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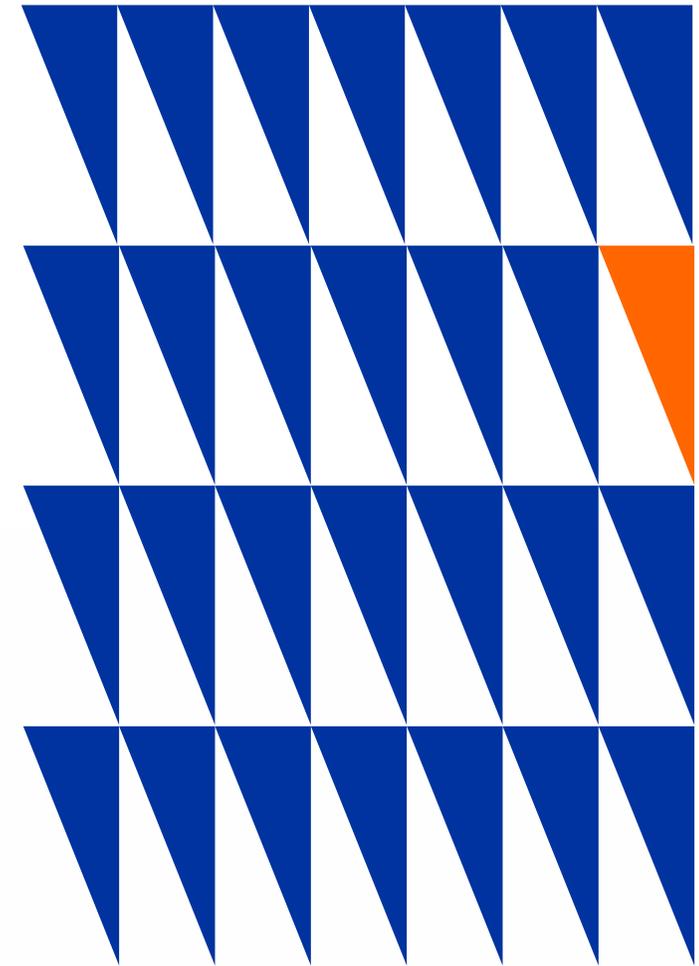
WELCOME TO



UNICA Research meeting

Hosted by Vrije Universiteit Brussel
Brussels, 2-3 December 2024

TOUR DE TABLE





UNICA WORKING GROUP RESEARCH

INTRODUCTION, PROPOSED OBJECTIVES AND WORK PLAN



Prof Pieter Ballon
Vice-Chancellor Research



GENERAL ASSEMBLY ENDORSED VUB AS UNICA RESEARCH WORKING GROUP CHAIR

- VUB, as a research university and one of the small/mid-sized European R&I leaders, is interested and suitable for reviving/leading this group
- Mid-2024, VUB already obtained 82 mio € in Horizon Europe funding (based on EU Horizon Dashboard)
- This is exceptionally high for a mid-sized university (based on the European Education Register data 2022)
 - #20 of all universities involved in EU programs
 - #2 of comparable universities in size
 - #1 of comparable universities with full curriculum



Prof Dr Pieter Ballon is vice-rector Research of VUB, and is director of imec-SMIT, a large research group on digital platforms



Tania Van Loon coordinates the Research Funding Europe team

AGENDA FOR THE FIRST MEETING

2 DECEMBER

- 14h Welcome words and tour de table
- 14h30 Proposed objectives and work plan for UNICA Research
- 15h Tackling urban challenges with European R&I funding and the New European Bauhaus
- Members' corner
- 17h Guided tour of usquare.brussels
- 18h "Thinking dinner" at Le Mess

3 DECEMBER

- 9h Research infrastructures: sharing good practices, considering collaboration and improving research infrastructure access
- 11h Contributing to policy shaping: the European Research Area
- 12h30 Priorities and action points for next meeting
- 13h group picture and farewell lunch

WHAT IS UNICA RESEARCH WORKING GROUP

A think tank and sandpit for Vice-Rectors Research and EU Research Liaison Officers to better position UNICA members on the European Research & Innovation landscape

UNICA RESEARCH WORKING GROUP

THREE-PRONGED APPROACH

Unique perspective of research universities based in Capitals of Europe

- Near EU and national decision bodies
- Diverse & sustainable urban universities
- The backbone of European R&I

