

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

*Report of the World Café Sessions*

## **Table 6: MCO Future Strategy**

*Host: Dr. Patrick Deane, President of the MCO Governing Council*

*Rapporteur: David Lock, MCO Secretary General*

The purpose of the table was to enable representatives of signatory universities to advise on the 2025 – 2030 strategy of the MCO. The briefing note for the session and the current strategy are attached.

The points noted were as follows.

The universities which are signatories of the MCU are **a very diverse group**. The diversity includes *inter alia* geography, size, mission, tradition, culture, public and private sector, secular and faith-based, variations in the level of activism and the political environment in which they work. What unites them are the values set out in the MCU which they endeavour to live by. This represents both a strength (the confidence that can be derived from a broadly-based group giving support when necessary) and a challenge (diverse ways and means of engaging with them will be required).

Building a high **level of commitment for the MCU values within an institution** was felt to be important if that institution is going to put the values into practice effectively and successfully. (One rector studied the MCU 2020 values with his 130 staff before applying to sign up to them.) **The MCO could help by building capacity to do this within universities.**

There was a **need to make the MCU and the MCO known to more universities** along with why it was important and what benefits it could bring. This was a substantial challenge as some rectors tended not to read material that was sent to them. Online conferences, possibly with some local speakers, were seen as a potentially effective way to do this, perhaps in collaboration with Rectors' conferences. The evidence from the Living Values project could be quite persuasive for this.

The MCO might attempt to **work more closely with Rectors' Conferences**, and perhaps **establish regional chapters** to acquire a greater understanding of regional issues (E.g. where and why governments were closing universities) and a closer engagement with universities as well as to provide more local support. Regional chapters could be self-supporting, although some links with the central MCO Council would strengthen the arrangement. Reports could

be delivered to an international conference. An **MoU between the MCO and individual Rectors' Conferences** could be helpful, but it was acknowledged that officers tended not to hold their positions for more than one or two years. Also, it could be valuable to include student organisations and encourage student participation in conferences and webinars.

The MCO was well placed to enable **collaboration between universities**. However, some Rectors' conferences may feel challenged by greater activity by the MCO and not cooperate as they see this as their role.

The translation of **MCU 2020 into more languages** would help.

Giving life to the values by **providing evidence that was based on research** could be quite persuasive. Research on monitoring the **impact of values being put into practice** in different situations could be illuminating.

A study of **how the values set out in the MCU 2020 related to the values in UN key documents and international law** could strengthen the power of the document and give it a sound ideological basis – although its strength of being developed *by* the higher education sector *for* the sector was noted. Further studies on how those values actually have effect or more effect, would likewise be valuable.

Would it be desirable for the MCO to have a **more direct connection with the UN** (UNESCO) or its Secretary General? (The role of IAU was noted.)

The perception of the MCU being a **fundamentally European document** and the MCO having a predominantly European focus could be a limiting factor in some countries. A wider international focus, and **stronger UN connection could be helpful**. If the **UN Secretary General** and senior officials regularly make reference to the MCU in their speeches and documents this would help the MCO. Likewise, if national political leaders did the same.

Developing the **role of students** within the MCO could have mutual benefit. Students tend to 'get things done'. Suggestions included creating a fellowship for one or more students to work with the MCO.

For all this to be achieved the MCO would need to **develop its communications capability**. The secondment of a communications officer from a university could be mutually beneficial although possible conflict of interest issues could need to be managed.

It was felt that the MCO should **develop an aspirational strategy** which should be stimulating for rectors. It would require increased communication.

**Engaging more** with private organisations, the media and civil society could be beneficial. **Greater involvement** in geopolitics and diplomacy could be helpful for the MCO. Helping universities that did not operate in a democracy could be a valuable service.

The MCO's focus on Ukraine and reconstruction was appreciated and it was questioned whether similar impact could also be achieved in other places and for different issues. This could result in universities being seen as more relevant and having greater societal impact.

A question was raised as to whether the MCO should have a role in **both nurturing the values and policing compliance with them**. Signing the MCU was easy relative to putting the MCU values into practice. Hence, should signatories be **challenged to show what they have done and what sustainable impact it has had**? It was not immediately obvious how the MCO could review or police this with credibility. 'Universities love to boast' – but could the MCO establish the reality of their claims?

The **re-engagement of long-standing signatories** who had not engaged actively in recent years could be a fertile priority for action.

Might the use of a **'badge'** which indicated compliance with the values be an aid to both universities (a communication that they complied and could be trusted) and the MCO (through greater publicity)?

