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14 juni 2021

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Nathalie Peeters

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To DeepL.

Abstract

The status quo of a university as a nation bound institution where universal knowledge is taught is colliding against its boundaries. Rising complex challenges such as how to tackle climate change, superdiversity and technological innovation are testing the limits of this academic, universal, elite, knowledge production. In a world where knowledge is produced in more places than the confinement of the institution, universities must aspire to transcend physical and structural boundaries.

In this dissertation, the current positionality of four universities, the University of Antwerp, the Vrije Universiteit Brussel, the University of the Western Cape and Ghent University will be analysed against three different theoretical frameworks. First of all, how do these universities tackle planetary and societal challenges? Second, how do they transcend the rigid boundaries of mono-disciplinary teaching and research and third, how do they engage within their local urban context?

Four initiatives, Stadsform, Brussels Academy, Centre for Humanities Research and The Stadsacademie will be introduced as means of breaching the walls of the university through conducting context bound, transdisciplinary urban experiments. Initiatives, that, from their [position](#) and relation to their academic landscape could begin to influence the rigid system of universities.

A plea will be made for universities to widen their gaze beyond the traditional discipline-oriented methods of teaching and doing research. A plea to engage with the local urban environment as the ideal testing ground for planetary and societal challenges.

A plea for universities to [position](#) themselves in this changing world as institutes offering a healthy balance of mono- and transdisciplinary education and research, of tackling discipline bound and discipline surpassing subjects, of tackling the global and the local landscape.



Context

In May 2020 we chose the topic ‘Architectural and urban issues in South-Africa, Cape Town’. This master’s dissertation assumed local fieldwork in Cape Town and was therefore subject to the reservation that this would be possible in the academic year of 2020-2021. The initial problem definition and objectives were stated as such:

In consultation with South African researchers (various staff members of the University of the Western Cape), an urban and/or architectural problem is addressed. From a historical analysis, the topicality of this problem is examined and, if necessary, a design scenario is developed to deal with it. In previous years, this has included research into the main campus and satellite campuses of the University of the Western Cape, as well as a large-scale hospital complex and the Voortrekker Road that connects downtown Cape Town CBD with the Bellville district. In 2016-2017, a collaboration started with UWC’s Centre for Humanities Research (CHR) on the establishment of an Institute for Advanced Studies in Arts & Humanities and the necessary infrastructure for it. It will be possible to build on previous studies or to tackle a new theme.

Since 2009, the Department of Architecture and Urban Planning of Ghent University has been involved in a collaboration with the University of the Western Cape (UWC) within the track “Cities in Transition” of the VLIR-UOS project no. 5 CLIDE. In the previous collaboration between the University of the Western Cape and the architecture students of Ghent University one main theme has been crucial: connecting academic knowledge to the urban fabric of Cape Town. Two main threads of collaboration characterise this main theme: the earlier dissertations happened in the operational framework of the institutional planners, led by Larry Pokpas, while the later dissertations took place within the operational framework of the Centre for Humanities Research (CHR), led by Premesh Lalu.

Given the situation in which our dissertation was made, with world-wide travel restrictions, we had to look for other ways of conducting research, keeping in mind that fieldwork in Cape Town was likely not going to happen. This gave us the incentive to start looking for experiments that connect university and the city, in other words; how academic knowledge can be spatialised within the local urban fabric. As the Jokerweek of this year started to take shape, it became visible that it (coincidental or not) was in line with the research we were doing.

As a side-note, the pronouns we and us, will only be used throughout this dissertation when it directly relates to us, Nathalie and Tereza, as authors. ‘We’ will not be used in its impersonal form.



Time is a social institution and not a physical reality.

Methodology

Throughout this dissertation we have profoundly, besides the typical articles, book chapters and dissertations, leaned on interviews as a method of gathering information. This method allows for a series of open questions followed by the possibility of providing lengthy answers to the interviewees own wish. Moreover, it also ensures a pleasant way of collecting information and getting to know one another in times of a virtual reality.

With the guidance of Charlotte Prové, the coordinator of the Stadsacademie in Ghent, we started conducting interviews from December 2020 until April 2021 with the following people (initiatives):

- Charlotte Prové (Stadsacademie)
- Thomas Block (Stadsacademie)
- Eric Corijn (Brussels Academy)
- Jessica van de Ven (Brussels Academy)
- Daniel Mossberg (CEMUS)
- Tim De Vos (Stadsform)
- Michiel Dehaene (Professor at Ghent University)
- Johan Lagae (Professor at Ghent University)
- Premes Lalu (Centre for Humanities Research) and Ilze Wolff (Wolff architects)
- Larry Pokpas, Laurine Platzky and Lois Dippenaar (Institutional Planners at UWC)

Each of these individuals or groups of people will be introduced within our dissertation because of the role they play within an experiment that connects knowledge from within an academic landscape with the local urban environment in a transdisciplinary setting. It was deliberate to choose initiatives and organisations along a wide scope of embeddedness within the university. This, to showcase how this relationship can influence their **position** and operation.

We would like to emphasise that the chosen experiments and interviewees are only a limited selection. However, to be able to analyse the different initiatives and positions for our dissertation within the given time-frame, a selection needed to be made. This selection is not complete and could certainly be extended. Other experiments that could have been interesting to analyse are: Pakhuis de Zwijger, Skuor, De Veldacademie, Urban Futures Studio, ...

Content

Acknowledgements	7
Abstract	9
Context	11
Methodology	17
Jokerweek 2021 <i>Shifting Positions</i>	21
Overview	41
Wickedness & Universitas.	45
The Status Quo of a University	45
Three Interwoven Narratives	49
The Academic Landscape	65
The University of Antwerp (UAntwerp)	70
Vrije Universiteit Brussels (VUB)	88
University of the Western Cape (UWC)	108
Ghent University	132
Conclusion	144
Urban Experiments	150
Stadsform	152
Brussels Academy	172
Centre for Humanities Research (CHR)	210
The Stadsacademie	242
Reflection	278

What is Jokerweek?

Jokerweek, quite literally a ‘joker’ week is a yearly initiative organised by the second master students and certain staff members of the department of Architecture and Urban Planning. The format was first introduced as an educational experiment in 1996 and has been a fixed part of the curriculum ever since.

For one week, the week before easter break, lessons are suspended, and room is made for themes that normally don’t find an entry point in the standard curriculum. An intensive weeklong ‘workshop’ in different groups is organised around a specific theme accompanied by an assignment that ranges from mock-up installations to critically assessing the provided material through collages, texts, objects, ...

A main thread throughout the years has been the implementation of so-called ‘vertical ateliers’. In this set-up groups are formed with students ranging from first bachelor through second master, establishing a peer-to-peer learning situation instead of the daily hierachal feel of the older against the younger student. In this format students work horizontally with each other and also get to know pupils from different years. In this way students are encouraged to learn from one another and use this in their design classes in general.

During the day students are working on the main assignment, which is accompanied by a wide range of activities such as: small workshops (f.e. bricklaying), a competition between the different years, lectures from prominent architects, critics, offices, ..., debates, eating together, partying, and so on. The essence of the Jokerweek lies in building a community while addressing important actual and contemporary issues of the time through doing what architecture students love, dealing with design, architecture and its relationship to society.

All students and staff members are expected to participate. As Johan Lagae, Professor of our faculty says: ‘If you don’t participate in the Jokerweek, you don’t belong in this department.’ The Jokerweek is an opportunity for architects and designers in the making, to fully submerge themselves, for one week, in the theme of that year and broaden their critical view on architecture, design and social issues.

Jokerweek 2021

Shifting Positions

As our dissertation started shifting towards analysing different initiatives that are, from within the university, engaged with and for the city through debates, lectures and cocreatational methods, *Shifting Positions*, this year’s jokerweek, gave us new insights and questions which helped shape and develop our dissertation. The weeks before the Jokerweek were contested by a genuine search for a plausible approach of our dissertation. On the one hand we conducted interviews with several people and on the other hand we had the information of previous dissertations on different neighbourhoods in South-Africa and interviews with actors present at the UWC. We had reached an impasse in how to approach and puzzle the already collected material. All the while the yearly Jokerweek was given form, slowly coming towards subjects such as positionality, critical issues and the vicinity of our own context.

The arrival of the Jokerweek within our rather strange senior year gave us a breath of fresh air. Throughout the week a realisation came to us: just like the experiments we were analysing, Jokerweek was an experiment that went against the status quo of a university. The theme of this year also brought a couple of important insights:

- How does one **position** itself in a changing world?
(Which led us to how do universities **position** themselves?)
- Complex planetary and social issues are tainting the world
- The importance of working on the local context
- In what way can pedagogical experiment transcend traditional boundaries?

This Jokerweek started from a sense of urgency. An urgency to deal with the many planetary and societal issues. As the world is facing these issues, a transformative way forward is desirable. The complexity of these problems force people to take a **position**. The demand for new ways of living and working together is growing and the call for change¹ is getting louder.

¹ In a lecture during the Jokerweek, Christophe van Gerrewey mentioned that it is important to note that this sense of urgency is not that ‘new’. Already in the 60s and 70s people, within the architectural world, were concerned about taking on a position in ecological, cultural and social issues. What makes it different today is the political culture people are living in. We, people, are living in a globalised, capitalist world which has put the options to position oneself to infinity. According to Van Gerrewey, today, many architects are overestimating their capability when trying to take in a direct position within the society we are living in. Perhaps it is an illusion that knowledge can immediately be converted to action? Should architects adapt to society? Or should they strive for the autonomy of their own discipline?

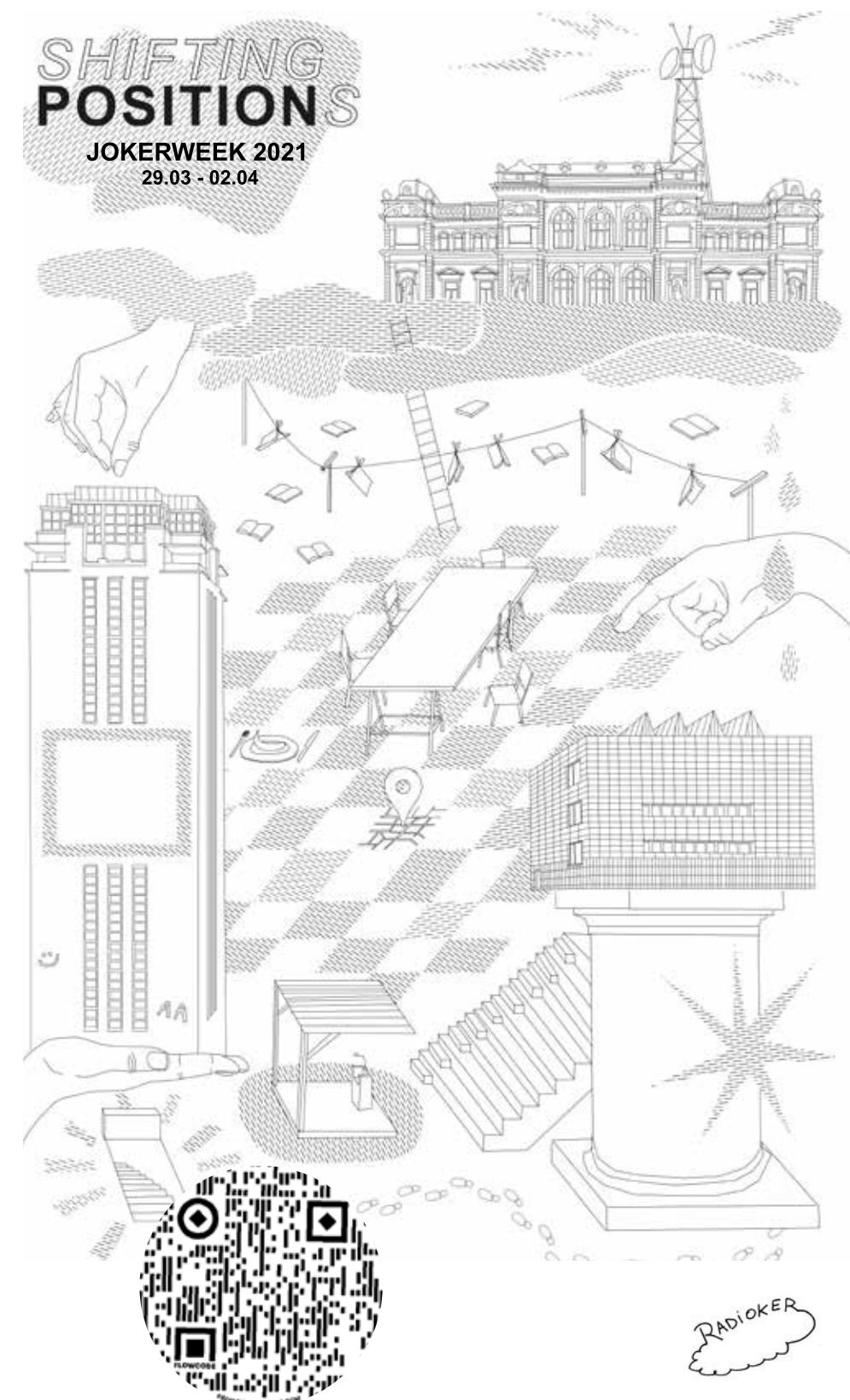
Whilst in normal years the Jokerweek takes place at a location in Ghent, where students work, eat and have a drink together, Covid had other plans. A digital platform would deem to be a crucial element. Different websites would be implemented on the homepage, encompassing a range of elements ranging from a library, to a radio, to the assignment. On Monday the 29th of March, the website of the Jokerweek ‘Shifting Positions’ was made public. The week was introduced as such:

Architects today are no longer exclusively active as designers. They are increasingly establishing themselves as experts in spatial issues with social relevance and urgency: from the problems of global warming and the impact of migration on our cities to ways of thinking about energy transitions, or new development models for the spatial organisation in Flanders (for example, think about what place agriculture should have in the future), to how we can design buildings sustainably by also considering the material flows they generate or already anticipating future dismantling, and so on. This issue of urgent themes and potential roles of the architect poses a number of very pertinent questions that we would like to reflect on together, as a training and therefore both with members of the department and with students. Moreover, all of this ties in closely with a reflection currently underway within the program about the future educational project.

The call for change is clearly audible. At risk of missing the appointment with history, we are organising ourselves into collective think tanks and, in addition to the classic role of author-architect, we are also exploring other possible positions of the architect. We note that in tackling these pressing themes (1. lack of space, 2. heritage, 3. circularity, 4. diversity, 5. hierarchy, 6. capital, 7. migration, 8. commons and 9. digitalisation) the position of the author-architect is coming under pressure and the question arises whether through this classic role one can still master the twenty-first century problems. That is why we are presenting you, members of the professional group and students, with nine possible positions. They are nine potential roles from which you can take a fresh look at the aforementioned urgent themes: A. educator, B. mediator, C. developer, D. researcher, E. critic, F. activist, G. artist, H. builder, and I. demolisher.²

The nine themes (lack of space, heritage, circularity, diversity, hierarchy, capital, migration, commons and digitalisation) the Jokerweek was built on, can be brought back to a state of imbalance we, as architecture students of the faculty of Architecture and Engineering at Ghent University, are feeling and living in. These nine themes are a mapping of complex ‘wicked’ issues. Wicked, in this dissertation, will not refer to something devilish, rather ‘wicked’ issues are problems that can’t be solved in a linear approach as they are bound to multiple stakeholders and their context.

The nine themes were accompanied by a self-stacked online library filled with articles, books, YouTube links etc. This material would be available to all students with publications about prominent issues and stimulating locations in Ghent to activate the students and make them think about architecture and society. It covered a wide range of subjects that, in a normal school week, doesn’t find an entry point in the curriculum.



Within this context of urgency, we find ourselves, as architecture student, in the need of positioning ourselves. The traditional *position* of the architect-designer as ‘the doctor of society’ no longer seems sufficient. The architect, within his/her/their limited job description, is not able to answer the complex questions our society is posing. It is not only within the discipline of architecture that these questions are posed. Universities in general are simultaneously struggling with these disruptive challenges. The pandemic has made it ever more clear how complex and connected planetary and societal problems are today. They cannot be handled separately. The urban tissue cannot be seen without its diverse inhabitants or its relationship towards climate. One cannot design a square or a park without incorporating water drainage systems while at the same time acknowledging the need of diverse users and cultures or the effect of the pollution of cars, ...

To grasp the complexity of these nine themes ‘*Shifting Positions*’ addressed the importance of *transcending* boundaries through opening up the possibility for pedagogical experiments and non-academic or non-hierarchical knowledge production. This was accomplished through several formats. First of all, the Jokerweek was supported by a student-led course ‘Architecture and Activism’, a selective course in the curriculum, that allowed a group of second master students to substantively choose and shape the assignment and format of the week. Secondly, groups were assembled with students across different years and professors who participated as if they were students, thus dissolving the standard hierarchy in an academic setting. Lastly, lectures and instructions, during the Jokerweek itself, were also given by non-academic actors.

At the same time the importance of the own urban environment in which Jokerweek itself is situated was made visible; taking the city of Ghent as the local context to work on and experiment in. A ‘splinterbomb’ with a collection of thirty underrated, interesting and absurd locations in Ghent were identified where the students could work on and engage with.

An online radio, Radioker, was introduced as the backbone of the week, emphasising the importance of connectivity and the physical local context. The radio, was, in times of Covid and online schooling, an essential element to achieve a well-rounded week. Every single aspect of the week from assignment to activities was bound together through the online platform of Radioker. From eight in the morning till ten o’clock at night, students could listen to all kinds of different programmes: from talks with professors, to dance hours, lectures from people in the architecture world taking in different positions and tackling urgent issues, to bachelor students’ take-over, to a round-up of the day’s activities and the outputs of students. Although transported as waves in the air, the radio was a pedagogical experiment displaying the importance of context-bound physical interactions: being able to talk about and experience a shared environment.

“*Shifting Positions*” was slowly born as a non-hierarchical week reserved for reading, discussing and interacting with(in) the urban tissue on different positions within the broad field of architecture and around the urgent themes that a ‘changing world’² is facing today. A week in which the students were provided with a wide scope, a cartography of change, that is happening and the activism that is sprouting off of it.



Assignment

Three types of assignments were made, and the output of these assignments could range anywhere from a text to a YouTube link to a picture of a model, to an image, a physical object, a movie,...

1. An instruction:

Instructions are written by different people close to or far from the architectural field and are meant to challenge the students to step away from their screen, take a **position** and fulfil the instruction outside.

2. Main assignment:

Different groups would daily be given one of nine urgent topics (with publications available in the online library), a quote and an intriguing location in Ghent to make it more tangible and particular. With these three elements, the groups had to choose one of nine positions. How would an architect with a specific role, engage in a certain topic on a certain location with a specific quote?

3. Final assignment:

At the end of the week all students were asked to deliver one A5 eluding their individual trace and their positionality throughout the week.



Assignment
Res(e)t Space

Position: Builder
Topic: Circularity
Location: 18



A single street squeezed between railway lines, hardware stores and the yard of a huge, generic building complex. Two billboards are facing the site.

Instruction by Adriaan Verwee

Six old School instructions: Re-enact one or more pieces of conceptual art that are listed below. Use photography, video, collage or fieldnotes to document your re-enactment(s).
Douglas Huebler, Duration Piece # 5 (1969) - photography

Shoot ten photographs during a ten-minute period of time, each documenting the location in a Park where an individually distinguishable bird call is heard. Each photograph is made with a camera pointed in the direction of the sound. That direction is then walked toward by the auditor until the next call is heard, at which time the next photograph is made and the next direction taken.

Assignment
'Industrial Heritage'

Position: Provoker/Activist
Topic: Heritage
Location 3



A deserted container park, on the border between the rather pleasant greenery of the outer city and the harshness of the port industry. In the distance, a neat football field and a church, which is to be reused, lurk around the corner.



Positions

Positionality was brought up for the first time in the midst of the preparation of the Jok-erweek, not knowing at the time, how later on, this term would become very important, not only for the week, but also for this dissertation.

The term positionality was first used in epistemology in the mid-1920's. When first appearing, it described where something is, spatially, in relation to other things. It didn't yet have a political and social connotation.

With the upcoming field of anthropology and sociology and common use of research such as participatory observation, the questioning of objective observation came into view in the sixties. Is it possible to, without being influenced by one's own personal interest, objectively observe a phenomenon? Further on, positionality was used and adapted with the rise of feminism and gender equality. In this dissertation we will keep our focus on positionality in relation to time and space and as influenced by one's own personal background.

It is important to note that not only is positioning oneself always in relation to one's context, but it is also as a reaction to the environment someone lives in, grew up in, went to school in. Positioning oneself is always contextualized. Thus, a **position** is mobile and ever changing as one's context is also ever evolving. A **position** is also personal and can't be transcribed to another person or another context without taking into account that context. This finds its reflection in the global issues the planet is facing. Critical issues such as poverty, migration and climate change are happening in all corners of the earth but are never materialising in exactly the same way as they are, time and again, contextualised differently.

In this dissertation we will address the different positions of actors who are involved in experimenting with the relationship between the local urban environment and the academic landscape.

This intrinsically shows how one's **position** is bound to the context and the (local) issues this context is facing. Being context bound, these issues are not excluded from being global and happening in multiple different places around the world, but they are excluded from being handled in exactly the same way everywhere. Hence, stating that these issues can by no means be solved in a 'model of approach' but should be adapted to the context they are developing in.

This leads to the importance of positionality. Different positions in society, coming from different (personal) backgrounds lead to different ways of approaching critical issues. Although approaches are context specific, their main goals and the bottom line of how issues are approached can be influential to one another as there is no I in team and neither one person, nor one team of people from one specific department in one specific country/city can 'solve' all the problems the world is facing.

Positions

Interviews

Charlotte Prové is the coordinator of the Stadsacademie, a 'Collaboratory' in which the socio-ecological problems of the City of Ghent are addressed in inter- and transdisciplinary educational and research projects. Charlotte holds a Master's Degree in Sociology and a Master's Degree in Nutrition and Rural Development. She acquired her PhD at the Faculty of Bioscience Engineering (ILVO/Ghent University). Her research work is focused on governance of urban food structures (with a special interest in social/environmental justice and urban agriculture), sustainability of and civic involvement in urban food systems, and well-being in the Flemish farm sector.

Thomas Block is co-initiator of the Stadsacademie, together with Michiel Dehaene. Moreover, he is also Director of the Centre for Sustainable Development, Associate Professor 'Sustainability and governance' at the Department of Political Sciences and Special Commissioner of Sustainability at Ghent University. He has a PhD in Political Sciences and a Master's Degree in Sociology. The identity of his research approach lies in the use of all following work methods:

- a (nuanced) constructivist epistemology
- a complexity-acknowledging perspective
- an interpretative policy analysis framework
- a participative research design
- the framing of sustainability issues as 'political' matter.

His research focusses on complex decision-making and transition governance, education on 'wicked' sustainability issues, scenarios and future studies, sustainable cities and urban projects.

Eric Corijn is a cultural philosopher and a social scientist who, next to philosophy also holds a Degree in Marine Biology and Futurology from the universities of Ghent, Brussels, Utrecht and Amsterdam. He obtained two PhD's one in Social Dynamics and one in Psycho Analysis. He worked at different universities as a researcher, an assistant and a professor. He also obtained a Degree in general studies of art, sculpture and monumental sculpture. He is the founder and director of Brussels Academy (embedded in the Vrije Universiteit Brussel (VUB)), an initiative that seeks to share knowledge with the broader public, founder of COSMPOLIS, an institute for Urban Studies (VUB) and vice-chancellor of Brussels Studies Institute, an institute that brings together 29 research

centres linked to eight colleges and universities. Corijn is also a member of the jury Stadsvernieuwingsprojecten Flanders and chairman of two think tanks: Vooruitgroep and Aula Magna.

Jessica van de Ven is coordinator of the Brussels Academy and the Brussels for Europe project. She is also editor of the VUB Press book series Urban Notebooks/Cahiers Urbains/Stadsschriften. She obtained a Master's in Communication Sciences at VUB. Before being coordinator of Brussels Academy, she was communication officer for Cosmopolis and the Stadsplatform.

Daniel Mossberg is the lead Coordinator of CEMUS Forum and Outreach and Educational Coordinator of CEMUS Education. He has worked as an Educational Coordinator and a Course Coordinator within CEMUS. He was Director of Studies at CEMUS from 2008 until 2018. He has an academic background in cultural anthropology, philosophy, American studies, environment and development studies, and climate and sustainability studies.

