

PART II

HUMANITIES, DEMOCRACY AND
CIVIC RESPONSIBILITY

The University and the City

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Introduction

This chapter aims at investigating how the humanities can contribute to understanding the city from the specific angle of its relation to the university, here understood as a material and immaterial site of knowledge and values production. Contemporary processes of urbanisation represent a complex phenomenon which is affecting all parts of the world, is accelerating the effects of globalisation and is deeply reshaping, among other things, the role played by the university as one of the historically privileged places where the humanities have been formulated, transmitted, defended and critically (re)thought within the contemporary world. The ‘becoming urban of the planet’ undoubtedly constitutes new challenges but also opportunities for rethinking the production, transmission and circulation of knowledge, and it is therefore of crucial importance to understand this process of transformation in the light of the new humanities.

In what follows, we suggest how to think about the historical processes around which urbanisation has taken place in the West, moving from the notion of interdependence to look at the double direction through which the city and the university have been affecting each other. We also argue that there is no better place to explore this interdependence than Bologna, which constitutes an exemplary case where municipality and university have been completely intertwined since the Middle Ages. As a result of this interdependence, in the following sections we will (1) explore how the academic community has long been involved in reflecting on and in dealing with the tremendous complexities, challenges and uncertainty that universities face today by discussing *the fundamental values of university*. The ‘Living Values Project’, for example, is an attempt to deal with these challenges and has been undertaken by the University of Bologna as part of the Magna Charta Observatory’s initiatives. We will also (2) analyse the way in which the notion of sustainability is a fundamental living value that strongly relates universities and cities of the future and opens a free space for people that can help to promote a new cultural approach to humanity. We will also (3) investigate how universities have been shaping the space by developing territorially, contributing both to the local territories and internationally by establishing strong cooperation with other universities, research institutions, and other public and private entities. This double direction of development makes universities a unique case for urban development. Finally, we will (4) show some best practices related to the city and university of Bologna where urban space and university interact to (re)generate a sustainable development and economic

growth for the whole city: the Foundation for Urban Innovation and the European Project ROCK.

1. The Becoming Urban of the Planet

It is clear that we are witnessing the 'becoming urban of the planet'. Over the last decades, the United Nations organisation has been increasingly sensitive to the processes of urbanisation, proclaiming that 'The world had entered an urban millennium' (Annan 2001). First in 1996 with the second *United Nations Conference on Human Settlements Habitat II* which took place in Istanbul; later in 2001 with the *Habitat Agenda Goals and Principles, Commitments and the Global Plan of Action*; and finally with the *World Urbanization Prospects – Revised* in 2014, the United Nations has been recognising the urgency of the urban explosion as a complex phenomenon affecting all parts of the world. According to the UN, 55 per cent of the world's population today lives in urban areas, a proportion that is expected to increase to 68 per cent by 2050. The *2018 Revision of World Urbanization Prospects* produced by the Population Division of the UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs notes that the urban population of the world has grown rapidly from 751 million in 1950 to 4.2 billion in 2018. Projections show that urbanisation – the gradual shift in residence of the human population from rural to urban areas – combined with the overall growth of the world's population could add another 2.5 billion people to urban areas by 2050.

Interpreting the primary trends in urbanisation likely to unfold over the coming years in a global context is thus key to recognising the processes for the development of the cities and also for furthering their potentialities of sustainable growth, quality of life, environmental well-being and economic vitality. However, it should also be recognised that the territory of the urban space is not a simple container in which things happen, but it is on the contrary a complex mixture of nodes and networks, places and flows, in which multiple relations, activities and values co-exist, interact, combine, conflict, oppress and generate creative synergy. The city goes beyond providing services for a large number of people, for it also provides the context for the full humanity of their life.

