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## Conference Paper

# The Student City. Strategic Planning for Student Communities in EU Cities

43rd Congress of the European Regional Science Association: "Peripheries, Centres, and Spatial Development in the New Europe", 27th - 30th August 2003, Jyväskylä, Finland

## Provided in Cooperation with:

European Regional Science Association (ERSA)

*Suggested Citation:* den Berg, Leo Van; Russo, Antonio Paolo (2003) : The Student City. Strategic Planning for Student Communities in EU Cities, 43rd Congress of the European Regional Science Association: "Peripheries, Centres, and Spatial Development in the New Europe", 27th - 30th August 2003, Jyväskylä, Finland, European Regional Science Association (ERSA), Louvain-la-Neuve

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# The Student City

## Strategic Planning for Student Communities in EU Cities

Paper submitted to the R-sections of the 43rd European Congress of the Regional Science Association, Jyväskylä, Finland August 27-30 2003.

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### Abstract

This paper aims at the elaboration of a framework for strategic action in the management of student communities. It is argued that students and academic communities could be a driving force for urban development, provided cities are fully aware of the potential that they offer and of the problems of the integration between this group and other “urban populations”. The encounter between students, residents and the private sector may indeed imply “costs”, of social and economic nature, which require complex forms of governance to be dealt with.

The study takes advantage of an investigation conducted among nine major European cities hosting a large higher education sector. The essential characteristics of the relationship of students with host communities have been analysed, as well as the role of higher education institutions and other actors in building a student-friendly city.

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## **1. Introduction**

Students are the citizens and the high-skilled working class of tomorrow. They keep cities lively and diverse. They are the main consumers of cultural and recreational facilities. They have a distinct expenditure pattern that in some cases is crucial to support the economy of whole cities or neighbourhoods. International student mobility is a major vector of socio-economic integration between regions of Europe. However, the conditions for a full integration of students in local communities are not always met. Students are still an “invisible population”, with little space in local policy, no decision power, and an ambiguous role in social development. Whereas education programs are generally carried out at the national or regional level, they often neglect the “urban” dimension of the issue, forgetting that human capital is highly mobile, and that it needs to be attracted, welcomed and managed locally. The importance of human capital as a determinant of the competitiveness of cities calls instead for pro-active, integral city policies targeting this community.

This paper intends to contribute to the elaboration of a framework for strategic action in the management of student communities. The study takes advantage of an investigation conducted among nine major European cities, which host a large higher education sector. Case studies have been conducted in nine European university cities: in alphabetic order, Birmingham, Eindhoven, Helsinki, Lille, Lyon, Munich, Rotterdam, Utrecht and Venice. The essential characteristics of the relationship of students with host communities in these cities have been identified, as well as the role of higher education institutions (HEIs) and other actors in building a “student-friendly” city.

The paper is organised as follows. Section Two of this paper introduces a range of issues regarding the relations between cities and their higher education sector, to focus, in the Section Three, on a model of sustainable city-university relationship. The information from the case studies has been used in Section Four to test the assumptions of the model. Illustrations and insight from the empirical study are provided. Out of a comparative analysis, a taxonomy of “student city” types is proposed as well as and a set of guidelines that should assist decision-makers and all the other stakeholders involved when planning for the development, relocation and organisation of higher education institutions. These guidelines are bound to be valid in all situations, but also indicate specific courses of action to be taken in different contexts to achieve a virtuous

integration between the resident, the student and the business communities. Section Five concludes.

## **2. Background issues**

### ***Student Cities in Europe: Models and Challenges***

Universities, higher education institutions and research laboratories have relevant regional impacts (both *direct*, as job and revenue generation, and *indirect*, as knowledge generation). These have been object of thorough academic research (see Florax 1992 and Phelps 1998 for extensive literature reviews). It is now widely recognised that the formation of human capital and the production of scientific knowledge are strong determinants of regional growth. Moreover, it is typical of European cities that universities are strongly associated to host communities (Hardy in Elliott *et al.*, 1996:11; Hall 1997) and contribute to their cultural status (Chatterton 2000). However, seldom do such obvious economic and cultural links between universities and cities translate in strategic common management of all the areas of contact between them.

New challenges for an effort in this sense come from the loss of relevance of nation-states and the increasing importance of cities as nodes of the global economy. In the emerging socio-economic environment, the opportunities for synergy between centres of creation of knowledge and local communities increase. Local universities and other higher education and research centres become fundamental elements of the competitiveness of cities and regions. However, this dependence is not mono-directional. Universities get more and more embedded in highly specialised regional contexts, and research is increasingly dependent from private sponsors, donors and commercial partners, which are typically local actors (Van den Berg, Braun and Otgaar, 2000). Moreover, cities are now more than ever a source of “problems”, a constant stimulus to intellectual production, that is one of the university's main missions.

Anyway, the relationship between universities and host communities is not limited to the institutional sphere. Despite their diverse backgrounds, students may be described as a socially and culturally homogeneous *population*, with distinct organisation patterns. They make use of the city's resources, and come in contact with other urban dwellers, in particular with the residents. The coexistence and interaction of such different populations, which according to Martinotti (1997) is one of the driving forces of

contemporary urbanisation, is not without problems. At the same time, it is a huge opportunity that cities can turn into a competitive advantage, to the extent to which the human capital formed contributes to the city's performance and quality of life.

