

HEROES

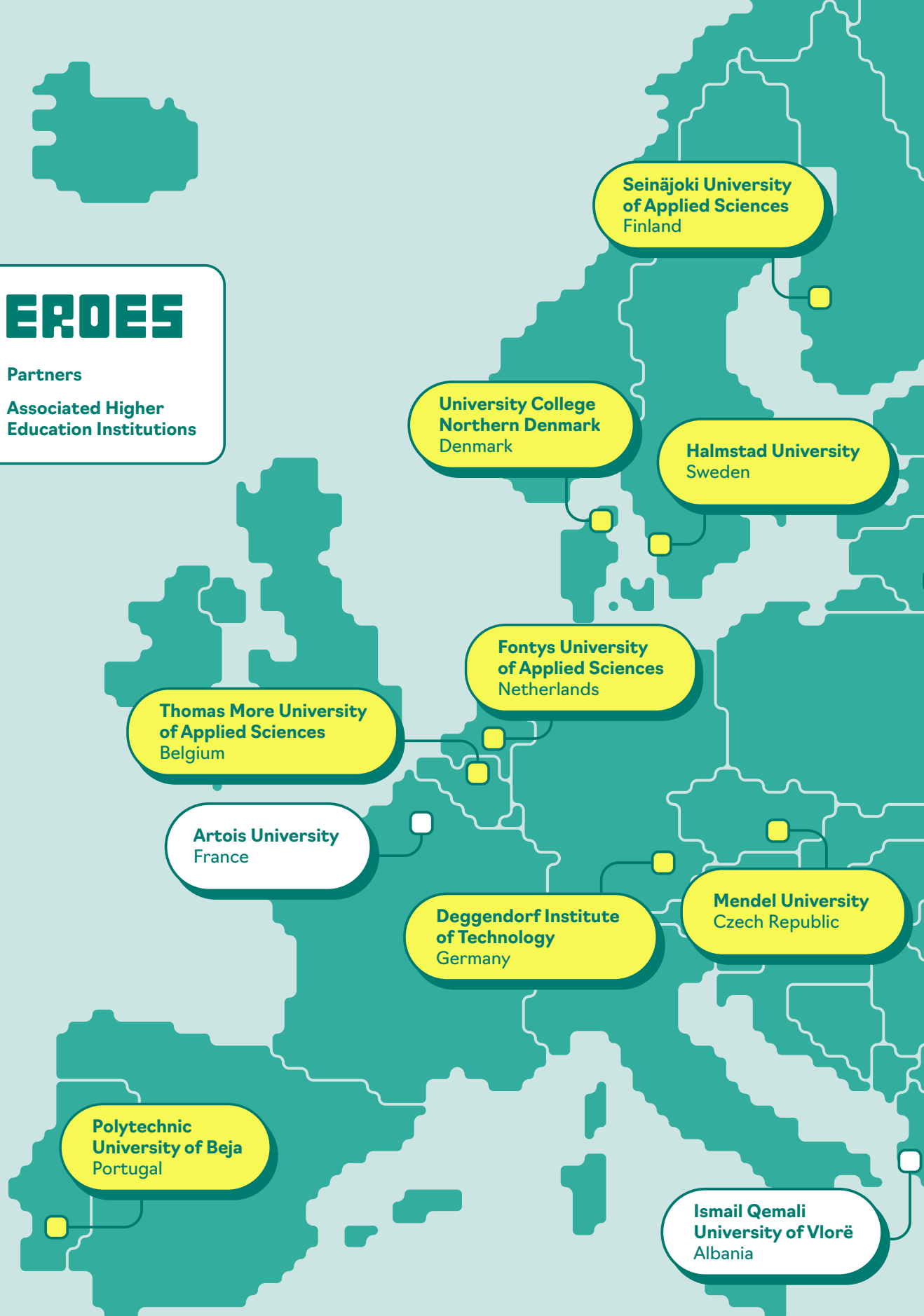
The background is a solid teal color. On the far left, there is a vertical yellow bar. Overlaid on the teal background are several teal-colored squares of various sizes, some of which contain photographs of students. One photo shows a young man with glasses and a backpack looking down. Another shows a young woman with blonde hair smiling and holding a book. A third photo shows a young man with curly hair looking to the side. The overall design is modern and academic.

Joint Mission Statement

HIGHER EDUCATION FOR RESILIENCE-ORIENTED
AND EMPOWERED SOCIETIES

HEROES

-  Partners
-  Associated Higher Education Institutions



We are HEROES, a European University Alliance of young, agile and regionally located professional higher education institutions.

Together we reach 120,000 students from different corners of the EU, from the associate degree to the PhD level, covering all disciplines and sectors with a distinct applied sciences perspective.

