

EUNIC ast

The European University of Islands, Ports and Coastal Territories





Our mission

to support a next generation of European and global students and citizens who are committed to meeting sustainability challenges

to foster a multicultural, multilingual and inclusive European academic environment which is open to the world

to enhance our collective capacity to better respond to the societal and environmental challenges faced by our islands and coastal communities

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1 An alliance shaped by the Seas

Europe and the Blue Planet

Seen from space, our continents are islands in a vast ocean covering over 70% of the surface of the Earth. Looking into space, astronomers search for H₂O as a proxy for life, mining asteroids whose water transformed our planet 4.5 billion years ago.

With these facts in mind, it is not surprising that the Sea has shaped our history and culture. Yet, we usually underestimate both the extent to which this is true and how specific this is to Europe.

Indeed, despite occupying less than 7% of the landmass of the earth, over 15% of the world's coastlines are European. This feature, unique amongst all continents, has had a profound impact on what makes us European and helps explain our historico-cultural and linguistic diversity when compared to China, Africa, India, or the Americas¹.

This is true from ancient times, when the first trading networks emerged in the Eastern Mediterranean with Phoenician trade and the Greek city-states, through the Mare Nostrum of the Roman empire, up to the great Viking explorers of the Dark Ages. It is our diversity and our propensity to set sail on the open ocean that led to an era of exploration that shaped the contemporary world. Today, the Blue Planet is confronted by climate change and coasts and islands are once again on the front line: rising sea levels are not only a subject to be studied but an existential threat, and adapting is an urgent necessity and a collective challenge.

This specific history and geography are at the heart of our European University, EUNICoast, whose ports and islands connect Europe to the world: South to Africa through Sardinia and the Balearic Islands, West to the Americas through the Azores and French Antilles, North to the Arctic with the Faroe Islands and the Baltic, East towards Asia through Burgas and Patras.

¹ See Jared Diamond's classic book *Guns, Germs and Steel* (1997) and David Abulafia's *The Great Sea: A Human History of the Mediterranean* (2011) and *The Boundless Sea: A Human History of the Oceans* (2019), which show how the complex coastlines of Europe help explain the human diversity of our continent and the age of discovery.

Islands and Ports

Islands and Ports are at the heart of European identity. Ports, as hubs of connectivity, represent the vitality of global networks. They are places where people meet and mix, where commercial trade and cultural exchange thrive. Each island, on the other hand, is unique, marked by the resilience of small communities, endemic biodiversity and strong local identity. Together they symbolise the diversity of Europe and the importance of connections.

Anchored to the sea in spirit and practice, our European University alliance seeks to awaken an appreciation for the maritime world's significance. For us, the sea is not a physical boundary, but a conduit of shared experiences, economic prosperity, and ecological balance. By instilling a deep-rooted connection to the sea, we empower our students to engage meaningfully with both ports and islands, and the intricate interplay between them.

Islands themselves are constant reminders of our origins. They represent microcosms of uniqueness and diversity, often challenged by their small size, low population

density, and dependence on a narrow range of industries or sectors for their livelihood². By studying them, we unlock insights into adaptation, sustainability, and the essence of self-reliance. By delving into their distinct challenges and advantages, we enable our students to develop solutions that resonate far beyond their shores. Our alliance aligns with EU objectives for island regions³, as we jointly weave a narrative of economic, social, and territorial cohesion, diminishing disparities and fostering the development of our islands.

Together we aim to nurture the human dimension of these two distinct yet interconnected elements. We envision a world where ports not only facilitate trade but also cultivate cultural exchange, where islands are not isolated outposts but crossroads for the transmission of innovations. Our aim is to create an educational environment that merges the dynamism of ports with the interconnectedness of islands.

Our focus on islands and ports is thus far more than just a symbol. It emphasises the way in which universities are places for deep thinking, thoughtfulness, experimentation and creativity. It underlines the importance of our role in creating meaningful connections and communication between our territories and our communities.