Florax (1992:3) notes that proactive behaviour of cities towards student communities might have ancient origins: some Dutch provinces in the 16<sup>th</sup> century already granted fiscal benefits to members of student communities as a means to attract them in these areas. More recently, national policies for the decentralisation of higher education, implemented in the 1960s and 1970s with the aim of supporting weak regional economies, have had mixed results and have to face the recent trends towards university restructuring and government cutbacks. The “regionalisation” of higher education through an array of strategies (birth of new “decentralised” universities; decentralisation of special study curricula by existing universities; diversification of university locations; etc.) has been pursued in other contexts (see Savino 1998 for an extensive account of Italy's case). However, this appears to be more like a centralised effort by nation states to deal with regional disparities, matched by local institutions in search of legitimacy, than a sound plan to favour community development. As of today, the exchange between cities and universities is an integral element of urban planning in Great Britain (Vassal 1987:154), but such cases can be considered exceptions rather than the rule.

### ***The Impacts of Student Communities on Cities***

Education and research activities produce *direct economic effects* (jobs, revenues, services). These can be quantified with sophisticated techniques. However, such effects are not central to the present research, which focuses instead on intangible, less easy to quantify effects. To this respect, the impact of the availability of a large pool of specialised intellectual capital, generally referred to as “knowledge spillover”, has primary importance. According to district theorists as Jane Jacobs (and differently from, among others, Porter), the generalistic and wide-ranging knowledge generated in state-subsidised higher education institutes has a wider impact on local growth than specialised knowledge produced in the private-sector R&D departments. In fact, the former is linked to industrial diversification, which is a winner strategy in the “new economy” environment. In turn, an innovative and stimulating working environment is supposed to bring forward those urban amenities that create further attractiveness, in a “virtuous cycle” of knowledge-driven development.

At the same time, universities and cities compete for land use. In various cases, universities have expanded in congested city centres, subtracting resources and functionality to the resident population and creating occasions for confrontation. This eventually led to the relocation of historical universities to suburban locations (Hall 1997:301 quotes several examples), with mixed results (Vassal 1987). More recently, the orientation of cities towards university settlements has changed. Policymakers acknowledge that campuses and other university facilities represent an enormous stock of capital investment, most of which is used for less than half of the year. As a response, they are looking for ways to increase the “urban” use of these assets, generating extra-revenue and benefiting the community.

Students have indeed a crucial impact on the housing market. They have spending behaviours that may differ greatly from those of the host community; as tenants, they enjoy lower protections and a faster life-cycle than the locals. In the end, these characteristics are likely to push up the price levels and increase the rigidity of the market. The opposite effect is also observed: student settlements can be synergetic to regeneration policies, in the cases in which costs are originally too high for restoration to be started, and neighbourhoods are left to decay. However, the housing market is highly segmented and it is also possible that the residents’ and the students’ markets hardly overlap. The housing preferences of most students are therefore not satisfied in the “normal” market and require dedicated structures, like low-price units close to the university areas, for which there might be a shortage. To this respect, the “campus formula”, popular in Anglo-Saxon countries and in France might be a proper solution, even if in this case the occasions of fruitful encounter between students and host communities are limited, and the direct economic benefits from students' settlements are reduced (Vassal 1987)<sup>1</sup>. This apparent contradiction may be solved through planning solutions that favour mixed functions and multiple uses.

Students consume cultural and recreational products and, in many instances, are producers themselves. City managers may base regeneration strategies on the auto-generated demand for peculiar goods and services (especially food, sport and culture)

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<sup>1</sup> In some cases, as in the case of Bordeaux quoted in Dubet and Sembel (1994), the creation of “citadels of studies” has produced unattractive peripheral enclosures rather than replicating the integral, comprehensive academic community that is found in American campuses.

when they decide to “open up” specific neighbourhoods or areas of the city to student communities. In this way they aim to create “cultural quarters” that are an increasingly important elements of the post-modern urban landscape. Such infrastructure also becomes a central asset in the cities’ tourism policy, as cultural facilities and services appeal to an international educated audience. In some cases, student-managed facilities host shows and events that position the city on the map for avant-garde culture (e.g. Berlin, Bologna, Amsterdam). In general, the informal, *bohémien* and extroverted climate of university cities and neighbourhoods adds elements of attractiveness to the urban environment.

Finally, students, especially international ones, represent a *wedge* respect to local cultures. They bring about social innovation and cultural change. For instance, as their life follows a peculiar time schedule (more flexible and “flowing” than that of the resident working class or other social groups), they demand a different organisation of the city's activity. As a consequence, this comes to resemble the 24-hour economy of the global mega-cities, even at the small scale of university cities, increasing the opportunities for residents but risking a rupture in their social routines. In some cases, a badly managed mixed-use of the public space may generate episodes of “cultural shock”, which give universities a bad reputation and hinder their role as engines of local development.

### **3. Strategic planning for student communities**

#### ***Negotiating and governing a sustainable university-city relationship***

From the above, higher education emerges as a fundamental element of urban development strategies. Moreover, universities and other HEIs are increasingly embedded in the local socio-economic environment as a community of temporary citizens and consumers, but even opinion leaders, trend-setters and policymakers.

The relation of students with the education institution is neither direct nor objective, as Dubet suggests (V.V.A.A. 2001: 62), but it is highly mediated by the environmental context. The condition of students is inherently *temporary*. It is implicit that students get embedded in the local when they are no more such. At the end of their study period, graduates go where the job market offers better opportunities. However, the quality of life in the period of their studies, as well as the sense of integration in the community,

are also crucial elements in this decision. Two extremes can be envisaged to this respect: one in which students, just like any other category of city-users, “use” or “consume” the city without ever becoming part of the community: in this case the university-city relationship is more likely to be one of conflict. At the other end, if the favourable conditions are present, the students find their own “place” in the city, or better create their own spaces, which become assets for the community at large. In this way, they become integrated in the community, acting as a driving force of urban development and change (Pallares and Feixa, 2000). It is therefore in the interests of local firms to invest in the quality of the environment and of the facilities for students.