Needs and methods **less covered by other EU R&I networks**

- Dialogue between vice rectors R&I and European liaison officers
- European Parliament & Directorates
- Connected R&I infrastructures

Increase exchange and collaboration of UNICA's members

- Academic R&I partnerships (eg. IAS network)
- Professional development for research managers
- Best practice exchange and scale-up

UNICA RESEARCH WORKING GROUP

In practice

- **Chair: VUB vice rector research prof. Pieter Ballon**
- **Co-chair(s): tbd in WG**
- **Support from UNICA secretariat**
- **For all UNICA vice rectors research & European liaison officers**
- **2-3 Dec 2024: WG research members 1st meeting in Brussels**
- **27 Feb 2025 pm: WG research @ UNICA days in Brussels**
- **Yearly 1-2 UNICA general events and 2-3 workshops for members**
- **Preliminary evaluation after 1 year**



PRELIMINARY ANALYSIS

CHARACTERISTICS OF CAPITAL CITIES

Capital cities are ([Eurostat Oct. 2022](#)) hubs for competitiveness and employment, drivers of innovation and growth; centres for education, science, social, cultural and ethnic diversity

- **High concentration of research activity:** universities & scientific organisations; research infrastructure and equipment; high levels of funding for R&I; collaborative and networking opportunities; high share of researchers in the labour force, broad range of job opportunities for researchers
- **“Urban paradox” of social, economic and environmental inequalities** (urbanization, climate change, health, education, and social inclusion) -> testbed for a more sustainable and inclusive growth and to demonstrate the impact and relevance of science and innovation to the needs and aspirations of citizens
- **Political and administrative centres** -> proximity and interactions with national and European government agencies and policy makers

PRELIMINARY ANALYSIS

UNIQUE FEATURES OF THE NETWORK

Multiple memberships

- 85% of UNICA members is member of the European University Association
- 30% is member of 1-2 other EU networks (i.e. The Guild, CESAER, YERUN, LERU)
- 22% is member of UniLION informal network of European Liaison Offices in Brussels (policy intelligence)

→ **UNICA working group research** should complement other initiatives and focus on niche activities that are most relevant for capital cities

76% of eligible UNICA members is full partner of a **European University Initiative alliance** (*65% of all members*)

PROPOSED RESEARCH FOCUS

FOR UNICA RESEARCH IN 2024-25

Kick-start with a limited number of activities:

- Tackling urban challenges with R&I funding programmes
- Research infrastructure: sharing good practices, considering collaboration and improving research infrastructure access
- Contributing to policy shaping: the European Research Area (ERA) actions 2025-2027



FULLY ALIGNED WITH UNICA STRATEGY

2024-2025

- Integrate your suggestions
- Discuss and agree on priorities for 2025
- Connect with 2025 UNICA days' theme: **"The role of university networks in the context of the European University alliances"**



B. RESEARCH & INNOVATION

Priorities

- 1. Engaging in the Renewal of the European Research Area (ERA):** Actively participate in shaping the future of European research by contributing to the ERA's development and advancement.
- 2. Promoting Equality and Inclusiveness in Academia:** Foster a research environment that is equitable, inclusive, and free from bias, ensuring equal opportunities for all researchers.
- 3. Contributing to the Reform of Research Assessment:** Advocate for a fair, transparent, and evidence-based research assessment system that recognizes the diverse contributions of researchers.
- 4. Championing Open Science:** Promote open access to research data, publications, and methodologies to advance knowledge sharing and collaboration.
- 5. Securing Stable and Transparent Funding:** Advocate for consistent and transparent funding mechanisms to support research activities and innovation.
- 6. Facilitating Academic Exchange and Collaboration:** Encourage and facilitate knowledge exchange, joint research projects, and collaborative ventures among UNICA member institutions.
- 7. Recognizing and Celebrating Research Achievements:** Highlight and celebrate the significant contributions of UNICA member institutions and researchers to advance knowledge and innovation.
- 8. Providing Peer-to-Peer Support and Continuing Professional Development for Research Managers:** Offer ongoing training, mentorship, and professional development opportunities for research managers within UNICA member institutions.

