



UNIC

# European University of Cities in Post-Industrial Transition



Co-funded by  
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## Welcome to the UNIC Narrative Handbook.

This is a brief overview of who we are, what we stand for, and the milestones of our journey so far.

This handbook is for anyone looking to understand UNIC's history, approach, and guiding principle as we build the university of the future.

We hope you can use our story and learnings as inspiration in developing your own work and activities.

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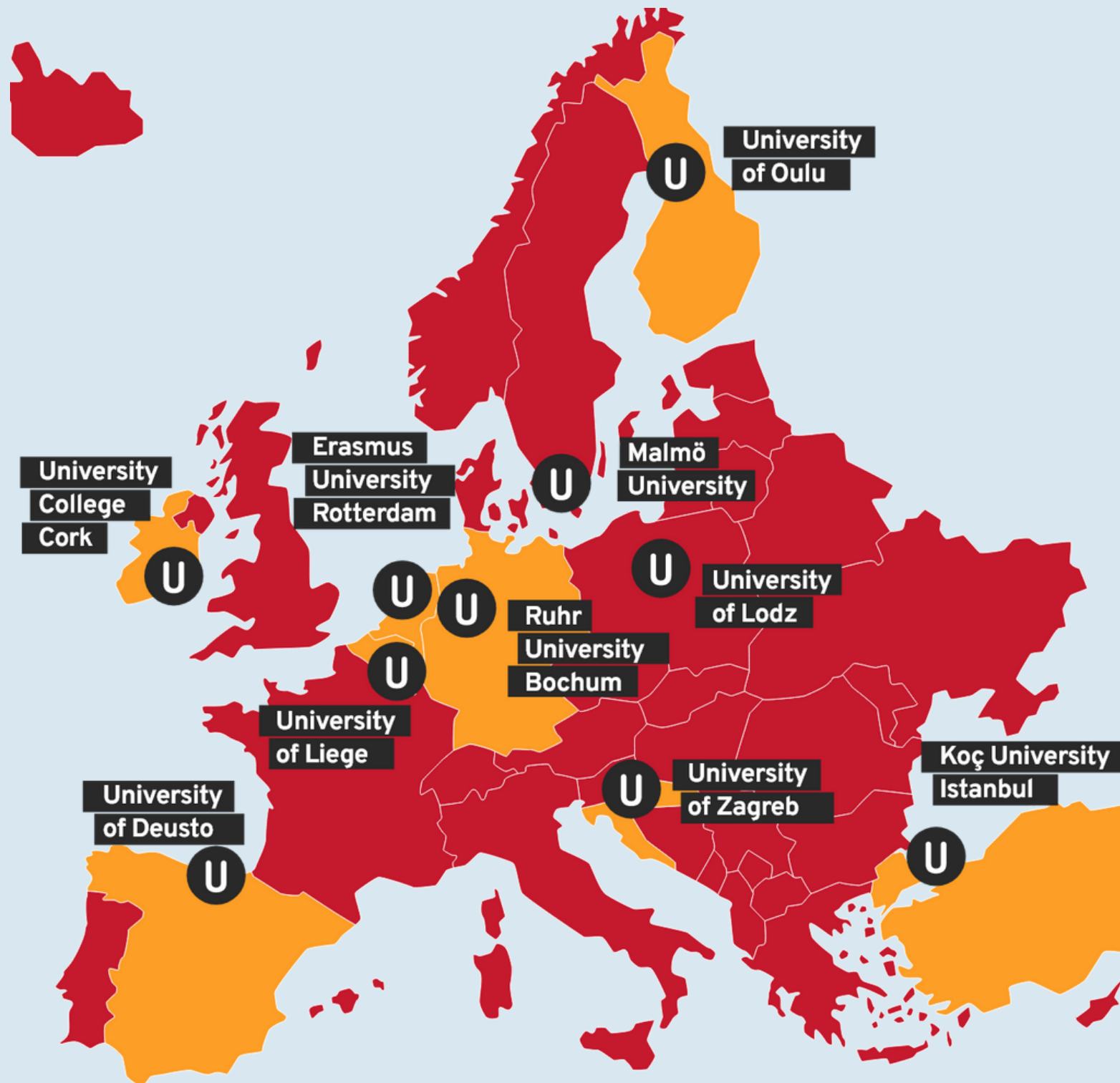
**UNLOCKING NEW MODELS OF LEARNING,  
WORKING AND RESEARCHING THAT WILL  
SHAPE THE UNIVERSITY OF THE FUTURE.**

## The European University of Cities in Post-Industrial Transition

UNIC, pronounced “unique”, is an alliance of ten universities rooted in ten specific post-industrial urban ecosystems, dedicated to unlocking new models of European learning, working and researching that will shape the university of the future.

