



# **Towards a structured collaboration between Lausanne and the University of Lausanne (UNIL)**

**Results and recommendations from the peer review  
meeting in Lausanne of the EUniverCities network,  
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## 1. Introduction

Lausanne city and UNIL are in the process of learning how to set up a structural collaboration, and seek to discover where and when this brings an added value. To learn from other European university-city tandems and obtain recommendations, a peer review meeting was organised in May 2015. Representatives of the EUniverCities network (from the cities/universities of Aalborg, Delft, Ghent, Linköping, Magdeburg, Norrköping, Parma, and Trondheim), came to Lausanne and were invited to reflect on two key questions:

- a) Science in the city: how can researchers and city officers take advantage of each other, by making scientific expertise available for city development on the one hand, or by offering real life situations to scientists on the other hand?
- b) Campus as a living lab: can the campus and its community be a testing ground for projects that might later be further rolled out/implemented in an urban environment?

The aim of the meeting was to share with European partners a range of collaboration models, to learn from each other how to handle collaboration at the governance level, for the mutual benefit of the city and the university.

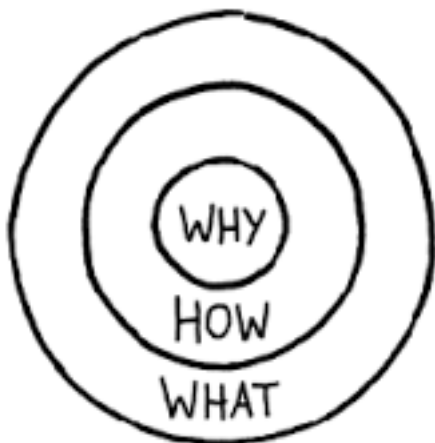
During the plenary sessions of the meeting, a variety of speakers from UNIL and the City of Lausanne presented examples of current collaborations and initiatives. We discussed pitfalls, challenges and opportunities during short Q&A sessions. Next, in parallel interactive workshops, the participants (a mix of city and university representatives from several EU countries and from Lausanne as well) reflected more deeply on these presentations. Also they discussed how strategic collaboration takes shape in the various cities, and tried to derive lessons for Lausanne.

This report summarizes the outcomes of the meeting. Section 2 focuses on the first question (strategic forms of collaboration); section 3 deals with the second one, the campus as living lab. Section 4 contains some key messages.

## 2. Towards a more strategic type of collaboration?

The presentations in the morning sessions made very clear that in Lausanne, city and university do not start from scratch: many projects are up and running, and many can be considered successful. This suggests that there is a lot of potential. The Volteface project could even figure as an international best practice, according to many of the foreign peer-reviewers. At the same time, there was widespread agreement that the collaborations are too much ad-hoc based, and dependent on individuals.

Hence the big question: Would it make sense for city and UNIL to engage in deeper collaboration, if so, what should that look like? To disentangle this question, it makes sense to use the “golden circle” of Simon Sinek<sup>1</sup>. It was developed to analyse marketing practices of companies, but it can be used for our purposes as well. It contains three layers. The outer layer, the “What”, represents the actual collaboration: it can be PhD or Master students writing a thesis about an urban issue; it can be a researcher that studies the impact of parental leave legislation on the municipal organisation. Or it could be a city service that asks a researcher to address a practical problem. The “How” is the form and method that is used in the collaboration; how is it set up, governed and funded, which partners participate, how do they work together etc. The “Why”, in the centre, is the key driver, the vision, and the motivation behind the collaboration. What are the key incentives and deeper reasons for city and university to engage in collaboration? How does it link to their core mission and tasks? This is placed in the heart of the circle. Without a good answer to the why questions, the “how” and “what” questions are floating in the air and it is hard to get good results.



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<sup>1</sup> Sinek, S. (2009), Start with why: how great leaders inspire everyone to take action. Penguin Group, New York, N.Y.

### **The “why” question**

So, why would city and university collaborate? *For the city*, a systematic collaboration helps to benefit from the vast knowledge and capacity of the university (researchers and students) to address a number of urban management and organisational questions. The city might also benefit by using/exploiting the very rich knowledge, capacities and experience of UNIL researchers in a number of fields, or use the universities’ knowledge base for specific purposes. For instance, a researcher in history of art might help setting up an exhibition, or produce a book about all pieces of arts exposed by the city in the public space.

Collaboration is not just about conducting new research and studies. The city can gain much by “tapping” from the rich knowledge and experience of UNIL staff. *For the university*, the city can be “used” to support and strengthen its research and education missions. The university could use the city as a very interesting “Umfeld” for research and experimentation, a box full of scientifically interesting and relevant research questions, a place where students can learn in real life contexts.

