

# EUniverCities Lecce

## Peer Review Report: Lecce as Smart Student City?



Results Peer Review Meeting Lecce (28-30 January 2015)  
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## 1. Introduction

Cities compete to attract and retain skilled people and knowledge-intensive business, and universities are a key “asset” in this respect. They attract students, who could become valuable human resources for companies in the city. Smaller university cities have a harder job to retain graduates than bigger ones. Their job markets are smaller and less attractive.

This is particularly true for Lecce, a university city in the South of Italy where the economy is less well-developed and the job market for highly-skilled people is weak. Most students of its university (the University of Salento) leave after the conclusion of their studies, for a lack of highly qualified jobs in the local industries.

Can Lecce’s university be a source of innovation, youth entrepreneurship, and creativity that might boost the local and regional economy? The University of Salento has much to offer for prospective students: good education, an attractive city, relatively low costs of housing and living. But it faces heavy competition from other universities and a brain drain from the South of Italy towards major cities like Milano, Torino and Rome where university education is considered to be of a higher quality, and better employment possibilities are offered. It is estimated that there are about 150,000 students from the Puglia region, of which approximately 40,000 choose to study in another Italian region.

To discuss and analyse the local situation, a so called Peer Review session was held, intended to obtain views and inputs from peers from other cities, in order to learn from each other and help the stakeholders in Lecce to take next steps (see the full programme in annex 1).

During the 1st day of the meeting, the peers were informed in more detail about the state-of-the-art and current policies in Lecce, and the challenges the city and its university face. A number of local stakeholders presented their views to the audience, and the participants experienced the issues through guided walks and an excursion to the campus. The next day, the participants worked in a group, shared observations and produced a series of suggestions and ideas for the city and its university, trying to answer the questions posed by the local support group.

This report contains the outcomes and results of the meeting. First, it summarizes the basic features of the city, its economy, and the relevant policy context<sup>1</sup> (section 2). Next, section 3 gives an overview of the current collaborative efforts by the city and the university, as well as recent developments. Section 4, finally, summarizes the observations and recommendations made by the working groups.

The results are the fruits of a combined effort of all the people who were involved in the group discussions and the presentations. The author is highly indebted to all the participants of the meeting. Also, we owe much to the members of the Lecce team led by Lara Mastrogiovanni.

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<sup>1</sup> This part is partly derived from the “Baseline Study” made for EUniverCities, for which the author interviewed a number of stakeholders in Lecce.

## 2.Context: City & University

### 2.1 City

Lecce is located in the region of Puglia (the most south-eastern region of Italy), in the province of Salento. The city has around 83,000 inhabitants. It has a large historic core, with a 2nd century amphitheatre, and many baroque-style buildings dating from the 16th century. Over the last decades, the city centre has been upgraded and renovated, largely financed by EU funds (i.e. URBAN projects). The city is located at 11km from the Adriatic coast and 23km from the Ionic coast.

The city has a number of cultural amenities (theatres, museums, galleries) and the centre is the platform for many cultural and creative activities (art exhibitions, concerts etc.). The city centre is gaining popularity as a place to live, after a long period of deterioration and decline. Through the “Lecce Città Wireless” project, wireless Internet is available for free, in a large part of the city centre.

Lecce is the centre of a predominantly rural region. The main industries are agriculture and tourism (in fact the number of tourists has grown substantially over the last few years). The region has very little advanced manufacturing activity, high-tech or knowledge-based services. Recently, existing larger industries (a shoe factory and a metal work factory) are in deep economic trouble. Unemployment rates are relatively high; youth unemployment (those aged 18-24) stands at 37% (2011), and the rate is 20% for the group aged 25-34. It is very difficult for highly qualified young people to find a job. Moreover, many people with an academic degree are “underemployed”, and perform jobs for which much lower qualification would be sufficient.

### 2.2 University

Lecce has a long history of being a city of learning, with major interruptions and upheavals, but most faculties are of a relatively recent date. In 1767, former Jesuit learning centres were transformed into state-controlled schools. In 1852, after a period of Bourbon repression, the Jesuits reclaimed the Royal Academy. During the unification of Italy, universities were suppressed. In 1869 The University of Legal Science was founded, but it terminated after only two years. It was only in 1955 that the Province of Lecce and surrounding towns created the Autonomous Magisterium Institute, and started to offer courses (official legal recognition followed only in 1959). Almost a decade later, the university was recognized as a national university (in 1967), with the institution of the Faculty of Physical, Mathematical and Natural Sciences.