² Many islands depend heavily on **tourism**, which can lead to **seasonal vulnerabilities and economic instability during off-peak seasons**. This reliance on a single industry makes the economy more susceptible to external factors like global economic downturns or health crises like the COVID-19 pandemic. Some islands may depend largely on **agriculture or fishing** which can be **risky if these industries face challenges such as environmental changes, overfishing, or market fluctuations**. Islands often rely on **maritime and air transport for the import and export of goods**. A limited range of transport options can mean **higher costs and difficulties in maintaining consistent supply chains**.

³ See article 174 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union.

This focus drives our commitment to fostering an inclusive community of scholars, practitioners, and thinkers who share our passion for maritime studies, the ocean as a living space and economic resource, the human dimension of ports and islands, and the transformative potential of education. United in our commitment to overcome shared challenges stemming from our peripherality and maritime nature⁴, we aim to produce graduates who embody the essence of interconnectedness — from ports to islands and beyond. Together, we envision a future where geographical boundaries no longer constrain the limitless human imagination.

This vision drives our European University and shapes our priorities and actions. In ten years, EUNICoast will be a well-established European University with a shared campus and joint educational offering at all levels, whose students can build flexible learning paths that match their needs and their aspirations – as well as those of our territories and Europe overall. Our education will be research-based, problem-oriented and deeply linked to innovation and technology transfer in our territories. It will drive our communities’ public engagement towards society.

We will become a leading university and worldwide benchmark for excellence in European seas and related academic “Blue Skills”.

⁴ See European Parliament resolution of 7 June 2022 on [EU islands and cohesion policy: current situation and future challenges](#)

2 Working together

for our communities and Europe

Covering the world and the seven seas

As the following map shows, EUNICoast forms a constellation connecting the seas and islands of Europe to the world. Together we cover not only the four main European areas but ten seas ranging from the Baltic to the Black Sea, through the Mediterranean and its inner seas (Adriatic, Ionian, Tyrrhenian) to the Atlantic. We stretch from the Tropics in the Caribbean to the borders of the Arctic Ocean.



Deeply embedded in our territories

The **size of our universities** reflects that of their communities and the role of the cities in which they are situated, ranging from half a thousand students in Åland to over thirty thousand in Patras. Although most of our universities are of small size (between a few hundreds and fifteen thousand students), together our 13 universities bring together more than 100,000 students and close to 10,000 academic and administrative staff.

Like the islands or peninsulas in which they are situated, their small size makes connections crucial: alone none of us has the critical mass to address the global challenges facing our lands or provide the breadth of knowledge that our students need. Together, however, we can establish strong connections and attain a critical mass to meet those challenges.

We share **similar challenges and opportunities** linked to our island, coastal, and marine contexts but bring different complementary areas

of expertise. Together we aim to explore and design new approaches in teaching, research, innovation, and outreach that can benefit Europe as a whole.

Our **unique geographical reach** at the interface between Europe and the broader world enriches our perspective, ensuring that our contributions to addressing the challenges of Europe's Blue Economy⁵ are well-rounded, informed, and effective.

Our **regional embeddedness**, characteristic of island communities, allows us to foster a collaborative culture with industry, government, and community groups, thereby enabling a granular understanding of our regional challenges and the ability to enact effective, knowledge-driven solutions.

⁵ The Blue Economy spans the sustainable management and protection of water and coastal ecosystems, and is a crucial element of what the UN terms the water-energy-food "nexus".

Designed in collaboration with other European Universities

We have designed our proposal in close interaction with the two existing European Universities that have chosen the Sea as a focus, SEA-EU (122,854 students and 16,912 staff⁶) and EU-CONEXUS (around 70,000 students and 5,500 staff⁷), with whom we have shared various seminars as well as draft versions of key sections of our proposal. EU-CONEXUS identifies as the European University for Smart Urban Coastal Sustainability “covering the smart urban sustainable coastal development from a holistic perspective”, whereas SEA-EU has a broad vision that supports “Living sustainably by, from and with the sea”.

We share a common commitment to a Europe of the Seas and the broader Blue Economy but bring specific areas of expertise (see “Our areas of focus”) as well as a unique geographical reach, which perfectly complement the respective strengths of SEA-EU and EU-CONEXUS. Together our expertise ranges from urban coastal

sustainability (EU-CONEXUS), to islands and ports (EUNICoast) and on to the deep ocean (SEA-EU).

In addition, we share the commitment of European Universities such as EU GREEN, COLOURS (COLlaborative innOvative sUustainable Regional univerSities), and E³UDRES² to poorly communicated peripheral regions, firmly believing in their potential as drivers of innovation and new problem-solving approaches. The COLOURS alliance demonstrates how collaborative efforts among universities can lead to sustainable development and innovation in peripheral areas. Similarly, the E³UDRES² initiative exemplifies a focus on empowering these regions, showcasing their capacity to offer unique insights and solutions to European and global challenges⁸, acting as a living laboratory for the society of the future. In this context, the islands where many of our universities are located not only embody the challenges of a more equal, better-integrated Europe but also provide a rich tapestry of opportunities for pioneering and context-specific innovations.

Finally, we are fully aligned with the many existing European Universities that have placed societal challenges, and in particular climate change, at the heart of their approach. This includes alliances like Arqus, which promotes transformative excellence with a focus on sustainability and

⁶ <https://osbe.sea-eu.org/>

⁷ ETER data and figures for the recently-joined members.

⁸ As mentioned above: **environmental and climate challenges** related to rising sea levels, coastal erosion, and extreme weather events; **economic diversification needs** as islands are often heavily reliant on tourism and primary sectors; **biodiversity preservation and ecological sustainability** related to the impact of human activities such as overfishing and marine pollution; **infrastructure and health system development**; as well as **depopulation and brain drain**.

tackling climate change and social cohesion, and EELISA, dedicated to addressing grand environmental and technological challenges in harmony with the UN 2030 Sustainable Development Goals.

These examples illustrate our shared commitment to addressing societal and environmental challenges,

Embracing European values

EUNICoast partners have developed a common vision and shared values that are in line with European values. They encompass, but are not limited to: diversity and multiculturalism, peace and human rights, democracy, solidarity, the rule of law, social welfare, healthcare, cultural heritage, tolerance, inclusivity, innovation, and technology. All these values are embedded in everything we do, they are part of our foundation.

In our commitment to these values, EUNICoast recognises the crucial role of peace in achieving sustainable blue economies and harmonious relationships among coastal and island communities. This commitment is exemplified by the leadership of

underscoring EUNICoast's integration into broader European sustainability initiatives. Indeed, for universities situated on the seafront, ecological planning, climate adaptation and the preservation of biodiversity are more than priorities, they are existential questions.

our members in initiatives like the UNESCO chair on peace and human rights at Burgas Free University, the participation of Le Havre University in the "Normandie pour la Paix" initiative, and not least, "the Åland Example"⁹. Additionally, EMUNI University's mission of fostering knowledge, inclusive growth, science diplomacy and dialogue in the Euro-Mediterranean region aligns with our objectives, further underscoring our dedication to peace as a key element in sustainability and stability.

Together, we will define **the meaning of 'European identity' in the context of our islands and coastal territories**. This means collectively reflecting on what makes us all Europeans, how the above-mentioned values contribute to this identity, and how we can continuously ensure that this European dimension is transversal and pivotal to all academic fields. This perspective is very much in line with our strong focus on the "human dimension" of ports and islands.

⁹ Åland is a unilingual minority language region in a bilingual country. It embodies "Islands of Peace"- demilitarisation and neutralisation, self-governance, red granite, islandness, and a strong regional identity, among others. The Åland Islands Peace Institute conducts extensive research into the Åland Example and offers a meeting point for knowledge and dialogue in order to promote better opportunities for peaceful conflict resolution and societal development.

We aim to reinforce the cultural heritage and traditions of our maritime communities, fostering reflection on our similarities and differences, while also combating all forms of prejudices and discriminations. This approach will enable us to better build upon our shared European identity and values.