The presentations and discussions in the groups made clear that the “why” question is answered differently for city and for university. For researchers, put simply, collaboration is useful if it enables them to do more and better publishable research (preferably funded), because this is what counts for them. For students, collaboration is useful if it provides them with an interesting and challenging work for their thesis. This makes their study more interesting and adds to their career opportunities. For municipal offices/departments, collaboration makes sense if the research allows them to do their job – the public service - in a better way, and if it is not too time-consuming or otherwise resourceful.

A number of differences were mentioned during the discussion. First, city and university have a different approach to problems. Researchers tend to analyze a problem thoroughly and in a very systemic way, whereas the city is much more pragmatic, expecting results/solutions rapidly and may not be that interested in the deep analysis, precise reasoning etc. Second, a scientific approach implies a risk of failure (you are never sure that your initial hypothesis will prove to be the right one, or you accept that you do not know what your finding will eventually be). But is a municipality ready to fail, i.e. to finance and support a project which might have results that are (very) different than expected? The problem is that often, the partners are not aware of each others’organisational culture and motivations. The different motives and expectations often remain implicit or “unspoken”, which can easily lead to problems and irritations along the way. A third barrier concerns timing. The political calendar is different from the academic calendar, and the city typically asks for quick results whereas the time frame of research projects is often longer. Fourth, there seems to be an information problem. On the one hand, city staff is insufficiently aware what kind of competences UNIL has to offer; on the other, researchers often don’t know what types of (research) questions the city has.

### **How and what**

A first conclusion must be that city and university in Lausanne must find common ground in answering the “why” question, on a strategic level.

Having said that, the foreign guests already developed a number of suggestions for the “how” and the “what” questions, that may serve as inspiration for the next local steps in Lausanne.

The participants agreed that the current bottom-up approach is too much ad hoc. There are good collaborations, but they happen more or less by chance, and depend very much on particular individuals. Many opportunities are missed in this way. The time has come to structure it. But how? A large number of ideas, steps and options were developed.

#### *1. Learn from good practices*

Systematically learn from current good collaboration examples that already exist between UNIL and the city. One way is to do interview sessions with collaborators and researchers, in front of a larger audience (as was done in the morning sessions). This reveals the lessons learned and obstacles that need to be removed. A follow-up must be given to capture the learning and to tackle the problems and bottlenecks.

Learning must also be organised within the university. There is a lot of individualism amongst the faculty and researchers, who often ignore that their neighbour is developing a collaboration or a project precisely in the same field that they are.

#### *2. Address the lack of mutual information, knowledge and understanding of each other*

City and university do not know and understand each other to a sufficient degree, leading to all sorts of misunderstandings, irritations, and disappointments. Also, many potential projects that could have been promising never see the light because people simply don't find each other.

To address the information problem, city and university could develop a platform where they meet, so that city staff knows more about the knowledge & competences of UNIL, and researchers are aware which research questions the city wants to have answered. Some concrete ideas:

- Get in touch with teachers and students (presentation at welcome lectures, for example).
- Organise a yearly event to make the university and city actors/officials meet. *Amsterdam used to organise a day where city departments, in a number of parallel sessions, present their policy challenges to researchers, and try to find matches and develop projects afterwards.*

- Organize a collaboration day, where collaborations can be presented and collaborators can share on the organization of their collaboration.
- Include the city in the definition of research projects: the city should not only be a subject of study but a full research partner for the project definition stage.

### *3. Engage students in the city*

Students from UNIL that were present during the meeting sent a strong message that they benefitted substantially from working on a city-university project: they found it challenging and enriching. But they realised that they were the “lucky ones” working with a professor that happened to be connected to the city administration somehow. A more structured approach is needed. How?

- Adopting practice-oriented methods of education may help to increase the link between city and university. The University of Aalborg adopted “problem based learning” as method in all curricula, which naturally led to much collaboration in and with the city.
- Have more students based in the municipality. Since a few years, Aalborg city has an active policy to have student in its municipal departments. It gives student a great opportunity, but also has changed the way of working of the city officers.
- Let students work on real issues in the city. This can be done in many ways. **Trondheim** set up a Sosiologisk poliklinik (sociology drop centre): students get to work on real issues (brought from the outside) where they can help on certain questions and apply their newly acquired knowledge. Demola/new factory (in **Tampere**) is an internationally recognized best practice programme that links student’s research work to demands/research questions from companies and public organisations. It is a co-operation of all the HEIs in Tampere and the city. Demola collects research questions, topics or requests for product development from all sorts of organisations, and assembles multidisciplinary student teams that work on those problems. Students can gain 5 ECTS by participating. Demola runs on a small budget (€300k) but it is considered very successful and dynamic. In **Norrköping**, the city asked engineering students to think of the future re-development of the old harbour on different aspects: energy system, water supply, mobility, etc.. A mixed jury with politicians, water suppliers, etc. was made to judge the students’ work.