From the late 1980s on, the university expanded rapidly. In 1987 the Faculty of Economics and Financial Science was added, followed by Faculty of Engineering (1990), the Faculty of Languages (1995), the Faculty of Cultural Heritage (1997), the Law faculty and the Faculty of Educational Training (1998). In September of 2006, Lecce University of Studies was renamed the University of Salento, responding to the growth of the university in the Salentine territory with the addition of the Brindisi campus. Marked strong research points of the university are nanotechnology and archaeology.

Currently, the University of Salento (UoS) has 20,000 students, and employs about 700 academic staff. The number of students has grown significantly in the last decades, from 10,000 in the 1980s to the current number. Especially in the mid 1990s, numbers grew dramatically. But in recent years there was a sharp decline, from about 28,000 in 2011 to 20,000 nowadays. Roughly 7,000 students live in the city, the others commute. Student

housing is a main issue in Lecce. By now, only 300 “official” student homes are available, and many students turn to the black market. Many homeowners are ready to rent a room to a student, but don’t want to pay taxes. This is a problem for many students from poor families: in order to be eligible for financial support by the region, students need to have an official renting contract.

In the Lecce area, the university has two main locations: the inner city (humanities), and the ECOTEKNE campus about 6km outside the city. The latter comprises the science faculties (e.g. mathematics, physics, biology, nanotechnology) as well as Law and Economics. Also, there is a campus in the city of Brindisi. Here, the aerospace faculty is based, linked with the Brindisi international airport.

The university is a source of new firms. The university’s website contains a list of some 15 spin-off companies that developed out of the university; interviewees mention a total number of about 40 companies located in the university’s incubator.

Internationalisation is a priority of the university. Currently, there are about 300 Erasmus exchange students, and during summer, hundreds of foreigners come to Lecce to learn the Italian language. The university wants to attract more foreign students, and deepen its engagement in international exchanges and European research projects. Promising student markets are China, Russia and Argentina (mainly second and third generation students from Italian migrants). The ambition is to have more international students in Lecce.

In Italy, education policy is mainly a national (state) matter. Currently, reforms are underway in Italy’s university policy. University funding will increasingly depend on the ability to find external funds. For universities in the South of Italy, this is a relatively heavy task, given the lack of knowledge-intensive industries in the region. One way to boost southern universities is to establish branches of the Italian National Council for Research (CNR). The research centre for nanotechnology is based on the ECOTEKNE campus.

The university of Salento has much to offer for prospective students: good education, an attractive city, relatively low costs of housing and living. However, it faces heavy competition from other universities. In this respect, the South of Italy faces a brain drain to other regions, mainly towards major cities like Milano, Torino and Rome where university education is considered to be of a higher quality, and better employment possibilities are offered.



### 3. City-university co-operation: an overview

In Lecce, there is no strategic forum or platform to accommodate a structured dialogue between the leaders of the city and the management/leadership of the university. The mindsets and time horizons of the “two sides” seem apart. From the city side, there is no demand for the university’s expertise. On an ad-hoc basis, city and university deliberate, to solve particular issues concerning transportation, urban planning, etc. Notwithstanding a lack of strategic embedding, there are some examples of collaboration.

First of all, the city made a substantial investment in public facilities for Salento University, in the city centre. Dilapidated old buildings were transformed into a modern complex. The “Officine Cantelmo” complex contains a library, meeting facilities, study rooms, a bookstore, and offices where students can get counselling regarding career opportunities. The buildings are a venue for cultural events, and concerts. The facilities are not only available for cities, but also directed at other young citizens. The complex helps to build the academic community in Lecce, but also gives the university a “face” and a strong connection to its urban context. The buildings are owned by the city but operated by the university through a students-run cooperative.

Another joint action is the opening of a multifunctional forum “Open Space Lecce Giovani” adjacent to the city hall, in the centre of the city. It is meant as a place for meetings, exhibitions and (cultural) events, with young people/students as main target groups. It offers a hall with 60 seats, but also working and exhibition spaces. The space opened in September 2012, and should contribute to the student’s connection and attachment to the city, and the visibility of Lecce as “university city”.

*Figure 1. Open space Lecce Giovani*



Concerning the local/regional economy, developing the labour market is a key priority in Lecce. In early 2012, the city (working together with the university) hosted the 1st European Job Day, with a number of activities, relevant for students. A series of workshops were held, unveiling training opportunities in Europe (at the Leonardo da Vinci programme and Erasmus placements); Would-be entrepreneurs could obtain advice on self-employment or starting up a business (including information on national and regional funds available); Innovative student projects, such as a wind-energy driven robot designed by graduates from the University of Salento showcased students’ talents.

