The Benefits of University Collaboration Within University–Community Partnerships in Europe

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Abstract

This article demonstrates and explains the benefits accruing to communities that involve universities in their local community-based projects from the context of community-based work taking place in Europe. We include concrete arguments intended to stimulate the transfer of the universities' accumulated knowledge to local (urban) community projects in order to overcome the challenges of contemporary cities. A multiple case study analysis of relevant university–community partnership (UCP) projects in Europe is used to provide evidence for the value of urban community–university partnerships. This article as a whole represents an attempt to bring to light the considerable potential of universities, which should extend their focus (metaphorically and physically) outside the purely academic sphere and magnify their capabilities within local university–community partnerships.

Keywords: university community partnership (UCP), community-based projects, EU community engagement, urban planning

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One of the major challenges facing universities today is the identification of the most adequate approach to (re)activating their relevance within local urban contexts in order to solve the concerns of contemporary local communities (Ishisaka et al., 2004). Bok (1990) and Votruba (1996) advanced the idea that the detachment of universities from local urban communities has distanced these institutions from local sources of creativity, which adversely affects indispensable academic dynamism. Wievel and Knaap (2005) recognized the university as a crucial stakeholder that could and should ameliorate city environments with the active involvement of local communities. Similarly, Boyer (1996) saw the university as the main actor able to resolve current social, civic, economic, and moral problems faced by society.

The process of building sustainable long-term, enduring partnerships between universities and local (urban) communities is still far from complete. In recent years, however, there has been a reemergence of the more persistent transfer of universities' expertise from the traditional campuses back to "real life" neighborhood environments. Today, it is possible to recognize that universities are cooperating with an increasing number and variety of communities (Jongbloed et al., 2008). Recent decades have seen an increase in the formation of long-term partnerships between universities and communities in order to address multiple social challenges (Strier & Shechter, 2016). Universities' revitalization efforts can activate a neighborhood and are especially beneficial if they are centered on community engagement and local volunteerism (Ehlenz, 2019).

A cooperative effort wherein the independent character of the university is manifested in the form of participation with local communities is often defined as a *university–community partnership* (UCP). The umbrella term "university–community partnership (UCP)" is used in academic journals to describe any endeavor in which universities and local communities are mutually involved (Lewis et al., 2016). According to Eckerle Curwood et al. (2011), UCPs can be defined as "collaborations between community organizations and institutions of higher education for the purpose of achiev-

ing an identified social change goal through community-engaged scholarship that ensures mutual benefit for the community organization and the university" (p. 16). University–community partnerships have also been described as "the coming together of diverse interests and people to achieve a common purpose via interactions, information sharing, and coordination activities" (Jassawalla & Sashittal, 1998, p. 239). Yassi et al. (2010) defined the university–community partnership as a form of academic outreach and community engagement in the service of addressing local community problems. These partnerships are characterized by long-standing commitment, comprehensiveness, shared planning, mutuality, and so on (Butcher et al., 2011; Strier, 2014). UCPs can also be understood as an experiment to determine what can be expected from collaborations among faculties, community activists, and other actors (Baum, 2000) and could eventually lead to a more meaningful and stable relationship rather than simple coexistence (Miller & Hafner, 2008).

University–community partnerships are driven by the achievement of mutual goals (Strier, 2011). *Mutuality* represents a common foundation or basis for most UCPs. A mutually beneficial, respectful partnership between the university and urban community represents the basis for planning communal urban project developments (Gilderbloom & Mullins, 2005; Perry & Wievel, 2005; Wievel & Knaap, 2005). UCP could represent an ideal formation that could amplify the mutual, reciprocal benefits through colearning and collective problem-solving. Enos and Morton (2003) claimed that such partnerships would not only change the individuals involved but also spread their influence into the community at large. The way the community will be considered and involved within universities' educational practices will significantly affect the skills, behaviors, and civic knowledge that students learn (Bakko & McBride, 2017).

The universities should recognize and value the expertise of people outside academia, especially as coproducers of knowledge. Universities should especially incorporate the voices and knowledges of marginalized communities in order to help and listen to the "unseen" part of society (Duncan et al., 2014; Kagan & Diamond, 2019). Universities should apply communities' intellectual resources toward societal needs (Kagan & Diamond, 2019).

Communities (within UCP) have a strong and heterogeneous impact on universities. First of all, community members could teach at the university and show how the theoretical frameworks actually work in practice. Therefore, UCP could represent a powerful method or facilitator to help teach traditional subjects in a more personal and applicable way. At the same time, it represents an ideal setting for students to associate their coursework on civic life with an authentic civic experience (Daynes et al., 2003).

