

UNI-HERITAGE. European Postwar Universities Heritage: A Network for Open Regeneration

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Abstract

This research project aims at the regeneration of European universities created in the 60s and 70s through a systematic, circular, open and integrated process of their cultural heritage. At present, these campuses represent both a tangible and intangible heritage (architecture, urban planning, landscape... but also pedagogy, specialization areas, educational policies) whose adaptation to contemporaneity involves issues related to environmental sustainability, to the institution organizational capacities, and to its social implication.

Specifically, this proposal focuses on actions that would offer strategies such as the renewal of infrastructures and services and the adaptive reuse of the built heritage (space recycling, sustainability), the updating of the physical teaching spaces to the new teaching methodologies (European Higher Education Area), and the campus social consideration as a comfortable, conflict-safe and cultural-integrated area.

Beyond the simple conservation, restoration and physical rehabilitation of a set of buildings and a university fabric, this project has the added value of an integrated or interdisciplinary action model that seeks four aspects of innovation: the organizational, the formative, the technological and social. This research proposes to ensure a longer life cycle for the heritage through its participation as a resource in the dynamics of regeneration of the universities.

Keywords: *University campuses; European cultural heritage; Open regeneration; Adaptive reuse; Sustainable development.*

1. Introduction

This paper presents a research proposal focused on the scope of the regeneration of university cultural heritage through innovative actions. The proposal makes the most of opportunities offered by the program Horizon Europe, pillar III - Social Challenges; the sections SC-5: 'Climate action, environment, resource efficiency and raw materials' and SC-6 'Europe in a changing world - Inclusive, innovative and reflective societies' being the focus. Funded projects from previous calls concentrate on historic and cultural heritage in the urban context (Esposito De Vita *et al.*, 2018; ROCK Project H2020, 2017); also earlier studies address the universities from a social perspective (van de Laarse, 2017; Benneworth, 2014). However, the specificity of this project lies in considering university heritage as a European asset of common origin and to aspire to its regeneration through actions that will produce innovations integrated in the social, technological, institutional and educational fields.

2. History and current state

In years following the Second World War, higher education went through a serious evolution that developed into scaling transformations in institutional and social spheres. There were three main causes: population rise (the legal age of the baby boom generation), the specialization of knowledge that increased the offer of educational degrees, and the social and political awareness of a higher education for all. Each European country had their own difficulties, but in all educational reforms, pathways leading to the Welfare state were a priority. This meant the beginning of an in-depth social and pedagogical debate in which architects, city planners and landscape architects would take part (Coulson, Roberts and Taylor 2015).

Half a century later, the situation is far from what is once was. 'If the education system is the expression of the nation, the university system can perhaps be seen as an expression of the age', states Walker (2018). She also maintains that universities continue to be a public asset where the progress of knowledge is produced but also, 'Higher education is being profoundly reshaped by its marketization, with league tables, branding, discourses of 'excellence' and competition for students framing such moves'.

From that postwar "utopic" vision -in terms of progress, confidence and growth - to the current neoliberal situation and conservative changes, European universities that emerged in the 60's and 70's have built a huge and rich cultural heritage in distinctive features, but with shared roots and common decisions. The European Union was built on the willingness of political and economic stability and the climate of collaboration favored future deals that led their member states towards a common market. The result of more than half a century of progress is a vast cultural panorama whose study from the view of higher education is more significant if we pay attention to the value of education in building a society.

If cultural heritage is all the tangible and intangible demonstrative materials of a society, the university cultural heritage is comprised of an entire legacy stemming from institutions dedicated to higher education. Within the sphere of non-material characteristics the educational policies are found (the profile and the specialization of areas of knowledge, the degrees, study plans, teaching, university management, the sociologic considerations and consequences...); among the “physical artifacts” that make up the university heritage, there is a wide variety of buildings, public spaces, works of art, natural and urban surroundings, infrastructures and other aspects derived from the territorial sphere.

The current state of this theme is proof of consistent research on all the factors that make up university cultural heritage, but they are mainly approximations that deal with the different issues separately, without even contributing to a possible mainstreaming between tangible and intangible heritage. In addition, the approach to study is carried out from a historical point of view, conservation and management, but works that refer to a more active role of heritage – as suggested in the European calling for R+D+I are scarce.

