

UNIVERSITIES WEAVING AND MENDING THE SOCIAL FABRIC

University, Social and Urban Challenges

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University, Social and Urban Challenges

Brussels....

...a multicultural city

...the political, administrative and economic
heart of Belgium

*...but as well a major university city with 74,000
students*



University, Social and Urban Challenges

The university in the city must constantly adapt to new realities:

- Students constitute a changing social group
- Increasing numbers of international students
- New layers of population gaining access to higher education



University, Social and Urban Challenges

The university's impact on the city:

- Academic research generates a host of business activity
- University hospitals and medical research centers
- Role played by university education in social emancipation
- Urban planning and development dimension
- Migration patterns



University, Social and Urban Challenges

Two main questions:

How the university needs to understand the diversity that characterises the city's social fabric?

What are the policies that the ULB has chosen to introduce?



How the university needs to understand the diversity that characterises the city's social fabric?

1. By supporting the democratisation of studies
2. By reconsidering students' social dimension
3. By supporting the diversity in the city's social fabric
4. By developing a societal involvement



1. Supporting the democratisation of studies

“Open door policy” for access to university education, no admittance test nor selection.

To cope with this policy and to overcome relatively low success rate in the first year of bachelor, the ULB has implemented following measures:





Supporting the democratisation of studies

- Increased learning support
- Remediation and booster schemes targeting first-year students whose levels of educational achievements are not in line with university standards

Supporting the democratisation of studies

As a result:

- This wide range of often unique support schemes has greatly helped in bridging the gap between secondary and university education.
- Schemes are seen as a direct way of allowing new population cohorts not only to enter university but also and above all to succeed!



2. Reconsidering students' social dimension: from local to international

Schemes for overcoming financial barriers:

- Low registration fees
- Reduction or fee waiving for students in difficult financial situation
- Study grants for socially disadvantaged students
- The ULB has set up a very dynamic student and staff welfare department



Reconsidering students' social dimension: from local to international

Tackle the persistent problem of “students’ accommodation”:

- One of the most worrying problems for a city university like the ULB
- Student rents for private accommodation have gone up by 35% over the last 10 years
- 7,000 out of 24,000 registered students apply for accommodation



Reconsidering students' social dimension: from local to international

- Measures for facilitating international mobility for our students
- Efforts made for understanding the reality of a foreign student 's social situation



3. Supporting the diversity that characterises the city's social fabric

Two examples:

The Student welfare department: an innovative and proactive service for students in difficult financial and personal situations

ULB - Jobs: a centralised service for facilitating access to students jobs for all ULB students



4. The university's societal involvement

- “Tutorat” mentoring programme (awarded by UNESCO the “Comenius medal”) was set up to facilitate the transition between secondary education and higher education.
- Inter-generational accommodation schemes: senior citizens letting out rooms at a low price in exchange for services rendered by the student lodger. Way for building up active social solidarity within the city.



Concluding remarks:

- Boosting the democratisation of higher education:

a social role for the university?

- Most UNICA universities are faced with the similar social and societal problems:

a topic for a common action?