Tim Devos graduated as engineering architect and followed a Master of Human Settlements. After working as a researcher for the Steunpunt Ruimte & Wonen of the Stedenbouw & Architectuur department of the KU Leuven, he completed his PhD at the Department of Social Geography of the KU Leuven, focusing on participation and co-production in urban planning processes. Tim has a research interest in socio-spatial issues, participatory planning and the role of the urban designer in a changing field. Tim Devos is co-founder and manager of Endeavour, a team of architects, urban planners and social scientists that aims to make designing and planning more inclusive and sustainable through research and innovation. With Endeavour, Tim Devos, is part of 'Stadsform', a platform in Antwerp that facilitates dialogues on 'the city of tomorrow'.

Premesh Lalu has been a political activist in Athlone at Belgrave high school and has lived in Athlone, a neighbourhood in Cape Town, for thirty years. Premesh Lalu was trained as an historian at the University of the Western Cape (UWC), South Africa. In 2003 he defended a doctoral dissertation at the University of Minnesota in African History called 'In the Event of History'. He became professor in the History Department at UWC.

[...] This is the year (1997) I enter UWC as an undergraduate student after coming out of prison as a student activist in 1995 at the schools in Athlone. I have grown up, cut my teeth, in the student organisation of 1995, the Athlone student action committee.” - Premesh Lalu

From 2008 until 2019 Premesh Lalu was the Director of the DST-NRF Flagship Centre for Humanities Research (CHR) at the University of the Western Cape. Lalu is a board member of the Consortium of Humanities Centres and Institutes, former chairperson of the Handspring Trust for Puppetry in Education, and former trustee of the District Six Museum in Cape Town, South Africa.

Lalu has tried to write across different disciplines of the humanities. He has published widely in academic journals such as History and Theory, Journal of Southern African Studies, Afrika Focus, Journal of Higher Education in Africa, Kronos: Southern African Histories, Current Writing, , Journal of Africa, Middle East and Asian Studies, Social Dynamics, and History in Africa. He is the author of The Deaths of Hintscha: Post-Apartheid South Africa and the Shape of Recurring Pasts (2009) and co-editor of Remains of the Social: Desiring the Post-Apartheid (2017) and Becoming UWC: Reflections, Pathways and Unmaking Apartheid's Legacies (2012).

“I am considered an outcast historian; in many ways I have challenged the discipline in how it comes to think of itself as an enquiry within the university.” -Premesh Lalu

Ilze Wolff is a partner of Wolff Architects based in Cape Town, South Africa. She graduated with a Bachelor of Architecture at the University of Cape Town (UCT). Following on this she received a Master’s Degree in Philosophy in Heritage and Public Culture at UCT. Ilze co-founded Open House Architecture in 2007, a transdisciplinary research practice which she continues to manage parallel to Wolff Architects.

Larry Pokpas was trained in language and more specifically semiotics. At the University of the Western Cape (UWC) in Cape Town, South Africa, he is an Institutional Planner and the Executive Assistant to the Vice-Chancellor. His main disciplines are ethics, philosophy of science, political economy and international relations.

Laurine Platzky completed a Bachelor of Arts and a Master’s Degree in city/urban, community and Regional Planning at the University of Cape Town. She promoted with a Doctor of Philosophy in Regional Development from the Erasmus University of Rotterdam. Before her employment as an associate for the institutional planning department at UWC, Platzky worked in the South African and Western Cape government where she worked on the integration and alignment of strategies and policies for development outcomes. Her focus lies on space and trying to overcome the spatial aspects of apartheid in coming towards a more inclusive society.

Lois Dippenaar has two different bachelors in English language and literature, one from the University of Pretoria and one from the University of the Western Cape. She also holds a Master of Business Administration from Stellenbosch University and a DBA from the University of Bath. Dippenaar has been active at UWC since 2002, first as a specialist writer in the office of the at the (at the time) Vice-chancellor, later, from 2008 onwards, at the Institutional Planning department. Dippenaar takes care of general planning responsibilities as well as communication with external partners.

Michiel Dehaene is professor at Ghent University (department of Architecture and Urban planning) Together with Thomas Block he initiated the Stadsacademie. After obtaining two Master Degree’s, one in Architecture from KULeuven and one in Urban Design from Harvard University, he completed a PhD at KULeuven on the British survey movement. He was assistant professor at KULeuven and Eindhoven University of Technology. Dehaene is focused on the epistemology of urbanism, dispersed urbanization and the interrelation between urbanization and design.

Johan Lagae is a professor at Ghent University teaching architectural history with a focus on non-European architecture. He obtained his PhD on 20th century colonial architecture in the former Belgian Congo. His research interests include:

- Colonial and post-colonial architecture
- Urban planning and urban history in (Central) Africa
- Colonial-built heritage
- Colonial photography.

Positions

Books & Articles

Donna Haraway is an American professor at the University of California in the History of Consciousness and Feminist Studies. She studied Zoology and Philosophy and completed a PhD in Biology at Yale University. Her research and literature is focused on science and technology studies, feminism, post-modernism and post-humanism covering a wide scope of different fields ranging from sociology to biology, anthropology, philosophy, ... In other words, Donna Haraway is a leading scholar in the relationship between people, machines and other organisms.

Bruno Latour is a French philosopher, sociologist and anthropologist. He is known for his work in the field of science and technology studies, the field that studies the social aspects of science. He was professor at the Paris Institute of Political Studies. Besides his focus on sociological phenomena, Latour is engaging in philosophical reflections on our contemporary world, and more recently on the debates surrounding climate change.

Horst W.J. Rittel (1930-1990) was a German design theorist and professor and best known for the coining of 'wicked' problems. He became professor of Design Methodology in 1958 at the Ulm School of Design. From 1963 to 1990 he was professor of Science and Design at the University of California, Berkeley, Department of Architecture and City and Regional Planning. From 1973 to 1990, he was besides professor also director at the University of Stuttgart, faculty for Architecture and Town Planning.

Melvin M. Webber (1920-2006) was an urban designer, professor and institution builder active in the fields of city planning and transportation. He is professor emeritus at the University of California, Berkeley. Webber is best known for, alongside Rittel, coining 'wicked' problems and the plea to focus on the connections between 'non-place realms', approaching the city as a switchboard and advertising dispersed settlements as opposed to urban dense settlements.

Jerome Ravetz is a philosopher of Science. He received a PhD in Mathematics and continued as a professor teaching History & Philosophy of Science at Leeds University. He is best known for his work on scientific knowledge. Currently he is working on the management of uncertain-

ty in risks and environmental issues. Together with Silvio Funtowicz, he developed the concept of 'Post-Normal Science'.

Silvio Funtowicz is a philosopher of Science active in the field of Science and Technology studies. He is a professor at the University of Bergen (Norway) at the Centre for the Study of Sciences and the Humanities.

We want to thank everyone who shared his/her/their **position** with us.

Wanneer het stof is gaan liggen

Wanneer de wonderen gelikt maar niet geheeld zijn

Wanneer de doden geborgen maar niet vergeten zijn

Wanneer de maskers gezakt maar niet verdwenen zijn

Wanneer de ogen bereid zijn

Zullen we dan eindelijk?

Wanneer de monden weer proeven

Generaties weer doen wat ze moeten : verschillen

Wanneer we stap voor stap de hand reiken

Het stof uit onze ogen wrijven

En verzamelen wat we toen nog niet wisten

zullen we dan eindelijk?

Wanneer de bestemming bereikt is van de bestelling die nooit op tijd is

De strandbal het pleit van de zeeraket beslecht heeft

De schermen -verzadigd- geen mens meer belichten

Zullen we dan eindelijk?

Wanneer de gewezen vingers

verpulverd, verbrokkelijk, versplinterd

doelloos zwalpen door de straten

gespeend van avonduur

en niemand nog weet of er ooit wel een kamp was voor de bal

Zullen we dan?

Eindelijk?

Met knipperende ogen en open monden omkijken?

Zullen we zien dat we niet wisten hoe?

Zullen we praten in een ronde en geen halve

over de lange termijn die steeds korter wordt?

Zullen we praten met de handen in de aarde?

Zullen we zien dat we kantelen en zullen we kiezen?

Zullen we het vuur doen branden van wat leeft en doet leven?

Zullen we het weer weten?

Wie we zijn en wie we eten?

Zullen we de afgelegde maskers bewaren

om met kennis van zaken en weinig tijd

geschiedenis te schrijven?

Zullen we oversteken op de schouders van onze voorouders?

Zullen we kiezen?

De gangmakers eerst

visionairen en verwanten

studenten en zelfstandigen

grootouders en ondernemers

banken en geleerden

vertegenwoordigers en roepers

schrijvers en boeren

en dan de moedige massa

die niets minder dan de aarde is

die kantelt.

Maaike Neuville voor De Transformisten

Overview

Within our own **position**, as architecture students at Ghent University, we are being confronted with complex planetary and societal problems. This is something not only students, but also universities are struggling with. How does a university deal with its status quo on the one hand, namely being an academic institution where knowledge is produced and transformed into ‘excellence’; and the complexity of planetary and societal problems on the other hand?

As a starting point we have indicated that the world is confronted with ‘wicked’ problems. In taking this further, we have come up with two possible ways of dealing with this wickedness. In the following chapter ‘Wickedness and Universitas’ we will discuss the ‘status quo’ of a university and elude the three interwoven narratives, that came to the surface during Jokerweek. These following questions will be handled within a theoretical framework:

1. What is a ‘wicked’ problem?
2. How can boundaries be crossed and transcended to obtain other types of knowledge production?
3. Why is the urban and the local environment necessary?

This chapter includes several theoretical frameworks selected both from written literature as from several interviews we conducted within our research. Each of these ‘theories’ takes in its own **position** within these three intertwining narratives.

Later on, in the second chapter, we will delve deeper into the academic landscape of four universities and how they relate to these narratives.

1. University of Antwerp (UAntwerp)
2. Vrije Universiteit Brussel (VUB)²
3. University of the Western Cape (UWC)
4. Ghent University (UGhent)

In the final chapter we will look at four urban experiments within this academic landscape. We will look at how they activated both other kinds of knowledge production and engaged with the local urban environment to create change from within the academic landscape they are a part of (to a greater or lesser extent). These experiments are intervening on the status quo of a university by transcending the traditional physical and structural boundaries and actively pulling in the locality of their urban landscape.

1. Stadsform, Antwerp
2. Brussels Academy, Brussels
3. CHR, Cape Town
4. Stadsacademie, Ghent

I.

'In a knowledge society, the production and use of imagination and knowledge can no longer be outsourced only to professional corporations with internal rules, such as universities or research institutes.

They, after all, 'valorise' their social impact by marketing products. In a sustainable and social ecopolis, imagination, and therefore knowledge and creativity, are central to a democratic urban project.'

- Latour , Laboratory life, 1979

"I am arguing for politics and epistemologies of location, positioning, and situating, where partiality and not universality is the condition of being heard to make rational knowledge claims. These are claims on people's lives. I am arguing for the view from a body, always a complex, contradictory, structuring, and structured body, versus the view from above, from nowhere, from simplicity." - Haraway

In Haraway's paper, "Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective", she means to expose the illusion of scientific objectivity and the way 'truth' is made. The idea of 'situated knowledge' was developed in conversation with other feminist philosophers like Nancy Hartsock. Positionality determines how one learns to see and know things. How someone's position needs to be taken into account to break the stigma of the universal truth of scientific knowledge on which assumptions and hypotheses are made. The scientific world dominated by white male have co-created the idea of what is true. Objectivity is not neutral and is based on power. Objectivity as a view from above, from nowhere is a perspective that under the guise of neutrality hides a very specific position (male, white, heterosexual, human) and thus makes this position universal. Universality and objectivity are non-local. Already in 1988, she uncovers how the partial perspective of situated knowledge makes it possible to think outside the dichotomy of objectivity and relativism.

Wickedness & Universitas

The Status Quo of a University

"A university is an institution of higher learning providing facilities for teaching and research and authorised to grant academic degrees." [Merriam Webster Dictionary]

The word university is partly derived from the Latin word 'universitas' meaning a whole or a totality. In late Latin this word also began to mean a corporation or a collectivity. When a group of people started forming institutions of higher learning they would be called 'universitas magistrorum et scholarium'. This is where the word university is developed from. The term 'universitas' refers to a select group of professors and scholars in a protected environment where knowledge could be transferred.

Despite each university being bound to its own historical and local context, in its core, universities are oriented towards universal and general knowledge production. The university is a place where knowledge and science are measurable. Where a dominant framing creates 'the objective truth'. It is a place where a select group of privileged people used to be educated, be it an elite group of people, a discriminated group or a Flemish speaking group. Universities are, in their DNA, not working on their local context and its issues. Historically seen, universities in se are not engaging in situated knowledge.

Today, more than ever, universities need to break away from universal, generic and objectified knowledge. There is an urgent need for new kinds of knowledge production on the one hand and the incorporation of local issues on the other hand to be able to tackle today's challenges.

Situated knowledge is a term that was introduced by Donna Haraway in 1988. It reminds us knowledge is, and never can or will be neutral. Whenever knowledge is produced, it always originates from one or several position(s). All knowledge is situated in terms of values, beliefs and cultural differences. Situated knowledge is about communities, not about isolated individuals. The only way to discover a larger vision is to be somewhere in particular. Knowledge is always situated. The idea of context free knowledge and universal knowledge is idealistic as opposed to realistic. Knowledge is always situated historically, at a certain moment in time, and somewhere, in a specific place. In that sense knowledge varies from place to place and from time to time.

"The overall research and knowledge agendas of universities have always been structured both by internal path dependency of "normal science" and by external policies and funding mechanisms. These are now challenged by the renewed global context and its local appearances; Thus: the strategic goals of universities have to be adapted to and derived from the global systemic challenges." [Corijn, The Urban University]

'A university without the concept of future is no university at all' as said by Premesh Lalu. It is important to bring a network of international universities into the conversation about the future of the university. Universities in this world need to tackle serious issues. But at the same time Premesh Lalu emphasises the desire to create an estheticized University.

The Centre for Humanities Research is an argument for the University of the Western Cape to be a university of an aesthetic sensibility, a poetic and literary longing. Only then the university has the concept of future. When looking at the website of UWC, according to Premesh, is a corporate website. It has lost its sense of what it means to long to be at the university. This corporate website is part of the neoliberalisation of the university, which will be explained later on. It is no longer aesthetic, and it has lost its future.

'A de-estheticized University is precisely a neoliberal university, overcome with corporal pretensions and ideas it must somehow transform young black students into corporate able citizens, while in the past, apartheid wanted to turn black students into administrators.' - Lalu

Thomas Block- Stadsacademie

"It is really a challenge that I think our university still has to make big steps in. The fact Stadsacademie as part of the interdisciplinary consortium is embedded institutionally is formally kind of narrow-minded at the moment. But we really do profile ourselves as something transdisciplinary."
- Block

In the book ‘Down to Earth: Politics in the New Climate Regime’ Bruno Latour states that humankind needs to return back down to earth. He describes that modernisation and globalisation on the one hand and populism and the return to the local ethnicity on the other are part of the same problem: the denial of climate change, or rather the climate crisis.

The modern (hu)man wanted progress, wealth, emancipation, knowledge, ... In order to achieve this the borders of growth were opened up to the entire globe. Globalisation assumes an infinite growth, a growth that our planet can no longer sustain. Nevertheless, the globe has become a place for the elite who continue to bet on this growth for their own benefit, whilst knowing very well that multiple earths are needed to carry this further evolving modernisation. In the meantime, people are returning to their own limited locality and retreating behind closed national borders. In this sense they deny any other kinds of locality and the right for others to belong to the earth.

Both of these trends ‘globalisation’ and ‘localisation’ fall back on the ‘Out-of-This-World’ attractor. An attractor that offers an escape route to a non-shared world where climate change is not a reality and where responsibility is dodged. The Out-of-This-World attractor is most easily explained through the policy of former US President Donald J. Trump. It is the all-American dream substantiated on the ignorance and disbelief of climate change. In order to address the critical questions, such as migration, climate change and superdiversity, society must pivot ninety degrees from this global-local axis towards a second axis portrayed by the out-of-this-world and terrestrial actor. The terrestrial actor is the actor society should shift towards according to Latour, and it is ‘thanks to’ the disbelief of Trump and his administration that this has become visible. The earth is no longer the framework in which people live and act, but it has a capacity to act itself. We (humans, nature, animals, machines) are all connected to each other and act in response to one another; We are all ‘earthlings’.

Three Interwoven Narratives

1. Wicked Planetary and Societal Problems

Anno 2021, Covid-19 has brought humanity face to face with the fact that humankind is approaching the boundaries of our planet’s ability to sustain humanity and is therefore under pressure. There is a scientific consensus that in the longer run the world can no longer support the lifestyle that its inhabitants are living nowadays – recent climate protests translate this as ‘there is no planet B’. At this point in time, humanity has been plagued by a global pandemic for over a year. A pandemic that emphasises the growing inequality between countries, continents and groups of people, the lack of international solidarity. With the vaccines being rolled out, one cannot deny the ‘every country for itself’ logic that is taking the stage³ and the failure of globalisation in relation to health care and contamination. Few scientists will oppose to the statement that planet earth and society as a whole are out of balance because of the people who are inhabiting it. Therefore, young adults like us, from a fairly advantaged position as students, often feel that we are no longer living in a world where solidarity is the main motivation but where individualism is on the rise.

All of us, humans, are being confronted with tough planetary and societal problems. Problems that ask for transitioning solutions regarding mobility, (bio)diversity, climate change, inequality, digitalisation, ... which prove difficult to tackle. These problems are tainted by a wickedness: they cannot be solved from one point of view or knowledge framework. And, although science has made a lot of progress over the last century, a proper solution to current planetary and societal challenges such as climate change or water scarcity hasn’t been put on the table. Given the fact that the earth’s temperature is rising, and environmental changes are happening, why are solutions so hard to come by? According to Rittel and Webber, this is because these challenges, as listed above (and many more), fall into the category of ‘wicked’ problems.

The notion of ‘Wicked’ problems was first coined by two professors at the University of California, Berkeley, Rittel and Webber in the early seventies within the context of planning. Within ‘Dilemmas in a General Theory of Planning’ (1973) they clarify the notion of ‘wicked’ problems starting from the creation of the contemporary city and the challenges it has resulted in. Rittel and Webber address how these challenges are ‘wicked’ in their nature and cannot be solved by normal hierarchical scientific approaches where a problem is defined, a hypothesis made, an experiment conducted, and a solution/outcome provided.

The professional⁴ (as opposed to the layman⁵) used to be seen as a straight to the point

³ “The world is on the brink of a catastrophic moral failure – and the price of this failure will be paid with lives and livelihoods in the world’s poorest countries.” - Dr Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, WHO Director-General, 18 January 2021 <https://www.who.int/campaigns/annual-theme/year-of-health-and-care-workers-2021/vaccine-equity-declaration>

⁴ Having the type of job that is respected because it involves a high level of education and training. [Cambridge Dictionary]

⁵ Someone belonging to the mass of the people as distinguished from those of a particular profession or those specially skilled. [Merriam Webster Dictionary]

solving of problems, such as the paving of roads and the laying of pipes for drinkable water, with the contemporary city of the authors as the ultimate outcome of these straightforward problem-based solutions. That contemporary city, although raised on ‘simple’ questions, has also uncovered stubborn questions due to rising pluralism⁶, (social) diversity and the differentiation of values due to migration and intermixing of cultures.

“There seems to be a growing realization that a weak strut in the professional's support system lies at the juncture where goal-formulation, problem-definition and equity issues meet.” – Rittel and Webber

Before Rittel and Webber, in the Industrial era, planning was complemented with efficiency. People strived for a low input of resources necessary to achieve the desired outcome. Efficiency reduced planning to problem-based solutions while keeping the cost low. Rittel and Webber acknowledge that the problems (such as connecting two places by (rail)road) the industrial era was facing were simple and could thus be assigned to a technically skilled person.

Goal-finding⁷ or goal setting, in the new environment of the contemporary city of the 70s, was looking like a difficult task, and let it be that goal-finding was, at the time of Rittel and Webber, at the basis of planning. This goal-finding principle resulted in two contradictory forms: the belief that humans can perfectly shape, plan out the future (cities) on the one hand and the disbelief of planning large societal systems on the other hand.

“Systems analysis, goals commissions, PPBS⁸, social indicators, the several revolts, the poverty program, model cities, the current concerns with environmental quality and with the qualities of urban life, the search for new religions among contemporary youth, and the increasing attractiveness of the planning idea-all seem to be driven by a common quest. Each in its peculiar way is asking for a clarification of purposes, for a redefinition of problems, for a re-ordering of priorities to match stated purposes, for the design of new kinds of goal-directed actions, for a reorientation of the professions to the outputs of professional activities rather than to the inputs into them, and then for a redistribution of the outputs of governmental programs among the competing publics.” - Rittel and Weber

The years up to the seventies (and also afterwards), were characterized by the belief in make-ability. The belief that an idealized planning system can and would function – think about the New Towns or La Ville Radieuse by Le Corbusier. However, in the years of Rittel and Webber, as spoken from a 1973 point of view and as mankind had evolved from an industrial city to a contemporary city, planning commenced to be addressed from a

⁶ “Pluralism is a political philosophy holding that people of different beliefs, backgrounds, and lifestyles can coexist in the same society and participate equally in the political process.” [Thoughtco]. The notion of pluralism is very much connected to that of positionality. For example, take the discipline of architecture. It is only through focussing on pluralism and noting that there is more than one path for an architect to go, that the theme of the Jokerweek evolved into ‘positioning oneself as an architect’ and later on into ‘positioning oneself in society’

⁷ In 1960 goal formulation/finding/setting was on the up-rise in The United States of America. A publication by Charles J. Hitch, within the RAND committee urged Americans to assess the objectives of research as critically as the models and given inputs moving from questions such as ‘What are machines made of?’ to ‘What do machines do?’ This was complemented by the publication of Goals for America under President Eisenhower setting the goals and projects for the next decade. Goal setting consists of creating an action plan designed to help groups or individuals to reach a specific goal

⁸ planning, programming and budgeting systems

different perspective. Planners had started to ask themselves the questions if what they are doing and the issues they were defining were in fact right. They began to realize that defining and locating problems is one of an obsolete character:

“We have been learning to see social processes as the links tying open systems into large and interconnected networks of systems, such that outputs from one become inputs to others. In that structural framework it has become less apparent where problem centres lie, and less apparent where and how we should intervene even if we do happen to know what aims we seek.” – Rittel and Webber

The plurality and diversity of contemporary cities form barriers for the possibility of a unitary approach, of planning systems and form the basis of planetary and societal challenges. Standard, analytical scientific methods cannot be applied to these open societal systems as they result in a unitary solution for a complex problem. Planners deal with societal and political issues for which a unitary approach is impossible and far too simple to grasp the pluralities on which it is built.

“The kinds of problems that planners deal with-societal problems-are inherently different from the problems that scientists and perhaps some classes of engineers deal with. Planning problems are inherently wicked.” – Rittel and Webber

Characteristic	Tame problem	Wicked problem
The problem	The clear definition of the problem also unveils the solution. The solution is determined according to criteria revealing the degree of effect: goal is achieved fully or partially, outcome is true or false	No agreement exists about what the problem is. Each attempt to create a solution changes the problem. The solution is not true or false—the end is assessed as better or worse or good enough
Role of stakeholders	The causes of a problem are determined primarily by experts using scientific data (e.g. clinical trials)	Many stakeholders are likely to have differing ideas about what the real problem is and what its causes are
The stopping role	The task is complete when the problem is solved	The end is determined either by stakeholders, political forces, and resource availability or a combination thereof
Nature of the problem	The problem is like other problems for which there are scientifically based protocols that guide the choice of solution(s)	Solution(s) to problem is (are) based on judgments of multiple stakeholders; there is no best practice. Every problem is unique and solutions must be tailored

*Taken from Kreuter et al.¹

Figure 1: Summary of Differences Between Tame Problems and Wicked Problems (Michael Hamm)

These ‘wicked’ problems as proposed by Rittel and Webber stand opposite so-called ‘tame’ problems where the mission and formulation are clear, and a linear algorithm can be applied to solve them, for example, solving a mathematical question or baking a cake. Rittel and Webber drew up 10 different points to describe ‘wicked’ problems:

1. “There is no definitive formulation of a wicked problem
2. Wicked problems have no stopping rule.
3. Solutions to wicked problems are not true-or-false, but good-or-bad
4. There is no immediate and no ultimate test of a solution to a wicked problem.
5. Every solution to a wicked problem is a ‘one-shot operation’; because there is no opportunity to learn by trial-and-error, every attempt counts significantly
6. Wicked problems do not have an enumerable (or an exhaustively describable) set of potential solutions, nor is there a well-described set of permissible operations that may be incorporated into the plan.
7. Every wicked problem is essentially unique.
8. Every wicked problem can be considered to be a symptom of another problem.
9. The existence of a discrepancy representing a wicked problem can be explained in numerous ways. The choice of explanation determines the nature of the problem’s resolution.
10. The planner has no right to be wrong”

The classical approach of science where the assumption is made that problems and issues of a planning kind can be split up into different hierarchical phases that lead to a solution is not adapted to the planetary and societal challenges, as have been listed before (and many more).

