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UNICA Work Programme 2024

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UNICA BUILDING COMMUNITY

First edition of the UNICA Days in Brussels, 28 February – 1 March 2024

The inaugural UNICA Days event in Brussels, scheduled from 28 February to 1 March 2024, heralds a pivotal moment in shaping the future trajectory of the network. Under the compelling theme, "Navigating the Future: Strengthening Democracy through Education and Research," this event provides an exclusive platform for the UNICA community to convene, network, and engage with key representatives, stakeholders, and decision-makers influencing Higher Education policy in Europe. With an emphasis on three crucial topics— the democratic mission of universities ahead of the EU Parliament elections 2024, visions for a new European research and innovation strategy, and developments in transnational cooperation on education in Europe— the UNICA Days present a unique opportunity for leaders and participants from UNICA member universities to contribute to the network's shared vision. Targeting Rectors/Presidents, Vice-Rectors/Vice-Presidents, Heads of International Offices, and members of UNICA Working Groups, the event's agenda includes panels, roundtables, keynotes, and networking opportunities. As we approach the European elections in 2024, the UNICA Days stand as a testament to the interconnectedness of Higher Education and European politics, positioning our community at the forefront of shaping a future anchored in informed decision-making, active citizen engagement, and societal progress.

"Vote for Europe" student video competition

As part of our commitment to fostering active engagement and awareness within the university community, UNICA is excited to organize a video competition centred around the theme of the relationship between students and European elections. This innovative initiative seeks to promote a stronger connection between the academic environment and the democratic processes shaping the European landscape. Participants will be encouraged to creatively articulate their perspectives, concerns, and aspirations regarding the European elections through compelling video submissions. A sample of videos will be displayed at the UNICA Days event in Brussels, providing a platform for diverse voices within the university community to contribute to a broader conversation about the role of students in the democratic processes of the European Union. This competition underscores UNICA's dedication to nurturing informed and active citizenship among students while fostering a sense of community engagement.

INNOVATION AND INTERNATIONALISATION OF HIGHER EDUCATION, ACADEMIC STANDARDS & COLLABORATION

UNICA EduLAB – 4EU+ Alliance Joint Education Webinar Series

First webinar: The European Degree: Impact on Student's involvement and the role of European universities alliances, late January/early February 2024 (precise date tbc)

Promoted by UNICA, 4EU+ and the University of Warsaw, in cooperation with ESU

UNICA EduLAB Seminar: "The end of the massification of higher education? Trends and debates regarding student enrolment and participation rates in higher education," 19 April 2024

Hosted by King's College London, School of Education Communication and Society within the Education and Society Dialogues Series

Beginning in the aftermath of WW II, massification has been one of the most transformative phenomena in higher education and possibly in the broader society as well during this time. The idea that higher education should not be a privilege reserved for the elites led not only to opening the university doors to students from all social categories and strata, but also to the idea that having more and more students enrol and ever-growing rates of participation is both justified and necessary from a social, economic, and political point a view. There was large support for these ideas within the academe itself, in political circles and in the general public. More recently, some politicians contest the usefulness of high and increasing participation rates and advocate instead for reducing them. The panel will discuss trends on the ground regarding student enrolment in Europe and how new policy narratives regarding enrolment and participation may influence higher education in the years to come.

UNICA IRO Group - Handbook of good practices for IROs on Student Housing & webinar

In response to the pressing challenges faced by international students in securing housing within capital cities, the International Relations Officers (IRO) group, after extensive consultations with its members, recognised the need for a comprehensive resource. The difficulties encountered by international students in accessing suitable accommodation, coupled with the acknowledged lack of expertise among international office staff in addressing these issues, underscored the urgency for shared best practices. Consequently, the group convened in Sofia in November 2023, engaging in fruitful discussions with representatives from the European Student Union and the Erasmus Student Network. These collaborative efforts culminated in a decision to compile the insights and guidelines gathered during these meetings into a handbook. UNICA is committed to publishing this handbook, offering a valuable resource for IROs to enhance their support for international students facing housing challenges.

Furthermore, recognizing the importance of widespread dissemination, the findings and best practices outlined in the handbook will be presented through a public webinar. This approach aims to extend the impact of the handbook beyond the UNICA network, fostering a broader dialogue and knowledge exchange among international relations professionals, educators, and stakeholders invested in addressing the housing concerns of international students. The webinar will provide an opportunity for interactive discussions, allowing participants to delve deeper into the nuances of effective strategies and further contribute to the collective knowledge in the realm of international student housing.

UNICA Rectors' Seminar in the framework of the UNICA General Assembly 2024, University of Stockholm, 27 June 2024 The annual seminar promises an insightful exploration under the working theme "Networking of Networks: Working Together for the Advancement of Higher Education." This seminar serves as a dynamic platform for university leaders to collaborate, share innovative ideas, and foster partnerships that transcend institutional boundaries. Emphasising the collective effort in advancing higher education, the event aims to cultivate a networked community committed to addressing contemporary challenges and promoting excellence in academia.

