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U!REKA Lab: Urban Commons as a Pedagogical Space of Transformation in the U!REKA European University Alliance

Abstract

European higher education alliances are commonly treated as administrative instruments, yet their pedagogical and cultural dimensions remain underexamined. This article presents the *U!REKA Lab: Urban Commons* as a transformative educational space within the *U!REKA European University*. Drawing on theories of experiential and project-based learning (Dewey, 1938), world-centred learning (Biesta, 2022), situated participation (Lave & Wenger, 1991), critical transformative learning (Mezirow, 2000), commons governance (Ostrom, 1990; Bollier & Helfrich, 2019), the analysis shows how students learn in the *U!REKA Lab* through embodied engagement, co-creation, governance practices and international comparison. Examples from the *U!REKA* cities Amsterdam, Frankfurt, Ghent, Helsinki, and Ostrava, illustrate how the *U!REKA Lab* enacts participatory and engaged research, explores timely pedagogical approaches, and aims to foster commons thinking, while simultaneously modelling new forms of international cooperation.

Keywords

urban commons, challenge-based collaborative learning, co-creation, transformative learning, arts-based methods, transnational pedagogy

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U!REKA Lab: Urban Commons als pädagogischer Raum der Transformation in der U!REKA European University Allianz

Zusammenfassung

Europäische Hochschulallianzen werden überwiegend als administrative Instrumente betrachtet, doch ihre pädagogischen und kulturellen Dimensionen bleiben bislang wenig erforscht. Dieser Artikel stellt das *U!REKA Lab: Urban Commons* als transformativen Bildungsraum innerhalb der *U!REKA European University* vor. Aufbauend auf Theorien des erfahrungs- und projektbasierten Lernens (Dewey, 1938), des weltzentrierten Lernens (Biesta, 2022), der situierten Partizipation (Lave & Wenger, 1991), des kritischen transformativen Lernens (Mezirow, 2000) und der Commons-Governance (Ostrom, 1990; Bollier & Helfrich, 2019) zeigt die Analyse, wie Studierende im *U!REKA-Lab* durch Engagement, Co-Kreation, Governance-Praktiken und internationalen Vergleich lernen. Beispiele aus den *U!REKA*-Städten Amsterdam, Frankfurt, Gent, Helsinki und Ostrava veranschaulichen, wie das *U!REKA Lab* partizipative und engagierte Forschung betreibt, zeitgemäße pädagogische Ansätze erforscht, das Commons-Denken fördert und gleichzeitig neue Formen der internationalen Zusammenarbeit etabliert.

Schlüsselwörter

Urban Commons, Herausforderungsorientierte Bildung, Ko-Kreation, Transformative Bildung, Kunst-Basierte Methoden, Transnationale Pädagogik

1 U!REKA Lab: Urban Commons as a Pedagogical Space of Transformation

European higher education alliances increasingly recognise that their transformative potential lies not only in administrative integration, but in their ability to form new social connections and cultivate new pedagogical cultures (Maassen & Olsen, 2007). The *Urban Research and Education Knowledge Alliance – U!REKA European University* exemplifies this shift. Rather than treating the university as a self-contained institution, *U!REKA* conceptualises it as an actor embedded in urban life, co-responsible for the social, ecological and cultural futures of European cities. The *U!REKA Lab: Urban Commons* emerges from this ethos: a learning environment where students, teachers and community partners explore how shared urban resources are negotiated, governed, and maintained. The Lab thus becomes not only a project within the alliance but a pedagogical manifestation and living lab of what a European University can be: situated, reflexive, collaborative and oriented toward the common good (Biesta, 2017).