Classical approach:

Understanding the problem → gathering information → analysing & synthesising → creating a solution

These problems tainted by a wickedness, in the sense of something devious with unpredictable consequences, are ambiguous and vague. And as many different stakeholders are involved and influenced by political, social and ecological reality, ‘wicked’ problems aren’t set in stone and are ever evolving/changing, bound to the context they are situated in, making each one particular. ‘Wicked’ problems are characterized by a colliding of different complex issues in a dynamic context with new forms of ‘wicked’ problems often appearing when trying to understand another ‘wicked’ problem. A classical approach of science can and will not lead to a ‘solution’.

In short, problems can be defined as ‘wicked’ problems whenever there are multiple uncertainties involved regarding the knowledge framework on which to build these ‘planetary and societal’ challenges. And secondly, whenever the disagreement in norms and values of multiple stakeholders involved is high. These two things and the interconnectivity between different ‘wicked’ problems make them much more difficult to address.

Throughout the dissertation we will address ‘wicked’ problems as ‘wicked’ planetary and societal problems. As ‘wicked’ problems are often connotated with climate change and ecological issues we would like to broaden this connotation with the cultural, social and political hence transforming it to ‘wicked’ planetary (in the sense of the planet as an ecosystem where all inhabitants on earth; humans, animals, plants, fungi, bacteria, ... live together) and societal (derived from man-made society which is, in its nature, linked to its political, social and cultural climate) challenges.

These ‘wicked’ planetary and societal challenges lead to the necessity to move away from a universal knowledge production. Creating universal knowledge gives the impression that everything can be solved in a similar way. We can state that today’s challenges are context-bound and differ from place to place. In order to tackle the ‘wicked’ planetary and societal problems of today, a transdisciplinary approach within the local urban environment is vital.

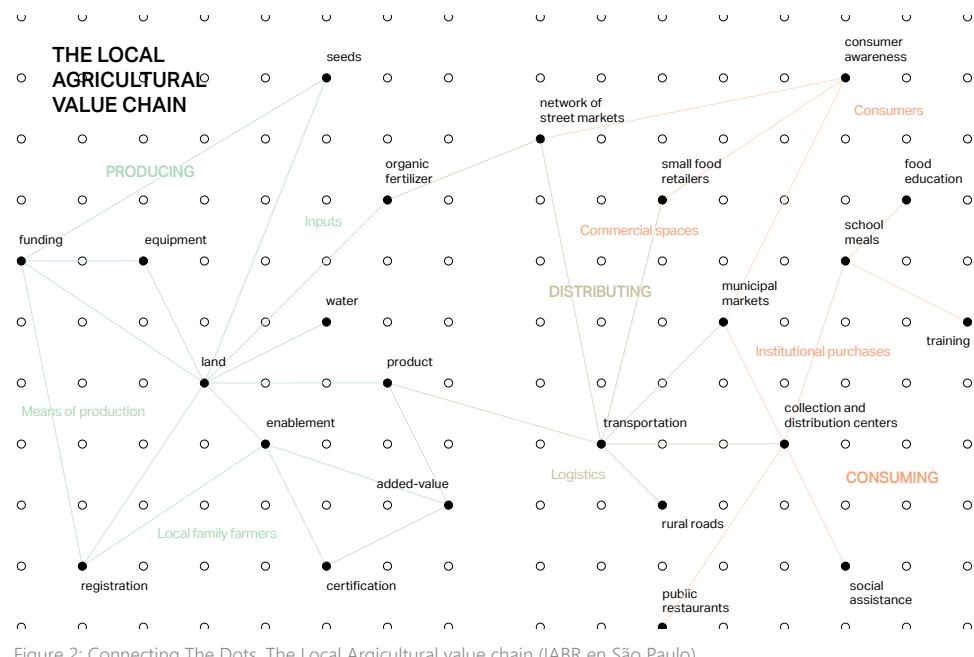
An example of a ‘wicked’ issue is the question regarding food production.

Within this issue there are many different stakeholders involved, whom all have their own perspective and position on how to address food production. This often divides the food question into several dimensions: There is the perspective of the farmer, who is protective of his agriculture lands, as they depend on their lands to make a living. Secondly, there is the policy of a city, that may or may not be striving to provide a sustainable food system. There is conducted research within universities, in which different departments, each within their own disciplines are conducting research on food production from a health perspective, an economical perspective, a diversity perspective, an ecological perspective... There is the consumer, the entrepreneur, the citizen, ... who all have their own position regarding the issue. All these positions show how the issue is too often tackled in a mono-disciplinary approach, which makes the sustainable food production question a very tough challenge to solve.

Although all cities are seemingly facing similar questions, they are different due to their context-bound nature. Food production isn't a problem that can be solved through a step-by-step guide. It is linked to climate, which is linked to capital, which is linked to inequality, which is linked to poverty, ... which are all interlinked with each other. There is an interconnectivity between these separate 'wicked' problems.

Should food be locally produced or globally spread? Should healthy food only be accessible to the middle and upper class to keep our economy thriving? If food is harvested locally, are there enough farms close-by to feed everyone? Is it possible to produce locally within the agricultural economy and financing system for local farmers? How do you make healthy food and nutrition accessible for lower income groups?

There isn't one solution to how the food question should be answered, nor is there one and the same vision between all stakeholders. It's an issue that's ecologically, socially and economically interwoven, not to mention politically.



2. Transcending Boundaries

Wickedness calls for other ways of producing knowledge that don't resemble the 'status quo' of a university in general. There is a need for the co-production of knowledge. There is a need for crossing and transcending the existing disciplinary boundaries. A need for new forms of knowledge and education. Whether this is slow science, Mode 2 science, sustainability science or post normal science (see further); transdisciplinarity and co-creation are 'key'.

Since the 90s, new modes of research have been stimulated by scientist and policy makers who've accepted that science has not been responding to the challenges of its time. Introduced as a response, Post-normal Science (PNS) is a model of scientific process pioneered by Jerome Ravetz and Silvio Funtowicz, which describes the peculiar challenges science encounters where "facts are uncertain, values in dispute, stakes high and decisions urgent." In light of these challenges, Ravetz and Funtowicz introduced three different strategies for a possible engagement between science and society.

These strategies, or types of science are dependent on the intensity of uncertainties in the system and the intensity of differences in values or the stakes involved in the decision. First of all, applied science can be used when uncertainties are low or exist only at a technical level and decision stakes are low because there are no external interests or stakeholders involved in the research or the involved parties don't have diverging interests and values. In this case the normal way⁹¹of doing science can be conducted and the available expertise is fully effective. This puzzle-solving normal science becomes inadequate whenever system uncertainties and stakes rise to a medium level. This medium level, professional consultancy, deals with new and unexpected situations where decisions might have a bigger impact on society. Finally, when both system uncertainties and decision stakes are very high, post normal science comes into the picture as a democratic scientific process that makes dialogue and participation across stakeholders possible.

Post-normal Science, as opposed to normal science, crosses disciplinary lines and involves new processes, methods and experimental systems. Post-normal Science pressures the division between the so-called alpha, beta and gamma sciences¹⁰² and is set on bringing knowledge production into the world and not keeping it within the walls of the university, hence, also focussing on transdisciplinary ways of teaching, learning and doing research.

⁹¹ In 'The Structure of Scientific Revolutions', Thomas Kuhn observes that normal science is the regular work of scientists theorizing, observing, and experimenting within a settled paradigm or an explanatory framework.

¹⁰² In the 19th century the organisation of universities and the professionalisation of science have created a division within the different scientific disciplines. Alpha sciences study the products of human action (such as History, Literature & linguistics). Beta sciences study non-human nature (Biology, physics, ...). Gamma sciences study human action (psychology, sociology, economy, ...). [Wetenschapsfilosofie].

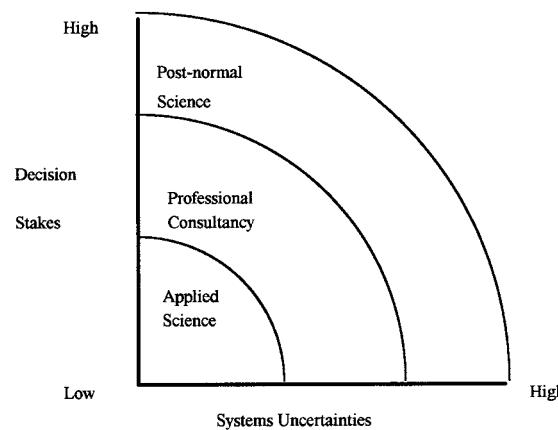


Figure 3: From Applied Science to Professional Consultancy to Post-Normal Science (Ravetz, J. (1999))

Parallel to PNS other similar concepts of knowledge and science production present a similar argument: slow science, ‘mode 2’ science, sustainability science,...

Slow science is part of the slow movement. Instead of providing a quick fix for societal problems, scientist should take time to think and read, and science should be a slow, methodological process. Slow science is a critique against the competitive academical landscape characterised by a time crunch on publishing and writing articles, on achieving results. A landscape where researchers need to publish at a constant pressure to keep their job or ranking.

“We are scientists. We don’t blog. We don’t twitter. We take our time. [...] We do need time to think. We do need time to digest. We do need time to misunderstand each other, especially when fostering lost dialogue between humanities and natural sciences. We cannot continuously tell you what our science means; what it will be good for; because we simply don’t know yet.” [Slow Science Academy]

The terms ‘Mode 1 and Mode 2 Science’ have been introduced by six different authors; Michael Gibbons, Camille Limoges, Helga Nowotny, Simon Schwartzman, Peter Scott and Martin Trow. ‘Mode 1’ knowledge production is the traditional research-based scientific knowledge. Within ‘Mode 1’ Science knowledge is perceived as universal, academic, certain and neutral. The approach is mono-disciplinary and technocratic, and the researchers are independent, neutral observers. The authors point out that the convention for evaluating knowledge reflects this ‘Mode 1’ thinking. ‘Mode 2’ knowledge production is,

on the contrary, an argument to perceive knowledge from within its context as an uncertainty that needs to be approached transdisciplinary and participative by engaged and self-reflexive researchers.

Despite differences in approach or formulation, each of these approaches to science acknowledges the fact that in order to tackle ‘wicked’ societal and planetary problems there is a need for a co-productive process in which transdisciplinarity is crucial.

“Transdisciplinarity is a reflexive, integrative, method-driven scientific approach aiming to bring change to WREST (wicked, real, world sustainability) problems by differentiating and integrating knowledge that crosses disciplinary boundaries and involves cooperation between academics (including students) and other societal actors” – Block

Mono-disciplinary research only draws on one scientific discipline to solve a problem, while multi-disciplinary research is conducted on an issue from different disciplines without crossing the boundaries of those disciplines. Furthermore, interdisciplinary research represents situations where research process integrates elements from several different disciplines. Both multi- and interdisciplinary research stay within the academic environment, whereas transdisciplinary research and education aim to formulate an answer to problems outside of the academic landscape by crossing the boundaries between different knowledge systems¹¹. Transdisciplinarity is the involvement of different scientific disciplines and non-academic actors, expertise and experiences into research processes to integrate and produce knowledge necessary to create solutions for planetary and societal challenges.

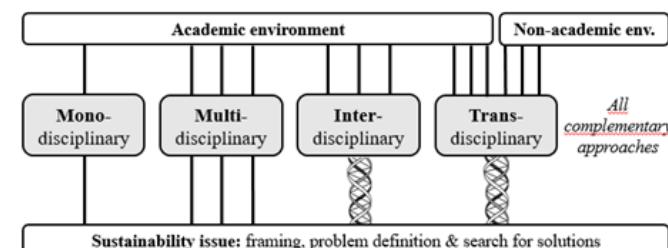


Figure 4: From monodisciplinarity to transdisciplinarity (Block et al. 2019: 33)

¹¹ For us, the authors, the university, the city, corporations or other stakeholders can be interpreted as different knowledge systems.

3. The Urban and the Local Environment

Within this narrative we push the urban and the local environment forward. Taken together, the urban and the local landscape form a possible way to address the planetary and societal problems the world is facing. They form a testing ground on how to approach these issues.

The urban environment is a spatial production in which different actors and processes are included, as a shared and dynamic, not to mention social construction. Within the urban environment, the city is the body that makes action possible, the city is the (governing) actor of its environment. Moreover, the urban environment is an interaction of contingencies. These contingencies define and influence the ‘physical’ reality of the urban tissue and are, at the same time, constituted by the specificity of this tissue. Therefore, we take both the urban as well as the local environment to define the scale that is needed to address wickedness.

The local environment is the spatial production one is most familiar. By breathing and living the space people inhabit, people connect and understand their own particular context or local environment most.

Why the urban environment?

We move the urban landscape forward as the space par excellence where the wickedness of problems is brought to light in the clearest way possible. The urban landscape can be best described as a coming together of different political, social and cultural beliefs. A landscape characterised by pluralism. It is a landscape where man must learn to live with man and man must learn to be in balance with nature and the ecological systems beneath the built infrastructure.

The last century has been dominated by a rapid growth of our cities. In terms of the built landscape and how it has evolved, globalisation has, is and will continue to keep evolving hand in hand with urbanisation. In 1900 the world had eleven cities of more than one million inhabitants. This number has risen to over five hundred forty-five urban areas with over one million inhabitants of which some even have over thirty(!) million inhabitants. Fifty percent of all people live in cities and the majority of people in urban environments.

This growth, due to migrations beyond borders as well as within borders (from rural to urban areas) towards the urban environment, has resulted in cities becoming more and more socially and economically diverse and challenged by pluralism. The city needs to respond to the current challenges, as Eric Corijn wrote in his book: ‘a city is not a country, it is a whole world’. After all the (metropolitan) city represents the complexity of the world in the best possible way: they carry the new economy, and they form the nodes of networks in the world system. This urban environment is eminently the place to respond

to today’s ‘wicked’ issues. Within transdisciplinary frameworks urban policies can provide an answer to tackle issues such as: mobility, education, energy, art, culture, collective provision, ...

Corijn addresses the complex challenges cities face in three categories: the ecological, social and cultural challenges. The planetary challenges (ecological) range from carbon emissions, to resource depletion, loss of biodiversity, climate change, food crisis, water scarcity, air pollution... The relationship between nature and the urban is distorted by today’s economy counting on an unlimited growth, a growth that our planet cannot keep up with. The ecological footprint of cities and humans demands multiple earths, which are clearly not available. There is the necessity to, once again, live in symbiosis with nature, animals, bacteria, ..., to form one ecosystem in which all inhabitants of earth can peacefully live together without one of them irreversibly destroying the other.

The second category Corijn describes is the growing social inequality. Cities are characterised by a growing differentiation between elite neighbourhoods and slum areas. Forty percent of Earth’s human inhabitants sustains life with only five percent of the overall income while eighty percent of the overall income goes to ten percent of the population.

Lastly, he describes the cultural category: the superdiversity that urban life is tainted with. Society is transitioning from a space of places to a space of flows with the urban environment being the main nodes in a network of interactions that transcends human made national boundaries and demarcated territories. These urban environments are the places where innovation takes place and are identified as a place of arrival for newcomers, students, migrants, expats, any starter in life really. Multiple different cultures, norms and values, languages, and lifestyles are accumulating in the urban environment. The diverging internal structures of the city as a node and the nation state, to whom the (territory of the) city ‘belongs’ is causing a tension between the two. The cities have long surpassed the idea of one nation: of one people, one state, one culture. As they transcend boundaries, cities are no longer products of a nation state but nodes in a global system.

“Cities cannot build on common roots, but have to project a common destiny, a futures project. Social integration and civic solidarity have to be combined with respect for multicultural and multi-religious realities.” – Corijn

Nowadays large urban agglomerations are taking on an ever-greater role. All over the world the networks in between urban landscapes are growing. This connection is non territorial; it is moving towards a world system without actually encompassing the whole world. Urbanity is complex but closer to reality. Urban life is more universal than national. The time has come for new geo-political structures, that start from the urban environment as a post-national form of coexistence, to take the reins.

Urbanity is a new way of living together that transcends the 19th century model of the nation state. Urban politics will be able to respond to obtain a sustainable social ecosystem, a redistribution of the commons, and to create an environment where people can live together in diversity and respect. Instead of looking at space made by political borders and structures the attention needs to be shifted towards shared space and the

urban and social geography of this space. To looking at space from different scales instead of borders. When talking about the space of the urban landscape there is a shift happening from the static object of architectural production to a spatial production in which different actors and processes are included, as a shared and dynamic construction. In a post-national world, the local urban living environment can be appropriated as a common ground.

"Society is becoming more and more diverse. What we share is the space we use together. We take the city as a common denominator to talk about our living environment. That's why we don't speak of urbanism, spatial planning or architecture but we speak of 'city-making' as a social process and all disciplines and all actors involved in it." – Devos

Why the local environment?

Urbanity is more universal than national. Nevertheless, within the urban landscape as place to address 'wicked' planetary and societal problems, one is best attained to work on their own local urban context, as it is the place people are most familiar with, the place they know the most about, the place they are intrinsically linked to. Wickedness forces us to think more 'practical' and to disseminate the universal from the particular. As Donna Haraway stated, knowledge is bound to its context and differs between places as it keeps on evolving within a dynamic society. Planetary and societal issues and questions, although connotated as global and systemic are context-bound. They are dependent on the socio-cultural, ecological and socio-economic environment. A city facing poverty in South Africa and a city facing poverty in Europe are bound to their own context characterised by their own climate, configuration of cultures, mentality and so on.

With the local context and global systemic challenges in mind, we advance the university as a space where, through use of transdisciplinary research, education and knowledge (with non-academic stakeholder), the complexity of the city can start to be approached as a node in a global network instead of a nation state product.

"The local needs to be redefined, not as a place in a country, or as an administrative boundary of a local government, but as a relatively independent entity of proximity connected to a world system." – Corijn

Conclusion

The local and urban environment, its governing actors and citizens will have an increasingly important role in tackling the societal, 'wicked' issues of today. A non-denial portion of knowledge is produced within the confinement of institutions like universities. Therefore, it is important to reorganise the knowledge from within institutions, to adapt the structure and to engage with the environment it is embedded in. The existing knowledge production of universities is strongly oriented towards a national policy in their composition, management and financing. Partly because of this, the knowledge development is compartmentalised and focused within disciplines and faculties rather than on more practice-oriented knowledge questions that are situated at the scale of the local context of the city or the neighbourhood. A strengthening of knowledge systems for decentralised urban policy¹² could help provide an answer to the challenge of incorporating the local context. A task-oriented way of working in practice requires new ways of working and thinking in which transdisciplinary knowledge will be necessary. Universities can help in improving their own urban and local surroundings. Cities all over the world are (to no avail) trying to solve complex problems with context-bound solutions. In order to succeed, cities need partners like the university as both centre of excellences and urban actors to help tackle these wickednesses.

'To be a good scientist, you have to become an urban scientist' [Corijn]. It is time for scientists, universities, students and society to step outside of their comfort zone. It is time for transversality. It is time to bridge and reconstruct. The three interwoven narratives are not a plea for de-institutionalisation, but a plea for enabling change from inside out. Therefore, a university that desires to actively take a **position** is a university that engages in transdisciplinary learning and its own local environment. A university that isn't nation bound but engages with its own context, city and communities. This does not oppose to the necessity of academic excellence in providing in-depth research of specific problems. However, when these problems become 'wicked', the need is high to create a healthy mix of expertise and discipline-bound knowledge together with non-academic and context-bound knowledge. At the same time, it is our personal opinion that other possible ways to tackle wickedness should exist and can co-exist with the above proposed approach.

Within the following chapter we will zoom in on the academic landscape of four different universities whom all share a common ground. They are in the midst of a 'world in change' and struggle with their **position** as universities. The 'wicked' planetary and societal problems of today, pose challenges to these institutions and their **position**. How do they deal with these societal issues? How do they leave room for pedagogical experiments and the crossing of boundaries? And in what way do they draw the local (urban) context into their institution?

¹² For example, Belgium has two levels of governance: Regions, subdivided in provinces and municipalities and communities that all have their own specific competences and administrative bodies.

The Academic Landscape

Universities in general have two main focus points: education and research. For generations on end, there has often been a focus on the valorisation of academic research within a university. Often the emphasis has been on using the research within the private sector and contributing to the economic growth. Universities positioned themselves as ‘entrepreneurial universities’ or ‘centres of excellence’. This is, many times substantiated through the concept of neoliberalism¹³, which creates a university that is market-driven and prepares students for a neoliberal world symbolised by corporate competitiveness at a global scale. The research department of such a university doesn’t only become a potential puppet on a string scrambling for international research funds but is also at risk of being confined to the technocratic needs of the business world. *‘The neoliberal university restructures the location of the university in wider societal and politico economic structures.’* [Risager and Thorup]. Stuck in competition and rising tuition fees, the ‘neoliberal’ university tends to lose sight of its potential as a social actor.

Globalisation has imminently brought universities face to face with a rising tension: How does a university, reconcile its **position** as a knowledge centre in an international field on the one hand with a **position** as an urban actor on the other hand? How can a university take on a societal role without having to undercut its ranking on a global level? Do scientists need to be taken away from their ivory tower to talk about the ‘wicked’ issues happening at the local level of their urban landscape? Universities are in the midst of reflecting on what kind of knowledge ecosystem they want to be active in and how, for example, they profile themselves as a knowledge partner for the local urban environment and vice versa.

“Rector of the University of Ghent Rik Van De Walle, Rector of the Vrije Universiteit Brussel Caroline Pauwels, Rector of the Catholic University of Louvain Vincent Blondel, Rector of the Saint-Louis University Pirre Jadoul and Rector of the University of Namur Naji Habra are leading one of the climate marches together with young people. In doing so, supporting these activist adolescents who are urging that it is time to take action to combat global warming” [VRT]

¹³ “Neoliberalism, ideology and policy model that emphasizes the value of free market competition. Although there is considerable debate as to the defining features of neoliberal thought and practice, it is most commonly associated with laissez-faire economics. In particular, neoliberalism is often characterized in terms of its belief in sustained economic growth as the means to achieve human progress, its confidence in free markets as the most-efficient allocation of resources, its emphasis on minimal state intervention in economic and social affairs, and its commitment to the freedom of trade and capital.” [Encyclopedia Britannica].

Within recent years Universities (or other higher education institutions) are ever evolving as a result of and with these changing expectations in society. They are trying to explore and develop cooperation in and with the urban environment. They are presenting themselves as ‘urban actors’ or ‘engaged universities’. These ‘new’ possibilities are more than ever related to the impact education and research at universities can have on complex planetary and societal issues. (This is intrinsically linked to the embedment of a university in its urban fabric.) Recently, the role of universities within the community and society has become a central element in the mission statements and strategies of these institutions.

Within this chapter we will delve deeper into the academic landscape of four universities.

1. University of Antwerp (UAntwerp), Antwerp
2. Vrije Universiteit Brussel (VUB), Brussels
3. University of the Western Cape (UWC), Cape Town
4. University of Ghent (UGhent), Ghent

All universities share a common ground; they are a part of a 'world in change' and struggle to find their place and meaning in society and in an ever more demanding environment. The status quo is challenged, and universities will be forced to redefine themselves going forward:

1. How do they deal with these societal and planetary ‘wicked’ problems?
2. How do they leave room for pedagogical experimentation, for the crossing of boundaries and for opening up to a transdisciplinary approach?
3. In what way do they draw the urban and the local context into their institution?

