



## Statement

*EUniverCities is an international network representing 14 European university cities and their university. The Network holds regular knowledge exchange meetings around concrete issues that are of relevance for its members, sharing the ambition to strategically enhance cooperation between city and university across economic, cultural and societal dimensions. The network brings together civil officers and a broad range of stakeholders from different cities, including tandems of high-level decision makers in each city (Mayors and Rectors).*

Europe's university cities make a very significant contribution to the goals of Europe 2020, as engines of smart, sustainable and inclusive growth. Together with large metropolises, they form the backbone of Europe's knowledge economy. They play a positive role in achieving territorial competitiveness and spatial cohesion. In this statement, we highlight their significance, features and challenges, and advocate for a stronger involvement of the network in the discussion of European competitiveness, cohesion and urban policies.

### *The significance of university cities*

Europe's university cities are the "pearls" in the European knowledge society. They are the birthplaces of new discoveries, ideas, and innovations, and they attract bright young people. Many have a flourishing economy, with innovative companies and excellent research. Also, we observe a growing culture of entrepreneurship in Europe's universities, with students and researchers creating new companies, thus also benefitting the local and regional economy. Moreover, students and graduates are a source of fresh and highly-educated human capital for companies in the city/region.

Thus, university cities play a key role in maintaining a balanced urban system in the European Union.

### *Europe's university cities are very diverse, but have some unique features:*

- They combine the advantages of having a "human scale" with enough density, enabling easier contact, fast network formation and exchange; these cities tend to have better organising capacity, i.e. they are able to forge flexible yet stable relations among city stakeholders to get things done;
- They are engines of research and innovation, with relevance for actors in the wider region. Beyond being education centres, their universities often combine international excellence with impacts on new firm creation and the upgrading of indigenous industries;
- They are centres of cultural production and consumption, lubricated by demanding and energetic student populations, with benefits for the wider population of city and region;
- They tend to be politically active places, cradles of democratic debate, grassroots movements, counterculture and change.
- Their universities are drivers of internationalization of the city and region, namely by hosting foreign students, guest researchers, etc. This contributes

to open up the city, link it to international knowledge networks. The international character of the city helps to develop and attract international business. With their international students and researchers, these cities are loci for the improvement of the intercultural cohabitation and collaboration.

*They also face specific challenges:*

- Retaining graduates (there is a big pull from capitals and large metropolises)
- Building a more competitive knowledge economy, by 1) developing science-based business, 2) create a start-up culture, in particular by combining research and education excellence with more spillovers to local industries and SMEs;
- Accommodate a diverse population of international students
- Engaging students and researchers in the development of new solutions for societal and urban problems and challenges.
- For cities with large rural hinterlands: enhancing the competitiveness of not only the city but also surrounding rural regions (with shrinking populations)
- For cities in polycentric urban regions: strategic positioning vis-à-vis other cities and universities nearby

*The role of the EUniverCities Network*

The EUniverCities Network will continue to gather (and possibly expand) its partners, with the mission to exchange knowledge and experience on these issues and learn from each other.

Beyond knowledge exchange, EUniverCities aims to develop further as a “think-tank”, deepening knowledge and insights on the relation between European cities and their universities, and enhancing the evidence base on the importance of university cities as drivers for competitiveness and cohesion in Europe.

Building on this basis, the Network offers to become a strategic partner for the European Commission. EUniverCities can assume the following roles:

- Discussion partner for the EC on the evolving European “Urban Agenda”
- Provider of a sound evidence base on the role of university cities in Europe’s knowledge society
- Provider of relevant input for future directions of European policy (mainly regional/urban policy and science policy but other fields as well)

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