This article offers a theory-informed, practice-based analysis, bridging theoretical frameworks of transformative pedagogy and commons governance in the practical implementation and institutional evolution of a European educational programme. The aim is to reflect on and categorise the activities within the *U!REKA Lab* and to show how these theoretical concepts are operationalised through international co-creation. Exemplary material such as research results, project documentation and reflection – including learning materials and lecture recordings, student research projects, as well as reviews of international project work in challenge-based educational formats – form the basis of this analysis. The examples were chosen to represent the diversity of educational activities and the (inter)disciplinary logic of the *U!REKA Lab: Urban Commons* and its role in different European cities. As a practice-based analysis, this paper focuses on pedagogical experimentation and institutional transformation aiming to validate the European University's pedagogical agenda. It does not aim to provide a generalising impact measurement or a quantitative outcome

evaluation of the educational programs. Instead, it offers a qualitative, reflexive account of how transnational engagement with commoning practices can drive organisational learning and European university integration.



Fig. 1 & 2: U!RBAN COMMONS School, Frankfurt 2021

The U!REKA Lab: Urban Commons understand contemporary cities as learning environments that present urban challenges as impulses for educational activities. This embedding of teaching increases the visibility of ideas and results proposed by universities to the public and political stakeholders and their chance to serve as a basis for actual urban development. Learning and teaching within these complex and uncertain environments call for new perspectives and forms of knowledge that cannot be transferred through abstract instruction alone. Instead, it requires educational opportunities beyond strict disciplinary confines that are emancipatory, relational, and experience-based, as well as world-centred (Biesta, 2022; Dewey, 1938). The U!REKA Lab activates such learning by placing students in real contexts of shared urban responsibility. They encounter the commons not as a theoretical abstraction,

but as a lived practice shaped by negotiations, conflicts, everyday care and institutional arrangements (Bollier & Helfrich, 2019; Ostrom, 1990). In this setting, the city itself and its urban commons develop into a pedagogical framework that is used as a backdrop and environment for collective and inclusive learning.



Fig. 3: U!RBAN COMMONS School, Frankfurt 2021

To strengthen the experiential and self-reflexive side of these guided explorations, the U!REKA Lab: Urban Commons integrates aesthetic and arts-based, as well as multi-sensual and embodied methods in its activities. Some of these methods have been collected in a publication (U!REKA Lab: Urban Commons, 2024). Students document and evaluate social and cultural aspects of building and city planning; they experience and refine participatory artistic-ethnographic methods of social space

analysis; they use approaches such as sensory maps, photographic essays, hybrid (video) documentaries, audio walks and small performances to express their interpretations and gain new insights into the commons spaces. These methods function as epistemic tools: they capture forms of complexity that conventional analytical approaches often miss. For example, when documenting organisation and inner workings of urban commons initiatives, such as cooperative housing projects, where students create narrative and visual artefacts that reflect the subtle negotiations, forms of hospitality and micro-practices of sharing that sustain a housing commons. The creative approach allows them to explore the relational and affective dimensions of collective living, complementing analysis with experiential insight.

The *U!REKA Lab: Urban Commons* as a pioneering model demonstrates the core educational agenda of the wider *U!REKA European University* and its educational framework. Established in 2019, the Lab's function is to experiment with and validate the pedagogical agenda and formats that define the alliance's vision for European university education. The Lab has operationalised this through a continuous cycle of activities, proposing a path towards international collaborative challenge-based education. Furthermore, its activities feed into the further development of *U!REKA* education, for instance through participation in the regular *U!REKA EduForums*, the *U!REKA Connects* annual conferences, as well as the online *U!REKA EduBase* (U!REKA, 2025). To achieve these goals, the Lab's activities include the following central elements:

U!RBAN Commons Courses: Integrating Educational Offers. The Lab overcame structural differences (like varying academic calendars) by developing teaching materials for a shared study module that partners could integrate into their existing local courses. Teachers and researchers from the network can be invited to join courses online. This flexible structure is supplemented by exchange days, lectures, and intensive exchanges, thinking in terms of a *U!REKA Urban Commons year*.

U!R Commons Days: Sharing Knowledge in Online Exchange. The online joint webinars are designed to integrate the local urban commons study modules. These events fix specific times during the study terms (1-2 times per year) and allow students and partners to meet digitally to share initial research findings and knowledge about methods and theories.

