

## ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE SERVING THE SOUTHERN REGION

INNOVATION · ENTREPRENEURSHIP · CIRCULAR ECONOMY

*“From partnership to implementation: artificial intelligence brings the circular economy closer to the Southern region.”*

In the first seven months of 2026, the international AI-InnoScEnCE project, funded by the EIT Higher Education Initiative (Horizon Europe – Pillar 3), entered Phase II of implementation at the “B.P. Hasdeu” University Center in Cahul (UTM). The team supported 4 start-ups, mentored 35 students and signed a Memorandum of Understanding with RWTH Aachen University.



AI-InnoScEnCE project poster

### PHASE II IN NUMBERS (JAN – JUN 2026)

4

start-ups and scale-ups supported  
(target: 1)

35

students in additional mentoring  
(target: 30)

48

students in EIT training programmes

19

academic staff in training

1

new Memorandum: RWTH Aachen  
University

9

regional events organised or  
attended by USC

Data from the USC progress report of 17 June 2026 and the dissemination reports.

## 1. ACTIVITIES AND EVENTS

- **Business Summit Cahul (2 July 2026):** staff and students of the Faculty of Economics, Engineering and Applied Sciences (FEISA) joined the dialogue “Integrating Artificial Intelligence into the Economic Development of the Southern Region”, together with entrepreneurs, experts and public decision-makers.
- **Strategic workshop (12 May 2026):** “Validation of the Innovation and Circular Economy Ecosystem through Artificial Intelligence in the Southern Region”, at the Inotek Center. In World Café sessions, 35–50 participants validated the AI-generated ecosystem maps and set the priorities of the future regional “Innovation Roadmap”.

- **Iceberg Bootcamp, 4th edition (4 May 2026):** about 60 participants, 4 of them from USC, worked with the Berkeley Method of Entrepreneurship (BMOE): from identifying real problems and interviewing customers to business models, financial planning and the final pitch, guided by international experts.
- **“Stop DeepFake” Hackathon (23–24 April 2026):** 56 young people built 15 prototypes for detecting video manipulation and fake news. The event was organised by the Inotek Center in partnership with the “B.P. Hasdeu” University Center and ziuadeazi.md, with European Union support.
- **“Environmental Solutions Developed by Youth” Hackathon (4–5 April 2026):** co-organised with UNDP under the project “Facilitating an Inclusive Green Transition in the Republic of Moldova”. Interdisciplinary teams of FEISA students proposed solutions for a sustainable future.
- **VibeHack Hackathon (20–22 March 2026):** organised by the Inotek Foundation; USC students developed digital prototypes for the education system.
- **Open Doors Day and IT Career Expo Cahul (14 March 2026):** more than 400 visitors learned about the university’s European projects (Erasmus+, Horizon Europe, DIGITRANS, NeedEDU4.0, AI-InnoScEnCE), while the IT Career Expo workshops showed real career paths in IT.
- **Public defence of interdisciplinary projects (3 February 2026):** students of the “Operations and Production Management” course presented industrial solutions for the circular economy, also assessed by Mr Nicolae Dunaș, director of “NICO ART” LLC.



Strategic workshop, 12 May 2026

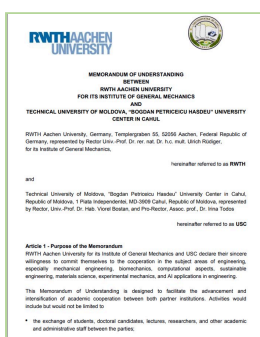


Iceberg Bootcamp, 4 May 2026



Business Summit Cahul, 2 July 2026

## 2. AGREEMENTS AND PARTNERSHIPS



MoU with RWTH Aachen

- **Memorandum of Understanding with RWTH Aachen University (Germany):** the first of the 2 new partnerships planned for Phase II. The agreement opens the way to joint research, know-how exchange and training. It adds to the 4 partnerships of Phase I, including the MoU with Ludovika University of Public Service (Hungary).
- **Inotek Innovation Center and UNDP:** co-organisation of the hackathons, the IT Career Expo and Business Summit Cahul.
- **Businesses in Cahul district:** “Terra-Vitis” LLC, “Perform-Com” LLC and the Cahul Beekeeping Cluster hosted study visits and provided real data for student projects.
- **Interdisciplinary Simulation and Innovation Hub (in progress):** the new innovation and entrepreneurship support structure planned by the project.