For university students, there are numerous benefits to working with the community. Students can come to understand how to work for mutual benefits and shared goals, acquire knowledge regarding social issues, develop skills to build consensus, and reflect on their identity and personal growth in the partnership context (Bakko & McBride, 2017). Coworking with the community activates the students' real-world learning. Important and often underestimated components and consequences of UCP represent the effects of understanding social issues, personal insight, and cognitive development (Bakko & McBride, 2017).

Obviously, university–community partnerships are based and take place predominantly in the neighborhoods where the community members live. Through fieldwork students can experience different social activism approaches and personally participate in the community-building process (Kaufman, 2004). Field education (within UCPs) allows for a better exchange of information between academic institutions and their communities (Wertheimer & Sodhi, 2014).

On the other hand, the university as a partner within the framework of a UCP could bring a variety of valuable resources, including faculty academics with research expertise, excellent libraries, knowledge dissemination strategies, and more (Dulmus & Cristalli, 2011). Ferman and Hill (2004) identified four principal incentives for partnering with higher education researchers: obtaining project-related resources, leveraging further resources, gaining access to networks, and increasing legitimacy.

Allen-Meares (2008) has put forward the idea that universities also have a moral duty

to cooperate with local (urban) communities. Similarly, Buys and Bursnall (2007) agreed that universities are committed to reacting to the growing social needs of the local communities. "Community engagement is more than a structural manifestation, essentially, it is a philosophical belief that can help evolve, shape, and progress higher education for local, national and international communities" (Bernardo et al., 2012, p. 191). The main challenge is to bring the university back to the "real-world" environment more consistently and systematically in order to solve the challenges faced by local communities in a cooperative manner.

UCP Challenges and Research Goals

Challenges

After defining "university-community partnerships" (UCPs), it could be understood that it is common and customary for a university to be involved and participate in local community projects. Currently, however, universities interact predominantly with their traditional stakeholders, such as students, researchers, and funding organizations (Jongbloed et al., 2008). Although relevant examples of constructive collaborations exist, in general universities and their adjacent local communities rarely work together to address common concerns (Martin et al., 2005).

Several factors account for this "unaccomplished" cooperation between universities and local communities. First, universities usually benefit more than local communities from UCPs, which can provoke a sense of resentment and mistrust (Strier, 2014). Second, according to Miller and Hafner (2008), unequal distribution of power represents one of the greatest barriers to successful cooperation between universities and local communities. Universities are usually better funded and more powerful than local communities, which at times allows them to steer the UCP agenda (Strier, 2011). University representatives are sometimes recognized as dominant and might not adequately consider the needs of the local communities (Miller & Hafner, 2008; Shamblin, 2011). These unequal balances of power could cause tension over proprietorship, funding, and control and affect sustainability (Strier, 2011). Third, a significant barrier is the university's image as an elitist institution sometimes discon-

nected from reality. Universities are often perceived as elitist and academic research as an exclusive domain (Strier & Shechter, 2016). According to Martin et al. (2005, p. 3), "Universities promoted themselves as elite bastions of information and knowledge." During a significant part of the 20th century, universities focused predominantly on research and publication, and their primary mission was to create an educated class of leaders (Wilson, 2004). Fourth, according to Eckerle Curwood et al. (2011), the modus operandi of universities has not yet adapted to be fully immersed in sustainable community partnerships. The administrative structure of some universities was not intended or formed to maintain long-term community engagement. An increase in the university's willingness to engage in community partnerships is crucial. Apart from those previously mentioned, Strier (2014) identified several other barriers that limit the effectiveness of UCPs, including competition over resources, different value systems, conflicts of interest, bureaucratic restrictions, a lack of adequate planning or implementation, absence of continuing evaluation procedures, and gaps in starting knowledge or experience. As Walsh (2006) affirms, the dissimilarity between the structure of universities and local communities can provoke irresolvable conflict, and it is therefore necessary to present several best practices that encourage and support the implementation of effective UCPs.

Research Goals

The abovementioned challenges could represent the main reasons that UCPs are still not currently more widespread in cities. Obviously, UCPs could bring benefits to both factions—the local community and the university. However, it has been identified that local (urban) communities are often skeptical and thus unwilling to participate with universities in such partnerships. The general, broad aim of this article is to demonstrate and explain why it is beneficial and advantageous for local communities to involve universities in their local community-based projects and why the university can be of use in local projects. The goal is to propose suggestions and arguments that could stimulate the transfer of the universities' accumulated knowledge and know-how to local (urban) community projects in order to overcome the challenges found in contemporary cities, especially in relation to "place" and spatial planning. The main

objective of the article is to show local communities the "university added value," not from abstract models or academic debates, but as demonstrated in already implemented UCP best-case studies. This article sheds light on the hidden innovative elements of UCP projects that might serve as a font of inspiration for future UCPs.