3. Hypothesis and objectives

The objective of this proposal is to develop an innovative, collaborative and circular systematic approach for the regeneration and adaptive reuse of the university cultural heritage that originated in the 60s and 70s of the 20th century. Starting from a data collection and sharing the processes openly, a monitoring of the different experiences is sought such a way that that the collective cultural awareness is activated and the innovations and adaptations to contemporary needs are optimized.

It should be considered that the work material includes both tangible and intangible heritage, and the interest of this project is focused on the actions where both are combined in generating new knowledge. The updating and the regeneration of the universities cannot be overlooked by searching for isolated solutions according to the different fields of action. Currently, the university policies do not contemplate physical and spatial adaptation to particular learning strategies of implantation nor of spatial adjustment to teaching, as the West German government did during the 60s and 70s. In addition, many current universities have become isolated ghettos with respect to their urban and peri-urban surroundings, with the consequent lack of integration in the social fabric and the growing problem of security in their facilities: a situation completely opposite to the purposes of the new French universities after the events of May 1968. A collaborative platform seems appropriate now, which allows the awareness of a European cultural heritage -which has traveled a historical path in parallel-, taking into account its more complete and interdisciplinary landscape.

The research hypothesis assumes that by implementing an index of successful regeneration initiatives promoted by any interested party, one can replicate the approach and test the models that address the specific needs of postwar university campuses.

Thus, the project is based on establishing a network of contemporary universities, as well as participatory and interested bodies (local or regional governments, private companies, research institutes, professional institutions related to the university world, cultural associations...), forming a consortium with common interests in different European countries. The actions involve research and innovation, both by collecting past experiences (to generate a database), and a commitment to collaborate in the new actions. A work platform allows new ways of collecting and exchanging data to facilitate networks and synergies. In turn, this monitoring tool enables the initiatives to be eventually classified according to their success ('role model') and can be transferred as 'suitable for replication', adopting a multidisciplinary tutoring process and defining common protocols and guidelines for implementation ('repeater role').

The added value is the combination of action models, work plans, financing mechanisms, etc. associated with improvements, adaptations and regenerations of the university cultural heritage. Beyond the simple conservation, restoration and physical rehabilitation of a set of buildings and a university fabric, with this project it is possible to produce results related to four areas of innovation:

1. Organizational innovation of the campuses, which deals with different scales of relationship between the entities involved.
2. Innovation in training, which ranges from spaces for education to strategies for the implementation of educational policies.
3. Innovation in technology, which aims to optimize the built and open spaces of the campus in order to improve its indicators.
4. Social innovation, which includes community considerations, the approach between universities and society, and participatory processes in the face of decision-making.

The proposal incorporates a preliminary list of specific objectives that are linked to one or several sectors of innovation (Table 1).

Table 1. Specific objectives of the project and its link to each of the innovation sectors

| Specific objective | Innovation areas |
|---|------------------------------------|
| 1_ Recognizing the key issues of the potential of university cultural heritage | I. Organizational |
| 2_ Defining the process that allows knowledge and mapping university cultural heritage in an integrated way | I. Training, technology and social |
| 3_ Designing regeneration measures that include new technologies, new teaching methods, new services and products to create new ways to access university cultural heritage | I. Training, technology and social |
| 4_ Generating an effective framework for follow up and evaluation | I. Technology |
| 5_ Generation and circular an inclusive chain to connect actors and activities involved with university cultural heritage. | I. Social |
| 6_ Improving the cooperation and capability to create networks of all the institutions in the consortium | I. Organizational |

Source: Authors (2018).

4. Program and management

The project’s management is based on the collaboration of European universities considering them from a cultural diversity perspective and with different interests regarding their regeneration. In this way, and for any specific action aimed at a transformation, some universities with a high level of development play the 'model' role, perceiving themselves experts, while others with similar needs, but not experienced, play the 'repeater' role. Not all actors have the same label in all actions: universities are considered in their 'model role' in some issues, but in their 'repeater role' in others (Figure 1).

The work strategy is based on a cycle of four fundamental phases. In phase 1, a knowledge archive is created, where the successful experiences as well as the specific heritage inventories of the universities are carried out. In phase 2, the roles are linked and the information is transmitted, assuming the tutoring process. In phase 3, the action is carried out. In phase 4, the result is evaluated and improved. The phases follow a loop structure that

consecutively adds models of successful initiatives to the knowledge archives, with continuous feedback with respect to their implementation and evaluation.

