

UNICA's response to the EU Green Paper: From Challenges to Opportunities: Towards a Common Strategic Framework for EU Research and Innovation funding

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In the *Innovation Union* flagship initiative, the European Union calls for an integrated approach to research and innovation and highlights the need to address societal challenges and key technologies. The Green Paper stresses the necessity to give a sharper focus on dealing with societal challenges in the new EU research and innovation activities. UNICA strongly believes that the active involvement of universities, which combine in their mission education, research, as well as societal outreach and community engagement, is essential for the precise and accurate identification of societal objectives without an overly scientific and technological bias.

By linking the production and proliferation of knowledge with its commitment to society, higher education institutions bring research and innovation closer to the needs of industry, businesses and wider communities, and play a central role in the knowledge triangle interactions. Also, universities constitute open-innovation ecosystems, functioning in a territorial context of a region, city agglomeration, and a campus, providing environment for research and the diffusion of innovation, as well as for testing innovative solutions among students, academics, researchers and administrative staff. In this regard, universities represent a great framework for the progression of eco-innovations, eliciting environmental advancements and contributing to a durable, equitable and economically viable development.

As Network of Universities from the Capitals of Europe, we recommend the development of EU funding instruments for the policies and activities implemented in the following areas:

- **Environmental sustainability at Universities.** UNICA advocates promoting the idea of “green academic footprint”, higher education institutions that acknowledge responsibility for understanding and providing solutions towards the environmental changes and commit to reducing their own detrimental impact on the environment. The ambitious policy objectives of the new Europe2020 strategy established in the area of environmental sustainability prompt reflection on the role of universities and their prospective contribution in moving towards a low carbon and resource efficient economy. “Green universities” should aim at reducing the negative environmental impact related to universities’ operation and infrastructure by developing jointly resource efficiency plans, resource management systems

and green public procurement policies, They should at the same time attempt to increase their positive, green academic footprint by intensifying cooperative eco-innovation activities of university research centres, enriching the curricula with courses related to sustainable growth and environmental protection and introducing awareness training for the students and staff. As most UNICA universities constitute an integrated part of a bigger city and cooperate with the city, using the local municipality as a living laboratory for students and researchers may open up a whole range of new opportunities for innovations regarding environmental sustainability. The UNICA Group on Green Academic Footprint may serve as a pioneering example of higher education institutions working together on reducing their negative environmental impact by benefiting from the creative input of all stakeholders involved, especially students. With regard to the statement made in the Green Paper, which indicates that innovation depends also upon activities and competences that are non-technological in nature, UNICA proposes that EU funding takes account of social and eco-innovations that are based on re-combining the possibilities offered by the existing models and technologies and sharing the solutions that have emerged through local sustainability efforts. Even though European universities have been working on integrating environmental sustainability on an institutional level, we recognize that American universities have come even further due to the development of driver mechanisms, including specific financial models. Therefore, UNICA proposes that EU funding supports the research on such financial paradigms.

- **Excellence in Doctoral Training.** Doctoral education has been undergoing a process of reconfiguration at universities in an attempt to meet the increasingly growing needs, enhance the employability of doctoral graduates and to rise to the challenges for the most innovative region in the world that Europe aspires to be. In order to optimise research performance at higher education institutions and assure the sustainability of university research centres, UNICA recommends a significant extension of EU funding schemes within Marie Curie Actions to foster the development of cross-border and cross-sectoral initiatives that would strengthen the ties with business and industry, not only on a European, but also on a global level. By highlighting the multiplier role of doctoral schools' directors and the significance of the supervisors – supervisees relationship, UNICA also calls for supportive EU funding instruments to develop and disseminate the measures necessary to establish effective doctoral supervision in the changing academic climate. UNICA has developed considerable expertise with the organisation of “UNICA PhD Master Class” seminars on doctoral supervision, and it is willing to bring forward this experience in order to contribute to the potential EU actions in this field.
- **Open Access.** UNICA welcomes the idea to support broader innovations, such as social innovation. However, the introduction of new ideas and solutions to the communities, including the academic community, elicits reflection on the issues of accessibility. New

technologies offer unprecedented opportunities to share scientific knowledge and enhance substantially the swiftness and quality of scholarly communication, Yet, many issues of accessibility to digitalised scholarly information and of search efficiency in the diversified digital contents still demand viable solutions. The open access initiatives undertaken so far by the European Union require from researchers to provide open access to articles resulting from EC funded research, within a specified time period. UNICA calls for development of instruments that could provide funding for the scholarly communication partnerships and further improvement of access to scientific information. Moreover, UNICA recommends that the EU funding tools take account of libraries and learning centres as driving forces in the elimination of the scientific information gaps and contributing to the full exploitation of the collective potential of European research. In this context, UNICA is willing to bring its considerable experience from its Scholarly Communication Working Group and the UNICA Scholarly Communication Seminars, organised biennially since 2002.

- **Inclusiveness and Equal Opportunities.** Assuming an active role in improving the situation of the community is a prerequisite for a full-functioning of a higher education institution, UNICA member universities are located in large municipalities, and their development is historically and inextricably linked with the cities/regions. Universities are agents of change, in permanent interaction with the community. To assure the inclusive growth stipulated in the EU2020 strategy, EU funding schemes should take account of initiatives aiming at improving the education for groups at risk of social inclusion, such as programs stimulating the mobility of people with special needs and of the socially underprivileged, as well as “internationalisation at home” projects. Furthermore, as the study of social inclusiveness and academic mobility still lacks proper, common methodology on the EU level, UNICA proposes the EU funding tools support sociological and anthropological studies that will provide reliable analysis of the situation. Once the current situation and the existing problems have been identified through scientific research, locally and socio-culturally compatible solutions can be suggested and the evidence-based policies implemented.

About UNICA

Founded in 1990, UNICA (Network of Universities from the Capitals of Europe) associates 43 higher education institutions from 32 European capital cities. It combines the strength of over 120,000 staff and 1,500,000 researchers and faculty members. It is committed to promote academic excellence, integration and co-operation between member universities throughout Europe. It seeks also to be a driving force in the development of the Bologna process and the integration of universities from Central and Eastern Europe into the European Higher Education Area. The Network provides a forum in which universities can reflect on the demands of strategic change in university research, education and administration. It organises annual meetings for EU Research Liaison Officers, Bologna Lab Coordinators and International Relations’ Officers, Rectors’ Seminars, as well as biennial events: Scholarly Communication Seminars, Seminars for Heads of Doctoral Schools (*UNICA PhD Master Class*), and UNICA Student Conferences. UNICA advocates the views of its member universities to the European institutions and to the public authorities on the national, regional and municipal level.