., our ambitions will be constrained. Europe must become part of our institutional setup. Only then can we claim that our students and staff are truly European citizens. And, as Europe is going global, we too will then be able to transcend the European space.

The future of ERUA

In three years' time, all of our students will have been exposed to an ERUA experience. Our non-academic staff, by sharing best-practice examples, will be able to provide an even more supportive learning and teaching environment. On our seamlessly joint virtual and physical campus, young as well as senior researchers will have identified joint research projects which will generate joint applications for third-party funding. Our governance structure will be both strong and flexible enough to take our alliance into its post-funding stage and to guarantee the sustainability of the structures which we will have established.

As a European University we will be firmly both embedded in, and offer important services to, our (local, regional, national, and European) communities. Specifically, ERUA, will have a measurable impact on the community of European institutions of Higher Education, not because we have become a template, but because we are a relay for transformation.

By 2025, our communities will have developed a common identity as ERUA students and staff. We will have become a truly European University in which our respective institutions find their place just as faculties and departments find their place in today's universities.

ERUA

Our action plan for the funding period

Goals and objectives

During the first 3 years, we will lay the foundations for our common future. We will do this by implementing a European University with a strong focus on the university's societal role according to the following three goals and their associated objectives.

1. We will engage in a bold reform of our current paradigm of collaboration to counteract institutional separation along national lines.
   a. We will construct common curricula and increase the compatibility of existing ones through the implementation of a bottom-up process of needs assessment, wide consultation and collaboration. We will ensure that these curricula enable either physical or virtual student mobility with a long-term target of 100%.
   b. We will create a strong community spanning our campuses placing specific emphasis on staff, since this is where identity and feeling of belonging are fostered in a durable fashion.
   c. We will create a common campus that seamlessly combines physical and virtual components.
2. We will set up the institutional structures on which individual policies and activities of ERUA's members will unfold.
   a. We will develop a flexible governance model and organisational forms that will be reflexive and capable of continuous transformation to adapt to changing environments.
   b. We will develop this organisational model in a way that ensures wide participation of the communities of ERUA and those of the wider circle of stakeholders and partners in the definition of our trajectory.
   c. We will establish a strong culture of dissemination and outreach based on powerful and well targeted services.
3. We will establish ERUA as a prime destination for students, academic institutions, policy makers and civil society with a focus on social sciences, humanities and arts contribution to societal challenges.
   a. We will foster creativity and open experimentation at ERUA according to our belief that all science is problem-solving - in the domains of research, teaching and outreach, but also concerning the very setup of our own institution by the installment of feedback loops that link creative work back to governance.
   b. We will be a relay for innovation in the academic sector by providing Think-Tank-type services to other actors to help them build on innovations developed at ERUA or elsewhere.
   c. We will accompany creative work and experimentation in a way that helps increase its innovative edge, its capacity for scaleup, its dissemination and ensures its social impact.

These goals will enable us to setup a new paradigm in which the activities of individual institutions are built around a common framework of educational policies, governance, and other activities.

This paradigmatic change entails a renewal of our own position as reform institutions and calls for our genuine involvement in an innovative transformation process.

These are ambitious goals for the funding period, but they are necessary so that we can lay down the foundations for the deployment of our integration programme at the scale of 10 and 20 years.

Key activities

Our 6 work packages are organised along 2 main feedback loops.
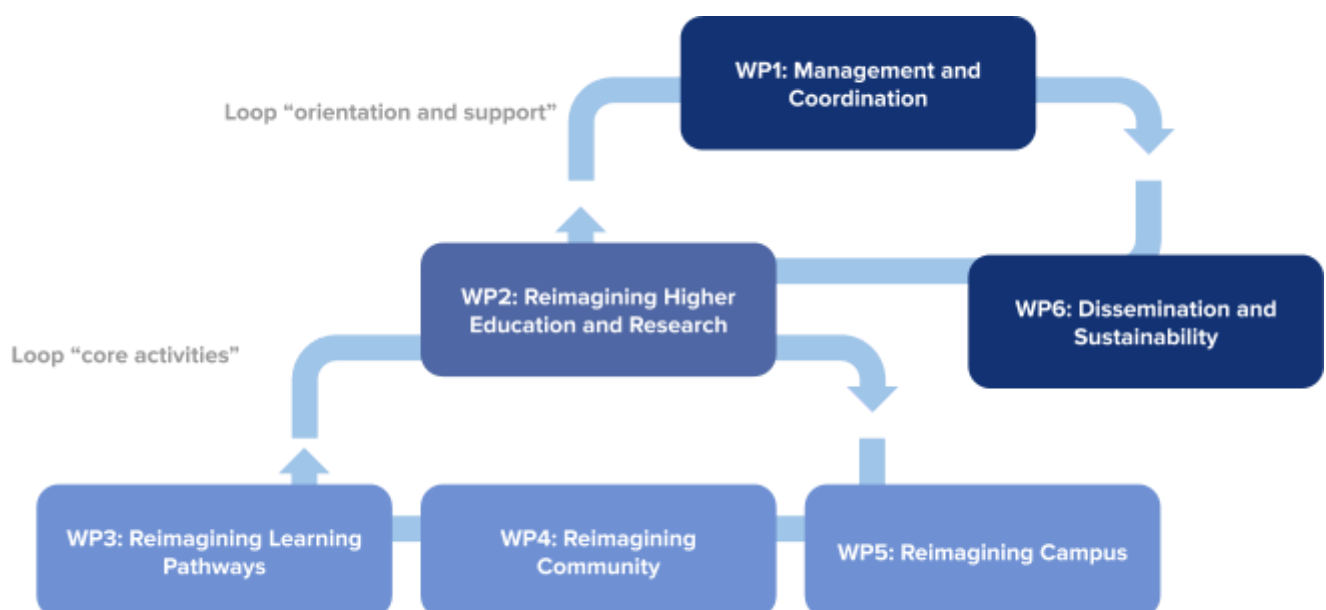
The first loop