Finally, by framing our activity within the EU Missions (particularly the

mission 'Restore our Ocean and Waters') together with the UN's Sustainable Development Goals, with a particular emphasis on gender equality and inclusivity, EUNICoast ensures that our activities will contribute to addressing the world's global challenges – and will do so from a marked European perspective, in line with EU efforts and priorities¹⁰.

¹⁰ See [European Parliament resolution of 7 June 2022 on EU islands and cohesion policy: current situation and future challenges](#).

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Our objectives

Capitalising on our partners' unique locations and expertise in maritime and coastal domains, as well as our diverse and multifaceted perspectives, EUNICoast is adopting a proactive approach to achieve a high level of integration of our different academic blueprints and action plans in order to:

(1)

Help build strong foundations for the next generation of European and global students and citizens who are engaged, aware and willing to contribute to meeting sustainability challenges.

We are committed to nurturing a globally aware and engaged student body, ready to contribute to meeting sustainability challenges. This includes fostering connections with institutions and communities around the world, promoting international exchange programs, and integrating global perspectives into our curricula.

By leveraging our unique geographical diversity, addressing common challenges, and tapping into the varied expertise within our network, we aim to enhance our learning outcomes substantially.

(2)

Foster a multicultural, multilingual and inclusive European education, research, and innovation environment which is open to the world.

Our approach involves creating collaborative platforms and networks that extend across and beyond Europe, inviting global expertise and diverse cultural perspectives into our research and educational activities. We will leverage long-standing successful partnerships such as the [Global U8 Consortium¹¹](#), the [Union for the Mediterranean](#) with institutions and organisations worldwide to facilitate a rich exchange of ideas and practices.

(3)

Enhance the joint capacity of the partner universities to better respond to the societal and environmental challenges faced by island and coastal communities.

This entails engaging with international stakeholders, participating in global forums and initiatives, and ensuring that our research and solutions have a worldwide impact and relevance, particularly in addressing the unique challenges of island and coastal regions.

By focusing on these areas, EUNICoast aims not only to contribute to the sustainability of ports, islands, and coastal communities across Europe but also to extend its impact globally, embodying the spirit of openness and collaboration that is essential for addressing the complex challenges of our time.

¹¹ The members of the consortium, led by Université Le Havre Normandie, are: Universiti Malaysia Perlis in Malaysia, Xiamen University in China, University of Hull in the UK, Inha University in South Korea, Otto von Guericke University Magdeburg in Germany (part of EU GREEN), and University of Fortaleza in Brazil.

Major societal and environmental challenges

Environmental and Climate

Challenges: Many of our regions are frontline areas for climate change impacts, facing rising sea levels, coastal erosion, and extreme weather events. This is especially true for our partners in the Atlantic Ocean¹² and the Mediterranean Sea, where the fragility of island ecosystems calls for urgent attention¹³.

Economic Diversification Needs :

The economies of these regions, notably those in the in the Adriatic Sea¹⁴ and the Euro-Mediterranean area, are often heavily reliant on tourism and primary sectors. They need to diversify the economy to mitigate vulnerabilities from economic downturns.

Biodiversity and Ecological

Sustainability: The unique and largely endemic biodiversity in areas like the Caribbean Sea and the Baltic Sea¹⁵ necessitates focused conservation efforts. The impact of human activities such as overfishing and marine pollution on these delicate

ecosystems calls for sustainable practices.

Infrastructure and Health System

Development: All our regions face the challenge of developing and modernising their transport infrastructure and health systems to ensure access and sustainability.

Migration and Social Challenges:

Several of our regions grapple with complex social challenges, particularly the influx of migrants, which poses significant demands on local infrastructure and resources. The arrival of large numbers of migrants can sometimes far outnumber the local population, placing enormous pressure on housing, healthcare, and social services.

Depopulation and Talent Retention:

Our regions face depopulation and 'brain drain,' where skilled individuals often migrate to larger urban areas or abroad. A major area of action is the development of education, professional training, upskilling, sustainable entrepreneurship, and employment opportunities for island inhabitants, with a special focus on women, who face higher unemployment rates than men in almost all EU islands, and young people.