Methodology

Through a scientific literature review it was possible to see that universities' potential contributions to UCPs have often been presented in too theoretical a manner, as an abstract proposition, or have been based on a small number of case studies and rarely (e.g., Lerner & Simon, 1998) on a wider examination of several UCP experiences. We wanted to use an evidence-based method to explicitly and concretely answer the question "Why is it recommended to involve the universities in local community-based projects?" Hence, for this article, which is based on a particular research framework, we carried out a comparative analysis of 11 recognized and successful UCP projects; most of these were implemented by the members of the Urban Education Live project consortium.

Five different international team members participated in the Urban Education Live (UEL) EU project. Three were from academic spheres—the University of Sheffield (UK), the University of Ljubljana (Slovenia), and the Tampere University of Technology (Finland)—and two were NGOs: Institute for Spatial Policies – IPoP (Slovenia) and Urban Transition Association (Romania). Each of the five consortium partners has been involved in several distinguished national and international university–community partnership projects, which we analyze in this article. The consortium teams, and consequently the analyzed case studies, are well balanced in terms of expertise (urban sociologists, architects, anthropologists, environmental economists, etc.) and in terms of geographic location (north, east, west, and south EU), which allows the formulation of a comprehensive overview of today's challenges and opportunities within European university–community partnerships. The Urban Education Live consortium has focused its research on several research pillars, and within the pillar "new role of the university" we identified and highlighted new original perspectives of the evolving relationship between the university and the local urban community within a UCP. Via case study analysis of contemporary UCP projects, the article highlights how the university is linked and activated within different local urban communities in Europe.

With the establishment of a research framework with unique UCP research focal points (see Figure 1), which were transmitted to a specially written questionnaire, we were able to identify a variety of constructive contributions that universities have provided to recent UCPs. In total we analyzed and compared 11 UCP projects. Short descriptions of case studies are presented in Table 1. The comparative analysis of the case studies is based on five UCP research focal points: (a) *the university as activator*, where we examined if, how, and where the university performed the role of "activator" for creative (innovative) urban processes; (b) *new context*, where we researched the advantages of establishing working hubs in new social contexts, using new locations in the city rather than traditional university campuses; (c) *university expertise*, where we identified why it was important that the university was involved in the project, and how a specific university's expertise contributed to the fulfillment of the project; (d) *the university's independent character*, where we explored how the university's independent character represented a major asset in facilitating the implementation of the specific project; and (e) *the community's effect on the university*, where we investigated how the projects influenced the university, resulting in new curricula, new pedagogy, new contacts, the production of new types of data, and so on. This new set of UCP research focal points was transferred to the main questionnaire, the analysis of which represented the empirical basis for our methodological research process. Each questionnaire had 51 open-ended questions. We used the content/thematic analysis method to analyze the questionnaires' answers.

It was essential for the purpose of the article that in seven out of the 11 analyzed case studies (see Figure 1, Step 3) the questionnaire was answered by the actors (consortium partners) who were actively involved in the projects ("Internal case studies"). The "direct data accumulation" allowed us to obtain accurate and authentic inside perspectives on the cases. The research focal points expressed in the questionnaire enabled participants to rethink past projects
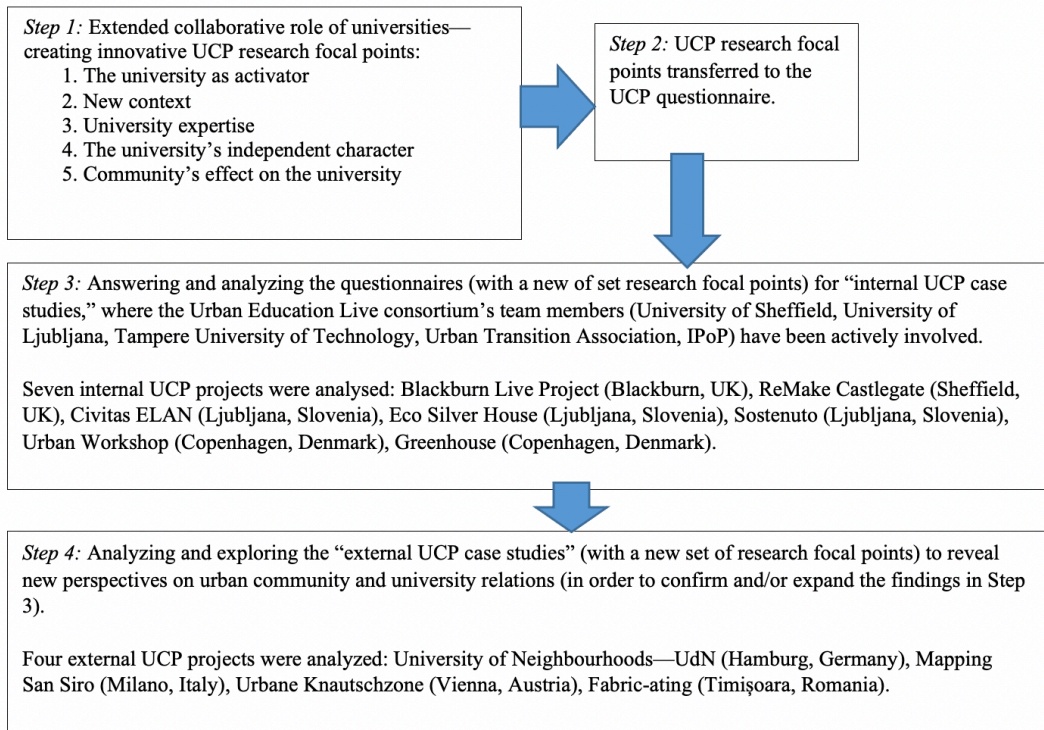
Figure 1. Methodological Process

