

EPICUR: Research Now Also Funded by the EU Commission

KIT coordinates the “EPICUR Research” project – besides student mobility and innovation, the tasks of the partners comprise research activities and the dialog with society

Karlsruhe Institute of Technology (KIT) is the consortium leader of the “EPICUR-Research” project which, from now on, will integrate research activities and interaction with society into the “European University” EPICUR (European Partnership for Innovative Campus Unifying Regions), thus rounding up the tasks of the alliance. The EU Commission is going to fund the project of this international consortium with two million euros over the next three years. Research partners of KIT are the universities of Freiburg, Poznań, Amsterdam, Thessaloniki, Haute-Alsace, the University of Natural Resources and Life Sciences in Vienna and the University of Strasbourg.

“EPICUR embodies the future vision of an interdisciplinary, diverse, and sustainable European alliance of universities that tackles complex challenges and will strengthen long-term cooperation on a European level,” says Professor Thomas Hirth, KIT Vice-President for Innovation and International Affairs. “I am pleased that EPICUR Research will help us to complete the knowledge quadrangle of teaching – innovation – research – societal interaction.”

The idea behind “EPICUR-Research” is to initiate and implement novel research alliances. The European Commission also hopes that this project will provide impetus for the future call for proposals for the “Horizon Europe” research framework program which will be effective from 2021 on and whose financing is currently being negotiated by the heads of state and government of the European Union, the European Parliament and the European Commission under the leadership of the German Council Presidency.

Already in autumn 2019, the eight EPICUR partners from six countries started to build a new kind of European university within the scope of an ERASMUS+ project: teaching and learning in a network of existing universities, virtual mobility of students and teachers, innovative didactic approaches, and the interlinking of regions were the starting points for the alliance, aiming at the creation of an inter-university campus.

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This was further facilitated by establishing the “Liberal Arts and Sciences” study program as an interdisciplinary addition to the contents of the existing range of subjects.

Expanding the knowledge triangle into a quadrangle

“With the recently approved research budget, we have, for the first time, the opportunity to map the tasks of a classical university – research, teaching, and innovation – also to the European University EPICUR and handle them there,” says Michael Zacherle, KIT EPICUR Project Leader. Dr. Günter Schmidt-Gess, who is responsible for the project at the University of Freiburg, adds: “Our interdisciplinary work at EPICUR is thus gaining in intensity and substance and, of course, in dynamism.” Both are convinced that the involvement of civil society in particular will provide fresh impetus to the work of their colleagues. “We initiate and promote mutual exchange with different societal representatives. The aim is not only to inform them about the results of our research, but also to find out in advance about the needs – and the apprehensions – of people in the various regions,” explain Zacherle and Schmidt-Gess. They say that this will expand the already established knowledge triangle into a knowledge quadrangle. This participatory approach ensures that researchers consider the needs of civil society, companies, authorities, associations, or NGOs right from the outset, so that they will be involved in their research design.

The range of new activities includes the development of a new research and innovation agenda for the European University, the establishment of an EPICommunity, in which researchers in the early stages of their careers are given the opportunity, among other things, to establish (digital) inter-university networks, to take advantage of mobility programs and to present research projects via a database. Furthermore, EPIClusters will be introduced as a new format for cooperation – not only between researchers but also with other societal sectors. Other activities include the exchange of research infrastructures and cooperation with other European universities in terms of content and structure. In combination with blended learning concepts, i.e. the fusion of face-to-face and online formats, and the promotion of the “Liberal Arts and Sciences” study program, which is aimed at future solvers of socially relevant questions, a mission statement is being created that further develops the tasks of a traditional university and places them in a societal framework.

Alliance of universities capable of responding to complex challenges

The objective of the EPICUR partners is to further strengthen cooperation and to respond to complex challenges jointly. This includes the development of innovative teaching formats inspired by the Liberal Arts and Sciences Education approach, the digital transformation of teaching and the facilitation of student and teacher mobility. “The basic idea of EPICUR is that students do not have to move to the partner universities just for one or two semesters, as it has been the case up to now, but can also complete smaller parts of their studies, such as individual courses or seminars, at the other universities by benefitting from virtual methods and blended learning,” says Zachlerle. The necessary formal and legal foundations for this would still have to be laid. This cannot be achieved within three years, but is a long-term project.

For more information about the European University EPICUR, see: <https://epicur.education>

Contribution of the German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD): <https://www2.daad.de/der-daad/daad-aktuell/de/76787-europaeische-hochschulen-im-dienst-der-gesellschaft/>

Being “the Research University in the Helmholtz Association,” KIT creates and imparts knowledge for the society and the environment. It is the objective to make significant contributions to the global challenges in the fields of energy, mobility and information. For this, about 9,300 employees cooperate in a broad range of disciplines in natural sciences, engineering sciences, economics, and the humanities and social sciences. KIT prepares its 24,400 students for responsible tasks in society, industry, and science by offering research-based study programs. Innovation efforts at KIT build a bridge between important scientific findings and their application for the benefit of society, economic prosperity, and the preservation of our natural basis of life. KIT is one of the German universities of excellence.

This press release is available on the internet at www.sek.kit.edu/presse.php

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