

The role of universities in addressing urban challenges

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THE FUTURE IS URBAN

1. We are entering a “**knowledge society**”. Knowledge is more than ever necessary to resolve complex problems. Knowledge is however no longer the monopoly of expert institutions, but **diffused in society**.
2. The large majority of mankind is now **living in cities**. A city is a particularly complex type of society. The knowledge needed for such systems is **transversal, complex** and **contextual**.

THE FUTURE IS URBAN

3. Cities are facing **three major challenges** (Eric Corijn):

- How to make cities **liveable**, through the combination nature/culture: the **ecological** challenge (sustainability)
- How to make cities and their multicultural communities **connected**: the **cosmopolitan** challenge (integration, cohesion)
- How to make cities **inclusive**: the **social** challenge (inequality, common good)

THE FUTURE IS URBAN

4. To deal with these challenges, universities as knowledge producers have to make a transition. **Knowledge production needs to be thematic, transversal, interdisciplinary, inter-institutional.** That implies more **collaboration** within academia and more collaboration with societal knowledge. (Cfr. Brussels Studies Institute)

5. To deal with these challenges, **local governments have to change their system of governance** ("no more silo's") and **interact and collaborate** with academia and civil society.

THE FUTURE IS URBAN

6. We need **platforms and interfaces** to facilitate and organize collaboration and co-production between academia, civil society and local government.

7. Not only on the local level! Cities are part of **European networks**. Therefore we need platforms and interfaces between academia, civil society and local government on the level of Europe.



2. URBAN & METROPOLITAN UNIVERSITIES

UNIVERSITIES IN/AND CITIES

Luc Soete: three types of university/city-relations

- **“University cities”** (Leuven, Oxford): dominant position of the university in the city and the region; without the university, the city would not exist.
- **“Cities with a university”** (Gent, Manchester): the city and the region are not dependent on the university; the city and the region have other trumps and attractions.
- **“Universities in big cities”** (Brussels, London): universities and the city face the same challenges – and need each other to deal with them.

Urban and metropolitan universities

- An **urban university** is a U.S. term for an institution of higher learning that is socially involved and serves as a resource for educating the citizens and improving the health of the city or region in which it is located.
- A **metropolitan university** includes a similar mission; however, its research has national and international implications and its student body includes a significant number of international students.

Being **in a city** does not make a **university urban, nor metropolitan.**

To be urban, a university **must be “of” the city as well as “in” and “for” the city.**

Research, teaching and service to society focused on **urban & metropolitan challenges.**



UNIVERSITIES IN/AND CITIES: THE QUADRUPLE HELIX-MODEL

Quadruple Helix Innovation

Government, Academia, Industry and Citizens collaborating together to drive structural changes far beyond the scope of any one organization could achieve on it's own





3. UNICA AS *THE* NETWORK OF URBAN UNIVERSITIES

UNICA NETWORK URBAN UNIVERSITIES

- UNICA is an institutional network of **51 universities** from **37 capital cities** of Europe, combining over **160,000 staff** and **1,900,000** students.
- UNICA is potentially **the largest and most relevant network of urban universities** in the **world**



UNICA NETWORK URBAN UNIVERSITIES

What kind
of **research**
is relevant
to the city?

What kind
of **teaching**
is relevant
to the city?

What kind
of **services
to society**
are relevant
to the city

- **UNICA can stimulate research focused on urban challenges**
 - **What?** Thematic research, beyond disciplines on mobility, smart cities, urban health, sustainability, diversity, urban economy, urban governance, urban living...
 - **How?** By facilitating UNICA-research networks, Ph.D programs, summer schools,...

UNICA NETWORK URBAN UNIVERSITIES

- **UNICA can stimulate teaching which is of urban relevance in terms of content and/or format**
 - New MIT programs focused on urban challenges: multiculturalism, urban governance, sustainability
 - Studium Generale: life lessons & soft skills for urban living (*Redelijk Eigenzinnig, Difference Day*)
 - Making the city your classroom (*wekonekt.brussels*)
 - Community Service Learning projects (*Univer.city*)
 - Programs in different cities (*4Cities-UNICA Master*)

UNICA NETWORK URBAN UNIVERSITIES

- **UNICA can stimulate service to society which is of urban relevance**
 - Citizen science projects in, with and for the city
 - Urban labs for interactive urban planning
 - Urban health programs
 - Urban commons
 - (Social) Entrepreneurship for the city
 - Smart cities
 - Fab Labs

An aerial photograph of Brussels, Belgium, showing a dense urban landscape with a mix of historic and modern architecture. The foreground is filled with traditional European-style buildings with red-tiled roofs. In the middle ground, several tall, modern apartment buildings stand out. The background shows the city extending to the horizon under a clear blue sky. An orange rectangular box is overlaid on the left side of the image, containing the text '4. A CALL TO ACTION' in white.

4. A CALL TO ACTION

A CALL TO ACTION

- Cities are highly complex types of society. The knowledge needed for such systems is by nature **transversal** and **transdisciplinary, complex** and **contextual**.
- Both cities and universities are organized in **silo's**. Therefore, we need to build new **platforms and interfaces** for **mutual interaction** and **co-production**.
- **UNICA can be the ideal platform/interface for developing a methodology for urban universities**
- **UNICA can be the ideal partner for European network-organizations of cities** (cfr Eurocities)

A CALL TO ACTION

Let's make this a UNICA project:

- Tender amongst members to **check willingness** to develop an academic interuniversity, interdisciplinary platform of “urban” knowledge production.
- Start a restricted number of **pilot projects** with support of UNICA.
- Report these experiences in a **UNICA City-University Cooperation workshop**, where we bring together project leaders, exchange of best practices, discuss future collaborations, discover the missing links, along the quadruple helix methodologies.

THANK YOU



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