¹² See the European Commission's [Atlantic Strategy and Atlantic Action Plan](#).

¹³ [EU Islands and cohesion policy European Parliament resolution of 7 June 2022 on EU islands and cohesion policy: current situation and future challenges](#).

¹⁴ Historically, the Adriatic region has been pivotal for trade and maritime commerce. Today, tourism, fishing, and maritime trade remain essential economic activities along the Adriatic coast. Many coastal cities in this region are major tourist attractions. See [EU Strategy for the Adriatic and Ionian Region \(EUSAIR\)](#) and more specifically [EUSAIR FLAGSHIPS 2021-2027, adopted in June 2020](#).

¹⁵ The Baltic Sea presents unique characteristics and challenges. It is one of the world's largest brackish water bodies, with a delicate balance of salt and freshwater, making its ecosystem particularly sensitive. Issues like eutrophication, overfishing, and marine pollution have been significant concerns in the Baltic Sea, affecting its biodiversity and ecological balance. See [HELCOM](#) (the Helsinki Convention) or <https://esd.copernicus.org/articles/13/457/2022/>.

Our areas of focus

We aim to address those sustainability challenges that are most prescient to our marine and island/coastal ecosystems. Our ambition is to tackle these challenges from an inherent embeddedness to our territories, but producing results that can be used by other regions across our continent – and beyond.

Based on a combination of our collective strengths¹⁶, the particular needs of our territories, and the EU policy priorities (especially the EU's new approach for a Sustainable Blue Economy¹⁷ and the water-energy-food-ecosystem Nexus approach¹⁸), EUNICoast has chosen to focus on the following inter-disciplinary challenges, directly related to or supporting the overarching Blue Economy¹⁹ and our distant maritime contexts. In formulating our focus, we have incorporated a future-oriented perspective, ensuring that our initiatives are aligned with foresight insights from the European 'Mission Area: Healthy Oceans,

Seas, Coastal and Inland Waters'²⁰. This approach ensures that our objectives not only address current challenges but are also strategically positioned to anticipate and respond to future developments in marine and coastal environments:

(1) Identities, Local Knowledge, and Cultural Heritage in Islands & Coastal Communities

Addressing this challenge will notably leverage our expertise in the social sciences and humanities, exploring the unique identities, local knowledge, and rich cultural heritage of island and coastal communities.

It emphasises maritime social justice, reduction of inequalities, and promotion of gender equality, aligning with the socially sustainable and equitable blue economy approach, specifically tailored to address the challenges and opportunities inherent in our diverse islands and ports²¹ to foster inclusivity, empower local communities, and ensure the well-being of individuals within our network and beyond.

(2) Blue Circular Economy, Port Logistics, and Sustainable Blue Tourism

¹⁶ Our common strengths were emphasised by a Topic Modelling analysis conducted on the scientific publications of the Alliance. Results are presented in **Annex 2** of the proposal. In short, a topic modelling is a T-SNE dimensionality reduction of the semantic representation of abstracts based on the Specter BERT language model: Cohan, A., Feldman, S., Beltagy, I., Downey, D., & Weld, D. S. (2020). Specter: Document-level representation learning using citation-informed transformers. arXiv preprint arXiv:2004.07180.

¹⁷ [EU's new approach for a Sustainable Blue Economy.](#)

¹⁸ [EU Policies: Water-Energy-Food-Ecosystem Nexus.](#)

¹⁹ As defined by the EU Blue Economy Report 2023, the Blue Economy encompasses sustainable economic activities related to oceans, seas, and coastal areas. It includes established sectors like marine living resources, marine non-living resources, marine renewable energy, port activities, shipbuilding and repair, maritime transport, and coastal tourism, as well as emerging sectors like ocean energy and blue biotechnology.