## KEY PERFORMANCE INDICATORS (KPIs — PHASE II, AS OF 17 JUNE 2026)

| KPI code   | Performance indicator                                      | Target | Achieved     | Status             |
|------------|------------------------------------------------------------|--------|--------------|--------------------|
| EIT HE03.1 | Start-ups and scale-ups supported                          | 1      | <b>4</b>     | ✓ <b>400%</b>      |
| EIT HE08.1 | Participants in development courses (students)             | 100    | <b>48</b>    | <b>In progress</b> |
| EIT HE08.1 | Participants in development courses (academic staff)       | 20     | <b>19</b>    | <b>In progress</b> |
| EIT HE08.1 | Participants in development courses (non-academic staff)   | 20     | <b>10</b>    | <b>In progress</b> |
| EIT HE08.1 | Beneficiaries of additional mentoring (students)           | 30     | <b>35</b>    | ✓ <b>Achieved</b>  |
| EIT HE08.1 | Beneficiaries of mentoring (academic / non-academic staff) | 10 / 6 | <b>5 / 2</b> | <b>In progress</b> |
| EIT HE19.1 | New or improved structures (Simulation and Innovation Hub) | 1      | <b>1</b>     | <b>In progress</b> |
| EIT HE20   | New partnerships established                               | 2      | <b>1</b>     | <b>In progress</b> |

### 3. START-UPS GUIDED AND ACCELERATED

In Phase II the project supported **4 start-ups and scale-ups** — four times the target. All are agricultural and wine businesses from the Southern region, which received mentoring and advice on access to finance and markets and on product marketing.

#### Sole trader “Capraru Nicolae” — La Cotihana

**Cotihana village, Cahul district**

*Agricultural and wine business · lacotihana.md*

#### “Terra-Vitis” LLC

**Burlacu village, Cahul district**

*Viticulture and precision agriculture*

#### Farm household “Stăvilă Ilie Vasile”

**Capaclia village, Cantemir district**

*Agricultural business*

#### Farm household “Malai Ion Vasile”

**Ursoaia village, Cahul district**

*Agricultural business*

These results build on Phase I, when the student start-ups FoodFlow, EcoWeb and AgroLink went through the “Dreamable” pre-accelerator. In the same period, Atlas Consult from the Republic of Moldova was among the 5 finalists of the HEIPowered Startup Pitch Competition.

### 4. STUDENT TRAINING AND GUIDANCE

By June 2026, **48 students, 19 academic staff and 10 non-academic staff** had taken part in the project’s training programmes, and **35 students** had received additional mentoring.

## COURSES AND MODULES

- **“Entrepreneurship” module (7 ECTS; Irina Todos, Slavic Gîrneț):** Fundamentals of Entrepreneurship and Business Economics — 38 students of Business and Administration and Machine Building Engineering and Management, plus 10 master’s students in Entrepreneurship and Business Administration.
- **Entrepreneurial Project Management (6 ECTS; Prof. Andrei Popa)** and **Innovation Management (3 ECTS; Liudmila Roșca-Sadurschi).**
- **Master’s module “Entrepreneurial Planning” (10 ECTS; Liudmila Roșca-Sadurschi):** Business Models and the Business Plan; Sustainable Development Management and Corporate Social Responsibility.
- **Bachelor’s theses:** 13 students of Food Industry Engineering and Management, Machine Building and Business and Administration, supervised by Liliana Ceclu, Liudmila Roșca-Sadurschi and Marina Bunea; 5 more students presented papers at conferences.

## COMPETITION AWARDS

**1st place**

“Stop DeepFake” Hackathon — FEISA student team, with faculty alumni as mentors and team coordinators.

**3rd place**

VibeHack Hackathon — the educational platform **SchoolOS**, created by Machine Building Engineering and Management students.

**3rd place**

UNDP environmental solutions hackathon — a containerised seedling nursery, aligned with the 2030 Agenda and the national afforestation programme; team member Elena Mincovschi, 1st year, Business and Administration.

## LEARNING THROUGH STUDY VISITS

- **“Terra-Vitis” LLC, Burlacu (29 April 2026):** group BA2401 gathered data for the semester project “Precision agriculture at Terra-Vitis LLC”, within the Project Management and Human Resources Management courses.
- **“Perform-Com” LLC, Cucoara (5 May 2026):** real data for the project “Smart beekeeping as a way of diversifying production”.
- **Cahul Beekeeping Cluster (May 2026):** Business and Administration students learned from Mr Anatolie Nebunu how projects and cooperation are managed in a regional cluster.



*“Stop DeepFake” Hackathon*



*“Environmental Solutions”  
Hackathon*



*Visit to “Terra-Vitis” LLC*



*Cahul Beekeeping Cluster*

## 5. SCIENTIFIC ACTIVITY

The USC team published **5 papers** in the proceedings of the national conference “Innovation: Factor of Socio-Economic Development” (Tehnica-UTM, 2026, ISBN 978-9975-64-666-6) and an article in the USC scientific journal, all acknowledging Horizon Europe support and available in open access.