It has often been observed that the emblematic significance of urban life today lies in its immediacy to social life and to knowledge's production and flow. If we look more closely at some historical urban processes – from the foundation of the Greek πόλις, which acted in the West as a primary matrix for politics by structuring the archetypal conception of the political as a Western specificity in contrast to the 'barbarian Other', to the *civitas*, the medieval communes that arose in Northern Italy and Germany in the late eleventh and early twelfth centuries, which emerged as a form of political and economic organisation capable of the development of the capitalist system and the rationalisation project of the modern state – it is possible to acknowledge the role they have historically played in shaping human values and social habits far beyond the Western context (Manent 2010; Cacciari 2004; Benevolo 1993; Bridge and Watson 2000).

Today, ways of seeing and reading the contemporary city are dominated by the paradigm of 'the global city' (King 1990; Sassen 1991; Jameson 1998; Petrillo 2006). As national sovereignty faded away, during the 1980s a debate emerged that inseparably linked the analysis of cities to their becoming global. New York, London and Tokyo in the North, but also São Paulo, Mumbai, Kuala Lumpur, Shanghai, Seoul, Sydney and Johannesburg in the Global South became the critical nodes of capitalism and globalisation (Nuttal and Mbembe 2008). Transformed by the new emerging order usually defined as neo-

liberalism, over the last quarter of the twentieth century the paradigm of 'the global city' has dominated the study of the urban form, becoming one of the cornerstones of studies of globalisation. Key to Saskia Sassen's concept of 'the global city' is an emphasis on the flow of information and capital where cities are profoundly shaped by the global circuits of capital and have become major nodes in the interconnected systems of information and specialised businesses: financial institutions, consulting firms, accounting firms, law firms, and media organisations (Sassen 1991, 2005).

2. Urbanization: Challenges and Opportunities for the New Humanities

These historical, economic and cultural processes which emerged at planetary scale should not however subsume the diversity of local practices and policies that deal with the daily interface between society and space in cities that are increasingly characterised by growing ethnic, religious, cultural, linguistic differences and by spatial practices and representations, new forms of appropriation, reappropriation and claim of urban spaces; urban inclusion of foreign residents in both the Global North and South. The fact that the urban space is now so heterogeneous, composed of proliferating borders, hierarchies and temporalities, should not however prevent us from recognising it as a coherent, albeit highly diversified, whole. In many respects, the fact that the processes are less legible today makes it all the more important to investigate these trends.

The city is also composed of ideas, people, images and imaginaries. Urban life had the capacity to generate and shape cultural forms, institutions and lifeways, but it also had the ability to translate, connect and make room for the co-existence of people where spaces and times overlapped (Nuttal and Mbembe 2008). Cities had always been crossroads of culture, and today urban areas are the driving forces of development and globalisation whose challenge is to empower people and create decent, healthy living conditions.

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, with at its heart the seventeen Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which are an urgent call for action by all countries – developed and developing – makes this connection even more clear (Assembly 2015). In particular, the eleventh goal entitled *Make cities inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable* acknowledges the essential role of an adequately sustainable urban development and management as crucial to the quality of life of people by drawing a strong connection between the urban space and the well-being of humans. Among others, the eleventh goal has the objectives of 'enhance[ing] inclusive and sustainable urbanization and capacity for participatory, integrated and sustainable human settlement planning and management in all countries', of 'strengthening efforts to protect and safeguard the world's cultural and natural heritage', and of 'providing universal access to safe, inclusive and accessible, green and public spaces, in particular for women and children, older persons and persons with disabilities' (Assembly 2015).

Many of these analyses and global policies encourage us to think about the city as a starting point where values and knowledge are shaped. However, despite the growing interest of sociologists and geographers in the urban space, which has provided scholars in many parts of the globe and in different fields of enquiry with lenses for an interdisciplinary analysis of contemporary knowledge and values production and circulation, the relationship between the city and the university – here understood as one of the places where knowledge is formed, circulated and transmitted – has been nevertheless under-theorised and scarcely investigated. While on the contrary it deserves more speculative attention.

