

03 HOW TO SUPPORT UNIVERSITY AND PUBLIC COOPERATION IN URBAN REGENERATION PROCESS?



Background

Cities are facing a variety of complex problems like rapid urbanisation, climate and environmental changes, demographic changes, and economic restructuring. Many cities across Europe are searching for strategies and approaches to tackle these problems.

There is an increasing interest of universities in contributing to urban development issues. Over decades universities gave input on questions related to urban development by conducting theoretical studies and research by design. Academia has played an important role in the nation-state identity building, development of cultural values and infrastructures at a national level. Universities are recipients of public funding, thus knowledge sharing with a wider society and governmental institutions appears crucial. University success has always depended on the capacity to secure resources to achieve their core missions. An important element of this is the creation of ‘useful knowledge’ embedded in people, technologies, publications and networks.

Moreover, in recent decades universities are supporting partnerships, grassroots projects and media conversations to take an active part in the development of cities. In addition to the wish of making research results available to a wider public and increasing chances of making use of them, universities are also interested in the co-production of knowledge with non-academic groups. Urban experimentation, which occurs within cities globally, brings together a variety of urban actors including governmental representatives, professionals, citizens and research institutes. These actors come together to cooperate within experimental projects which aim for positive sustainable change through urban innovation.

Due to the broad range of definitions, the university-community engagement can take a variety of forms, for example, lifelong learning, volunteerism among staff and students, service-based learning, participatory research, knowledge exchange, cultural and educational events, and access to universities’ facilities for others to use.

Understanding the motivation of both, universities and other actors, to engage in university-community cooperation, is a crucial point to support this initiative.



Image 1. On-site discussions in program “Multifunctional public open space development in Riga’s neighbourhoods” [photo by the authors].



Image 2. On-site observation and meeting with the local community and municipality representatives, Jugla, Riga [photo by the authors].

Motivation of university-community engagement

For university:

- University’s contribution to the society through their education and a wish to contribute in solving problems of social inequality by getting involved with community engagement based on socialist and other progressive ideological stances.
- Making the educational process more relevant to everyday needs and therefore greater value for students.
- Staying competitive with other universities. In the context of global competition in higher education, students can be considered consumers who are an important source of income for universities. By advertising the opportunity to have experiences of community-university collaboration, universities aim to attract new students.
- Strengthening university’s research by affording the opportunity for new insights and evidence-based research.
- Various stakeholders such as governmental institutions and political parties ask universities for support in community engagement processes to demonstrate the societal impact of their research and their contribution to the public good.

For municipality and a wider community:

- Receives additional resources to lead the brainstormed ideas to a tangible project application.
- A higher professional level of proposals are easier to compare and evaluate; therefore, they often get more support in the public vote.
- In case of uncertainty about the right idea and location to submit for participatory budgeting (PB), students have proved to be a reliable partner, able to conduct preliminary studies, analyse neighbourhood territory, its strengths and weaknesses, available functions, etc.
- Students after being acquainted with PB process show increased interest in engagement with community also afterwards.

Learn more

Useful links:

<https://uisur.ktu.edu/>
http://www.participatorybudgetingworks.org/uploads/files/lists/youthpb_toolkit_en_compressed-20220324160040.pdf
<http://empaci.eu/>

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