There was a suggestion that the MCO might **expand its presence in Ukraine**, providing technical assistance with the reconstruction and the importance of values.

It was suggested that the **MCO should partner with other organisations**, Academics Without Borders being cited as a specific example.

The **kudos of the link with Unibo** was cited by a newer university, and the potential for it to help universities have impact was recognised.

It was felt that **funding** these developments could be achieved through a variety of options. Keeping it free of charge to sign the MCU was generally desirable. There could be different levels of subscription which could depend on E.g. GDP factors, or on the level of engagement that was bought into. E.g. access to the conference or access to research and other services and greater participation. A higher fee could be charged for the conference for lower fee subscribers or non-subscribers.

The budget should be sufficient to support **international projects**, including the development of leadership capacity.

A question was asked as to whether the MCO had **any competition** in the international higher education values space.

A suggestion was made that the MCO might move in the field of higher education to a role similar to that which FIFA has in football. Time precluded the development of this observation.

DJL

28-10-23

## World Café Table 6.

## BRIEFING NOTE

### **Magna Charta Observatory – have your say on its future strategy**

Host: Dr Patrick Deane, President of the MCO Governing Council

Rapporteur: David Lock, Secretary General

The MCO is the guardian of the values set out in the Magna Charta Universitatum <https://www.magna-charta.org/magna-charta-universitatum/mcu2020> (also translated into other languages). It seeks to include all signatory universities in its work and reach out to other universities. The Observatory's over-arching objectives are to:

- a. strengthen the network of universities that share the principles set out in the MCU;
- b. disseminate the values set out in the MCU and promote their application in practice;
- c. promote and communicate the Observatory's activities and its mission;
- d. increase the number of universities applying to sign the MCU.

A copy of its current strategy is appended.

Since its formation in 2001 the MCO has become more global. The number of signatories has increased from 338 to 965 from 94 countries. Over the years its activities have developed **from** having an emphasis on advocacy and action where the fundamental values of academic freedom and autonomy are being eroded or universities are not living in accordance with them **to** developing tools and insight that enable signatory universities to review their adherence to the principles, values and responsibilities set out in the MCU.

The MCO is currently implementing its 2020 – 2025 strategy and developing the strategy for 2025 – 2030. It will be reviewing questions including the following

1. The extent to which the emphasis on 'the values in action' should be developed relative to advocacy and what form each should take.
2. The way in which MCU 2020 should be promoted and the MCO's communications might be improved.
3. The relative priorities to be given to current activities
  - a. Living Values Project
  - b. Research – the responsive and responsible university
  - c. Student engagement
4. Identifying new developments that will have impact
  - a. Incorporating values in leadership development
    - i. For university leaders
    - ii. For student leaders
  - b. Others
  - c. Translations of MCO documents into more languages
5. Administrative matters such as how the MCO might best engage and communicate with signatories and other stakeholders and what a fair, equitable and sufficient funding and effective governance model might best look like.

Discussions such as this are part of the process for preparing the new strategy. Your views will be taken into account when the Council of MCO prepares a strategy for 2025 – 2030.

## **Appendix A**

### **Strategic plan**

#### **Magna Charta Observatory Strategy 2020 – 2025**

##### **The Observatory's Mission**

1. The Magna Charta Observatory of Fundamental University Values and Rights (MCO) is a non-profit organisation, founded in 2000 by the University of Bologna and the European University Association.
2. The Observatory plays an active role in guaranteeing the respect, protection and promotion of the fundamental values and university rights set out in the Magna Charta Universitatum (MCU), signed in Bologna in 1988 and developed in the MCU 2020. The Observatory acts as the guardian of these values and assists signatories and other bodies in the understanding and implementation of them.
3. It gathers information, raises awareness of the importance of fundamental values for the development of universities and higher education systems by organising and participating in events, expressing opinions, preparing documents, developing guidelines and resources and undertaking reviews. The Observatory both proclaims the values and increasingly engages with universities to support the achievement of their implementation.
4. From being established in Europe it is the mission of the Observatory to become more global. The Observatory works with other national, European or international organisations pursuing similar or compatible aims and universities which have signed the Magna Charta Universitatum. The Observatory provides support for universities and it is their collective voice on which the Observatory relies when expressing opinions.
5. The Observatory invites universities to sign the MCU as a public commitment to the values therein. More signatories and more events are means of having greater impact in the world

##### **Achievements up to 2020**

6. By 2020 the MCO had:
  - a. 906 signatories of the Magna Charta Universitatum (up from 366 in 1988)
  - b. Developed a new Magna Charta (MCU 2020) to reflect the changes affecting universities since the original 1988 version
  - c. Piloted and launched the Living Values project with the help of a newly formed group of Ambassadors
  - d. Held events in 14 countries, 20 international anniversary conferences, issued 19 publications and reports on observations, made presentations to international and regional conferences and engaged signatories more actively
  - e. Increasingly involved more students in its activities.
  - f. Moved from just proclamation to also include the application of values and

g. Modernised how the Observatory works, including greater use of the website and virtual communications.