If we think about the historical processes around which urbanisation has taken place in the West, it is possible to acknowledge a constant interplay between what the city has become and the place where knowledge and humanistic values have been taught through education. One might attempt to enrich and complexify this definition of what this constant interplay has meant by introducing the issue of interdependence between the city and the university, and by showing how this interdependence has been a crucial feature of their relationship. We can assume interdependence as a term which deliberately suggests a two-way street, in which one can either emphasise the relative independence, the relative autonomy, of the university as a distinctive and autonomous realm in modern societies, but also the other way round, and insist on how the university has been a driving force that had manifold consequences for what lies outside itself.

3. The University and the City: Once Upon a Time, There Was Bologna . . .

This might be the case of the city of Bologna and the University of Bologna whereby their constant interplay and interdependence can be observed from their very foundation, which not coincidentally happened in the same period: the university was officially founded in 1088 while the municipality of Bologna was founded only a few decades later in 1116. The historical roots of universities are well known: the idea of the university, as a *free and secular* institution, springs from the medieval European spirit of the cities in the aftermath of the new millennium. And Bologna, together with Paris and Oxford, was the cradle in the Western world of this new creature of human intellect.

The School of Bologna was established autonomously, it was born and distinguished itself as a private school: the *Studium* of Bologna was not established top-down, at the behest of a sovereign or as an organised group of professors, but was the result of the spontaneous and informal initiative of students. Bologna was a rich and powerful medieval city, capable of attracting and welcoming hundreds of wealthy young people, who brought with them not only books and servants but also large sums of money.

For this reason, the Municipality of Bologna immediately formed an indissoluble bond with its *Studium* and supported it, at least in the first centuries, with laws and decrees that protected it. Since these origins in Bologna, municipalities and universities were thus completely intertwined, and lived together under the arcades, in squares, in private homes, monasteries, in city districts, and nowadays under skyscrapers or in science parks.

It is precisely this line of enquiry which suggests the further development we want to pursue here: the relationship between the distinctive form the urban processes have taken today and that equally distinctive form we find in the university as one of the historically privileged places where the humanities have been shaped, formulated, transmitted, defended and critically (re)thought through to the contemporary world. Interpreting the production, transmission and circulation of knowledge is key to recognising the role that the university can play as a site for knowledge production, and therefore it is crucial to understand the process of transformation of the new humanities.

4. The University's Living Values

The theoretical starting point for the present analysis is to investigate the relationship between the university and the city by recognising that the university's 'living values' have been shaping the urban mindset and space. In particular, we want to analyse, interrogate,

but also comment on good practices that creatively engage with the role the university can play within and, more importantly, with the city in building a discourse that prioritises issues such as inclusion, equity, sustainability, circular and mutual economics, environment, health, and cultural heritage, among many others.

Where do universities stand in this near future? In what ways can universities and cities act together in order to implement and create new models, concepts, spaces and words for living the city and metropolitan areas? How can the universities contribute to empowering citizens to become active agents of the processes of urban and social change in a Smart City or Smart Metropolitan Area? In other words, in what ways can the university give shape to the city through the production, transmission and circulation of knowledge and values?

Although universities today face tremendous complexity and uncertainty due to the changing dynamics of national and international politics, increased competition for students and funding, challenges arising from internationalisation, and the rapid evolution of technology and communication, nevertheless the values that have been at the heart of universities since their formation remain an essential tool in dealing with these challenges. The academic community has long been involved in reflecting on the possible changes in global perspective and, through its social engagement, the discussion on the fundamental values of the university has been one of the fundamental activities. Since 1988, the founding values of the *Magna Charta Universitatum*, on which more than 800 universities around the world have already agreed, along with its process of revision, constitute a global document that recognises the founding principles of each university community in the context of the challenges set by society today. Among the initiatives of the *Magna Charta Observatory* to which the University of Bologna has adhered, the *Living Values Project* is aimed at engaging the whole academic community on the *Magna Charta Values* in order to reflect on the fundamental values of the university and to discuss their implementation and possible changes in a global perspective.