RESEARCH

UNICA Scholarly Communication Seminar "Open Science and Academic Libraries: Organizational Challenges in an Evolving Research Landscape, University of Ljubljana, 22 – 24 April 2024

The seminar will delve into crucial topics such as Open Science, including:

- Open Science good practices related to the management of academic libraries,
- The role of European Universities alliances and Horizon Europe in Open Science,
- The prospects for the reform of research assessment.

UNICA will also welcome the participation and collaboration with members of the Open4UA project, who will share practical lessons and experiences from their work supporting Ukrainian institutions with Open Science.

UNICA Scholarly Communication webinar on Rights Retention, promoted by the University of Edinburgh, 31 January 2024

The discussions will focus on the sharing and development of rights retention policies at universities that level the space for agreements between authors and publishers. This is a key topic for the implementation of Open Access. The online seminar will also represent a step on the path to ensuring that individuals keep a share of the ownership of their work while benefiting from the opportunities to spread their research available to them in the digital world.

ENGAGED, & SUSTAINABLE URBAN UNIVERSITIES

UNICA Green & SDGs online Roundtable on the development of Sustainability Strategies, March 2024

In alignment with the shared commitment to advancing a whole-institution approach to sustainability across European universities, the UNICA Green & SDGs Working Group will organize a roundtable discussion bringing together UNICA members to share experiences and challenges in the development of a sustainability strategy at their institution and learn lessons from different approaches and perspectives.

The roundtable will build upon and present the results from the **comprehensive survey** launched among UNICA members in December 2023 aimed at mapping the state of play across UNICA diverse membership and to collect information about the scope, the evaluation and certification mechanisms, the communication and awareness strategies, relating to the implementation of sustainability strategies at UNICA member institutions.

Erasmus+ project “Mindfulness Practices for Students in Society (MP4s)” - <https://mp4s.eu/>

Project Period: 2021 - 2024

Relevant UNICA working group: UNICA Green and SDGs

Coordinator: Institut Polytechnique UniLaSalle

Partners (UNICA members in bold): Consorzio Scuola Comunita Impresa, Ocak Izi Dernegi, Conhecer-Se, UNICA, **Vilnius University, Nova University, Roma Tre University**

Guaranteeing the wellbeing of students and staff in a sustainable long-term way has become a predominant topic for higher education institutions especially since the COVID-19 pandemic. In line within UN Sustainability Goal 3 and 4, the MP4s project provides open access set of resources for students, teachers, and faculties to support higher education institutions in their implementation of mindfulness practices for a social and climate transition.

To realize this endeavour, the project foresees the following major project results to be delivered:

- Mapping of emotional challenges and concerns of students based on research conducted by the four universities of the consortium.
- Development of the first Mindfulness Toolbox.
- Set up of an orientation and assessment tool in collaboration with university partners and teachers
- Design of the SIT4PLANET tailorable syllabus as a core tool which will enable university stakeholders to weave mindful practices in any course or campus activity
- To deliver manuals for trainers and students for the implementation of the syllabus
- To set up a recognition and certification system which will be formulated to reward the students embarking the journey and give visibility to their engagement and the results achieved
- To formulate policy recommendations on how to integrate the SIT4PLANET in universities to promote the inclusion of mindfulness practices in the curricula, and all facets of academic life.

UNICA's contribution: In close consultation with members, UNICA will deliver the **policy recommendations** on the promotion of the implementation of mindful practices and the therewith bound acquisition of skills in the university setting. The recommendations will be disseminated in the framework of a 1-day conference in Brussels in June 2024.

E+ project Open Pass 4 Climate

Project Period: 01/11/2022 - 31/10/2025

Relevant UNICA working group: UNICA Green & SDGs

Coordinator: Institut Polytechnique France UniLaSalle

Partners: Universidade Nova de Lisboa, Consorzio Scuola Comunita Impresa, Universidad de Valladolid, UNICA

The project recognizes the key role universities and teaching bodies play to engage students, organisations and the wider community on the changes needed for a just and green transition. More precisely, the project aims to encourage learners and staff to build further green competences with regards to skills and attitudes which are needed to successfully meet UN and EU set climate goals. In doing so, the project contributes to UN Sustainability Goal 4 and 13. Key output in this regard will be the development of a digital European Open Badges Passport, documenting green competences acquired in and outside HEIs in a shareable and recognisable way for a for-climate lifelong learning pathway. The OpenPass4Climate will be developed in cooperation with four universities of the program and associated partners. On the way to the development and implementation of such a Pass, the following major project results will be produced:

- An online and interactive catalogue mapping eco-pedagogical best practice activities available in the four-consortium partner countries
- An Assessment Tool of nature engagement
- An Open Badge collection and OpenPass4Climate
- An impact evaluation on the Pass and Policy Recommendations

UNICA's contribution: Contribution to the design and implementation of an OpenPass4Climate through the provision of 1 transnational meeting and 1 training in March 2024, recommendations on the use of the Pass in Europe and the dissemination of these in the framework of two conferences organized in Brussels in 2025.