We chose to analyse these universities in relation to the three previously explained narratives; defining ‘wicked’ planetary and societal problems, the necessity for transcending the boundaries of disciplines and institutions and the importance of the local urban environment. In order not to create any hierarchy, the universities are analysed in the alphabetical order of the cities they are located in. The following sections encompass a lot of quotes, this to value and respect the connotation of the voices of these four different universities. By looking at the various mission statements, by conducting interviews, by studying websites and reading articles we have tried to formulate a broader context of this academic landscape. This, in order to be able to **position** four urban experiments within their academic landscapes later on.



Figure 5: Rectors of Belgian universities at the head of the 14th climate march (VRT)

Antwerpen
204,5 km²
529 681 inhabitants



1000m

5000m

The University of Antwerp (UAntwerp)



©2003

Rector: Herman Van Goethem

20 367 students

9 faculties

1. Business and Economics
2. Pharmaceutical,Veterinary and Biomedical Sciences
3. Medicine and Health Sciences
4. Arts and Philosophy
5. Design Sciences
6. Social Sciences
7. Law
8. Applied Engineering Sciences
9. Science

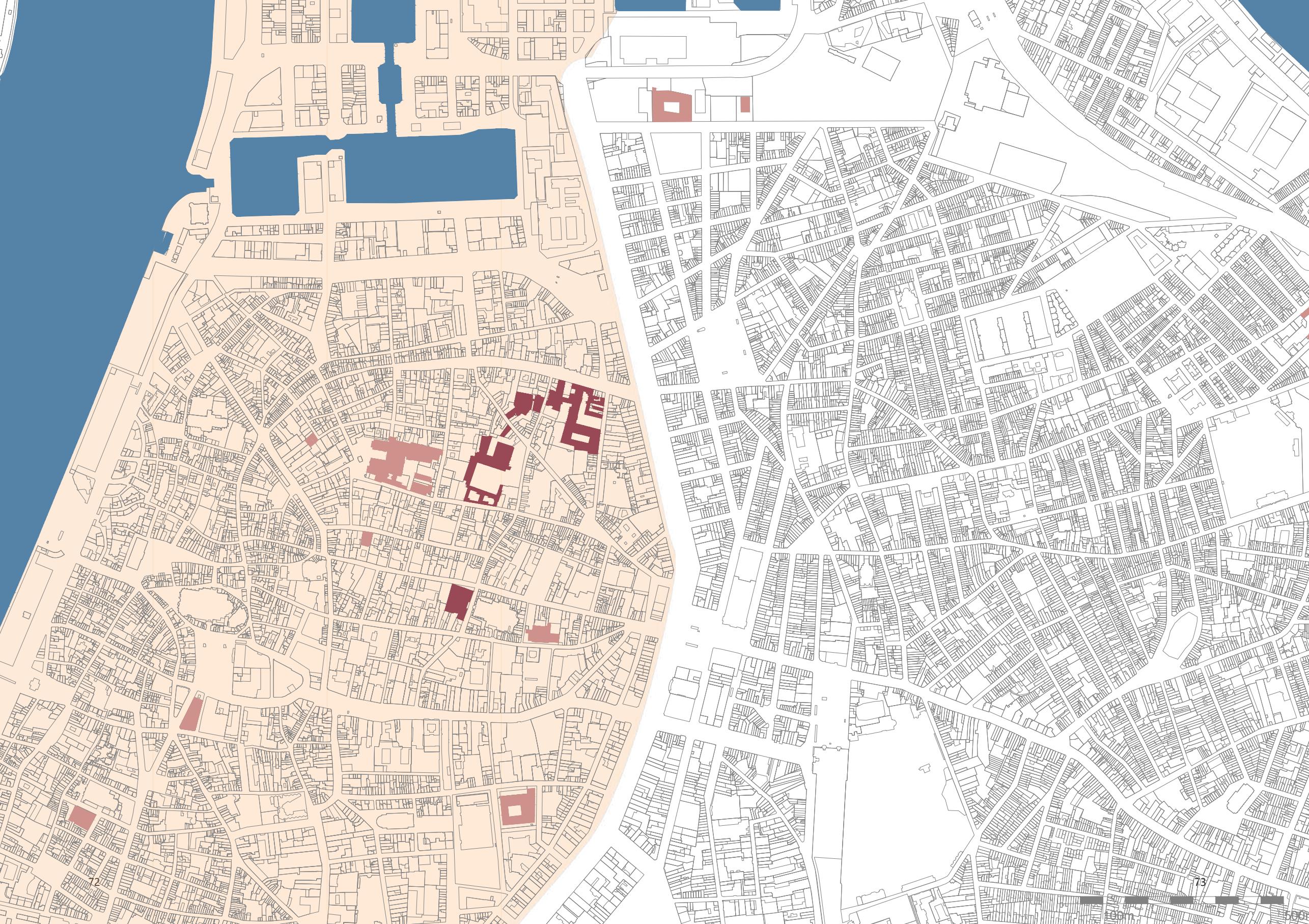
City Campus

The university has four main campuses, three of them are located in the outskirts of the city, the main campus is located in the heart of the city. (see inzoom)

Middelheim Campus

Groenenborger Campus

Drie Eiken Campus



History and Background

The University of Antwerp is the ‘youngest’ University of the four and stems from a confederation with the same name: University of Antwerp (1973). It is a merger of three smaller universities that were already present in the urban tissue:

- UFSIA (Universitaire Faculteiten Sint-Ignatius Antwerpen) – founded in 1852 as ‘Institut Saint-Ignace’ and received the label of university in 1965.
- RUCA (Rijksuniversitair Centrum Antwerpen) – founded in 1852 as ‘Institut Supérieur de Commerce de l’Etat’ and received the label of university in 1965.
- UIA (Universitaire Instelling Antwerpen) – founded in 1971.

This confederation officially became a university in October of 2003 under Chancellor Professor Doctor Francis baron Van Loon. Currently, Herman van Goethem is starting his second four-year term as chancellor of the university.

Vision Statement

“It is a young university that combines the assets of its historical roots with its ambition to contribute positively to society.”

Mission statement

“The University of Antwerp:

- is a young, dynamic and forward-thinking university. It integrates the assets of its historic roots with its ambition to contribute positively to society.
- develops, provides access to and disseminates scientific knowledge through research, teaching and **service to society**. It carries out these tasks in a spirit of academic freedom and responsibility.
- espouses active **pluralism**. In that spirit, it stimulates critical research and teaching, reflection and debate on scientific, social, philosophical and ethical questions.
- conducts creative and innovative scientific research which strives for **international excellence**. It stimulates both basic and applied research and their valorisation.
- offers internationally accredited academic teaching based on scientific research. It aims at the development and integration of knowledge, skills and attitudes that will prepare its students to take responsibility in society.
- stimulates public debate and greatly values its staff and students' service to society.
- is active in a **global environment**. It stimulates its staff and student's international orientation.
- is committed to the development of its city and region. With its partners in the Antwerp University Association, it takes responsibility for higher education in the **Antwerp region**.
- attaches great importance to its close, historic links with Antwerp University Hospital and Antwerp Management School. It seeks constructive partnerships in the fields of research, teaching and academic service to society. In addition, the University shares its expertise with both **public and private partners**.
- fosters **diversity** and offers its staff and students equal opportunities and maximum potential for personal development.
- ensures the quality (education - research) and **sustainability** of its activities. Its contact with students, staff and other stakeholders is constructive, respectful and open-minded.”

The draft for the latest policy document (2020-2024) for the University of Antwerp includes several key elements:

- Collaboration (with mutual trust)
- Act local, think global
- Highest possible quality in education, research and services to the university and society
- Laboratory of the modern, multi-diverse 21st century city
- Research with a universal scope
- International students

"Starting next academic year, the University of Antwerp will offer an elective on climate change to students in the second or third bachelor in all programs. The course is part of a new 'basket of broadening and interdisciplinary electives'. One subject, life philosophy, is mandatory, the rest are free to choose. We want to encourage students to supplement coursework with a social engagement and world citizenship component," Rector Herman Van Goethem said earlier." [De Tijd]

From 2019 onwards the university of Antwerp has, more explicitly, started engaging its students in the planetary and societal issues and debates society faces and is confronted with. The introduction of a 'new basket of broadening and interdisciplinary electives' will encompass a range of courses where societal and planetary challenges or interculturality are key such as sustainability and the environment, cultural diversity and modern media. Besides these electives the university is also moving towards developing a new Master in Bioscience in Sustainable Urban Development.

As many cities, including Antwerp, are becoming more and more diverse, the university has been coping with a decrease of student enrolment. Although the university, as of school-year 2019-2020 had 20.8% students with a migration background as opposed to 12.5% only five years earlier, the university is not adapted enough to the current diversity. Tackling this diversity not only requires an adjustment of the academic orientation (inside-out) but also a deep understanding and consideration of the needs and desires of the diverse city and its student population (outside-in).

"Over the next decade Antwerp will evolve into a majority-minority city, with the majority of its inhabitants made up of a range of minorities. Based on its mission as a socially engaged university, the University of Antwerp has always endeavoured to promote the inflow, through-flow and outflow of students from disadvantaged groups. Nevertheless, our university needs to position itself even more in this respect, both internally and externally. There is a discrepancy between the potential inflow of quality students from disadvantaged groups from secondary education and their presence at the University of Antwerp. Moreover, a recent study showed that their study success is significantly lower than the study success of non-opportunity groups. In order to make progress, we will join forces and optimize the available internal expertise (CeMIS, Department of University & Society, Department of Social, Cultural and Student Services, student associations)." [Policy Plan 2016-20]

The University is also trying to cope with this decrease through multiple undertakings over the past couple of years. From 2016-2020 the attention was placed on the Diversity Action Plan which looks at the process and results of students from disadvantaged backgrounds. During this term (2020-2024) diversifying the university will also include the examination of poverty and the implementation of inclusion programmes for incoming mobility students.

Education

The University of Antwerp engages in quality and innovative education focused on five different characteristics:

- Competency-based education
- Nexus educational research
- Internationalisation
- Activating
- Student-centred education

Competency-based education is focused on an integrated use of knowledge, skills and attitudes where competencies are equally and gradually built up. The objective for nexus educational research aims for 'students to develop competence to independently acquire new knowledge and insight' and 'to become aware of the need to act with scientific integrity in the entire scientific process' [UAntwerp]. At last, the university is determined to include international and inter-cultural competencies, uses non-Flemish teaching materials or teachers, engages in Erasmus+(-like) programmes and teaches students how to work and do research in an international setting. They are also committed to international consortia.

"I also want to strengthen our policy of excellence through incentives for top students (summer schools and doctoral scholarships with further specialisation at major universities abroad." [Draft Policy Plan 2020-2024]

The university, as illustrated above, seems very much oriented towards the formation of independent, specialised, internationally accustomed and research-oriented students. There is no real mention of any guest lecturers from different disciplines who are invited to discuss how the complex issues society faces are the result of different impacts spread out over different disciplines. The only exception is in the newly created basket of electives (as mentioned in wicked societal and planetary problems) that encompasses an interdisciplinary approach. As Van Goethem has drafted a policy document for his second term (2020-2024) as chancellor, he has, more notably, started to address the importance of interdisciplinarity when facing planetary and societal challenges.

"In light of major societal challenges, interdisciplinarity is required now more than ever. Researchers and professors from across the university should be brought together on key social issues such as circular economy, employment, well-being, housing, education, health, culture and communication, heritage, traffic and mobility, sustainability, biodiversity and the environment." [Draft Policy Plan 2020-2024]

As stated before, we advocate for a balanced mix between, on the one hand, discipline focused education and research and on the other hand transdisciplinarity where different disciplines and stakeholders across academic and non-academic borders come together and do research/ debate/ analyse complex planetary and societal matters. These new electives for second and third bachelor students as well as a plea for interdisciplinarity are a step in the right direction.

Rankings

Besides an international approach at the level of the students and their education, the university is also set on becoming an international player, paying attention to their worldwide rankings as a young university and the expertise that is being developed in the different, separate research domains.

"The Times Higher Education Ranking recently ranked our university among the top 200 in the world. This ranking is important because it opens new doors, and it indicates that our university is a strong player. In Belgium, only KU Leuven, Ghent University and UCL – all significantly larger than UAntwerp – are ranked higher." [Draft Policy Plan 2020-2024]



Figure 6: Ranking UAntwerp

Research

The university is also keen on further developing their research on an international scale with the introduction of fifteen new centres of excellences. For the UAntwerp internationalisation in research can be a springboard towards external funding and more research as well as a showcase of what the university's research encompasses to an international audience. This way, the university can gain more international competence. On a positive note, these research centres do aim at bringing 'together researchers from different fields to work on major scientific and societal issues.' [Draft Policy Plan 2020-2024].

"The University of Antwerp conducts creative and innovative scientific research that strives for international excellence. It stimulates both fundamental and applied research and its valorisation." [UAntwerp]

Becoming more known across borders and within different universities around the world can also lead to a bigger influx of good researchers for the University of Antwerp, leveraging the importance of becoming a player in the worldwide network of universities.

"We further strengthen the University of Antwerp as a 'research university! We continue to opt for 'activating, student-centred and competency-based education! We also focus on 'diversity and participation', 'active pluralism', 'sustainability' and 'internationalisation and region', and we add two new policy themes: 'entrepreneurship' and 'metropolitanism!'" [Policy Plan 2016-2020]

In his second term, Van Goethem also highlights the importance of interdisciplinarity, not only for education, as illustrated above, but also within research centres/departments/groups.

"In this regard, we need to foster more collaboration between the research groups. After all, today's societal challenges are highly multidisciplinary in nature. We have therefore adjusted the excellence funding system to make cooperation possible (TOP projects), compulsory (Methusalem) and worthwhile (GOA). We will continue to focus on stimulating multi- and interdisciplinary collaboration, for instance with regard to future opportunities for new research excellence consortia. Whenever existing structures stand in the way of close cooperation and integration, we must actively strive to get rid of those obstacles." [Draft Policy Plan 2020-2024]

Van Goethem also pledges for 'open science', which in some ways, could also be seen as a form of interdisciplinarity. Although the research at the university of Antwerp is still very much focused on raising internal (FWO and BOF) and external funds for its research, Van Goethem does advocate for Open Science putting it high on the agenda of UAntwerp.

"... An open science culture in which ethical conduct, integrity, openness, involvement of stakeholders and citizens, and societal impact are key aspects. In cooperation with external partners, we are looking into the possibility of an open-access publishing platform." [Draft Policy Plan 2020-2024]

Apart from the focus on internationalisation and an additional emphasis on interdisciplinarity, UAntwerp is also focused on the valorisation of science, as stated in the policy document described as ‘the process of converting knowledge that is useful for the economy and society, gathered through innovative research, into a product, a process, an organisational model or a business model.’ Van Goethem places cooperation as the starting point for valorisation, which matches the key focus on interdisciplinarity throughout the whole draft of the 2020-2024 policy document. He is nudging at interrelations with stakeholders outside of the academic world. This could eventually evolve into transdisciplinarity being more visible and addressing the importance of involving different kinds of stakeholders when tackling ‘wicked’ planetary and societal problems that we, the authors, are pleading for throughout this dissertation.

“Valorisation can only succeed when many players and stakeholders work together to achieve a win-win situation. A complex set of relationships needs to be developed, and we have focused intensively on these networks. We work closely with institutions in the region that are organisationally related to the university, while also having close ties to valorisation, such as the AUHA partners, UZA, AMS and the ITM. In addition, we have built up strong contacts with the business community and with the City, the Province and the Port of Antwerp, as well as with other institutional and societal stakeholders, both in Flanders and at the European level.” [Draft Policy Plan 2020-2024]

Within this new aspect of valorisation and the importance of collaborations between different stakeholders such as ‘researchers, businesspeople, entrepreneurs, investors, policymakers, citizens and society’, Van Goethem introduces three multidisciplinary valorisation domains:

1. Sustainable Chemistry & materials
2. Vaccination & Infectious Diseases & Environmental Health
3. Metropolitanism & Smart City, Mobility & logistics

These domains are formed throughout a process of assessing the demands that exist outside of the university. Although the demands are taken as starting point, they are verified with the available research domains and the areas where funding is already available. This is logical but also forms a limitation to what could be. With these three domains and its knowledge-driven approach the university of Antwerp aspires to play a role in the innovative landscape rather than their own local context.

“The university has thus broadened its role to become a driver of innovation, and an innovative regional force to be reckoned with in knowledge-intensive ecosystems. Not only do we deliver well-trained people and generate knowledge and insight, we also aim to meet the specific needs of the innovation ecosystem in which the university is embedded.” [Draft Policy Plan 2020-2024]

Hannah Arendt Institute

Hannah Arendt Institute is a collaboration between the UAntwerp and the Vrije Universiteit Brussel on tackling particular challenges that a changing society faces. The Institute focuses on a transdisciplinary approach and wants to help build a society where everyone feels involved. It aims to build a bridge between knowledge and policy through science valorisation. An institute where knowledge is made understandable for a wider public than purely academics. Therefore, it organises public dialogues where debates on societal challenges are encouraged. The societal challenges the institute focuses most on are citizenship, urban life in Flanders and Brussels and diversity.

“ [...] We do this by connecting the scientific knowledge about diversity, urbanity and citizenship with the insights and experiences of policy makers, organisations and citizens. Together with them we look for workable solutions that have a positive impact on living together.” [Hannah Arendt Institute]

YUFE Network

YUFE, or Young Universities for the Future of Europe, is one of the first European universities which, together with sixteen other alliances, is running a three-year pilot programme. These European Universities were launched within the framework of the European Commission wanting to establish a European Education Area by 2025. The seeds for this idea were planted by French President Macron. He called for the creation of some twenty “European Universities” at which all students would study abroad and take classes in at least two languages by 2024. These universities are set on long-term strategies and challenge-based approaches concerning sustainability and excellence and offer student-centred curricula across inter-university campuses. They are set on cooperating in interdisciplinary teams surrounding the big issues Europe is facing.

“The European Universities are transnational alliances that will pave the way for the development of universities of the future. The alliances promote European values and identity and are transforming the quality and competitiveness of European higher education while making it more diverse and inclusive.” [YUFE]

YUFE consists of ten academic partners, including the University of Antwerp, geographically spread out over Europe and four non-academic members. The partnership of these universities and non-academic actors is grounded in ‘their common aim to contribute to a more competitive, innovative and united Europe and their ambition to help address today’s challenges.’ [YUFE].

YUFE is pointed towards being student-centred, open and inclusive. It works with a quadruple helix of universities, government, citizens and businesses. This quadruple helix and their related stakeholders such as students and policy makers work together to create an environment where joint educational programmes are provided for an inclusive higher education environment. This environment should cross national borders and deal with the current challenges society and the labour market are facing. YUFE allows students to personalise their curriculum, creating a new study experience for its students.

The Urban and the Local Environment

The Urban Environment

The University of Antwerp is moving towards being engaged in its urban context. In the policy document of 2016-2020 Antwerp, with its port and international connections, was approached as a city in a global network that is anything but a local player. The university's **position** within the urban landscape of Antwerp is seen as a strengthening aspect. The university is focused on the urban network that this metropolis has on global scale, emphasising the urban but leaving the local factor behind.

"We are located in a multifaceted urban network that, although limited in size, indicates the network contours of the metropolis in the twenty-first century. The University of Antwerp is therefore anything but a local player. Its metropolitan nature touches the core of our identity and offers special opportunities to **position** ourselves internationally and to drive society." [Policy Plan 2016-2020]

By addressing Antwerp as a metropolitan city in a global network and thus leaving the local perspective behind, the university fits in the narrative of a post-national society. A society where cities become nodes in a worldwide network and have their own local autonomy that transcends the national boundaries.

"Nationalism is another tricky issue. As the refugee crisis and Brexit show, post-2016 Europe must accept different speeds. We can pursue political structures in which local autonomy is respected and valued more than today, something like a "European state reform" at its Belgian." – Herman van Goethem

The university of Antwerp also wants to profile itself as a lab for the 'modern, multi diverse city of the 21st century'. A lab that can help, as stated in the 2016-2020 policy document, to contextualise the city as 'an economic, social and cultural biotope where people live together in a democratic relation' and where the urban society can feed an interdisciplinary framework and where the themes of the city directly form the core of the university.

*"We want, where possible, to expand our education and research as well as services from the great laboratory that is Antwerp, with its significant cultural past, engine of development and innovation, crossroads, located in the vicinity of an industrial fabric, with a large migration influx, a world port and much more. All of this also aligns with one of **the Sustainable Development Goals** set forth by the United Nations: to address global challenges from within the local metropolitan context, leveraging the interdisciplinary potential of education, research and valorisation of the local universities and colleges."* [Policy Plan 2016-2020]

Sustainable Development Goals

In 2015 the United Nations introduced seventeen sustainable development goals (SDG), part of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development 'which are an urgent call for action by all countries – developed and developing – in a global partnership.' These goals were adopted by the 193 countries that are a member of the United Nations.

SDG 1: No Poverty

SDG 2: Zero Hunger

SDG 3: Good Health and Well-being

SDG 4: Quality Education

SDG 5: Gender Equality

SDG 6: Clean Water and Sanitation

SDG 7: Affordable and Clean Energy

SDG 8: Decent Work and Economic Growth

SDG 9: Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure

SDG 10: Reduced Inequalities SDG 11: Sustainable Cities and Communities

SDG 12: Responsible Consumption and Production

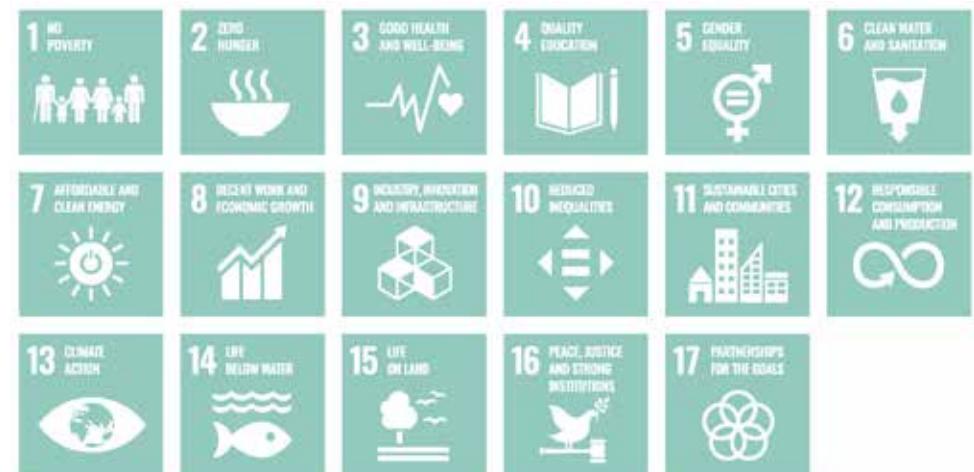
SDG 13: Climate Action

SDG 14: Life Below Water

SDG 15: Life on Land

SDG 16: Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions

SDG 17: Partnerships for the Goals



Sounding as a promising start towards being locally engaged and working across disciplines ‘close or far off from the researchers at the university of Antwerp such as employment, housing, education, health care, culture and heritage, communication, traffic, sustainability, environment and so on ...’ [Policy Plan 2016-2020], it slowly spirals down to a means of profiling itself on an international scale.

“The University of Antwerp wants to strongly emphasise its social role and responsibility as a centre of knowledge and education in the greater Antwerp area, in order to position itself nationally and internationally.” [Policy Plan 2016-2020]

All the key ingredients were present in the last term, however, an utterance of the explicit link with Antwerp as testing ground for this metropolitan city seemed absent. The second term of Van Goethem and its draft policy plan (2020-2024) introduced the phrase ‘Act local, think global’ in the intro but failed to elaborate on the execution of the Act Local part for the remainder of the document and rather kept the attention on the universities’ **position** in Flanders and the world as well as a ‘specific focus on networking’.

“Much of what we do is inspired by the phrase ‘Act local, think global’. Nevertheless, we also act globally: we are carrying out research with a universal scope in all three areas of science, and we also want to attract students from all over the world. Over the course of the past term of office, however, we have realised that the Antwerp region – at the intersection of both physical roads and cultures – is an important foundation for the structural development of our university in Flanders and the world. We have strengthened that foundation in various areas, and we will continue to do so.” [Draft Policy Plan 2020-2024]

The attention towards the local is only hinted at in the last two policy documents. An aspect of the local is mostly developed through [the Urban Studies Institute](#).