### **The changing landscape**

7. The environment in which universities operate differs greatly from that of 1988 and by 2025 it will have changed even more. The differences have, in part, been a consequence of a faster pace of change, greater globalisation, more diverse expectations from wider range of stakeholders and greater uncertainty. Universities are also being challenged in new ways and with greater intensity including more discrimination, violation of freedom of expression and censorship.
8. The successes of universities have been magnets for additional interest in them and have led to greater interference in their regulation.
9. There has been an erosion of support for autonomous universities and of trust in independent science and free scholarship.
10. There has been politically or ideologically motivated reigning in of universities and their staff and students by governments and/or other authorities.
11. Universities have a vital role to play, both in their own societies and globally. Universities are key players in the definition and attainment of the UN Sustainable Development Goals 2030. These call for multidisciplinary working and external collaborations as well as setting an example in their own behaviour.
12. In this changing landscape with the greater uncertainty, fundamental rights and values have a crucial function to guide the development of universities and enable them to create the future they want.
13. Proclaiming their values more strongly will help universities. Ensuring that their values are clearly articulated, adopted by staff and lived, in practice, will create internal integrity and strengthen the achievement of a university's mission.

### **The Observatory's strategy for 2020 – 2025**

14. As the guardian of the MCU values, the MCO will seek to include all universities, including those that have been newly formed, in its work. The Observatory's overarching objectives are to:
  - a. strengthen the network of universities that share the principles set out in the MCU;
  - b. disseminate the values set out in the MCU and promote their application in practice;
  - c. promote and communicate the Observatory's activities and its mission;
  - d. increase the number of universities applying to sign the MCU.
15. More specifically the MCO will:
  - e. organise an annual ceremony for the signature of the Magna Charta

Universitatum;

f. organise regional workshops or participate in events organised by other bodies to achieve its objectives;

g. make inputs to national, regional or international meetings where there is an opportunity to promote the Magna Charta Observatory and/or the understanding of values set out in the Magna Charta Universitatum and their implementation;

h. develop the Living Values project and support signatory universities in their implementation of it;

i. assist signatory universities generally in operating in accordance with the values set out in the Magna Charta Universitatum;

j. use webinars and other virtual means where it is expedient to do so including where physical activity is not permitted or impractical.

16. The MCO will work closely with the European Universities Association, which has a statutory requirement that universities applying to join the Association must be signatories of the MCU 1988 (*sic*) but actually 'to uphold the values and principles enshrined in the MCU 1988'. It will work closely with the University of Bologna to support each other generally in areas of mutual interest to achieve an effective and lasting collaboration in order to raise awareness of the importance of fundamental values for the development of higher education systems. It will work with other regional and international bodies for the same purposes.
17. The new elements of MCU 2020 provide fertile ground for research, webinars, regional workshops and rich content at conferences. It will be a priority to persuade as many signatories of the 1988 MCU to sign the 2020 edition.
18. The Living Values project will be developed and more support will be provided for universities wishing to use it. A data bank of evidence about successful use of the project and community of practice is to be developed for the benefit of signatories.
19. More effective communications, including the use of social media, will aim to improve the involvement of signatories in the work of the MCO and their active application of values. Investment in research will enhance the MCO's input to this.
20. Signatories will be engaged more deeply and more frequently in the issues which the MCO is facing. This work will connect with events and a space on the website will be available to signatories as a forum, a source of ideas and a place where the experience of signatories can be shared.
21. The Observatory will plan programmes which comprise webinars, workshops and conferences and will support these by developing resources which can be available to all universities via its website, which will be modernised.
22. The partnerships with IAU, SAR, EUA, ESU, WAHED and AArU will continue to be developed through participation in their events, projects and other activities where these meet the objectives of the Observatory. Involvement with these, and possibly other groups, will also serve to interest more universities in signing the MCU.



23. The strategy will be kept under review by the Governing Council and resourced by an annual payment from UNIBO in accordance with the protocol, voluntary contributions from signatories, which will be recognised more prominently, and charges for participation in activities where such charges are deemed to be viable.

Adopted by the Observatory Governing Council

16 March 2021