Our mission is boosting development of knowledge and co-creation through collaboration, innovation and inclusion, all for societal impact and improvement.

# UNIC universities



- Koç Üniversitesi**  
(Koç University, Istanbul, Turkey) •
- Université de Liège**  
(University of Liège, Belgium) •
- Uniwersytet Łódzki**  
(University of Łódź, Poland) •
- Malmö universitet**  
(Malmö University, Sweden) •
- Oulun yliopisto**  
(University of Oulu, Finland) •
- Erasmus Universiteit Rotterdam**  
(Erasmus University Rotterdam, The Netherlands) •
- Sveučilište u Zagrebu**  
(University of Zagreb, Croatia) •
- Universidad de Deusto**  
(University of Deusto, Bilbao, Spain) •
- Ruhr-Universität Bochum**  
(Ruhr University Bochum, Germany) •
- Coláiste na hOllscoile Corcaigh**  
(University College Cork, Ireland) •

# UNIC's Core Identity



UNIC places inclusion and mobility at the core of a new European University, developing models for teaching and learning in “superdiverse” settings. To this end, UNIC promotes (and supports) what we call **Engaged Research**, and drives changes in institutional culture and academic governance within the alliance.

The results, from handbooks on integrating mobility into existing university courses to joint masters programmes taught across eight university campuses, equip the next generation of global citizens with the 21st century skills and knowledge to address the challenges of changing urban contexts in Europe and beyond.

The **UNIC Identity** is defined by our geographical spread, our members’ shared post-industrial history, and the immense diversity within the alliance.



# A BRIEF HISTORY OF UNIC (2020-2024)



# Brief History of UNIC



Credits (from left): Alexander Santos Lima, University of Deusto

UNIC was established as the “European University of Post-Industrial Cities” in 2020, a project under the **Erasmus+ European Universities Initiative**. It was initially an alliance of eight universities, with the University of Lodz (UniLodz) and Malmö University (MaU) joining in 2022.

UNIC came together because, as universities in cities in post-industrial transition with a combined population of almost 20 million citizens, we were **uniquely positioned to study, contribute to and share practices on some of Europe’s most central challenges for the future**. Through our systemic collaboration in UNIC we contribute to innovative practices in our cities, focusing on key 21st century challenges such as urban resilience and smart cities, sustainability, environment, health and wellbeing, security and justice, diversity and inclusion, culture and creativity, and entrepreneurship. Our European collaboration provides opportunities for our student population, but also for our researchers and professional staff to become leaders and change agents in these transitions.

# UNIC highlights

WP1	WP2	WP3	WP4	WP5	WP6
8 Universities and City Councils	7 EU Member States and Turkey	277,000 Students	20 million Citizens (City Populations)	29,000 Staff	+2 New Partners - Malmö and Łódź
1 Joint Governance Structure	16 Student Board Representatives	8 Cultures of Governance and ICT mapped	2 Universities in European Student Card pilot	1 Virtual Campus for 8 Institutions	8 Mobility Hubs
1 Handbook on Physical and Virtual Mobility	2 UNIC Joint Master Degree Programmes	5+ Joint Degree Programmes	400+ UNIC Online Opened Courses	8 Online Language Modules	24 Teacher Trainings
1 Superdiversity Academy	2 Academic Seminars on Superdiversity	1 Superdiversity Classroom Guide	6 Superdiversity Schools	400 Buddy Couples	120 Open Cases on Superdiversity
1 Systematic Lit Review + Benchmark Analysis	50 Pop-up CityLabs	48 Virtual Meeting Platforms	3 International CityLabs Festivals	7 Academic Publications on CityLabs	195 CityLabs cases in Open Case Repository
1 Communication and Dissemination Plan	4 UNIC Conferences	80+ Targeted Mailings	75,000 Website visits / year	1184 LinkedIn Engaged Followers	100+ UNIC events across the consortium

Three **UNIC CityLabs Festivals** were organized: Liege in September 2021, Oulu in June 2022, Bilbao in April 2023. CityLabs were UNIC’s physical and virtual meeting points where students, citizens, academia and city stakeholders work together to identify and solve societal challenges faced by post-industrial superdiverse cities. More than 50 “pop-up” CityLabs events, and another 48 “Virtual Meeting Platforms” were organized between 2020 and 2023.

