

## CONCEPT NOTE

### ASTEROUSIA HYBRID UNIVERSITY 2025-2026:

PHASE B: 19 JAN 2026 – 15 FEB 2026

*Integrated Natural and Cultural Heritage-Based  
Approaches for Mediterranean Biosphere Reserves and  
Other Designated Sites*



MEDITERRANEAN INFORMATION OFFICE  
FOR ENVIRONMENT, CULTURE AND  
SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

## ABOUT

This CALL FOR REGISTRATION concerns the organisation of the online part (Phase B) of the Hybrid Asterousia University 2025-2026. It is primarily targeting post graduate students, young researchers, educators, guides and site managers related to existing and candidate Biosphere Reserves (BRs) of the UNESCO MaB Programme, other UNESCO designated sites, such as Geoparks, World Heritage Sites (WH), and other designated areas such as Protected Areas (PAs), Natura 2000 sites, etc., from the Mediterranean and all around the world.

Phase B comes as a follow up of Phase A (live) that took place in October 2025 in the Biosphere Reserve of Asterousia in Crete (Greece), with 38 participants from 11 countries. [Read more on Phase A](#) or watch the [YouTube video](#) with highlights of the event. It is one more activity taking place within the Mediterranean Strategy on ESD.

**Phase B** is scheduled as a 3-week long online course to capitalize and broaden the outcomes of Phase A and to provide learning and networking opportunities to a wider audience. It acts as an autonomous e-course which combines asynchronous (self-paced) with synchronous learning content (3 live “*meet the experts*” sessions).

## PHASE B IN A NUTSHELL

**Duration:** Three weeks, starting from **19 January** to **8 February 2026**.

**Format:** Asynchronous (self-paced) and synchronous sessions (weekly live meetings, every Friday).

**For whom:** Anyone with an interest, study or work on BRs, Geoparks, Heritage Sites, Protected areas, and an interest in linking natural and cultural heritage approaches and education can take part.

**Commitment:** The total training time for learners is approx. 12 hours (~4 hours/week).

**Class size:** Up to approx. 100 online learners.

**Language:** English.

**Platform:** <https://envirolearning.net/>

**Certification:** Learners who successfully complete the course assignments will get a certificate co-signed by the UNESCO Regional Bureau for Science and Culture in Europe and the UNESCO Chair & Network on Sustainable Development Management and Education in the Mediterranean from the National and Kapodistrian University of Athens.

**Cost:** Thanks to the kind contribution of the organizers the course is **free of charge!**

## LEARNING GOALS

What are learners expected to gain from this e-course?

- An introduction to the UNESCO designations including the Man and the Biosphere Programme (MaB) and its Biosphere Reserves as beacons of sustainability, but also Global Geoparks, Heritage Sites, etc.
- An overview of current integrated management approaches linking natural and cultural heritage approaches.
- Introduction to interesting case studies (sites) with inspiring practices linking natural and cultural heritage
- Effective public / youth engagement strategies.
- Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) methodologies, appropriate for BRs, etc.
- Access to a wealth of online resources.
- Networking with people with similar interests and concerns from many countries.

## YEARLY FOCUS

The main theme this year will be the synergies and expected mutual support of Natural and Cultural Heritage through combined interactions in BRs, within the context of Sustainable Development. Every week we focus on a “cluster of topics” with a dedicated team of experts. Learners follow the course content on their own pace (asynchronously) and have the chance to interact with the experts and their co-learners in a live (synchronous) session.