Table 1. Descriptions of the UCP Case Studies		
Projects *(Duration, location)*	**Partners Involved**	**Mission / Description**
A. Blackburn Live Project 2013−2016 Blackburn (England)	University of Sheffield, Blackburn with Darwen Borough Council, Blackburn Is Open, Creative Lancashire	The various collaborations focused on exploring the connectivity between social and creative infrastructure in Blackburn, and developing upon Blackburn's existing creative town plan; exploring the role that arts and the creative industries could play in rejuvenating Blackburn town centre.
B. Civitas ELAN 2008−2012 Ljubljana (Slovenia)	Cities: Ljubljana (Slovenia), Gent (Belgium), Zagreb (Croatia), Brno (Czech Republic), Porto (Portugal). In Ljubljana: 11 local partners (local NGOs, University of Ljubljana, research institutes)	"Mobilize" citizens by codeveloping clean mobility solutions for vital cities, ensuring health and access. Special attention was devoted to the aspect of inclusion and participation of the public in the implementation process. The core activity in Ljubljana represented the introduction of environmentally friendly, fast, reliable, and safe public transport on the corridor named "Dragon's tail."
C. Eco Silver House 2013−2016 Ljubljana (Slovenia)	10 research institutions (from Slovenia, Austria, Sweden)—including University of Ljubljana, industry partners	The overall objective of the project was to demonstrate and validate new technologies, concepts, and systems for sustainable, low-energy building in order to test and assess the technological, economic, and social feasibility of innovative energy solutions in the high-rise multiresidential building Eco Silver House.

Table 1. Descriptions of the UCP Case Studies *cont'd*		
Projects (*Duration, location*)	**Partners Involved**	**Mission / Description**
D. Fabric-ating 2014–2015 Timișoara (Romania)	Local NGOs, West University of Timișoara, Shakespeare High School, Fabric Consultative Neigh. Council, Timișoara Municipality, The West University Student Association, Transformatori	The main goal of the project was to reclaim a series of underused public spaces across the neighborhood and to use them as a pretext for community engagement and for promoting active citizenship. The project represents an example of combining a top-down research-driven approach to the social and spatial characteristics of the area with bottom-up approaches characterized by interactions with local inhabitants.
E. The Greenhouse 2012–2013 Copenhagen (Denmark)	Supertanker/CiTyBee, Roskilde University, The municipality of Copenhagen	The aim was to map the intangible industrial heritage of Hedehusene and the tangible urban structure (buildings and other traces). This original goal was combined with an aim to experiment with new methods and develop a new processual approach to "strengthening local civic life."
F. Mapping San Siro 2013–still active Milan (Italy)	University "Politecnico di Milano," University "IUAV," University "La Sapienza"	The project aims to address the research of a peripheral degraded urban neighborhood through the direct participation of the local population. Mapping San Siro brought together a multidisciplinary group of students, teachers, and researchers, aiming to explore different forms of scientific knowledge production in order to stimulate dialogue with local communities.
G. ReMake Castlegate 2014–still active Sheffield (UK)	Friends of Sheffield Castle, Friends of the Old Town Hall, Sheffield City Council, CADS, Thrifty Store, BDP, TUoS, Sheffield University, etc.	To produce a vibrant and creative vision for the future of the area—working bottom up to build on existing heritage, enterprise, and social history, with the participation of the local community. Through Live Projects and Live Design Studios, more than 100 master's students have produced research projects and speculative designs that are relevant for the local area's future.
H. Sostenuto 2009–2012 Ljubljana (Slovenia)	Bunker (Slovenia), Citema (Italy), Expeditio (Montenegro), Relais Culture Europe (France), University of Valencia (Spain), Zunino e partner progetti (Italy)	Reinforcing the cultural sector's innovation capacity in the Mediterranean as a way to generate new social and economic models and boost competitiveness and sustainability in the Med. zone. Sostenuto is a pilot project carried out in four cultural labs in France, Italy, Slovenia, and Montenegro.
I. University of Neighbourhoods 2008–2013 Hamburg (Germany)	HafenCity University (HCU), IBA Hamburg, Kampnagel	Developing and testing contemporary forms of education at the crossover point between culture, knowledge, and urban development. Throughout this autonomous, experimental project set up by the Urban Design faculty (HCU), the themes and questions from the fields of education and research were being put into practice.