### *4. Show leadership from the side of city and university*

Initiative and support “from the top” is a precondition to make things happen. This may have the following elements:

- Regular informal meetings between the leaders might be a good start (even without formal agreements)
- Next, develop a joint vision, and transform it into a general agreement (the form can be variable: a contract, a convention, a letter of agreement). This sends a strong signal.
- Assign the necessary resources (money, persons & time)
- It would help if the city management would actively support collaboration, and give its employees support and (extra) time necessary to realize collaboration projects. Currently, it all depends on the personal motivation of individuals. In **Trondheim**, city services have to have a really good reason to reject a request of collaboration coming from researchers (a strong top-down incentive).
- Incentives are needed to make scientists work in the urban field. The university may add societal relevance as serious criterion in the judgement of its scientists, or actively promote applied research. Positive stimulus may come from the EU2020 strategy, in which projects are increasingly being judged according to practical implementation potential. The city could be developed as platform for these collaborations.

*5. Consider the following organisational changes/innovations that other university cities invented:*

*Aalborg* has systematically organised the collaboration. The university has a Vice-Rector for collaboration, Director of collaboration, and collaboration coordinators. A joint secretariat of 4 people is responsible for the cooperation between the city and the university (meeting twice a month), and a steering committee is supervising it. The secretariat oversees and support the “matchmakers” that are appointed in the city (all 7 departments) and at the various units of the university. They bridge the gap, and are the entry door for the seeking students that have a project. Moreover, the university has 90 “ambassadors” in the industry; they gather in an annual conference and discuss and initiate all sorts of collaborations. Setting up this structure did not happen overnight: it took 4 years to set up the strategic cooperation

*Amsterdam* university of Applied Sciences has a 4-year collaboration agreement with some city boroughs (“fieldlabs”) to help the development of the city (ethnic entrepreneurship, child education, fighting poverty, ...). The University and the city has a special fund for this collaboration (100 K EUR per institution). A Core Team (university and city staff) sets the research agenda and invites researchers to commit themselves; an external academic team safeguards the quality.

*Norrköping* city set up a 3 mios CHF fund to finance research projects in the city. These projects are co-defined with the city; if validated by the city, a full contract is signed. The city produces a typology of project levels with consideration to the

level of researchers who lead the project: research = phd / special works for students / job employment for student. It is integrated in a project of development of the relation/cooperation between the city and the university. Likewise in *Trondheim*, the government and the city grant money (3 mios NOK) to university projects directed towards the municipality.

*Aalborg* developed a strategy for smart city; It created an open data base with all kind of data that the municipality has, and opened it for researchers or companies to develop future projects.

### **In sum**

Collaboration evidently brings a number of benefits for both city and university. In Lausanne, there are already many great examples of fruitful collaboration, but they are ad hoc, they depend on individuals, and don't scale up. Many opportunities and synergy are missed in this way.

To escape from the ad-hoc mode, university and city should know and understand each other better, meet each other more frequently and systematically, and understand/respect each others' needs, drivers and incentives. Moreover, more learning and exchange must take place (between city and university but also within UNIL and city) about how to do a successful collaboration.

It is advisable to take the following measures:

- Organise systematic learning from existing good practices of UNIL-City collaboration
- Make sure that supply and demand meet. Take measures to address the lack of mutual information, knowledge and understanding of each other
- Find ways to systematically connect student work to urban management challenges in the city
- Develop a joint strategy for all this on the top level, and dedicate resources to it. The EUniverCities partners have found different paths how to do it.
- Get inspired by approaches of partners in the EUniverCities project



### **3. The campus as living lab?**

During the second day of the conference, we discussed the more specific question if and how the campus and its community could be a testing ground or “living lab” for projects that might later be further rolled out/implemented in an urban environment? In the plenary part, the concept of living lab was further explained and defined. Also, a number of examples were presented about current projects/companies that started at the UNIL campus and since were wider applied. It became clear to the visitors that great efforts toward sustainability have been made on the campus, thanks to a pro-active sustainability strategy of UNIL. Also, there are some good examples where the UNIL campus has been the cradle of new developments. But it became also clear that these examples emerged in an ad-hoc manner, and were mainly driven by the energy of some individuals. They were fully supported by UNIL but what lacks so far is a structured approach towards living labs.

After the plenary session, we split in three groups to exchange experiences from other city/university tandems, and develop ideas/suggestions for Lausanne. In this section, we summarize the main findings.

