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## **PIONEER Alliance**

### **Work Package 3 Transformative Leadership**

#### **Workshop: *PIONEERING Leadership: A Collaborative Workshop for Transformation in Higher Education***

**September 9 – 10, 2025**

**TH Köln – University of Applied Sciences**

### **Welcome Address by Prof. Dr. Sylvia Heuchemer, President, TH Köln - University of Applied Sciences**

Dear colleagues,  
dear PIONEER-Family,

On behalf of TH Köln, it is my great pleasure to welcome you to our workshop *PIONEERING Leadership*. I am truly delighted to greet you here at our Ubierring campus – and to see so many of you gathered, bringing with you such diverse backgrounds, experiences, and perspectives.

Your presence here today, coming from different regions across Europe, already demonstrates what this workshop is about: building bridges, creating connections, and learning from one another – not only in an academic sense, but also in a very practical way.

What unites us is our shared conviction that universities are more than places of teaching and research. They are institutions with a responsibility that reaches far beyond their campuses. They are actors in shaping our cities and regions. They are spaces where knowledge is not only collected, but shared, applied, and further developed – together with the people who benefit from it.

Our focus is clear: we want to contribute to making cities more inclusive, safe, resilient, and sustainable – in line with the UN Sustainable Development Goals. And we

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understand cities not merely as geographical spaces, but as living communities in which the interplay of economy, society, culture, and environment is constantly negotiated.

More than two-thirds of Europe's population lives in cities. They are hubs of encounter, innovation, and culture – but also spaces where challenges such as social inequality, housing shortages, or the consequences of climate change become particularly visible. If we aim to improve quality of life, strengthen social cohesion, and build a sustainable future, we must begin here. And we must do so in close cooperation: universities with municipalities, companies with citizens, start-ups with city administrations, research with practice.

The PIONEER Alliance embraces challenge-based learning: students and researchers work on real-world problems, co-develop solutions with local partners, test them, and continuously refine them. Our member universities form a pan-European ecosystem in which knowledge is created and applied collectively. This means: we not only share research findings, but also methods, experiences, and networks. We design pilot projects that can be implemented directly in cities – showing that cross-border collaboration can have tangible impact.

*PIONEERING Leadership* – for us, this means understanding leadership not merely as an organizational function, but as a lived attitude. It includes being open to new perspectives, even when they feel unfamiliar at first. It means embracing diversity not as a challenge but as a strength. And it means being willing to question one's own approaches and explore new ways forward. Leadership, in this context, is about creating spaces where others can contribute their ideas and take responsibility. At universities, this means encouraging students to raise their voices, supporting staff in further developing their skills, and enabling researchers to bring their knowledge into society.

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Leadership is also a decisive factor in a much broader sense: it is essential for the transformation of the European Higher Education landscape as a whole. Achieving the ambitions of the Bologna Process, fostering a true European knowledge society, and strengthening cross-border cooperation all depend on leadership that provides direction while enabling participation. Within PIONEER, this becomes particularly clear: only through shared leadership can we address the major challenges ahead. Reaching the goals of the alliance – making cities more sustainable, inclusive, and future-ready – requires universities to assume responsibility, to take a clear stance, and to act boldly. Leadership here means not only accompanying change but actively shaping it: by creating spaces for experimentation, strengthening partnerships, and empowering the next generation of leaders to carry this transformation forward.

The PIONEERING Leadership workshop is an opportunity to discuss these principles and perhaps even to bring these principles to life, at least in part.

My special thanks go to everyone who made these days possible: the WP3 team for organizing, the speakers for sharing their expertise, our international guests for traveling here, to all of you for contributions – and last but not least, everyone who worked behind the scenes.

Over the next days, you will have the chance to engage in a variety of formats – from lectures and creative working sessions to group discussions and informal exchanges over coffee and lunch. I warmly invite you all to use this time to approach one another with openness and curiosity, to share your ideas courageously, and to develop concrete steps that will have an impact beyond this workshop.

Now, I would like to briefly introduce the next keynote speaker. He is well known here at TH Köln, as he recently took over as chair of our university council: Prof. Dr. Ulrich Radtke, an outstanding expert in higher education, who will give us an insight into his expertise with his presentation on *What Are the External Expectations of Higher*

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*Education Institutions – Today and Tomorrow?* His wealth of experience gained through decades of work at several universities, in high-profile management positions, and on a wide variety of committees is a great asset. I wish you and all of us an exciting lecture as well as inspiring, productive, and meaningful days together.

Thank you very much!