²⁰ [Mission area, healthy oceans, seas, and coastal and inland waters - Foresight on Demand Brief in Support of the Horizon Europe Mission Board.](#)

²¹ As described above in "Deeply embedded in our territories": **environmental and climate challenges; economic diversification needs; biodiversity preservation and ecological sustainability; infrastructure and health system development; as well as depopulation and brain drain.**

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In order to tackle this challenge, we will combine our expertise in economics, law and management sciences to advance the blue circular economy, improve port logistics, and promote sustainable blue tourism.

It will build upon sustainable blue tourism, integrating it with the broader context of the Blue Economy. The focus will extend to the importance of tourism logistics and its sustainability prospects in the governance of shared resources. It involves considerations such as equitable access and use, sustainable practices, community involvement, policy and regulation.

(3) Governance, Planning, Management, and Monitoring of Islands and Coastal Communities

Geared towards geographical and earth sciences, this area aims to enhance governance, spatial planning, management, and monitoring practices in island and coastal communities.

It incorporates maritime law, integrated coastal zone management and marine spatial planning, including integrated ocean governance. This also involves coastal hazards risks monitoring and assessment.

(4) Health, Biodiversity Protection, Nature-based Solutions, and Sustainable Exploration of Coastal/Marine Resources

This area targets marine, biological, agricultural, and life sciences to address health, biodiversity protection, and sustainable exploration of coastal and marine resources using nature-based solutions.

It is linked with the health and well-being theme, particularly the “One Health” perspective for understanding major threats like zoonotic infections. It also focuses on coastal and marine biodiversity conservation and restoration.

(5) Engineered and Data-driven Solutions for Coastal Infrastructures, Marine Renewable Energy, Marine Safety, and Navigation Systems

Overcoming this challenge requires know-how in engineering and technological sciences, especially engineered and data-driven solutions. It also includes ocean data governance and security.

This area will entail a focus on innovation and technology as key drivers for solving complex challenges in coastal and marine environments, from renewable energy to maritime safety.

All five topics are driven by the shared challenges we face and directly related to the global sustainable development goals of the United Nations. They all aim to contribute to proactive ecological planning in order to address the impact of climate change and manage the resultant socio-environmental challenges, including migration and population displacement. In this, the combination of our shared geographical position on the border between land and sea with a diversity of biomes stretching from the Tropics to the Arctic provides us with a unique setting to observe, explore solutions and manage transitions that will benefit not only our own communities and territories but Europe as a whole.

Our approach

Guided by our vision and ambition, EUNICoast's conceptual approach is anchored in the following principles:

- **Evidence-Based:** By leveraging the collective expertise of our member universities, we will conduct rigorous academic research to provide evidence of the challenges and opportunities within the Blue Economy. This evidence will inform strategic decision-making and policy recommendations at the local, regional, national, European, and global levels.
- **Future-Oriented:** Armed with insights from research, we will conceptualise and evaluate potential strategies for the blue economy in our priority areas by working closely with external stakeholders. These strategies will be critically appraised to ensure they are viable, sustainable, scalable and aligned with overarching economic goals.
- **Multi-Stakeholder Dialogue:** By fostering dialogue between academia, industry stakeholders, policymakers, and coastal communities, we aim to ensure that our conceptual approach is holistic, inclusive, and grounded in real-world challenges and solutions.

● **Adaptation and Flexibility:**

Recognising the dynamic and often unpredictable nature of environmental and socio-economic challenges, especially in coastal and maritime contexts, EUNICoast embraces adaptation and flexibility as core components of its approach. This principle acknowledges the need for our strategies and solutions to be agile and responsive to changing conditions, ensuring they are resilient and adaptable for the future.

By adopting a conceptual approach that is evidence-based, forward-looking, flexible and collaborative, EUNICoast is poised to make significant contributions to the sustainable and resilient growth of the blue economy. We aim to align our core missions and varied regional perspectives with these challenges to form a comprehensive, holistic approach to Blue Sustainability and Inclusivity – an approach that is specific to island/coastal territories but that can dialogue with academics, practitioners, and public policy actors from all across Europe.