U!R Commons Lecture Series: Expert Knowledge & Public Visibility. The public virtual events invite experts to share knowledge on commons theory and practice, enhancing visibility, fostering dialogue across and beyond the network and inspiring participating students, staff and external stakeholders.

Common(s) Exchanges: Collaborative Challenge-Based – Blended Intensive Programmes. Summer Schools and *Erasmus Blended Intensive Programmes* (BIPs) are used to explore urban commons in practice and to intensify international exchange. Recent exchange programs took place in Frankfurt (2021, 2023), Helsinki (2022), and Ostrava (2023, 2024, 2025).

U!R Commons Expos: Knowledge Dissemination & Advocacy. The annual exhibitions are integral for presenting student research findings, often utilising creative audiovisual, performative media to share results created in participatory processes and bring the knowledge back into the social sphere and to the stakeholders.

urcommons.eu: Facilitating Collaboration & Collecting Results. The knowledge base functions as the digital center of the *U!REKA Lab*, facilitating international exchange and collaboration. It serves as a public repository, making learning materials and recordings from the *U!R Commons Lecture Series*, and the visual, artistic, and documentary results of student research readily accessible based on the commons principle. Its purpose is to continuously report on the Lab's activities and share knowledge, fostering ongoing exchange and network building (*U!REKA Lab: Urban Commons*, n.b.).

2 Common(s) Education = Common(s) Practice

The Commons Lab's pedagogical approach is grounded in the idea that learning unfolds through participation, situated experience and the negotiation of meaning. This resonates the perception of learning groups as of communities of practice: students become participants in ongoing collective practices, gradually developing the competencies, attitudes and sensitivities required to engage with urban realities (Lave & Wenger, 1991). When students visit a neighborhood initiative such as *Cabane Banane* in Ghent, or the *ADA collective canteen* in Frankfurt they encounter a social infrastructure organised around shared responsibility and everyday mutual support. The rhythms of the place – open kitchen, multilingual conversations, improvised cultural events – offer insight into how social commons emerge from repeated acts of care rather than from formal agreements. The example does not serve merely as a case but becomes a pedagogical moment in which students learn to observe, engage in, but also interpret multi-layered social contexts.

In encounters with ecological commons theoretical insights are complemented with experience, with participant observation and collective practice. During explorations of urban gardening projects in Frankfurt, Ghent and Helsinki, students participate in community gardening and agriculture activities where they learn that ecological sustainability is not only a technical issue but a social and relational one. One that requires a strong community of commoners, but also rules and regulations to create, govern and maintain these shared resources. The artistic-ethnographic explorations conducted by the students reveal governance-by-practice: a form of commons coordination and shared responsibility that can challenge students' assumptions about expertise, leadership and ownership. This attention to experiential and embodied learning also appears in solidarity agricultural production, such as *Die Kooperative e.G.*, *SoLaWi Frankfurt*, or *Gemüseheldinnen* (vegetable heroes), where students document the everyday work of maintaining food-related commons. Through audiovisual means, they explore how ecological care becomes a social practice, noticing the interdependence between individual effort and community expectations.

