



# Preparing universities of the future: (Re)building inclusive and sustainable campuses

Conclusions from the UNICA Conference hosted by the University of Sarajevo

JUNE 2023



## Report UNICA Conference, University of Sarajevo, 25 – 26 April 2023

### “Preparing universities of the future: (Re)building inclusive and sustainable campuses”

#### Contributors of the Conference

**Nihad FEJZIC**, Director of the Center for Interdisciplinary Studies, University of Sarajevo • **Rifat ŠKRIJELJ**, Rector, University of Sarajevo • **Hasan TANOVIĆ**, Mayor of the Municipality of Novo Sarajevo • **Tobias RECKLING**, Co-Coordinator of UNICA & the City and Team Manager Knowledge Exchange & National Funding, University of Vienna • **Katarzyna WOJNAR**, Co-Coordinator of UNICA & the City and Assistant Professor, University of Warsaw • **Lejla HAJRO**, Head of Directorate for University Campus Development, University of Sarajevo • **Ivanka Popović**, POPOVIĆ, University of Belgrade • **Mirzeta MEMISEVIC HODZIC**, Senior Teaching Assistant at the Faculty of Forestry, University of Sarajevo • **Wendy BOS**, Editor-in-Chief openresearch.amsterdam • **Sylvain RIGOLLET**, Attaché for Cooperation, Ministère de l'Europe et des affaires étrangères (French delegation in Bosnia and Herzegovina) • **Gabi GÖBL**, Science Shop Program Coordinator, Central European University • **Matthew LAWSON**, Senior SRS Learning, Teaching and Reporting Manager, University of Edinburgh • **Vebjørn BAKKEN**, Director at the Energy and Environment Office, University of Oslo • **Enita NAKAS**, Vice-Rector for International Relations, University of Sarajevo • **Adnan RAHIMIC**, International Relation Officer and PhD student, University of Sarajevo • **Katrīna SPROGE**, Vice President, European Students' Union • **Armin ŠESTIC**, Project Manager, Garden of Dreams Festival, NGO • **Mario MANNA**, PhD candidate, Luiss Guido Carli • **Despoina MANTZIARI**, PhD candidate, Aristotle University of Thessaloniki • **Helen SOOVÄLI-SEPPING**, Vice-Rector for Green Transition, Tallinn University of Technology • **Jana DLOUHÁ**, PhD., Charles University Environment Centre



Co-funded by the  
European Union

Co-funded by the European Union. Views and opinions expressed are however those of the authors only and do not necessarily reflect those of the European Union or the European Education and Culture Executive Agency (EACEA). Neither the European Union nor the granting authority can be held responsible for them.

UNICA – Network of Universities from the Capitals of Europe  
c/o University Foundation, Rue d'Egmont 11, 1000 Brussels, Belgium  
Copyright 2023 © by UNICA

All rights reserved. This information may be freely used and copied for non-commercial purposes, provided that the source is acknowledged (© UNICA)  
[www.unica-network.eu](http://www.unica-network.eu) | [office@unica-network.eu](mailto:office@unica-network.eu)  
A free electronic version of this report is available at <http://www.unica-network.eu>

## Table of Contents

Introduction.....	3
Summary of the Conference .....	6
Session 1: “Universities and cities interaction to harmonise the transformation of each other“.....	7
Session 2: “Stakeholders’ and university community’s expectations from the campus“ .....	11
Answering the Conference's guiding questions.....	17
Conclusion.....	19
What’s next?.....	<b>Error! Bookmark not defined.</b>
Additional Resources .....	21

## Introduction

In a fast pacing world marked by global challenges and the need for global solutions, universities have assumed a unique role of contributing to societal development. In Europe, this has been acknowledged at the highest level, as seen in the Commission Communication on a “European strategy for universities“, where one can read that *“Universities have a unique position at the crossroads of education, research, innovation, serving society and economy“*, - but also by institutions themselves, as universities pledge to serve SDGs through their Mission Statements and Strategic Plans. National education policies and research mechanisms also highlight the importance of community engagement, interdisciplinary research, and partnerships with various stakeholders to address societal needs. To successfully fulfill their role, one can say universities have been putting in place transformations in their 'software', this is, adapting their curricula, orienting their research to societal needs, establishing collaboration with industry and governmental bodies, etc; and in their 'hardware', which means physically changing the appearance of their campuses to reflect principles of inclusivity, community, wellbeing, flexibility and connectivity. But while pursuing their mission to tackle challenges, universities are themselves bound to be challenged by many factors including digitalization, the climate crisis, the growing demand for collaboration with civil society and citizens, and even unpredictability, as seen during the COVID-19 pandemic.