UNIC’s **Superdiversity Academy** was launched with a webinar on March 3, 2021: since then, it has submitted six co-authored working papers, co-written a “State of the Art Report on the Literature on Superdiversity and Higher Education” , delivered two rounds of peer-reviews on diversity and inclusion practices within UNIC universities, co-written the “Superdiverse Classroom Guideline”, and delivered six 3-day Superdiversity Schools dedicated to making universities more inclusive.

# TIMELINE



UNIC kicks off in October 2020

2020



UNIC launches **free online language modules**, a celebration of linguistic diversity. Hundreds of students and staff members have started learning. UNIC's **Handbook on Physical and Virtual Mobility** unveiled.

2021



UNIC's Erasmus Mundus joint masters programme **RePIC - Redesigning the Post-Industrial City** - launches across eight universities.

2022



UNIC4ER, our research program and focus on **Engaged Research**, launches. It has since developed a UNIC Seed Fund, Open Science Campus, and an Engaged Research Declaration for collaborative research for, and with, society.

2023



UNIC's new phase kicks off October 2023

## WHY UNIC

Europe and the world are at a **significant turning point, confronted with serious challenges**. Digital transformation, security threats and major political developments will be among major drivers of change in coming years. Universities within UNIC are faced with the pressure to respond to challenges of growing complexity.

Against this backdrop, **UNIC aims to become a self-sustaining university within the next decade** – characterised both by deeply inter-connected services across the alliance as well as by locally-embedded individual partners.

# Our Mission

Our ten universities operate in cities in post-industrial transition; our staff, researchers and students play a key role in the changing environment. **We are connected by a commitment to foster transformative modes of teaching, research and learning that respond to the challenges faced by our cities.** Increasingly superdiverse populations requires attention to inclusion and accessibility across this work.

Together, we strive to promote common European values and strengthen European identity while working on institutional transformation of European higher education institutions.

INCLUSIVE | NON-TRADITIONAL | URBAN | UNIQUE



Credits (from left): University of Oulu, University of Deusto, Alexander Santos Lima



**UNIC STUDENTS AND UNIVERSITY STAFF WILL ENJOY A TRULY EUROPEAN LEARNING, TEACHING, RESEARCH AND WORKING EXPERIENCE, WITHOUT ADMINISTRATIVE HURDLES.**

# Our Vision



Credits (from left): Alexander Santos Lima, University of Oulu.

We will take inclusion to the next level, using our current expertise in superdiversity to broaden educational opportunities for non-traditional students, including members of new migrant communities and people living in socio-economically disadvantaged areas.

We will engage students in real-world urban challenges with our city partners through initiatives such as City Labs, bringing ‘science to the city’ and contributing to the resilience and renaissance of Europe’s post-industrial urban centres. Our students and staff will study, teach and work throughout Europe, becoming change agents who will contribute to the ongoing transformation of our cities, ultimately building out a future for Europe.

# Our Goals



Credit: University of Zagreb

- **Contributing to an inclusive global learning society** with a readiness to act upon change and societal challenges, placing inclusion and mobility at the core of a new European University and developing models of best practice for teaching and learning in superdiverse settings;
- **Equipping the next generation of global citizens** with the 21st century skills and knowledge to address the challenges of superdiverse societies;
- **Preparing students with a readiness to act** when facing the demands of changing urban contexts in Europe and beyond, through the practice of engaged learning and engaged research;
- **Developing institutional culture**, engagement instruments and academic governance within our Alliance.



# The UNIC Way

COLLABORATION, CO-CREATION  
AND MODELS OF PRACTICE

## Empowering students to shape Europe's future.

We believe that universities in cities in post-industrial transition are uniquely positioned to deal with Europe's challenges and opportunities, as innovative skills and scientific expertise are in high demand.

The "UNIC Way" is collaboration and co-creation, not only to learn from each other but also to shape new structures and models of practice, tailored to the needs of our students, staff, cities, and civil society. Through this, we pave the way towards an open, systemic and self-sustaining European University.

## Inclusive | Non-traditional Urban | Unique

CHANGE AGENTS, AND TRUE  
PARTNERS TO OUR CITIES

Human dignity, freedom and intellectual expression are all treated as a priority throughout our activities. UNIC is a firm partnership and symbiotic relationship between universities and cities, teaching to realise social responsibility and commitment to the flourishing of society.

# Key terms

## CO-CREATION

At UNIC, we know from experience that there is no ‘one size fits all’ model. We have learned to harness the strengths and resources of individual cities and universities for shared common good, a process we call “co-creation.”

## ENGAGED RESEARCH

Academia without the ivory tower. Engaged Research describes a range of approaches and methodologies that share an 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 public interest issues where societal partners are collaborative participants.