All 13 partners share a **common perspective on these challenges** and how we plan to approach them through the four core missions of our universities (education, research, innovation and transfer, and societal engagement). This common perspective will be reflected in the **creation of five interdisciplinary Teaching and Research Hubs** with

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participation from students and academics of all partner universities.

These Hubs will bring together our partners' existing expertise across all five priority areas and act as main

Our activity across the four missions of our universities

Our evidence-based, forward-looking, and collaborative approach is reflected across our different activities, which cover the **four missions of our universities**: education, research, innovation, and outreach to society. By working together across all four dimensions, we will achieve our previously-stated objectives: we will support a next generation of European and global students and citizens who are committed to meeting sustainability challenges; we will foster a multicultural, multilingual and inclusive European academic environment which is open to the world; and we will enhance our collective capacity to better respond to the societal and environmental challenges faced by our island and coastal communities. Our ultimate aspiration is to become a model of good practice, further enhancing the

drivers of our European University. By setting them up, we aim to foster interdisciplinary and intercultural dialogue and the emergence of educational and research initiatives.

international competitiveness of the European universities landscape.

In education

first and foremost, EUNICoast will work towards building a shared educational offer, with a particular focus on aligning it with the European Approach for Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes (EAQP). Through this offer, every student from our regions (and beyond) can receive training on Blue Economy-related skills – a training that is tailored to their background, their discipline of interest, and their personal aspirations. This includes an emphasis on the use and recognition of micro-credentials, offering modular learning opportunities that cater to diverse learning needs and career goals.

On one hand, we will revise our existing curricula to align them with our values and vision, and we will identify the flagship courses and programmes that can be scaled up to the level of the Alliance for a bigger impact. On the other hand, we will bring together our efforts and academic expertise to design new joint educational offers around our priority areas: from a series of microcredentials led by our different partner universities,

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to various rotating Summer and Winter Schools, to a set of joint Masters degrees offered to all our students. In the mid term, we aim to set up a joint European Bachelor and joint PhDs, thus covering all levels of education and building a comprehensive EUNICoast educational offer.

A crucial aspect of our success is fostering and incentivising the alignment of our academics through pedagogical and professional programmes for university staff. This aims to progressively transform the education culture among our universities' staff towards more flexible and internationalised principles, naturally extending across all our education areas.

Importantly, EUNICoast will leverage digital technology and learning methods to address the geographical challenges and isolation of some partners, notably those situated in islands. We plan to introduce online courses, including MOOCs, and employ digital platforms for teaching and blended learning. This strategy will make education more accessible, bridging the physical distance between partners and promoting a connected, inclusive learning environment. This digital integration is key to our commitment towards a flexible, innovative educational culture across EUNICoast.

In research,

we will foster collaboration between our researchers and academics to

develop joint research around our five areas of priority – joint research that is problem-oriented and targets evidence-based solutions. This will allow us to increase our capacity to deliver research that has a transformative international impact; something that is currently limited by our low critical mass of researchers at our individual institutions. We will start by building a common Research and Development agenda that will set the stage for a deepening of our research collaborations, and we will support our academics' research activity by setting up shared infrastructures such as a Joint European Projects Office and delivering joint training to early-career researchers. Finally, open science and responsible research initiatives will also be factored in.

Additionally, in line with the recent reform of research assessment in Europe, EUNICoast embraces more inclusive and impact-oriented practices in research evaluation. This reform, marked by the agreement establishing the Coalition for Advancing Research Assessment (CoARA) to which Åland University of Applied Sciences, University of the Azores and West Pomeranian University of Technology are signatories, shifts the focus towards new assessment criteria and methods, promoting a research culture that values quality and impact over traditional metrics. EUNICoast will align with the objectives outlined by the European Commission with the aim to foster a research environment that is

adaptable, forward-thinking, and globally resonant.

In technology transfer and innovation,

we will work in close collaboration with our regional private and public partners, with the aim to foster a circular economy approach within the maritime sector – focusing on resource efficiency, waste reduction, and innovative solutions for sustainable growth. All our institutions already have long-standing collaborations with industry and local governments, and we will pool together these actors to address our common regional challenges from a holistic and European perspective – making sure to align our work with the ongoing efforts in these fields. This will mainly be achieved by the creation of a Joint Technology Transfer and Innovation Office.