CONTRIBUTE TO POLICY SHAPING

EUROPEAN RESEARCH AREA POLICY AGENDA 2025-2027

- UNICA WG Research invited by EUA to contribute to the European Research Area (ERA) forum
Adoption of new 11 strategic priorities and 12 ERA actions expected S1-2025
Followed by roll-out, peer-learning, monitoring
- Suggested ERA actions of particular interest for Capitals and not tackled by other EU networks
 - Strengthen Sustainability, Accessibility and Resilience of **Research Infrastructures** in the ERA
 - Strengthening **inclusive and intersectional gender equality** in the ERA
 - Strengthening **Freedom of Scientific Research** in the EU
 - Facilitating and accelerating the **use of AI in science** in the EU
Link with new "AI Research council" ([Political guidelines 2024-2029](#), 17 Sept 2024)

CONTRIBUTE TO POLICY SHAPING

SECURING THE FUTURE OF THE EUROPEAN UNIVERSITY ALLIANCES

Current ERA action 13 “Empower Higher Education Institutions”

(followed by The Guild, YERUN, COIMBRA group, EuroTech, AURORA, ALLEA...)

- Mission letter to new Commissioner for People, Skills and Preparedness
- Mission letter to new Commissioner for Startups, Research & Innovation

You should continue work on the **European Degree** as a flagship for quality learning mobility. You should continue work to incentivise its use, as well as stimulating skills academies and partnerships and supporting **European Universities Alliances**.

I would like you to focus on **supporting the next generation of researchers** and help strengthen and incentivise cooperation between academic, private and public sector entities to create attractive career perspectives. As part of this, you will support the work to strengthen our **University Alliances**.

Focus for UNICA days in Feb. 2025

TACKLING URBAN CHALLENGES WITH R&I PROGRAMMES

SHARE INFORMATION AND EXPLORE JOINT COLLABORATION

- High levels and long-term EC investments in **R&I to improve urban environments**
 - Past Horizon 2020 ca. €3.1 billion in urban sustainable development research
Smart cities lighthouse programme at least € 400 million
 - **Horizon Europe Climate-neutral and smart cities mission (112 net-zero cities)**
 - **New European Bauhaus facility:** R&I and roll-out (co-funded)
Supported by new Commission
 - Joint Programming Initiative (JPI) Urban Europe
 - Mission Innovation
 - Calls for inclusive societies (Cluster 2), European Regional Development Funds...
 - Strong representation: 78% of UNICA members are located in [net-zero cities](#)
- Opportunity to stimulate joint R&I collaboration? With WG UNICA & the city?

Brussels
Sarajevo
Zagreb
Copenhagen
Paris
Budapest
Reijkjavik
Dublin
Roma
Riga
Vilnius
Amsterdam
Warsaw
Lisbon
Bucharest
Bratislava
Ljubljana
Madrid
Stockholm
...

**NET
ZERO
CITIES**

RESEARCH INFRASTRUCTURE

SHARE INFORMATION AND EXPLORE JOINT COLLABORATION

Status

- [BRNO declaration](#) on “Fostering a global ecosystem of RI” aligned with UNICA mission
- Mission letter new Commissioner “**Long term strategy to boost European RI**”
- No clear overview of RI in capital cities
- Calls from Horizon Europe RI (1st pillar, MSCA staff exchanges, COST...)
- Limited budgets for RI → **collaboration and complementarity are crucial**
- **Good practices to manage operating costs for RI**
- Dedicated specialized staff for RI → training programmes through UNICA?

→ opportunity for UNICA WG research to explore

- How to anchor RI in national / regional strategies
- Links with policies (scientific, sectoral, socio-economic)
- Role of RI in R&I ecosystems of capital cities
- International collaboration (members, Joint Research Centre, MSCA staff exchanges calls...)

UNICA RESEARCH SESSION 1

TACKLING URBAN CHALLENGES
WITH EUROPEAN RESEARCH & INNOVATION FUNDING



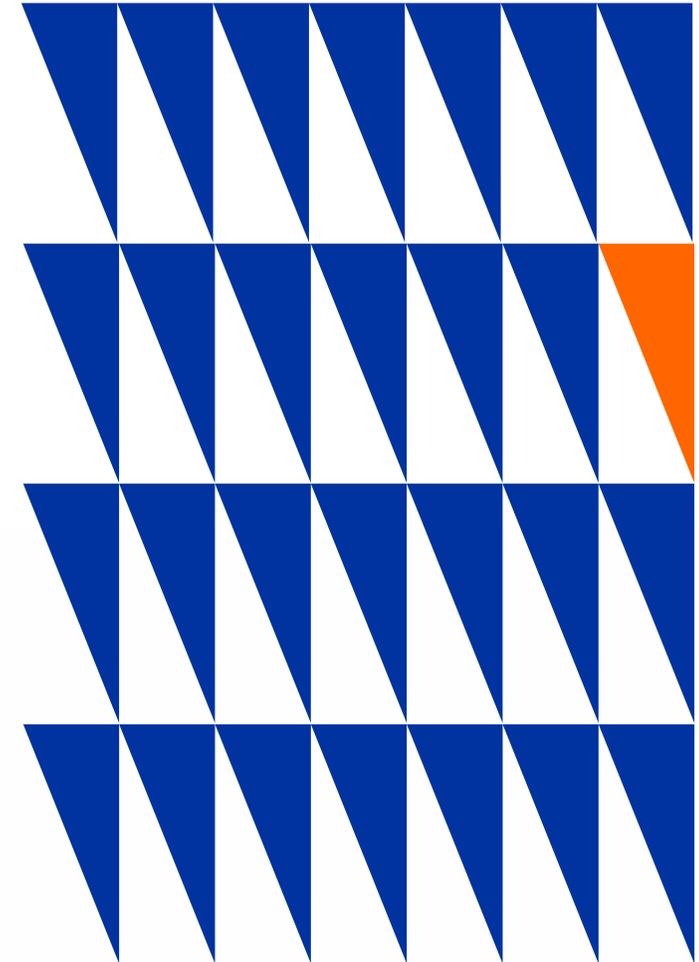
Chair: Tania Van Loon
Research Funding Europe
Coordinator



KEYNOTE SPEAKERS

FOLLOWED BY MODERATED DISCUSSION

- The New European Bauhaus Initiative, by **Sophia VLIETGER DE OLIVEIRA**, Policy Assistant, European Commission, JRC Unit B4 – New European Bauhaus
- The Academic Observatory for Cycling and Active Mobilities, by **Julian RANDALL**, Director Research Services, University of Lausanne



MEMBERS' CORNER

PRIORITIES & PROPOSALS FOR FUTURE ACTIVITIES

- **Brandusa BITEL**, Representative in Brussels and Deputy Director of the R&D Department, Carol Davila University of Medicine and Pharmacy
- **Capucine BOIDIN**, Vice-President Research, Sorbonne Nouvelle
- **Anna DEMNER**, Senior Research Officer & Acting head of the Office, Office for International Research and Liaison, University of Warsaw
- **Alina Mihaela DIMA**, Vice-Rector, Scientific Research, Development and Innovation, Bucharest University of Economic Studies



UNICA RESEARCH SESSION 2

RESEARCH INFRASTRUCTURE: SHARING GOOD PRACTICES,
CONSIDERING COLLABORATION
AND IMPROVING RESEARCH INFRASTRUCTURE ACCESS



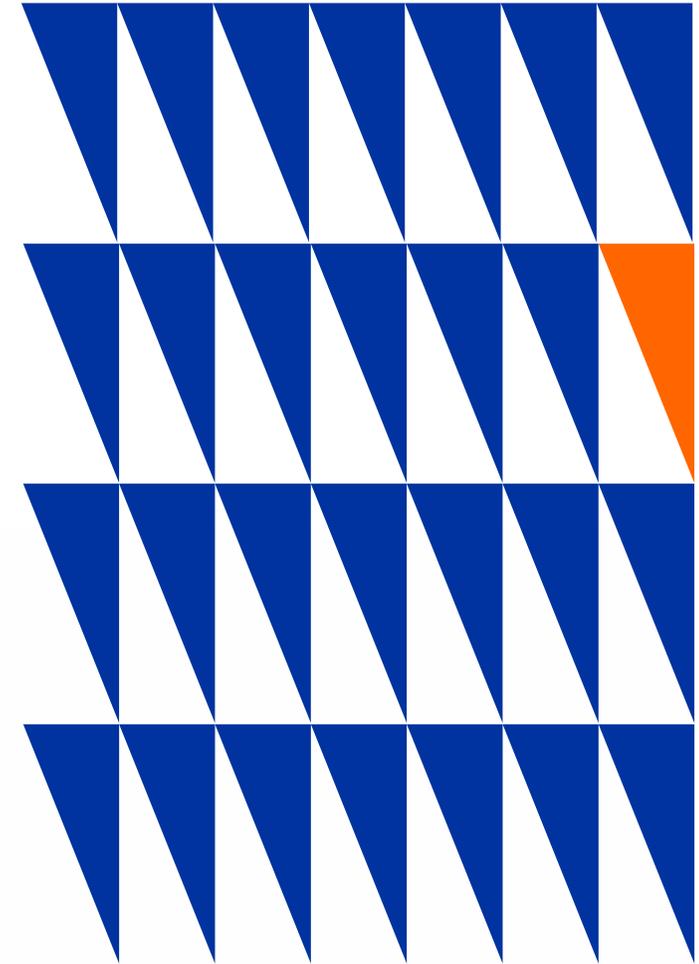
Chair: Elsie Premereur
Research & Grant Officer



KEYNOTE SPEAKERS

FOLLOWED BY MODERATED DISCUSSION

- **Emanuela BELLAN**, Head of Unit Member States Partnerships and International Relations, European Commission's Joint Research Centre
- **Koen JONKERS**, Head of Unit for Scientific Development Pro-grammes, European Commission's Joint Research Centre





UNICA RESEARCH SESSION 3

CONTRIBUTING TO POLICY SHAPING: THE EUROPEAN RESEARCH AREA



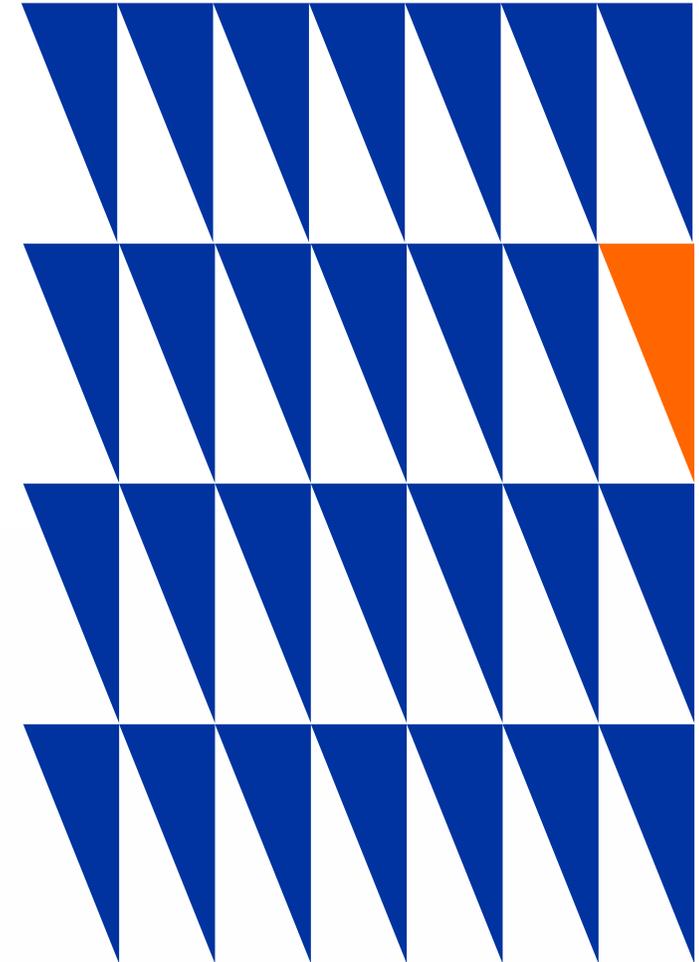
Chair: Pieter Ballon
Vice Rector Research



KEYNOTE SPEAKERS

FOLLOWED BY MODERATED DISCUSSION

- Presentation by **Vinciane GAILLARD**, Deputy Director for Research and Innovation, European University Association (pre-recorded)
- Perspectives on the ERA actions, by **Agnese RUSAKOVA**, Senior Researcher, University of Latvia, FORTHEM Alliance and Expert, Council of Rectors of Latvia
- Perspectives on the ERA action on AI, by **Elisa MAES**, Head of Data Management, Vrije Universiteit Brussel



WRAP UP

Conclusions and actions points

- Lean forms of academic exchange & collaboration to form the backbone of European R&I
- ...

Save-the-date: 27 Feb. 2025 afternoon during UNICA days
Feb.26-28, 2025 in Brussels

**“The role of university networks in the context of
the European University alliances”**