[The Urban Studies Institute](#)

The duality between the local urban environment and internationalisation can be exemplified through the urban studies institute based at the university of Antwerp. The policy document of 2016-2020 sees this institute, together with environmental and sustainable development as starting point for a research infrastructure centred around a metropolitan area. The Urban Studies Institute encompasses and brings together twenty different research groups ranging from groups centred around migration, a summer school on the sustainable city, a metropolitan legal lab. These groups are in one way or another linked to the city (and its history), urban development and/or to urban challenges in an interdisciplinary setting.

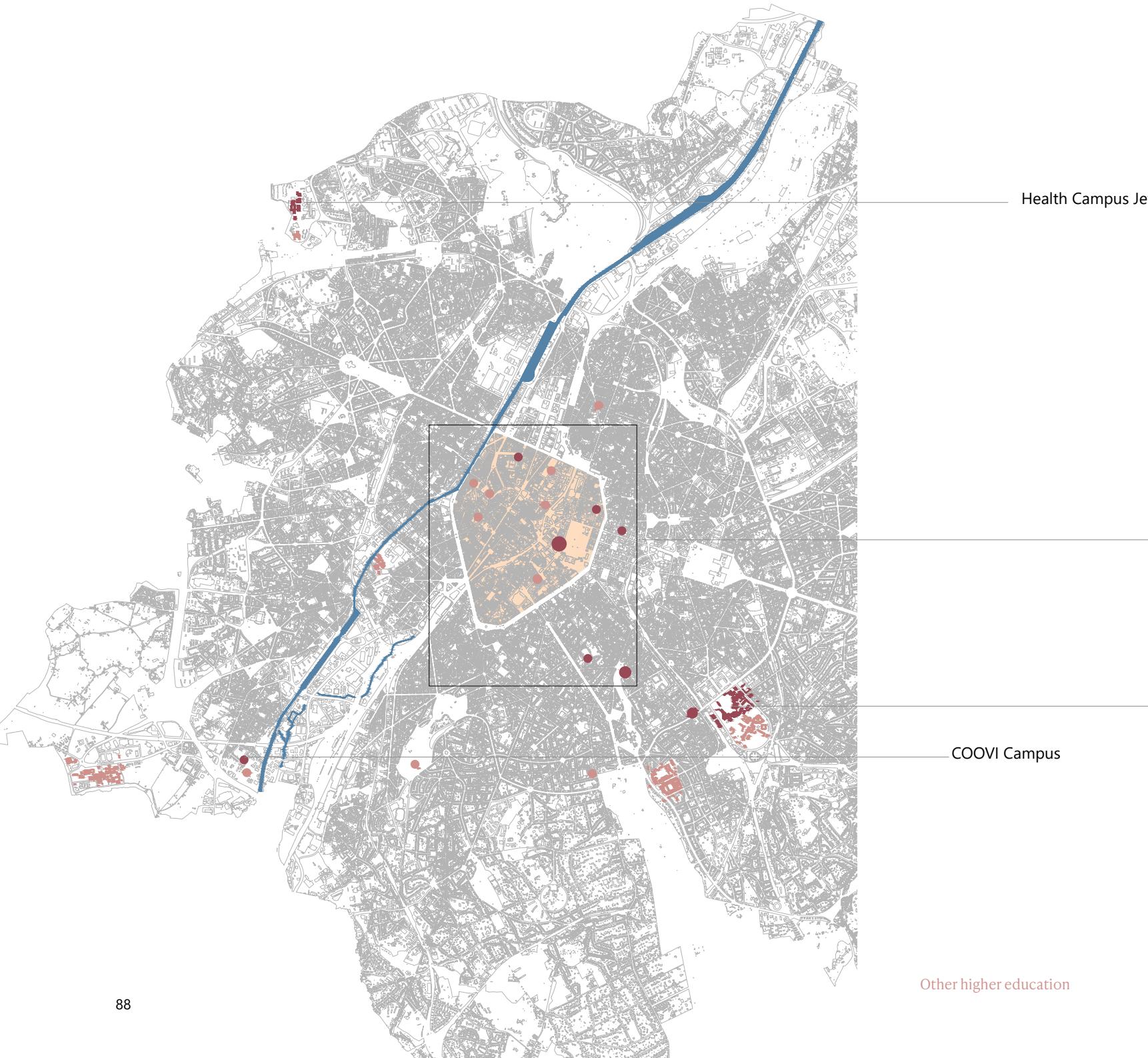
“The Urban Studies Institute offers a platform for interdisciplinary fundamental and applied research into the city and urban issues in Flanders, Europe and the world. The collaborations between research groups lead to innovative research with international prestige.” [Urban Studies Institute]

Its principle is interdisciplinary research. In order to form collaborations with non-academic stakeholders, the institute has introduced ‘De Stadsacademie’ (not to be confused with ‘De Stadsacademie’ in Ghent). With ‘De Stadsacademie’ the university is taking baby steps towards moving from their status as an international leading university in research towards actually being an urban actor in the urban tissue of Antwerp, although still keeping the focus wide. It involves multiple different stakeholders and mostly works towards an interdisciplinary rather than a transdisciplinary way of teaching, learning and research.

Brussels
161,4 km²
1,2 miljon inhabitans



Vrije Universiteit Brussels (VUB)



°1970

Rector: Caroline Pauwels

19 245 students

8 faculties

1. Languages and Humanities
2. Social Science and Solvay Business School
3. Law and Criminology
4. Medicine and Pharmacy
5. Physical Education and Physiotherapy
6. Psychology and Educational Sciences
7. Sciences and Bioengineering Sciences
8. Sciences

History and Background

The Vrije Universiteit Brussel (VUB) originates from the Université Libre de Bruxelles (ULB) established in 1834. The ULB was founded as a university that is independent of state and church, hence the use of the word ‘free’ or ‘libre’ in its title. In 1970, the university was split up into two legally, administrative and scientific separate universities, the Flemish Vrije Universiteit Brussel (VUB) and its French-speaking counterpart Université Libre de Bruxelles (ULB).

The idea of a division of the university in two parts, one Dutch- and one French-speaking university was planted long before the actual division that accelerated through the student protests in May 1968¹⁴.

The ULB, a free, liberal, socialistic, communistic and union university was embedded in a strong French speaking climate: French was for a long time the main language of universities in Belgium, the language of the elite, the aristocracy. Only a few studies were offered in Dutch and these were often taught by native French speakers who had learned a bit of Dutch. Only two departments at ULB i.e., Law and Languages and Philosophy had a Dutch tradition. In the sixties, a doubling of the number of students at the university took place of which only 13 percent was Dutch speaking. The idea of doubling the courses, a French course accompanied by a Dutch course was held back under chancellor Leroy (middle of the 1960's).

“The Flemish had to take advantage of their contact with the universal language that was French. This view, which had wide support in French-speaking circles, was not only at odds with the Flemish demand for bipartisanship but was seen by many Flemings as an expression of detest for the Dutch language.” [VUB]

The sixties were characterised by the growing tension between the Dutch and French speaking communities. The Flemish movement demanded for a full-blown Dutch department with its own infrastructure, administration and research. This tension was also influenced by a much bigger communitarian issue that had been developing between the French and the Dutch speaking. ‘Fuelled by broader processes of economic, social and political emancipation, the Flemish had organised language marches, enforced the establishment of the language frontier and language laws, and, in order to counter the Frenchifying influence in Flemish Brabant, limited Brussels to nineteen municipalities.’ [VUB]

The demand for a Dutch counterpart of the university was legitimised by the student protests of May '68 in Leuven where students of the Catholic University of Leuven (KUL) marched against the expansion of the Université Catholique de Louvain (UCL) and its influence on the KUL.

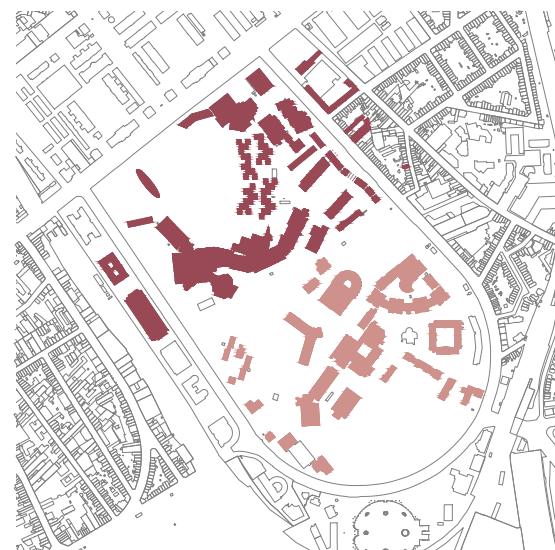
¹⁴ May '68 was characterised by student protests all over Europe. These also left a mark on the Belgian environment resulting in the division of two universities in its Dutch and French counterpart: the catholic university of Leuven split up in KUL (Dutch) and UCL (French) and the Free University of Brussels split up into VUB (Dutch) and ULB (French).

Following these protests, a movement arose in Brussels, demanding a democratising of the university, mostly supported by both the Flemish and French side, as both sides felt the confinement and struggles of a non-democratised university where both Dutch and French students were taught. The collaboration between the Dutch and French wanting a democratised university eventually evolved into a call for bifurcation: a financial separation and the recognition of a Dutch-speaking university.

“No Language, No Freedom.” [VUB]

In light of the 1970 state reform¹⁵, where the cultural communities would become a fact, a full separation into two completely separate universities, ULB and VUB, instead of into one bilingual university, was implemented. A bilingual university run by two different cultural communities would have led to many issues and debates as universities were no longer under federal authority. ULB was given seventy percent of the university’s heritage, VUB received the remaining thirty percent, located at campus Etterbeek. A spatial division of the heritage is visible on that same campus where the site is split into two separate parts, one for the new Dutch speaking university (VUB) and one for the French-speaking (ULB). Later on, VUB expanded to the University Hospital in Jette, the Photonics Campus in Anderlecht and the technology campus in Gooik.

“At the birth of the VUB, Prof. Frans De Pauw and a colleague search for a suitable location for a university hospital. During a walk at the edge of the Laarbeek forest they notice a couple making love and conclude that the place is a fertile environment for a hospital. It opens in 1977.” [Centrum voor Academische en Vrijzinnige Archieven]



The split of the two universities is still visible in the urban tissue

¹⁵ The first revision of the Constitution in 1970 resulted in the setting-up of the three cultural communities: French, Dutch and German. From the legal viewpoint, that meant the start of the process of State reform.

As of today, the two universities work together in a close collaboration with the unwanted complete separation of the universities in the back of the mind. In 2016 Caroline Pauwels became the chancellor of VUB and was re-elected in 2020. The university has four vice-chancellors focused on the four main principles of the university: research, education, innovation and internationalisation. The university today counts close to twenty thousand students spread out over eight faculties and eighty-three departments.

Throughout the policy plans of the university, two notions are crucial: internationalisation and multiversity.

"I see internationalisation and multiversity as an essential and transversal factor in education, research and service." [Policy Plan 2016-2020]

Mission Statement

*"The VUB is a university in the capital of Europe. It aims to inspire and form its students, researchers and staff into broad-minded **world citizens**. Freedom, equality and solidarity with society are the building blocks of our university project. The VUB stimulates self-reflection, an inquisitive and critical attitude and an open, creative mind about scientific and **social issues**. Respect and empathy are central to our interaction with others and the world."*

*Based on the principle of free inquiry, both our research and teaching are fundamentally ground-breaking and pioneering. We build bridges between ethics, theory, practical research, and the field. We encourage **entrepreneurship, engagement**, and responsibility. We want to contribute to an **inclusive society**.*

The VUB cherishes its freethinking and humanistic roots. We are guided by the motto 'Scientia vincere tenebras' - conquer the darkness through science - and by the conviction that each one of us can make a difference: 'it's up to each one of us!'

Vision Statement

*"Every organisation today urgently needs to prepare itself for a world that, sooner than we think, may look completely different. Above all, every organisation must think about how it can avoid being overtaken by events. This is also the exercise we are starting at the Vrije Universiteit Brussel: what changes must we initiate in the next three years to avoid becoming obsolete within ten or fifteen years? The Vrije Universiteit Brussel chooses a course that is radically humanist, **radically urban** and radically twenty-first century, which means: sustainable, diverse, digital and deliberative. [...]"*

Planetary and Societal problems

The VUB strives to be a sustainable university committed to sustainable development in education and research. Within the strategic goals VUB is committing to an ecological integrity by strengthening the social tissue and well-being of its students and personnel and by striving for financial health and ethical and societal responsible entrepreneurship. The sustainability policy divides its priorities over four main themes: education, research, management and outreach. Actions encompassing more than one of the four themes help strengthen each other.

"The 'sense of urgency' of sustainable development is present in every social debate. VUB has an important exemplary role to play from its humanistic value framework and wants to be the catalyst for solutions that are democratic, ecological, social and economic." [VUB]

Within this concept of a sustainable university, a university must strive towards a balance between the concepts universitas and humanitas, and in this light needs education and research that take their time to cope with these issues.

"In the coming years, that pendulum must come back into balance. A balance in which a community of like-minded spirits (our universitas) puts itself collectively at the service of mankind (humanitas). In addition to the justified pursuit of economic impact and valorisation, a university is also a promoter of social and societal interests and welfare, and this in the long term. There is a need for a scientific and intellectual project that takes the time to deal with the major societal challenges and participates more actively than ever in the societal debate on these issues. A Universitas project that dares to take intellectual risks, that seeks out frontier research¹⁶ driven by curiosity and that makes serendipity possible." [Policy Plan 2016-2020]

One of the strategic goals for 2030 is aimed at developing courses and education programmes that are geared to the multi-layered societal challenges of a complex world. Similar to the University of Antwerp, the Vrije Universiteit Brussel aims to establish course units that are university-wide and can thus be incorporated in anyone's curriculum regardless of what they are studying.

"Together we take on cross-domain social and scientific challenges and thus train conscious and driven experts and citizens who, in a sustainable and humanistic way, continue to shape society." [Policy Plan 2016-2020]

¹⁶ "Frontier research: (1) usually addresses issues about which there is considerable controversy in the scientific community in the area in which they are being explored; (2) deals with questions that are hard to answer, at least by applying the normal methodological approaches; (3) employs methodologies and concepts that are atypical for the field concerned; (4) takes unexpected findings that challenge the dominant paradigm as its starting point; (5) and, continuing from the previous point, focuses on issues whose resolution is key to confirming (or rebutting) the prevailing paradigm; and (6) involves research with a very high degree of uncertainty as to its likelihood of success, and so on." [Lychnos]

Not only is the environment ever influenced and changing, the people who are inhabiting the city are also susceptible to their environment. The metropolis of Brussels is becoming more and more diverse. This multidiversity that the city is facing will be mirrored at the university as the inflow of students is already becoming more and more diverse. In the school year of 2019-2020 a little over nineteen thousand students enrolled spread out over one hundred forty-five nationalities. Twenty-three percent of these students are international (52,9% non-European). The university is investing in intensifying its search towards a better approach to multidiversity. The university has started drafting a diversity plan in which they want to look at specific goals and actions.

"We are looking at the possibility of international and especially multicultural classrooms, and connect them digitally with foreign exchange partners and projects. We focus on the integration of newcomers, including the use of buddies for refugees and our international students." [Policy Plan 2016-2020]

Transcending Boundaries

Education

'Education @VUB is entrepreneurial and ambitious.' VUB is focused on training the students in five different criteria: *'Becoming critical thinking individuals, participating in free inquiry, being engaged for a better society, becoming world citizens and being prepared for their career'*. They must develop skills fit for the 21st century according to world economic forum: *'Complex problem solving, critical thinking, creativity, people management and emotional intelligence.'* [VUB]

Besides this entrepreneurial character, the urge for students to become 'world citizens' resembling a competitive market-driven neoliberal university, the university is set on bringing students into contact with non-academic economic, social, political, cultural, ecological, ... stakeholders through visits to discipline and research related institutions and organisations within Brussels. *'A resilient university is one that strives for multidisciplinary research and education.'* [Policy Plan 2016-2020].

"We not only have to prepare students for the job market, not only give them knowledge and skills and the capacity for lifelong learning. They also need to experience the complexity of twenty-first century urban society and come to understand that you can only address today's great challenges if you tear down the walls between disciplines, between academia and civil society, the art houses and the business world, between the university and the metropolis." – Pauwels

The new, overall university-broad courses on sustainability that will be introduced (as mentioned in the previous part) will be 'characterised by an interdisciplinary approach,

acquiring broad professional competencies and fostering engagement.' [ASP30 Radical Sustainable]. These discipline transcending courses will e.g. be about critical thinking, intercultural communication, ethical technology thinking, societal and technological challenges, artificial intelligence, ... The city of Brussels is approached as the perfect lab for these sustainability questions that will be handled.

Research and Ranking

"On the research front, the VUB aims to deliver quality research with strong local roots and high international recognition.

- An optimal research environment
- An international and interdisciplinary research culture
- Participatory and community-based research
- An inclusive, open and networking research community"

The dilemma's that society faces are not only multidisciplinary in character, they are also complex and in need of collaborations, collectivism, creativity and excellence. *'The bundling of forces will lead to a bigger chance of succeeding and more efficiency.'* [Policy Plan 2020]

Just like Herman van Goethem (UAntwerp), Caroline Pauwels advocates for 'open science' stating that it is important to move away from knowledge divided over different pillars, knowledge that also stays within those pillars and individualism. In a world where scientists are ever more questioned and a scientific result that is not liked by politicians is labelled as fake news, scientists must defend their discipline.

"Mindful of our motto 'scientia vincere tenebras', it is our duty as scientists to speak up. We must make our voice heard even more strongly and make scientific knowledge accessible and comprehensible to society. The current standards by which we judge scientists do not yet do sufficient justice to the efforts of colleagues in the field of science popularisation. We will change this in the next term." [Policy Plan 2020]

For Caroline Pauwels, the key to moving away from a 'closed' science and speaking up more as scientists is multidisciplinarity on all levels and surfaces.

"The grand challenges of the 21st century are by definition multidisciplinary, requiring fundamental, strategic and applied research. Research and innovation go hand in hand. It distinguishes us and makes the university a unique place. We need to watch over that portfolio. We need to connect and balance them more. More collaboration outside our own discipline and faculty, more cross-fertilisation between the Jette and Etterbeek campuses and our branches in Flemish Brabant Anderlecht, between the university and the hospital." [Policy Plan 2016-2020]

VUB wants to go beyond multidisciplinarity by working outside of their own university framework with other universities in Flanders as well as other university partners around the world as well as non-academic expressing a favour towards its own continent, Europe. Brussels is a metropolitan city, the political capital of Europe, a node in a European (even

global) network of cities. It is a multiverse well-connected city. VUB being present in the nodal system of Brussels, should outplay its role as a university in this environment.

“Further Europeanization seems a good way to go, including the further activation of the European university network. Further internationalization should be very focused, yet limited, and best done in cooperation with other Flemish and Belgian partners.” [Policy Plan 2020]

Whilst on the one hand striving for more multidisciplinary research, the university must on the other hand not be forced or ‘reduced’ to this approach it has just been introduced to. As a university aiming for sustainability, VUB is well aware of the necessity of an incremental approach.

The university wants to work towards collaborations across the different research groups on a big enough scale. As new concerns are arising within the research departments surrounding the battle for financing and quantity over quality, VUB pleads for more collective interest.

“Evaluation criteria focus too much on individualising aspects and output funding only takes into account what can be “objectively” measured. This undermines the university as a collective project in the service of society, based on humanistic values. Science became, as it were, an A1 format, rankings a mantra, and “publish or perish” a dogma. Individual interest prevails over collective interest.” [Policy Plan 2016-2020]

This battle for financing and quantity is intrinsically linked to the way universities are ranked. Ranking systems are rising in importance because they maintain international partnerships and funding for research and education and attract international and talented students and researchers. VUB’s ranking is included in a general document containing all relevant numbers from student enrolments to funding, thus, not explicitly giving it too much attention but still including it under the tab facts and numbers on the website. VUB is focused on including only those rankings that align with the university’s scientific and societal intent. The university wants to safeguard the unique character of the alfa and beta sciences.

“QS World University Rankings has VUB among the 18% best universities worldwide. World University Ranking (WUR) places the VUB in the elite top 200 based on research, education, employer reputation and international orientation. Times Higher Education (The) World University Rankings has the VUB among the 6% best universities worldwide. With Multirank, you can compare higher institutions according to your interests. Indicators such as education, research, knowledge, transfer, international orientation and regional engagement translate into ten ‘A’ Scores.” [VUB]

VUB’s focus on rankings aligned with their scientific and social intent is highlighted by their strong research surrounding sustainable issues as well as their attention towards the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) and missions in Horizon Europe¹⁷ as a guide for broad research programmes. VUB is looking for more sustainability both in the field of

education and research as for funding.

“Given the trend towards linking education and research in European policymaking, we support the search for even more European financial flows within research and innovation. Priority is given to the ERC support and to the further valorisation of the human and social sciences.” [Policy Plan 2020]

VUB is, over the next couple of years set on optimising its policy related to ranking, also conducting research towards alternative ways of ranking, partly moving their focus from standard rankings towards ones that are, for example, aimed at the deployment of the sustainable development goals within a university.

The aim for sustainable development is not only reflected on funding, rankings, the search for new programmes and a research platform but also towards possible partnerships in the futures. These should not be chosen for funding. Partners should have the same, or similar principles. ‘Outreach, stakeholder participation and awareness are essential threads running through the sustainability policy.’ [ASP 2030]

“We have to look for partners who share our values and ambitions, with whom we can work together on a positive project, in a reciprocal cooperation that is about more than financial gain. We play on Brussels’ central position, its multidimensional and multi-layered specificity in national and international networks as an asset when setting up partnerships.” [Policy Plan 2020]

The second term of chancellor Caroline Pauwels has shifted the focus from multidisciplinarity to interdisciplinarity, to a glimpse at transdisciplinarity that will become more and more important in the upcoming terms.

“The VUB distinguishes itself from others because we take responsibility for the city and society with our research. This implies that we forge strong links with the community, with local governments, with schools, with socio-economic actors. In this way we allow a ‘quadruple helix’ to emerge: a network in which companies, citizens, the government and the university are strongly connected. In the next term, we will focus even more on this.” [Policy Plan 2020]

Within these possible partnerships, international partnerships are seen as a plus, even a must for a connected city such as Brussels, as its ‘many European institutions and international networks make Brussels the world in pocket-size.’ [Policy Plan 2016-2020]. The university must adopt an ethical code where the intellectual, cultural, economic and social wealth that is at its fingertips is employed for research, education but also social service for the city.

¹⁷ Horizon Europe is a European funding programme that is focused on tackling global challenges such as climate change whilst achieving the SDG. The programme facilitates collaboration and strengthens the impact of research and innovation in developing, supporting and implementing EU policies.

Eutopia Multiversity is an alliance between six different universities: VUB, Universitat Pompeu Fabra Barcelona, CY Cergy Paris Université, University of Warwick, University of Gothenburg and University of Ljubljana. Their main goal is to establish a new educational model that is focused on the long-term and sustainable networks instead of ‘moving individuals from X to Z for a single short or long period.’ [VUB] In order to achieve this new educational model, the universities will set up a co-creation process for courses and learning material in Connected Learning Communities that aim at collaborations between academics, students and extra-academic stakeholders, establishing an interdisciplinary team across different universities. Whilst also taking into account the planetary and societal challenges, the universities realises that an efficient form of travel policy will be necessary, as sustainability is a priority but also the importance of ‘feeling connected’ with the environment someone is working on.

“I’m proud that the Vrije Universiteit Brussel, with five other ambitious European universities in the Eutopia alliance, has been chosen by the European commission as one of the pilot projects for developing a ‘European University.’” – Pauwels

UNIVER.CITY

“UNIVER.CITY explores possibilities with Community Engaged Research and Learning (CERL). The active cooperation between the city and university is central. Academic and extra-academic actors are brought together to explore social challenges and contribute to sustainable societal progress. The starting point is the notion of the ‘networked curriculum’: education and research at the interface of disciplines and sectors, nurtured by active interaction between theory and practice, the university and wider society, online and on-site learning, breeding ground for both lifelong and broad personal education and development, local and global impact.”[weKONEKT.Brussels]

The Urban and the Local Environment

The Urban Environment

“We need to be connected to the city, to society and to the world. We do not yet sufficiently exploit the central position of Brussels in national and international networks as an asset when setting up partnerships. We have a responsibility towards the urban environment we are part of.”[Policy Plan 2020]

Brussels is a multiverse well-connected city. VUB, present in this nodal system of Brussels, should play out its role as a university in this specific environment. Linking the urban back to ‘wicked’ planetary and societal issues, VUB recognises the importance of using the urban landscape within these challenges.

