

# City and university:

## Co-creating a more attractive city

### Examples from Aalborg, Linköping and Ghent



Thematic paper

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## Abstract

*Both city and university have a stake in developing an “attractive city”. How can they collaborate in this respect? In this paper, we present three cases in which city and university collaborate to make the city more attractive: Aalborg, Ghent, and Linköping. We focus on interventions in the field of urban planning and the use of public space.*

## 1. Introduction

During the EUniverCities exchange project<sup>1</sup>, representatives from 10 European medium-sized cities and universities shared knowledge and practices on how city and university can work together in a better way, for the benefit of both. In this thematic paper we deal with one specific topic, namely how city and university can collaborate to create a more attractive city.

Both sides have an interest here. For a university, the attractiveness and quality of life of the host city matters: it affects their current students and staff, and being in a more attractive city helps the university to attract the best mobile (foreign) students and researchers. For the city government, enhancing attractiveness is a core business, because it is a key factor in attracting (and keeping) higher educated inhabitants, knowledge based companies, tourists and investors. Many studies have shown the correlation between urban attractiveness and economic performance<sup>2</sup>. The university is a key asset in this respect: it is a magnet for young, dynamic and talented young people, and increasingly also for companies; The university is also an source of cultural, social, intellectual and political life in the city. In many cities, the presence of a large student population is “a key marketing devise to boost its external, international, and cosmopolitan image”<sup>3</sup>. Student life has become part of a marketable urban lifestyle brand.

So, both city and university have a stake in developing an “attractive city”. How can they collaborate in this respect? In this paper, we present three cases in which city and university collaborate to make the city more attractive. We focus on interventions in the field of urban planning and the use of public space.

Our first two cases, Linköping and Aalborg, have a young university (established in the 1970s) located at a “stand-alone” campus outside the city. A key question for these cities is how to create a dynamic and attractive city for students and knowledge workers, by re-connecting campus life and urban life somehow. But their responses are different. In Linköping, city and university work closely together to realise a new, innovative neighbourhood next to the university campus, as an attractive/dynamic quarter for knowledge workers and as a bridge to the city. In the second case, Aalborg, another road is taken. Here, the city centre is obtaining more “campus elements”. The municipal government builds new students apartments downtown, to attract students; Moreover, city and university collaborate to create an “experience zone”, making the inner city into a platform for all sorts of academic and student activities. The third case, Ghent, is again very different. Here, the universities are fully interwoven in the urban fabric. The problem here is to manage growth: Student

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<sup>1</sup> The EUniverCities Urbact-network unites 10 medium-sized European cities that seek to improve the university-city nexus. By applying to the URBACT programme, they want to learn from each other's experiences and practices, and move forward as successful and inclusive knowledge cities.

<sup>2</sup> See Van Winden, W. (2010), Knowledge and the European City, Journal of Economic and Social Geography, Vol. 101 (1), pp. 100-106.

<sup>3</sup> See Chatterton, O. (2010), Commentary, Environment and Planning A 2010, vol. 42, pp. 509-514, p. 512.

numbers have grown dramatically in the last decade, crowding out other activities. Growing numbers of students, citizens and tourists “compete” for scarce space. City and university now look for ways to co-create public spaces in a better way, especially in the central Arts district with its high concentration of university buildings.

Below, we describe the case in some more detail. The paper ends with conclusions and considerations about co-operation mechanisms.

## 2. When the campus is far away... Re-connecting city and campus

Many “newer” university cities (those who obtained a university in the second half of the 20th century) have an isolated campus, located (far) away from the city centre. Thus, there is a strong physical separation between city and university. Academic activities and student life take place at the campus. Students spend most of the day there, they study there, many live in student housing on the campus, or in premises nearby the campus. As a result, the city centre does not have the buzz of students walking, cycling or hanging around. And students spend much of their money in or around the campus rather than in the city.

These type of campuses are typically a legacy of the 1960s and 1970s, when new universities were developed at greenfield sites, across Europe. Here, it was easier and cheaper to build, and there was more room for expansion. But now, many of these university cities seek to re-establish the link between city and campus. They have come to see the value of student and academic life as a resource, as a source of buzz and liveliness, as an urban asset. A typical case is Linköping, in Sweden. How is this city seeking to re-establish the link?