Table 1. Descriptions of the UCP Case Studies *cont'd*		
Projects (*Duration, location*)	**Partners Involved**	**Mission / Description**
J. Urban Workshop 2012 Copenhagen (Denmark)	Roskilde University, Citybee, local community of Hedehusene	Exploring the field of experimental urbanism encompassing concrete urban areas' challenges and actors. The goal was to develop open-ended, interactive skills for the individuation of urban challenges. A special focus of the project was dedicated to the methods for active involvement of locals through spatial interactions.
K. Urbane Knautschzone 2016–still active Vienna (Austria)	Social Design Arts as Urban Innovation; University of Applied Arts Vienna, Dérive—Association for Urban Research	The project shows that societal innovation with unexpected approaches becomes possible in the space where different forms of knowledge and methods interact. The interventions aimed to highlight and strengthen the neighborhood's potentials regarding cohabitation and community identity.

from a new perspective and to reformulate the processes and outputs for each project. These questionnaires were completed by individuals who had been actively involved in the respective UCP projects, giving an insider's perspective on UCP processes and outcomes.

The other four case studies (see Figure 1, Step 4) represent some of the most recognized and successful UCP projects in Europe. These four additional case studies, which were not performed by the consortium partners ("external case studies"), have been analyzed with the same theoretical framework (same research focal points) as the internal case studies. In order to respond to the questionnaires, empirical data for the external case study analysis was collected through secondary sources (articles, books, brochures, guides, webpages, etc.). With the analysis of the external case studies (Step 4), we wanted to amplify the research process in order to understand and analyze additional UCP experiences from various perspectives with the intention of obtaining some relevant, unusual, and unexpected elements and to eventually confirm and expand the findings from an analysis of our internal case studies (Step 3). Findings from the comparative analysis will enable us to indicate the benefits that universities could potentially bring to university–community partnership projects.

University–Community Partnerships—Case Study Analysis

In this section, the research of all 11 analyzed case studies will be highlighted using an analytical framework with key UCP research focal points (see Figure 1, Step 1). The UCP research focal points facilitated our investigation, wherein we particularly intended to emphasize the importance of university involvement in local urban neighborhood projects. Within the initial university–community partnership investigation, we identified five important UCP research focal points—(1) the university as activator, (2) new context, (3) university expertise, (4) the university's independent character, and (5) community's effect on the university—which represent the essence and the structure of the research process for our case study analysis (see Methodology section). The intention of this research structure is to accurately identify the mutual benefits of university–community partnerships, and in particular to highlight the contribution of the university—the "university added value"—in such partnerships.

The University as Activator of Creative Urban Processes

From the analysis of the UCP case studies it was possible to comprehend that the university's activator role is primarily shown within the fundamental function of the university or, rather, the aspiration of the university to become a cogenerator of innovation. In the project Sostenuto in Ljubljana, the University of Ljubljana started the flow of creative urban process, with other city partners and actors being gradually added. The university took the role of a cogenerator of conceptual frameworks, a terrain research unit, or a cocreator of a unique methodological platform within

the project by providing complex research methods for analysis in the field and at the same time by identifying and connecting relevant stakeholders for further activities. University engagement in local urban settings could activate the creative potential of the local community. Within the UCP case study Blackburn Live Project, the project's partners established a research hub in one of Blackburn town centre's vacant shops by arranging public consultations for what was called a "Making Session." In this UCP, it was possible to apprehend that the active involvement of the university could activate fresh thinking and innovative ideas in a local community-based project.

The university can transfer its capacities and knowledge into specific local contexts in order to "contaminate" the residents with new "working tools" that enable them to see their project from different viewpoints. In the UCP project Mapping San Siro, a program of teaching in the field allowed students to reflect on which outcomes are possible with the goal of academic utility— that is, benefiting students and teachers— and with the goal of social utility, benefiting the city and communities. University representatives encouraged direct interaction between activists, local actors, and researchers, who could all become equally involved in the production of knowledge. This "contamination of openness" is a perfect example of how the university encourages the creativity of all the actors involved. Several completed UCP projects (e.g., Greenhouse, Urban Workshop) highlighted the university's openness and freedom in research as key elements that enable exploration of often overlooked factors and discovery of unrecognized resources and voices.

In the project Sostenuto, it was possible to observe that knowledge and skills acquired by university students in debates and onsite visits promoted social dynamics between them and local residents enabling mutual learning. Another important feature that emerged in Civitas ELAN is represented by the university function *merger of knowledge platforms*. This integrative university characteristic is manifested through combining skills and knowledge of very different UCP project actors.