More in general, different stakeholders are affected by the “location choice” of the university. Among these are the government, which provides the necessary infrastructure; sectors of the society as landowners, developers, retailers and specialised service providers; and the community at large. Other actors are concerned with the scientific and human produced in local universities, like the private firms, the agencies promoting regional growth, the trade unions, etc. Each of these actors has well-defined aspirations regarding higher education. These may be partially contrasting, and need to be rejoined in a comprehensive “vision” of a sustainable “student-friendly” city: a development model for higher education that enriches the local community, limiting undesirable impacts like gentrification, seclusion, or cultural friction. The challenge is to find the right balance between the needs and ambitions of the academic community and especially students, and the policies targeting the resident population.

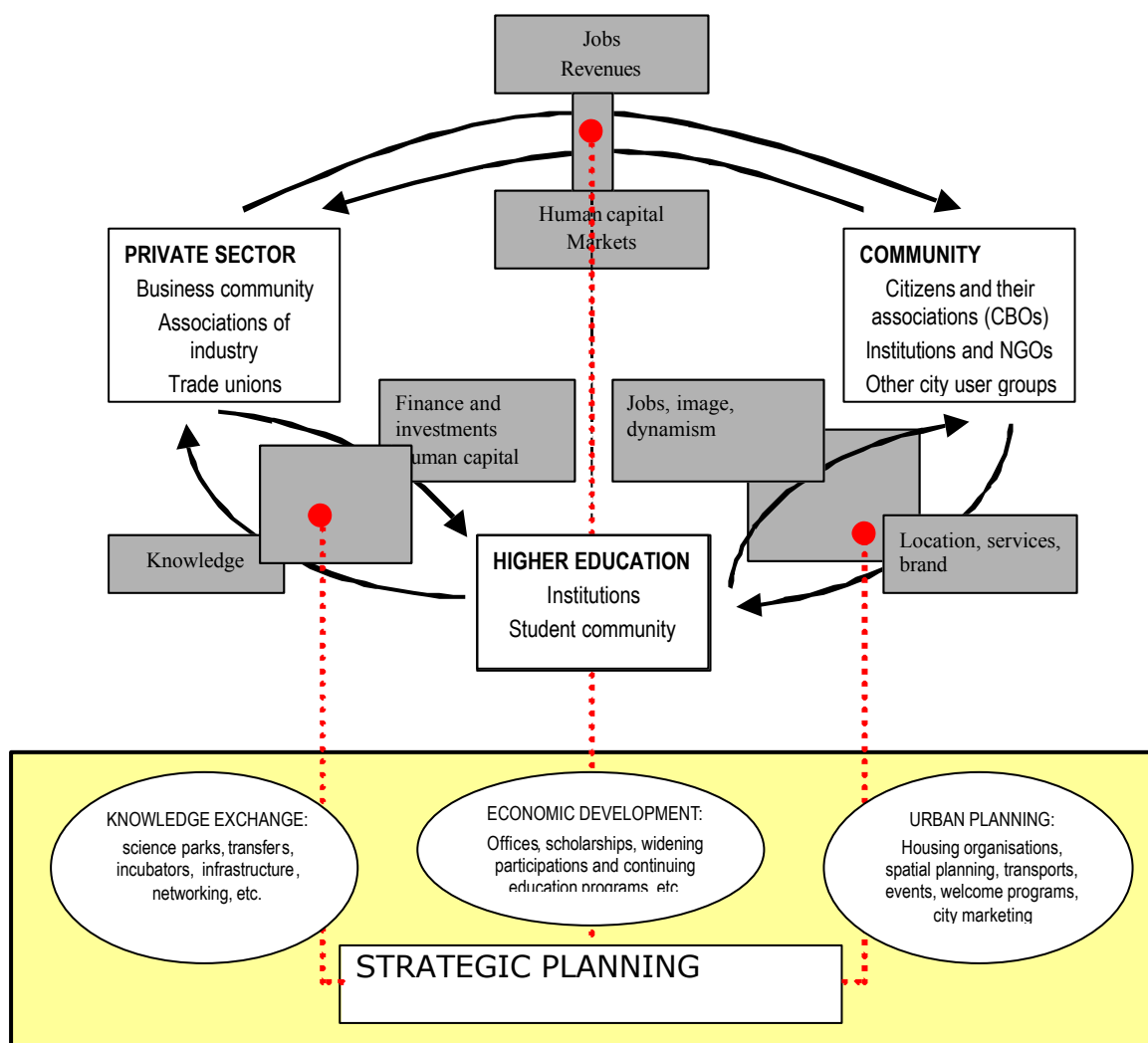
### ***A model of sustainable city-university relationship***

Strategic planning may allow communities to undertake a *virtuous cycle of development*, in which an attractive city works like a “magnet” for higher education and research, and this fosters an even more attractive urban environment for citizens, investors, tourists, etc. In the end HEIs become a real “growth factor” for the regional economy and society. The sustainable relationship between the university and its environment is assumed to depend on the balance in its process of exchange with the place. The interaction between the actors involved in the development of higher education in a city can be analysed systematically to highlight the role of the student community in urban development, the existing points of weakness in this interaction,



and the actions that can redress this balance. This idea is synthesised in the diagram of Fig. 1.