In social engagement,

our approach relies on establishing or expanding strong and lasting partnerships with other European Universities, NGOs, policymakers and civil society actors to figure out the best way to put our previously-described efforts at the service of our regions and societies. A key focus of this mission will be public engagement: giving our university communities (students, academics) the opportunity to interact closely with the various actors in their territories and become more socially engaged – be it through problem-based education, collaborative

research, or extra-curricular events and activities with a marked engagement factor. Establishing strong and beneficial relationships with policymakers across Europe will also be a main factor of this work.

Moreover, by working together, we intend to further strengthen the cross-cutting dimensions that are essential for achieving this transition: digitalisation, feasible mobility, open data, capacity building, and interdisciplinarity. EUNICoast will:

- Develop the **digital infrastructure and competencies** at our partner institutions that are necessary to support our vision for deep collaboration, as well as to deliver education and produce research that is internationally relevant, flexible, and in line with current standards. We will work towards the development of interoperable platforms that will, for example, allow us to deliver e-seals for our series of microcredentials²². Our mid-term ambition is to integrate our current student and research information systems and develop a EUNICoast Virtual Campus.
- Develop common **strategies to facilitate the mobility and accommodation** of students, researchers, and staff to achieve full participation of all partner institutions across our various activities. A first step will be, for example, setting up a Shared Mobility Office at the level of the Alliance, which will bring together

²² On this specific point, Åland University of Applied Sciences' long tradition of microcredentials through an established open university unit at the campus will be of particular help. This type of function is applied at almost all Finnish universities and is fairly unique in Europe. The university currently has 2000-3000 students taking individual courses (microcredentials) yearly.

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the mobility offices of all partner universities and start working towards leaner mobility systems.

- Implement **FAIR data standards** (findable, accessible, interoperable, and reusable) in all of our education and research activities, to gradually align our institutions and our outputs to the principles of open education, open data, and open science. Not only will all of our shared outputs be made openly-accessible, but we will consistently work towards improving the standards at our individual universities.
- Support **capacity building** across our institutions so that all communities (teachers, researchers, non-academic staff) are equipped to achieve our ambition, and are aligned with our vision of fostering cultural transformation towards a unique European education system. For example, we are planning to set up a dedicated Development Plan for staff with an initial triple focus: English skills, “literacy of the sea”, and the Sustainable Development Goals. We are also planning to train academic and non-academic staff on public engagement and structurally embed these initiatives in our way of teaching and doing research.
- Champion an **interdisciplinary** approach to our various activities by acknowledging the intertwined nature of societal, environmental, and technical dimensions in the maritime context. We aim to build a strong community of interdisciplinary scholars working on overarching sustainability challenges and adopting problem-oriented approaches that balance STEM with

social sciences and humanities. The creation of the five interdisciplinary Teaching and Research Hubs will contribute to this vision.

The EUNICoast Alliance is committed to adapting and evolving in pursuit of our joint goals. Recognising the diversity of practices and innovative approaches developed across our Alliance, and in the spirit of collaborative excellence and shared growth, each partner University is prepared to revise its internal regulations and procedures to adopt and implement best practices developed by other partners, and to share these with their national policy-making agencies and bodies. We therefore aim to work efficiently across institutional and national boundaries, endeavouring for excellence in every mission and focus area of the Alliance and fostering an environment where all members contribute to, and benefit from, the collective good of the Alliance.

In sum, we strive to adopt new ways to deliver high-quality and skills-focused education to our students; to perform research that is territorial-based but internationally relevant; and to embed ourselves in our territorial ecosystems and global value chains. By enhancing our collaboration across all these dimensions, and by engaging with external stakeholders (industry, policymakers, and society at large), EUNICoast can make an unmatched contribution towards the sustainability of ports, islands and coastal communities across Europe and the world – and help put universities at its centre.