University Engagement in New Social Contexts and in New Locations Within the City

Most of the analyzed case studies dem-onstrated that it was beneficial for UCP projects to be performed in "real" neighborhoods, outside university campuses (or other forms of traditional university infrastructure). Partaking in a UCP project in the local community territory strengthens the relationships, collaboration, and trust between the local community, the university, and other actors. These benefits have manifested in various ways.

For example, locally performed projects are advantageous for university representatives because they enable students to be more directly involved with community members and have better access to informal networks—that is, they offer improved connections with local inhabitants. In the project University of Neighbourhoods, the creative approaches included artistic engagement, working with an orchestra, and special sharing mechanisms. The students learned from the neighborhood and came to understand local people's interests and use of space, which enabled them to further develop unique engagement techniques for the local area. In Blackburn Live Project, it was noted that the new university's physical settings in local neighborhoods made it much easier for students to establish contact, invite local people to join in their activities, and debate. In Mapping San Siro it was perceived that the teaching-in-the-field program allowed students to reflect on the social utility of project actions that could improve quality of life, particularly for local community members who live in a deteriorated urban zone.

Often UCP projects are performed in deprived neighborhoods characterized by strong sociospatial inequalities and intercultural or intergenerational conflicts; this was true for the projects Mapping San Siro and Urbane Knautschzone. Universities should prioritize such efforts and be more active in those neighborhoods that require more care and consideration. In Urbane Knautschzone, "working in the field" and being a "university satellite" gave researchers an opportunity to work in deprived peripheral areas in Vienna. Similarly, in the UCP project Urban Workshop, the declining suburban setting in which the students worked placed them outside the comfort zone of the creative class and forced them to be more aware of how to work, research, and be active in a nonacademic and non–inner city setting. Local communities in deprived neighborhoods are often forgotten by local

and national authorities. Participating in a UCP offers them an opportunity to be heard, to raise their voices and create a strategy for change, with the university's participation.

The collaboration with the community may also advance the spatial transformation of the urban fabric. In the UCP project ReMake Castlegate, local stakeholders, with university support, opened up and revived an abandoned city center building. The reclaimed space gave creative entrepreneurs, artists, individuals, and organizations an opportunity to test civic ideas in a valuable yet underused public city space on a temporary basis.

Finally, it is also important to mention that, as was demonstrated in the UCP project Sostenuto, a significant manifestation of university action in new urban locations represents the higher quality and more accurate data accumulation that results from direct contact with the locals in their territory (direct source of information).

University Expertise as a Crucial Asset for Project Performance

The university's specific (academic or research) expertise in the analyzed case studies is manifested in various ways. First, the university's ability to explore inventive methods and develop different implementation strategies is beneficial for every UCP. As was shown in Blackburn Live Project, the university can provide the support (time and resources) to develop speculative visions based on rigorous research. The role of speculative planning is crucial because it can raise aspirations and activate debates about the future of specific projects. ReMake Castlegate demonstrated that students and academics have the time and resources to develop hypothetical future strategies, or visions, which are not often possible to achieve through nonacademic partnerships.

Another important contribution that the university provides to UCP projects is represented by intricate and up-to-date conceptual and theoretical frameworks. The academic presence ensures a higher level of analytical introspection. In the UCP project Civitas ELAN, academic presence ensured a higher level of analytical introspection into the mobility process of the city, meaning that the processes were not only analyzed according to basic categories of demographics, statistical data, SWOT analysis, and so on, but included production of high quality new solutions that were tested via review by other scholars (academics). The university is also essential because it constructs up-to-date methodological bases for terrain analysis. Analysis of the case studies Blackburn Live Project and Sostenuto revealed that engagement with the university raises the quality and standards for publication production, organization of exhibitions, workshop engagement activities, and so on. The project Fabric-ating further demonstrated that expertise brought in by the university in conducting and analyzing surveys also contributes to the establishment of a strong academic research base needed to structure the findings and decide on the crucial next steps within the project.

Naturally, it is usual for the university to add a more general, supportive, administrative, and logistic contribution to UCP projects. The mutual cooperation between the community and university is also shown through numerous community members' presentations, lectures, and workshops performed in universities' halls.

The University's Independent Character Facilitates Project Performance

Through the analysis of the case studies, it was possible to determine that the university's independent research represents one of the major assets for efficient UCP project performance. The analysis demonstrates that the university's research is (at least in the past "internal" case studies) independent and therefore more objective, because it is not constrained by private economic interests and expectations. The university's openness, which also derives from the absence of specific expectations, is essential for project performance. The independence of the university allows the students to generate fresh and innovative ideas not influenced or conditioned by the commercial realm, as occurred in Blackburn Live Project. The autonomous character of the university allows specific acute and unrestricted observations and considerations. In the project Civitas ELAN, it was possible to ascertain that the university, due to its independence from the municipality and other actors, was able to critically reflect and consequently upgrade the project's implementation processes. In a way, the recognized public role of universities represents a counterbalance to the specific self-interested aspirations on the part of certain political and private actors.