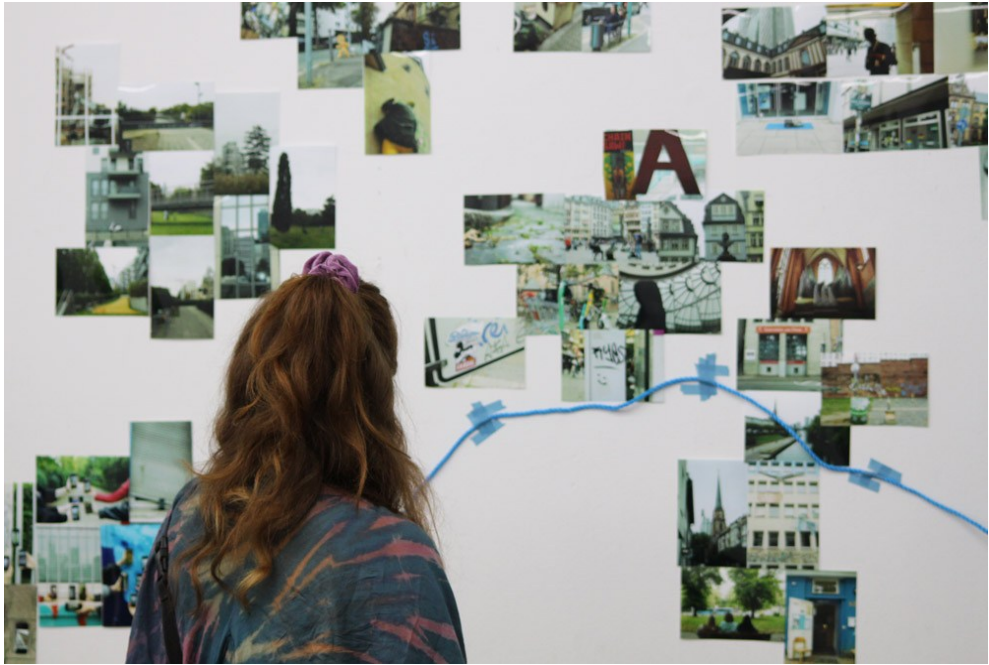


Fig. 4: BIP [COMMON GROUND] Frankfurt 2023

The governance dimension becomes tangible in examples such as the commons initiative *RADAR Frankfurt*, that lobbies for the temporary opening of vacant buildings for artistic and creative use or in the research on housing shortage and alternative forms of communal co-habitation, such as in the *NIKA House*. Students investigate the politics of commercialised urbanity and urban vacancy and develop commons-oriented ideas and utopias together with local stakeholders. They explore how information about unused spaces circulates, how grassroots initiatives articulate claims to public resources, the role that squatting and occupying buildings and spaces can play as a cultural practice and how administrative actors respond to these claims. Mapping exercises, interviews, and performative interventions reveal the contested nature of urban spaces, and students come to see urban planning and governance not as a static

system, but as a dynamic process shaped by negotiation and visibility (Healey, 2005).

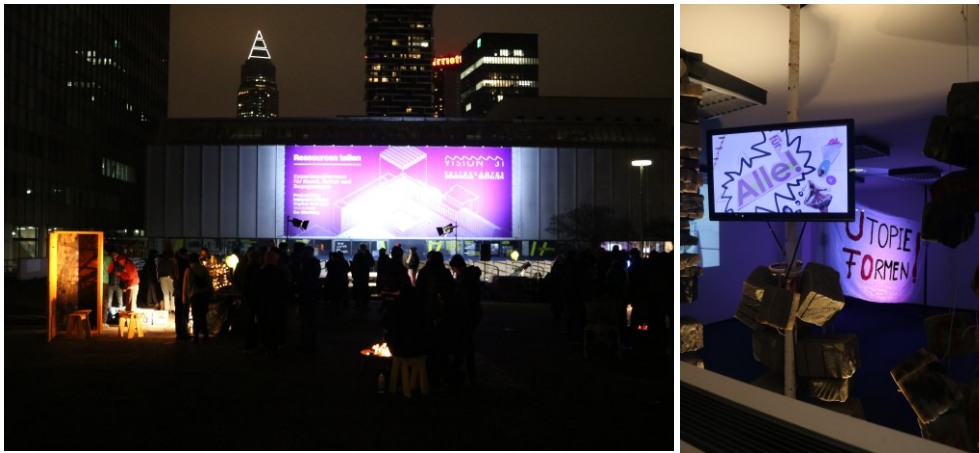


Fig. 5 & 6: U!R Commons Expo @ Vision31 NEB Finale, Frankfurt 2025

Several cohorts of *U!REKA Lab* students could contribute to the NEB-funded project *Vision31 – Co-Create Culture Campus* in which local initiatives and stakeholders partner up with city administration as well as higher education, namely the Frankfurt UAS (Vision31, n.b.). This project offers a promising experimental ground for commons-oriented city and neighborhood development by temporarily using and co-managing a former library building and the adjacent former campus until 2031. Groups of students worked there locally in the *Frankfurt U!R Commons Courses*, but also international students were involved with the social space and its challenges in short-term international exchange programs in 2021 and 2023. When such projects are experienced and discussed in international groups, differences and commonalities in structures across countries sharpen students' understanding of governance and the diversity of European urban spaces. Furthermore, they offer impulses to carry good practices for students and teachers back to their home universities and cities.