- **1<sup>st</sup> Week: 19 January – 25 January 2026, Focus on the wide picture & management:** The overall context; UNESCO MaB Programme; Biosphere Reserves, Heritage Sites & Geoparks in the Mediterranean and beyond; The Agenda 2030 and the SDGs Traditional governance & practices integrated with modern management approaches etc.
- **2<sup>nd</sup> Week: 26 January -1 February 2026, Focus on Heritage & case studies;** Tangible and intangible Heritage; Case studies or sites with integrated environmental and cultural management, Mild local development through cultural related tourism (e.g. star watching, religion, etc), the Hydria virtual museum, Intangible heritage documentation and transmission (songs, stories, practices related to natural resources, food, landscapes, etc.)
- **3<sup>rd</sup> Week: 2 February – 8 February 2026: Focus on Education, Awareness, Effective Engagement:** Effective communication methods; Community engagement through traditional knowledge holders; Participatory / Citizen Science; Education for Sustainable Development (ESD).
- **Extra Week: 9 February – 15 February 2026:** 7 more days to complete the assignments.

## FORMAT

Every week combines Asynchronous (self-paced) and synchronous learning content.

Asynchronous content:

- Existing online videos and documentaries
- Video lectures from invited experts
- Recordings from Phase A (Crete, October 2025)
- Readings: Online toolkits, Guidelines, Ppts, etc.

Synchronous content:

- Three live 1.5 hr "meet the experts" sessions where the participants can discuss with the experts on their lectures. These sessions are held via Zoom, **every Friday, 14.00-15.30 (CET)**, and are then uploaded on YouTube, to be available to those who missed them.

## REGISTRATION

TO REGISTER FILL IN THE FORM.

### Asterousia Hybrid University2026: PHASE B Weekly Plan

Integrated Natural and Cultural Heritage-Based  
Approaches for Mediterranean Biosphere  
Reserves and Other Designated Sites

Launching: 19  
January 2026



## CO-ORGANISERS | STAKEHOLDERS

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

- Region of Crete
- Heraclion Development Agency (HDA)
- UNESCO Regional Bureau for Science and Culture in Europe (Venice Office)
- UNESCO Chair and Network on Sustainable Development Management and Education at the University of Athens (UoA)
- Mediterranean Information Office for Environment, Culture and Sustainable Development (MIO-ECSD) through the MEDIES initiative

**Other contributors:** The Hybrid University will bring together a series of actors in and around the Asterousia BR, including:

- The Mediterranean Committee on ESD (MCESD)
- Association for the Protection of Asterousia
- Agricultural School of Messara
- Agricultural Cooperative of Olive Producers of Asterousia - FAMELIA
- Archaeological Museum of Messara
- Cultural Association of Charakas Village
- Natural History Museum of Crete
- HCMR Hellenic Centre for Marine Research
- Local Associations of professionals & Women

## ACRONYMS

**BR(s)** Biosphere Reserve(s)

**CC** Climate Change

**ESD** Education for Sustainable Development

**IWRM** Integrated Water Resources Management

**MCESD:** Mediterranean Committee on Education for Sustainable Development

**MSESD** Mediterranean Strategy on Education for Sustainable Development

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

**SDGs** Sustainable Development Goals

**WEFE** Water-Energy-Food-Ecosystems nexus approach

**WNBRs** World Network of Biosphere Reserves

## INDICATIVE SOURCES

UNESCO World Heritage Sustainable Tourism Toolkit [LINK](#)

2022 Ecotourism and Sustainable Development in BRs (Workshop outcomes, Canada 2022) [LINK](#)

2023 Traditional knowledge, methods and practices concerning olive cultivation inscribed in Intangible heritage list [LINK](#)

Woolshed: A New Era for Alpine Wool – Intereg project [LINK](#)

UNESCO & MIO-ECSDE, ESD in Biosphere Reserves and other designated Areas (2012), [LINK](#)

MAB/UNESCO: Local Good Practices on SDGs, [Link](#)

Discover more about the Asterousia BR, [in this website](#).

UNESCO (2022) Technical guidelines for Biosphere Reserves [Link](#)

Promoting sustainable development through UNESCO's programmes and sites [Link](#)

Exploring sustainable development: a multiple-perspective approach [-LINK](#)

Learning about water: multiple-perspective approaches – [LINK](#)

Greening Curriculum Guidance: teaching and learning for climate action - [LINK](#)

Green School Quality Standard: greening every learning environment – [LINK](#)