The first loop encompasses WP1 (Management), WP6 (Dissemination) and WP2 (Reimagining Higher Education and Research). This loop provides a direct and supporting framework that ensures the impact of the "core activities" WP3, 4 and 5 (Learning Pathways, Community, and Campus).

We will develop the long-term governance model during the project itself out of the temporary project governance. We will start out with a light framework governance with a single small coordination instance overseeing an important number of workgroups. In time we will establish a full governance that is simultaneously efficient and bottom-up. The development of the model will rely on feedback from the other WP, especially on WP2. Feedback and communication will be at the heart of the

model, rather than large councils representing all stakeholders, a multiplication of advisory bodies or an intricate system of checks and balances.

Our concept for Dissemination and Sustainability relies on pooling of our resources, developing a common communication strategy, developing specific communication and dissemination tools for the different WP and devising a common funding strategy to develop the initiative.

But this first feedback loop builds something more than simply the governance and dissemination framework: WP2 will include an Observatory on innovative teaching and a Think Tank on the impact of the Social Sciences and Humanities and specifically on interdisciplinary links to other fields of science and both structures will be closely linked to "core activities" work packages WP3, 4 and 5 on the key aspects of Teaching, Community and Campus. Observatory and Think Tank will accompany those work packages by e.g. elaborating an initial mapping of existing initiatives across ERUA and publicising them, by providing context, benchmarks in international perspective. It will also distill the experience gathered through existing and future projects into formats which are immediately useful to the community and to governance alike.

Of course, WP3, 4 and 5 are also linked directly to Governance and Dissemination and vice versa, but WP2 provides the main tools that shape our governance, and specifically, a plan-do-check-act cycle work in the complex setting of an academic alliance encompassing all missions of the member institutions. Here, circulation of information and feedback in a suitable format is key.

However, WP2 is not reduced to the two mentioned structures - the Observatory and the Think Tank. WP2 will ensure that (1) ERUA provides spaces for experimentation and innovation, that (2) innovative projects of diverse types can count on intellectual support (contextualising, benchmarking) to help them reach their innovative potential and truly become cutting edge, that (3) such projects will be noticed and receive due credit and follow-up to make sure that they can develop an impact corresponding to their potential within and without the initiative and that (4) they integrate into an overall development framework so that the projects foster ERUA's profile and missions.

WP2 also contains concrete tools and support functions: e.g. a framework to provide spaces, funds and time for creative experimentation in teaching with a special focus on integrating multi-campus teaching; the pooling of competences of research support offices across ERUA; an alliance-wide directory of potential partners.

The second loop

The second loop comprising WP2 (Reimagining Higher Education and Research) and WP3, 4 and 5 (Learning Pathways, Community and Campus) emphasises the close connection they are bound to have. WP2 will of course be a focal point, but continuity of personnel among the workgroups and flow of exchange will also link the others (e.g. aspects of community and campus are obviously closely related). WP3, 4 and 5 will shoulder the main work in the construction of the European University.

We will rethink our curricula and develop an integrated framework for development of learning pathways gradually making our respective teaching offers compatible. Successful experiments conducted in WP2 will be developed and implemented here - be it within their pilot phase or when scaling up.

Building a community is a key objective for the construction of a European university. We believe that the creation of community should place the main attention on staff and professional development - always including academic and non-academic staff. Community-building and the creation of a feeling of belonging among the students can only yield sustainable impact if it builds on the community and feeling of belonging of staff. Otherwise, even if it succeeds, it can be expected to be short-lived. Mobility is another key aspect of community building (again: staff as well as student mobility, and administrative as well as academic staff), as is a clear strategy to support and develop diversity.

Concerning the campus, we will work on digital as well as physical connections among the different campuses, creating a virtual level of cooperation and at the same time making ERUA "alive" in the physical campuses. Regional involvement will also in part be tackled here in close articulation with WP2.

The feedback loops we install ensure that all local actions will be linked to ERUA's overall trajectory.