3 Collaborative Challenge-Based Blended Intensive Programmes (CC-BIPs)

Our international work in local contexts demonstrates how the *U!REKA Lab: Urban Commons* disrupts conventional notions of learning. Rather than asking students to apply theoretical models to the field, it allows theory to emerge from situated experience. The process is intensified in series of *Erasmus+ Blended Intensive Programmes* (BIP) that are organised by the members of the Lab in local cities.

This development was pioneered in the *U!RBAN Commons School* in Frankfurt (2021) that set the core elements of the exchanges: their challenge-based experiential focus on actual projects and places in the city, as well as internationally supervised interdisciplinary creative project work. The program that was developed together with students and stakeholders was gathering international students from various fields, including civil engineering, architecture, urban planning, social work, sociology, and arts. Apart from sprint-style collaborative workshops, the program included lectures, excursions, exhibition visits, concerts, film screenings and performances with contributions from international students. It culminated in a common intermedial presentation of students' work. In the following years this approach was further developed and refined under the Erasmus+ BIP funding scheme in other participating cities.

The challenge-based *BIP Urban Commons and City Development* (2022) in Helsinki used a five-day sprint format based on the co-city cycle: knowing, mapping, collaborating, prototyping, testing/modeling (Iaione, 2018) to foster the collective design of urban spaces and the reclaiming of public spaces through the participation of inhabitants. This approach was used to tackle real-life problems like proposing cultural and social utilisation of abandoned historical buildings in the city, designing solutions for multicultural services for Ukrainian refugees in Eastern Helsinki, or on planning a communal garden on the underused terrace of the *Metropolia Myllypuro Campus* to boost biodiversity and serve pedagogical purposes for the university and the surrounding community.

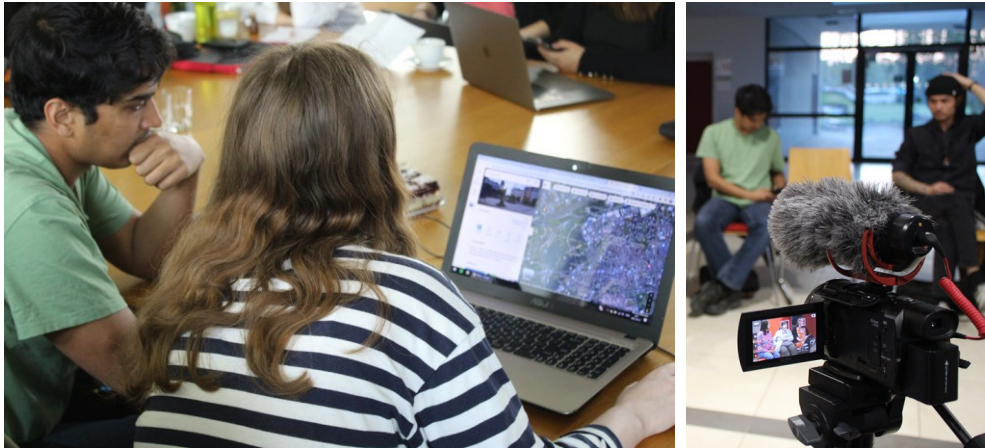


Fig. 7 & 8: BIP Common Regeneration, Ostrava 2023

Ostrava was home to the *BIP Common Regeneration* (2023) that focused on how the concept of urban commons can be used to transform an industrial and mining region. The program specifically focused on challenges in localities such as *Český Dům* (a former culture and community center, for which ideas were developed that involved the local neighborhood in its regeneration) and streets like *Jílová*, an area of deep-rooted social and economic exclusion affecting local residents. Student solutions often focused more on social and economic aspects rather than just technical problems. In the marginalised *Jílová* area, alongside physical interventions such as community gardens and playgrounds, students proposed a comprehensive approach including the creation of a community land trust to manage land ownership and housing using a participatory model. The BIP provided students with the opportunity to propose commons-based solutions to real-life challenges, contributing to the investigation of transformation processes and the search for socio-cultural and ecological values. This sparked subsequent exchanges in Ostrava that continued to focus on the socially excluded *Jílová* locality.