From the analyzed questionnaires it was possible to observe that the independence of the university has often been correlated with the term neutrality. The neutrality of the university within a UCP is crucial, especially with regard to the process of establishing a dialogue with the local community. This neutrality generates a trusting relationship that enables the university to take on the role of a referential partner within UCP projects, as in Civitas ELAN and Sostenuto. Through the analysis of the projects, it was noted that the involvement of the university as a partner in a project could, at times, provide much-needed trust, especially for the establishment of the initial dialogue with the local urban community; Fabric-ating provided an example of this.

The autonomous character of the university often enables it to act as an intermediary between various, often noncompatible subjects. The university can contribute to the mediation of private investors and city institutions. The university interprets its public role by promoting spaces of interaction between the local context (local communities) and other institutions (private companies, municipalities, NGOs) in which the university may act as an intermediary and enhance positive dialogue. Examples of this function included Mapping San Siro, Eco Silver House, and Fabric-ating.

Community's Effect on the University—UCP Improves the University

Although it is not directly relevant to the main research goal of this article, it is important and interesting to understand how UCP affects the university. Apart from knowledge and capacities that the university transfers to the local urban community, it is also necessary to determine the essential impact that the community has on the university.

From the case study analysis it was possible to ascertain that local urban community projects could bring several advantages to the university. Universities could learn from the implemented projects and acquire new methods to apply in future UCP projects. With UCPs, students integrate new practices of learning and working that are not possible in traditional learning processes; this occurred in Civitas ELAN. Blackburn Live Project demonstrated that in contrast to more conventional teaching methods, working directly with the community en-forces collaborative and participatory skills that will be essential for students' future practices. In the UCP project Greenhouse, collaborating with the community enabled the students to integrate mutual learning processes and participatory practices in a much more practical and concrete way. Students were active on location full time, and they acquired collaborative experiences with the community members when they coorganized special events such as public meetings, "live mapping," explorative walks, and open gardens.

Within the UCP project Sostenuto, students, during their on-terrain "activation," were spontaneously encouraged to communicate and engage with other parties, which led to the formation of new perspectives in their learning process. Interestingly, in the case Fabric-ating, students recognized the hands-on character of the project as a missing link in their education process.

Transmitting new in-depth knowledge to students from which they can build their own research capacities and practices represents a clear benefit for the university environment. In the UCP project ReMake Castlegate it was possible to identify the concrete benefits of working in the same place for several years, which led to "situated pedagogy" and "live pedagogy" that became even more embedded. Close working relationships between the university and the local urban community provided new contacts with local community groups and with public and private institutions. In University of Neighbourhoods the establishment of a new stakeholder network—consisting of new local contacts—represented a valuable resource for subsequent common projects for universities.

For students and teachers, the different pedagogic process within a UCP entails a change in perceptions, attitude, and sensitivity. Through the development of these new abilities, it is possible to foster interaction that applies active and critical intelligence to face the complexity of urban events and to promote new civic growth. In Mapping San Siro it was noted that working directly through practice is a fundamental tool, especially for students and teachers of urban studies; it enables the development of reflective knowledge—a necessary component of good technical competence. In addition, Blackburn Live Project and ReMake Castlegate demonstrated that cooperating

with the community helps students develop specific soft skills such as interacting with clients and stakeholders, working together as a group, effective communication, encouraging participation, managing expectations, problem solving, conflict resolution, and strategic thinking.

Final Analysis and Conclusion

Based on a multiple case study analysis of relevant university–community partnership (UCP) projects in Europe, we have attempted to explicitly and concretely answer the question "Why is it recommended to involve the universities in local community–based projects?" A focused case study analysis of urban community–university partnership has enabled development of concrete arguments that can serve as recommendations to apply in future urban community–university partnerships or to stimulate the establishment of new partnerships. The analysis is summarized in eight potential benefits that universities could bring to university–community partnership projects. The following list of "university added values" emphasizes eight good reasons to involve the university within local urban projects. The list is not only intended to convince local communities to embrace the universities in their local projects, but also to foster in universities a better understanding of their potential.

1. Through the intensification of university involvement, it is possible to explore and research speculative, innovative methods and strategies.

University partnerships are typically experimental due to research activities and an innovative, exploratory nature (Trencher et al., 2014); that is, the university stimulates openness and freedom in research. The experimentation it supports within different research areas can open new alternative research dimensions that enable the detection of otherwise overlooked resources and voices. Such exploration of often obscure elements opens new possibilities, visions, and concrete solutions. UCP projects could benefit from university involvement as universities facilitate the research process with the development of speculative future strategies that are not achievable through nonacademic partnerships.