### 2.1 Linköping, Sweden: Co-creating a new neighbourhood

Linköping has 152,000 inhabitants. It is located in the east part of Sweden, in the province of Östergötland (about 420,000 inhabitants). Since medieval times, it has been a city of learning, with important church functions.

It has a dynamic business and innovation climate, many high-tech jobs, good accessibility to beautiful natural surroundings, high levels of safety. Linköping University (LiU) is young: it was established in 1975. The local industry – with Saab as prominent player – lobbied strongly to have a university, as a source of new staff and as research partner. In the late 1960s a branch of Stockholm University was set up in Linköping which later became the independent Linköping University. Currently, it has about 27,300 students (of which 19,000 in Linköping’s main campus), in a variety of disciplines. It has four faculties: Arts&Sciences, Health Sciences, Educational Sciences, and the Institute of Technology. LiU employs 3,900 staff, of which 1,500 teaching staff. The “needs based” roots of the universities are still present: the university is particularly strong in applied research, and has multidisciplinary groups that tackle problems and challenges from several angles. Strong fields are (among others) material sciences, visualisation, and industrial ecology.

The main university campus, where 19,000 students study, is located about 4 km from the city centre. It is a typical product of the 1970s: mono functional, stand-alone, and inward looking in urban planning terms. Despite the short distance, it is almost as if the city and the university live parallel lives. Students love their time at the university but when they graduate they have few connections with the city. The “student city feel” is not strongly present in the city centre, and many students do not live in the city but in a small town near the campus. They live in a “bubble” and typically have no problem to leave when offered a job elsewhere. Decision makers in the city and the university realise that something must be done to make Linköping “rock”, and remain attractive for highly skilled workers.

#### Developing a new urban district

A key measure is an integrated urban project, aimed to build a full-fledged new neighbourhood adjacent to the university campus, with community features, schools (including a secondary school for 600 pupils), preschools, care, retail, service, etc. inside.

City and university closely collaborate in the planning and design stage, striving to make it a “sustainable” neighbourhood.

The new urban environment should add new facilities and people to the university area, which creates more buzz and liveliness at every hour of the day. The new neighbourhood is built for residents (about 2,000 households) including university students, teachers, researchers and those working in the technology park and other companies and businesses in the area. In the words of the deputy mayor: “In 1975 Linköping got a university, now the university gets a city (with the name Vallastaden)”. The name was chosen after a consultation of the population.

The first stage of Vallastaden will be showcased in a housing exhibition in 2017, as an example of future environments for living, learning, creative communities and ecological and social sustainability. Vallastaden will be a place to see and try new solutions, an arena for the University and other stakeholders to connect research into a new urban reality. The City of Linköping and Linköping University are the main partners in LinköpingsBo2017, but the project has a broad interaction with business, construction companies, architects and others to succeed in its high ambitions. LinköpingsBo2017 also has a mission to work with new forms of dialogue and participation in all processes of the project. Communication with the city's residents, and stakeholders is a major part of the project; There have already been several brainstorming sessions with different stakeholders. The University together with its neighbours VTI (Government Traffic Institute), Mjärdevi Science Park, FOI (Government Science Institute) and Tekniska Verken has formed an advisory group to the Vallastaden project. This group of organisations meet on a regular basis to brief one another on progress and to discuss forthcoming situations with the aim of raising awareness, to seek advice and use best practice.

*Figure 1. Map of Vallastaden*



LinköpingsBo2017 is of great importance to the cooperation and exchanges between the city and the university. During the project, several common arenas and forums will be required to control, manage and execute all the activities in the project. These arenas and forums are expected to impact positively on the city-university's partnership. To achieve the ambitions of LinköpingsBo2017, all parts of the university and the city need to actively collaborate in order to find interesting and innovative solutions for tomorrow's society. The land used to be owned by a state company (that owns the land of universities), but recently, the city bought the land. To realise the ambitions, a municipal company was created; in its board, the university has a prominent role, with two seats. The universities' Masterplan is brought in line with the plans for Vallastaden. Vallastaden is a sizeable project: the city will invest up to €11m for the infrastructure alone; total investments in the area are expected to amount to €110m.

Several other measures are taken to reinforce the link between city and campus:

- A new cycling road between city and campus is planned.
- A new tramline is to connect the inner city with the campus and Vallastaden neighbourhood.
- The city also has a plan to develop the inner city; it is considering ways to attract more university activities and students to the centre.

