



The European University of Post-Industrial Cities

Towards a collaborative approach & structure for engaged research

D2.3 A Joint UNIC4ER Engaged Research Declaration



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The European University of Post-Industrial Cities

Towards a collaborative approach and structure for engaged research (UNIC4ER)

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Introduction

On the 15th of June 2022, in Oulu, Finland, the universities and cities, which are part of the European University of Post-Industrial Cities (UNIC), ceremonially committed themselves to develop a common approach to engaging communities and their cities in promoting research and innovation that can have an impact on the lives of citizens. This declaration, a first in Europe, advocates "engaged research", an approach that involves local people and communities, NGOs and municipalities working together with universities to collectively decide what to research and involve societal partners at all stages of the research process. This approach shows the way forward in bringing Europeans together across languages and borders to actively participate in building thriving, compassionate and enlightened societies and sustainable economies, based on research.

Methods

Consultation Process

Students and staff from the university, municipalities and civil society partners participated in a series of events designed to provide a firm foundation and common understanding of engaged research and its methodologies to subsequently enable a focused co-creative process for the creation of the Engaged Research Declaration. These events were mobilised through an Engaged Research Strategy Forum. The first Engaged Research Strategy Forum was an online event due to Covid-19 travel restriction and was held on the 18th and 19th of January of 2022 (UNIC4ER Deliverable 2.1). This forum created a foundation for subsequent deliverables and included the following sessions:

- *CityLabs and Engaged Research* where the UNIC4ER Taskforce met with UNICWP5 Coordinators to work on the strategic alignment of UNIC4ER Engaged Research and CityLabs work plans and ambitions.
- *Mapping Engaged Research within and across UNIC* where participants explored the diverse mapping needs across UNIC4ER work packages while looking at interconnections, common methodologies, challenges, and opportunities of mapping exercises. Mapping efforts helped us identify strengths and gaps across the UNIC consortium to inform the Engaged Research Declaration and the subsequent Engaged Research Strategy document.
- *Learning from Engaged Research Best Practice Showcase*. This event featured the work of 4 engaged researchers from within UNIC who presented their work and they subsequently

participated in a panel discussion. This event was designed to raise awareness of best practices in engaged research.

- *Co-Producing a Common Understanding of Engaged Research*. This workshop began with a critical, interdisciplinary discussion within the eight institutions about what engaged research is, as well as the methods by which it can be implemented across the consortium. The co-production of a common understanding was viewed as critical for the development and delivery of a Joint UNIC4ER Declaration on Engaged Research.

A second in-person Engaged Research Strategy Forum was held at University College Cork, Ireland from the 31st of March to the 1st of April 2022. In Cork, participants worked together on the text of the declaration, making this a truly collaborative initiative. This co-productive process mirrored the first forum but with a sharper focus on developing this key deliverable. The following sessions were conducted:

- *UNIC European Cities: Exploring the Societal Challenges facing Post-Industrial Cities* which aimed to advance city stakeholder involvement in UNIC and identify societal challenges and related research needs linked to the Urban Agenda for the EU.
- *Towards a draft Declaration on Engaged Research* which aimed to advance the co- production of a common understanding of Engaged Research within and across the UNIC cities and delegates began development of a draft Declaration on Engaged Research.
- *UNIC4ER Meets the City* which aimed to promote universities working with their cities on collaborative engaged research initiatives and to ensure that these initiatives serve our city stakeholder’s short and long-term development needs.
- An online *Learning from Engaged Research Best Practice Showcase* was also held on the 29th of March. This was the second in the showcase series and this event featured the work of an additional 4 engaged researchers from within UNIC who presented their work and they subsequently engaged in a lively panel discussion to raise awareness of best practice engaged research.

Description of Meta Framework Domains

The following eight domains were developed to guide development of the survey instrument to holistically evaluate institutional practices and identify systemic levers and drivers affecting engaged research across the consortium.

Governance & Leadership & Policy Context - the key principles that guide the aspirations and practices within and amongst our academic institutions that enable or limit the effectiveness of engaged research. This category also includes internal governance structure(s) with responsibility for research policy.

Organizational Systems, Infrastructure, Funding, People & Incentives - all factors that enable, encourage, and sustain engaged research which include the multiplicity of dynamic interactions amongst people, capital investment and the built environment - essentially taking a comprehensive, integrative and holistic systems-based approach.