HEROES is committed to transforming the talents of this new generation of Europeans into superpowers that benefit their communities and advance the smart regional resilience of people, businesses and nature.

HEROES

Vilniaus Kolegija/Higher Education Institution
Lithuania

Ukrainian Catholic University
Ukraine

Universum International College
Kosovo

Hellenic Mediterranean University
Greece



OUR PURPOSE

What HEROES strives for



In today's world, certainty is a rare commodity. But amidst the constant flux of our rapidly changing world, one enduring truth emerges: the only constant is change itself. In the face of this dynamic reality, we need heroes to ensure resilience in all EU's regions, and strong local ecosystems.

The HEROES European University Alliance (HEROES) **champions and shapes tomorrow's heroes of the EU**. Our heroes are courageous and driven (future) professionals who tackle global challenges at a local level, whether it's through introducing telehealth, leveraging extended reality to strengthen local businesses, or utilising artificial intelligence and the Internet of Things for the efficient use of water. Our heroes are students, lecturers, researchers, professional staff and local representatives that advance **smart regional resilience** where they study, work and live, and their accomplishments encourage and

influence peers internationally to tackle shared challenges.

The joint purpose of HEROES' 9 professional higher education institutions (HEIs) is twofold:

- Firstly, to sustainably **deepen their institutional, structural and strategic cooperation**. A fruitful HEROES partnership already exists, it is now ready for the next level.
- Secondly, to **strengthen the resilience of people, businesses and natural environments at regional and local level**. Local

responsiveness and resilience to today's challenges are crucial as effects of climate change, biodiversity loss, eroding social cohesion and technological disruption are strongly experienced at the grassroots level, and practical solutions for local use are urgently needed. HEROES is made up of partners located and firmly established in small and medium-sized cities and are thus ideally placed to both come up with contextualised innovative solutions that work and implement them effectively in cooperation with local stakeholders.

HEROES advances regional resilience in a smart way. Digital technologies provide powerful tools to solve complex problems, if applied properly: HEROES focuses on human-centred, nature-positive and resilience-enhancing **digital innovation**.

Through **transnational collaboration** in education, research & innovation, and service to society, HEROES' ultimate purpose is to deliver hero-like human capital, knowledge, skills and competencies that strengthen the ability of citizens, communities, businesses, and natural environments to withstand and cope with uncertainties, changes, or disturbances; bounce back better when these occur; and seize opportunities for healthier, more inclusive, and sustainable outcomes. ■

Our superpowers

The HEROES European University Alliance is a bond between 9 professional HEIs from 9 EU member states with a shared set of unique characteristics that contribute to the successful achievement of our purpose:



We have a **strong basis for next-level cooperation** as we build further on existing and successful bilateral and multilateral partnerships and cooperation agreements. These include mobility agreements, blended intensive programmes, cooperation partnerships, research and innovation projects and projects that strengthen the cross-border or transnational cooperation between our regions.



Our geographical footprint encompasses **broad and balanced regional coverage** in Europe, ensuring close proximity and easy accessibility for students, lifelong learners, and local partners. Our campuses are strategically located in small to medium-sized cities, playing a pivotal role in fostering economic, social, and cultural development within the predominantly rural areas that surround them.



We provide **professional and applied sciences-focused tertiary and continuing education**. Our programmes are tailored to professional needs and societal challenges. As an intermediary between theory and practice, our professional higher education incorporates knowledge into practical, practice-based teaching, learning, and training.



We conduct **innovative practice-oriented scientific research** that is demand-driven, addresses societal challenges and has a direct impact on professional practice and society. Our work involves developing, testing, and implementing innovative solutions and translating knowledge into practical applications and methods. We actively share results with society, educational programmes, and the scientific community.



We operate within and actively shape **local and regional innovation ecosystems**, collaborating with SMEs, industry, authorities, civil society, NGO's and traditional universities. Mainly situated outside core urban areas, we swiftly address local needs, offering human capital and knowledge to drive regional development.



We are **agile**, which means we are capable to respond quickly and iteratively to evolving needs, labour market shortages and changing knowledge and skills opportunities. To contribute to this, we provide multi-functional and multi-disciplinary staff teams, the use of agile methodologies, and a high level of readiness of knowledge and skills.

OUR MISSION AND VISION

What HEROES is driven by

HEROES' mission is to strengthen smart regional resilience through (i) providing high-quality professional education to students and lifelong learners, (ii) fostering practice-oriented scientific research, and (iii) maximising collaboration opportunities between stakeholders.

- HEROES equips its students, lifelong learners, lecturers, researchers and professional staff with a **multidisciplinary** set of entrepreneurial, transversal, inter-cultural, digital and green skills.
- Together with local stakeholders, HEROES **co-creates solutions that address the specific challenges of local communities, businesses, and natural environments**. Many have already joined forces with HEROES partners, and more are invited and welcome to do so in the future.