The starting questions from where the process started were: What are the fundamental values of our university? How are they put into practice every day? What are the strengths and weaknesses in their implementation? Are any changes necessary? These 'living values' of university constitute 'an essential tool in dealing with these challenges, whether it is the traditional and more fundamental values of autonomy and academic freedom, social responsibility toward their community, or other values specific to institutional missions, values are crucial to helping universities understand and identify themselves and communicate that identity and mission' outside its walls (*The Magna Charta Universitatum*).¹ The University of Bologna, for example, recognises these 'living values' that have been identified as the result of the *Living Values Project*: critical thinking; integrity; engagement; cooperation; responsibility; collegiality and continuous improvement; creativity and dignity; sustainability; trust; inclusion.

5. How University Values Could Shape the Urban Space and Mindset

The conceptual importance of the relationship between the university and the city moves from noticing how the university 'living values' have been shaping the urban mindset and space. It is not by chance that political theory shows how it is the spatiality of our social interaction that allows political action and public life, making them last longer than an ephemeral moment (Parkinson 2012; Amin 2008; Hillier and Hanson 1984; Hou and Knierbein 2017).

Sustainability is a fundamental living value that strongly relates to universities and cities of the future and opens a free space for people.² Indeed, designing a sustainable university/city model is therefore one of the most important challenges for the future. Massimo Cacciari, philosopher and also mayor of Venice for several terms, wrote:

Before discussing urban planning choices we must [. . .] ask ourselves the question: what do we ask of the city?

Do we ask to be a space in which every obstacle to movement, to universal mobilization, to exchange, is reduced to a minimum, or do we ask it to be a space in which there are places of communication, places full of symbolic meanings, where there is attention to *otium*?

Both are dealt with, respectively, with the same intensity, but both cannot be proposed together, and therefore our position towards the city is completely schizophrenic.

This does not mean that it is desperate, on the contrary it is very beautiful because who knows what will come out. It is such a sharp contradiction that it could be the premise of some new creation. [. . .]

It is necessary to start from the contradictory nature of this question and try to value it as such [. . .].

It is better to make architectural and urban planning projects in which to highlight the contradictory nature of your question in front of the public, without covering up and mystifying this situation, without believing to overcome it with some forward flight or by returning to the past of Athens.

There will be no more agora. (Cacciari 2004: 27–9 [translated by Antonio Rotolo])

The choice between two ideals mentioned by Cacciari – the functional and efficient city or the city in which to cultivate human relationships outside the logic of production – arises for the future cities as well: Which one to privilege? This was a classic question, which in the twentieth century confronted two paradigms which Cacciari considers irreducible and which have been under scrutiny in the urban and philosophical reflection: the former one typically represented by the Bauhaus, among others, the latter expressed by those, like Henri Lefebvre, who claim that cities should be designed to respond to what human beings really need, i.e., a shared, relational and open city, where everyone can ‘feel at home’ (Lefebvre 1968).

We must go beyond this dichotomy because culture will necessarily shape sustainable urban space and cities as multicultural communities: justice, democracy, inclusion, innovation and green transition can co-exist and integrate in the broad idea of sustainability as proposed in the UN Agenda 2030. The strong link between sustainable universities and cities is thus meant to promote a new cultural approach to humanity, as perhaps suggested (but still to be fully developed) in the New European Bauhaus.³ Increasingly, universities are expected to contribute, with their institutional activities, including training, research and social and public engagement, to promote the culture of sustainability and to the achievement of the seventeen SDGs. This agenda becomes realistically possible the more the values and the communicative and inspirational power of the SDGs enter into university cities’ daily life, with real impact on the behaviours of teachers, administrators, executives and auditors within different institutes.

Universities have committed to the values of sustainability, such as enhancing and safeguarding the territory, improving community well-being, promoting a knowledge-based development economy, social equity, and the ability of those involved to work effectively

together for the common good. Accordingly, university activities can produce a significant impact, both direct and indirect, on the community, the city, and on the region.