For the university, the “3rd mission” is important: it wants to contribute to society. But there is no comprehensive strategy that translates this ambition to the city of Lecce or the wider region.

## 4. Results of the peer review

### 4.1 Introduction

The key question, posed by the local support group, was the following: How can Lecce be a smart and attractive student city? In a 1-hour session, we discussed this question with the participants of the review.

#### Vision

We heard several speakers expressing the ambition to turn Lecce into a more vibrant knowledge city. And several projects work in that direction. But what seems to lack is a shared vision what type of student city Lecce wants to be or become. It is not very clear what the unique selling points of the university are, and how they relate to the local economy. Discussions focus on quantity (student numbers, etc.) rather than quality or vision. Thus, for prospective students, it is not clear why they should come to Lecce. Student numbers have decreased substantially in the last years. What lacks is a proper analysis why this is the case. This makes it more difficult to make interventions.

#### Entrepreneurship

Student entrepreneurship could be the lifeline of Lecce's economy. One long-standing problem in Lecce is the weak local and regional economy. As a result of this, students have few opportunities for interesting internships during their studies; there is less scope for business-university interaction compared with universities in the more prosperous and industrious north of the country. And after graduation, there are fewer job opportunities. It is clear that these problems will not be solved overnight but student entrepreneurship is at least part of the answer.

In this respect, there are many good initiatives in Lecce, for students and by students. The participants of the peer review observed a strong entrepreneurial spirit, at the campus where companies (spin-offs) are located, and also the presentations by young entrepreneurs during the Peer Review meeting tell a promising story of what is possible in Lecce. The city and the university are taking important steps to facilitate this even more, and the Local Action Plan contains important ambitions to make this happen. The Puglia Smart Lab is an interesting setting where urban problems are being addressed in new ways. And Link Lecce, a student organisation, organizes interesting workshops, study trips and courses for ambitious students.

Current efforts to promote entrepreneurship deserve strong support. Incubator and acceleration programmes are in place, and need to be further developed and strengthened. Also, promoting entrepreneurship at secondary school might help to seed the entrepreneurial spirit in the region. Moreover, role models are important for young people; it helps to put successful students entrepreneurs in the spotlights –featuring them in the media, inviting them on public appearances etc.) and to communicate to younger generations what can be achieved.

#### Public spaces & mobility

How can Lecce work on its identity as a city of knowledge and a student city with an international flavour? An observation shared by many participants concerns the quality of public spaces and the modal split. Large parts of the inner city are very nice and attractive,

but at the same time many roads look messier and not so well maintained; also there is a lot of graffiti around.

The central station, a key entry point of the city, was experienced by some of the participants as unwelcoming and unsafe (at night). Most signs are not in English, there was a lack of maps and other indications, making it hard to find your way around as a newcomer in the city. This must change in order to make Lecce a smart student city with appeal to foreign students. City and university need to draw up a common approach to make the city more international.

Lecce may want to be “a smart student city” but in many respects it does not look like one. There is no clear student quarter, and bike use and public transport use seem to be on a low level, especially for a city with so many students. Much of student life takes place at the far-away campus, with very little spin-off and visibility in the city of Lecce.

### **On governance and participation**

In Lecce, several projects are in place where city and university collaborate in one way or another. But on a strategic level, the relations between city and university leave much to be desired. What lacks is a platform for structured discussion, where common issues are discussed and solutions are developed. At current, city and university seem to work alongside each other, but not really together. It would help to create a strategic platform where city-university nexus is discussed on a high level.



## Annex 1 Programme of the meeting

### Wednesday, 28 January      **Arrival of European guests**

19:00 – 22.00                      Welcome dinner, location Hotel Tiziano

### Thursday, 29 January      **Presentations and Site Visits**

On the first day of the Peer Review in the City of Lecce, together with the University of Salento and other key players will present the problem statement through various presentations and site visits.