Higher education has direct links with the private sector, including the business community, their workers and organisations. Universities transfer their knowledge to the private sector, in guise of research contracts, consulting and training programs. The resources generated in this exchange may be utilised by universities to expand their education supply, for instance financing new facilities and research programs. At the same time, HEIs involve practitioners of the private sector in teaching activities, and in this way education opens up to real world, delivering a practical expertise that is increasingly sought for by firms. By developing life-long education programs and training courses, HEIs contribute directly to the companies' needs, and indirectly upgrade the city's potential as an innovative and convenient business location.



**Fig. 1: The role of higher education as an engine of sustainable urban development**

HEIs are also in a direct relationship with their host community, as they are physically located in a place. They generate jobs and revenues, as any other urban industry, and in change they demand services and infrastructure that the community should deliver or finance. The exchange relationship between HEIs and communities also takes place at a softer, less visible level, as universities may enjoy “city brands” that gives them prestige above their actual merits, and on the other hand they offer reputation and dynamism to the city, contributing to its competitiveness.

However, HEIs are not only important as industries in themselves. They are also levers for a stronger, more competitive and more “embedded” local economy. The “institutional” role of higher education is indeed that of upgrading the human capital available locally and its innovative capacity, therefore influencing the location decisions and the productivity of the companies, as well as the magnitude of the impacts that trickle down in the local society. Hence the very “embedding” process of firms in the local environment is indirectly influenced by the higher education sector.

These processes of exchange are not merely between institutions, but rather between “groups” – students and the academic community at large, entrepreneurs, citizens – with distinct behavioural characteristics. Institutions do mediate these relations: for instance, elected city councils would negotiate university development with the boards of the institutes, and chambers of commerce would stipulate partnerships with the same boards to activate stage programmes. However, the relationship between groups is more complex, as it relies on idiosyncratic factors. Academic staff would get interested in the local economy, or students would comply with residence planning, only if they see a clear advantage in it, or in other words if some level of “integration” is achieved, based on mutual recognition, dialogue and exchange. Some of these relationships are not supported by a market exchange, and therefore they are not self-regulated. They are also dynamic. If they are not satisfactorily developed, or they are not in balance, the consistency of the whole system comes less, and the capacity of the city to grow would be affected.

*To be sustained in the long-term, the city-university relation might therefore require some form of intervention from the public sector. An explicit, integral policy of cities*

*addressing the student population intervenes at any of these levels.* By actively promoting exchange initiatives between the HEIs and the private sector, the potential for a development model based on knowledge is improved. Students receive an education that is genuinely “rooted” in the local environment, and the chances that knowledge filters in the place are higher. By channelling resources to investments in quality of life for students, and in initiatives that increase their integration, cities make themselves more attractive and dynamic, open to the international environment, visible. Finally, by supporting job market initiatives and continuing education, cities make sure that human capital is not “pushed away” from cities, and that the firms stay attached to the place where they can find the best skilled people.

In this light, it is possible to evaluate systematically the state of the city-university relationship, identifying critical points, priorities for policy and strategic developments.

#### **4. Illustration from case studies**

The nine case studies have been selected in such a way as to cover a broad range of possibilities as far as city sizes, economic structures and geopolitical contexts are concerned. In this way, the results from the study may be better generalised.

**Table 1. Main characteristic of the case study cities and their higher education sector**

<b>City</b>	Residents metropolitan region (millions)	Higher-education student population	N. of universities / higher education institutions	Downtown / campus locations
Birmingham (UK)	2.6	55,000	3	1 downtown, 2 peripheral campuses. Student housing in campus.
Eindhoven (NL)	0.7	18.000	2	1 downtown campus. Student housing in city centre.
Helsinki (SF)	1.2	60,000	9	3 main peripheral campuses and many downtown settlements, with 1 downtown campus. Student housing in campuses and city.
Lille (F)	1.2	100,000	8-9	2 peripheral campuses and 1 downtown campus. Student housing in campus and all around metropolitan region, with concentrations in some

				districts.
Lyon (F)	1.2	100,000	12	3 main peripheral campuses, 1 downtown settlement. Many smaller schools in the ring. Student housing in campus and private residences downtown.
Munich (D)	2.4	80,000	5	4 main peripheral campuses and various downtown settlements. Student housing in campuses and in the city.
Rotterdam (NL)	1.4	46,000 (excl. University of Delft)	6	1 main campus just outside city centre and 1 medical campus in city centre. Student housing spread around the city.
Utrecht (NL)	0.5	55,000	4	1 main peripheral campus, various downtown settlements. Student housing in campus and throughout metropolitan region, including city centre.
Venice (I)	0.3 (Municipality)	25.000	4	Many downtown settlements, 1 large university campus downtown, and one peripheral campus.

### *A typology of three “student cities”*

Table 1 provides the most relevant information about each city and their student community. The cities in our sample are quite different and find themselves at different stages of development. We proceed by proposing three different profiles of student cities, and assessing, in a comparative way, the points of strength and weakness in city-university relations in each case.