1. POPA Andrei. *Artificial intelligence as an advantage for entrepreneurship in a circular economy*, pp. 48–49.
2. FILIPOV Ina, MANDAJI Elena. *Normative ecosystems and smart governance for integration of artificial intelligence in the circular economy*, p. 52.
3. POPOVICI Ilona. *Mapping and comparative analysis of artificial intelligence applications in the circular economy*, p. 55.
4. VÎȘCU Irina. *AI-based educational platforms as a vector for cooperation and technology transfer in science and engineering for the circular economy*.
5. CİCANCİ A., RUMEUS I., VÎȘCU I., CECLU L., BLEJAN A.M., CORBU A.R., NOUR V. *Apple and pear by-products – sources of bioactive compounds for the food industry*.
6. FILIPOV Ina. *The normative-institutional dimension of the integration of AI in the circular economy in the Republic of Moldova*. Scientific Journal of Cahul State University: Social Sciences, vol. XIX, no. 2, pp. 60–73.

## CONFERENCE PRESENTATIONS

| Date, place                                    | Conference                                                                                                                   | Paper                                                                                                                                     |
|------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>5 Jun 2026</b><br><b>Cahul</b>              | International conference “Prospects and Problems of Integration into the European Research and Education Area”, 13th edition | CİCANCİ A., BUNEA M. — Soybean oil for sustainable bio-epoxy resins; BUNEA M., UNGUREANU C.V. — Starch- and cellulose-derived biopolymers |
| <b>11 May 2026</b><br><b>Galați (Romania)</b>  | International student scientific session “DONARIS 2026”                                                                      | DORNEA E., FILIPOV I. — Local governance in the transition to the circular economy                                                        |
| <b>24–25 Apr 2026</b><br><b>ASEM, Chișinău</b> | Scientific Symposium of Young Researchers, 24th edition                                                                      | AJDER A.-M., ROȘCA-SADURSCHI L. — Integrating the circular economy into automotive production in Moldova                                  |
| <b>23 Apr 2026</b><br><b>Cahul</b>             | National conference “Opportunities for Involving Young People in Research”, 6th edition                                      | AJDER A.-M., CECLU L., FILIPOV I. — Vehicle life-cycle management in the logic of the circular economy                                    |

**WP2 results — deliverable D2.3.** The team is working on “Validation of Best-Practice Recommendations” (D2.3), using podcasts, video recordings, questionnaires, “tech coffee” meetings, workshops and case studies. The two online questionnaires — circular economy and artificial intelligence — have collected **64 responses**, and a survey by participant category (gender, age, location, education) is in preparation.

## 6. OTHER ACTIVITIES

### DISSEMINATION AT THE NEW EUROPEAN BAUHAUS EVENT

Dr Liliana Ceclu, Dean of the Faculty of Economics and Engineering and institutional coordinator of AI-InnoScEnCE, presented the project's experience at the New European Bauhaus dissemination event. The presentation "From partnership to implementation" traced the full path of a Horizon Europe grant — from identifying the EIT HEI call (October 2024) to Phase II — and showed how the project applies the New European Bauhaus values: **sustainable, beautiful, together** (over 60% female participation in Inotek programmes) and the principles **participatory, transdisciplinary, multi-level**.

#### Six lessons shared with participants:

- |                                                               |                                                                 |
|---------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>1</b> Build the consortium around the theme of the call.   | <b>2</b> Give every partner a functional role.                  |
| <b>3</b> Negotiate a leadership role, not just participation. | <b>4</b> Invest early in administrative and financial capacity. |
| <b>5</b> Make inclusion and the regional dimension count.     | <b>6</b> Plan sustainability from day one.                      |

- **Article in "E-Circular" magazine (June 2026):** Liudmila Roșca-Sadurschi and Liliana Ceclu published "AI-InnoScEnCE: Artificial intelligence lends a hand to the circular transition of the Republic of Moldova" in the 50th anniversary issue of the national circular economy magazine.
- **National project website:** [ai-innoscence.usch.md](https://ai-innoscence.usch.md), in Romanian, English and Russian, presents events, news and publications and gives access to the consortium tools: the Living Library of AI Good Practices (WP2) and the Circular Innovation Ecosystem Radar (WP4).
- **University transformation:** the merger with the Technical University of Moldova, at first a challenge, became an opportunity for new study programmes, bootcamps, hackathons and infrastructure.

### HELP VALIDATE THE BEST PRACTICES

Fill in the project's two questionnaires — your answers go directly into the D2.3 validation report:

#### Circular economy

[ai-innoscence.usch.md/en/survey/ec](https://ai-innoscence.usch.md/en/survey/ec)

#### Artificial intelligence

[ai-innoscence.usch.md/en/survey/ia](https://ai-innoscence.usch.md/en/survey/ia)

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