As the Network of Universities from the Capitals of Europe, the motivations hindering universities' action and the transformation they lead has always been subject of discussion. Because if it is true that all universities are expected to serve local communities, their immediate neighbourhoods, and the cities where they are based and operate, this is of even more significance for Universities based in capital cities in Europe. The cultural diversity and “living lab” aspects of Capital cities, the proximity to governing bodies, their technological, cultural, and innovative capacity, and the opportunities they provide as powerful economic and commercial centres, create a special environment for universities to maximize their potential in supporting societies to address global challenges and shaping a better future.

Having this in mind, on 25 and 26 April 2023, the University of Sarajevo hosted the UNICA Conference **“Preparing the universities of the future: (Re)building inclusive and sustainable campuses”**. The Conference was a joint initiative of the UNICA & the City and the UNICA Green & SDGs Working Groups. It provided the participants with an opportunity

to address the topic of synergies between universities and cities from different perspectives, to learn from the expertise of colleagues with different profiles and backgrounds, and to discuss possible cooperation in the future.

This report aims to capture the key highlights and essential information discussed during the event. Its purpose is not to be a detailed record of each presentation and discussion, but rather to present the collective conclusions of the presented cases, practices, and ideas. The report starts by outlining the main takeaways of the two sessions in which the Conference was structured: “Universities and cities interaction to harmonise the transformation of each other” and “Stakeholders’ and university community’s expectations from the campus“. Based on these, the report presents attempted answers to the questions that guided the organisation of the event:

- How can students be involved in campus transformation?
- How can we respond to the energy crisis, the global e-learning competition, and blended work and learning by combining ancient buildings and new technologies?
- How to improve the utilisation and accessibility of the existing academic commons by creating living labs to develop and test research and innovation?
- How can universities and cities interact to engage in sustainable transformations?

The report wraps up with a list of conclusions that can serve as inspiration and guidelines for professional working in the concept and the design of sustainable university campuses.

### **About UNICA Green & SDGs**

UNICA Green & SDGs is the network’s platform that focuses on Sustainability and the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals. The Group was established in 2011 on the initiative of the participants of the UNICA Student Conference 2010 in Rome, under the name UNICA Green Academic Footprint (UGAF).

Initially, the platform focused mainly on the discussion and exchange of practices related to the implementation of environmental sustainability strategies at universities. Recently, the group started widening its activities to meet the comprehensive concept of Sustainability conceived by the United Nations which, besides environmental policies, also includes development strategies. The activities of the Group include sharing experiences on strategic tools, environmental management systems, and good practices related to the

day-to-day work of a sustainable management office, student involvement, and outreach. The UNICA Green & SDGs Workshops gather Vice-Rectors responsible for the implementation of institutional sustainability strategy from UNICA member universities, Sustainability/ Environmental coordinators, as well as representatives of UNICA Green & SDGs, peer networks, governmental bodies, and city authorities. [Learn more](#)

### **About UNICA & the City**

The UNICA & the City Working Group focuses on the relation between the institutions and the urban ecosystem with which they interact. The group was created with the mindset that universities are leading players in societal impact, shaping processes in the employment panorama, sustainable development goals, innovation practices, and governance and public policy affairs, among others.

The working group seeks to be a facilitator in strengthening the links and cooperation between the universities and other organisms in the urban system. This translates into collaborative endeavors with other stakeholders, organisation of conferences and seminars focused on pressing urban challenges, promotion of good city-university practices, and engagement with urban development initiatives. [Learn more](#)

### **About the University of Sarajevo**

The University of Sarajevo the largest and oldest university in Bosnia & Herzegovina, tracing its initial origins to the 1500s. The University is committed to remain an autonomous academic community of teachers, researchers, artists, and students incorporated into the international university and academic community and trends.

A sizeable and complex organisation, the University continually invests efforts in strengthening its role as a responsible institution within its social community, and to ensure the role of the recognizable centre for scientific and artistic work, bringing together teams of domestic and international experts and artists around projects relevant to the domestic, regional, and wider social context and environment. The University of Sarajevo is comprised of twenty-two Faculties, three Academies and five research Institutes with the status of full members, internally organized within six Science/Arts Groups from the fields of Social sciences; Humanities; Medical sciences; Natural, mathematical and bio-technical sciences; Technical sciences; and Arts.