To achieve its mission, HEROES engages in **challenge-based learning, research and innovation that enhance regional resilience through digital technologies**.

To ensure local uptake, we focus on technologies ready to apply. This involves addressing the necessary conditions and skills for the human-centred, nature-positive, and resilience-enhancing use, considering digital ethics, inclusion, literacy, security, transparency, trust, usability, wellbeing, and the digital carbon footprint. HEROES understands that the practical deployment of a new wave of deep tech innovation is indispensable

to address societal challenges at a deeply regional and local level.

HEROES' vision is to bring together a new generation of Europeans and transform their talents into superpowers that benefit their communities as well as their personal development.

These heroes are students and professionals who strive for professional excellence, have the courage and resilience to venture new solutions for global challenges and learn from mistakes. **Excellence, courage, inclusion, sustainability and European values** as set out in article 2 of the Treaty on the European Union are at our core. ■





**HEROES strengthens
the smart regional
resilience of people,
businesses and nature
through quality
professional education,
impactful practice-
oriented scientific research
and collaboration between
like-minded partners,
transforming the talents
of committed Europeans
into superpowers.**



OUR APPROACH

What HEROES does

The HEROES European University Alliance serves as an **inspirational trailblazer** for future models of transnational cooperation in professional higher education advancing smart regional resilience. Our joint long-term ambition is to bring institutional cooperation to the next level and contribute to the European Education and Research Areas in synergy with the European Higher Education Area. We gradually make our cooperation systemic and structural via an integrated long-term joint strategy.

Our long-term strategy unfolds in **3 strategic flagships** that cover the knowledge square of education, research, innovation and service to society. These flagships are the main pillars of our green and inclusive HEROES inter-university campus:

FLAGSHIP 1 EDUCATION4HEROES

EDUCATION4HEROES includes a new **joint educational offer** at bachelor, master and doctoral level with a strong link to practice. These programmes empower students with the skills and competencies needed to address multiple crises from a local and regional perspective. In this way, we give local ecosystems the capacity to withstand disruptions.

The offer is based on the complementarity of existing excellence in practice-based education and research. Integrated curricula feature improved, challenge-based pedagogical methods and incorporate various types of mobility, supported by innovative technologies. Backed by a shared quality assurance approach, we provide joint HEROES modules and minors for bachelor students,

collaborate on new double degree programmes, co-create a new joint professional master programme, and seek synergies in doctoral programmes. Our new joint programmes are flexible and interdisciplinary, leveraging applied digital innovation in various fields of study to enhance the resilience of people, businesses and nature. Our ultimate aim is to achieve a joint European Degree label, solidifying the high standard and collaborative nature of our educational offerings.

FLAGSHIP 2 HEROES4REGIONS

HEROES4REGIONS is our **challenge-based learning programme**. In collaboratively designed courses, knowledge and innovation-creating teams composed of students, lecturers, researchers and representatives from local businesses and communities collaborate on real-life local challenges. We offer students a catalogue of interdisciplinary challenge-based modules where they can engage in effective learning adventures through blended (HEROLABS and HEROQUESTS) or virtual mobilities (GLOBALHEROES). We engage associated higher education institutions from Albania,

France, Greece, Kosovo, and institutions from Ukraine and the global south in our challenge-based learning programme, leveraging practical skills and competencies for smart regional resilience, all the while promoting European values.

In synergy, we establish the HEROES4REGIONS **practice-oriented scientific research hub**. This hub is organised around flexible, living pod networks assembling experts from different thematic areas (agriculture & food; care & wellbeing; circular economy; digital transformation; education, learning & inclusion and regional development). In the spirit of heroism, they mix and match their expertise, to pursue shared, challenge-based research and innovation agendas fortifying the three resilience-oriented priority areas of the alliance: people, businesses and nature. The hub, designed as a nexus of shared infrastructure, support services, and regional knowledge and technology transfer capacity, is a breeding ground for new collaborative research, development, innovation or valorisation projects empowering our surrounding ecosystems and contributing to the challenge-based learning programme.

FLAGSHIP 3 HEROES4EVER

For working professionals, HEROES4EVER provides **flexible learning opportunities and a wide range of alternative learning pathways** for digital upskilling and employability enhancement. It includes courses and trainings on skills for green and digital transition and transversal skills leading to

digitally badged micro-credentials. Online courses and 'MOOCs for credits' will respond to the use of artificial intelligence (AI), anticipating the automation of skills and recognising observed skills needs in terms of resilience of people, businesses and nature. Our micro-credential programmes are co-created with representatives from the field of work and have a local perspective. Transnational staff learning and development opportunities focus on emerging issues that enable the future-proofing of professional higher education, pointing to the profound impact of global challenges and advanced digital technologies (such as generative AI and extended reality (XR)) on future teaching, learning and assessment.