## **2.2 Aalborg: co-creating the inner city**

Aalborg is another example where city and university look for ways to improve urban attractiveness together. With about 130,000 inhabitants, Aalborg is the fourth largest city in Denmark (the wider municipality has about 200,000). The city is located in the northern part of Jutland. Over the 20th century, the town became highly industrialised, but like in so many other cities, the industries declined since the 1970s. The city had to find a new growth direction. The creation of Aalborg University in 1974 (a merger of a number of some established institutions, combined with the creation of a number of new faculties) marked a turning point, from which the city moved from industry to knowledge. Since, many jobs were lost in (large) industrial companies, but new ones created in the educational institutions and high-tech firms. The focus of the city's policy shifted to increasing attractiveness and luring students, knowledge workers, and knowledge-based companies.

The number of students at Aalborg University has increased from 3,000 in the 1970s to the present 15,000, and also, there are 15,000 students at the university colleges. Aalborg University is internationally renowned as a leading educational institution adopting "problem based learning" (PBL). Its main campus is located in the eastern part of town, at some kilometres distance from the city centre. It was developed in the 1970s as a greenfield campus on the edge of the city, a large area hosting all the faculties and university buildings.

A key ambition of Aalborg is to develop and brand itself more as an international knowledge city; it wants to be an attractive city not just for students but also for (international) knowledge workers, creatives and companies. This is a shared ambition: city, university and the university colleges have signed a strategic cooperation agreement with directions on how to develop the city, the university, and how to foster local social and economic development. More students should find a job or start a company in Aalborg after graduation, rather than leave to other places. A key part of the strategy is to develop the city centre in particular as a vibrant place for students, knowledge workers and creative people. The city has invested recently in quality of life and cultural amenities (i.e. the Utzon centre, Nordkraft); to become more attractive for students, the city has built new student apartments: every student who comes to Aalborg is guaranteed accommodation.

Attractiveness is not only about building facilities and houses; the software and programming side (events, happenings, activities) is equally important. With this in mind, in 2012, the city took the initiative to develop an “experience zone” in the city centre. The main idea was to engage students in all sorts of ways, and enable them to make their expressions a visible part of the city life. In the years to come, more students will live in the inner city (as many new apartments are being built). Their presence and energy is seen as a key asset for the city’s attractiveness. The Experience Zone should turn the city into a platform or “playground” for student activities and expressions of any kind: cultural events, arts exhibitions, concerts, but also research and education related activities: the zone should become a facilitator for students to practice their skills, to work on real life issues and challenges, or to show their competences, creations and innovative ideas. It should be easy and straightforward to take initiatives and organise activities. Geographically, the Experience Zone will cover the entire inner city. Among others, it contains a “science street” where scientific discoveries are showed and where scientists can present their results to people passing by. Working groups were established with representatives from various city departments and university groups.

Ultimately, a close and deep co-operation with university departments is needed to realise the potential. A longer-term ambition is to involve a wide range of research and education programmes of the university in the programming of the experience zone. This would require the involvement of many more people. All stakeholders realise that this will take a lot of time and effort.

### 3. The city as campus; Managing urban growth together in Ghent

Ghent is the second-largest city in Belgium with a population of about 250,000 inhabitants. The city has more than 70,000 students (2014) at its university and four university colleges. Student numbers have risen sharply over the last decade. There is no single large campus site (only a small one); the numerous campuses of the university are spread over the city. The university is interwoven with the urban fabric, with a large concentration of university buildings in the Arts district adjacent to the town centre.

Key stakeholders in Ghent consider it as a major challenge for the city and its HEI's to manage the growth of Ghent as a city of students, research and innovation. Within the city borders, there is only limited space available for research, for student housing, and for innovative business. Moreover, there is no reason to believe that the pressure will decrease in the (near) future: student numbers keep growing, but so does tourism; the local economy is developing well, and the population is also growing due to migration but also due to the fact that many students want to stay in Ghent after graduation. Managing growth requires an integrated and sustainable approach and joint efforts involving all stakeholders. In the framework of the EUniverCities URBACT-project, a Local Support Group (LSG) was set up, charged with elaborating a long-term shared vision and a strategy for managing growth in a sustainable way. The group identified number of interrelated themes such as the management of semi-public and public spaces, mobility and parking policy, touristic and cultural upgrading. Because of the wide range of themes the LSG decided to establish 6 thematic working groups, focusing on (1) the use and management of public and semi-public spaces, (2) student and image (including communication and co-creation), (3) student housing, (4) mobility, (5) culture and tourism and (6) structural cooperation between city and HEI's.