6. Towards a European Identity – Territorial Vocation vs. European Campuses

Universities develop territorially by contributing to the local territories and internationally by establishing strong cooperation with other universities, research institutions, and other public and private entities. This double direction of development makes universities a unique case for urban development. Universities are constitutively territorial and beyond any physical borders.

The territorial vocation of universities is evident not only because they are physically located in cities, but because it is a mission of universities to generate positive social impact and produce innovation. Territorial ecosystems are innovation engines where the collaboration among universities, research centres, companies and local institutions take place, with the promotion of high-level activities, innovation and applied research defined on the basis of territorial vocations.

The case of the University of Bologna confirms this fact, and it is an example of a widespread idea of a multi-campus university now well known around the world. Since 1989, the University of Bologna has been structured in several campuses: the campuses of Cesena, Forlì, Ravenna and Rimini are flanked by the Bologna branch. Each campus is characterised by a strong scientific and educational identity (linked with the territory), and has its own structures and services dedicated to institutional, cultural, associative and sporting activities. In each location there are schools, departments or their specific organisational units. Each campus coordinates the services and initiatives to support teaching, research and the benefit of students. Furthermore, relations with organisations, associations and citizens are very active, with a view to the cultural, economic and social development of the territories.

On the other hand, universities have always transcended national borders and are open communities, not primarily being territorial stakeholders: one of the fundamental living values for universities – their autonomy – certainly cannot translate into self-sufficiency and solipsistic independence. Universities are thus open communities, and internalisation strategies can no longer be seen as simple instruments to achieve specific goals contingently shared by different institutions.

In other words, internationalisation of the future seems to be based not only on strategic partnerships in projects, but also on permanent university alliances.⁴ The idea of a European university was launched in particular after the Brexit referendum to enhance European integration and universalistic identity. The University of Bologna founded with other universities the UNA Europa, which wants to mark a further step towards the realisation of a long-term, integrated, multi-lingual and multidisciplinary European academic space, based on the principles of interconnection, inclusiveness, innovation and internationalisation.⁵ European universities intend to develop single permanent European campuses where researchers, students and staff can freely develop their activities together and create multidimensional academic communities.

7. Case Studies

Let us now mention two case studies from the University of Bologna which can be seen as paradigmatic for their ability to interpret the complex relation between the university and the urban space and the new challenges they are both now facing. These two case studies linked to the University of Bologna and the city of Bologna represented by the Municipality have in common their capacity to combine the university and the city as two actors operating in synergy to co-create best practices that aim to rethink and transform the urban space values and its 'living values'.

7.1 *Foundation for Urban Innovation (FIU)*

The first example of good practice is represented by the Fondazione per l'Innovazione Urbana – Foundation for Urban Innovation (FIU)⁶ which is a legal entity founded jointly by the City of Bologna and the University of Bologna, with the support of major local stakeholders in the city: FIU is organised as a lab for analysis, communication, development and co-production focused on urban transformations with the aim of making the city more welcoming and sustainable, strengthening local urban welfare, and boosting urban and digital democracy. FIU is thus committed to addressing social, environmental and technological challenges within urban organisms. To this end, FIU acts as a 'collective brain' and hub of urban change, a catalyst for ideas and activities, and a place where citizens, public institutions, associations, social movements and all representatives of the economic, social and cultural worlds can meet, discuss and interact proactively. As an 'open and widespread lab' with a systematic approach based on collaborative creation to turn the city into a more liveable and resilient organism, FIU aims to integrate research and innovation into real-life communities and settings by opening up the co-design and co-creation phases through three different branches of activities: the Urban Centre which provides informational activities to promote the territory and urban culture; the Mapping the Present aimed at analysing and documenting urban transformations with a focus on open data; and the Civic Imagination Office which activates participatory paths of co-production such as District Labs and Participatory Budgeting. The Foundation develops projects related to the care of territory and communities, from both a material and an immaterial point of view, to urban planning and regeneration, environmental sustainability, resilient cities, citizen, cooperative, social and solidarity economy, and technological innovation.