University and Society Collaboration & Co-Creation – Strategies, policies and practices, communities of interest or practice that expand the scope of engaged research by establishing processes to enhance the reciprocal exchange of knowledge and provide networking opportunities for co-production amongst academia, government, civil society and enterprise.

Preparing & Supporting Engaged Researchers - systems, practices and capacities existing at UNIC partner institutions to assist researchers understand the significance of engaged research; to align their existing research skills and expertise with engaged research objectives and methodologies; to identify and connect with societal partners and other academic researchers across disciplinary lines; and to identify, secure and administer research funding.

Engaged Research in Teaching & Learning and Research Based Teaching - strategies for the integration of Engaged Research, Teaching & Learning into undergraduate and postgraduate curriculum so that students learn to understand the processes and methodologies to advance the frontiers of knowledge while realizing the necessity of engaging *with* community partners rather than ‘for’ or ‘on’ them and thus helping democratize the research process.

Open Research and Digital Transformation & Capability - the open sharing of research artifacts such as publications, data, physical samples and software for broad distribution and dissemination to all levels of society to include academics, government, community organizations, engaged citizens and enterprise. Open Research includes Open Science while expanding inclusion to all disciplines such as the Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences. Open Research aims to foster transdisciplinary dialogue and research wherever feasible and bridge gaps between the Global North and South.

Internationalisation and Trans-nationalization - capacity to form engaged research partnerships and networks beyond individual nation states which allows for a pooling of academic expertise and resources to focus attention on the global challenges of our time which transcend national borders yet can have common patterns of cause and effect amongst many city regions around the world.

Measuring Impact - quantitative and qualitative methods for assessing the impact and societal benefit of engaged research within and across cities. In the UNIC context, this can be collaborative engaged research initiatives such as RDI projects, publishing academic papers, creating partnerships, generating data, or effecting policy which advances the UNIC CityLab Challenge areas, the European Urban Agenda and the SDGs.

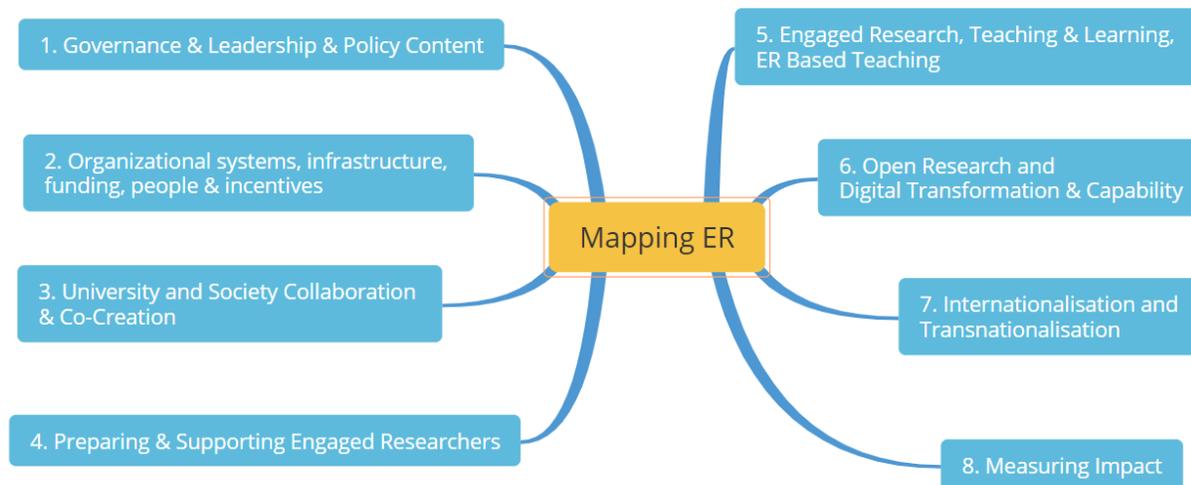


Figure 1. The following mind map depicts the UNIC4ER mapping meta-framework which was refined during the 18 January 2022 mapping workshop at the UNIC4ER Strategy Forum.