«Type 1» *Student Cities: Rotterdam, Lille, Venice, Eindhoven.* These four cities are undergoing a process of economic transition, in which higher education could play a key role. The quality of higher education in these cities is not an issue, as it is generally good to excellent. Rather, problems arise with their capacity to put to value the human capital trained there. Most graduates in the local HEIs cannot be convinced to remain there after the completion of their studies. This is mainly due to two factors: the low profile of the local job market for different professions, and the incapacity of the city to offer challenging conditions to young graduates as far as housing and quality of life are concerned. These cities are therefore struggling to become more attractive and competitive, but they lack a clear *vision* around which to organise the action of the

many players involved. Moreover, they need to make their physical and cultural development strategies more sophisticated, and to communicate their points of strength.

Venice is undoubtedly an attractive city, but it still suffers from its image of a place that is only for tourists, with bars that close early at night and hardly any cinema. This image may not correspond completely to reality, but the side of the city unrelated with tourism, its cultural initiatives and the diverse social and ethnic composition, are present in the city's communication strategies. Rotterdam has the opposite problem of becoming more attractive and vibrant, for its very residents to begin with. The cultural consumers of Rotterdam are more often not from the city; locals – including the students – are passive and reluctant to engage in world-class events like the recent European Cultural Capital 2001. Until now, the city has been unable to develop a consistent strategy for a high-class, hospitable city centre that may appeal to target-segments like young skilled workers and “creative talents”. The same applies to Eindhoven, where a rigid planning rule has so far created a bottleneck in the accommodation capacity of the city. The new local government has promised to revise the planning regulation; it remains to be seen whether the plans of the local institutions and HEIs to make the city more culturally and socially exciting, will be backed up by important private partners as Philips. Lille has a reputation of grey, rainy, industrial city, but it can boost a magnificent renaissance centre, good food and nice street-life; however, most students live in campus and in unattractive suburbs, while many historical houses in the centre remain empty. Thanks to its world-class accessibility, the job opportunities in the region are not missing as many companies moved in, but top-level jobs are still scarce; graduates would rather flee to more congested but exciting cities in Lille's proximity, like Paris or Brussels.

*«Type 2» Student Cities: Munich, Birmingham, Lyon.* In these three wealthy cities, the abundant higher education provision is not that relevant to the local society. All three are “second cities” in their national systems, and they found their own way to grow. Today, the challenge for these cities is to maintain their competitive edge, better “hooking” the knowledge produced at the local universities to the local economy. To this aim they have to become more attractive for young workers in the new service sector, as the local supply is insufficient for the demand of skilled labour. However, they are relatively dull and unanimated places when compared with other national cities.

A Fordist, old-style organisation of the economy still dominates. Small, innovative enterprises do increase in number and relevance, but this is hardly reflected in the structure of the society. These cities' progresses could come to a halt if they do not make a more creative, proactive use of their academic community and knowledge. This may mean for them to develop top international-oriented specialisations in education and research supply within their university institutes and technical schools.

Munich is a splendid city, very attractive for firms and tourists, but living there is hardly affordable for many students, who prefer to commute there from their hometowns in the region. Hence, there is very little "student atmosphere" in the city. A consumption hub for wealthy people and foreigners, this city has therefore little social dynamism. Its points of strength, the human-size, the aristocratic cityscape, are not necessarily attractive to students and skilled workers. Innovativeness and inclusion, in a long-term perspective, are inter-related. Planning for a model of student settlements that are functional to make of Munich a dynamic city is today a priority, which may require a new stage of negotiation between the regional government and the higher education institution. The same holds true to Lyon, which is also perceived as rather dull, despite its world-class cultural status and its bustling economy. The local businesses do not see in the prestigious public universities good partners for research and education; on the other hand, the planning instruments deployed so far by the metropolitan government are insufficient to effect the cultural change that would be needed for universities to be more clearly connected with the "local". This distance between higher education and community is reflected in the spatially segregated and culturally sterile profile of the student community. Birmingham made giant steps but it is still a city centre with problems, as far as appearance, safety, and lack of animation are concerned. The city is making plans to create a cultural hub in its east-side redevelopment, which may be attractive to students as well as to citizens and visitors, but this vision has still to be finalised, and there are doubts about its financial sustainability.

«Type-3» *Student Cities: Utrecht, Helsinki*. In these student cities, higher education institutions have been historically strong and beneficial stakeholders to the local economy. In many respects, these two cities may be considered examples of successful student-community integration, both sharing the cosy atmosphere and the open attitude towards students. Moreover, both host top-class universities of Arts and Design, which

provide a relevant contribution to their “cultware”. These cities are very attractive to students. However, today, in both cases, the use of space for university-related functions seems to have been exhausted. This fact is not perceived as a big problem, as their regions offer good alternatives to families attaching much importance to living space and quality. However, problems could come in the future as further expansion may conflict with other urban functions.

Helsinki may have to host an increasing number of students in suburban campuses, reducing the vitality of the city centre and making it necessary to move to a higher gear in mobility management in the metropolitan region. This may be a problem, as so far the neighbouring municipalities in the metropolitan region have had a “predatory” attitude with respect to the attractiveness of Helsinki as a higher education centre. Utrecht faces the risk of becoming a “student-only” city, as a high number of residents will move to cheaper and more accessible dwelling in the new development area on the West Side. In both cases, the spatial balance of the city-university relation is in jeopardy.

### ***Comparative analysis***

The model of sustainable city-university relationship presented in Section Three can be utilised to assess the points of strength and weakness in the dynamic relation between city and higher education for urban development the nine cities. Our analysis looks at the insufficient “contribution” of one actor to the others, but also on the “balance” established between the three groups. An unbalanced relationship is one in which one actor – for instance, the academic community – does contribute to the welfare of another (in the example, its status and economic role as an employer for the community), but receives little support from it (bad services and obstacles to further development). Such unbalanced relationships are supposedly not sustainable. Sooner or later the actors for whom the “local” represents an opportunity cost, would modify their strategy. On this account, universities that are provided insufficient community services may move to peripheral locations where their economic impact is diminished, and the private sector that does not get an adequate knowledge and human resource from the local higher education institute may decide to relocate. All sorts of combinations and possible responses can be devised.