“These specific problems, in which ecological challenges, social inequality and multicultural models of society are central, are shared with other major cities and will in the near future also determine the social reality on a broader scale: after all, in 2050, two-thirds of the world’s population will be living in an urban environment. With a number of comparable metropolitan universities and using our networks (UNICA, EUA), we look for best practices through exchange and see how a knowledge institution can strengthen the urban fabric. Our multidisciplinary Brussels Centre for Urban Studies and our master’s programmes in this field are an asset here. The VUB’s research into migration, diversity, intersectionality and multilingualism can also have a distinctive effect in an urban context.”[Policy Plan 2020]

The Local Environment

“Every University works within a specific time and space. For us that is Brussels and the 21st century. Anchoring the VUB and connecting it more strongly than ever before to its Brussels environment is a challenge. The city provides us with a dynamic urban laboratory. The challenges are there for the taking in so many fields. Not least in the field of education and research. Let’s not only ask ourselves what Brussels can do for the VUB, but also what the VUB can do for Brussels. We will be better off together.”[Policy Plan 2016-2020]

VUB deliberately calls Brussels their living lab. They don’t take their location in a city like Brussels, connected with many other cities and made up of many different nationalities, for granted. They see opportunities and possibilities, a potential in being a university that wants to use its knowledge and expertise for the city, the people of Brussels and in general society.

“We can be the urban university that embraces Brussels’ superdiversity.”[VUB]

Whilst addressing the importance of the local urban environment the university is embedded in and at the same time is an actor from and for this environment, Caroline Pauwels doesn't lose the international out of sight, stating that it's the local that connects the university to the global.

"Our scale, but above all our ideological uniqueness, our past and our mission, mean that we are inextricably linked to the city in which we work and often live and for which we have to take responsibility. We are therefore a university in the city, with the city, and for the city. But Brussels is also an international, even cosmopolitan city. A city with a large international community, with international institutions, with headquarters of international organisations and companies. A city where the majority of residents come from elsewhere and build a new future here together. So, we are a university in a global city, in a hub of global networks. The local connects us to the global." - Pauwels

Brussels Centre for Urban Studies

"The Brussels Centre for Urban Studies, one of the largest centres of its kind in Europe, brings together researchers from across the social sciences, humanities and engineering. [...] It comprises more than twenty research groups and two hundred researchers with the aim to support inter- and transdisciplinary research projects in the domain of urban studies." [Brussels Centre for Urban Studies]

The Brussels centre for Urban studies aims at making the urban research produced at VUB visible, supporting inter- and transdisciplinary research projects. On the one hand they encourage the networks between VUB researchers and international and local networks. On the other hand, they stimulate partnerships and collaborations with non-academic stakeholders, profiling themselves as the 'first point of contact for everyone interested in research on Brussels, such as researchers from other universities, policy makers and civil society actors.' [Brussels Centre for Urban Studies]. The institute's focus is global but with a specific attention towards the urban fluctuations in Brussels and Europe.

"The Centre encourages and supports research on Brussels and in the domain of urban studies and, in doing so, is linked to other complementary initiatives in Brussels: the Brussels Studies Institute (BSI), an inter-university research platform for research on Brussels; and the Brussels University Alliance (BUA), an alliance between the ULB and VUB to develop synergies in education, research, service to society, infrastructure and logistics. As part of

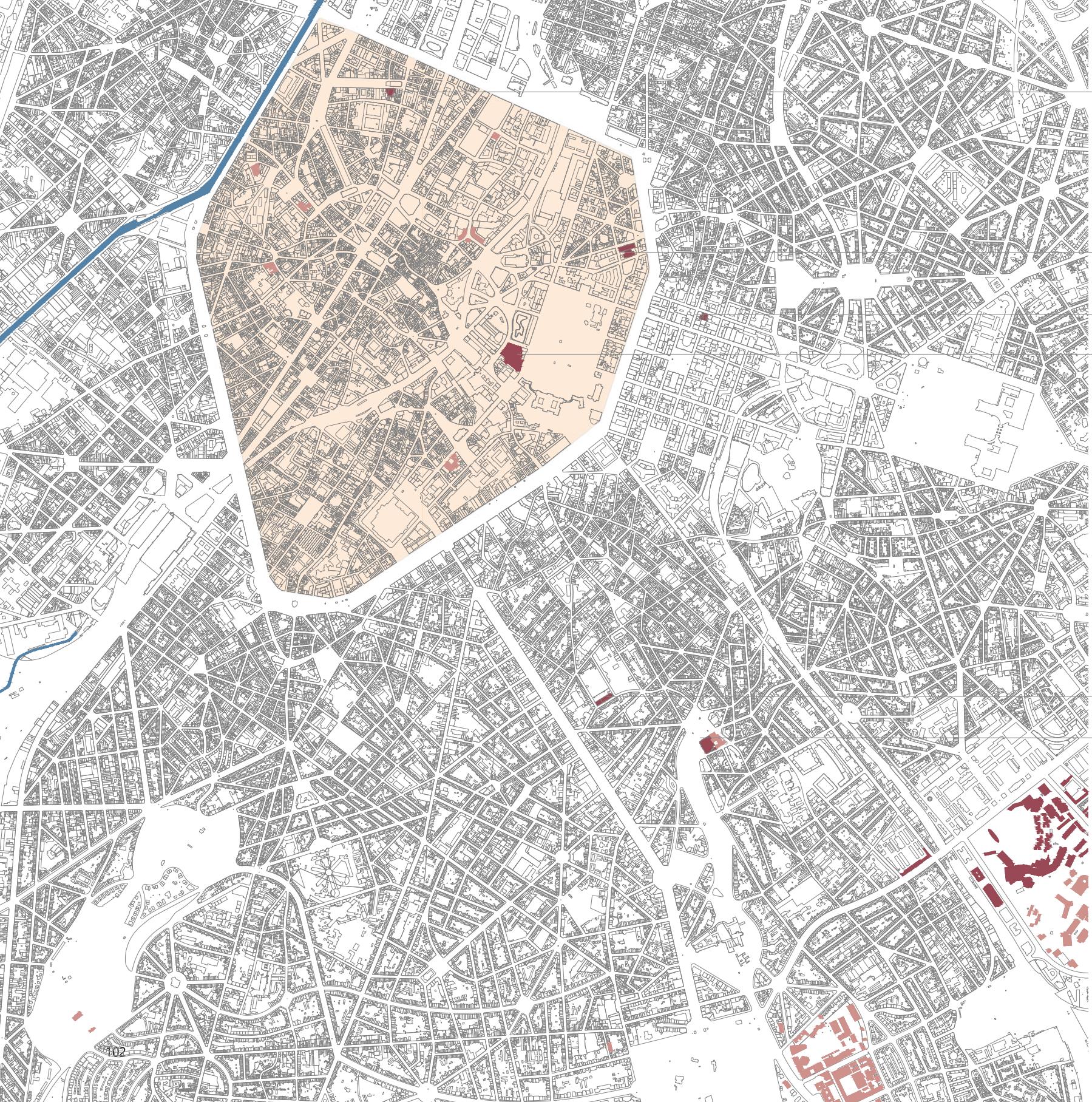
the VUB-ULB alliance, the Centre also collaborates with EBxl, the ULB network for research on Brussels." [Brussels Centre for Urban Studies]

Besides research, the institute is also involved in education as it, together with its members offers a variety of urban studies programmes, advanced masters or extracurricular programmes for all, academic and non-academic actors, who are interested in the urban reality of Brussels and other cities.

WeKONEKT.Brussels

WeKONEKT.Brussels is an initiative that was launched by two universities in Brussels: VUB and ULB. This collaboration was initiated to create a better connection between the city of Brussels and the two universities. The three narratives that we have been eluding throughout the dissertation can more or less be traced in this initiative: they want to provide solutions on societal challenges (although not stating that they are 'wicked' and a 'solution' cannot just be found), transdisciplinarity through connecting students with Brussels stakeholders (but still stating that the expertise of the university will provide the answers) and a plea to work with and in the community of Brussels, addressing its local urban context.

"The universities offer students opportunities to develop into critical global citizens and social leaders of the future. In doing so, they use Brussels as a lecture hall and workplace, and connect students with Brussels stakeholders and the professional field. They strengthen the Brussels community by organising education with, in and for Brussels. Researchers apply their expertise to make Brussels stronger by providing answers to metropolitan, societal challenges. Initiatives of and supported by include education, sports, culture, science, arts, law and more." [WeKONEKT Brussels]



City Campuses

KVS (Koninklijke Vlaamse Schouwburg)

Flemish Parlement

Jozef II

Bozar & Cinematiek

CIVA

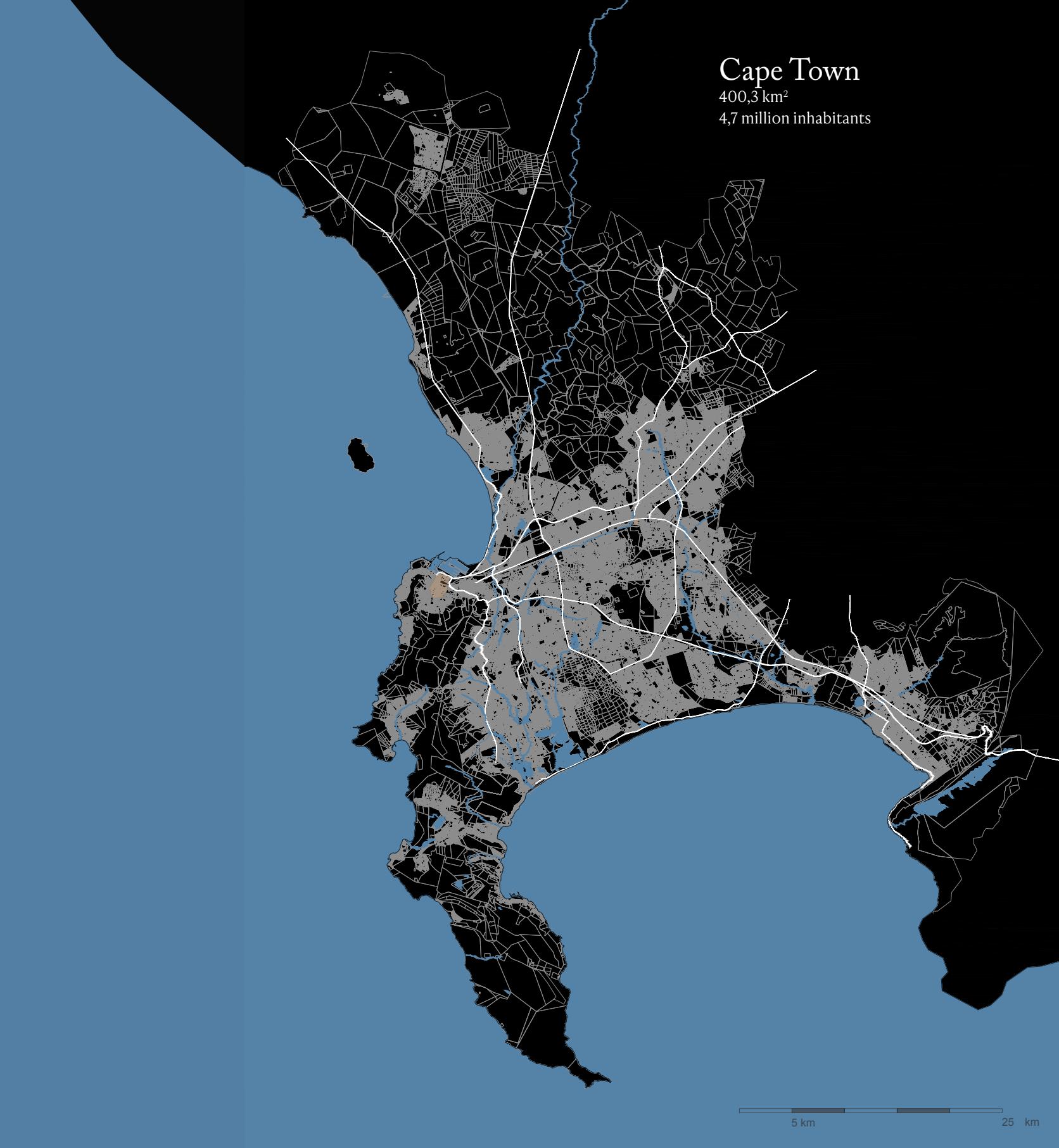
Flagey

An example of a [weKONEKT](#) project is the introduction of a city campus located in the centre of Brussels, with its main office in the Bozar, an arts centre in the heart of Brussels, as the campuses of both ULB and VUB are located outside of the centre. These city campuses can be booked by professors and opened up to include a non-academic public. They've also organised the [weKONEKT.week](#) from the 29th of March to the 2nd of April of this year, 'occupying' the city for one week with activities from walking tours to kayaking for trash, a lecture on 'street politics', online dialogues, a workshop on diversity-sensitive communication, ...

Other higher education

“Making choices, tackling major challenges, and combining this with alternative funding and collaborations outside the academic domain will get a boost when, at the governmental level, and in consultation with the other university partners, a case is made for reviewing the existing metrics and the larger framework for inter-university collaboration. The Brussels specificity or Brussels factor should be included in these discussions.” [Policy Plan 2016-2020]

Cape Town
400,3 km²
4,7 million inhabitants



University of the Western Cape (UWC)



°1959

Rector: Tyrone Brian Pretorius

24 223 students

7 faculties

1. Arts
2. Community & Health
3. Dentistry
4. Economic and Management Science
5. Education
6. Law
7. Natural Sciences

Belleville CBD
(2nd node)

Transnet Site

Cape Town CBD
(first node)

J.S Marais Hospital

Transhex

Faculty of Dentistry
(Tygerberg Hospital)

Main Campus

Faculty of Dentistry
(Mitchells Plain)

Arts & Humanities
The Greatmore Building

The university is spread out over 4 campuses in three different neighborhoods (Tygerberg Hospital, J.S Marais Hospital, Main Campus and Mitchells Plain). Three new sites are under construction: Transhex, Greatmore and the Unibell student residencies situated opposite the southern border of the main campus.

Other higher education



History and Background

Within the urban tissue of Cape Town, the University of the Western Cape can be found. Cape Town, located on the shore of Table Bay, is the second-most populous city in South Africa counting about four million inhabitants. For decades South-Africa was subject to apartheid, a system that wrote segregation into the law and where many (non-white) people were forced to live, work and exist in the 'appropriate' areas. The story of Cape town's racial segregation started a long way back but is very much entangled with the present. Today apartheid and colonialism might be 'over' within the political structures, but it has left tremendous psychological scars on individuals and communities. The physical and mental barriers that were built still have to be dismantled.

History of Cape Town¹⁸

At the end of the 16th century the Dutch took control of the Southern tip of Africa to supply their ships along their trade route to Asia. In 1850 the British confiscated this port from the Dutch and called it Cape Colony. It became a strategic location for trade. About 70 years later, after discovering diamonds within the Cape Colony, they started building railways from the mines in the inner land towards the coast to export the diamonds overseas to their home country. Cape Town became a very important port city in the global diamond market, and, due to this increased trade, turned into a major city. The colonial government started writing segregation laws and people were restricted to live in certain areas. The Native Lands Act of 1913 pushed Black people towards the edges of major cities and specific areas that were badly connected with the rest of the country.

In 1934 the Union of South Africa was no longer in control of the British and the remaining white descendants of Dutch colonists started taking control. The National Party, an all-white government approved about 150 laws to legalise apartheid. In 1950, the Population Registration Act officially classified people by race: white, coloured, native (black) and Asian. Black People were moved into rural areas called 'Bantustans' where there was little economic devel-

opment, and which were excluded from the railway network built by the British. The Group Areas Act¹⁹ in Cape Town in 1950 gave the most valuable property and land to white people and moved the non-whites into separate urban areas. And so, it happened that non-white people were removed from their homes to make place for white people, which is what happened in District Six²⁰ among others. Apartheid, as a system, lasted for several decades, and only came to end in 1994 when a democratically elected government took power, led by Nelson Mandela. This was supposed to be a new beginning ...

Nevertheless, the apartheid system created a legacy that has remained visible within the newly created townships on the peripheries of cities such as Cape Town. After the government lifted the restrictions on where to live, millions of people who had been excluded from economic development, migrated to urban centres to provide for their family and find job opportunities. Many houses were built on the empty lands in the periphery of the cities. Ironically enough, the intention to overcome the apartheid's legacy unintentionally reproduced the very same situation it was trying to undo. The townships on the city's periphery became informal settlements where the majority (about 60%) of the black population of Cape Town is living nowadays. The people in these townships have to travel many hours to go to work or to go to the university.

Segregation is still actively present within the urban tissue of Cape town. The colour of your skin often still determines in which neighbourhood you live in and what quality of life you have. These different neighbourhoods are segregated from each other by strips of empty land, railways, gates, industrial sites or natural dunes. This geographical segregation enhances the gap between the wealthy and the poor as more job opportunities are close to the central business districts (such as Cape Town CBD⁴ and Bellville CBD).

¹⁹ The Group Areas Act was a policy that legislated the designation of a certain area to one group (whites, blacks, coloureds or Indians), therefore property on a white area could only be owned and traded by whites.

²⁰ The significance of District Six will be elaborated further on in this dissertation.

²¹ Central Business District

¹⁸ For a more extensive history look at the previous dissertations made within the partnership between the UWC and Ghent University

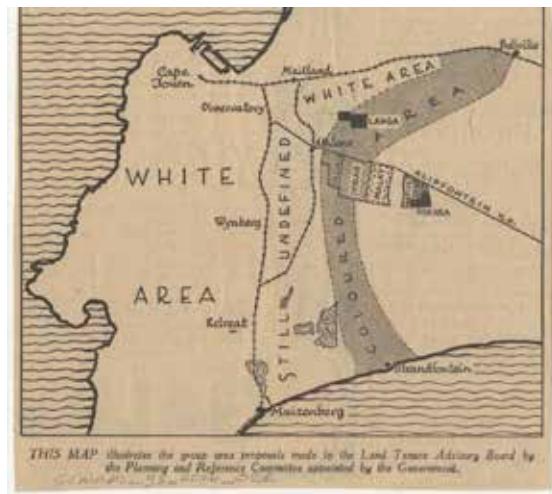


Figure 8: Article in the Cape Times showing the Group Areas for White and Coloured (1950)



Figure 9: Beach reserved for white people only

The University of the Western Cape (UWC) was established in 1959 as a direct result of the Extension of University Education Act 45 introduced in that same year by the oppressive apartheid regime. It emerged in a moment when the apartheid state was building large-scale infrastructural projects defined around ethnic and racial lines. The Act supposedly led to higher education for everyone but limited the access to certain universities on the basis of racial and ethnic identification. It stated that non-whites were, by law, not allowed to attend former open, white schools without the written permission of the Minister of Internal Affairs. This led to the creation of a separate university for the coloured, later also enrolling blacks, The University of the Western Cape. The University was established as a university that was only allowed to offer classes that would result into low or middle level positions. The graduates were meant to work as civil servants in the coloured and black townships, staying within their own communities and limited economic means while being oppressed.

The University of the Western Cape, often described as a historically disadvantaged university, was placed by the Apartheid Regime at the outskirts of the city, out in the bush, physically dislocating it away from the mainly white central business district of Cape Town. Although it was deliberately placed there, it was one of the only coloured universities placed in a relative urban environment, rendering it more attractive for protests. What the regime at that time misjudged was that, by locating a set of oppressed people together and actually giving them the possibility to organise themselves, fight back and revolt, it helped to create a sense of power.

The typical image of Cape Town with its waterfront and attractive big villa's is not the surrounding in which UWC is situated. The university is situated amidst residential areas ranging from middle class housing to the cape flats with slum areas, amongst historically disadvantaged neighbourhoods and big industrial sites such as the [Transnet Site](#).

The Transnet site was a site reserved to become the main distribution centre for Cape Town. The containers that would arrive by ship at the port would be transported by train to the Transnet Site and be distributed from there. This plan never came into action and the distribution was kept at the port, rendering a vast, underutilised open space of 340 hectares. This site is situated between Bellville CBD and the University of the Western Cape and is preyed upon by many actors, including the university for a redevelopment. As of today, many redevelopment plans have been made but Transnet is unwilling to sell the site, which could be a crucial piece of land for the university in connecting its main campus with Bellville.

“What makes UWC interesting is that it also thinks from its location. Because it has been so crucial as part of its own history and also the discourse they have now. At 30 km from the centre, a place that is actually a kind of enclave, the way the main campus connects, or doesn't connect, to its surroundings is quite pronounced.” – Lagae

Besides the specific location, the campus was also spatially developed with an insertion of racially inspired elements through indigenous plants and oppressive clothing (ties and frocks), creating a sense of ethical belonging for people of colour. UWC wasn't only spatially and 'ethnically' different from other universities, it was also not allowed to teach certain 'high' standing courses such as architecture or medicine, as a way of oppressing the intellectual minds of the coloured people whilst still allowing them to go to university.

“UWC was created on the edge of a city in a place that had no views and was not meant to offer any views. [...] There cannot be a concept of knowledge that does not take into consideration the design and the architectural formations and spatial formations of the university. Both those questions need to be aligned and we need to think of them together. Knowledge and where the university is located and how it is designed.” – Lalu

In 1970 the former University College of the Western Cape earned the status of University, becoming the University of the Western Cape. This resulted in the possibility of formulating its own courses and handing out degrees. The late 60s and 70s were characterised by the growth of the neighbourhoods around the campus, where dislocated coloured and black people were housed, in the vicinity of the economic growing business district of Bellville and the industrial Transnet site. With this in mind, from the seventies onwards, UWC became an active player in the emancipation of black and coloured communities. As student protest were on the rise in South Africa, many students who were loyal to the Black Conscious Movement²² protested against the all-white staff environment of the university. Their first act was to throw away the mandatory ties. The protests accumulated on and off campus and the appointment of the first coloured rector was a fact in 1975.



Figure 10: 'Hek Toe!' : Student protesting at the main entrance of the university (1980s)

22 The Black Consciousness Movement (BCM) was led activist Stephen Biko. It was an anti-apartheid activist movement that emerged in 1968 in South Africa and was set on raising black self-awareness. It aimed to unite Black students, professionals and intellectuals. It is a movement that represents political consciousness and arose after the jailing and banning of African National Congress (political party that fought against apartheid and for the voting rights of Black and Coloured South Africans) and Pan Africanist Congress leaders who had played a role in the Sharpeville Massacre (1960).

In 1982 the university formally rejected the political-ideological grounds on which it was established and moved towards defying the Universities Act of '59. This was complemented by a set of new architecturally eclectic buildings meant to showcase a democratic, inclusive approach. The university declared itself open and to this day is still exploring ways of giving meaningful access to all people while providing and producing knowledge that sustains the university and its environment for a longer period.

1994, the year the apartheid regime fell, introduced harsh times for UWC. Many of the teaching staff were prominent members of the opposition and protests, and with the fall of the apartheid regime they were plucked one by one to populate the new government, businesses and intellectual leadership and lead the country out of its apartheid time. The aftermath of the apartheid regime also resulted in the country opening up, hence not restricting students where they could study. The post-1994 environment did not stimulate the kind of intellectual vibrancy that was present during the struggle. The institution faced financial bankruptcy and extreme measures had to be taken, resulting in an inward turn and downsizing of the university. In the beginning of the 21st century, the confidence in and credibility of the university was at an all-time low.

Since then, the university has been struggling with its own identity and its apartheid history, often still being referred to as the disadvantaged-coloured university, a burden that is in desperate need of catching up with its white alternative. With the narrative of UWC as a university of struggle on repeat, the university has actually become to see it as its identity. But how can a university divert from this imposed *position* of struggle?

“There is a famous formulation that goes by the word ‘Hek toe’. In student meetings, students would gather in the main hall. If someone would shout ‘hek toe’, they would all marge to the front gate and confront the police there.” – Lalu

Becoming UWC

Around 1994, Jake Gerwell, the chief administrative officer at UWC, announced UWC as the intellectual democratic home of the left. Nevil Alexander, a leading South African political thinker and scholar, challenged the forging of UWC as an intellectual home of the left as he expressed the danger in this idea. A university that would create a position from which one could challenge apartheid but was not going to give access to the formation of knowledge and a new concept of freedom.