The university is undergoing a significant campus renovation with funding from the government and the European Investment Bank. [Learn more](#)

## Summary of the Conference

Throughout the two day Conference there were panel discussions and case studies regarding experiences of viable designs of a multi-modal campus implemented at UNICA member universities. After a reception held at Sarajevo City Hall on the evening of the 24th of April, the Conference officially started on the early morning of the 25th with speeches by the conference organizers, followed by the first session, which answered the questions of how universities and cities coordinate mutual transformations through their interaction.

In his introductory speech, the Rector of the University of Sarajevo, Prof. Ph.D. Rifat Škrijelj, emphasized that *“Success in developing synergy between universities and their local communities will be the best promoter of universities and their importance for community transformations aimed at sustainability, inclusiveness, and openness”*. The coordinators of the UNICA & City project Katarzyna Wojnar, from the University of Warsaw, and Tobias Reckling, from the University of Vienna, also greeted those present, with Wojnar stressing the importance of cooperation during the economic and pandemic crisis.

Starting with the presentation on the renovation of the campus of the University of Sarajevo and then moving to practices from other universities, participants had the opportunity to learn how universities manage different expectations towards the campus, the strategies introducing interdisciplinary research facilities, multifunctional public and dining spaces, libraries, hybrid and flexible classrooms and offices, innovation ecosystems, inclusive residential solutions and campus service one-stop-shops.

The second day was dedicated to understanding and balancing stakeholders' and university community's expectations from the campus. This brought in the perspective of different actors, namely students and international students, the creative sector, the surrounding community who's not part of academia, and even the more abstract idea of future generations that will be using the campus. This session brought the Conference to a full circle since, through the eyes of different actors, as it landed on the same idea with which the Conference started.

## **Session 1: “Universities and cities interaction to harmonize the transformation of each other”**

The conference began with a presentation by Lejla Hajro, Director of the Directorate for Construction and Maintenance of the University of Sarajevo Campus, who outlined the experience of the University of Sarajevo, which is undergoing a significant campus renovation with funding from the government and the European Investment Bank. By designing, projecting, and reconstructing the main campus of the university, the institution is contributing to the process of valorising the entire environment. The campus is located in the city's administrative centre and was originally a site of military barracks, a feature that provides an interesting example into the many layers and actors that play a part in the architectural design of universities, which includes preservation of historical hallmarks as well as being mindful of the neighboring communities and buildings. One characteristic that is also worth emphasizing in the sustainable effort of the project is the use of the materials of the demolished buildings to put up the new ones that replaced them.

Mirzeta Memišević Hodžić, Senior Teaching Assistant at the Faculty of Forestry at the University of Sarajevo, followed with an intervention on the importance of green spaces in university campuses and their impact on the quality of life. Some of the proven benefits of having urban green areas in cities include improvement of air quality, reducing noise pollution, and promoting physical activity. However, drawing from the specific legislation, classification, and protection, the presentation pointed out the quantity and quality of green areas in Sarajevo and Bosnia and Herzegovina is not satisfactory - in Sarajevo, green areas cover only 2% of the total area!

One relevant factor that explains the lack of green spaces in the city - and that is likely prevalent in other European capitals – is the anthropogenic influence on urban green areas, this is, the reduction of green areas to increase the area for construction facilities, the widening of roads, etc. To increase the green areas in the capital and the country, local government has put in place a "Green" action plan and "Green" budgeting to ensure the sustainability of urban green areas, which consist of space-planning guideline for the management of urban green areas. The presentation concludes that the space of the University of Sarajevo Campus provides an opportunity to satisfy some of the needs associated to the plan of increasing green areas in Sarajevo and Bosnia & Herzegovina, for the benefit of students, employees, and citizens.

Leaving the city of Sarajevo and moving West, the session continued with Wendy Bos, Editor-in-Chief of [openresearch.amsterdam](https://openresearch.amsterdam), who made a case on how universities can act

as catalysts of change through the example of the Metropolitan Region of Amsterdam. Stressing that *"Cities are at the center of transition"*, the presentation emphasized the need for new methodologies and structural reflection on action to address the accumulating and accelerating crises in cities.

How? Enter Urban Regional Research Ecology, the interdisciplinary field of study that focuses on understanding the ecological dynamics and processes within urban and regional environments. In this context, we are introduced to the figure of the 'Chief Science Officer', the central point of contact for the municipality and the knowledge institutions when it comes to knowledge and research. This position is held by Caroline Nevejan, Chair of the Designing Urban Experience at the University of Amsterdam, who is responsible for orchestrating research between the municipality of Amsterdam and the different scientific, academic and artistic universities in the city. With a small team, the Chief Science Officer makes sure that civil servants and researchers can find each other and invent different new ways of working together. As urban challenges need synergy between research and policymaking, the figure of Chief Science Officer emerges as the connector between both worlds, guiding research efforts, promoting collaboration, and ultimately influencing decision-making processes.

The field of Urban Regional Research Ecology and the position of the Chief of Science Officer say about the future of universities suggest in themselves a shift in the traditional concept of a university campus. It implies that higher education is extending beyond the physical boundaries of the university and exploring new ways of learning, collaborating, and engaging with the broader community. Learning and engagement are no longer confined to the traditional campus boundaries. Universities embrace a more inclusive and accessible approach, reaching out to a broader audience and actively participating in societal issues beyond academia. Or, to put simply as Wendy Bos: *"Campus of the future? Outside the walls of the university!"*

**Take a look!** 🖱️

[openresearch.amsterdam](https://openresearch.amsterdam)

This is a digital platform for research, knowledge, and innovation about Amsterdam and the metropolitan area. The goal of the platform is to share knowledge, to show relations between different kinds of knowledge, and to work together in research projects.

## Univer(cities): case studies

### ***OSUN Science Shop***

EHU and CEU is running a two-year pilot initiative in Austria, Belarus, Hungary and Lithuania, supported by the Open Society University Network (OSUN), between August 2021 and July 2023. OSUN Science Shop provides research support responding to concerns experienced by society aiming to close the gap between academic disciplines and practice, through solving actual problems. The OSUN Science Shop program invites citizens and non-profit organizations to submit questions and requests to the university that can be pursued by students who are eager to do good through their studies.

Experiential, engaged and service learning, community-based teaching and learning, civic engagement, citizen science and participatory action research are the flagship practices that mark the ethical and pedagogical frame of our work, and guide our efforts in building & equal partnerships. [Learn more](#)

### ***University of Edinburgh and the city of Edinburgh: Students as Change Agents***

In their pursuit to make the world a better place, the University of Edinburgh's has committed to ensure that their actions and activities deliver positive change locally, regionally and globally. With this idea in mind, the university launched the Students as Change Agents, a 'living lab' approach for students, staff, and challenge hosts to tackle real-life challenges and generate fresh thinking. It involves students from multiple disciplines, who want to make a social impact.

The innovative approach, which is in place since 2019, has already benefited over 600 students and 21 challenge hosts. With over 90% of satisfaction rate, the approach allows not only for real world application of knowledge and skills but also increase of the students' awareness, which stays with them long after they graduated, as evidenced by some students, who went on to pursue careers directly associated to societal transformation. On the other side, the input of students has helped the community as a whole, by taking the student's perspective to decision making bodies as relevant as the United Nations or the Scottish Government.

### ***The Climate House & Oslo Science City and the City of Oslo***

The City of Oslo and the University of Oslo are working towards ambitious climate targets and sustainable urban development. As part of their collaboration, the University of Oslo was an official partner of the city when this was deemed European Green Capital 2019. In this context, Oslo was looking for lasting contributions, and so UiO came up with the Climate House. This is the first nordic exhibition space focusing exclusively on climate and is part of the Natural History Museum at the University of Oslo. But beyond an exhibition, the Climate House is in itself a landmark of climate change. Why? Because it's a zero-emission building, it was built as a fossil-free construction site, it contains solar cells, natural ventilation (chimney effect), and is made up of local materials and low-carbon concrete.

Another relevant initiative that shows the synergy between city and university is the development of the Oslo Science City. Anchored in the City of Oslo's 2019 "Strategy for the Development of the Knowledge Capital", the new 1.4 million m<sup>2</sup> Oslo Science City aims at creating a physical framework for Norway's innovation environment of estimated 150,000 scientists, students, entrepreneurs, and contribute to the country's transition to renewable energy.

According to the University of Oslo, the project works well as challenges and goals in the context of climate and sustainability are common. However, collaboration that runs smoothly is not so easy to build from day to night. As actors involved differ in their interests, urban development requires extensive discussion to align priorities.

## Session 2: “Stakeholders’ and university community’s expectations from the campus”

Day 2 of the Conference focused on the different groups in the community that impact the design and concept of university campus. It started with Adnan Rahimić, Senior Expert Associate for International Cooperation at the University of Sarajevo, who presented the perspective of international students. The presentation demonstrated that UNSA has an extensive monitoring plan of international students' wellbeing both before, during, and after mobility. This has allowed for UNSA to map students' needs, in the most varied topics both relating to the university and the city of Sarajevo. One of the key elements in students' daily lives is the campus space, since students have a strong sense of belonging to it, and so this is identified as a priority area for improvement.

In their quest to improve the university experience, UNSA puts a spotlight on the transformative power of an enhanced campus space. With ingenious suggestions such as converting empty hallways into vibrant study areas, complete with cozy chairs and tables, and turning them into dynamic exhibition spaces, the aim is to fashion an environment that not only caters to academic

### *Did you know...*

There are 2 types of campus:

- campus university where all main buildings and facilities are within one area
- city university where buildings are scattered throughout the city.

needs but also fosters a sense of community. Adequate provisions of electric outlets and robust WiFi coverage further reinforce the idea of a campus where students can seamlessly blend their digital lives with their educational pursuits. Recognizing the vital role of the campus as a welcoming sanctuary, the document advocates for the infusion of greenery, establishing shops, benches, and tables, and integrating smart features like solar panels and charging stations. These initiatives align with the vision of a student-friendly haven that encourages meaningful connections and cultivates a deep appreciation for sustainable living. As the seamless integration between UNSA and the city is an evident need, it prompts a reflection on the intrinsic value of a campus where students feel at ease—a space where exploration, inspiration, and a true sense of belonging converge. But of course, achieving this also means securing ample funding, exploring opportunities within EU-funded programs, harnessing the transformative potential of Erasmus mobility, fostering meaningful networking, and organizing events that foster idea exchange and project creation.

Still on the topic of international students, Katrīna Sproge, Vice President of the European Students' Union, shared a few aspects that must be taken into consideration from a group that is often overlooked. The first area of concern is information accessibility. Ensuring equal access to information for both international and domestic students, including those with disabilities, is also crucial. Furthermore, ongoing training for staff and faculty on creating accessible resources and seeking feedback from the campus community further enhance information accessibility. Access to student support services is another important aspect. It is crucial to ensure that international students have the same rights and access to support as domestic students. Efforts should be made to inform students about available support services and eliminate language barriers when accessing them. Additionally, providing access to mental health support services on campus is vital. Affordable and accessible housing is emphasized as an important consideration. It was suggested to provide affordable student housing when possible, ensuring it meets accessibility needs, but also supporting students in finding off-campus housing and providing guidance on avoiding scams. By focusing on values such as accessibility, affordability, inclusivity, adaptability, and efficiency, these environments can provide information accessibility, access to student support services, safe and inclusive surroundings, affordable and accessible housing, and an adaptable campus that meets the needs of students.

The session continued with a presentation by Mario Manna, PhD candidate at Luiss Guido Carli and Despoina Mantziari, PhD candidate at Aristotle University of Thessalonikiof, about the City Science Initiative (CSI), which brings together City Science Officers from different European cities to explore how science and technology can address local challenges and promote evidence-informed policy-making. The initiative showcases the potential of European Commission services and networks, facilitates a network of CSOs, and identifies the needs and priorities of cities in terms of evidence-based policy-making.

#### *A tale of two workshops*

In an endeavor known as the Universities as Catalyst for Change project, the cities of Amsterdam and Thessaloniki orchestrated two workshops with a compelling objective: to gain profound insights into the perspectives and aspirations of aspiring researchers in their endeavors to tackle urban environments and crises. These workshops served as dynamic platforms for participants to delve into creative exercises, including the crafting of fairy tales, as well as engaging in thoughtful discussions to express their needs and desires as future researchers. The workshops concluded that universities should evolve into open, inclusive, and affordable spaces that foster collaboration, innovation, and active participation in both research and policy-making initiatives. Such universities would serve as vibrant hubs,

promoting knowledge sharing, interdisciplinary collaboration, and the translation of research into practical solutions that improve the well-being of urban communities. By embracing these principles, universities can truly become catalysts for positive change in our ever-evolving urban landscapes.

The session concluded with a presentation by Helen Sooväli-Sepping, Vice-Rector for Green Transition at Tallin University of Technology. The institution is committed to become a sustainable and inclusive university, having embedded this commitment into their strategic plan. As part of this, the university has taken on the challenge of becoming climate neutral by 2035. Drawing from the example of other institutions, there is evidence that universities are strongly committed to sustainable practices and reducing their carbon footprints. By setting ambitious targets, implementing innovative initiatives, and engaging the campus community, institutions are paving the way towards a more environmentally conscious future. The focus on energy and emissions, alongside efforts to increase renewable energy sources and reduce overall consumption, reflects a comprehensive approach to mitigating climate change.

Furthermore, the emphasis on collaboration and interdisciplinary cooperation through platforms and task forces promotes knowledge exchange and innovation in sustainability research and practice. By integrating sustainability principles into education programs, universities play a vital role in shaping future generations of environmentally conscious leaders.

### ***Community building: case studies***

#### **Charles University on a Cooperative Way to Sustainability**

Charles University has been actively pursuing a cooperative approach to sustainability through its Environment Centre, which conducts environmental research, provides expertise, and collaborates with various stakeholders. The university has made significant strides towards sustainability in recent years, including assessing the UN Sustainable Development Goals, embedding sustainable development in its strategic plan, and garnering responses from faculties and sub-organizations. An example of such commitment, as the university's involvement in large scale project, the UNILEAD, a collaborative effort among 25 Czech universities to strengthen universities' role as effective and inclusive public organizations by promoting collaboration and sharing best practices in sustainability. Efforts towards sustainability are also evident with the appointment of a

Sustainability Manager, works to have a Sustainable Development Strategy, the creation of an action plan with indicator, or the conduction of Energy Performance Contracting studies. The accomplishments of Charles University in its pursuit of sustainability underscore the vital role of social capital. The university's collaborations with parliamentary bodies, government agencies, NGOs, and academic institutions demonstrate the power of building relationships and networks to drive sustainable change. Charles University's journey towards sustainability exemplifies how the cultivation of social capital can propel universities to become influential actors in driving societal change.

### **Towards the multi-functional, inclusive and sustainable campus - snapshots from universities around the world**

The post-pandemic university is witnessing shifts in design and principles to create multi-functional, inclusive, and sustainable campuses. These changes include embracing virtual communication as the new norm, emphasizing the significance of face-to-face interaction and the campus community experience, and addressing the challenges of campus design such as spatial configuration, resource utilization, and connectivity. Principles of universal design, inclusiveness, community-building, wellness promotion, sustainability, flexibility, and connectivity are guiding the transformation of university campuses. This involves ensuring accessibility, tactile information, acoustic hygiene, gender awareness, mobility corridors, and seamless experiences for diverse users. The transformation of university campuses towards multi-functional, inclusive, and sustainable environments reflects an understanding of the evolving needs and aspirations of the university community. By embracing principles of universal design, social connectivity, wellness promotion, sustainability, and flexibility, universities are not only adapting to the post-pandemic landscape but also creating spaces that foster collaboration, innovation, and holistic well-being.

Furthermore, these campus design changes align with broader societal shifts towards more sustainable and inclusive practices. They serve as exemplars of how universities can play a pivotal role in shaping a better future by prioritizing the well-being of their communities, engaging in interdisciplinary research, and integrating sustainable principles into every aspect of campus life. Campuses become more than physical spaces; they become catalysts for positive societal transformation, where innovation, well-being, and sustainability converge to shape a better future for all.

### Interdisciplinary research facilities

*Brubotics, Vrije University Brussels*



The Brubotics Rehabilitation Research Center (BRRC) is a state of the art, interdisciplinary human movement analysis lab (including 14 Vicon mocap cameras, 3 build in AMTI force plates, a 16 channel Cometa EMG device and a MetaMax 3B gas analysis system), focusing on robotic and technology supported rehabilitation research.

### Dining, food and relaxation

*The Student Centre, University College London*

Over 1,000 study spaces across eight floors, as well as a cafe, a rooftop terrace and the Student Support and Wellbeing Centre. The Centre's green credentials also played a part in its recognition by Prix Versailles, as it features recycled building materials, rooftop solar panels and a temperature regulation system that helps to reduce energy usage.