Only few cities in this study scored positively on the relationship between universities and their communities: among them Helsinki and Utrecht. *Type-1 student cities* score moderate to negative. In *Type-2 student cities*, these relations are decidedly on the bad side. Higher education institutions are like islands, both physically, and in terms of network interaction. The student communities are dispersed, are not perceived as members of the community and more often than not their settlements is a source of friction with the local residents in congested and sensitive housing markets.

*Type-3 cities* perform well also in the university-business relations. In particular Helsinki's HEIs have developed a dense network of formal and informal links with the local firms. The private sector contributes generously to research programs, and Helsinki's R&D and knowledge transfer facilities are among the best in our sample of cities. *Type-2 cities* score just as well to this respect. In this process, proactive city governments and metropolitan authorities have played a key role, promoting growth clusters and investing in capacity and infrastructure. Birmingham's and Lyon's experience with science parks was successful as far as knowledge transfer is concerned, less so in terms of starters. *Type-1 cities* present the most evident problems. Leaving the case of Eindhoven aside, where Philips has been a fundamental actor in the development of higher education, in the other cities the higher education institutions do not always work in the interests of the local economy.

A weak relationship in the relationship between the private businesses and the local community means that business does not contribute to the development of the community to its full potential, because it has a strong outward orientation. It is like a "stranger body" for the local community. That is likely to depend on an unfocused role of higher education institutions as engines of urban development, driving for instance the dynamics of the job market towards a desirable structure. It is the case of *Type 3 cities*, like Helsinki, where the recent problems in the ICT sector threaten to have huge impacts on the local (and national) economy. However, the diverse range of professions and skills trained in the local higher education institutions is a guarantee that in the future Helsinki will be able to diversify its economy making it more solid. In *Type-1 cities* the relations between the city and the private sector are problematic (Venice, Rotterdam) or still in a process of reorientation (Lille, Eindhoven). These cities have problems in developing an entrepreneurial class that may contribute to strengthen of their economy. This is the consequence of higher education not being sufficiently



geared to the local environment. On account of this, the job market in the regions remains undifferentiated and tight, and graduates look for better jobs elsewhere. In *Type-2 cities* students do not get easily integrated in the community. They have a hard time all through their study career, be it for finding a room, for going back and forth with campuses and lecture halls scattered everywhere, for organising their cultural life. At the end of their study period, they might find good jobs in the region and remain in this place, but many of them will feel disaffected with the place and leave. In fact, these are the areas where local firms do not find enough workforce and this represents a barrier to local growth.

### ***Guidelines for policy and best practices***

An explicit strategy targeting the student community is necessary for the long-term competitiveness of cities. The guiding principle is that a city has to be attractive for students, at all stages of their career: from the first moment when they have to decide on a place where to study – this decision is less and less associated with the reputation of the universities and increasingly on the quality of life that they think they will enjoy in a city –, up to the moment when they will plan for their future work and residence location.

For what regards the socio-economic positions of the nine cities, *a more explicit use of excellence of the higher education to promote the city as a business location* has emerged as the toughest challenge in cities like Lille, Birmingham, Eindhoven, and Rotterdam. In these cities, higher education institutes were originally established to serve the industrialisation process of a region. Today, they have to change thoroughly their orientation towards a more diverse range of disciplines, following on the complexity of the knowledge economy. The University College of Utrecht, a small, international-oriented school within the University of Utrecht, was modelled on the “ivy league” schools to offer outstanding educational standards in human and social sciences. The initiative for this “flagship” in higher education was taken by the mayor of Utrecht to put the city on the international map. Lyon’s “Young Ambassadors” is a club supported by some *Grandes Écoles* and the Chamber of Commerce to keep the links between the city and the foreign students temporarily hosted, and use the network of international relations built in this way as an instrument for the co-operation and trade strategies of the local business community.

Cities like Lyon, Munich, Helsinki, which are at a more advanced stage of their economic development processes and are now pointing at the development of specific growth strategies. Local governments there may take the leadership and involve private parties in the creation of *centres for education and knowledge-transfer*. The District for Innovation in Venice and the Utrecht Centre for Knowledge are good examples to look at. The European Summer University organised in Birmingham was a good opportunity for the city to take the leadership in a higher education project, and to use it to the benefit of the community (student projects are based on disadvantaged neighbourhoods), at the same time widening the international orientation of the city.

In Utrecht and Venice, the biggest challenge is to use the potential of their higher education sector in a better way and further the development of the university settlements in a sensitive urban environment. To do this, they need to catalyse various efforts and many largely inconsistent initiatives under a planning “umbrella” that integrates the interests of the city, of the institutes for higher education and of the business community. The Culminatum Oy agency in Helsinki does precisely this kind of job, promoting higher education as a “metropolitan function” and co-ordinating various initiatives in such a way that they are mutually reinforcing.

Another relevant factor in the city-university relationship is the *settlement pattern of the student population* and of the university itself. Two different models are possible, one that foresees “informal” downtown settlements, and one that is organised in one or more “education citadels” or campuses, often physically separated from the rest of the city. Should the “downtown” model be the successful, fruitful opportunities for cultural contamination are present, but also risks of conflict with the local population. The “campus” model is more conservative, but isolated and unattractive campuses may be as unsustainable as unplanned downtown settlements.