In defining an integrated and efficient approach, the core team of the LSG decided to focus on one city area in particular: the 'Arts district'. This is a district in the city centre where most of the students are living, and where the challenge of growth in Ghent is the most urgent. Also, its spatial delineation allows to grasp the full complexity of the challenge in a feasible way. As a cross-section of the wider city the district forms an excellent "laboratory" for elaborating a vision on how to manage the growth of Ghent in a balanced way.

The stakeholders realise that solutions cannot come from one actor: they need to be developed in co-creation, by students, citizens, the university, and the city together. Co-creation requires financial resources, but perhaps even more importantly, a "model" to organise it, and support for the actual implementation. Both are lacking so far, but actors work hard to find a way. As an important step, the university is prepared to see itself as co-maker of the city, rather than just a user of urban land. And the city looks for ways to involve students and academics in the renewal of public spaces in the Arts district; a peer review session was held to generate fresh ideas to make the area more attractive, and new types of involvement processes will be tested in the coming years (more details can be found in the peer review report<sup>4</sup>).

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<sup>4</sup> <http://eunivercitiesnetwork.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/06/EUniverCities-Peer-Review-Report-Ghent-December-2014.pdf>

## 4. Conclusions and challenges

The three cases presented in this paper illustrate that city and university have an interest to “co-create” an attractive city (albeit that they take different avenues to do so). All are typical examples of integrated development, where many stakeholders are involved and must find ways to join forces. A key question for all of them is how to frame the collaboration. Looking at the cases, two main challenges can be discerned, each requiring a different approach.

*Challenge 1. Capitalising on the universities’ core business: research, innovation, and education.*

In Linköping, the development of Vallastaden is an urban project, it is designed in the logic of an urban planning project, but with a big “plus”: The university enhances the project with research and innovation. It is a partner in finding more innovative and sustainable technological solutions, and to conduct and follow experiments with participation, etc. Likewise, in Aalborg, city and university see academic and innovation activities of all sorts as a source of liveliness for the inner city.

The challenge here is how to “seduce” professors, research groups, teachers, and students to work on such type of projects. This is not easy, because they are not naturally inclined to do so. At least two conditions apply. First, this can only work when the projects are enough of a scientific challenge. City and university groups must work together from the design stage on. Second, there must be high levels of trust between city departments and university groups. It is not enough to have a strategic collaboration on the top level of the organisations (mayor/aldermen and rectors/deans). City staff must invest in getting to know individual researchers and groups, and learn what they do, what they might contribute, and how to build projects together. Research groups must be prepared and encouraged to think and act outside their academic box (put simply: teaching, publishing in journals and going to conferences) and engage with the city. Both sides must learn to understand each other’s language and drivers, and this only occurs when they work together and talk a lot to each other.

*Challenge 2. Engaging with the university as key urban co-producer.*

This challenge is of a different nature. The universities’ core business is research, innovation, and education. But it is also a key (and sometimes even dominant) force in urban planning and management. Its actions and decisions concerning (re)location affect many other urban stakeholders. The case of Ghent illustrates this clearly as here, university and city are so interwoven. In these situations, ideally, city planning and public space management are a collaborative venture, where city and university arrive at solutions that benefit both sides. But in practice, universities do not always regard themselves as city makers. And the challenge is complicated. From this perspective, it is very interesting to see how Ghent has created mixed working groups, with representatives from university and various city departments, to develop a comprehensive strategy, and how the city looks for new ways to let academics and students participate in urban planning issues in the Arts district. Working groups are a good tool to develop ideas and solutions in a multi-stakeholder setting, but it remains a challenge to relate or “channel” the work of these groups to the regular decision making routines and mechanism of the city and the university. In these situations, good working relations between the top level of both organisations helps to get things done.

URBACT II

**URBACT** is a European exchange and learning programme promoting sustainable urban development.

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

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