

Summary - Debate on the Peer Review Questions - 26 January 2012

Moderator: Prof. Herwig Reynaert, Dean of the Faculty of Political and Social Sciences, Ghent University

▪ Students' Participation

The biggest challenge Ghent is facing is the participation of a very large but ever changing and divers unregistered student population in city life. Interesting in this case is that the other cities and universities present at the meeting share the opinion that students' participation is important but they do not have problems with the registration of students as residents of the city.

Mayor Henning G. Jensen (City of Aalborg): In Aalborg there is no negative effect about being registered in the university city as a student. Actually it is stimulated to register yourself in the city where you are studying: a higher fee is being paid for renting a student unit.

Examples of direct students' participation in local politics are the local student party in the City of Delft (STIP) and elected students who are member of a local political party in the City of Aalborg. Are there disadvantages in this? Until now the participation of students in local politics and/or having a student political party is overall an advantage: more communication and participation of students in city life. However, continuity maybe a small problem. Each STIP-member, for example, acts as City Council member for only one year. So each year they transfer their knowledge and experience to another member.

▪ Student Housing

Jan Benschop (DUWO): Deliberation on student housing problem - a problem which is shared by a lot of participants - is important. The only growth of cities is occurring in the 13 university cities in the Netherlands. What are the experiences of others in this?

Peter Plenge (Aalborg University): In Aalborg student housing is part of the city/university branding. Next to the social purpose of the units they are being used for branding/marketing/profiling. An old power plant (Nordkraft) for example is now a multifunctional building and meeting point for students. Other non-university cities look up to these developments. These kind of projects are great opportunities to attract new students, knowledge workers etc.

Gijs Coucke (Ghent University): According to the Swedish model student unions are taking care of student housing. Are there other cities where this happens?

Dag Ove Johansen: Trondheim has a more or less similar model.

▪ Entrepreneurship/City Life

Jan Nielsen (City of Aalborg): Talking about student housing is too narrow. Let's talk about students' life in the city in this network. For example entrepreneurship.

Lise-lotte Järvinen (City of Linköping): How to attract the students to settle down (retention), entrepreneurship are important topics for Linköping as well.

Pär Westrin (University of Linköping): Not only the participation/involvement of students is important. Involving companies is also very important.

Tuija Mannila (City of Tampere): A broader discussion is important, but we also need to address the bits and pieces. Enhancing businesses, creating an environment in which students co-operate with companies.

Joanna Szelağ (The City of Lublin): Because of EU programmes Lublin does not really face challenges concerning student housing. The issue/challenge Lublin is facing is the dialogue/cooperation between city and the universities. At the moment the vision of these institutions is differing. Now the idea to develop a student city council is going to be explored. Another problem is the decrease of the city population (and with that also a shrinking student population). The City of Lublin considers that participation in this network creates as an opportunity to learn from the experiences of other cities and universities.

Josef Jirkal (Brno University): Brno University and the City of Brno recognize these issues and want to observe and learn from the other participants.

Gertjan Dewaele (Ghent Student Council): Thinking about the question why students should stay in the city. With reference to his own situation it was important (a wish) to become a resident of Ghent as well.

Tuija Mannilla: However another important motive is getting a job.

Marc de Perrot: Next to this there is a lot of competition between cities (also those without universities). So it is very hard to retain students.

Jan Benschop: The main motives in the Netherlands are 1) labour market, and 2) availability of housing.

Christian Fossen (NTNU): The challenge is to create a social life not only within the student community but also with the inhabitants. This may be a difficult challenge to overcome.

Thijs Verbeurgt (Ghent House of the Student): This more integral approach is also needed in relation to spatial planning. Student housing must be part of a bigger picture: housing of young knowledge workers, (young) families etc.

Klaus Puchta: Attracting and retaining of people in general is an important issue. From his experience it is hard to compare on a one to one level. The differences between countries, cities is big. According to his view is important to learn and hear a lot about one city during one meeting. There's not enough time to review all cities/universities in detail.