8.30 – 8.45 Guided walk from Hotel Tiziano to Must

8.45– 9.00	Registration and Coffee	Must
<b>Opening Session</b> <b>An Overview of C-U cooperation and local/regional economic interconnection</b> <b>Attractiveness and Economic interconnection</b>		
09.00 – 09.20	Welcome Words	<b>Mr. Paolo Perrone</b> Mayor City of Lecce  <b>Mr. Vittorio Boscia</b> Vice-rector
09:20 – 09.40	Expectation for the meeting and Introduction of the Peer review session	<b>Mr. Patrick van Geel</b> , Senior Advisor, European Affairs, City of Delft  <b>Mr. Willem van Winden</b> , Lead Expert EUniverCities
09.40 – 10.15	Lecce Smart City promoting Entrepreneurship and Social development. Initiatives, cooperation and Situational picture	<b>Mr. Alessandro Delli Noci</b> City Councillor for Technological Innovation, Youth Policy, Vocational Training and Job Policy - City of Lecce  <b>Mr Raffaele Parlangei</b> - Director of Smart City Office, Europa2020 Office and Open data Office - City of Lecce  <b>Representative of Living Lab</b> – Puglia Smart Lab – City of Lecce

10.15-10.45	The impact of the University for the development of local cooperation Situational pictures	<p><b>Mr. Andrea Filieri</b> Director of Europe Direct Salento – and Research Office Manager of University of Salento <b>Europe Direct Salento</b> as a European tool of cooperation and co-production C-U</p> <p><b>Mr. Luciano Tarricone</b> Director of ADISU – Regional Agency for university student services An Overview of the project “Studenti al Centro” and its results.</p> <p><b>Student’s association and ESN</b> To be a student in Lecce!</p>
10.45 – 11.00	Q&A Session - Representative of C- U	
11.00 - 11.30	Coffee break	
11.30 – 12.45	Site Visit around the city by TOURANGO Simulation of new model of tourism in the City linked to the University cultural places. The Path proposed represents a potential solution to take advantage of the city tourism in order to boost the brand of Lecce University City. Action proposed in the LAP by the GSL.	
13.00 – 14.00	Light Lunch @Must	
<p>Afternoon session @ Student Center - Officine Cantelmo  <b>Entrepreneurship and Students</b>  <b>Student solution for a Smart City and the participative Process towards a Common Agenda!</b></p>		
14.00 – 16.00	<b>Visit of the Campus Ecotekne</b> Innovation and Creativity and Technological Innovation <b>Spin-offs</b>	
16.00 – 16.15	Coffee break @ Officine Cantelmo	
16.15 – 16.30	Welcome words Officine Cantelmo as best practice for social and student entrepreneurship and best example of cooperation City/University/Region	<b>Mr. Marco Cataldo</b> <b>President of Officine Cantelmo</b>
16.30 – 16.45	Presentation of the Local Action Plan and the main solutions identified for the cooperation C-U	<b>Ms. Lara Mastrogiovanni</b> Local Support Group coordinator The participative process and the Local Action Plan
16.45 – 17.00		<b>Mr. Salvatore Modeo –</b> CEO of The Qube and Expert of startup ecosystem Proposal of Regeneration of Officine Cantelmo with the support of City/ University/Region #rethinking Cantelmo Project

17.00 – 17.30	<b>Diversity and Dynamism in the cooperation C-U: Experience by Students and Entrepreneurs</b>	Round table Smart Solution for the cooperation C-U
17.30 – 17.45	Q&A And Peer Local Support Group coordinator	
17.45 – 18.00	Closing Session and Intro of the Peer Review Session of tomorrow	
18.00 – 19.00	Guided walk to “Archaeological Museum Faggiano”	

19.00-22.00

Dinner, restaurant *73cento*

### Friday, 30 January Peer Review Session and Conclusion

The Peer review session will take place in a working room in Hotel Tiziano in order to facilitate those who will leave during the morning session.

What can be done to improve the Image of the City as an attractive Student City?

8.45 – 9.00	Registration and coffee	
09.00 – 09.10	Welcome	<b>Mr. Alessandro Delli Noci</b> City Councillor for Technological Innovation, Youth Policy, Vocational Training and Job Policy - City of Lecce
09.10 – 09.15	Intro Peer review Methodology	Mr. Willem van Winden, Lead Expert EUniverCities
9.15 – 10.45	Peer Review Session in two groups	<b>Ms. Lara Mastrogiovanni</b> <b>Mr. Salvatore Modeo –</b> and LSG for the report
10.30 – 10.45	Coffee break	
10.45 – 11.30	Presentation of the results	LSG Coordinator and Students
11.30 – 12.00	Closing Session	Mr. Patrick van Geel, Senior Advisor, European Affairs, City of Delft  Mr. Willem van Winden, Lead Expert EUniverCities

URBACT II

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It enables cities to work together to develop solutions to major urban challenges, reaffirming the key role they play in facing increasingly complex societal challenges. It helps them to develop pragmatic solutions that are new and sustainable, and that integrate economic, social and environmental dimensions. It enables cities to share good practices and lessons learned with all professionals involved in urban policy throughout Europe. URBACT is 181 cities, 29 countries, and 5,000 active participants

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