

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: