

MISSION STATEMENT

Six urban-focused Universities of Applied Sciences in Europe founded the Urban Research and Education Knowledge Alliance, known as U!REKA, in 2016, built upon the knowledge that we have a greater impact as a diverse and international team. U!REKA covers four regions of the European Higher Education Area and has a total student body of approximately 123,000 students and a combined number of staff of about 11,000 employees. Since its launch, U!REKA has equipped its students and life-long learners with the skills they need for the world of work, fostered mobility, and delivered impactful research in order to create a positive impact in our cities, regions and beyond.

Through the 2023 Erasmus+ European Universities Initiative Call, **we seek to take a major leap in our collaboration**, in terms of both quality (a long-term, more structured and strategic collaboration), and quantity (a broader network with larger group of more diverse partners). We intend to achieve this leap through establishing the U!REKA SHIFT project (Sustainable Human Inclusive Future-proof Transition) which is essential to turn the U!REKA alliance into the U!REKA European University Network.

VISION

Our vision is to create a profound shift towards climate neutral and eventually climate positive societies by establishing the U!REKA SHIFT project, as a step towards transferring ourselves to the U!REKA European University Network, where we shape professionals who are able to accelerate the needed transition. Our Universities of Applied Sciences have a wide and diverse student population located in large European cities. These students will go on to work in diverse sectors of the economy and society, which makes our position crucial to the European journey towards a green and digital transformation.

Inclusion is our core value and through the development and implementation of a joint U!REKA inclusion plan we aim to ensure that all students and life-long learners have equal opportunities to participate in all our activities. Through the U!REKA challenge-based and collaborative approach to learning we support all students, irrespective of their educational field, in **developing the necessary green and digital competences**. Enabling the **active participation of all stakeholders and students** to co-create solutions to societal challenges will enhance the knowledge and agency of our students as well as the accessibility and the usability of the solutions created. Our highly skilled **U!REKA future-proof urban professionals**, will play a pivotal role in achieving climate neutrality by 2050 in Europe. We will support and work together with our cities and other stakeholders to achieve the EU's ambitious climate-neutrality targets of mission cities being climate-neutral by 2030 and the remaining European cities by 2050, and at the same time excel in our quality of education and research. Through our tight-knit collaboration, **U!REKA future proof urban professionals** will be well networked and skilled at working across professional and cultural borders.

Through the U!REKA SHIFT project, we will take our existing collaboration to the next level. Based on our experience with joint short-term courses, such as blended intensive programs, we aim to **develop joint and double degree programs (BSc, MSc, and PhD) and an inclusive and connected campus with open courses available to students, staff and lifelong learners, based on a joint strategy for education**. Further building on our collaboration in EU-funded projects, we will develop joint centres of expertise integrated with knowledge-creating communities, therefore making our collaboration more **systematic, structured and sustainable**. These joint centres of expertise will share the research infrastructures and resources from across all U!REKA SHIFT full partners and develop a joint research agenda. In this way, we aspire to have a more profound contribution to the European Education Area and European Research Area in synergy with the European Higher Education Area. While our existing collaboration has focused on urban issues at large, through the establishment of U!REKA SHIFT, we will concentrate our resources and efforts to support the green and digital transition in Europe, by shaping professionals who will support the transition towards climate-neutral and smart cities.

THE U!REKA EUROPEAN UNIVERSITY WILL STRENGTHEN THE EUROPEAN GLOBAL ROLE AND LEADERSHIP IN MITIGATING CLIMATE CHANGE AND DEMONSTRATE EUROPEAN UNIVERSITIES' CRUCIAL ROLE IN EDUCATING FUTURE PROFESSIONALS FOR THE TWIN TRANSITION.



MISSION The U!REKA SHIFT mission consists of three main objectives, underlying our joint vision:

1. To establish a sustainable **inter-university campus**, based on a long-term strategy on education, ensuring seamless mobility and with respect for good governance;
2. To become a **lighthouse European University for challenge-based and collaborative learning and innovation**; and
3. To shape U!REKA **future-proof urban professionals** who will accelerate the transition towards **climate-neutral and smart cities**

OBJECTIVE 1

To establish a sustainable U!REKA inter-university campus, based on a long-term strategy on education, ensuring seamless mobility and with respect for good governance

We will develop a U!REKA learning environment (inclusive and connected campus) through which our U!REKA students, staff, cities and citizens gain equal access to education, with a focus on the green and digital transition and transversal skills. We aim to provide **personalized and flexible study paths** to ensure that no one is left behind. We will promote European values and intercultural understanding through **seamless mobility, physical, virtual and blended**, to all our students and staff, and through our good governance principles. We will develop exchange mobility practices in line with the Erasmus+ priorities of environmental responsibility as well as inclusion and diversity. Putting our students first, their mobility will be further strengthened through the implementation of the European Student Card Initiative by all U!REKA universities, and the development and establishment of the U!REKA Exchange concept.

The U!REKA long-term strategy on education is based on the following principles: to incorporate a **collaborative approach to challenge-based learning**, as well as to foster the **connection between education and research, development and innovation**. For our European University, the common objective of this strategy is to effectively and efficiently address the sustainable and digital challenges.

In **challenge-based education**, learning is initiated by means of a real-world problem which is interesting and meaningful to students and representative of what they will encounter in their future practices (Merrill, 2002; Van Merriënboer & Kirschner, 2017; Asghar, Ellington, Rice, Johnson, & Prime, 2012; Savery & Duffy, 1995; Minstrell, 1989; Jonassen, Strobel, & Lee, 2006). Problem statements that are rooted in real-life societal, environmental or workplace challenges therefore provide the most powerful and authentic triggers for students to learn new concepts. We will collaborate with external partner organisations, such as cities, industries and non-profit institutions to co-create such problem statements, based on the contents embedded in the learning objectives of the participating programmes at our respective HEIs.

The **integration of education into research and innovation** facilitates the continuous development of U!REKA education and ensures that its contents anticipate the needs of the society. In this way, U!REKA will develop **high-quality education and future-proof skills**.

Finally, all the management of U!REKA SHIFT and all its activities are based on principles of good governance, meaning that there is full participation of students and stakeholders in both management and the whole of the PDCA circle of activities. Through the good governance principles, European values like equality, diversity, respect for human dignity, and solidarity are being lived and practiced, so that all U!REKA graduates carry these values through their lives.

OBJECTIVE 2

To become a lighthouse European University for challenge-based and collaborative learning and innovation

The U!REKA strategy for education is based on challenge-based and collaborative learning and the connection between education and research and innovation, with the common goal to deliver future professionals as change-makers for a sustainable future. This is in line with the 2020 joint declaration on the European Higher Education Area. Our challenge-based and collaborative learning and innovation is a cross-cutting methodology, which ranges from our inclusive and interdisciplinary approach of defining our U!REKA SHIFT goals and actions together with the stakeholders, all the way to the activities implemented in U!REKA education, research and innovation. Our local cities, and regions, as well as the European Regions Research and Innovation Network (ERRIN), expressed a key need for us to facilitate the integration of our local ecosystems for co-creation and sharing best practices. The key concerns of our local cities, regions, companies and NGOs for climate neutrality were used to define the themes and contents of the U!REKA centres of expertise. The quadruple helix collaboration will be facilitated through the establishment of a joint knowledge-creating community, which in turn will provide real-life challenges for student projects, collaborative courses and programs. We will continue to engage the students, staff and external stakeholders in co-development, co-implementation and co-evaluation of U!REKA joint degree programs, joint minor programs, microcredentials, centres of expertise and our inclusive and connected campus, which also provide study opportunities for lifelong learners.

The results will be communicated and disseminated to other European Universities through EU-level networks and associations such as EURASHE and UAS4EUROPE. By doing so we aim to transform the European higher education sector by introducing new ways to enhance creativity, sustainability, interdisciplinarity and inclusion through our leading example on the challenge-based and collaborative learning and innovation.

OBJECTIVE 3

To shape U!REKA future-proof urban professionals who will accelerate the transition towards climate-neutral and smart cities

U!REKA future professionals are students who are equipped with the set of skills and competencies needed to help improve and face the continuously changing global environment in which we live. We focus our education, research, development and innovation on shaping these future professionals. In this way, we empower our cities and wider network of European cities to become climate-neutral and smart. This will be facilitated through embedding at least one U!REKA SHIFT course on sustainability or digital transition with a virtual, blended or physical mobility component in the curriculum of all U!REKA degree students. Also, we will establish joint and double degree programs and joint minor programs that are connected to the themes of our centres of expertise (Climate-Neutral Urban Communities, Transition to Circular Society, and Innovative Governance Models & Citizen Engagement) to tackle the major obstacles in our path towards climate-neutrality. These collaborative programs are truly interdisciplinary, having a **major element of social sciences, art and humanities in their curriculum**, and available for all U!REKA students. We will provide a U!REKA Certificate for graduates of the U!REKA minor program and joint degree programs, and incorporate them in the curricula of U!REKA universities. Our joint degree and joint minor programs aim to contribute to our cities obtaining new solutions for sustainability and acquiring a skilled workforce for the future, a need they expressed actively. In addition to this, we will develop microcredentials (3-5 ECTS) on green and digital transition as well as transversal skills.



SUSTAINABLE INTER-UNIVERSITY CAMPUS WITH SEAMLESS MOBILITY

A LIGHTHOUSE FOR CHALLENGE-BASED AND
COLLABORATIVE LEARNING AND INNOVATION

FUTURE-PROOF URBAN PROFESSIONALS ACCELERATE THE TRANSITION
TOWARDS CLIMATE-NEUTRAL AND SMART CITIES



U!REKA WAY FORWARD

During the four years U!REKA SHIFT funded period as a European University, we will deepen our collaboration to become more systemic, structured and sustainable, based on our joint vision and mission. We will focus on improvement and tight collaboration in several fields to achieve this: governance, stakeholder and student engagement, the inclusive and connected campus, centres of expertise with knowledge-creating communities and challenge-based collaborative education. The work done during this period and the results and lessons learned stemming from this, will be the solid foundation for our sustainable collaboration as the **U!REKA European University Network** for the coming decade and beyond. The following outlines our concrete ambitions both for this coming period and the future of our alliance together.

1. GOVERNANCE

In U!REKA SHIFT we will deploy an agile governance structure with the active participation of students and stakeholders. We will establish an external advisory council that consists of our associated partners and other key European networks and associations, and a student council with student representatives of each U!REKA university. This is important in order to incorporate the views and insights of students and stakeholders in a systematic way into the decision-making of U!REKA and to enhance the quality and the impact of U!REKA activities. At least two student representatives and two city representatives will participate in the U!REKA SHIFT Steering Committee with full voting rights.

We will also establish an executive committee responsible for the operational management of U!REKA SHIFT, and the Education, R&I and Study Administration task forces to ensure that U!REKA SHIFT results are integrated and embedded in the structures of our U!REKA universities, thereby guaranteeing quality and sustainability. Furthermore, the agility will be enhanced through benchmarking governance procedures with already established European Universities and developing a Good Governance Toolbox together with all stakeholders.

We further develop our joint values, policies and long-term strategies through a participatory process with students, staff and stakeholders. A joint quality assessment will be set up to ensure that our actions are of high-quality and support our path towards our joint vision and objectives. We will investigate the need and potential to establish a joint legal entity, to enhance our governance procedures and pooling of resources. All these actions will contribute to U!REKA being able to act as one European University Network and further strengthen our structural approach to reaching our long-term vision.

In the long-term, we aim to establish a more centralized governance structure accounting for the needs of all stakeholders, balancing efficiency and expediency of decision making with actions that are responsive to the challenges we face together.

2. STAKEHOLDER AND STUDENT ENGAGEMENT

A core element of U!REKA SHIFT is to ensure the participation of students and stakeholders in the design, development, implementation and evaluation of all our programmes, initiatives and activities, and in the governance of the network. This engagement is important in supporting our joint values on inclusion and sustainability across the organisation and ensures that underrepresented and vulnerable groups are involved.

A specific framework for stakeholder and student engagement will be co-developed – for both governance participation and full engagement in all U!REKA SHIFT activities in the coming period and beyond. In this way we aim to lay the groundwork for increasing engagement across all our activities so that access to the opportunities provided by U!REKA SHIFT is both feasible for, and accountable to, all stakeholders.

3. INCLUSIVE AND CONNECTED CAMPUS

We will strengthen student mobility (physical, virtual or blended) in order to make it a reality for all. While we already have Erasmus+ inter-institutional mobility agreements in place between our universities, we will deploy activities to achieve a significant increase in the U!REKA degree student mobility rate (at least 50% of students to benefit from the mobility by the end of the project), so that this becomes an integral part of studying at our U!REKA European University Network. To enhance the mobility and educational opportunities available for our students, staff and lifelong learners, we will establish an inclusive and connected campus. The campus will connect learners (both physically and virtually) with a selection of courses in sustainability and digital as well as transversal skills, such language, communication, inclusion and entrepreneurship, across U!REKA universities and beyond. The courses will be in English and can be classified as microcredentials (3-5 ECTS). After four years, the campus will offer a total of 70 open courses and provide flexible study paths for learners. These will remain available after the funding period and will continue to be extended.

We will develop joint microcredentials for sustainability and digitalization topics that anticipate the needs of cities and citizens, made available to all students and lifelong learners. The courses will offer upskilling and reskilling opportunities in green and digital transitions. Furthermore, open education developed through externally funded research and development projects at U!REKA universities will be made available for lifelong learners through our inclusive and connected campus. In the long-term, we aim to continue to develop and improve our inclusive education offering as the U!REKA European University Network.

4. CENTRES OF EXPERTISE WITH KNOWLEDGE-CREATING COMMUNITIES

To focus our efforts and promote the climate neutral and smart cities mission, we will establish three joint centres of expertise. Our joint centres respond to the needs expressed by our external stakeholders (cities, regions, companies and NGOs) during the development of the U!REKA SHIFT proposal. They are also in line with U!REKA's existing strengths and competences in facilitating the engagement and the participation of citizens and other stakeholders in local ecosystems to solve urban challenges. Currently, each U!REKA university has its own collaboration platforms and centres of expertise relating to these topics working in collaboration with their own local ecosystems. Within U!REKA SHIFT, we will establish joint centres of expertise and connect our local ecosystems into one knowledge-creating community in order to learn from each other and create value in ways that we cannot as individual universities. In U!REKA SHIFT, we will **connect our local ecosystems to work together** to solve complex societal challenges. This means having a wider range of expertise by integrating our resources and infrastructure to serve the U!REKA SHIFT community as a whole.

Our joint centres of expertise will focus on the following topics:

- 1) Climate-Neutral Urban Communities,
- 2) Transition to Circular Society and
- 3) Innovative Governance Models & Citizen Engagement.

The overarching objectives of these Centres of Expertise are:

- Integrating education with research and (professional) practice across U!REKA institutions and their ecosystems;
- Developing and supporting U!REKA Future professionals;
- Developing new knowledge;
- Promoting lifelong learning;
- Accelerating and increasing the innovative capacity of companies and social and public organizations as well as the innovative capacity of the university of applied sciences itself.

Specifically, the Centres of Expertise will act as intermediaries to **share knowledge and research** for testing and replicating existing local climate neutral and smart solutions in partner cities together with the knowledge-creating communities. Together we will also develop **joint European projects** (Erasmus+, Horizon Europe and Interregional innovation investment) for co-creating new solutions for climate neutrality. Finally, we will facilitate **U!REKA student projects** for generating new, inclusive, smart and innovative solutions to support the climate neutrality of European cities and regions. We will collaborate with the European Regions Research and Innovation Network (ERRIN) and EIT Climate KIC to promote the European Mission on Climate Neutral and Smart Cities. As such, this collaboration will promote the sharing of our applied research results and lessons learnt across European cities and regions so that further developments and initiatives can take place in the future.

5. CHALLENGE-BASED COLLABORATIVE EDUCATION

U!REKA SHIFT will take our joint education to the next level, as we will develop **joint and double degrees and joint minor programs related to the themes of our centres of expertise** and enhance our pedagogical practices for challenge-based and collaborative learning and innovation. We will implement a flexible course structure to facilitate joint education overcoming the different timing of semesters at our universities, building on our shared experiences of implementing collaborative online international learning (COIL), blended intensive programmes (BIPs) and U!REKA summer schools in the past.

We will also set up a joint interdisciplinary and international work placement program together with our partners in both the private and public sectors to educate future professionals. Our staff will be able to participate in joint U!REKA professional trainings to enhance their green and digital competences and diversity and inclusion skills required for developing challenge-based collaborative education. For our students, staff and external stakeholders, our joint education will provide further opportunities to study and learn together with European peers, and to develop the skills, knowledge and confidence required for European collaboration.

After the 4-year U!REKA SHIFT project, we will have the structures and processes in place that empower us to collaborate as one U!REKA European University network towards our vision and missions.

Our societal impact will be larger than our geographical presence thanks to our close collaboration with our associated partners of higher education institutes (Edinburgh Napier University, U.K, University of Bari, Italy, University of Applied Sciences BFI Vienna, Austria, New Bulgarian University, Bulgaria, and Odessa National Economic University, Ukraine) and European Association of Institutions in Higher Education (EURASHE) and associated partners of local cities, regional councils, industry associations and the European Regions Research and Innovation Network (ERRIN).

Through close collaboration with our associated partners and other partners our long-term ambition is to **strengthen European challenge-based and collaborative education, research and innovation to shape future-proof urban professionals** who will accelerate the transition towards climate-neutral and smart cities.

U!REKA
 Sustainable
Human
Inclusive
Future-proof
Transition

U!REKA Partners:

