

Universities and Re-Construction of Cities: the Role of Research and Education

Report of the World Café Sessions

Table 2: European Universities and the creation of a truly European innovative ecosystem of post-industrial cities

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Focus

Innovative forms of collaboration are emerging between universities, not only in terms of research, but also education and impact. The European Union's initiative around European Universities is one example of this. The core focus of this world café topic is how such collaborations can contribute to the broader urban settings in which the universities are located. Can European universities provide a truly European innovative ecosystem that foster post-industrial transitions?

European universities, as various other forms of international inter-university collaboration, provide innovative spaces for new forms of student mobility, research collaboration and sharing and impact. These provide unique opportunities for shaping truly European innovative ecosystems that connect cities with similar needs and resources, such as post-industrial cities. For instance, they can provide resources for knowledge-driven economic innovation, upscaling, technological innovation for sustainability, and the sharing of practices on how to address common social topics such as superdiversity, inequality and poverty.

The core objective of this world café is to discuss how to make European University alliances work and how to maximize their impact on society.

The following **key questions** were delivered beforehand to the participants:

- How can we make European Universities work, and what can we learn from European universities for other university collaborations?
- How can European Universities benefit transitions in postindustrial cities?

- How should European Universities engage with societal actors, communities and enterprises that make up our cities?
- What is the potential of European Universities for postindustrial cities in particular?
- How can European Universities contribute to a truly European innovative ecosystem of cities?
- How can European Universities provide a space for sharing values and practices between European Universities?
- What can European Universities contribute to European values?

To center the discussion, each session was structured around three main questions:

- What are European Universities and what similarities do they have with other university networks.
- How do universities in post-industrial cities collaborate?
- What works and what doesn't work in terms of contributing to post-industrial transitions.

These documents summarize the ideas discussed in the three sessions. After a brief introduction to the topic, by the host, each session was open to discussion.

For clarity, this document presents the ideas by affinity and not necessarily in chronological order. The discussions were fast-paced and vivid, and this reporting exercise is but an effort to summarize the rich dialogues that took place.

The host and co-host who introduced UNIC are from Erasmus University which leads and is responsible for the collaboration of 10 universities. UNIC is one of 45 European university alliances. It is unique in that it is not only a network of universities but also of 10 post-industrial cities. The alliance sets itself as purpose to work together toward the post-industrial transitions that the cities have in common.

Challenges

University-city alliances can be difficult. Universities and cities corporations. When those alliances involve institutions from other countries, the question "why do we need other countries?" may (and will) arise. While universities and local governments can work together and produce important results, it should not be ignored that town and gown conflicts are also possible. Money from the government can be very helpful for these alliances. However, unlike the US, neither the EU or the UK have provided significant resources. When you are dealing with cities, you are dealing with the public purse, and that can complicate things.

Ecosystems take time and effort and involve many actors, many moving parts.

Uncertainty from cities, politicians, government, and rectors. Are a challenge for alliances and ecosystems. It's a long-time effort.

Opportunities

Oftentimes, academic institutions can collaborate easier than political actors. Academic institutions in post-industrial cities often play a leading role in the transitions of the cities in which they are located; it is not just science in the city, but also with the city and for the city. In the group, various examples were mentioned where 'univer-cities' laid the groundwork for the current revival of entire urban areas.

Relevant topics

Innovation, sustainability, and diversity are important topics that need to be considered in these alliances. Migration is an issue (Immigrants from Belarus, African countries)

It's good to have other people's input, networks help.

Students, and sometimes faculty, are engaged in mobility.

Europe allows us to do things a little bit different. That could help us for migration.

Post-industrial cities are usually built on labor migration. This is also reflected in the student population of our universities.

Universities linked to student migration.

These types of initiatives call for the creation and implementation of projects that involve actors such as the industry, youngers adults, and other stakeholders.

Examples of Alliances

- European Alliance
- European Reform Alliance
- European university of the seas. Groups costal universities of Europe
- SEU
- Glasgow

The alliance has councils to make it operative. It includes not only universities, but also representatives from the cities and the ports. Some of the relevant outcomes are:

- Collecting data from the ports.
- Serving as a space to socialize information about events.
- Creation of courses on demand.
- Empowering the community.

- The alliance is a space to discuss how they prioritize the sustainability goals.

In the case of Glasgow, the idea of creating the network came from a committee integrated by different stakeholder which, in a report, suggested the creation of the network and the City Council adopted the recommendation. There was a specific universities agreement, and universities were encouraged to think how they can work together with the city council. A Civic University Commission was created, there was a Civic University agreement. In Glasgow, enterprises (companies?) are members of the network.

The case of Newcastle University provides an example of a “really place-based policy”: It coordinated research programs, skills training, R&D.

Interpersonal relationships are important. The five (university?) presidents do get on well. That matters!

One participant highlighted that the residents of industrial communities don’t like terms like “post-industrial”. Too academic? And referring too much to the past rather than to the future; how to frame the future of post-industrial cities??

Benefits

Networks among cities stakeholders are important. One participant highlighted how her university teaches medical professions that are needed and provided some ideas how medical schools can help their cities:

- Using hospital for teaching [it was not clear to me id that refers to using hospital for medical practice or using hospitals to reach out to patients and their families]
- Introduced thematic lines focusing on health and well being
- Universities can provide detailed economic analysis, for example, identifying sectors for development, identifying where to retrain, and suggesting where to improve quality of life by spending money in social adjustment.

Examples contribution of universities to solve societal problems:

One participant illustrated how his university designed bio-bags to preserve biopsies or fluids, something very useful during the Covid Pandemic. They work together with regional authorities.

Some questions raised during the discussion:

- What does an ecosystem look like?
- How do we organize communities of interest?

- What is “European”? Is this an inclusive word (a broad definition of Europe) or is it exclusive. Perhaps what Macron defined as “European way of life”? In which the way of university involves democracy, inclusion, gender balance, as opposed to the “Asian way of balance”. Is there a danger of you promoting some supremacy?

Postindustrial transition

Does post-industrial implies “collapse”? Not necessarily. For some participants, post-industrial does not necessarily excludes non-industrial cities. All cities are now postindustrial somehow. For another participant, cities in under-industrialized areas cannot be postindustrial... and that can be good! In some cases, cities are transitioning from postindustrial to high-tech.

There is the assumption that [the alliances or ecosystems] will have positive spin off to their regions. The Impact on postindustrial regions is by design or on purpose. Such impact can include:

- Research and innovation of reengagement impact
- Societal impact and added value, and
- Impact by CO-design.

Some important differences regarding the postwar period

- People are living longer.
- The way we’re dealing with post-industrialism is different to what happened in the 50s.
- A master’s is the new entry degree (not the bachelor’s anymore)

Is there a gap in the society based on age and access to higher education?

Perhaps. But values and core values are not necessarily driven by education by also by family and societal values. Universities have a superregional function.

Social sciences are important, especially in post-industrial settings. It helps understand and navigate the complicated social structures of these cities and promote conflict resolution where necessary. However, specialized knowledge and training can also constitute potential barriers. Access to education is key, especially in post-industrial cities. The university should not stand with its back to the city.

Innovative research policy

The Covid pandemic showed that research networks are possible and can be very productive, but they are difficult to maintain. One participant highlighted how the best strategy to promote collaboration could be start at the bottom, with five-year old ones, and engage them with [through?] collaborative projects, etc.

Resources

Alliances and ecosystems need resources. Oftentimes, individual researchers are the ones with the grants. Researchers can also share resources themselves; collaboration in inter-university networks can bring various efficiencies!