UNICA QUALITY ASSURANCE

Membership Survey and Members' Report

The production of a member report, subsequent to the completion of the member survey, constitutes a pivotal element in enhancing the efficacy of the UNICA Network. This process serves to facilitate internal decision-making through the provision of insights crucial for performance monitoring, resource management, and overall quality assurance. The report, summarising the outcomes of the membership survey, is designed to contribute valuable insights for shaping forthcoming strategy and workplans. The anticipated completion date for the report is by the end of the second quarter. The report will encompass an evaluation of the outcomes derived from the 2023 internal member survey, an identification and analysis of emerging trends, and the execution of a SWOT analysis utilizing survey findings as a foundational component. The preparation of this comprehensive report, intended for distribution to members, will be spearheaded by the secretariat, with substantial contributions from the steering committee and the working groups.

Procedural and QA Document for the UNICA Working Groups

The Procedural and QA Document for Working Groups within the UNICA Network aims to enhance operational efficiency.

This involves analysing and standardizing the composition and structure of working groups, gathering industry-leading practices, and creating a comprehensive document that integrates existing models with innovative procedural guidelines and quality assurance measures. The document will establish a standardized model for quality assurance, composition, and procedures to foster a more cohesive relationship between working groups and the secretariat. Additionally, a commitment to a comprehensive internal quality assurance review in 2024 will focus on management quality and outputs. This review will assess governance structures, responsibilities, resource allocation, support availability, internal communication, and processes for feedback and continuous improvement. It will also address the coherence, relevance, implementation, and impact of the network's outputs, utilizing measurable targets, best practices, and benchmarks. The goal is to identify areas for improvement and propose quality assurance solutions that align with UNICA's mission, vision, and values, ensuring impactful actions that serve the needs of member universities and the European higher education community. In 2024, there are plans to map the composition, capacity, and working arrangements of working groups to establish a standardized model for future optimization.

UNICA POLICY AND ADVOCACY

UNICA Opinion and Position Papers

The production of Opinion and Position Papers within the UNICA work plan is strategically aligned with the overarching goals outlined in the network's strategy plan. These papers will serve as influential tools, shaped by the strategic vision of the network, to inform, impact, and drive positive change in higher education. Anchored in expert insights, the papers will focus on articulating the crucial role of universities in Europe. The thematic content of these papers will be dictated by areas where our university membership necessitates a unified and robust response. To ensure comprehensive coverage, these themes will draw on input from internal experts within our network as well as external collaborators with specialized knowledge in relevant domains. Through this collaborative and interdisciplinary approach, UNICA aims to contribute thought leadership that addresses contemporary challenges and shapes the future trajectory of European higher education.

UNICA COMMUNICATION & OUTREACH

Strengthening of brand

As part of our ongoing commitment to strategic communication and outreach, UNICA is embarking on a comprehensive strengthening of the brand. Through the strategic use of various communication tools, we aim to not only enhance the visibility of our network but also facilitate the widespread dissemination of best practices drawn from our diverse membership. This approach will effectively address critical processes and discussions relevant to higher education, ensuring that our initiatives remain at the forefront of pertinent dialogues.

targeting and engaging both internal and external audiences, we seek to fortify our connections with member institutions while also cultivating broader awareness among the general public. This dynamic branding strategy aligns with our mission to actively involve and promote the achievements and impact of UNICA across a spectrum of stakeholders, reinforcing our position as a leading force in shaping the future of European higher education.

Growth of online presence and outreach

UNICA aims to showcase the outcomes of its strategic efforts to enhance online visibility, emphasising the creation of a user-friendly experience, improved search visibility, and accurate representation of the brand and mission across digital channels. Additionally, UNICA plans to explore untapped opportunities on platforms such as LinkedIn, leveraging article posts, interactive polls, and user-generated content while staying attuned to emerging trends.

Simultaneously, the organisation prioritizes "Audience Engagement and Community Building," emphasising prompt responses to comments, messages, and inquiries. Actively engaging with influencers, partner organizations, and individuals in the higher education policy sphere is seen as vital to fostering a supportive online community. Lastly, UNICA commits to continuous improvement through "Analytics and Feedback," regularly monitoring social media analytics to assess content and engagement strategies. This data-driven approach ensures alignment with trends and the evolving needs of the higher education policy audience.