In the series of BIPs in Ostrava *JÍLOVÁ: Addressing Socio-Spatial Exclusion* (2023), *Just City* (2024), and *Communities in Action: Urban Sustainability & Engagement* (2025) students from several *U!REKA* universities and partner institutions worked in structurally vulnerable neighborhoods. Their experiences – interacting with youth and social workers, interviewing residents, and designing small-scale interventions – exposed them to different interpretations and challenges of contested public spaces, such as excluded communities, social responsibility, structural limits of welfare, as well as various forms of care. The frictions that arise when students compare their experiences and assumptions to local realities become moments of deep learning. They begin to understand urban inequalities not as abstract patterns, but as lived realities shaped by history, (mal)administration, but also as realities that can be changed by means of targeted interventions and community practice.

Blended Intensive Programmes (BIP) are sometimes criticised as costly, inefficient, and shallow mobility experiences, they can however be highly useful educational formats. When they follow a collaborative, challenge-based approach and combine virtual collaboration with short-term physical mobility in a well-structured way, they are providing an accessible, high-impact, and flexible learning experience that aligns with timely educational goals. BIPs can play out their real strength when they are well embedded in a network, carried by a community of teachers, researchers and external stakeholders, who can take responsibility co-developing, teaching, and hosting parts of the programme. Furthermore, as the examples of series of *Collaborative Challenge-Based Blended Intensive Programmes* (CC-BIPs) in Ostrava's Jílová neighborhood and Frankfurt's Culture Campus show, they can foster an engagement of local and European universities in specific localities over a longer period of time. This offers possibilities of continuous work with local communities and stakeholders that can develop impact beyond the short-term nature of BIPs.

4 Transforming U!REKA through Interdisciplinary and International Educational Practice

The activities of the *U!REKA Lab: Urban Commons* are not only about the external urban environment; it is also about the universities and their inner workings and transformation. The alliance becomes a site of institutional experimentation, where teachers and staff from the partner universities co-design and co-teach modules, co-develop study programs and micro credentials and work towards a useful institutional integration that highlights the combined strengths and capabilities of the university network.

The *U!RBAN Commons School* in Frankfurt, for instance, brought together diverse disciplines, didactic approaches and educational cultures: governance critical theory from Amsterdam, social work, care and community-building perspectives from Ghent, arts-based research and experimentation and human-ecological urban design from Frankfurt, civil engineering and social sciences from Ostrava, critical urban planning from Helsinki and artistic intervention from Lisbon. These encounters foster pedagogical development, because they expose both teachers and students to cultural and disciplinary differences in teaching and knowledge creation. The format invites educators to adopt transformative leadership in education, a stance oriented not toward control and top-down management, but towards facilitation, reflexivity and the recognition of interdependence (Shields, 2018). Teachers learn to share responsibility, critically evaluate their methodological repertoire and modes of teaching, negotiate aims and adapt and update their approaches as they move through institutional and interdisciplinary boundaries.

The interplay between these varied practices supports a broader pedagogical aim: cultivating critical thinking and transformative learning. In *U!REKA*'s cross-city constellations, students encounter peers with different disciplinary backgrounds, institutional expectations and cultural lenses. These differences are not treated as barriers but as resources. During the online *U!R Commons Days* students present their

work to peers. The diversity of outputs – from visual ethnographies to speculative design prototypes – creates moments of comparison and dialogue that expand students’ understanding of varied forms of knowledge. Through such exchanges, they learn to navigate epistemic plurality and develop critical thinking and a reflexive orientation toward complexity.