The European Engaged Research Declaration

The UNIC European Engaged Research Declaration reflects diverse inputs received over a series of consultation events run as part of our UNIC Strategy Forums on Engaged Research, including a plenary in Cork where delegates travelled from eight universities and cities to prepare the document text together. Thus, it is an inclusive document that reflects the democratic voice of city, civil society, students, and staff across the alliance. As with any consultative and negotiated process, there are diverse perspectives. These are incorporated as best possible in the declaration document. The Declaration is designed to be inspirational and aspirational, and hopefully serve the test of time. It is not a legally binding document. This is clearly stated on the attached version used for the ceremonially signing and will be on a future graphically designed version of the Declaration document.

The Declaration text aligns with our UNIC Erasmus+ Grant Agreement and the UNIC4ER H2020 SWAFS Grant Agreement. The Declaration text also aligns with the key EU Policy document shaping the future of the European Research area, the 'European Pact on Research and Innovation', and the common European values and principles for research and innovation expressed within the Pact, which will give our Declaration enormous currency across UNIC and beyond, albeit why it is termed a 'European Declaration'.



UNIC European University of Post-Industrial Cities

EUROPEAN DECLARATION ON ENGAGED RESEARCH

UNIC: Educating Through Teaching, Research and Community Engagement for Inclusive Societies

We are UNIC, a European alliance of universities and post-industrial cities, whose aim is to develop a new model of European inter-institutional teaching, research and engagement infrastructure that promotes ‘superdiversity’ and interrogates and addresses the challenges facing post-industrial cities. The uniqueness of our alliance resides in our places, our histories and traditions, our individual and collective experience, and the diverse nature of our cities. The vision of our alliance is that our universities, municipalities & civil society partners will collaborate multilaterally to address urban challenges - collectively shaping learning, research and engagement within and across our cities in an inclusive manner – and serving as a beacon for other non-aligned post-industrial cities. UNIC has a distinct focus on ‘Engaged Research’, which builds upon our strategic advantage as an alliance of research-intensive universities and city partners with experience in collaborating with society to address just and inclusive post-industrial transitions. We believe that active societal engagement in research and innovation, in all its dimensions, allows us to harness the full creativity of our societies to address the great challenges of our time. Indeed, the European Research Area and its ‘Pact for Research and Innovation in Europe’, promotes societal responsibility, that is, research & innovation co-created with societal partners, towards strengthening common values, trust and ownership of research.

DECLARATION ON ENGAGED RESEARCH

The first such Declaration in Europe, the document gives expression to a set of underlying values, principles and commitments co-created with delegates from the UNIC European University of Post Industrial Transitions. Students, staff, municipalities and civil society partners attended an Engaged Research Strategy Forum online in January 18th and 19th 2022 and a plenary in University College Cork, Ireland, from March 30th to April 1st 2022. A signing ceremony, involving university, municipality and civil society delegates, took place in Oulu, Finland on June 15th 2022. This Declaration indicates and makes highly visible our collective commitment to Engaged Research.

DEFINITION & VALUES

Engaged Research is an overarching term that describes a wide range of comprehensive research

approaches and methodologies that share a common interest in collaborative engagement ‘with’ and ‘within’ society. Fundamentally committed to academic freedom and the public good, Engaged Research aims to improve, understand, or investigate issues of public interest where societal partners are active collaborative participants in the research process. It nurtures democratic competencies through participation - from defining research need, to the co-creation of knowledge and equitable and reciprocal knowledge translation to and with society. Committed to sustainability, and inherently transdisciplinary, it explicitly builds awareness of the interconnectedness of our social-ecological systems. Imbued with different knowledge traditions (expertise, practice, experience and wisdom), it is manifestly impactful research that has an emancipatory and transformative social justice orientation - consistently pursuing intersectional understanding towards greater social solidarity, diversity, inclusion and equity.

PRINCIPLES AND COMMITMENTS

DEMOCRATIC PURPOSE

We recognise the civic and democratic purpose of societal engagement and participation as integral to the mission of our respective institutions, municipalities and organisations. We believe that universities and cities can model and lead a new agile paradigm of democratic research engagement with the world. We believe that research, now more than ever, requires its application and endeavour to be rooted in the social and the ethical, needing a paradigm shift, so that it may assist with best effect for all in the collaborative solving of the societal challenges of our times. In our collective strategies and plans, wherever possible, we commit to promoting societal engagement, recognising that research mobility and collaboration across our universities and cities has this resolutely democratic purpose.