The 3 flagships will be built on a solid base of **joint structures and initiatives** that foster good governance, support mobility opportunities and establish a transnational multistakeholder ecosystem and green, inclusive and resilience-oriented community. We call these the cornerstones of our HEROES inter-university campus.

CORNERSTONE 1 A solid governance for HEROES

Our institutional cooperation is based on a solid **governance for HEROES** characterised by equal participation of all partners, a network structure connecting the diversity of staff and student bodies, and agility for continuous improvement. Principles of subsidiarity and unanimity guide our decision-making, involving all institutional levels. Advisory bodies are established at both local and transnational levels, engaging representatives from the professional and socio-economic world, academia, policy, and civil society, including other European Universities and higher education umbrella organisations. Student representatives assemble in a

Student Council to ensure their perspectives are considered in decision-making. Governance strives to reduce existing barriers to international cooperation and mutual recognition. Our common legal status will undergo further piloting and refinement.

CORNERSTONE 2 A transnationally connected HEROES ecosystem and community

We forge a **transnationally connected HEROES ecosystem and community**, uniting organisations and people to offer insights, resources, and collaborative capacity to support cooperation, co-creation, and the dissemination of HEROES initiatives. We build robust relations with our HEROES Friends (local and regional authorities, small and medium-sized enterprises, NGO's and citizens) and harness the potential of our alumni as ambassadors to empower both students and staff. As teamwork is key to heroic endeavours, our HEROES Friends and ambassadors are an integral part of our flagships. We engage our community to champion environmental awareness, EU values and inclusion, and foster interest in STEAM disciplines among our prospective female students. We encourage grassroots initiatives that enhance resilience, with a commitment to scaling them up upon proven success.

CORNERSTONE 3 Innovative mobility support services for HEROES

We are set to establish a **joint mobility office** dedicated to provide an array of shared, innovative mobility support services for both students and staff. The joint office will prepare and implement common strategies to optimise and harmonise mobility processes

(promotion, administration, management) and to connect existing systems to efficiently manage various mobilities in the alliance. Our commitment goes beyond procedural efficiency; we aim to define a joint green and inclusive mobility strategy. The latter places special attention on monitoring and supporting disadvantaged groups. Furthermore, the office pioneers a common approach for support services embedded in local communities, encompassing areas such as housing and local immersion. In alignment with these initiatives, we will kickstart the implementation of the European Student Card.

CORNERSTONE 4 A virtual campus for HEROES

We will build a **virtual campus** for HEROES, offering (prospective) students, lifelong learners, and staff the opportunity to seamlessly explore and enrol in our collaborative educational offer online. Moreover, users can tailor their multidisciplinary learning pathways directly on this platform. The virtual campus features robust partnering capabilities, allowing for the identification and pursuit of challenges by our knowledge-creating teams, as well as opportunities for internships or work placements within the transnational ecosystem. It will further facilitate virtual meetings and collaboration in interactive and immersive environments. ■

OUR LONG-TERM
PERSPECTIVE

The future of HEROES

At the end of the funding period, **the HEROES Alliance will have the capacities, structures and processes in place to operate fully as a green and inclusive HEROES inter-university campus** in a two-tier (virtual and physical) network structure that enhances smart regional resilience and is pivotal in promoting the European way of life and strengthening a European identity.

In addition, within a 10-year horizon, we will have created a **spill-over** effect through the attractive and widespread dissemination of the outputs and outcomes of our next-level partnership on education, research, innovation and service to society. This spill-over extends well beyond our own regions to the surrounding ecosystems and communities of other professional higher education institutions, primarily those of our associated higher education institutions in Albania, France, Greece, Kosovo and Ukraine. In this manner, HEROES contributes to fostering a Europe that is more unified, innovative, digitally advanced, interconnected, environmentally sustainable and open to the wider world. Given the rapidly changing world, our alliance remains agile. ■

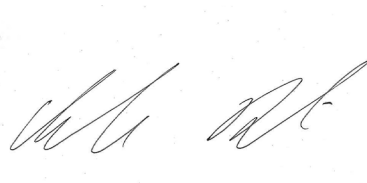
HEROES is strongly supported by experts and organisations in the International Advisory Network, which includes:



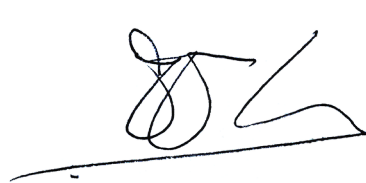
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HEROES

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