2. The university produces highly elaborated and up-to-date conceptual and theoretical frameworks.

An important function of the university is to generate conceptual frameworks with the construction of innovative methodological schemes and implementation strategies. The intensification of university involvement enables achievement of higher research standards. Potential areas of improvement include publication production, organization of exhibitions, engagement in workshops, and other activities.

3. The university is usually less constrained by private interests (including economic interests) and expectations and is not influenced or conditioned by the commercial realm.

The university's autonomy represents a counterbalance to the commercial realm, to economic interests and expectations. UCP partners can rely on the university's autonomy in terms of communicative and performative standards, as it enables and encourages a cooperative critical evaluation (together with the community) on the nature of the implemented solutions. The university's independent production and resulting objective research improve the final quality of the desired UCP outcome.

4. The university may act as an intermediary and enhance a positive dialogue between different stakeholders.

If a problem in the "dialogue" or a dispute between the different stakeholders within a UCP project arises, utilizing the university as a mediator is recommended. Within the public sphere, the character of the university often evokes the signifiers *neutrality* and *trustworthiness*. The university therefore could serve as an intermediary between various often noncompatible subjects. The university could also be integrated in a complex process of establishing an initial dialogue with the local community. In addition, its positive brand and neutral image allow the university to function as a merger of knowledge platforms, combining the skills and expertise of very diverse project stakeholders.

5. The university is a valuable and reliable partner in relation to administrative, logistic, and personnel support.

Apart from the obvious research contribution, the university also has a more general supportive, administrative, organizational

role, which could be advantageous for all UCP stakeholders. The university often contributes to UCP projects in various ways, offering administrative, logistic, and/or personnel support.

6. The university could and should express its maximum capabilities within deprived neighborhoods characterized by strong sociospatial inequality and intercultural conflicts.

The university should be more present in "real neighborhoods" outside traditional lecture halls (university campuses). Projects are best implemented in a neutral territory outside the traditional university campus—in "authentic" urban contexts, especially in deprived urban or suburban settings outside the comfort zone of the creative class. Working directly with local community members allows the university to access informal networks in order to better understand local needs and challenges. Universities should prioritize their efforts to support local communities in underprivileged neighborhoods with high social inequality. UCPs could strengthen the relationship, collaboration, and trust between the local community, the university, and other actors in order to initiate the process of improvement of specific sociospatial contexts.

7. The university could establish new stakeholder networks—new local contacts.

The university represents a respectable networking agent that, due to its neutrality, has the potential to open new connections with local stakeholders. The university's networking character could represent a valuable resource for UCP projects and subsequent common (i.e., local) projects.

8. University engagement in new urban contexts could stimulate various forms of creativity within the local community.

UCP projects should actively engage the university because it encourages the inventiveness of all actors involved, thus serving as a powerful generator of innovative ideas. The university promotes a radical rethinking of how society might challenge the built environment. The university can inspire local citizens with fresh new ideas and embodies a connector of different knowledge platforms (as a promotor of "fresh" ideas).

The university could and should encourage ingenuity and introduce all stakeholders to unconventional perspectives. The university represents the fresh eyes that enable one to see new possibilities and inspire local citizens with fresh new ideas.

Although the main article's research aim focuses on potential benefits that the university brings within UCP, it is necessary to emphasize that the community has an equivalent significance and influence within the partnership. Collaborating with the community within a UCP brings several benefits to the university. The UCP represents a real-world setting, where university students can acquire and integrate numerous competencies: collaborative and participatory skills, reflective knowledge, conflict resolution, strategic thinking, co-learning, collective problem-solving, and more. Communities have a considerable impact on the civic knowledge attained by students, who recognize that applicable, tangible work within community projects should be more integrated in their educational processes. In addition, community projects based on civic experience influence students' personal growth, attitude, sensitivity, personal insight, and cognitive development.

If universities and local communities are driven by a common goal, together they could have a significant impact on improving the quality of life for citizens (Ishisaka et al., 2004). A university–community partnership could represent a realistic channel for developing different resources in order to address local community issues. However, expectations of partnerships are often too ambitious and available resources so limited that it is essential to expend effort establishing a realistic analysis, organizing, planning, and funding (Baum, 2000). The first step before establishing realistic goals and expectations is to understand the essence of each stakeholder involved in a UCP, as well as the characteristics, limitations, added values, and advantages of each partner. The first precondition is to acknowledge what our hidden potential is, what we are capable of. This article as a whole represents an attempt to bring to light the unexploited but considerable potential of universities, which should extend their focus (metaphorically and physically) outside the purely academic sphere and magnify their capabilities within local university–community partnerships.

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