CARING FOR ALL PEOPLE

We are committed to fostering equitable and agentic communities where all people are encouraged to participate as active members engaged in the shaping of flourishing, compassionate, enlightened societies and sustainable economies, informed by the power of research and evidence. Our responsibility is to developing people as ‘life-wide’ cooperative makers of the democratic communities in which they live and work. We will co-operate in advancing the truly emancipatory potential of research with and within society and for all of life. We will demonstrate agile and courageous leadership in promoting ‘Engaged Research’ within our local and national societies and systems, providing a unifying voice in Europe and beyond for research that is participatory, responsible, and impactful and that advances open research, promotes diversity & inclusion, and that makes a difference in people’s lives.

CARING FOR PLACE

Place is vital to the human experience and our sense of well-being, especially as we reimagine our urban environments for the benefit of future generations. For us, research and innovation are not something apart or separate from society but are an integral and vital part of the life of our communities. We thus recognise the importance of ‘emplacing’ research in local contexts through deep engagement with stakeholders over time. We will contribute to the resilience and renaissance of Europe’s post- industrial cities, regions and communities through actively prioritising and

addressing urban challenges. We will develop integrated university-city Engaged Research & Innovation platforms and consensually agreed roadmaps, underpinned with a common understanding of Engaged Research, a strategy, supportive systems and a common engagement interface to realise the collaborative involvement of civil society, public & city partners, university students and staff in Engaged Research initiatives.

CARING FOR OUR PLANET

We believe that research plays a significant role in addressing almost all of the grand challenges we face as a global community, from the climate crisis – the greatest threat we face, an existential threat – to the related issues of environmental degradation and biodiversity loss, global north and south disparity, health and wellbeing, systemic inequity and inequality, among others. We therefore urgently need to accelerate societal empowerment, and interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary connections between economy, society, ecology and culture, this cannot be postponed. We will therefore support the development of climate neutral, smart and ultimately ‘wise’ cities, prioritising Engaged Research as an important basis for a broader and potentially emancipatory understanding of the interconnectedness of our social-ecological systems.

Recognising the above definition, values, principles and commitments, and encouraged by a spirit of common democratic purpose, and an agile ambition to care for people, place and planet we sign this Declaration on Engaged Research:

UNIC is an alliance of the following partners: Belgium Université de Liège, City of Liège; Croatia Sveučilište u Zagrebu, City of Zagreb; Finland Oulun Yliopisto, City of Oulu; Germany Ruhr-Universität Bochum, City of Bochum; Ireland Coláiste na hOllscoile Corcaigh, City of Cork; Spain Universidad de Deusto, City of Bilbao; The Netherlands Erasmus Universiteit Rotterdam, City of Rotterdam; Turkey Koç Üniversitesi, City of Istanbul. This is not a legally binding document. Signatories include University Rectors and Student Leaders, City Leaders and City Partners.

Signing of the European Engaged Research Declaration

The European Engaged Research Declaration was signed by University and Municipal leaders from the UNIC Consortium during the [UNIC CityLabs Festival](#) in Oulu, Finland on the 15th of June 2022 in the Oulu City Theatre. This event was hosted by the City of Oulu and this event was opened by Päivi Laajala, Mayor of Oulu. The Declaration, a first for Europe, champions 'Engaged Research, which is an approach that involves local people and communities, NGO's and Municipalities, working together with universities to collectively decide on what is to be researched and involving societal partners in all stages of the research process. This grassroots-up approach leads the way in bringing Europeans together across different languages and borders, to participate as active members in shaping flourishing, compassionate, enlightened societies, and sustainable economies, informed by the power of research and evidence.



Fig. 2. Oulu Mayor Päivi Laajala provided opening speech at the signing of the European Engaged Research Declaration and launch of the UNIC CityLab Festival. This event was hosted by the City of Oulu.



Fig. 3. Professor John Cryan, Vice President of Research and Innovation at University College Cork takes a moment to acknowledge the significance of this document during the signing ceremony for the UNIC European Engaged Research Declaration.



Fig. 4. Ceremonial signing of the European Declaration on Engaged Research with City and University representatives from across the UNIC the European University of Post-Industrial Cities. In the joint declaration they commit to develop a common approach to engage citizens, communities and their cities in promoting research and innovation. This declaration is part of the UNIC4ER (UNIC for Engaged Research) project funded by the European Commission.



Figure 5. UNIC CityLab Delegates in attendance for the opening ceremony of the CityLab Festival and signing of the European Declaration on Engaged Research with City and University. Photo credit: Sanna Krook.