It's important to note, as the book *Becoming UWC* mentions, when describing the university, it is often forgotten that the university was founded within the logic of apartheid, where the taxonomic classification of ethnicities and race was a naturalised and normative discourse. The formation of a coloured university was the logical outcome of a naturalist rhetoric. The university was a product of the combining of epistemology and ideology and the reinforcing of one another 'to uphold the racial premise of the state.' [Lalu & Murray]. In this light, the university was built on an apartheid apparatus where one must recognise the history of power that was exercised there. The fundamentals of the university were based on the development and expansion of a country taxonomically divided by race and ethnicity.

*"In *Becoming UWC* we are interested in what it would mean to render the space meaningful in a way that would allow us to recast the limits of an instrumental and disciplinary apparatus in thinking our way out of the inheritance of apartheid."* – Lalu & Murray

For Premesh Lalu, to be at UWC every day, to survive, to teach and to think within it, requires thinking about a future beyond UWC. To think how UWC can be something different. To think about UWC as an institution not of apartheid making. How can a university, that is built by apartheid, start to think their way out of apartheid? The only way UWC can do this is by aligning knowledge and space, knowledge and design to generate and invent a different concept of freedom.

"I try to say that the only way we can do this is by aligning knowledge and space, knowledge and design, knowledge and the view of the university as a way of generating or inventing a different concept of freedom." – Lalu

This struggle for a post-apartheid university and its identity grafts itself on different grounds ranging from its enclave *position* in the urban landscape to the, by the apartheid, preordained selection of courses that could be taught at the university. This has led to an institute balancing two different paths while exploring its own identity and coming into being with its history: the one of outreach and the one of excellence.

A part of the inaugural speech of the current chancellor Professor Tyrone Brian Pretorius makes this need for a balance clearly visible:

Inaugural Speech of the Rector on the 17th of February, 2015

"To get where we need to be as a nation, we have to deal appropriately with the question of access [to higher education]. However, for access to be real, there can be no compromise on the aspiration to excellence. We need to tone up our whole higher education system so that no student or academic is left feeling that second rate is good enough. South Africa needs the best from all its universities and UWC remains committed to working with ALL its sister institutions towards realising the full potential of our people and building a sustained academic network in Africa and globally. [...]

I start, then Chancellor, with a South African challenge with global dimensions. While the world was in awe at South Africa's political transformation in 1994, the world continues to change at an alarming rate, which presents immense opportunities and risks. We would be failing as universities if we do not adapt to, engage with and think deeply about these changes with a view to graduating citizens for the world.

Three areas of rapid change stand out as demanding our engagement across disciplines. Global warming and climate change are likely to result in increased shortages of food and drinking water and health challenges. Secondly, in a world that is deeply scarred by abject poverty, increased proportions of the world's population - and indeed of South Africa's population - is living a precarious, undignified existence at the periphery of society. And thirdly, the world is experiencing a growing culture of consumerism, immediacy and extreme individualism without responsibility.

These insistent areas of change need to be researched rigorously. But it is also incumbent on the university to create an environment which heightens awareness of them. A university also has to be an unapologetically intellectual community with an ongoing interest in the significance of knowledge for our country and world. Inevitably, it has to deal with what is often presented as conflicting and inherent tensions between mandates, priorities or foci. Our world, however, does not exist as a set of binary opposites. Things are seldom simply black or white. Brian O'Connell has often presented a slide image of Cape Town's affluent CBD alongside the city's underdeveloped townships, not to illustrate these states of living as fixed opposites, but rather as the inherent, complex tensions of our world. Unfortunately, we tend to oversimplify these in binary terms. Closer to home, these actions have recently resulted in embarrassing attacks based on racial and xenophobic grounds. We cannot afford to turn a blind eye to issues such as these that are threatening and unravelling our rainbow project. In the face of that complexity, this university has opted to position itself as an 'engaged university'."

Mission statement 2035

UWC is a research-led university responsive to the needs of a changing world through excellence in teaching, learning and research and the generation and application of new knowledge. Firmly anchored in its **local and sub-regional context** and inspired by its distinctive academic role in building a more **equitable and dynamic society**, the University continues to empower its students, staff and partners to advance its mission of serving the greater public good and searching for humane and **sustainable solutions to the challenges of our time**. This is pursued through high academic standards, intellectual rigour and productive partnerships and **networks beyond the confines of disciplinary and geographic boundaries**.

Vision Statement 2035

By 2035, the University of the Western Cape will be widely recognised as a **leading research-led university**, most notably for the nexus between its undergraduate and post-graduate degree programmes and its research endeavour, its substantial place in key areas in the knowledge ecosystem, its keen focus on the public good and transforming lives, and its productive relationships and effective partnerships with universities and key agencies in Africa and beyond.

Values

UWC is focused on five values: academic excellence, engagement & responsiveness, integrity & accountability, collegiality & collaboration and inclusivity & diversity

Planetary and Societal Problems

“Universities are required to focus on addressing global and local social, economic and environmental challenges through its research and innovation focus, and importantly, through its role in preparing graduates who are responsible citizens and ethical professionals able to contribute to finding solutions towards a more equitable and just society.”
[Draft Institutional Operation Plan 2021-2025]

The University of the Western Cape has stated in its vision for 2035, the aspiration for academic success and progress while at the same time using academic research and capacity for the betterment of society, to engage in themes such as diversity, sustainability, social justice, ... Within their institutional operational plan for 2021-2025, UWC recognises the need for ‘change’. Change is triggered by the dissonance between the current realities and the ideal intent. One of the external drivers for change is the inequality in South Africa, being one of the most unequal countries²³ in the world. They are very aware of the fact that *‘no public university can plan for its future without taking into account the enormous challenges that confront society.’*[Pokpas].

“UWC has in its mission statement the proud history of using its academic resources to build a more equitable society. So, from its mandate which was always limited through the apartheid regime to certain areas, we don’t offer disciplines in areas such as medicine and architecture, we were not permitted by law to embark on those, but it transcended those and used resources available, its intellectual capacity to tackle the more complex wicked challenges of society. In its academic mandate it would deal with issues of humanity, with issues of social justice, of public health as opposed to medicine, with issues of food security, ... These would be the core identities around which the intellectual project is built on. So, in a sense that makes the institution to some extent, unique, different to what other institutions are trying to do and that doesn’t mean that it is by definition different.” – Pokpas

Sustainability

Little can be found on the main website of UWC on sustainability within their educational and research programmes. At the occasion of UWC’s 60th anniversary, the university created another website (without any connection to their main website), which includes the UN Sustainable Development Goals are. These goals are envisioned within several ongoing projects, such as the emergence of an interdisciplinary department for woman and gender studies and the acquisition of an atmospheric water generator. On this website they aim to focus on five themes that include multiple Sustainable Development Goals:

- Driving Research and Innovation (SDG 7,9,12)
- Enabling Learning Management systems (SDG 4,14,15)

²³ In South-Africa the bottom 50% of the population only has 5.8% of the wealth, in Western Europe that is about 20%.

- Combating Inequality (SDG 5,8,10,16)
- Enhancing Sustainability (SDG 6,11,13)
- Promoting Student Development and Wellness (SDG1,2,3)

Although on their main website, little is mentioned about sustainable education and research specifically, in the interview with Larry Pokpas, he mentioned how UWC is trying to focus on using the knowledge production for the betterment of society which in turns shows how they focus intrinsically on sustainable knowledge production.

"It is probably an institution that punches above its weight. It plays in the upper league of research-led universities in South Africa, it leads the debate in a number of areas, but the one outstanding characteristic would be to use the knowledge production to the betterment of society as a very deliberate strategy." – Pokpas

Diversity

Within their operational plan, UWC aims to pay more attention to employment, equity and diversifying its staffing profile, focussing on the under-representation of black African staff and women. They want to continue to **position** the UWC as an employer of choice ‘through a dynamic and supportive work environment and a resilient culture that embraces diversity, inclusivity and excellence.’ [Draft Institutional Operation Plan 2021-2025].

"The University is committed to equity, diversity, inclusivity and fairness, and seeks to nurture and build on our diverse cultural heritage." [Draft Institutional Operation Plan 2021-2025]

Transcending Boundaries

"At UWC, we are enthusiastic about forging mutually beneficial partnerships that will assist us to realise our vision of being a place of quality, and a place to grow from hope to action through knowledge." [Institutional Operation Plan 2021-2025]

Education

Within the inaugural speech of Professor Tyrone Brian Pretorius, one can see how his perspective is clearly open for other ways of education at UWC.

"A university where learning rather than teaching is the focus which acknowledges that learning takes place in very holistic ways with flexible modes inside and outside the classrooms. [...] A university that recognises that our graduates should be T-shaped. T-shaped people have both sufficient depth in their discipline and extensive breadth in deploying the range of skills that 21st century society demands." – Pretorius

UWC wants to be a university where learning rather than teaching is the focus in order to nurture graduates who ‘have the knowledge, skills and attributes to succeed in the world of work; are lifelong learners; and are socially aware, ethical and caring global citizens.’ [Institutional Operation Plan 2021-2025].

Within UWC there are several interdisciplinary centres such as the interdisciplinary centre for sports science and development, or the inter-and transdisciplinary department for women’s & gender studies that collaborate with local and international partners. Although announcing this open-minded perspective where the university goes beyond traditional borders, it is not visibly reflected on the website.

Research & Ranking

"We respect and strive for excellence in teaching and learning, research and innovation as we strive to be widely recognised as a leading research-led university." [Institutional Operation Plan 2021-2025]

UWC is extremely focused on strengthening its **position** in a global and international context as a top research university, which shows commitment to the excellence of specific research disciplines and teaching. They continue to feature among the top one hundred fifty institutions in the Times Higher Education Emerging Economies University Rankings, being placed at one hundred twenty-six in 2021. They are building strongly on international partnerships and are enriching the institutional context through international students and staff in order to strengthen their **position** as a research-led university. Internationalisation is a key-aspect in connecting knowledge across hemispheres within a network of nodes. In order to ‘keep up’ with peer institutions they keep on striving for

excellence, focussing on talent management without denying the competitive environment of academic research.

“UWC has expressed its intention to position itself as a university that is increasingly recognised for its capacity to produce and advance new knowledge in areas of recognised research strength, and to work towards the translation of knowledge through innovative endeavours.” [Draft Institutional Operation Plan 2021-2025]

Nevertheless, this doesn't mean that they are not pushing the boundaries of disciplines. They are building on different partnerships, private, public, civil society, business, ... One of the key words UWC will be working on is ‘connecting’. This connectedness is related to the partnerships and networks they want to build on both nationally as internationally. Moreover, they want to ‘make boundaries permeable for its students and staff to easily cross structural and disciplinary boundaries’ [Draft IOP 2021-2025]. Clearly, UWC is betting on transdisciplinarity. Sadly, as they approach themselves as experts who have ‘much to offer’, they seem to ignore or fail to see that transdisciplinarity goes both ways and non-academic actors might have a lot to offer for them too.

“We are confident about our identity as an institution rooted in South Africa and the African continent, and we believe we have much to offer to a vast array of local, continental and international partners - be they other educational institutions, the private sector, government or civil society.” [Draft IOP 2021-2025]

According to ‘the institutional operation plan’, in order to position the university as a dynamic, research-led university in a continuously changing national and international landscape, brand management is an essential part of organisational positioning in the virtual world. It states that this hasn't received enough attention in the past. In 2020 they introduced a new University website which will assist in broadening UWC’s brand positioning:

“Continued engagement, through marketing campaigns and other initiatives is required to broaden UWC’s brand positioning. The new University website will assist in this regard. Still, dissemination of all brand information and brand consistency require a more coordinated and systematic approach to advance the positioning of UWC.” [Draft IOP 2021-2025]

Similar to other universities, UWC is an active part of the neoliberalisation process the world is facing. The fundamental social role universities have as institutions is displaced by ‘the economic role of serving corporations’ global competitiveness’. [Slaughter & Rhoades]. UWC is saying that the students should become ‘global citizens’. The ‘globe’ offers endless opportunities for students to make it in the world of innovation, enterprises and progress. Their website, in a sense, is a reflection of the university as a corporation rather than an institution.

“As a caring university community, there is a general feeling that much more can be done to help students succeed academically and acquire the requisite attributes and values to

thrive as global citizens in the 21st-century knowledge economy.” [Draft IOP 2021-2025]

Being a part of this global knowledge economy, UWC is very much aware of the necessity to work together in research and innovative networks while at the same time being conscious of the need to be anchored to its ‘own place’:

“Although we are anchored in our geographical place and deeply cognizant of our obligations to our “place”, we are also very conscious that the research and innovation landscape is increasingly being shaped by large networks of scientists working together to address the grand challenges of our time” [Draft IOP 2021-2025]



Launch of the new website on December 3rd

The Local Urban Environment

In the institutional operation plan for 2021-2025 little is mentioned on the need to work on Cape Town in its totality, as a specific urban landscape. Rather, UWC is focussing on its direct environment, namely the neighbourhoods they are embedded in and surrounding neighbourhoods, mentioning the ambition to be an anchor institution. This is in contrast to its idea of ‘branding’ and ‘training students into global citizens’ which has been explained in the previous part. The university is in the meantime anchoring itself physically within the local urban environment of Cape Town. This in turn brings us back to contextualised education and research which is not as endless and limitless as the idea of ‘the globe’.

“In UWC's context, the idea of UWC as an anchor institution is intended to be closely connected with the notion of UWC as an engaged university, seeking to meaningfully connect with different publics. Over the last number of years, UWC has been consistent in articulating engagement in a context where UWC is aware of a distinctive academic role and its potential to help build a more equitable society. Its mission and vision speak to the imperative of being responsive to local and global challenges. In this regard, infrastructure development can be an important enabler, locating the University in different areas in support of new and different kinds of engagements and partnerships.” [Draft IOP 2021-2025]

The university wants to **position** itself as an anchor institution to create knowledge and at the same time align this knowledge within its local environment. Historically UWC was placed at a hostile distance from central Bellville, separated by the vast landscape of the Transnet site, isolating generations of students from the two nodes²⁴ (Bellville CBD and Cape Town CBD) of the city and the job opportunities that are situated there.

“Transforming the apartheid landscape by appropriately developing the buffer between the main campus and the city has remarkable potential. It would revitalise the Bellville CBD, bring three universities and TVET Colleges within walking distance of one another, vastly improve the educational experience of 60 000 students, and, through stimulating innovation, build the regional economy and improve the lot of surrounding communities.” – Pretorius

UWC has expanded its footprint beyond the main campus. The Dental Faculty is situated at the Tygerberg Hospital Estate and in Mitchell’s plain, where students learn clinical skills and at the same time offer health care to surrounding communities. The Faculty of Com-

munity and Health Sciences (nursing school) has recently been established in Bellville. At the moment, the Greatmore Building in Woodstock, the Transhex building on Voortrekker Road and the Unibell student accommodation in Belhar are in the make.

UWC will continue to engage itself in its neighbourhoods, both urban and rural, and promote cultural, educational, developmental, social and economic relationships with its surroundings.

“UWC is strategically located to be a powerful partner in transforming the whole area into a model post-apartheid space and reconnecting it to the city's mainstream life, but it cannot achieve this alone. Through the Voortrekker Road, Central Improvement District (VRCID) initiative and the work of the Greater Tygerberg Partnership (GTP), the revitalisation of Bellville has been receiving attention and UWC will continue to support and participate in these initiatives.” [Draft IOP 2021-2025]

Urban Anchor

In 2011-2012, Ana Michelena and Eva De Bruyn conducted fieldwork in light of a collaboration between architecture students from Ghent University and the University of the Western Cape, on the off-campus facilities of UWC to investigate the university struggles with its remote location and its position as an enclave in the periphery of Cape Town. Ana Michelena focused on UWC’s involvement in the J.S. Marais Hospital in Bellville that has, since then, evolved into the nursing school, in ‘The University as an urban agent. A critical design proposal for a UWC satellite campus in Bellville’. Eva De Bruyn studied the possible relation between the faculty of dentistry and its outreach programme, and the township of Mitchells Plain in ‘Campus and the City in a South African Context. Reflections on a UWC satellite campus in Mitchells Plain, Cape Town’. Within their joint dissertation the two students conducted research on the possibility of engaging and physically positioning the campuses and the outreach programme of the university better within the urban environment and its characteristics that the university is embedded in. This resulted in different possible design schemes.

²⁴ Bellville and Cape Town, are, together with two other nodes (Philippi Metro General and Somerset West) the economic hubs the city of Cape Town is betting on in structuring the city and the concentration of job opportunities and mobility.

"There is an African problem proverb that says: if you want to go fast, go alone, if you want to go far, go together. In this case we need to work with as many different role players as possible, international and local partners and find a way to have these conversations and debates about complex challenges that we are trying to address, and this is simply symbolic of what it is we are trying to do. The physical space is not about the building, it is about impacting the lives of people over time and how do you create resilient societies cities and environments. From that perspective, actually dealing with complex wicked problems, with no simple solutions and these are simply ways of getting us into spaces, to work with others, to find those solutions." - Pokpas

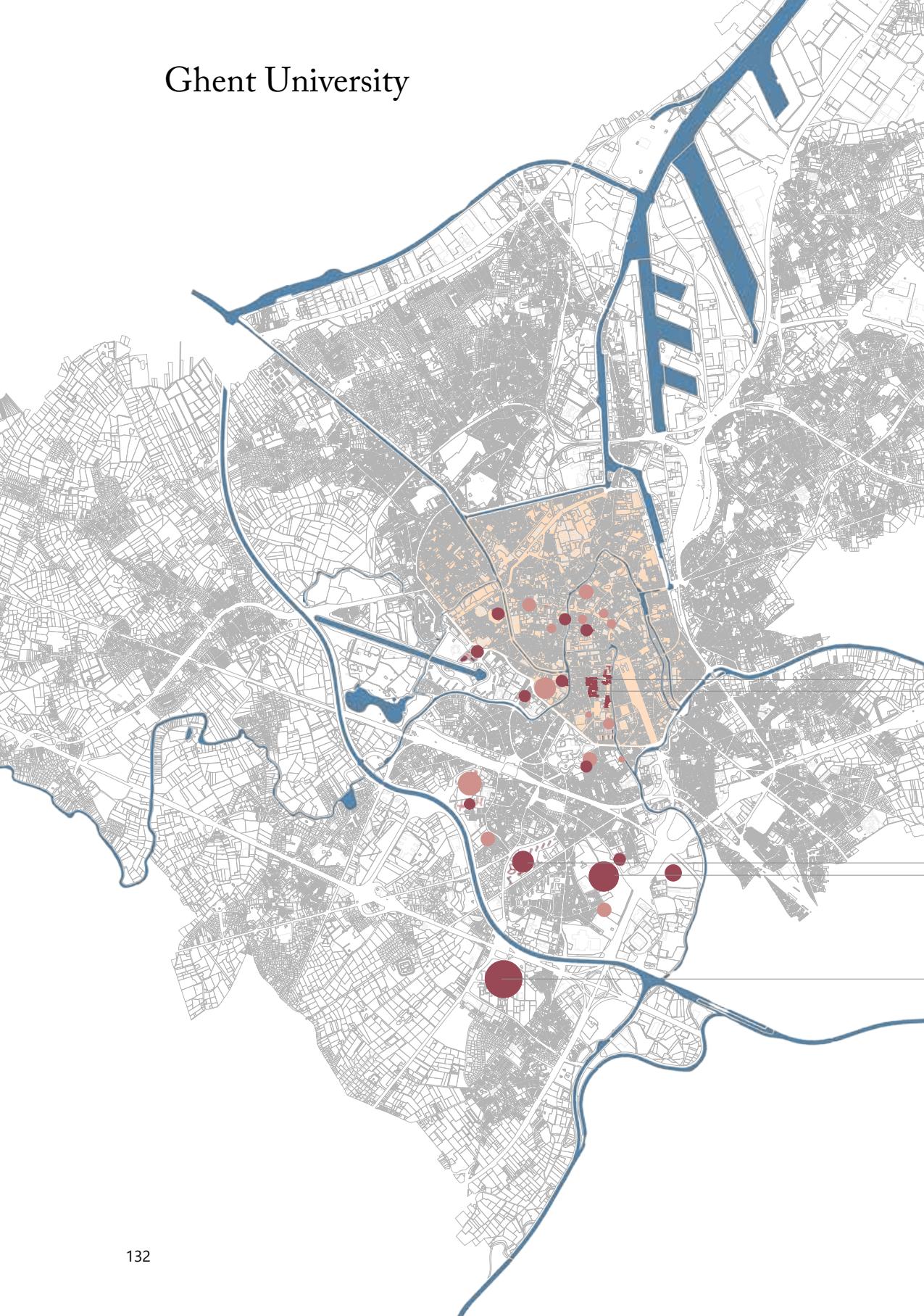
Ghent

157,74 km²

263 406 inhabitants



Ghent University



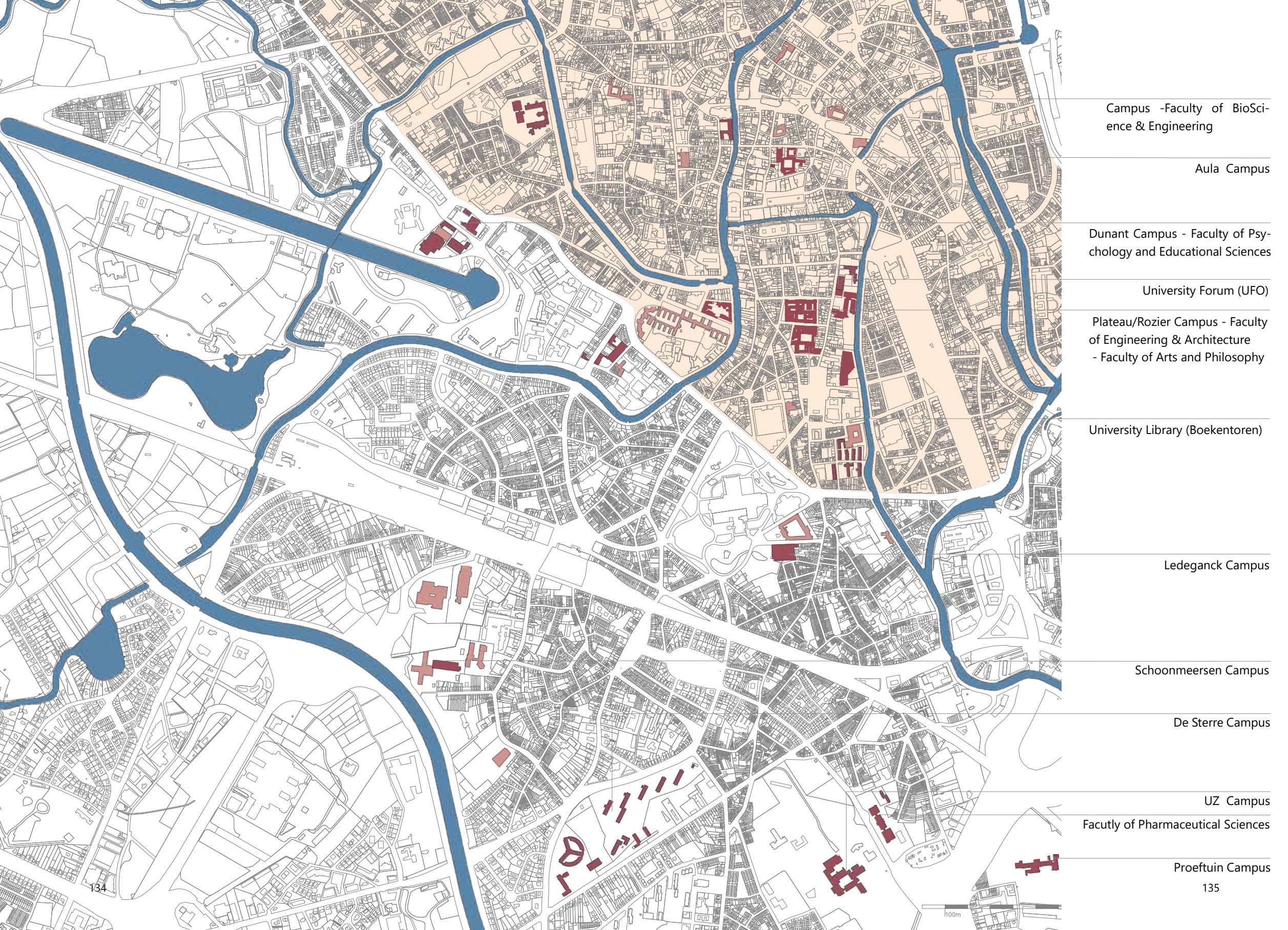
°1817

Rector: Rik Van de Walle

47 743 students

11 faculties

1. Arts and Philosophy
2. Law and Criminology
3. Sciences
4. Medicine and Health Sciences
5. Engineering and Architecture
6. Economics and Business Administration
7. Veterinary Medicine
8. Psychology and Educational Sciences
9. Bioscience Engineering
10. Pharmaceutical Sciences
11. Political and Social Sciences



History and Background

Ghent University was founded by William I, King of the Netherlands in 1817 as one of the three (Latin-speaking) State Universities in Belgium. After Belgium's independence in 1830, the Belgian State became in charge of the administration of Ghent University; French was the new official academic language. This changed in 1930 when Ghent University became the first Dutch-speaking university in Belgium. From 1991 onwards the nation state was no longer responsible for the universities and power was transferred towards community-based policy and a greater autonomy was assigned to the universities.