7.2 *The ROCK Project*

The second case is ROCK, a European Project funded by the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme, coordinated by the Municipality of Bologna which includes also the University of Bologna along with other universities, municipalities, SMEs and companies, associations, data managers and developers, dissemination and networks between EU cities, development and consulting groups, etc., from thirteen different countries.⁷ The ROCK project focuses on historic city centres as extraordinary laboratories to demonstrate how cultural heritage can be a unique and powerful engine of regeneration, sustainable development and economic growth for the whole city. ROCK aims to support the transformation of historic city centres afflicted by physical decay, social conflicts and poor life quality into Creative and Sustainable Districts through the

shared generation of new sustainable environmental, social, economic processes. ROCK aimed to develop an innovative, collaborative and systemic approach to promoting the effective regeneration and adaptive reuse of historic city centres by implementing a repertoire of successful heritage-led regeneration initiatives. In practice, all the involved cities are characterised by their high cultural heritage value: the Role Model cities have already experienced a transformation from Heritage cities to Creative and Knowledge-based cities, while the Replicators are currently initiating the process, developing transformation programmes, managing finance and engaging key players. The overall concept of ROCK is thus based on the development of a shared multicultural, multi-heritage and multi-stakeholder city vision, which integrates heritage-led regeneration, sustainable economic development, city promotion and knowledge sharing.

Conclusions: The University and the City in the Post-COVID-19 Era

In addition to the need for understanding the changing nature of urbanisation and the ways in which universities are changing the urban mindset and space, we would also like to identify the importance of understanding the current processes of redefinition of knowledge circulation at a time of technological change in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic. We would like to conclude this chapter by opening up a series of (still open) questions that the current pandemic and life with COVID-19 have made it more urgent to pose. This fundamental concern addresses the question of how knowledge production and circulation is affected by the transformations the pandemic has brought and how they impact on social relations. We believe that there is an urgent need to ask how the COVID-19 pandemic is affecting not only the use of digital technology, but also how it is redefining social relationships within the urban and more importantly the academic space. This problematic has fundamental implications for different groups and raises for instance the following questions:

- What will be the medium- and long-term effects of the pandemic on urban and university spaces? And what will be the effect of the pandemic on university spaces understood as public spaces?
- How is the pandemic redefining the production and circulation of knowledge within and beyond the academic walls? How has the pandemic – and the use of digital platforms for teaching, learning and sharing knowledge (some of them were not even considered suitable for these purposes) – allowed for new models but also new channels for teaching, for knowledge transmission and circulation? How is distance learning – and the blended system of learning – facilitating or hindering the transmission of knowledge and what values is this system helping to circulate?
- How are all these changes within the academic institution going to affect the ways in which citizens will live the urban space in the medium term?
- How will these changes affect, reduce and/or increase inequality and via which characteristics?

Of course, we are not in a position to fully answer these questions, but we think it is crucial to include in our agenda the challenge that the university within the city will have to face in current times.

Notes

1. See <http://www.magna-charta.org/activities-and-projects/living-values-project>
2. Part of this section elaborates on the University of Bologna's *Report on U.N. Sustainable Development Goals* (2016: 5).
3. See https://europa.eu/new-european-bauhaus/index_en
4. For a brief overview see https://ec.europa.eu/education/education-in-the-eu/european-education-area/european-universities-initiative_en; and <https://eua.eu/component/tags/tag/81-european-universities-initiative.html>
5. See <https://www.una-europa.eu>
6. See Fondazione Innovazione Urbana: <http://www.fondazioneinnovazioneurbana.it/en/> (accessed 10 February 2021).
7. For more information, see The Rock Project: <https://rockproject.eu/project>

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