Cities like Birmingham and Lyon, where the student population is not that large, have a concentration of problems in specific neighbourhoods. They should instead *look for a better spread of these settlements on the territory*. One of the outcomes of our investigations is that “quartier latins” with a high concentration of students and cultural producers have a short life cycle, and easily become a source of external costs for the community. To this regard, organising accessibility among different campus locations and from these to the city centre is crucial. Lille’s VAL metro system managed to rejoin

the campus to the city centre, making it possible for students to enjoy the city life while living in cheap residences in the campus.

A balanced approach combining the location of student facilities and meeting-places in strategic locations and regenerating areas might achieve long-lasting results, containing the associated costs of gentrification. Venice has been successful in combining regeneration objectives with a settlement policy for the university, though the negotiation had to go through hard times. Today, the S. Margherita student district is the liveliest “cultural hub” of the city, an island in the city’s dull mass-tourist climate; S. Marta, once a deprived and isolated neighbourhood, has gained a new centrality hosting faculties and student facilities. Helsinki utilised the potential from its University of Art and Design to support a whole regeneration project based on the meeting between art education and city life. The Art and Design city of Arabianranta came out of an integral vision of higher education and research as driving forces of urban development, working *in* and *for* the community.

The students of Lille found their own way to make themselves felt as a resource for the community. Each year they organise a balloon race, the *Mongolfiades*, which is very popular among the locals and a source of pride for the city. The city gives this initiative full financial and logistic support. In other circumstances where students are less active, the integration policy has to be more sophisticated. In the cadre of the “knowledge quarter” project, every student of Eindhoven is equipped with a laptop and has unlimited broadband access. They form virtual communities among students, for instance in “e-learning” facilities, but also with residents for the access to urban functions such as culture, commerce, government, etc. In this way, two separate communities barely interacting in the everyday life may get together on the web.

One specific problems raised in all the case studies is that of *planning for student accommodation*, responding to different imperatives: not to create “segregated” student communities; balancing student settlements and residents housing, avoiding distortions in the housing market; and covering all the types of student housing, from the low-end subsidised segment, to short stayers and top-quality facilities for young researchers and starting professionals. It is important to this respect to develop a “vision” about the city as a place for students where to build a life-project, organising effective and attractive solutions for their passage from the student to the residential market once they finish their studies. Students should be offered a “package”, an opportunity to plan their future

presence in the city, which clearly reconnects their possible status as workers with that of “dwellers”. Student housing corporations like Stadswonen in Rotterdam care much about housing quality and variety because they are the first to know that today students appreciate good housing and personalised solutions over price and proximity to the campuses, as it was the case in the past. They have a vision of building the city for the “knowledge society” and this vision should be endorsed by city administrations.

International exchanges increase the number of short-stayers. Appropriate solutions have to be offered to this group, so that their period spend in the city is as pleasant as possible and they may become “ambassadors”. Yet these kinds of accommodation are hardly supplied in the normal market, so that universities should arrange special solutions, like the University of Eindhoven did in a partnership with the private developers, building the “Fellowtel” inside its campus.

The “downtown” settlement model of higher education implies that affordable housing opportunities for students have to be available, and that this does not create unsustainable tensions on the real estate market. It is especially important that the city brings the private sector to recognise the importance of investing for student accommodation, if they wish to reap the benefits from an enhanced pool of local labour. Some typical mistakes will have to be avoided, like relying on rigid regulations to limit the inflow of students in residential areas, or to allow the subdivision of large flats to host numerous students, which ultimately bring to a decline of housing values and to an irreversible loss in the overall housing quality of the city. In finding solutions to the housing scarcity that plagues the student communities in congested cities like Munich, Utrecht, or Venice, housing corporations should be creative and involve students in designing the best solutions. A good example is given by Studentenwerk in Munich and their projects of providing well-equipped “containers” for first-year students in former military barracks.

Different student populations use the city in different ways, as different as the attitudes, behaviour, study fields and lifestyles of student may be. A neat distinction was underpinned in our research. Students in technical and scientific disciplines attach much importance to campus life, as their progress depend peculiarly on the quality of education facilities. The education policy of higher education institutions, with training periods organised in local firms, may help to bring together these communities with the local environment. However, a consistent policy of welcoming and attracting students in

the community life is also needed, for instance through regular events, in order to establishing some empathy between local residents and the student population. Students in human and social sciences, art studies, liberal professions) are more inclined to use the city in more comprehensive way. In Utrecht, Venice, Rotterdam, cities that were far from dynamic, the big development of higher education functions in the last three decades brought tangible improvements to the social environment. However, this integration needs to be aided. The pressure from student communities can be felt like a threat by weak groups, like the elderly and the unemployed. It is therefore necessary to activate communication channels, and to actively support and guide the activity of student groups. The Ichthus School in Rotterdam was recently moved to a new location, between a high-class redeveloped area and a deprived neighbourhood. The school (itself characterised by a highly ethnically mixed student population) decided to be functional to the development of the area, opening a “helpdesk” to assist residents and community initiatives. Organising the bureaucratic procedures for foreign students to take their residence in the city can facilitate the process of integration, by taking down a “cultural barrier” that sometimes is the first visible face of the new host community for a newcomer. The Universities of Lille are active in organising the “link” between foreign students and the prefecture where they need to register in order to be eligible for a house or a part-time job.