*Photo: University College London*

### Wellbeing one stop shops

*Caring Universities, University of Amsterdam*



As a student, combining social life, studies, work and exercise can be quite a challenge. UvA a one stop shop programmes which students can use anonymously, for free, and with guidance from a free online coach.

The programmes are developed for a number of complaints, such as mood problems, stress, procrastination, eating problems and covid related problems.

### Libraries as learning commons

*Library of the University of Cyprus*

The four-storey building contains a library, an information systems centre, the Center of Technology for Teaching, and a language centre. It is covered with green and blue fabric, with a roof garden located on its flat roof so that it looks like an "abstract composition" of a hill. It's a hybrid between natural landscape and man-built environment, with a giant white pointed column that stands in the centre of the space distributing light to the whole building.



*Photo: University of Cyprus*

## Hybrid and flexible classrooms and workspaces

### *Classrooms at the University of Toronto*

Myhal auditorium: plenty of aisle space and rectangular tables, built for collaboration; a microphone and video hook up at every table for easy class participation; a gigantic digital screen and enough room at the front of the class.



*Photo: University of Toronto*

## Housing and real-estate portfolio

### *University of Massachusetts Amherst*



*Photo: University of Massachusetts Amherst*

Using a phased, core and shell strategy to construct Life Science Laboratories (LSL) building allowed the University of Massachusetts Amherst to obtain high level research space and take advantage of the competitive bid market and economic incentives.

## Answering the Conference's guiding questions

### **1- How can universities and cities interact to engage in sustainable transformations?**

Universities and cities can interact through collaborative partnerships and joint initiatives to engage in sustainable transformations. This can involve sharing knowledge and expertise, conducting research projects in collaboration with city authorities, and actively participating in urban planning and development processes. Universities can contribute to sustainable urban transformations by aligning their research and education programs with the needs and challenges of the city. Joint projects can focus on sustainable infrastructure development, energy efficiency, green spaces, and community engagement. By working together, universities and cities can leverage their respective resources and capacities to achieve shared sustainability goals and create vibrant and inclusive urban environments.

### **2- How can students be involved in campus transformation?**

Students can be actively involved in campus transformation by participating in decision-making processes, joining sustainability initiatives and clubs, and contributing their ideas and perspectives. Universities can create platforms for student engagement, such as student-led sustainability committees or forums, where students can voice their opinions and propose solutions. Additionally, universities can implement programs like Students as Change Agents, which provide students with opportunities to tackle real-life challenges and make a social impact. By involving students in campus transformation, universities can tap into their creativity, energy, and passion for creating positive change.

### **3- How can we respond to the energy crisis, the global e-learning competition, and blended work and learning by combining ancient buildings and new technologies?**

To respond to the energy crisis, universities can focus on energy management and efficiency measures, such as implementing renewable energy sources, optimizing building insulation, and promoting energy-saving practices among students and staff. Embracing new technologies like smart building systems, energy monitoring, and renewable energy generation can also contribute to sustainability efforts.

In the context of global e-learning competition and blended work and learning, universities can leverage technology to enhance virtual learning environments, provide online resources, and foster collaboration among students and faculty. At the same time, ancient buildings can be retrofitted with modern technology and infrastructure to create a seamless integration of traditional architecture with innovative digital solutions. This approach ensures the preservation of historical heritage while embracing the opportunities presented by new technologies.

#### **4- How to improve the utilization and accessibility of the existing academic commons by creating living labs to develop and test research and innovation?**

Creating living labs within academic commons can enhance their utilization and accessibility. Living labs are spaces where researchers, students, and external stakeholders can collaborate on real-world projects, test innovative ideas, and develop practical solutions. By integrating living labs into academic commons, universities can foster interdisciplinary research and create opportunities for knowledge exchange and co-creation. These spaces should be designed to be flexible, adaptable, and equipped with state-of-the-art technologies and resources to support research and innovation activities. Engaging students, faculty, and external partners in the design and operation of living labs ensures their relevance and effectiveness in driving research and innovation.