## SUPERDIVERSITY

UNIC’s pedagogical models challenge simplified ways of thinking about diversity. This social complexity – superdiversity - is manifested in the growing prominence of complex mixtures and intersectionalities that define our cities today, and our research expertise both celebrates superdiversity and fosters environments of inclusion and understanding.

## EUROPEAN UNIVERSITY

UNIC is one of over 50 European Universities Alliances, part of an ambitious and flagship EU initiative. Through long-term structural and sustainable cooperation, alliances like UNIC will improve the international competitiveness of higher education institutions in Europe, and promote European values and identity. [Learn more here.](#)

# UNIC programs and initiatives



UNIC is a complex, multi-threaded project that brings together **10 universities, 7 thematic lines, 3 specialized Centres, 2 joint master programmes,** and an **evolving repository** of best practices, engaged research projects, and vital event programming.

## UNIC BUILDS OUTWARDS FROM ITS STUDENTS.

Students are our co-producers of knowledge, lifelong learners, change agents, and active global citizens. They run the **UNIC Student Learner's Forum**, which roots UNIC's work in student experiences across Europe.

UNIC builds institutional convergence by taking a creative and entrepreneurial approach to integrating the strengths of our 10 universities.

# UNIC programs and initiatives

## Thematic Lines

Across our ten universities, UNIC has built a set of interlocking collaborative structure, a **virtual UNIC Campus**, that integrates our vibrant, diverse community through programs, projects, and initiatives. These include seven cross-cutting Thematic Lines, providing content and communities for UNIC's innovation in education, engagement and cooperation capacities:

- Superdiversity
- Sustainability and Green Cities
- Urban Resilience and Smart Cities
- Justice, Security and Institutions
- Entrepreneurial Learning for Innovation
- Health and Wellbeing
- Arts, Culture and Creativity

## Centres

UNIC's three core "Centres" create sites of co-creation:

### UNIC Teaching and Learning Centre

A space to develop new ways of innovative learning and teaching, from Blended Intensive Programmes to pedagogical transformation.

### UNIC Centre for City Futures:

A "one-stop-shop" for universities to engage with cities and communities for transformative innovation

### UNIC Capacity Building Centre

Creating the structural and cultural conditions for UNIC educational innovation, impact and inclusion.

## Joint Masters

Our two special Joint Master's Programmes, are offered across eight UNIC campuses and connect to UNIC's core themes of post-industrial transitions and superdiversity:

- Redesigning the Post-industrial City (RePIC)
- Superdiversity in Education, Organisations, and Diversity (SEOS)

*Completing the mosaic is the vibrant Superdiversity Community and UNIC student body fostered through these projects and initiatives, who are engaged through a constant stream of events, publications, workshops, and conferences.*

# UNIC Style Guide

**Words matter.** While we use English as a working language, UNIC is a multilingual alliance that publishes across 10 European languages. We harness our choice of words in support of superdiversity and intersectionality. We think of language as a powerful bridge able to transform ideas and shape discourse.

## PEOPLE-FIRST, INCLUSIVE LANGUAGE

- We affirm our shared identities and connections by centering people first and ensuring that the essential characteristics of how people see themselves are represented and respected.
- We hold space for intersectional identity, and ensure that we reflect culture, agency, and spirit.
- When we're not sure, we ask!

## ACTIVE VOICE, MINIMAL JARGON

- We always try to root out bias to the status quo by reducing ambiguity in our writing.
- We prioritize the transformative and emergent ideas, and write directly and clearly.
- To the greatest extent possible within the scope of academic research, we minimize “work package” language and jargon.

## RESPECT, HUMILITY, AND RIGOR

- While we celebrate our successes, UNIC's writing is rooted in humility.
- We take great care to acknowledge our influences, give due credit.
- We strive, always, towards anti-ageist, anti-ableist, data-driven writing that is restorative, and energizing.

# UNIC in the Future

In the coming decade, UNIC will be **fully established as a leader in regional engagement and a true partner for the city**, naturally involved in municipal activity. As an active research hub, UNIC will **deliver innovation through inter-disciplinary research practice**. A mutually co-operative relationship between the city and the UNIC alliance will allow for research to easily engage societal partners, and in turn for city partners to solve problems through university expertise.



Credit: University of Deusto



We hope you found this handbook a useful resource. If you have any questions or require further assistance, please contact the UNIC communications officer at [info@unic.eu](mailto:info@unic.eu)

Our collection of toolkits, templates and design materials can be downloaded from the UNIC website at [www.unic.eu/en/press-and-media](http://www.unic.eu/en/press-and-media)

*Find us on social media: @unic\_eu*