Finally, each city has to deal with a decision-making environment that may impede the implementation of optimal solutions. Cities manage their student and academic communities as elements of the urban environment. Each city has a “higher education policy”, whether or not this is in their formal competence, and whether or not it is an explicit strategy. Physical planning, housing regulations, international relations, economic development, all these fields of government affect and connect with higher education and research and the way in which these functions develop in the urban environment. Not always, though, this happens to the best interests of the community and in the best possible ways. Given its complex nature, the good management of higher-education student communities, that we have come to term “student-friendliness” throughout this study, is to be challenged with diverse, complex tools.

The role of formal policymakers is paramount in building a cohesive strategy to attract and manage students. However, the quality of the decisional networks, the co-operation and empathy established between the city and the higher education institutes, on one

side, and the private sector, on the other, is fundamental to their effectiveness. Informal stakeholders (private sector / students and community organisations), with their actions, can enhance or hinder impacts from student communities in the desired direction. This also requires strategic decisions on the education curricula to promote, the means to diffuse the knowledge generated, and the actions to facilitate the “cultural empathy” between host and guest communities. Platforms of discussion at all levels are established, but only in a few cases they are really effective in bringing forward more strategic co-operation between city and higher education institutions (examples are Culminatium Oy in Helsinki, and the Committee Grand Lille). In other cases they have not achieved their objectives for lack of focus or because important actors were missing.

Governing the integration of higher education with the community is also a complex spatial planning process, as in the cases of Utrecht and Venice, where the university expansion cannot be contained in the city but necessarily happens at a metropolitan level. Organising the involvement of peripheral administrations can be controversial. For this reason, it is necessary that the planning of higher education, included the development of transport and facilities for students, is done at a regional level. Utrecht provides a good example of such planning initiatives, where the Province of Utrecht is an important stakeholder. The concept by Helsinki’s Culminatium Oy to develop a “knowledge corridor” as a physical link connecting all the peripheral campuses among them and with the city centre is also a precious contribution to a more integrated “knowledge region”.

It is important to recognise the role of intermediary organisations in the process of enhancing the communication between institutions of different nature. Association of universities like the *Pôle Universitaire Européenne* in Lille may be of help, to the extent that they acquire a real leadership, dominating that of the single Universities. Also, student associations can enhance the visibility of the student community, becoming an interlocutor of the institutions. *Student unions* in Helsinki, Eindhoven, Venice, have gained such status. City administrations can play a role in supporting these organisations through funding, locations and promotional backup. The involvement of students in local policy, for instance through the participation to the Council commission works in matters of interest for students (as it happens in Helsinki), or through the creation of real “lists” that engage in local elections (as it was the case in Eindhoven with its “List 11”), is a way for the city to be more “aware” of its student

population and for the students themselves to have a more responsible, “insiders” attitude towards the host community.

## **5. Final remarks**

Universities may be “good” to cities, and cities may be “good” to universities (Indovina, 1998), but this virtuous relationship is far from automatically achieved. Local governments play a crucial role in bringing forward the favourable conditions. The city can actively support graduate students who wish to stay through a “settlement policy”; for instance, facilitating the access to the job market and the real estate for young couples, or organising local alumni networks. Moreover, even if the host community clearly benefits from a wider knowledge base, such benefits are not immediate to most citizens and need to be communicated effectively to grant the necessary social and political support to such initiatives. Lipsky (V.V.A.A. 2001:56) suggests that the micro-scale, rather than big infrastructure projects, have a decisive impact on the way in which students feel “comfortable” in a place. One can think (quoting Lipsky) of «easy access to copying machines, the quality of mattresses in student residences, the flexibility of libraries opening times», etc. At a higher scale, it is necessary to develop a “vision” of the city as the attractive, welcoming host of a higher education function, which today is as important a pillar of economic development as manufacturing and technological excellence have been in the past.

The analysis of the way in which the city-university relationship is structured in nine European cities displays a wide typology of situations and problems, with some common points that are clear indications for policymakers. To name a few, the importance that firms today attach to flexible, locally-oriented education curricula, which puts increased pressure on higher education to work together with local governments in the definition of their supply; and the importance of diverse, versatile student communities in building a creative, learning city. This underscores the importance of planning for adequate student settlements but also solicits a socially responsible attitude of firms in enhancing the quality of education facilities.

The balance between this attention for the detail, which is the result of an acknowledgement of responsibility from the university as a social actor, and an holistic, comprehensive planning effort that brings together public and private parties, at a wide

regional scale, is the key principle of a “sustainable student city”. The attitude of the city is critical to mobilise other actors around this goal.

In synthesis, a comprehensive urban strategy for a student-friendly city should include the following issues.

- *Attracting the students*: marketing the city as a student-friendly community.
- *Assisting the students*: offering high quality services for welcoming and assisting the students, in order to achieve a better integration with the host community.
- *Housing the students*: the optimal pattern of student settlement according to local contexts must be identified in order to minimise the impact of student communities on the local housing market.
- *Empowering the students*: It is necessary to recognise a “right of citizenship” of students, granting them a role in local decisions, which may vary from informal consultation arrangements to direct participation to democratic life.
- *Increasing the opportunities of contact* between students and the other local stakeholders, to integrate them in the web of relations that characterises the local economic environment and enhance the “embeddedness” of the university in the city fabric.
- *Keeping the students linked to the city* so that the human capital is not dispersed after the completion of studies and the benefits from knowledge and cultural impacts are maximised.



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