



“Smart City Hackathon” in Sofia

Veranstaltung “Internationales Innovationsmanagement” (SoSe 2026)

Viadrina-Examination No. BA: (3358)

Language: English

Dates: June 15th – 19th, 2026 plus virtual lecture (June 1st, 2026)

Viadrina Instructors: Meike Joseph, M.Sc. & Prof. Dr. Albrecht Söllner

Location: New Bulgarian University (NBU), Sofia, Bulgaria

Partner Universities (ERUA Alliance):

- New Bulgarian University, Sofia
- European University Viadrina, Frankfurt (Oder)
- Mykolas Romeris University, Vilnius
- SWPS University (Wroclaw & Krakow)

Course Description

Hack Smart Sofia 2026 is an intensive, interdisciplinary innovation sprint embedded within the European Reform University Alliance (ERUA). The program brings together students from our partner universities to collaboratively address urban challenges in Sofia through entrepreneurial and innovation-oriented approaches.

The hackathon focuses on the development of innovative solutions to real-world urban problems such as digital transformation, smart mobility, sustainability, public governance, and inclusive city development. By combining perspectives from management, social sciences, urban studies, and technology, students critically engage with the political, economic, and societal dimensions of innovation ecosystems in Europe.

The hackathon is part of the Bachelor course “International Innovationsmanagement” and integrates academic reflection with practical experimentation. Participants work in international teams to analyze local challenges, generate ideas, develop prototypes, and present their solutions to an expert jury.

Learning Objectives

By the end of the hackathon, students will be able to:

1. Analyze urban challenges within their broader economic, political, and institutional contexts.
2. Apply innovation and entrepreneurial methods (e.g., design thinking, rapid prototyping, lean startup).
3. Develop and communicate solution-oriented concepts in international, interdisciplinary teams.
4. Enhance intercultural competence through close collaboration with ERUA partners.
5. Strengthen communication, analytical, problem-solving skills, and emotional intelligence.

Course Structure & Schedule (5 Days in Sofia, Bulgaria + Virtual Meeting in Germany)

- **Virtual** Preparation-Meeting: June 1st, 2026
- **Day 1 (June 15th):** Field-based exploration & challenge definition
- **Day 2 (June 16th):** Field-based exploration & challenge definition
- **Day 3 (June 17th):** Problem Exploration & Validation:
- **Day 4 (June 18th):** Solution Design & Prototyping
- **Day 5 (June 19th):** Final presentation to a professional jury

Teaching & Learning Methods

- Innovation sprint format (hackathon structure)
- Team-based project work
- Mentorship by academic and ecosystem experts
- Field-based learning
- Peer feedback and reflective discussion
- Jury-based final presentation
- Networking activities within the European startup ecosystem

Assessment

- Active participation throughout the hackathon
- Team-based solution concept and prototype
- Final pitch presentation

6 ECTS are achieved through active participation in all program components and the successful completion of the team project, including preparatory assignments and reflective components.

Funding

- Travel- and accommodation expenses for the hackathon in Sofia will be financed by the ERUA as a travelling seminar. Further information will be announced soon.

Application for Seminar Participation

Please explain in a short letter of motivation (300 words) OR a one-minute video how smart cities shape pathways toward sustainable urban transformation in Europe! Please also name a characteristic or skill that makes you particularly qualified to participate in the event and to work in the group. Show us that you are the right person for this innovation journey! Please also attach a resume (max. 1 page)!

Generic letters of motivation created solely by LLMs (e.g., GPT, BARD, or LLaMa) are unfortunately not very meaningful. An authentic letter of motivation should always come from you. However, LLMs can serve as competent sparring partners if you work with them transparently and creatively. So let us know which creative prompts you used or whether you chose not to use LLMs.

Please note that the application deadline is **March 15**. Early applications are now possible and encouraged! Participants will be selected on an ongoing basis and places are limited. Please send your application via e-mail to joseph@europa-uni.de.

Please note that by participating in the course “International Innovationsmanagement”, any photos and videos taken of you may be published by the organizers for PR purposes in print media, on the Viadrina website, on media sharing sites such as Flickr and YouTube, and on social media channels such as LinkedIn, Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter. If you do not wish to be photographed or filmed, please inform the organizers in advance.

Furthermore, you grant the organizers of the seminar and the European University Viadrina the right to make full use of the works and content created during the seminar. This includes use in modified or unmodified form without any restrictions on the factual, spatial, technical, or temporal scope of use.