## Conclusions

Universities are making efforts to create sustainable, inclusive, and multi-functional campuses. Across many European universities collaborating with the cities has become one of the main instruments to fulfil those efforts. Universities are recognizing the need to coordinate with their local communities to achieve mutual transformations. This requires strategic partnerships, interdisciplinary research facilities, and the revitalization of campus spaces. The development of green areas on campuses is crucial for improving air quality, reducing noise pollution, and promoting physical activity. All of this has led to the appointment of new figures, such as the Chief Science Officer, and the expansion of knowledge-sharing platforms, to address urban challenges and inform evidence-based policymaking.

The involvement of different stakeholders, including international students, the creative sector, and the surrounding community, is essential in shaping the expectations and designs of university campuses. The integration of their perspectives ensures that campuses become vibrant, inclusive, and student-friendly environments. The shift toward hybrid and flexible learning spaces, engagement with the broader community, and the use of digital platforms exemplify the evolving concept of a campus that extends beyond physical boundaries. The commitment to sustainability is evident through initiatives aimed at reducing energy consumption, incorporating renewable energy sources, and promoting resource efficiency. Universities are embedding sustainability into their strategic plans, establishing action plans, and conducting Energy Performance Contracting studies to drive change.

The examples presented during the Conference in Sarajevo demonstrate as well that, by leveraging social capital, universities can become influential drivers of societal change and contribute to the well-being of their communities. Social capital fuels innovation, facilitates collaboration, and amplifies the impact of initiatives. Ultimately, social capital serves as a driving force behind the transformative actions needed to achieve sustainable development. In conclusion, the evolution of university campuses towards multi-functional, inclusive, and sustainable spaces reflects a broader global shift towards a more sustainable and interconnected future. These transformations not only enhance the learning and research experiences for students and faculty but also contribute to the well-being of the broader community. As universities continue to prioritize sustainability, inclusivity, and innovation, they play a crucial role in shaping a better future for all.

## Recommendations

As a network that functions as a forum for sharing good practices and serves as a valuable platform for knowledge exchange, collaboration, and mutual learning, and that has urban challenges at the core of its action, UNICA will keep following up on the topic of synergies between universities and cities. The Conference in Sarajevo has provided clear examples that this is a strategy that is bringing significant benefits to the urban communities and contributing to achieving the SDGs. UNICA Green & SDGs and the UNICA and the City Working Groups have renewed reasons and motivation to keep exploring this. Here are a few ways in which to leverage on the Conference:

- **More collaboration between working groups:** leveraging the collective expertise and resources of two groups has proven to enrich the session and respective outcomes. Beyond the two working groups that were involved in the Conference in Sarajevo, there are opportunities for fruitful collaboration with other – for instance, the IRO Group, which shares concerns like the housing crisis or the integration of international students;
- **Share Case Studies and Success Stories:** encouraging members to share case studies and success stories has proven to be inspiring for others and to draw conclusions from a practical point of view. Besides encouraging members to keep sharing these during events and working group meetings, UNICA should invest in the development of other mechanisms, mainly communication strategies, to inform about these practices, including to wider communities beyond the network;
- **Facilitate Peer Learning and Mentoring:** Beyond webinars, it would be interesting to establish a mentoring program or peer learning exchanges where universities with successful collaborations and initiatives can guide and support other institutions interested in developing similar synergies with their respective cities. This enables knowledge transfer and encourages the adoption of best practices;
- **Conduct Research and Surveys:** to better understand the dynamics, challenges, and opportunities of university-city synergies. This research can generate evidence-based insights and policy recommendations for both universities and cities to strengthen their collaborations;

- **Collaborate on Urban Projects:** UNICA should invest in facilitating joint urban projects among member universities and cities within the network. These projects can focus on areas such as urban planning, community development, environmental sustainability, and social innovation. Collaborative initiatives provide opportunities for universities to contribute their expertise and research capabilities to address local challenges;
- **Engage with high-level stakeholders:** UNICA must take advantage of its privileged positions in Brussels to connect with stakeholders and policymakers who operate in the area of urban city development. Entities like DG REGIO and the Committee of the Regions, and organisations like EUROCITIES or ICLEI – Local Governments for Sustainability, might be worth reaching out to.

## Additional Resources

- [Information about the event + presentations of all contribution at the UNICA website](#)
- [Article post-Conference + photos](#)
- [News articles about the Conference at the website of UNSA](#)

***Do you want to know more or wish to get involved in the UNICA  
Green & SDGs and/or the UNICA & the City activities?***

Reach out to the UNICA Secretariat at [office@unica-network.eu](mailto:office@unica-network.eu)