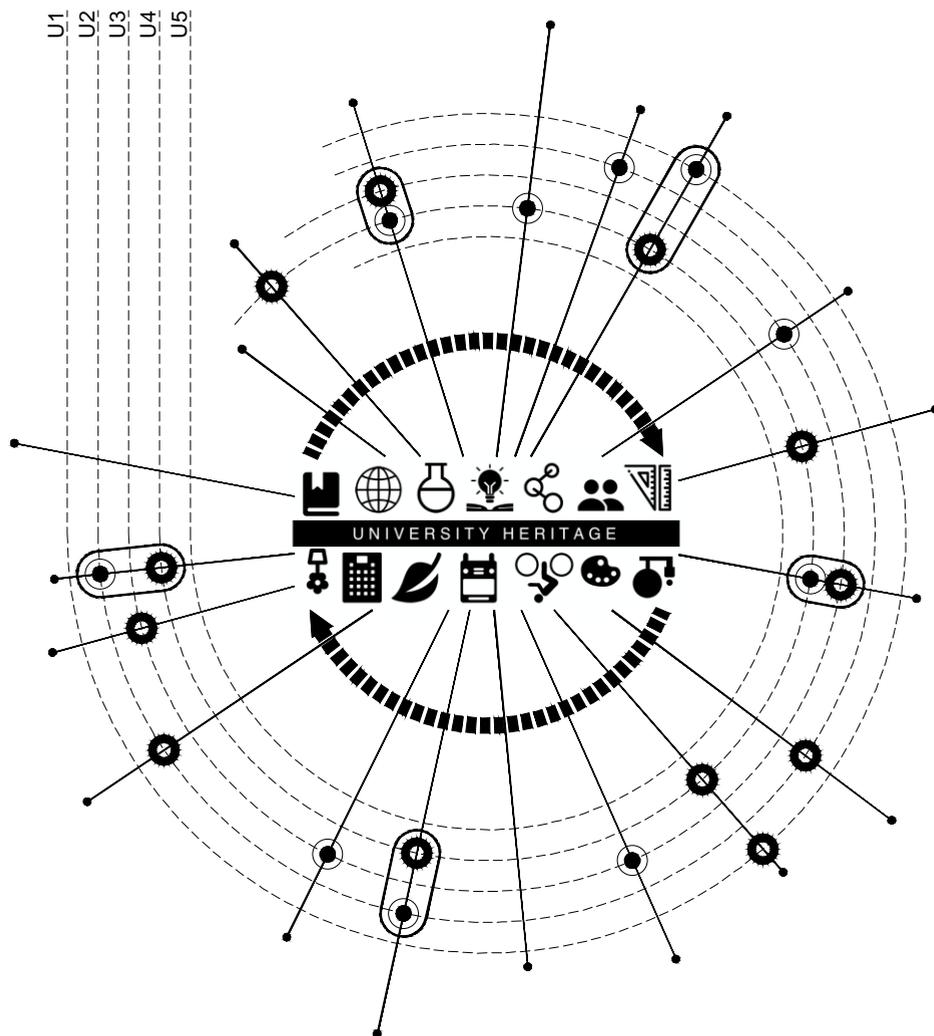


Figure 1. UNI-HERITAGE. Diagram of actions (convergent lines) for achieving specific objectives. Each university in the network (U1, U2, U3...) positioned according to role (full point/hollow point) in its actions. When role model and repeater role coincide, the development of the mentoring action takes place.

Source: Authors (2018).

5. Impact and results

The expected impacts are primarily related to the achievement of effective and shared policies that will be able to accelerate the regeneration based on university heritage. Consequently, the accessibility and social cohesion will be improved, the participation in the decision-making process will be increased and business opportunities will be fostered.

This impact is in line with the interests of the European calls and falls within the four domains of innovation described in the general and specific objectives mentioned above. The effects of the project mean a temporary double scale: on the one hand, the impact takes place within the same period of development of the work; On the other, collaboration processes generate synergies whose consequences would be made evident a later stage.

Thus, the results of the project can be observed under three perspectives:

A first block of results transfer is the one related to the work approach of an innovative nature and with a systematic, circular, open and collaborative character.

Secondly, the results transfer related to the interactive work platform must be considered and once operational, it will allow a wide range of applications. It is not just an archive with databases, but rather a tool that can incorporate other existing software and contemplate new functionalities for university campuses as well as the integration of existing computer applications.

Finally, the results transfer of the actions or projects carried out through this proposal are fundamental since they facilitate the creation of innovations regarding their heritage consideration.

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