Fig. 9 & 10: U!R Commons Expo @ Deutscher Werkbund Hessen, Frankfurt 2024

The annual U!R Commons Expos serve a crucial role by acting as the primary venue for disseminating and reflecting upon the challenge-based student research conducted within the U!REKA Lab: Urban Commons. These events are integral to the educational model in mainly three aspects: in the areas of knowledge dissemination and public engagement, in co-creative and interdisciplinary reflection, as well as in

developing a meta perspective and future vision. Firstly, the exhibitions provide a low-threshold opportunity to share the knowledge students have created about urban commons initiatives and commoning processes, creating a feedback loop. Taking the research back to the public sphere and to the involved initiatives is offering the possibility of actual impact on urban society. Secondly, the exhibitions, whose curation and set-up itself are a co-creative process, document the participatory processes of student research and facilitate additional exchange and interdisciplinary insights among participants. Finally, the exhibitions allow students and teachers to gain a meta-perspective on the diverse topics and challenges explored internationally, leading to the systematisation of various urban commons categories (U!REKA Lab: Urban Commons, 2024). This can form the basis for further comparative analysis and an opportunity to further develop the U!REKA Lab: Urban Commons approaches and focus.

The *U!REKA Lab: Urban Commons* and the dissemination of student research projects furthermore feeds into the logic of the *U!REKA Centres of Expertise* (CoE) by acting as a bridge between education, applied research, and innovation. While the CoEs *Climate-Neutral and Resilient Cities*, *Transition to Circular Society*, and *Innovative Governance and Citizen Engagement* are designed to muster common alliance research activities and connect European researchers and partners to address societal challenges, the Commons Lab serves as an experimental field for testing these solutions in real-world contexts. The Lab is engaging students and staff in complex issues like climate neutrality, circularity, and citizen engagement through challenge-based learning, which generates the practical insights and good practice examples required to inform CoE research. Furthermore, the Lab is influential in setting up knowledge-creating communities that support the CoEs in driving the alliance's goals towards a greener, smarter, more inclusive and sustainable urban future.

5 Living the U!REKA CICICI Educational Principles

The *U!REKA Lab: Urban Commons* functions as a microcosm of the broader *U!REKA European University* project. Coordinating learning across institutions requires the negotiation of accreditation systems, co-teaching arrangements, ethical procedures and assessment cultures. These processes highlight that cooperation is not simply a matter of aligning structures but of cultivating shared ways of working. Through recurring cycles of experimentation, feedback and adaptation, the alliance embarks on a journey of institutional learning: developing international educational agendas and formats in close exchange with experiential collaborative teaching practices. The Commons Lab thus can be seen as an actor of alliance development, demonstrating how experimental educational practice can forward the evolution of transnational teaching and international integration in the educational sector.

In this context, the *U!REKA Lab: Urban Commons* operationalises the alliance's *CICICI principles* – Co-Creation, Inclusivity, Challenge-Based Learning, Interdisciplinarity, Collaborative Learning, and International Exchange – not simply as pedagogical ideals but as governance instruments that structure how joint education is negotiated, coordinated and institutionalised across the partner universities. As articulated in *U!REKA's Educational Framework*, these principles emerged through a series of EduForums bringing together *U!REKA* teachers and staff and cross-institutional consultations, forming a shared policy foundation for the alliance's educational integration (U!REKA, n.b.).

In the *U!REKA Lab: Urban Commons*, *Co-Creation* becomes a governance practice that redistributes authority and ownership: teachers, students and community stakeholders are encouraged to jointly shape learning processes and results. *Inclusivity*, conceived as a continuous institutional responsibility rather than a static value, influences how access barriers, language diversity and different modes of participation are addressed in transnational teaching teams. *Challenge-Based Learning* provides

a unifying methodological spine, enabling partners with divergent disciplinary cultures and national regulations to collaborate around shared societal problems rather than around pre-aligned curricula. Similarly, *Interdisciplinarity* offers a ground for new encounters and inspiration, a productive force when students and teachers from different programmes work together on real-life challenges. *Collaborative Learning*, central to *U!REKA*'s educational vision, encourages forms of shared teaching and learning that challenge traditional classroom structures and create positive interdependence in (international) group work. Finally, *International Exchange*, positioned in the framework as an essential condition for European citizenship education, is enacted through blended mobility formats, lecture series, online exchanges, summer schools and BIPs, which require the navigation of obstacles in calendars, digital infrastructure and administrative routines across the alliance.