Although officially a State university, Ghent University's relationship with the city, which provided the buildings until the interwar period, was particularly close. The City council had lobbied William I fiercely in having a university within the city of Ghent. Geographically, Ghent University is a 'city university', being strongly embedded within the historic centre of the city. For Ghent, the arrival of a university meant the introduction of a body of intellectuals into the urban fabric. The new intellectual elite spread out in the urban life, mixing with citizens in City Hall, the courthouse, the hospital, the societies, and so on, creating a new biotope which strengthened the bond between university and city. However, at the end of the 19th century, this bond came under pressure as the university grew, specialised and became more scientific, leading to infrastructural problems that demanded an up-scaling of the university. In the beginning of the 20th century, the expropriation of the workers quarters on the 'Blandijnberg' was conducted in order to make room for new university buildings such as the Rozier-Plateau building, where our faculty is located at the moment as well as the famous Boekentoren which, to this day, still houses the University Library. Within the 60s and 70s some of the faculties were relocated. The expanding university established its medical and science faculties on large sites (de Sterre, UZ campus, ...) situated at the outskirts of the city creating 'green campus models' as enclaves without any connection to the city or its local environment. These campuses at the edge of the city increased the commuting of students and professors which reinforced the alienation between city and university.

From 1991, the university was given more authority and they became their own building contractor. Building activities were again focused within the 19th century belt. The relationship with the city became closer again. However, today, Ghent University is planning on moving the Faculty of Engineering to the outskirts of the city (Zwijnaarde) which will again widen the gap between university and city. In 2013 Ghent University also opened 'Ghent University Global Campus' in South Korea.

"Ghent University is a top 100 university and one of the major universities in Belgium. Our 11 faculties offer more than 200 courses and conduct in-depth research within a wide range of scientific domains. Ghent University Global Campus is also the first European university in Songdo, South Korea" [UGhent]

Vision Statement

"Ghent University aims to be a world player building innovative research and education, based on international excellence. It commits itself to spearheading scientific and social debates and training people who dare to think today about the challenges of tomorrow."

Mission Statement

"Ghent University...

- Distinguishes itself as a **socially committed and pluralistic university** that is open to all students, regardless of their ideological, political, cultural or social background;
- Defines itself in a broad **international perspective**, all the while accentuating its individuality in terms of language and culture;
- Aims to encourage its students to adopt a critical approach within a creative, development-oriented educational and research environment;
- Offers a broad spectrum of high-quality research-based educational programmes that are constantly being adapted to the most recent scholarly and scientific developments;
- Aims to develop in a selective manner the advanced degree programmes, as well as postgraduate and permanent education;
- Aims to situate its educational and research activities within the broader social context and to remain in continual **dialogue with all parties** concerned;
- Aims to promote and further develop fundamental **independent research** in all faculties and to be a world player in the selected fields of endeavour;
- Aims to be an university with a focus on the social and economic applications of its research findings **enterprising**;
- Attaches particular importance to the social facilities made available for students;
- Creates a stimulating environment for its staff and provides them with the fullest scope of opportunities for developing their potential;
- Attaches particular importance to the **participation** of students, staff and social representatives in the formulation of policy;
- Desires strong interaction with its alumni;
- Opt for a **decentralised**, dynamic organisation model."

Within the coming years Ghent University is focusing on six different themes: social identity, diversity, sustainability, alumni activities, talent management and active learning strategies:

"In the coming years, Ghent University is focusing on six specific challenges. These six topics were suggested by the Ghent University community and are therefore close to our heart. As a result, we tackle these issues together with the staff, alumni and policy makers within and outside of the university ... as well as, of course, with our students. For each challenge, a special commissioner has been appointed to support us in its accomplishment."

Planetary and Societal Problems

Rik Van de Walle, together with four other chancellors of like-minded universities, joined one of the many climate marches in 2019: ‘*The results of scientific research must be taken into account in the debate. They should not guide politics, but rather feed policy. The young people have specifically asked to be here to support that, and as rector I am here to represent science.*’

Ghent University profiles itself as a socially engaged pluralistic university that is open to all students and staff. By focusing on sustainability, social identity and diversity the aim is to play a role within planetary and societal challenges as an ‘engaged’ university.

“*In addition to providing education and conducting academic research, a university also plays a social role, for example, by initiating and nurturing public debate. The focus on its social identity is one of Ghent University’s policy choices because we wish to create more social value through academic research in the coming years. For example, Ghent University aims to collaborate with social actors to conduct academic research that is socially relevant.*”[UGhent]

Sustainability

“*Ghent University aims to take the lead in sustainability issues and teach its students and staff how to deal with such issues. For example, the university wishes to integrate sustainable development more explicitly into the course catalogue so that students are ready to tackle the challenges of today and tomorrow. Ghent University wishes to be a leading knowledge centre for a future which is ecologically, socially and economically sustainable, in a local and global context.*”[UGhent]

In past years, Ghent University has not been left behind in the fight for a future that is ecologically, socially and economically sustainable. Several initiatives have taken off: The Green Office, UGhent Transition, the Stadsacademie, Thursday veggie day, ... Recently they have started offering university-wide (meaning every student can follow these courses) elective courses focusing on socio-ecological theme's such as sustainability thinking, human rights, co-creation and coaching & diversity.

Diversity

“*Ghent University is aware of the fact that the ever-increasing diversity in our society is not yet properly reflected in the lecture halls and workplaces at the university. Many young people with a migration background are still not finding their way to the university. Similarly, school leavers with a lower socio-economic background often do not opt for a university education. As for students with a functional disability, the way that their guidance is being organised could probably be improved.*”[UGhent]

The world is becoming more and more diverse. Within the Diversity policy and action plan for 2019-2023 Ghent University is focusing on four strategic objectives:

1. Creating an institutional culture that facilitates the super-diversity present in society
2. Organising a structure that supports integrated and diverse knowledge building
3. Supporting and widening the access of students and staff from under-represented groups
4. Increasing the retention of students and staff from under-represented groups

However, their strategic objectives haven’t been actualised on the ground. In the academic year of 2019-2020 only 11,8% of students’ mother tongue, within Bachelor studies at Ghent University, is foreign, only 4,7 % of the students come from a European migration background²⁵ and only 7,1% have a non-European migration background²⁶. These figures, compared with the years before, have barely risen.

When looking at our own academic environment within the faculty of Architecture and Urban planning at Ghent University, only two out of seventeen professors within the tenured academic staff are female and only three of the assisting staff. In addition, there is little colour and diversity among staff and students in terms of background and nationalities. Remarkably, is the further along someone progresses in our education, the less diverse the students/one’s peers become.

Clearly, Ghent University still needs to take action to turn their objectives into reality.

Transcending Boundaries

Education

Ghent University is focusing on active learning strategies. Within the educational strategy Ghent University is concentrating on multiperspectivism which is the embodiment of their motto ‘Dare to think’. They are encouraging critical thinking by incorporating changing perspectives, pluralism and deviating approaches.

“*Dare to Think* is the credo of Ghent University: critical and independent minds study, carry out research and work at Ghent University. The phrase is the literal translation of apere aude that was originally used by the Roman poet Horace and was also the main idea of enlightened critical philosophers such as Immanuel Kant.”[Focus on Ghent University]

Part of this multiperspectivism is the involvement of perspectives of different disciplines (inter- and multidisciplinarity) as well as stakeholders from the field (transdisciplinarity). This in turn shows how they are open to transcending traditional ex-cathedra education and its boundaries.

25 Students with at least one parent who had a non-EU nationality at birth.

26 Students with at least one parent who had a EU nationality at birth.

“The university does not only want to involve university stakeholders (e.g., students, parents, teachers) in the organisation and quality assurance of its education, but also strives to valorise the perspectives of stakeholders from the field (e.g. culture, economy, healthcare, justice, governments).” [Strategic Objectives of Education at Ghent University]

As mentioned above, the university offers university-wide elective courses focusing on sustainability. These courses, although mentioning little about a transdisciplinary approach, are offered to all students of Ghent University regardless of their disciplines, creating a multi- or interdisciplinary setting. Some courses, such as ‘Sustainable cities’, are trying to engage in a transdisciplinary setting, by including policy makers of the city of Ghent within their course.

Ranking

Ghent University defines itself as one of the major universities in Belgium which in its turn shows how they are proud of being an excellent University that is focused on high-quality research and education. This is furthermore highlighted on their website, on which Ghent University is presented within the rankings on a global scale. These rankings are based on the number of top publications, grants, prizes, productivity ...

“Ghent University recognises the reality of rankings but does not deliberately strive for high-ranking positions. A good position is the result of an internal focus on quality and excellence.” [UGhent]

Even though the university does not ‘deliberately strive for high ranking’ the fact that the website explicitly mentions the ranking shows how the university does want to profile itself as a ‘centre of excellence’.

World rankings	
Ghent University	position
Academic Ranking of World Universities (Shanghai Ranking) 2020	66
National Taiwan University Ranking 2020	77
U.S. News Best Global Universities Ranking 2021	85
Times Higher Education (THE) World Universities Ranking 2020	103
QS World University Ranking 2021	135
Europe's most innovative universities 2019	48

Figure 11: UGhent visualising its ranking on the website

Research

In 2019, Rik Van de Walle and Mieke van Herreweghe were chosen as chancellor and vice-chancellor after a long battle and several voting rounds. One of the main elective themes was the idea to create more academic freedom with a newly designed system of rewarding and appreciating by minimising formal accountability and administrative overload. In other words, a strive to release pressure from the competitive field within the

academic world. One could start to think Rik and Mieke are part of the slow science movement, as they proceed similar to this movement, expressing an awareness of the publication pressure researchers are feeling.

“The idea often seems to be that everything would grind to a halt if you stopped judging academics along the lines of publications, prizes and grants.” – Van de Walle

Today, Ghent University is countering this idea by fixating on talent management. Academic staff are no longer assessed solely on academic output, but on talent development that encourages creativity and awards excellence. This new focus opens up a perspective on Ghent University’s intention to be a ‘centre of excellence’ in the international field.

Transition UGhent

Ghent University, albeit being a traditional university, does make room for projects in which other types of knowledge production are addressed, such as the ‘think and do tank’ Transition UGhent, that has been active since 2012. Transition UGhent is a transdisciplinary innovation network in which policy makers, students, academics, citizens, dreamers, doers, ... join forces to create a sustainable university. With small scale experiments and actions, Transition UGhent, tries to bring together expert knowledge, activism and engagement, in order to create a systematic and structural transition towards a sustainable university and society.

Some of their transition standpoints:

- “Focus on sustainability education as a coherent learning thread within the study programme instead of optional courses
 - Focus on sustainable mobility: reuse or different use of car parks, focus on bike space, awareness of sustainable travel for international exchanges, ...
 - From concrete to a reduction of soil sealing, gardening, green spaces, ...
 - Circular use of material
 - Veggie meals in the canteens
 - Experimenting with other ways of education, for example implementing ‘student-lead education’ within sustainability education
 - Involve all stakeholders within academic research
 - Focus on social commitment of research. Step away from the A1 religion: Publications in international peer reviewed journals often become a goal in itself.
 - Create a sustainable long-term vision for UGhent’s building stock“
- [Memorandum 2018 ‘Together towards a sustainable university’]

The Urban and the Local Environment

The Urban

As stated before in a post-national world, the local urban living environment can be taken as a common ground. 'The urban' represents the complexity of the world in the best possible way: urbanities carry the new economy and form the nodes of networks in a global system. In that sense Ghent University doesn't lag behind. They focus intensively on internationalisation.

"Over the coming years Ghent University will focus on an active international student recruitment policy. A more diverse student population is a vital condition for high-quality education in today's globalised diverse society. Concerning scientific research international cooperation and recruitment also lead to results with world fame." [Strategic Objectives of Education at Ghent University]

Yet, the focus of internationalisation is not on decentralising knowledge and linking it to local context but rather on the battle for 'fame' within a globalised world. In that argument, the establishment of a 'Global Campus' in South-Korea, reflects the importance of being recognised in a global network. Which, in spite of its approach, is then again strengthening a post-national world in the sense of linking urban environments instead of nations.

Enlight

In 2020, Ghent University set up a consortium of 9 European Universities and twenty-three associates consisting of cities, NGOs, foundations, research centres, regional developments and businesses, with the goal to transcend national borders and bringing together universities and their local environment including all its different actors. ENLIGHT stands for European diversity Network to promote equitable quality of Life, sustainability & Global engagement through Higher education Transformation. "With ENLIGHT, we not only want to transcend national borders, we will also broaden the scope within our own university. All ENLIGHT universities will work together with their city and region to identify and address societal challenges. Based on these challenges, we want to create new forms of learning in which students work together with researchers, citizens and companies on real social issues. We are ambitious: students will be stimulated to think innovatively, to work together beyond the borders of their own discipline and to deal with diversity inside and outside Europe."

The Local

Following the urban, the local environment in its turn is the argument of implementing a focus on local issues within the policy of universities. At first sight, the involvement of Ghent University in this argument is only limited or even non-existing.

This can be exemplified with the recently made decision to move all civil and industrial engineering students and staff to campus Ardoen in Zwijnaarde located in the outskirts of the city and at the same time being hardly involved in the local environment. An example that does aim to focus on locality, is the 'quadruple helix' collaboration between citizen, policy, industry and university located in the library of Ghent 'de Krook'.

By concentrating more on internationalisation than on the local context, there is a danger that, despite profiling themselves as an 'engaged and pluralistic' university, they may move towards another direction, a neoliberal one, creating an entrepreneurial global university where students are trained to become entrepreneurs and global citizens. Nonetheless the rector wants to continue defending all studies, even the ones that are not aimed directly at an economic goal or enterprise, at all cost:

"The idea that a course of study must be utilitarian, or else it has no right to exist, is something I thoroughly oppose." - Van de Walle

In that sense Ghent University is not only a university of profit and productivity but carries within itself the possibility of being an 'estheticised university' as mentioned by Premesh Lalu.

De Krook

"UGhent is a critical, socially engaged and open university. This unique character is now being further exploited by UGhent at De Krook. De Krook offers a showcase for the research and knowledge of UGhent. Visitors can experiment with the latest technologies such as Virtual Reality or 3D audio, think about the future of the city in the co-creation room or listen to researchers who enthusiastically share their knowledge on a human scale. In short, at De Krook UGhent brings its top research even closer to the people, by involving them in all phases of the research. We organise major events, public evenings, co-creation sessions and lectures. This way, everyone can discover UGhent's top research and help shape it." [UGhent]

The connection of this physical location of the Krook close to the University forum and the historical city centre is an opportunity for Ghent University to bring research closer to the people on the one hand, and to tackle societal challenges within 'an interactive laboratory in the middle of the city' [UGhent] on the other hand. Within this laboratory, innovation can be stimulated, and researchers can be brought together from different disciplines within a local context.

Yet, these ideas seem to primarily be a reality on their website, the collaboration in de Krook does not seem to be working to its full potential and much more could come out of this initiative.

Conclusion

The University of Antwerp is focused on using their location in Antwerp as a way of positioning themselves in a global world, as a port towards the international networking. Key themes are increasing interdisciplinarity in research and education, networking on a global level and Antwerp as lab for ‘the’ 21st century diverse city – but is there such a thing as ‘the universal’ city? Antwerp is betting on its metropolitan character in a global world rather than actively engaging with its own local context without wanting anything in return.

Caroline Pauwels, Chancellor of The Vrije Universiteit Brussel, is very much aware of the difficulties that a rigid system such as a university are facing in terms of funding, internationalisation, diversity and how it relates to interdisciplinary methods and tackling societal challenges. VUB is a university that feels the necessity to engage with and for its local urban context and its inhabitants but also with society and the world as a whole. Its education and research are aimed at an interdisciplinary approach that wants to benefit the urban environment and create partnerships with international (European) stakeholders who think alike and expand its university network.

UWC on the other hand is betting on two horses. It recognises that universities are complex, multifaceted institutions, required to fulfil multiple roles. Roles, which as pointed out, are often presented as binary opposites (though we, as authors, are of the opinion that nothing is binary). On the one hand universities are deeply embedded in the global knowledge economy which requires high levels of knowledge production and innovation within the making of international partnerships. On the other hand, UWC, acknowledges the importance of anchoring itself in the local context, creating a meaningful path, by undertaking research, teaching and learning in the context of engagement.

Ghent University, with Rik Van de Walle as chancellor, is, similar to VUB, transcending boundaries within the academic world by focusing on ‘talent management’: creativity and freedom should not be overshadowed by pressure and competition. At the same time Ghent University acknowledges the need for other types of knowledge production in which non-academic actors are involved. What is striking, is the lack of attention Ghent university is giving to its local environment. Within their policy, internationalisation and the global network is key, clearly lacking a vision of participation within its own local context.

As seen above, all four universities, and universities in general, are becoming major players in a global network. There is a danger that lies in this approach: the global **position** of universities might reflect back onto their own education and research. All four universities, and universities world-wide, are in one way or another close to becoming ‘entrepreneurial and neoliberal universities’. When reflecting this within the institution, students are trained to believe in ‘the entrepreneur of the self’ and feel the urge to carry the re-

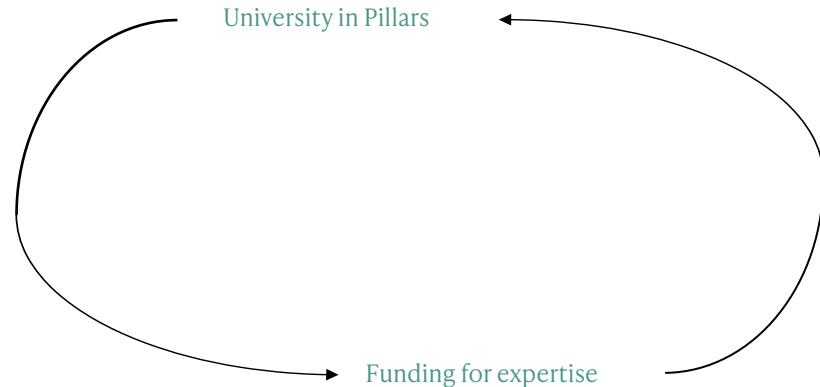
sponsibility of being able to handle the world on their own. This illusion, that people can create their own future, is setting students up for failure whenever they can’t find their place in the world. If students are becoming global citizens, how will they relate to their own living environment? Bruno Latour stated in his book ‘Down to Earth: Politics in the New Climatic Regime’, that humans are no longer living in a shared world. This idea to create ‘global citizens’ in no way demonstrates a contextualised and localised perspective on knowledge. As mentioned beforehand, we propose the urban local living environment as the place to bring the world back to the surface, to come back to earth.

Internationalisation is often a key aspect that universities are working on. They aim to become actors in a ‘global network’. On the one hand, creating an international network, research, partners and knowledge sharing gives universities the opportunity to share expertise, on ‘wicked’ issues as well as niche-subjects across borders, connecting universities and thus cities in a global web. Our plea is to constantly shift this shared knowledge back and forth, from its own academic landscape, to the local environment, from working within the institution, to working across universities or with urban actors.

On the other hand, internationalisation is often driven by a financial perspective. The more research papers, programs, etc. on an internationalisation scale, the more funding a university receives. Receiving grants has become a competition of who can produce the most in the shortest amount of time on subjects that are short-term and mono-disciplinary, a phenomenon UAntwerp, UGhent and VUB have begun to counterbalance through the introduction of new parameters.

“With the Special Research Funds (BOF), the Flemish government years ago gave each university a strategic instrument to pursue an autonomous basic research policy based on its own priorities and needs, but always with excellence as the selection criterion. [...] As rectors, we have taken the formulated recommendations of the evaluation report as a starting point for a fundamentally innovative proposal to adjust the BOF regulations. Key words are interuniversity cooperation, excellence, international cooperation and interdisciplinarity. [...] The introduction of a new citation parameter will allow us to better appreciate the quality of publications. Finally, we are committed to developing a specific performance indicator that maps interdisciplinarity.” – De Schepper (UHasselt), Pauwels (VUB), Sels (KU Leuven), Van de Walle (UGhent), Van Goethem (UAntwerp)

Funding is necessary to conduct research, but, at the same time, these types of funding condemns universities to work in monodisciplinary settings as they need to focus on the specific discipline the funding is reserved for. This monodisciplinary setting most funding is based on can be satisfying in order to tackle niche-specific objectives. Nevertheless, in order to tackle planetary or societal ‘wicked’ issues, trans and interdisciplinary research of different expertise is a necessity.



We, as authors, believe this situation, where universities are stuck between wanting to tackle societal issues through interdisciplinary research teams on the one hand and, in dire need of proper funding, but being restricted by the existing rigid funding mechanisms of universities on the other hand, can be broken through.

For example, by offering and embedding transdisciplinary education that is not as bound to this rigid structure, rather than solely focusing on transdisciplinary research, by creating sustainable collaborations between universities focused on shared perspectives rather than funding or even, as VUB mentioned, looking for other funding opportunities such as the SDG funds and Horizon Europe.

We, in no way, expect of the academic landscape to fully shift from monodisciplinarity to transdisciplinarity on all levels, and to only work on the local context. Expertise in one area is necessary, to, combined with other expertise in different areas tackle the complex societal and planetary issues the world is facing. There is, thus, both a necessity for discipline bound expertise (tame problems still need to be solved) and a platform where expertise across disciplines can be brought together. At the same time there is both a necessity for a sharing of knowledge on 'wicked' societal and planetary issues as well as using the local landscape as testing ground.

After a profound dive into the academic landscape of the four universities we can state that the status quo of the university is not as black and white as it used to be. Traditionally, universities have not been concerned with examining their own context; on the contrary, they have often been set up to educate a select few (or, as we saw in the case of UWC, mainly to isolate them). Haraway's concept of 'situated knowledge' is not present in the DNA of the traditional university.

We have discovered that universities are increasingly opening up to other ways of acquiring knowledge that are not purely scientific, objective and universal. Nevertheless, we see that due to the rigid structure universities are stuck in, their ambition and daily reality

do not always match. This academic landscape thus gives an emergence of various initiatives and experiments that seek to break the rigid structure from within the confined boundaries of these institutions.

In addition to the ambition to implement other forms of knowledge production (inter and transdisciplinary), we can see a trend within the four universities to focus on internationalisation and creating worldwide partnerships. Through these partnerships, knowledge can be transferred beyond national borders and this creates the opportunity of using shared expertise for the betterment of society and the planet. Unfortunately, not every university is aware that their expertise, in order to have an impact, should, besides being leveraged in a transdisciplinary setting, be deployed to interact with their local environment. We can conclude that the Vrije Universiteit Brussel and the University of the Western Cape are more aware of this context-bounded engagement universities should have.

As mentioned before, we have picked and analysed four initiatives, one within each of the above mentioned ambitious - but unable to translate it to into concrete actions - universities. Initiatives that are eager to change the institution from within (Stadsform to a lesser extent) by focusing on these intertwining paths of transdisciplinarity, 'wicked' issues and the local urban environment of the city they are a part of. All four initiatives are somehow embedded in an academic landscape and trying to connect their research to the local context of the city they are working in and on. Even though they have a different geography, the ambition is similar: they are all initiatives linked in one way or another to one or more universities, working in their own way towards a post-national world by means of post-normal science, bringing together academic research in a transdisciplinary setting, collaborating with non-academic actors within the local urban environment.