#### **Campus or city?**

In each of the groups, the partners doubted whether the campus is the right context for a living lab. A campus is very different from a city in many respects: First, it has no permanent inhabitants (students do not live on the campus); second, the campus’ population is a “special society” in terms of age structure (very young) and education level (very high). In a way, it is a highly controlled and sterile environment, limiting the scope for useful real-life experimentation. On the other hand, UNIL has some characteristics that help in being a living lab. The campus still possesses a lot of open spaces that could be used for interesting temporary living lab activities, for example in the field of sports and related technologies. Also, it is less heavily regulated, decisions to do things can be made more easily than in the real city. Most participants agreed that the living lab function does not need to be restricted to the field of sustainability: it can encompass any field or activity.

Many participants argued that it might be more promising to have a living lab in the city rather than in the campus. Delft is a case in point: it has a living lab on the campus (the green visit) but now faces its limitations. TU Delft is in need of a “real” social & urban space to test ideas (for solutions in the field of health, energy, water, risk management...). In Aalborg, a new campus has been built in the city centre where students live and it has become a testing lab available for various projects.

#### **Essential elements in a living lab**

On campus or not, some elements are crucial in any living lab. Here are some key lessons from other city-university tandems:

1. Work with end-users (often citizens) and invite them early in the process of living lab projects from the start.

2. Don't limit yourself to city and university: Open the living lab to industries and businesses, which would like to meet the students and professors. Link up with entrepreneurship and the private sector.

3. Make sure to have different academic disciplines in each project.

Moreover, setting up living labs is complex, and requires a permanent working group between city and university to identify on the longer term what type of projects could be developed. A common culture, or "way of working" must be developed along the way. It makes sense to work on two levels:

- Strategically (with the presidency) - top down
- Support/encourage pop up effects of living lab, and simplify support for projects – bottom up

Several participants noticed that currently, you can't see the university in the city. It would help to find places to integrate the university, for example organize events with students in the city.

### **In sum**

Over the last years, UNIL has taken many progressive steps to make the campus more sustainable. In several projects, pro-active students and researchers have played a prominent role. And there are some examples where the campus was the cradle or "breeding nest" of innovations, that were later rolled out elsewhere. The UNIL leadership should continue to support such developments.

However, it makes less sense to see the campus as a 'living lab': A campus is too different from a real city to play that role effectively. Nevertheless, living labs are great tools for research and learning. UNIL and the city should consider setting them up in real-life settings in the city of Lausanne.

A living lab is a special and dedicated form of city-university collaboration. It requires a strategic approach in which city, university and other stakeholders work together, not in a single project, but on a programmatic level.

Some key lessons from other living labs are the following: 1) involve end users in the design process; 2) engage the private sector and work in an interdisciplinary way 3) manage expectations of the stakeholders and develop clear rules for working together.

#### **4. Main messages**

This document contains a number of considerations, ideas and recommendations for a more structured collaboration between UNIL and the City of Lausanne. It is based on discussions during the EUniverCities peer review meeting that was held in Lausanne. This section summarizes the main messages.

City-university collaboration can substantially contribute to the research and education mission of UNIL, and also it can help the city in many ways. But it has to be organised, given the substantial differences between both organisations. In Lausanne, there are already several great examples of fruitful collaboration, much appreciated by students, researchers and civil officers who took part in them. But they are ad hoc, they depend on individuals, and don't scale up. Many opportunities and synergy are missed in this way. Several members of EUniverCities members shared this problem and developed fruitful solutions (listed in this report).

It starts with leadership. As a first step, it might help to draw up a joint covenant or strategy, containing a strong message from the top leadership of city and UNIL about the importance and relevance of city-university collaboration (they must agree on the "why" question), as well as concrete measures and steps how to achieve it (the "how" and "what" questions). Examples from other city-university tandems might serve as inspiration.

This joint covenant/strategy should enable, facilitate and empower people (on each side) to make the connection work. It should also dedicate sufficient resources. The strategy should address the main barriers that stand in the way of collaboration (as identified by the preparation team, and discussed during the peer review): lack of incentives, different drivers/motivations, lack of mutual knowledge and understanding, a lack of meeting opportunities and interfaces. This document contains a number of ideas on how to tackle these issues; many of them are relatively easy to implement.

To make things happen, it makes sense to create a permanent mixed working group, charged with taking initiatives, organising sessions and events aimed at sharing and matchmaking, communicating results, supporting collaborators, mobilising and engaging enthusiastic frontrunners from both sides. The members must also "spread the word" in their own respective organisation, and support/encourage their colleagues to take part.

One element of the strategy could be to explore the potential of a concrete living lab in Lausanne where city, university and business develop innovations together with end users. This could be a concrete project, and also help to make the university more visible in the city.