By integrating the *CICICI principles* into its concrete practices, the *U!REKA Lab: Urban Commons* functions as a governance laboratory for the European University: it tests how joint values can be translated into educational practice and institutional procedures, how the diversity of systems can become a productive resource (rather than a shared burden), and how educational collaboration can foster organisational learning within *U!REKA* (despite sometimes underdeveloped agility and flexibility). In this sense, the Commons Lab not only embraces and exemplifies the pedagogical ambition of the *CICICI* framework – it actively contributes to shaping the alliance's evolving governance architecture.

6 U!REKA Labs: Commoning Institutional Transformation: Reflection & Projection

The *U!REKA Lab: Urban Commons* is not only focused on a timely concept and relevant challenges in our urban environments, but also on transforming the universities themselves, by setting up a structure that can be pursued and adapted in other specialised *U!REKA Labs*. By bringing together diverse disciplines and didactic cultures, the *U!REKA Labs* foster pedagogical development and expose staff and students to interdisciplinarity and interculturality in education and knowledge creation. Thus, they are far more than specialized educational programs; they serve as a laboratory for the *U!REKA European University*, operationalising the alliance’s *CICICI* not just as pedagogical ideals, but as concrete instruments and therewith actively modeling and driving transformation through “commoning” educational practice. By demanding continuous cycles of experimentation, feedback, and adaptation, the Lab structure compels partner universities to engage in institutional learning, fostering the development of international educational agendas and formats through practical collaborative teaching.



Fig. 11 & 12: BIP Series [COMMON GROUND] Groningen 2024 & Helsinki 2025

The U!REKA Labs can also serve as a means for community formation, feeding into the U!REKA Centres of Expertise and their knowledge creating communities and U!REKA European University's larger mission and its goal of providing ideas for solving contemporary challenges towards more sustainable und future-proof cities. To understand this relationship, one can view the Centres of Expertise as the alliance's "research engines" that design sustainable blueprints for the future, while the U!REKA Labs act as the "experimental ground" where those ideas are co-developed, driven, challenged, and refined by the next generation of professionals. To strengthen the institutional collaboration, also between the two main pillars education and research in the U!REKA European University, the U!REKA Lab structure would have to be expanded in the various fields relevant for the alliance.



Fig. 13: BIP [COMMON GROUND] Groningen 2024

The success of the *U!REKA Lab: Urban Commons* and also the more recently established *U!REKA Lab: Co-Creativity in Social Arts* in coordinating learning across institutions, despite challenges like varying academic calendars as well as disciplinary, teaching and assessment cultures, demonstrates that effective cooperation relies on a bottom-up process of cultivating shared ways of working rather than merely aligning structures top-down. The Labs actively contribute to shaping the alliance's evolving governance architecture, exemplifying how practical, commons-oriented educational collaboration can be a driver for the evolution of transnational teaching and institutional integration within the European University project and the local implementation within study programs (Dorn, Gschrey & Stephan, 2026).

Ultimately, the *U!REKA Lab: Urban Commons* reveals how higher education can contribute to democratic and sustainable urban futures by grounding learning in shared responsibility, reflexive engagement, and collective imagination. It enables students to experience the city as a space of negotiation rather than consumption, fostering an appreciation for commoning practices as forms of civic learning. The Lab models a European University defined not merely by structural integration, but by its ability to foster transnational communities of learning that value diversity, reciprocity, and experimentation. In this sense, the Lab not only teaches about urban commons – it actively performs them, cultivating a commons-oriented educational ethos that reinforces the broader aims of the *U!REKA European University*.

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