

Universities as Potential Social Agents in the Urban Regeneration of Fragile Local Communities: A Mutual Learning Process

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Communities: A Mutual Learning Process

Ph.D. in Urban Planning, Design and Policy

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This thesis is being developed for the Doctoral Program in Urban Planning, Design, and Policy from the Department of Architecture and Urban Studies (DASU) at the Politecnico di Milano. Therefore, this research is part of the DASU Research Project “Fragilità Territoriali” funded by the Ministry of Education, Universities and Research of Italy (MIUR), Initiative from the Department of Excellence 2018-2022, Politecnico di Milano, Italy.

To this end, collaborative research was conceived within the Faculty of Architecture and Urbanism of the University of São Paulo (FAUUSP) at the Architectural Technology Department for a double Ph.D. degree.

In addition, this research is supervised by Prof. Dr. Alessandro Balducci and co-supervised by Prof. Dr. Roberta Consentino Kronka Mülfarth.

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This work is inspired by my greatest reference, my Father, a professor, and the most humble and intelligent person I have ever met. I am building my path, which seems to be just the same as his —finding in education the motivation to do something that will always trigger my curiosity and creativity!

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First of all, a special thanks to the most important and favorite people in my life, my Father, Sergio, my Mother, Rosa, and my Sister, Bruna, for their support and love and for always believing in my dreams; without you, nothing of this would have been possible. My lucky charm!

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Third, special thanks go to my dear family, to my special friends, and to the unique people I met on this incredible journey, who always cheer and support me. Some of them have become a family to me and I will always carry them in my heart. Finally, I would like to thank those who are no longer here with me, but always have a special place in my heart, my dearest Grandparents.

The Ph.D. path is a challenging and incredible journey, and it is up to you to make this path worthwhile. All the difficulties and challenges make your work even better, and all the connections and networking you do make for better and more collaborative research. Therefore, what makes you move forward are the people who will always support you and keep in your mind to always believe in your dreams. In the end, everything is going to be all right!

“In the end we will conserve only what we love, we will love only what we understand, and we will understand only what we are taught”

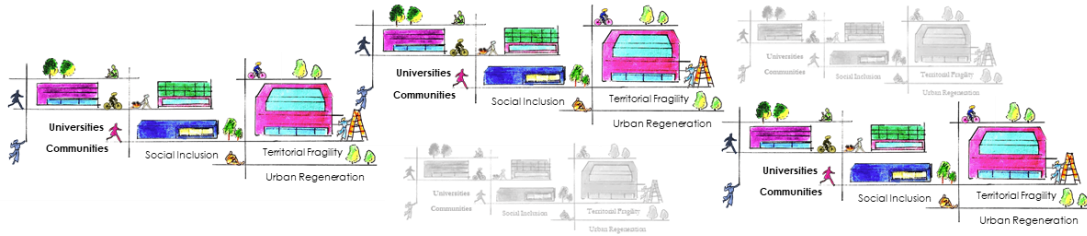
(Baba Diow, 1968)

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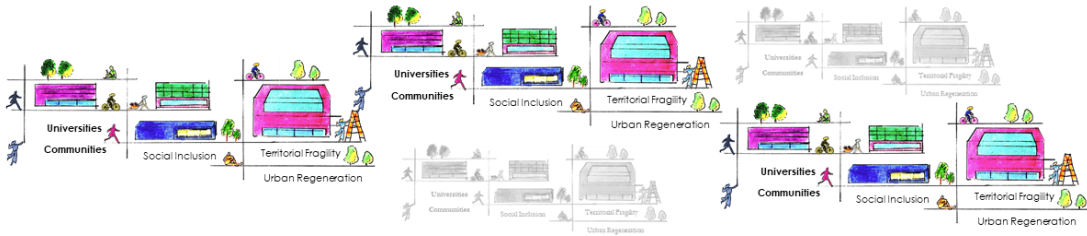
“Architecture is about people”

(Francis Kère)



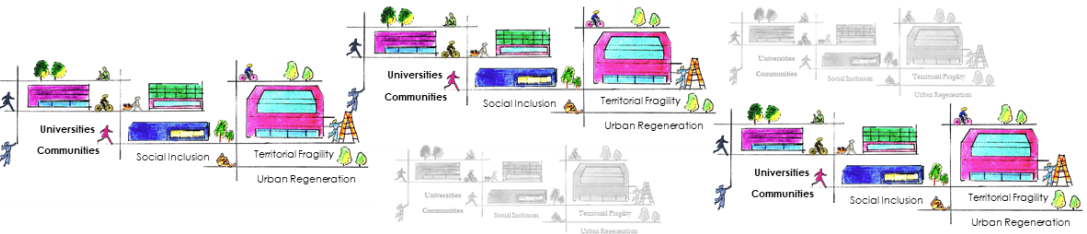
“Architecture is a social activity that has to do with some sort of communication or places of interaction, and that to change the environment is to change behavior”

(Thom Mayne)



“I think you never stop learning”

(Norman Foster)



Preface

This thesis is being developed within the scope of the research project “Fragilità Territoriali” in the Department of Excellence hosted by the Department of Architecture and Urban Studies (DAStU). For this reason, the conception of the thesis’s content was structured by exploring what connections could be made considering socio-economic development aspects of community life when approaching the framework of territorial fragilities with a focus on urban regeneration. Furthermore, this context also investigates the potential role of universities and how they can contribute to finding solutions to mitigate fragilities in the territories in which are inserted.

Participation to several meetings, interviews done with some professors and researchers, and most importantly, attendance workshops organized by social networks and organizations, made it possible to realize that the social role of universities could be an effective instrument for approaching fragile territories and urban regeneration issues.

Firstly, some diagrams and pictures were conceived to develop the first insights and ideas. Then, these tools started to be used both as analytical and as inspirations to illustrate the concepts better and provide a more dynamic reading and context understanding. Finally, it is essential to note that the diagrams and pictures are also a creative way of highlighting the personal point of view of the author about the theme.

Following this approach, Fig. 1 is a diagram of the first insights, ideas, and keywords concerning the framework of territorial fragilities and the social role of universities. In particular, it addresses the role of universities and communities and what strategies are being applied to connect universities with society. In this regard, building networks between universities and communities is crucial in constructing environments of trust, mutual learning, and respect among the actors involved in this process.

Finally, the framework of territorial fragility, which connects the universities with their territories, in this case, the local communities (contemporary peripheries in the context of the cities), in the search for urban regeneration,

could result in projects and actions leading to the sustainable development and improvement of the community's life quality.

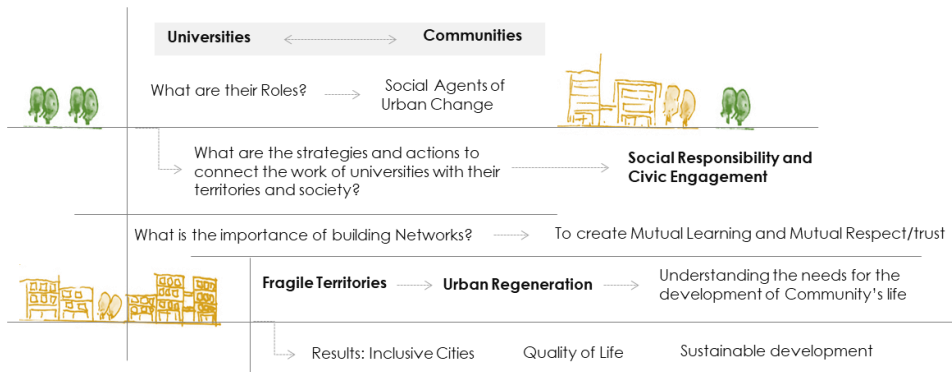


Fig. 1 | Diagram of the first insights of the thesis's theme. Source: developed by the author, 2023.

The following steps were to raise a research question and sub-questions to structure the thesis's main content better. Then, it was possible to investigate and select which case analyses could be considered a tool to complement the research and validate it regarding the social role of universities within its territories.

In short, this research project was conceived from the perspective of emphasizing the potential role of universities in the urban regeneration of fragile territories, encompassing local communities in the contemporary peripheral areas of the city. The main aim is to offer an original contribution by addressing the subject through critical thinking involving conceptual aspects and applications.

The construction of the proposal was based on the definition of the problem, the comprehension of the importance of this investigation, the development of a methodological strategy based on theoretical aspects, and the collection of a database.

The methodology applied to the development of this investigation is divided into three phases, which include a conceptualization of the two important

pillars, the role of universities in urban regeneration of territorial fragilities and an approach including social and civic engagement, the case analyses examples, and the networks and organizations. Finally, the conclusions derived from conceived research question and sub-questions that guided the investigation were elaborated, as well as propositions for future outcomes.

The analysis of the cases will be described as a way to demonstrate the importance of projects developed within communities, particularly involving educational practices, to achieve urban regeneration and develop mutual learning between universities and society. Following the analysis of the cases, an overview of some interconnected networks and organizations having social and civic aspects in their scope is presented as well. Beyond promoting the work of universities, these networks and organizations contribute to the conceptualization of its social role.

This thesis is organized into six chapters. The first is related to the research project, its objective, and its methodology. Next, the second and third are the work's two important conceptual pillars. The second chapter addresses historical and conceptual aspects by focusing on the rise of the social approach in the university context. Finally, the third chapter concerns the framework of territorial fragility, contextualizing the economic conditions of European regions and contemporary peripheries' definitions.

The fourth and fifth chapters consist of the practical part of the investigation.

The Fourth chapter presents, some of the most internationally recognized university networks and organizations. It highlights how universities and organizations worldwide are spreading and sharing ideas to understand better the importance of social aspects in teaching and learning.

The fifth chapter presents case analysis examples to demonstrate how universities are changing behaviors by improving educational practices to achieve urban regeneration in the face of fragile local communities' needs. Finally, different perceptions and projects developed between university and society are presented, providing environments for students, teachers, and all

actors involved to develop critical thinking about the urban issues that society faces.

To conclude, the sixth chapter addresses the conclusions based on the research question, sub-questions, and future outcomes.

Each chapter begins with a summary table reporting a brief description of its content to guide the reading, and the references are indicated at the end of each chapter. Lastly, aiming to complement the text, the articles submitted and published are included as annexes.

Abstract

Currently, the world is facing economic, social, and environmental issues in a more revolutionary and connected way than in previous years. One of the main challenges is identifying which, among possible actors considering their role in society, could be the leaders of future changes. Therefore, over the years, universities were progressively building and playing an essential role through new research strategies linked to social responsibility within communities by expanding research and teaching beyond the boundaries of the university campus.

This work aims to provide concepts and ideas to induce a discussion and build critical thinking on how important it is to connect the work of universities with fragile local communities, in other words, to understand the social role of universities better. First, a general overview of social responsibility and territorial fragility concepts is presented. Then, university social networks and organizations and case analyses illustrate the importance of projects developed within communities, particularly with innovative educational practices, to search for urban regeneration and mutual learning between universities and society.

Keywords: Universities. Communities. Social responsibility. Territorial Fragility. Urban Regeneration

Riepilogo

In questo momento il mondo sta affrontando questioni relative agli aspetti economici, sociali, ambientali in modo più connesso e rivoluzionario rispetto agli anni scorsi. Una delle sfide principali è identificare quali tra i possibili attori che considerano il loro ruolo nella società possano essere i leader dei cambiamenti futuri. Pertanto, nel corso degli anni, le università stanno progressivamente costruendo e giocando un ruolo importante, attraverso nuove strategie di ricerca legate alla responsabilità sociale all'interno delle comunità, ampliando la ricerca e la didattica oltre i confini del campus universitario.

L'obiettivo di questo lavoro è fornire concetti e idee per indurre la discussione e costruire un pensiero critico sull'importanza di collegare il lavoro delle università con le comunità fragili locali. Fondamentalmente per capire meglio il ruolo sociale delle università. In tal senso viene presentata una panoramica sui concetti di responsabilità sociale e fragilità territoriale. Reti sociali e organizzazioni universitarie, unite all'analisi di casi, illustrano l'importanza dei progetti sviluppati nelle comunità, in particolare nelle pratiche educative di rigenerazione urbana e di mutuo apprendimento tra università e società.

Parole chiave: Università. Comunità. Responsabilità Sociale. Fragilità Territoriale. Rigenerazione Urbana

Resumo

Atualmente o mundo enfrenta questões econômicas, sociais e ambientais de forma mais revolucionária e conectada do que em anos anteriores. Um dos principais desafios é identificar quais dentre os possíveis atores considerando seu papel na sociedade poderiam ser os líderes das mudanças futuras. Assim, ao longo dos anos, as universidades estão progressivamente construindo e desempenhando um papel importante por meio de novas estratégias de pesquisa vinculadas à responsabilidade social junto as comunidades, expandindo a pesquisa e o ensino para além dos limites do campus universitário.

Este trabalho visa fornecer conceitos e ideias para induzir uma discussão e construir um pensamento crítico sobre a importância de conectar o trabalho das universidades com as comunidades locais fragilizadas, ou seja, entender melhor o papel social das universidades. Neste sentido, apresenta-se uma visão geral dos conceitos de responsabilidade social e fragilidade territorial. Em seguida redes sociais e organizações universitárias, juntamente com uma análise de caso, ilustram a importância dos projetos desenvolvidos nas comunidades, em particular envolvendo práticas educativas, para alcançar a regeneração urbana e a aprendizagem mútua entre universidades e sociedade.

Palavras-chave: Universidades. Comunidades. Responsabilidade Social. Fragilidade Territorial. Regeneração Urbana

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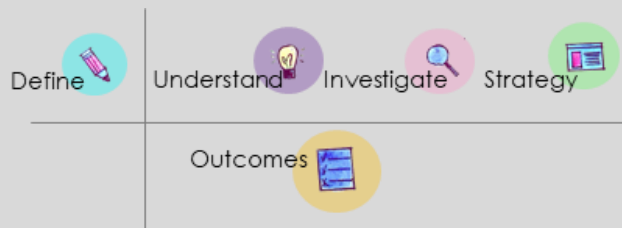
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Chapter 1 | Project Research

Building the Central Idea



This research emphasizes the potential social role of universities in dealing with fragile territories, developing a methodological strategy to investigate how universities are seeking urban regeneration, through research linked to local communities.

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Introduction and Justification:

This research proposes an overview analysis of the role of universities and how they are dealing with issues of fragile territories as in the contemporary peripheries and, more specifically, the local communities.

The idea is to investigate how universities are acting as social and civic agents and how they can provide directions to an innovative educational process and a cultural and environmental sustainability approach that are effective to achieve urban regeneration.

Methodology:

The methodology applied is made up of three phases and is intended as a way to understand in which context universities are inserted, for guiding them to provide knowledge co-production by establishing respect and mutual learning with the local communities in their cities.

The methodology is guided by the research question:

How is the role of universities being practiced in dealing with fragile territories in the search for urban regeneration?

1.1 Introduction

The main aim of this work is to emphasize the university's social role as a potential connector with society, among the other different and multifaceted roles that it can play, for instance, when considered as an institution, as an economical and sustainable indicator, or as a community in itself. However, to build critical thinking about the social role, its importance, and its challenges.

According to Kempton et al. (2021: 13):

“But what are universities for? This simple question, which is as old as universities themselves, remains extremely topical and pertinent today. In fact, the rapid transformation experienced by contemporary societies implies the search for a better understanding of the role and purpose of universities. Due to the profound changes in the world economy, universities have been called upon to go beyond their traditional missions and therefore play a strategic role in the development process of their regions”.

Consequently, over the years of the university's history, there have been important missions to highlight that define its role.

Fig. 2 illustrates a diagram of universities' missions:¹ teaching, research, engagement, university 4.0 and, university 5.0.

¹ Content extracted from: Kempton et al. (2021: 16).

First mission: Teaching	Second mission: Research	Third mission: Engagement	University 4.0	University 5.0
<p>Initial conception of Universities:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Since the conception of universities in the middle ages, the primary task of universities was the preservation and dissemination of knowledge to contribute to the accumulation of human capital, that is, to teach and instruct. 	<p>First academic revolution:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> During the nineteenth century the two missions of teaching and knowledge generation (research) come together. Production process is specifically focused on problem solving, generating innovations and knowledge. 	<p>Second academic revolution:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Third mission (end of the 20th century and in the 21st century) emphasizing research (knowledge, technology transfer, innovation), teaching (lifelong learning, continuing education) and social engagements (university involvement in social and cultural life). Diversified avenues of funding and income generation; institutionalization of the entrepreneurial mindset; economic and social development. 	<p>Third academic revolution:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> In the 21st century changes in technology have enhanced the connections between research universities and economic policies. The university becomes a provider of knowledge about the future, leading the development of high-tech industries; use of modern technologies in the education process; interdisciplinary; new competencies; project-based approach; digital economy. 	<p>Fourth academic revolution?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Instead of purely technological approaches, University 5.0 incorporates a human-centered approach. The principle is to include society so everyone can share the same opportunities and with that, influence economic growth and well-being for all. It is a developing concept, exploring the implications of the close connection between people and technology in higher education strategies, policies and governance.

Fig. 2 | Diagram of universities' missions. Source: imagine developed by the author, 2023.

In doing so, throughout the end of the 20th century and the beginning of the 21st century, the approach of the engaged universities and universities' third mission started to be emphasized (Kempton et al., 2021). In addition, social engagements were enforced, highlighting social development through the university's involvement in cultural and social life.

This concept and this new movement of universities are characterized by combining research, teaching, and engagement at the same level, therefore, connecting the work of universities with society.

Universities, on the one hand, and communities, on the other hand, build networks and assume a role as active agents for providing environments that connect research, teaching, and social engagement simultaneously.

Fig. 3 illustrates the diagram of the engaged university's approach.

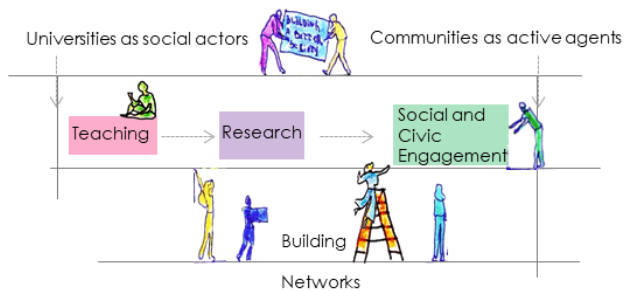


Fig. 3 | Diagram of engaged university's approach. Source: imagine developed by the author, 2023.

However, as this concept is still under development, it is important to start generating a process of discussion, reflection, and critical thinking about this approach.

Hence, although is not easy to define this role, or measure its impact through social indicators, a context focusing on the social aspect is an excellent way to emphasize how universities can play a relevant role by providing new learning and teaching environments and aspirations for becoming a real agent of urban change.

Moreover, the exciting aspect of the social role is that it can be applied in different contexts, environments, and dimensions, whether the university is private or public. The main question is whether universities can improve the educational process to such an extent as to change society fundamentally. In this sense, approaching the social aspect means providing an environment to discuss, argue, be more civic aware, and build critical thinking regarding society's urban issues.

In this regard, there is an urgent call for social responsibility and civic engagement from universities, through the development of tools able to support and transform “local citizens and organizations into truly empowered actors, able to promote and control changes, but also to claim for effective institutional support” (Cognetti, Maranghi, 2019: 1-206).

Furthermore, there is the fact that universities are inserted within a territory, and this territory can be represented in different scales as a city, a region, a

neighborhood, a local community, and so on. In this regard, it is known that the complexity of contemporary cities and their dynamics and urban challenges are demanding from Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) a new approach in the teaching-learning process plan for more sustainable and inclusive cities.

For this reason, this research will approach universities and fragile local communities as social and active agents involved in the mutual learning process to seek urban regeneration. The urban regeneration approach is “widely recognized as a comprehensive and integrated vision and plan to solve the multifaceted problems of urban areas and to improve the economic, physical, social and environmental conditions of deprived areas” (Barosio et al., 2016: 367-380) and the local development of marginal and contemporary peripheries² in the last decade have become more inclusive.

This movement is happening due to the presence of different actors consisting of “citizens and local organizations, considered able to interpret and bring out local resources and competences, essential to develop successful interventions, especially in an era of scarce availability of funds” (Cognetti, Maranghi, 2019: 1-206).

Furthermore, since in this research the territory considered a fragile local community, it is necessary to approach and explore the context of territorial fragility. Firstly, not focusing on finding alternatives for their anti-fragile aspects but instead providing an interpretation, the contextualization is based on the development of these territories that, for some reason, present an imbalance of their economic, environmental, social, and cultural aspects. Moreover, it is vital to understand the conceptualization of this theme further to open up better discussions afterward.

² Peripheries were used to be considered places geographically far from the central urban areas and to be related to weakness and cloudy concepts for different places. However, today new peripheral conditions are appearing, which go “beyond both the center-periphery dialectic and the meaning linked to physical distance from central areas: contemporary peripheries are at the same time heterogeneous, different and specific. As in the past, they do not have a specific role, assuming it with regarding another area” (Fontanella, 2019: 40).

Aiming to connect better the aspects addressed in this research, but also as a form of evaluation, a leading case analysis of the Mapping San Siro (MSS) project developed in the San Siro neighborhood in the western center of the city of Milan (Italy) will be presented.

The neighborhood of San Siro can be considered a fragile local community due to, among other things, its “living conditions: urban decay and blight exacerbate already existing problems, such as disadvantage, social exclusion, poverty, and the coexistence of different populations and cultures” (Cognetti, Castelnuovo, 2019: 37-54).

To complement the social aspects, around the world, many universities and institutions exchange knowledge and experiences on how they work with their communities. Thus, this research will focus on the importance, among others, of university networks and organizations, which are part of social responsibility and the civic and public engagement context.

Therefore, this research aims to open up a dialogue and critical thinking concerning achieving urban regeneration in fragile communities. Moreover, the idea of developing critical thinking about this content is based on the fact that “the most effective thinking and knowledge-building is a dialogical process of both ‘reflective practice’ and participation in various ‘communities of practice’ both local and universal” (Richards, 2009: 22-260).

To conclude, the content and results of this research can emphasize, although the challenge of implementing the social role of universities, the importance of improving and changing behavior in educational practices by providing better environments for mutual learning.

“The advantage of the presence of one or more higher education institutions in a region is that expertise from these different scales can be a major asset to the community” (Chatterton, Goddard, 2000: 478).

1.1.1 Objective and Justification

This research was conceived thinking about the possible role that the university can play in becoming a real active agent of urban change. In this sense, the social aspect was chosen, which deals with the aspirations and behavioral change of educational practices and with training students to become better citizens capable of developing civic awareness and critical thinking about urban issues facing the world. This social aspect is difficult to define but is also a challenging approach. In this sense, it is worth mentioning:

“the engaged university model is that the increasing recognition of the economic and social value that Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) can bring to their regions is driving expectations that their teaching and research should be responsive to the needs of local industries, labor markets, and governmental or civil society actors” (Kempton et al., 2021: 36; Chatterton et al., 2000). This resonates with recent appeals for the ‘civic’ mission—which was central to the foundation of US and UK universities in the 19th and early 20th centuries—to be revitalized as a guiding principle for contemporary higher education” (Kempton et al., 2021: 36; Vallance, 2016).

Universities are considered to be at “the forefront of scientific and technological advances in undertaking global research and educating future leaders and professionals, universities deliver impactful knowledge in every sector across all nations and act as anchors in the communities they serve nationally and internationally” (Purcell et al., 2019: 1344).

In this regard, some specific issues were addressed, as follows: how essential universities are to communities and society, how important it is becoming for universities to carry out social responsibility and civic engagement actions in fragile territories, how effective research is in achieving urban regeneration, and how committed universities can be in providing co-production of knowledge to their communities and society. Moreover, it is important to address how this role is being built and how the impact of its actions is being perceived.

Therefore, the construction of this research proposal is based on five inputs to justify its importance.

Define: What is the problem? The problem is the importance and why innovative educational processes still need to be recognized among institutions. And for that, this research will go deeper to understand the role of universities as social and civic agents and which practices and their implementation are crucial in dealing with fragile territories in the search for urban regeneration. Moreover, it is essential to understand what fragile territories mean, or in other words, which are the conceptual definitions for fragile territories and contemporary peripheries.

Understand: Why is it important? It is important, because universities are organizations with the power to use their teaching and research expertise to create actions that go beyond the borders of the university campus to reach communities. Furthermore, on the one hand, these kinds of fragile territories suffer from an imbalance of social, economic, environmental, and cultural aspects. But on the other hand, they are part of the urban organization of the city and can be better explored.

Investigate: How do we identify the problem? Use of interdisciplinary academic areas combined with case analyses as a way to better contextualize the fragile territories and the role of universities.

Strategy: How do we proceed? Conceiving a specific methodology framework for this research.

Outcome: Does it work? The expected outcome of this research is to highlight the importance of developing new educational processes (mutual learning) in different perspectives that provide knowledge co-creation and co-design to achieve better urban regeneration alternatives facing the needs of fragile local communities.

According to Creative Community, report (2023)³ it is relevant to highlight the importance of co-creation:

“Co-creation is a collaborative approach whereby the people who use something are empowered to make it. The central goal of co-creation is innovation and change, supported by values such as equality and diversity, accessibility, mutual benefit and reciprocity between collaborators. There are three elements that are key to co-creation: community; collaboration; and context. In co-creation, research is done with a community, rather than to a community; all collaborators are of equal importance in providing individual expertise”.

Fig. 4 is a diagram of the expected outcomes of this research.

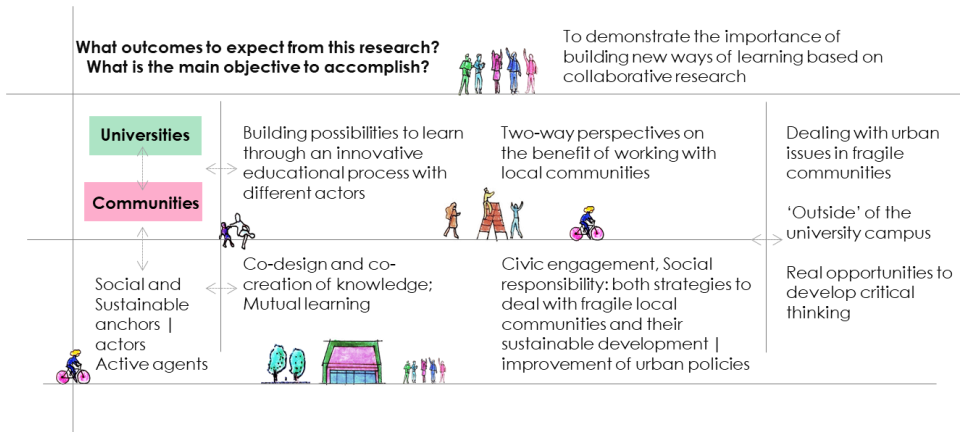


Fig. 4 | Research’s expected outcomes. Source: imagine developed by the author, 2023.

In addition, this research aims to investigate the importance that universities are assuming in developing projects based on social responsibility and civic engagement. Moreover, universities can provide directions to an innovative, cultural, and environmental sustainability approach that could effectively achieve fundamental societal changes.

³ Source: <https://www.creativecommunities.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/04/By-All-For-All-The-Power-of-Partnerships-Creative-Communities.pdf>

1.1.2 Methodology

The methodology applied for this research consists of three phases, which contemplate the role of universities as social and civic agents in the search for urban regeneration. Moreover, this methodology is guided by the research question, and sub-questions presented, which were essential to understand the structure of this research.

Research question: How is the role of universities being practiced in dealing with fragile territories in the search for urban regeneration?

Sub-questions: How are universities playing a role as powerful organizations that use their teaching and research knowledge to design actions beyond the borders of the campuses?

How is it possible to build a relationship of common learning and mutual respect between universities and communities?

What is the positive impact of the social and civic engagement approach in the urban regeneration of fragile local communities?

It is important to highlight that this methodology was developed as a way to understand in which context universities are inserted, for guiding them to provide co-production of knowledge by establishing respect and mutual learning with the local communities in their cities.

The first phase is composed of a literature review and conceptualization of the two essential pillars: the role of universities and territorial fragility.

Fig. 5 illustrates the diagram of these two pillars and related concepts.

University's social role context	Territorial Fragility framework
Sustainable development	European Regions: economic aspects and urban policies approaches
University Social Responsibility USR; Civic Engagement; Service-Learning S-L and Student-Community Engagement SCE	DASfU Research Project "Fragilità Territoriali"; Italian context; Contemporary Periphery in the territory context; Inner Periphery (IP)

Fig. 5| Diagram of the two conceptual pillars. Source: imagine developed by the author, 2023.

The second phase is the body of the thesis. It intends to analyze and explore three cases in which universities apply social responsibility and civic engagement as strategies to deal with the urban issues of fragile local communities.


The analyses were developed from two different perspectives: the first is on innovative educational processes and mutual learning, and the second is learning from university networks' activities. Both emphasize different scales regarding territory and the methodology applied to urban alternatives to capture diverse ways of undertaking a fragile environment. Still, at the same time, they highlight collaborative research among different actors, stakeholders and the importance of comprehending the communities' life.

A methodology of investigation of the case analyses was structured based on fieldwork, data collection, and interview with professors and students to understand the positive impact of the social approach in research when dealing with fragile local communities.

In that, it was possible to highlight some engaging activities developed in the cases, such as participatory co-design, mapping, listening, and a living lab of sharing experiences. Most relevant, on the importance of building networks through the social role of the university.

Hence, different perspectives on the social role of universities are presented by analyzing three cases: the Mapping San Siro (MSS) project, the NoVoid project, and the WC2 University Network.

Fig. 6 is the diagram of the case analyses and their respective universities and locations.



Case Analyses			
Collaborative Research between Universities and Local Communities	FA.Ulisboa (Faculty of Architecture of the University of Lisbon)	NoVoid project	Portugal
	FAUUSP (Faculty of Architecture and Urbanism of the University of São Paulo)	WC2 University Network	Brazil
	DASU (Department of Architecture and Urban Studies) Politecnico di Milano	Mapping San Siro (MSS) project	Italy




Fig. 6 | Diagram of the case study analyses. Source: imagine developed by the author, 2023.

Furthermore, as a complement, an in-depth analysis of some internationally recognized university networks and organizations in the field of social and civic engagement takes place, on the one hand, as an exciting contribution to place the experiences analyzed in a more general process of maturation and sensitivity of universities towards social problems. On the other hand, to understand how universities are operate to disseminate the theme of social responsibility.

Finally, the third phase presents the conclusions and future outcomes based on the research question and sub-questions.

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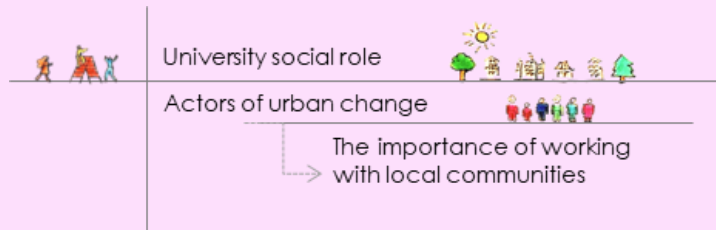
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Universities as Potential Social Agents in the Urban Regeneration of Fragile Local
Communities: A Mutual Learning Process

Ph.D. in Urban Planning, Design and Policy

Chapter 2 | University's Social Role

The relevant aspect of social and civic engagement



The main goal of this content is to investigate the general context of universities and their roles as social and civic agents in promoting quality of life to society.

Universities as Potential Social Agents in the Urban Regeneration of Fragile Local
Communities: A Mutual Learning Process

Ph.D. in Urban Planning, Design and Policy

Introduction:

This specific chapter, which is one of the two important conceptual pillars of this research, aims to explore and understand the context of the social role of universities.

Therefore, in recent years universities are playing a important role as possible agents to achieve changes in the society; among a variety of paths to play this role, this research will focus on social and civic engagement as a strategy to build knowledge and networks between universities and communities.

The role of universities:

Universities are increasingly becoming organizations that seek to implement social and civic actions in their areas of teaching and research. Furthermore, universities play a role as responsible actors in forming more inclusive and sustainable environments.

The idea of this theme is to explore the context in which universities started to act as social and civic agents based on co-production of knowledge between universities and communities. A specific literature guided the construction of the concepts and definitions of this theme.

Moreover, it is important to highlight that, although this concept is difficult to define and implement, it is necessary to start generate discussion and critical thinking on the social role of universities. Hence, this role also leads to build better learning environments and changing the behavior of the educational process in order to achieve more effective solutions and aspirations for society issues.

2.1 Introduction

In recent years, universities are playing an important role, “some would say a unique role, in their cities and regions in meeting a diverse set of needs, and, in doing so, contributing to the economic and social development of those cities and regions” (Charles et al., 2021: 5; Goddard et al. 1994; Arbo and Benneworth, 2007; Goddard and Vallance, 2014).

More than that, universities must confront their role to offer practical alternatives when dealing with their territories' urban issues. Hence, universities can become potential social agents to achieve changes in society. Among various paths to play the role, this research will focus on social and civic engagement as a strategy to communicate and co-produce knowledge between universities and communities.

In this perspective, a deep understanding and reflection are necessary to address how the social approach can influence the development of innovative educational practices, providing experiences and opportunities beyond the university's campuses.

To emphasize the social approach, it is important to mention, “The primary missions of a university are to engage in teaching and research, the nature of academic scholarship across all areas of knowledge leads to interaction and positive engagement with businesses, government, public services, voluntary and community bodies, and individual citizens” (Charles et al., 2021: 5). In this sense:

“University can be seen as a ‘community of experimentation and innovation’ (Breznitz and Feldman, 2012, 139) engaging in a wide range of business, public and civic activities” (Charles et al., 2021: 6).

In doing so, approaching the social aspect in the context of engaged universities is crucial because it reflects on “universities as anchor institutions and new forms of the civic university. There is a proliferation of conceptual frameworks applied to the task of analyzing the engaged university at different levels of generality, some about the university sector as a whole, some to specific forms of institution, yet one common aspect is that all universities are to some degree unique” (Charles et al., 2021: 9-10).

In addition, it is important to notice that universities can reinforce their role with cooperation between organizations and networks, which serve as platforms in joining efforts to promote the importance of institutions in the social, economic, cultural, and environmental development of their territories.

In this sense, as an example of one of these organizations and in compliance with the principles settled by the Coalition of Urban and Metropolitan Universities (CUMU)⁴, it worth mentioning:

“Urban and metropolitan areas face unique challenges in serving the multifaceted needs of their communities but also have advantages that create some of the world’s greatest universities... Urban university-community engagement enriches metropolitan communities while strengthening the universities’ core commitment to teaching and research”.

The idea of universities becoming a potential anchor for the benefit of their communities and the enhancement of policymakers start to gain shape with “new universities since the 19th century has often been associated with the desire to support regional economies. This was especially the case in the US since the Land Grant colleges were established by the Morrill Act of 1862” (Charles et al., 2021: 10)⁵.

Therefore, in the UK the civic universities appear in provincial cities in England (19th Century), by supporting local interests based on engaged education and research. According to Charles et al. (2021: 11):

“Prior to 1900, Oxford and Cambridge were not addressing the needs of British industry, and hence the civic universities were created as a response

⁴ CUMU (Coalition of Urban and Metropolitan Universities) “is an international affiliate organization of colleges and universities in metropolitan and urban areas that share common understandings of their institutional missions and values” Source: <https://www.cumuonline.org/about-cumu/> (2022).

⁵In this research, the main focus is to present a brief content about University Social Responsibility to understand how this concept was born among universities. The focus will be on describing the general idea of this concept. At the end of the chapter are references for more in-depth information on the social and civic history of universities.

to those needs (Sanderson, 1972). Universities such as Manchester and Liverpool were established with funds from local industrialists, and in many cases the public also, with specific gifts from business leaders for labs related to their business interests” (Sanderson, 1972; Whyte, 2015).

In this regard, universities’ attention to social responsibility began in the late 1990s with a focus on environmental protection in response to sustainable development, through the approach of urban living laboratories, intended to contribute as an experimental environment for universities.

Thereby, living labs “are urban because they refer to the political dimension of cities. In this perspective, they are environments allowing those involved to experiment and train the civil capacity ‘of all’, thus challenging the function of local democracy. This implies a focus as much on residents and local players as on institutions. All these actors must be put in a position to learn from the local situation, introducing mechanisms that contribute to the redefinition of both the habits and the places of citizenship as well as routines and institutional norms” (Cognetti, 2023: 28).

Therefore, it is possible to say that in the past decade, the awareness of social responsibility of universities influenced the level of study and research linking issues of local, national, and global concern. This is related to the third stream⁶ or third mission, which aims at working with employers and community groups as part of the teaching and research of universities.

In this sense, it is important to highlight that “another key argument associated with this approach is that instead of being marginalized as a separate and discretionary ‘third mission’, regional engagement needs to be embedded in the core research and teaching activities of universities” (Kempton et al., 2021: 37).

⁶ The Third Stream is an international concept that “traces an emerging role of universities in innovation processes. Such processes require a more collaborative approach with other sectors and the gradual extension of this from working with the private sector to the consideration of collective actors working on civil society issues” (Millican, Bourner, 2014: 29; Laredo, 2007).

Therefore, the universities are playing more socially active role by promoting the co-production of knowledge and new innovative educational practices that required the combined engagement of students and communities to build a better society. Such practices are disseminated through “the knowledge of service-learning in higher education in Europe, as an educational approach that enhances students’ civic engagement, brings them closer to different social realities while allowing them to work in a real environment” (EOSLHE)⁷.

In this sense, as a way of creating a field of investigation and practice, universities are exploring the notion of University Social Responsibility (USR), which can be considered an engine of educational policies that relate to the fundamental objectives of the university concerning the environment they are acting.

Thus, the USR mission can be promoted in different ways among universities by creating environments that are open for:

“Establishment of communities within and outside the University which promotes social responsibilities in different stakeholders; promotion of activities which are ethical, inclusive, and beneficial to the public; emphasis on environmental conservation, sustainability, and balanced social development; promotion of welfare and quality of life of people, especially the needy and vulnerable populations; and commitment to building a better world” (Shek, Hollister, 2017: v).

It is important to understand the role of universities in the achievement of social responsibility, as “not only as critical educational organizations that impact human society but also by fostering awareness of social responsibility for the younger generations” (Lo et al., 2017: 41; Muijen, 2004). In this way,

⁷ EOSLHE (European Observatory of Service-Learning in Higher Education) “as a permanent space for cooperation and exchange among the members of the European network Europe Engage for mapping the use of, collecting data and evidences and promoting the use of this learning methodology as well as its institutionalizing processes”. Source: <https://www.eoslhe.eu/what-we-do/> (2022).

USR, as an approach that provides a better connection between the university and the needs of society, can play an important role.

Moreover, in the global northern region, the USR terminology is known as “civic engagement” or “community engagement”, and is therefore used to describe the impacts of higher education institutions on public and community activities.

The civic role of universities (19th and early 20th century) can be recognized in their serving the public through dynamic and mutual actions. In other words, it “presupposes the importance of greater involvement by the public in the design and implementation of collaborative activities and also demands that faculty draw on their scholarly expertise for the benefit of the public as well as themselves” (Reich, 2014: x; Lunsford et al., 2010: 105).

The idea of social and civic engagement goes beyond the boundaries of the university campus, therefore creating a relationship with the communities. It reinforces how this question of going off campus (related to the third mission) should be problematized, by considering that the community engagement is with a plurality of subjects in a situation that is certainly more complex.

Universities can address “the solutions needed to reinstate healthy pathways of access and opportunity” (Cantor, Englot, 2014: 4).

Furthermore, from the social responsibility perspective, it is possible to cover various denominations, including civic engagement, community engagement, public engagement, collaborative research, community-based learning, etc. In addition to the fact that these denominations may have different processes and approaches, what they have in common is that they describe the aspirations to better connect the work of universities with society.

Here below, contents will be presented that encompass the fields of social and civic perspective in universities better to understand the concepts and objectives of these themes. The main aim is to provide objective and

consistent content to develop critical thinking further and induce discussion about its importance and challenges.

2.2 Sustainable Development Context

Sustainable development is a global call, in which “leaders pledged common action and endeavor across such a broad and universal policy agenda”⁸ to achieve a better, safe, just, and sustainable world.

The first actions to be applied in promoting sustainable development started in 1972 in the first United Nations⁹ Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED), held in Stockholm, Sweden.

Therefore, it was in the second version of the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) held in June 1992 in the city of Rio de Janeiro (Agenda 21)¹⁰ that sustainable development was launched and recognized worldwide as a concept. This concept embraces the relationship between environment and development, which seeks to balance the social, economic, and environmental limitations that the world faces. In this sense, it is worth mentioning according to König, Evans (2013: 1):

“With ongoing urbanization, over half of the human population now lives in cities. Rapidly growing cities present pollution hotspots and challenges for resource provision. New approaches to organizing social life, infrastructures, and research, and technological innovation are urgently required. The quest for such new approaches is often framed by

⁸ Source: <https://sdgs.un.org/2030agenda> (2023).

⁹ “The United Nations is an international organization founded in 1945. Currently made up of 193 Member States, the UN and its work are guided by the purposes and principles contained in its founding Charter. The UN has evolved over the years to keep pace with a rapidly changing world. But one thing has stayed the same: it remains the one place on Earth where all the world’s nations can gather together, discuss common problems, and find shared solutions that benefit all of humanity”. Source: <https://www.un.org/en/about-us> (2022).

¹⁰ “Agenda 21 is a comprehensive plan of action to be taken globally, nationally and locally by organizations of the United Nations System, Governments, and Major Groups in every area in which human impacts on the environment”. Source: <https://sdgs.un.org/publications/agenda21> (2022).

‘Sustainable Development’, which seeks to reconcile economic activity with social progress and environmental protection”.

Later on, in September 2015 in the city of New York, the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development was adopted by all United Nations Member States, which “provides a shared blueprint for peace and prosperity for people and the planet, now and into the future. At its heart are the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which are an urgent call for action by all countries – developed and developing – in a global partnership” (United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Sustainable Development, 2022)¹¹.

The 17 SDGs are “integrated and indivisible and balance the three dimensions of sustainable development: the economic, social and environmental” (United Nations, General Assembly, 2015)¹².

Universities are considered facilitators in adopting the SDGs¹³ at a sustainable strategic level, connecting higher education to business, industry, health, community, and entrepreneurs.

Therefore, these strategies are being conceived considering the integration of sustainability in research, teaching, and facilities that include planning configurations of the entire campus, encompassing buildings and their environmental impact. At the same time, these strategies are oriented towards a set of objectives and principles related to people and the city, clean energy, the environment, mobility, climate change, food, and health, among others.

Since then, universities around the world have been promoting new ways of thinking about sustainable actions. In this sense, it is common to frame the role of universities as living laboratories for other universities, communities, and cities, as a way of implementing these actions, which seek sustainable

¹¹ Source: <https://sdgs.un.org/goals> (2022).

¹² Source: <https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N15/291/89/PDF/N1529189.pdf?OpenElement> (2023).

¹³ To further information about the 17 SDGs: <https://sdgs.un.org/goals> (2023).

development and social responsibility beyond the limits of university campuses.

Furthermore, the living lab terminology can be defined and exemplified as a model, which “become a part of transformative institutional change that draws on both top-down and bottom-up strategies in pursuit of sustainable development” (Purcell et al., 2019, 1344). Either as “a situation or circumstance where real-world sustainability challenges are formally addressed in stakeholder partnerships” (Purcell et al., 2019: 1345; König et al., 2013).

Moreover, living labs constitutes “a form of experimental governance, whereby stakeholders develop and test new technologies and ways of living to address the challenges of climate change and urban sustainability” (Evans et al., 2015: 1) and can be described as “real-life environments in which to experiment, develop, co-create, validate, and test services and systems with different actors” (Cognetti, 2023: 27).

Hence, approaching the urban context, urban living labs “seem to be able to develop and reinforce people’s ability to reflect, imagine, aspire, and take action for the transformation of their life context, becoming real agents of change” (Cognetti, Marangui, 2023: 74; Bylund et al., 2020). Furthermore, there are many definitions of a living lab approach: however, it is important to highlight the role of living labs as providers of environments for students and the local community to develop mutual learning and co-production of knowledge.

For example, institutions and students can understand more critically the needs of these communities and, on the other hand, the community can better understand how scientific knowledge can provide changes through small urban interventions and forms of social and culture representations. Concerning the living labs context and to emphasize it, it worth mentioning that:

“For universities to realize their potential to address sustainability challenges they need new frameworks that synthesize their core business or

research, teaching, and social responsibility. Living labs provide new ways of working that can systematically frame co-production opportunities to achieve just that” (Evans et al., 2015: 6).

2.3 The Social context of the University

Teaching and research have changed from the past idea of the universities being just providers of knowledge, but rather how new standards for the social role of universities can impact actions for the benefit of society. In this sense, a brief historical part of the social approach is presented.

The University's fundamental goals, focused on education and research, can be traced back to classical Greece and ancient civilizations.

In 392 BC Isocrates, an Athenian upper class, established the first institution focusing on the practical arts of rhetoric. Later, the Roman Empire changed this educational focus to meet its practical needs. Moreover, in the 6th century, higher education disintegrated together with the Roman Empire and only reappeared in the 11th century.

According to Shek et al., (2017: 26) “The renewal of interest in higher education in Renaissance was both a “rebirth” of classical Greco-Roman and Christian scholarship and also a greater exposure to other culture or civilization”.

The first recognized university in the world was the University of Bologna, in Italy, established in 1088. Therefore, it is important to note that in the medieval period, higher education was based on teaching and professional skills. However, the role of the universities was “to fulfill the social demand and to provide the required educated priests, administrators, lawyers, physicians or personnel for business” (Shek et al., 2017: 27; Scott, 2006).

In the 17th century, higher education suffered a stagnation and therefore returned to its function of collecting and preserving knowledge in society and became an instrument of social differentiation and exclusion. Furthermore, in the post-industrial period of the 19th century, universities emphasized practical knowledge and professional accreditation.

In the 19th century, “to better serve the post-industrial society, there was an increasing emphasis on practical knowledge and the importance of professional accreditation (Watson et al. 2011). For example, since the twelfth century, Oxford and Cambridge were almost a duopoly of higher education and considered themselves colleagues in an autonomous collective (Lay 2004). Thus, in response to the resistance to change of the Oxbridge system, the University of London was developed to provide a more practical curriculum and greater accessibility to people... Another major reform in the 19th century was initiated in Germany” (Shek et al., 2017: 28).

In 1810 at the University of Berlin Wilhelm von Humboldt¹⁴ established a new vision for the old universities of the 19th century, emphasizing “scholarship, and the assertion that the true university accord equal significance to research and training...the ideal university aimed to increase the total of human knowledge through research” (Shek et al., 2017: 28; Lay, 2004: 48).

This new vision had a major influence on the future of higher education, covering not only Germany but also Great Britain and the United States.

For instance, in the United States, American higher education was guided by democratization, where the idea that the republican value of freedom and self-government should be introduced by education to young people.

Therefore, following the passing of the Morrill Act¹⁵ in 1862, the US federal government created the Land Grant College, which has financial resources to offer opportunities for students not belonging to the elite and especially supports more utilitarian studies. Furthermore, the Morrill Act could give higher education a new view of democracy’s college.

¹⁴ Diplomat and founder of the Humboldt University of Berlin. Source: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wilhelm_von_Humboldt (2023).

¹⁵ Sponsored by Senator Justin Morrill of Vermont, the "Act Donating public lands to the several States and [Territories] which may provide colleges for the benefit of agriculture and the Mechanic arts" marked the first federal aid to higher education. Source: <https://www.archives.gov/milestone-documents/morrill-act> (2023).

Therefore, the University of Wisconsin, joined the rank of a land-grant institution in 1866 and could provide benefits and social interaction for the entire rural population of that state. The idea of the University of Wisconsin was to provide public social services among state universities and to be a reference point with its contributing to teaching and research with equal public services. Hence as a result, “this became the foundation of social engagement of higher education while the emphasis of service became one of the key pillars of universities” (Shek et al., 2017: 29).

The US higher education model was based on European traditions combined with the intent of responding to the needs of local society. In this sense and according to Shek et al., (2017: 29), it is worth mentioning that:

“The roles and functions of universities are multiple and varied, depending on the broader social context and internal dynamic of universities. While the traditional role of higher education emphasizes more on general education and research and prepares administrators for the regime, the recent development also highlights the inverse role of higher education, such as the importance of professional school and the service to the society and economic world”.

In the 20th century, universities were developed with diverse forms and functions of teaching and research, but higher education aimed also “to support the public service and democratization in the society” (Shek et al., 2017: 28; Scott, 2006).

Regarding that, it is necessary to discuss about the importance of the university’s social responsibility “While universities are steering towards the market mechanism but still enjoying much autonomy and academic freedom, social responsibility becomes the normative expectation of organizations nowadays (including universities) by the general public (Shek et al., 2017: 22; Vasilescu et al. 2010)”.

Furthermore, the role of universities and their social responsibility are defined in the contemporary world based on the changing nature of society and the globalization challenge. In addition, the new product of higher education based on non-teaching functions is meeting the needs of society

and adapting to the local context, through the promotion of civil society¹⁶ and sustainable human development.

“In no doubt, higher education sectors have changed a lot in the past few decades and the age of globalization.

Particularly, higher education has changed from primarily offered to the elites to an open system of mass education (Altbach et al. 2009; Morey 2004). In response to the rapid growth of knowledge, the expansion of demand for higher education, and competing demand of higher education for the service of the economy and society, higher education sectors are at the crossroad of what function and appropriate role they have to play to fulfill its unique role in the society. In the age of profane marketization and commodification of higher education, how and for what value could higher education maintain its social mission and purpose? Scott (2006) argued that to face the rapid social change, universities have to set clear missions to facilitate decision-making, align associated academic policy

¹⁶ Agenda In Focus. Who and what is ‘civil society?’ World Economic forum (2018). According to the World Bank “Civil society ... refers to a wide array of organizations: community groups, non-governmental organizations [NGOs], labor unions, indigenous groups, charitable organizations, faith-based organizations, professional associations, and foundations”. Source: <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2018/04/what-is-civil-society/> (2022).

and practice, enhance communication internally and externally, and promote organizational improvement” (Shek et al., 2017: 32).

Thus, this brief historical part has been developed to better understand how universities have changed over the centuries concerning teaching and research.

The context of social responsibility and the following contents were chosen, among others, to objectively describe the relevant and necessary aspects that involve this field.

2.3.1 University Social Responsibility (USR)

The world is facing several problems, among others, in the field of environmental protection, health (Covid-19), economy, aging populations, and cultural and social aspects. The big challenge is to understand the role and who they are the agents that can provide real changes in these aspects, ensuring the quality of life for society.

In this respect, universities can play an important role as they are commonly regarded “as incubators for knowledge and solutions to promote quality of life, it is important to ask how universities can help to build a better world. It is the public expectation that universities should generate knowledge which can solve real-life problems which can eventually promote quality of life” (Shek, Hollister, 2017: v). Hence, the social approach can lead universities to develop better alternatives for society in the face of inequalities and the urban conditions of their territories.

The scenario of higher education importance along with the approach on how academic services can take into account the needs of people and society has been growing in recent years and has been addressed in the literature.

In this sense, University Social Responsibility (USR) as an approach that can provide a better connection between the university and the needs of society can play an important role.

“There have been emerging efforts among universities around the world to undertake social responsibility initiatives and practices. This is the result of a growing recognition that universities should go beyond research and education to actively contribute to the sustainable development of human society. Universities at the forefront have established social responsibility organizational structures, either a committee or an office, to strategically plan, coordinate, adopt, and implement social responsibility and sustainability projects (US Fed News Service 2010). More progressive institutions have already published their university social responsibility (USR) or sustainability reports (e.g., Harvard University, University of Bologna, University of Manchester, University of California-Berkeley, Michigan State University, etc.). What appeared to be individual and discrete actions have gradually evolved into joint and network endeavors as exemplified by the Talloires Network and the USR Alliance. In this process, the scope of social responsibility commitment and activities has evolved from being solely community-focused to include

environmental sustainability, and more recently towards a holistic view of triple-bottom-line sustainability” (Wing-Hung Lo et al., 2017: 38)

Therefore, to respond to the social crises, regarding globalization and neo-liberal models of economic development universities plays an important role “by providing innovative solutions to the complexity of the current problems at the national and regional levels” (Shek et al., 2017: 12; Herrera 2009: 40).

“The idea of social responsibility owes its origin to the business community, where the progressive but unorthodox view of “more than profit-making” was raised in the 1930s to temper the excessive profit orientation in business pursuits” (Wing-Hung Lo et al., 2017: 38).

The application of corporate social responsibility (CSR) took its importance on the business sector “In turn, the concept of corporate social responsibility has developed and been entrenched as an important dimension of business management. The conceptual evolution of the definition of social responsibility has undergone a process of “a hundred competing schools of thought” (Wing-Hung Lo et al., 2017: 38).

The CSR is essentially defined as follows:

“CSR maintains besides maximizing profits business enterprises should also look at how they can fulfill their social responsibilities such as promotion of corporate governance, reduction of corruption and collusion, limiting negative and maximizing positive environmental and other impacts of their operations and provision of voluntary service to the underprivileged and needy groups” (Shek, Hollister, 2017: v).

As maximization of profits is not a common objective among universities, educational services, and commercial activities, it is necessary to explore the notion of USR for research and academic practice.

Although the concept of USR is spreading fast around the world, its design basis is still under development. Currently, USR can be considered an engine of educational policies that relate the fundamental objectives of universities with the environment in which they operate.

From a practical perspective, the sense of USR is to contribute to the quality of life, by promoting knowledge of social utility. It is worth mentioning that USR requires “a two-way perspective between universities and society, which involves directly multiplying the critical uses of knowledge in society and the economy” (Shek et al., 2017: 13; Herrera, 2009: 40).

In 1998, at the UNESCO¹⁷ World Conference on Higher Education a call for the re-evaluation of educational policies for the new millennium was launched, to recognize the importance of the social dimension of universities in training qualified graduates and responsible citizens by creating opportunities for students to build their sense of social responsibility.

Furthermore, the 1999 World Declaration highlighted the importance of social responsibility and education matters in social-cultural and economic development. In this way, higher education (HE) institutions “were seen as having a key role in creating ‘citizens of the world’, capable of committing themselves to address global problems, valuing diversity and promoting a culture of peace. A ‘third stream’ of social and economic engagement was recognized alongside HE’s goals of teaching and research, as was the need to ensure that teaching, research, and dissemination were ‘mutually enriching’ with tangible outcomes for society” (Millican, Bourner, 2014: 8).

¹⁷ UNESCO (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization), seeks to build peace through international cooperation in education, the sciences, and culture. “UNESCO’s programs contribute to the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals defined in the 2030 Agenda, adopted by the UN General Assembly in 2015”. Source: <https://www.unesco.org/en/brief> (2022).

Moreover, initiatives to promote and support USR's actions and ideas have emerged in the last decade in Europe, Africa, Asia, Oceania, Latin America and North America.

In 2009, ten years after UNESCO's 1999 World Declaration, several conferences were held to promote the role of HE in major global challenges and social responsibility. Therefore, it was possible to realize that HE and research are on the way to contributing to sustainable development, poverty eradication, and achievement of internationally agreed development goals, like as the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and Education for All (EFA).

In this sense, some movements have been develop to create better connections between universities and society by strengthening community and civic engagement and social responsibility among universities. For instance, the Community Knowledge Initiative launched in 2001 by NUI Galway in Ireland and the first International Conference on University Social Responsibility in 2009, organized by the University Social Responsibility Alliance.

In practice, USR may be associated with “a more encompassing concept, one that includes the social impacts of the full range of university functions and includes corporate social responsibility issues such as the energy efficiency of building design, employment policies, purchasing, and financial management” (Hollister, 2017: 5).

In the university field, social responsibility is a way of applying research to understand social and community issues, which means that institutional profiles are taking emphasis on institutional policies that “reach beyond student volunteering and service learning, and applied research” (Hollister, 2017: 5).

To promote the USR approach, universities and organizations around the world are promoting networks¹⁸ related to the social and civic perspectives

¹⁸ Chapter 4 will present and describe the actions and goals of some of the networks with social and civic perspectives, chosen for their international recognition and relevance.

to share knowledge, exchanging experiences, and spreading the work in progress of universities and most importantly, to promote a collective effort in boosting public awareness and to support institutions based on the UNESCO declaration.

Therefore, USR does not only focus on impacts on teaching, research, and service missions but also on practices and policies encompassing the fields of social, economic, cultural, and environmental dimensions. Such an approach can meet the needs of society and be adapted to local contexts through the promotion of social and sustainable development.

“University social responsibility could be understood as the responsibility shared by universities in contributing to social betterment through the integration of social responsibility policies into institutional management, teaching, research, services, and public activities” (Shek et al., 2017: 13).

2.3.2 Civic Engagement

As mentioned before, in the past decades, social perspectives in HE have gained significant importance for the way universities can influence the achievement of the public good by providing more sustainable environments through collaborative research within communities. In this sense, it is relevant to highlight a global¹⁹ perspective and concepts to better understand this approach, regarding educational practices.

Therefore, engaging with the public is increasing the importance of higher education in building a trustful environment and strengthening the relevance of HE institutions through responsible actions and accountability. In this regard, public engagement “describes the myriad of ways in which the

¹⁹ Here focusing on the American and European higher education views.

activity and benefits of higher education and research can be shared with the public. Engagement is by definition a two-way process, involving interaction and listening, intending to generate mutual benefit” (NCCPE)²⁰.

Hence, it is possible to say that public engagement matters, because it provides opportunities to “enrich and animate the work of universities with new ideas, critical challenge and curiosity” (NCCPE)²¹. The need for public good and social responsibility in universities has gained a wide dimension in recognizing and creating opportunities for progress between research and communities.

According to Stanton (2007: 4): “Higher education was founded with a civic mission that calls on faculty, students, and administrators to apply their skills, resources, and talents to address important issues affecting communities, the nation, and the world”.

In this sense, universities and higher education institutions can be considered in a civic perspective, as “places for learning and creating new knowledge, a place for student development and well-being” (Reich, 2014: x).

Furthermore, the civic engagement approach highlights the public commitment to the design and implementation of activities that use scholarly expertise for the benefit of institutions and the community. One can see “the college and university participation with the community as an intimate and necessary component of learning and knowledge creation for students, for faculty and staff, and for the community participants with whom they work” (Reich, 2014: x).

In this regard, universities are required to reinvent themselves in different dimensions to meet the needs of the new times. For example, one can

²⁰ National Co-ordinating Centre for Public Engagement (NCCPE). Source: <https://www.publicengagement.ac.uk/about-engagement/what-public-engagement> (2022).

²¹ Source: <https://www.publicengagement.ac.uk/about-engagement/why-does-public-engagement-matter> (2022).

highlight the transformations of ivory tower universities into engaging institutions that embrace the zone of diversity and inclusion.

According to Cantor, and Englot (2014: 5) “We can get out of the ivory tower and fulfill our role as members of anchor institutions in our communities, drawing connections to national and global contexts, but we need to relinquish some control and to operate in a much messier world than we are accustomed to in the academy”.

Furthermore, universities are changing some of their perspectives and actions to become engaged environments, for instance as talent’s cultivators. This explains how student’s potential can be measured by considering a broader dimension where we might “credit universities as much for whom they reach as for whom they reject, and as often for how far their students go as for where they began. There are plenty of reasons to do just this” (Cantor, Englot, 2014: 5).

Another perspective is that of embracing ‘inclusion’; university scholarships may offer the opportunity to create communities of knowledge creation in learning environments. In this sense, universities are re-thinking becoming collaborative public scholarships to be only disciplinary silos. According to Cantor, and Englot (2014: 7), it is worth mentioning that:

“as we consider the diverse faculty of the future—many of whom are likely to have deep ties to communities and commitments to community partnerships, including working with students on publicly engaged scholarship and teaching—we will increasingly find not only that this scholarship should count, but also that it must count. This realization will require deep reflection on how to reward excellence in public scholarship, teaching, and engagement”.

For this reason, community engagement scholarship can enrich and strengthen civic engagement in higher education. Therefore, in 2003 the Committee on Institutional Cooperation (CIC), composed of Big Ten Universities and the University of Chicago, launched the Committee on

Engagement to guide the definition and measure of civic engagement activities in universities.

To understand the terminology used in the context of social and civic engagement, Tab. 1 and Tab. 2 report definition of key terms such as, engagement, engaged scholarship, community engagement, scholarship, and community-engaged scholarship, according to Stanton (2007).

**Terminology
under the
civic
engagement
umbrella**

Engagement

Is the partnership between the knowledge and resources of universities and those of public and private sectors, aimed to enrich scholarship, research, and creative activity; enhance curricula, teaching, and learning; prepare educated, engaged citizens; strengthen democratic values and civic responsibility; address critical society issues; and contribute to the public good (Stanton, 2007: 6; Bloomfield, 2005).

Engaged scholarship

Is a specific conception of faculty work that connects the intellectual assets of the institution (i.e., faculty expertise) to public issues such as community, social, cultural, human, and economic development. Through engaged forms of teaching and research, faculty apply their academic expertise to public purposes, as a way of contributing to the fulfillment of the core mission of the institution (Stanton, 2007: 6; Holland, 2005).

Tab. 1 | Terminology under the civic engagement umbrella. Source: design table developed by the author, 2023.

Terminology under the civic engagement umbrella**Community engagement**

The application of institutional resources to address and solve challenges facing communities through collaboration with these communities (Stanton, 2007: 6).

Scholarship

Teaching, discovery, integration, application, and engagement; [with] clear goals, adequate preparation, appropriate methods, significant results, effective presentation, and reflective critique that is rigorous and peer-reviewed (Stanton, 2007: 6).

Community-engaged scholarship

Scholarship that involves the faculty member in a mutually beneficial relation with the community. Community-engaged scholarship can be trans-disciplinary and often integrates some combination of multiple forms of scholarship. For example, service-learning can integrate the scholarship of teaching, application, and engagement, and community based participatory research can integrate the scholarship of discovery, integration teaching, application, and engagement (Stanton, 2007: 6).

Tab. 2 | Terminology under the civic engagement umbrella. Source: design table developed by the author, 2023.

Social responsibility and civic engagement can be seen as a pathway to cross the borders of university campuses by taking learning and research into practice through collaboration between universities and communities.

Moreover, it is the mutual and common knowledge achieved that can provide opportunities for universities to play a role of agents of change. It is possible to say that universities can become communities of experts, rather than clan off experts; in other words, there is the need “to leverage the role of our universities as anchor institutions. We need to create a two-

way street of engagement with diverse, cross-sectoral, reciprocal partnerships—inside and outside of the academy—with “experts” with and without standard academic pedigrees” (Cantor, Englot, 2014: 7-8).

Furthermore, it is relevant to build the habit of civic engagement among students by providing the necessary knowledge connected with the academic endeavor and creating opportunities for real-world experiences in civic engagement.

It is not an easy task for universities to incorporate civic engagement; however, this is necessary as it “involves skills that can be taught, but at its best the knowledge and commitment it requires grow out of the student’s involvement with their academic studies—and very often the reverse, as well” (Purce, 2014: 14).

It is important to understand that, although students' civic and community engagement is growing throughout HE within research institutions and universities, there is a concern with students' interest and knowledge about civic and political issues. Hence, this can provide a wide reflection on what are the outcomes, knowledge, values, and skills that students can learn from community engagement activities at research universities.

In addition, universities are applying activities and knowledge of social and civic engagement in a diverse way in their courses, and co-curricular programs, in the development of clear learning objectives and results, to understand and develop strategies to discover what the impacts and results are of these activities for the student's life and the community. It is still a challenge learning how to promote measures and create opportunities in the development of a broad engagement inside and outside of the university community.

“The need to strengthen civic commitment and active citizenship; it is about volunteering, about an ethical approach, developing a sense of civil citizenship by

encouraging the students, the academic staff to provide social services to their local community or to promote ecological, environmental commitment for local and global sustainable development” (Lo et al. 2017: 40; Vasilescu et al., 2012: 4178).

2.3.3 Service-Learning (S-L) and Student-Community Engagement (SCE)

The role of HE in the second decade of the 21st century is changing worldwide as universities are becoming more “accountable to the societies in which they are located and where there has been a revolution in HE participation rates” (Millican, Bourner, et al., 2014: 7).

According to some authors, to face the world’s issues in a more active and efficient way, universities need to work in partnership with regional and national decision-makers, international groups, and local communities. Further and more importantly, to better understand the value of knowledge and how it is built, universities must change their mission to generate and transmit knowledge. In this sense, this mission is based on the community-university, which aims to provide:

“Partnership activity, action research programs and the use of community, and participative research approach all provide mechanisms that bring together academic and practitioner-based knowledge on common problems. Their students will need a personal appreciation of difference and first-hand knowledge of how to deal with diversity. They will need to be able to apply learned knowledge, to work within, and outside of organizational structures, and with others from different sectors and disciplinary backgrounds. They will need an understanding of national policy initiatives and a sense of their responsibility as global, as well as national, citizens”. (Millican, Bourner, 2014: 11-12).

To provide students with awareness and practical actions related to social responsibility, it is important to consider service learning and community engagement as two possible ways of providing knowledge and learning.

Moreover, in the United States (US) vision, service learning and student engagement programs can provide “a service experience with a civil society organization with specific curricula outcomes. It emerged from a period in US history when a new generation of faculty, recruited in response to growing numbers of students, brought to the universities values, concerns, and interests that had been molded by the civil rights movement and the protest movements of the early 1970s” (Millican, Bourner, 2014: 5; Stanton et al., 1999).

Service learning goes beyond the practical perspective to a deeper understanding; it requires critical reflection, working with different groups, and developing agendas for practice, theory, and policy, combining experimental education with the core principles of “intellectual development, cross-cultural awareness, civic and social responsibility, ethical development, career exploration, and personal growth” (Millican, Bourner, 2014: 43).

Therefore, and considering the other perspective, student-community engagement (SCE), according to Millican, and Bourner (2014: 1) “Refers to students being involved in community projects local to their university. It normally involves the inclusion within the higher education (HE) curriculum of a period during which students work for a community-based organization in ways that enable them to benefit the community and to learn from the experience”.

The SCE approach was launched in 2008 within the United Kingdom (UK) and by the Community University Partnership Programme (CUPP), also at the University of Brighton. This approach expresses the mutual benefit in engaged and experiential learning, which “sets out to introduce students to how diverse knowledge can work together for a more holistic understanding of a particular situation or context” (Millican, Bourner, 2014: 5).

The CUPP can build capacity at a community level by promoting sustainable development, by boosting student involvement within local communities as well as, carrying out applied research as a way to respond to community request.

Although SCE has come in different forms, all of which “share the aim of developing more rounded and competent professionals and value both academic and practitioner knowledge. Although such programs are not new, they are becoming more significant internationally, particularly with to questions of citizenship, employability, and social justice” (Millican, Bourner, 2014: 7).

“A policy of ethical quality of the performance of the university community (students, faculty, and administrative employees) via the responsible management of the educational, cognitive, labor and environmental impacts produced by the University, in an interactive dialogue with society to promote a sustainable human development” (Lo et al., 2017: 40; Reiser, 2008: 2).

2.4 The social aspect: its importance and its connection with territorial fragility and challenges

The context of social responsibility can contribute to a better understanding of how the role of academia can be transformed into a more significant process for providing better learning environments and, therefore, how it can be used as a possible strategy in dealing with the framework of territorial fragility.

In this sense, universities are assuming an important role as agents of change and the social aspect can be considered a relevant way or tool to improve urban policies and achieve more inclusive and sustainable environments.

Hence, universities can guide how to deal with the urban regeneration of fragile local communities.

Moreover, analyzing the literature gathered and the attended workshops, firstly, it is not easy to define the social role of the university, nor the social concept, which still faces challenges. For example, how it is being implemented, how it is to be measured, how it can impact, and how it can be effective in changing behavior in educational processes. On the other hand, although the social role is a necessary approach to be considered to change educational practices, there is the challenge of being recognized and receiving financial support to enable projects and research development in various university areas.

Therefore, the so-called third mission appears as a new movement that embraces the social and civic aspects of universities. It can be considered a motivational approach in the pedagogical and educational process by providing environments for students to develop critical thinking about urban and social issues and connecting teaching, researching, and engagement at the same level. However, at the same time it can also show how much crucial it is that the role of universities take on a leading role in addressing the issues of society.

As regards the conceptual perspective, the social and civic aspects considering the participation of different actors can help improve and provide new skills, co-production of knowledge, and innovative pedagogical and learning methods. Furthermore, mutual learning, which results from merging scientific knowledge and common knowledge, is an important aspect to be elaborated on when connecting the university with the public.

However, for universities to assume this role changes are needed in academic environments, such as example, opening up to an interdisciplinary approach and innovative educational practices in the development of actions and projects that faces the needs of society.

On the other hand, the social and civic approach can lead to the achievement of actions that support and address sustainable development, with more

emphasison the application of the 17 SDGs, as mentioned at the beginning of the chapter.

Bearing in mind that this research context is related to universities and the urban regeneration of their territories, the social role of universities can have a direct and indirect impact on the application of the 17 SDGs. Hence, in the improvement of urban policies, projects, and actions that are related to the social, economic, and environmental aspects, in order to persue a better quality of life in cities and local communities.

Furthermore, sustainable development is based on the work of so-called university urban living labs, which are structured and conceived such a way to better understand the development of life in the territories in general and, in this case, in local communities.

Therefore, the concepts presented can add an interesting point of view to be considered when elaborating critical thinking on how the social aspect has become an important approach for contributing to public benefits, urban regeneration, and improvement of local communities.

Finally, and despite the challenges of the social approach, it is fundamental to create environments capable of providing more innovative educational practices with an interdisciplinary approach, which motivates and involves collaborative work and the participation of different actors for the mutual exchange of knowledge.

Indeed, universities can be the leaders and the main communicators in building networks for a better world; however, doubts remain about whether universities are prepared to assume this social role and whether students will be motivated to be part of this change in educational processes.

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Chapter 3 | Territorial Fragility

The framework and its socioeconomic aspects



This content aims to explore and discuss the concepts and definitions of territorial fragility with a focus on the contemporary peripheral areas of the cities.

Universities as Potential Social Agents in the Urban Regeneration of Fragile Local
Communities: A Mutual Learning Process

Ph.D. in Urban Planning, Design and Policy

Introduction:

This chapter aims to explore and understand the concepts and definitions of Territorial Fragility framework and, therefore, to discuss an example of urban policy to better understand the fragile aspects of territories.

It is a fact that nowadays the term fragile has emerged more clearly, as after the Covid-19 pandemic it has been easy to understand that the world faced an unexpected situation which has brought to light the feeling of how humans, nature and the world can become fragile when dealing with life's uncertainties.

It is not easy to deal or define a condition of fragility; however, it is important to highlight that its aspects can be also related and perceived in territories, especially in regions, cities and communities that are affected by economic, environmental, social and cultural imbalances.

Territorial Fragility and contemporary periphery:

Europe is currently facing an issue of regional economic divergence due to unbalanced economic progress, social cohesion and local political stability.

The idea of this theme is to explore the context of territory fragility starting from a general overview. As the research will focus on a small scale, the relevant definitions and conceptions of contemporary periphery areas of the city will be described based on the specific literature.

3.1 Introduction

This research is part of a wider program promoted by the DASTU²² Department to deal with problems of territorial fragility.

To provide a better understanding of the territorial fragility context, it aims to briefly present the European region's economic divergence and the context of territorial fragility, encompassing the concepts of contemporary peripheral areas of cities.

This research mainly focuses on social aspects as a way of achieving urban regeneration, but it is also important to emphasize the importance of also addressing the economic aspects of territories and regions as well as the policies developed for them, considering that many areas of the world are still characterized by poverty, economic decay, and lack of opportunities.

It is a fact that the term fragile has emerged more clearly, after the Covid-19 pandemic, as now it is easy to understand that the world has faced an unexpected situation, which has brought to light the feeling of how humans, nature, and the world can become fragile when dealing with life's uncertainties.

It is not easy to deal with or define a condition of fragility, however, it is important to highlight that its aspects can be also related and perceived in territories, especially in regions, cities, and communities that are affected by economic, environmental, social, and cultural imbalances.

When focusing on the European situation, firstly one may quote that “regional economic divergence has become a threat to economic progress, social cohesion, and political stability in Europe. Market processes and policies that are supposed to spread prosperity and opportunity are no longer sufficiently effective” (Iammarino et al., 2017).

Regarding the disparity between Europe's economic regions, as well as the divergences among opinions, theories, and policies, the big challenge now is

²² Department of Architecture and Urban Studies (DASTU) from Politecnico di Milano.

to find the best approach to deal with issues related to socio-spatial aspects and economic growth.

In this sense, place-sensitive development policies are being considered a solution to the problem and a, better approach of economic imbalance issues in European regions. According to Rodríguez-Pose (2018: 189):

“Place-sensitive development policies need, however, to stay clear of the welfare, income support, and big investment projects of past development strategies if they are to be successful and focus on tapping into untapped potential and on providing opportunities to those people living in the places that “don’t matter”.

Therefore, the term fragile areas appeared in Italy²³ at the beginning of the 2000s and more specifically during the 2000-2006 programming cycle of the European Structural Funds. Fragile areas are recognized as declining territories within regions in the European development average, and as the concept that “best represents the many uncertainties of our time related to different issues such as political and economic instability, energy and ecological transition, climate change, demographic and migratory dynamics” (Chiffi, Curci, 2019: 55).

Over the last fifteen years, European resources for cohesion have been allocated in a diverse fragile areas also are including:

“Suburban neighborhoods in metropolitan areas (see the URBAN programs, PON metropolitan cities, Bando Periferie) and large metropolitan municipalities called to face the climate crisis. At the same time, a new policy season has given rise to the experience of the national strategy for internal areas (SNAI), identified in mountain areas and other areas at risk of depopulation due to distance or absence of essential services” (Territorial Fragility Journal, N.1, 2021: 4).

²³ This research will present the approach to territorial fragility in the European context and more specifically in the Italian context; however, the concept is spreading and being more internationally recognized, which will help better understand the needs of local territories, improve policies and find alternatives for the urban development issues.

For a long time in Italy, this theme was not part of the national political agenda, and it is possible to observe that territorial inequalities were not only related to income inequalities but also, to the different skills development opportunities related to the space and territorial context of poor neighborhoods of large cities and inner areas.

This wide umbrella of fragility concept also encompasses approaches that can provide design directions and strategies to work with, such as:

“Abandonment, Accessibility, Adaptation, Connection, Housing, Landscape, Narrative, Peripheries, Policies, Prototyping, Regeneration, Segregation, Shrinkage, and Welfare... Material and immaterial fragilities are linked to: lack, poorness or obsolescence of existing building and infrastructure, changes in social structure, and emerging individual needs”
(Dezio et al., 2019: 22).

Furthermore, the Politecnico di Milano and its Department of Architecture and Urban Studies (DAStU)²⁴ are researching territorial fragility, with aim of “exploring the complex and multiple phenomena that engendered processes of fragilization of the relation between space and society” (Balducci, 2019: 19).

In this sense, it is essential to realize the importance of territorial fragility, in terms of building dialogues, seeking feedback from the socioeconomic system, and exploring the resources and potential of its landscape, culture, and environmental aspects for the development policies that may lead to economic and social benefits.

Approaching territorial fragility also means working on inequalities not only individually, which have become a major problem, but also at the level of territorial communities.

This research focuses on territorial fragility at the scale of the city, and more specifically on the contemporary peripheral areas of urban centers (local

²⁴ Through the research (Department of Excellence 2018/2022) related to “Territorial Fragility”. The project addresses the natural, social, political and technological issues of the fragile territories of the European Union.

communities)²⁵, which, can also be recognized as regions of territorial disparity and fragile are dealing with socio-spatial issues that are a result of poverty, security conditions, social segregation, lack of accessibility, and public maintenance (in short, lack of social, intellectual, and financial capital).

“The urban periphery is no longer just what surrounds the perimeter of the big city. Very often, we find critical neighborhoods in semi-central areas. Many indicators of urban suffering show that phenomena of aging, overcrowding, low levels of education, the concentration of migrants, have extended to external peri-urban areas and many in-between territories of large urban regions” (Balducci, 2019: 20; Balducci, Fedeli, Curci, 2017).

In what follows, the context of the European economic regions, the approach to territorial fragility, and the emphasis on the concepts and definition of peripheral areas will be presented.

3.2 European Regions: economic aspects and urban policies approaches

It is a fact that the world is facing major issues in social, economic, environmental, and cultural terms and many actions and strategies are being developed to find the best alternatives and solutions to preserve and build safer and more sustainable environments.

²⁵ It is important to emphasize that not all peripheries and local communities are considered fragile, but all of them have aspects of a vulnerability that encompass the context of fragility.

Therefore, when focusing on European regions, it is important to emphasize that currently, they are facing the problem of regional economic divergence, which is related to the imbalance of economic progress, social cohesion, and local political stability.

The various economic clubs in Europe's regions raise this issue, which highlight their diverse ideas on the challenges and opportunities for development. According to Iammarino et al. (2017: 1), it is worth mentioning:

“In the new millennium, inequality among the European Union's regions has turned sharply up again having fallen in the 1990s from high levels in 1980. Small and medium-sized manufacturing cities and regions have persistently suffered relative declines in employment and income. Their surrounding suburban or rural areas have also tended to stagnate. In contrast, many large metropolitan areas, including their suburbs, which had generally suffered a decline in the 1960s-1980s, are now among the most dynamic areas in terms of the creation of income and employment”.

The increase of interregional inequality is related to two forces. The first one is the development cycle in the economic structure of the 1970s, which concentrated technological innovation (high technology and knowledge-intensive sectors) in large metropolitan areas and specifically in mobility, non-routine and creative jobs.

The second force is related to “the long cycle of regional evolutionary features, comprising place-specific endowments of people and skills, firms and industries, formal and informal institutions, capabilities for innovation, and their reaction to change” (Iammarino et al., 2017: 1).

Inequality is increasing in Europe and it can be seen in two ways. First, it can be considered as a factor that continues to support the most dynamic regions and their economic position in the world; second, territorial inequality can be seen as an inefficient pattern for the economy.

Moreover, European “club theory” is being directed towards stabilizing a balance in economic development while sustaining the prosperity of dynamic regions and creating possibilities for other regions to improve.

The aim of this club theory is to provide insights into development and improving the mindset on policies. Club memberships is determined considering the “Economy-wide forces that define the overall ladder of possibilities, interacting with a variety of regional characteristics that determine the role of regions. European regions can be allocated to different economic clubs, depending on their level of development: regions with very high per-capita personal income (PCPI) (VH); regions with high PCPI (H); regions with medium PCPI (M); and those with low PCPI (L)” (Iammarino et al., 2017: 1).

Tab. 3 and Tab. 4 illustrate the definition of each economic club according to Iammarino et al. (2017):

Economic clubs**The VH club**

Is dominated by a few very large metropolitan regions or capital city-regions, but also encompasses a few additional regions - generally highly urbanised via a network of cities - specialising in very-high-quality goods and services. They form the group of leading regions which generate more than their fair share of European prosperity (Iammarino et al., 2017: 1).

The H club

Shares many characteristics with the VH club. These regions tend to be somewhat less metropolitan or city-centered than the VH club and less dynamic in demographic terms. Their employment rates are high and many have satisfactory productivity growth per head, although not all areas in this club (e.g., south-east England, Benelux, northern Italy, Catalonia as well as many German regions) share this dynamism (Iammarino et al., 2017: 1).

Tab. 3 | Definition of the economic clubs: VH and H. Source: design table developed by the author, 2023.

Economic clubs**The M club**

In Europe, it mainly includes parts of north-western Europe that are outside the VH and H clubs. Two main sub-groups can be identified within this category. The largest comprises regions that have lost manufacturing jobs, which is often reflected in stagnant or declining employment rates, low population growth or even decline. Education levels are below those of the H and VH clubs. These regions are economically fragile because of various combinations of declining manufacturing, unsatisfactory educational and skills attainment, and inadequate labour force participation. A second group stands out because it is either experiencing population growth - often amenity-driven growth - or new phases of industrialisation following recent EU integration (Iammarino et al., 2017: 1).

The L club

Consists of large swathes of eastern and southern Europe. The southern EU regions in the club are those with longstanding issues related to productivity, specialisation, skills, and labour force participation. The eastern European regions in it show noticeable differences: they have higher education levels than the southern and western L-club members, but tend to experience higher population loss (Iammarino et al., 2017: 1).

Tab. 4 | Definition of the economic clubs: M and L. Source: design table developed by the author, 2023.

In order to understand these regional disparities, the new economic geography (NEG) and evolutionary economic geography theories considered that agglomeration could provide positive facades²⁶. In this sense, it is worth mentioning that:

²⁶ These facades are “behind the dynamism of large cities and regions” (Iammarino et al., 2017: 2).

“A common feature of all these theoretical streams has been an acknowledgment of the role of geographical space in lowering barriers and costs of knowledge sharing and transmission across a range of networks as a decisive factor behind the strength of cities, industrial clusters, and regional innovation systems” (Iammarino et al., 2017: 2).

However, there is no strong evidence to confirm that high growth in agglomeration can provide better economic activity in less developed regions.

In this sense, alternative policies are demanding, combined with efficiency and equity that can address the causes of territorial distress by expanding the potential of each territory. According to Rodríguez- Pose (2018: 206), “This does not mean more policies, but better policies”.

According to Pessina (2019: 42), public policies in the Italian context have been allocated “as institutional policies (foreign, military, judicial); economic policies (monetary, fiscal, industrial, employment); territorial policies (urban, environmental, housing, cultural heritage); and welfare policies (pensions, health). Even though there have been many attempts to integrate various sectoral policies in Italy in recent decades, the integration has neither been easy nor effective, in some cases”.

There is a condition of fragility in territories to approach urban policies:

“Urban peripheries, former industrial areas being regenerated, or the places currently being abandoned, depopulation and shrinkage, as well as large-scale rural areas, have been the objects of various ‘place-based policies’, trying to integrate various sectoral policies, e.g. housing, social and economic policies” (Pessina, 2019: 42).

In Italy, there is a conflict between place-based policies (UE guidelines) and people-based policies (related to welfare). To overcome the differences between policies and territories “and consequently the scarce effectiveness of many policies in the so-called ‘places left behind’ (Rodríguez-Pose, 2017), Italy has recently been experimenting with some ‘place-sensitive policies’ (e.g. Strategia Nazionale per le Aree Interne), trying to combine traditional

welfare policies with acknowledgment of the potential of local contexts” (Passina, 2019: 42).

The concept of Place-Sensitive Distributed Development Policies (PSDDP) is considered innovative as it, combines the key concepts of development theory and takes into account the conditions and characteristics of each territory.

Furthermore, each club will require a different approach to policy development. According to Iammarino et al. (2017: 3):

“PSDDP offers a viable option to promote the economic development of the most dynamic places in Europe while, at the same time, countering the potentially negative spiral of geographically restricted development on three fronts by a) pushing more and more regions towards more non-routine (innovative) functions in their economic mix; b) expanding the sources of creativity and satisfaction that are good in and of themselves on human grounds; and c) stimulating greater investment in basic capabilities that are essential to a dignified and creative life”.

Moreover, the search for distributed development policy is the third alternative type that runs differently from the other two extreme theories, the equity by territorial distribution and all-agglomeration strategy.

The problem with existing policies is that by using economic impact studies, most of them fail to capture public economic development investments broadly.

To achieve the best economic development strategy, it is needed to enable “as many actors and regions as possible to participate productively in the economy to their greatest ability. This prioritizes improving the quality of life and well-being by enhancing capabilities and ensuring that agents have the capacities and freedom to achieve this” (Iammarino et al., 2017: 26).

Economic development strategies should search for a combination of maximizing and adapting to the diversity of people and interests involved

and having good institutions that can promote low-skilled jobs and reduce social exclusion.

Therefore, it requires “...improving government capacity, enhancing transparency and accountability, designing better policies, and tackling corruption are fundamental tools for addressing territorial distress” (Iammarino et al., 2017: 26).

Moreover and according to Iammarino et al. (2017: 27), the PSDDPs are based on the principles:

“Some general policy principles emerging from current local economic development theories are policy differentiation, coordination, and integration. Place-sensitive distributed development policies imply differentiation both between and within the ‘core’ and the ‘periphery’. By differentiating needs, challenges, and drivers of change from one regional group to another, the notion of ‘development clubs’ helps to operationalize a place-sensitive approach by, at the same time, avoiding generalization of the core-periphery dichotomy and the uniqueness of regional case studies, which are both ineffective ways of tackling territorial and individual inequality. Place-sensitive approaches also take into consideration group differences in institutional quality”.

Place-sensitive policies explore the potential of each territory by generating and spreading development, therefore unfolding the potential of many European regions by allowing local stakeholders to maximize their skills and abilities to enhance the economic performance and potential of Europe in a total range.

In this sense, it is worth mentioning: “This requires the design and implementation of development policies based on guidelines for each club or group of regions sharing similar characteristics, which can be adapted to specific regional features” (Iammarino et al., 2017: 30).

The advantage of these place-sensitive policies is that they can conquer the false trade-off between efficiency and equity. Hence, to leverage the

opportunities of most territories, considering their local context and level of development or economic path.

According to Rodríguez- Pose (2018: 205), “One of the main challenges for the implementation of this type of place-sensitive policies in lagging-behind and/or declining areas is institutional”.

Furthermore, the divergences between the European economic regions can be seen from the perspective of fragile aspects. In this sense, the concepts of territorial fragility and contemporary peripheral areas (the scale chosen from territorial fragility) will be presented.

3.3 DASTU Research Project “Fragilità Territoriali”: Italian Context

The concept of territorial fragility was initially associated with “internal areas or mountain areas, whose marginal conditions are often aggravated by hydrological or seismic risk” (Balducci, 2020)²⁷. More recently, aspects such as the demographic and the social ones, among others, were also included, therefore encompassing urban contemporary peripheries and suburbs of large cities, for instance, in many areas in southern Italy and other countries.

This definition indeed provides a general overview context; however, each region, city or place has its fragility aspects based on their environmental needs. Moreover, it is important to highlight that:

“Since the turn of the 21st century, a new geographical picture of territorial fragilities has begun to emerge in Italy. Decommissioned or obsolete industrial sites, mountainous areas, peripheral urban neighborhoods, and regions characterized by limited economic development: complex geography towards which national and EU policy provided a far too simplified description of Italy. The simplified identification of the country divided between internal areas and metropolitan cities provoked further cleavages and fractures in the country. To contrast it, the idea emerged of focusing on the (Italia di mezzo), looking at unrepresented areas of the

²⁷ Material provide by Prof. Alessandro Balducci. I territori fragili di fronte al Covid (2020).

country which are paid little attention.” (Territorial Fragility Journal, N.1, 2021: 4).

Furthermore, fragile territories are related to territorial cohesion or public assistance policies and have not been able to control the process of decline and depopulation.

In this sense, highlighting the theme of territorial fragility is a necessary way to build dialogues to find a return from the socioeconomic system and explore the resources and potential of its landscape, cultural, and environmental aspects in the development of policies that help achieve economic and social benefits.

As mentioned previously, this theme is being researched by the Politecnico di Milano within the Department of Architecture and Urban Studies (DAStU)²⁸, which during the 2018 to 2022 period was awarded by the Italian Ministry of University and Research (MIUR) the recognition of “Excellent Department”.

The Territorial Fragility project²⁹ is being developed as a collaborative research and “multidisciplinary approach common to doctoral courses and to the training offer of DAStU teachers within the school of architecture, urban planning, and building engineering (AUGC)” (Territorial Fragility Journal, N.1, 2021: 20).

Thus, the main goal is establishing a competence center that can become a guide for the thematic reflection.

It is important to highlight that considering teaching, research, and design in the approach of territorial fragility means, “provide theoretical and

²⁸ “DAStU is among the university departments selected by MIUR as part of the department of excellence 2028-2022 initiative with a project focused on (Territorial Fragility), a particularly topical issue of extraordinary civil and social value” (Territorial Fragility Journal, N.1, 2021: 1).

²⁹ More than a research project, “thanks to MIUR funding is a permanent laboratory animated by doctoral students, research fellows, new researchers, and professors recruited thanks to ministerial resources to develop new knowledge and new design and policy approaches that can be applied to a topic of great relevance and topicality for the country” (Territorial Fragility Journal, N.1, 2021: 18).

operational tools that help to recognize them, catalog them, analyze them and finally re-interpret them in the critical processes of research and teaching” (Territorial Fragility Journal, N.1, 2021: 20).

Moreover, as this project is also related to civil and social values, it is important to emphasize the role of universities considering the territorial fragility approach.

In the 1990s, the universities started a process of rethinking their role in society and public engagement, therefore reconfiguring their role, which for a long time had been perceived as elitist and disconnected from the reality of social problems.

Universities started to commit to the issue of “deception and partnership, building spaces for active collaboration between the university and society, in the increasingly widespread belief that, to provide answers to the complex problems posed by society, it is more necessary to build knowledge together with society, in its various components” (Territorial Fragility Journal, N.1, 2021: 22).

The territorial fragility project can be considered as a way to combine the role of universities and society to build common knowledge to develop possibilities for economic, cultural, environmental, and social changes.

“Universities adopted a range of strategies from then on to reduce this distance, move closer to real problems, and make research results available to society, while also facing the evident difficulties involved in stepping away from university language, halls and classrooms. The tools, resources, and expertise required to carry out this role are often missing. At the same time, the world around us

offers new tools and channels (dynamic and open) that constantly change the shape of collaborative dialogue between research and society. The Department of Excellence territorial fragilities project has provided a unique opportunity for experimentation in this direction” (Territorial Fragility Journal, N.1, 2021: 21).

In addition, the idea is to build the territorial fragility concept by exploring research hypotheses that can correlate a different type of definition with integrated experiences. Next, the concepts and definitions of contemporary peripheral areas will be presented.

3.4 Contemporary Periphery in the territory context

First, it is important to understand that fragile territories are not only those excluded from development such as internal areas but as already mentioned, fragile territories are also part of the peripheries that are within large metropolises.

Currently, the urban and metropolitan dynamics require deep reflection and a redefinition of the meaning of periphery. Urban peripheries within their associative networks can offer opportunities for projects that seek urban regeneration.

The urban structure is defined by a polycentric condition with different centralities arising from the existing fabric from the regeneration and transformation of cities. In this sense, it worth to mention the following:

“Our world has changed: New information and communication technologies are gradually, selectively and subtly transforming the environment within which interactions (between individuals, businesses, and institutions) take place. Gradually, both within academic circles and within popular culture, we are changing our concepts of “space” and “proximity” (Copus et al., 2017: 26).

Furthermore, the approach to urban life encompasses the economic, social, environmental, and cultural dimensions, which requires a better exploration and understanding. Hence, the regeneration approach can be used as a strategy to find possible solutions and imaginaries for the future in immaterial dimensions.

To rethink the quality of life in cities it is relevant to recognize “geographies of material welfare in fragile conditions, from metropolitan suburbs to internal areas, intercepting situations of contraction, abandonment and shortage” (Territorial Fragility Journal, N.1, 2021: 15).

In this sense, it is important to understand the need for intervention, the maintenance and transformation of spaces, and their uses to integrate the territory into different levels, considering the urban centers and territories of middle Italy.

Moreover and as mentioned previously, peripheries were intended as places geographically far from the central urban areas, but now and new conditions of peripheries are appearing due to the urban changes.

In this sense, regards the fragility aspects of peripheries, they are multidimensional, which means interrelated with spatial, socio-economic, environmental, and cultural aspects, and the effect caused by spatial fragility on public and private property is also considered.

Spatial fragility can appear as underutilized and abandoned spaces and buildings, for example, housing and public spaces with poor quality of services and collective equipment.

In the most diverse aspects of fragility, such as spatial, social and demographic, economic, cultural, and environmental ones, the peripheries characterized by degraded population, spatial segregation, and social exclusion, lack of employment and housing conditions, the inadequacy of cultural activities and public spaces, precarious education system; as for environmental aspects, they are characterized by air pollution and, in some cases polluted soils. Peripheral and urban metropolitan areas become

peripheries because of a weakening process, which is affected by the loss of balance, stability, and resistance.

The peripheries are part of an integrated system of fragility that is the result of a cause-effect mechanism, but at the same time, they are considered as having a potential to be explored based on their spaces and actors. Moreover, the fragility aspect can be recognized as conditions for vulnerabilities, such as social exclusion and social-spatial issues, which influence the balance of social, economic, and environmental aspects.

Although they are part of the urban fabric and metropolitan areas, peripheries are considered fragile territories not only because of the aforesaid aspects, but also due to the lack of adequate policies, investments, and better projects; in addition to that the most relevant thing is that the residents are losing their engagement in planning and their sense of belonging.

“Aimed at spreading social well-being the public policies of the 20th century resulted in an extensive, widespread production of public spaces, facilities, and services. We refer to this legacy as (material welfare), a kind of capital that is fundamental when rethinking the quality of life and the quality of a city, despite many situations and conditions of fragility emerged” (Territorial Fragility Journal, N.1, 2021: 14).

Finally, according to Fontanella (2020: 41), “With the distancing of these places from urban development dynamics, fragilization processes have gradually overwhelmed urban and metropolitan peripheries”.

3.4.1 Inner Peripheries (IP)

To complement and encompass the peripheral context, it is relevant to briefly present the terminology of Inner Peripheries (IP), which appeared in

the European Regional Policy discourse between 1970s and 1980s. This concept is still under development and according to Copus et al. (2017: 24):

“Inner Peripheries remain, in many ways, a territorial enigma. Their geographical distribution is unknown, and the process through which they are formed is poorly understood. Little is known about how their geographical distribution has evolved. From the point of view of policy action, there are few examples of dedicated schemes and programs to halt or ameliorate the deprivation processes by which some inner areas become lagging and peripheral”

According to Pèrez-Soba et al. (2013: II) inner peripheries can be identified as “the result of significant spatial-temporal socio-economic developments, which usually receive political responses” and “be described as being in the shadow of neighboring metropolitan areas within a macro-regional context”.

Moreover, IP can be understood as a combination of socio-economic features linked to several configurations, such as “physical, social, economic, institutional and cultural network” (Pèrez-Soba et al., 2013: III). The IP concept can also be related to rural and urban environments, as they are also located “in the vicinity of strong development centers (i.e., metropolitan areas) associated with the provision of Services of General Interest, defined by population, jobs, universities, hospitals, administrative centres, etc” (Pèrez-Soba et al., 2013: III).

In addition, the definition that encompasses the context of peripherality has changed over the last two decades and according to Noguera, Copus (2016: 1) it is worth mentioning that:

“The original (spatial) meaning of the term “peripherality”, was all about the economic and social costs and penalties faced by locations at a distance from the main “hubs” of economic activity in Europe, where the benefits of agglomeration economies were maximized, has become muddled up with a range of “figurative” meanings, which are to do with socio-economic “marginality” in an aspatial sense. It is perhaps emphasizing

before we go any further, that we do not see marginality as synonymous with peripherality. The former despite its etymology is generally used to denote socio-economic rather than locational characteristics.”

3.5 Territorial Fragility: a reflection on the social role of Universities

Aiming to connect the university with its hosting territories, this research focuses in particular on local communities, hereby considered fragile, and the quest for urban regeneration.

In this sense, the framework of Territorial Fragility, concerning the approach adopted by DASTU, is an important research tool to feed the development of projects, because as mentioned before it explores “the complex and multiple phenomena that engendered a process of fragilization of the relation between space and society”. However, it is also “related to civil and social values, it is important to emphasize the role of universities considering the territorial fragility approach”.

Indeed the Territorial Fragility framework can help shape the social role of universities while providing researchers with a critical approach to the fragile aspects (to explore the potentialities of the fragility) to why these territories matter and why putting these fragilities in the spotlight is a positive impact on the social and economic development of these territories.

The social role of universities connects the work of universities with society and the public, being on one hand inductive of the development of better learning environments and, on the other hand, allowing working with local communities to approach urban regeneration. The learning environments can provide students the opportunity to build critical thinking and raise their civic awareness about the issues local societies are facing.

In this regard, it is possible to affirm that the social role of universities is a potential strategy to deal with the fragile aspects of local communities. Social actions are a necessary instrument for understanding and proposing better alternatives to the needs of these communities, regions, cities, territories, and so on.

Moreover, the social aspect appears either concerning the construction of civic awareness of the urban issues facing society or through the improvement of urban policies and living conditions, generating new visions and critical thinking.

Consequently, by presenting the economic situation of the territories and combining it with the participation of different actors (as a social approach) it is an important way to understand the real context of these territories to develop better future urban scenarios for more inclusive and sustainable territories.

In this sense, it is the opportunity to understand the economic, environmental, and social aspects involved that served as a basis for the development of a critical (personal) reflection on what is our role as a student, as a university, and as a community.

A key point is to address in this research, how these concepts and definitions are constantly changing based on the imbalance of socio-economic and spatial aspects of their regions and environments. In addition, how we can deal with this change.

To conclude, it is important to realize what knowledge we can share and what experiences we can provide for the development of more concrete ideas to change behavior toward civic awareness, to innovate the education process, and achieve changes taking into account collaborative work with society and, in this case, with local communities.

The social reflection on the Territorial Fragility framework is to understand the importance of the social, economic, and environmental aspects of its regions to find possible solutions for urban regeneration and to improve urban policies for more sustainable environments.

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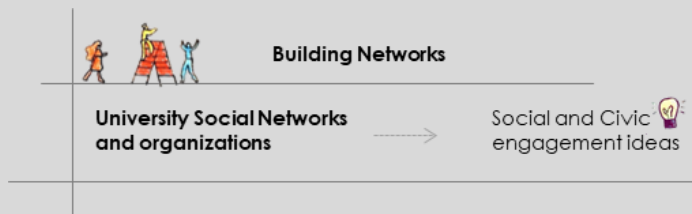
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Universities as Potential Social Agents in the Urban Regeneration of Fragile Local
Communities: A Mutual Learning Process

Ph.D. in Urban Planning, Design and Policy

Chapter 4 | Building Networks

Connecting the work of universities with the society and the public



This content presents some of the most internationally recognized networks and organizations that promote social responsibility and civic engagement through providing training programs, and information to guide organizations, universities and institutions in the implementation of social strategies.

Universities as Potential Social Agents in the Urban Regeneration of Fragile Local
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**Summary
Table****Introduction:**

Currently, the world is still facing the challenge to deal with issues related to climate change, poverty, aging population, economic imbalance, and the pandemic, among others, and more than ever it is important to recognize who are the agents and their roles to change and respond to this situation.

Universities must be one of the agents in the search for a better world, as they are considered places that hold knowledge and can also promote quality of life.

Organizations and social networks importance:

One of the main objectives of this chapter is to raise important perceptions of how these organizations and networks can provide training, access and material to improve social and civic engagement and awareness with a focus on the academia.

This chapter presents some of the most internationally recognized organizations and social networks that promote civic and social responsibility, which is a process that involves listening and interacting to achieve the main goal to generate benefits with the public. Therefore, these specific organizations and networks were chosen from the material collected from professors, researchers and universities.

In addition, this chapter also describes the structure of these networks and explores what type of material and actions they can offer to contribute to the dissemination of concepts and actions for social and civic engagement among organizations and universities around the world.

4.1 Introduction

Many organizations around the world, together with universities, are developing different types of initiatives, such as building networks or designing work platforms, to promote social and civic responsibility. Essentially, universities can act as communication vehicles, and for this reason, we can say that they can make not only networks but also design ideal external training programs environments for different actors (for instance, promoting workshops to work with society and dealing with urban issues).

Introducing these networks and organizations by focusing on the social approach is, in fact, an important complement to this research. The networks and organizations projects hereby highlighted are examples demonstrating the interactions among universities and local fragile communities, as well as how these projects promote the work of universities outside the academic field.

Networks and organizations review, in addition, put in evidence that the university must be one of the agents in the search for a better world, due to its ability to start including social responsibility as a mission to achieve changes in the educational process. In other words, to arrive at solutions to real-world problems, the universities must develop actions that connect teaching, learning, and research activities, by serving and creating a relationship with the public, such as, by way of example, the local communities.

It is important to point out that in some of the workshops and training carried out by these organizations and networks were used as guidelines for the fieldwork and, interview with professors, researchers, and students described next in the case analyses.

Fig. 7 is a diagram of the main general aspects and challenges provided by organizations and networks, emphasizing the importance of building connections/networks among different actors.

Main General Aspects		Challenges faced
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Spread concepts and share ideas Provide workshops and training programs to engage with people Provide access to practical activities, case studies and projects 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Connection and communication Platform Promote the investigative work of universities Provide opportunities for publications 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Promote the importance of civic awareness, social responsibility, service-learning in different academic areas Dealing with covid-19 difficulties in the development of online activities that continuing to be motivational To be recognized outside the academic field

Fig. 7 | Diagram of the main general aspects of organizations and networks. Source: image developed by the author, 2023.

Following the previous comments, this chapter introduces some of the most internationally recognized organizations and networks that promote social and civic responsibility. They were selected considering the material collected, also made available by professors, researchers, and universities.

Fig. 8 is a diagram of the organizations/networks and their home country.

Organizations and Networks			
Promote the importance of civic and social approach by building connections around the world	Coalition of Urban and Metropolitan Universities (CUMU)	The Taillores Network	United States
	University Social Responsibility Network (USR)		China
	National Co-ordinating Centre for Public Engagement (NCCPE)		England
	European Observatory of Service Learning in Higher Education (EOSLHE)		Europe
	Campus Engage		Irish
	Urban Rooms Network		United Kingdom

Fig. 8 | Diagram of the organizations and networks. Source: imagine developed by the author, 2023.

4.2 The Talloires Network

The Talloires Network is an international association of institutions with more than 400 coalition universities spread across 85 countries “who have publicly committed to strengthening the civic roles and social responsibilities of their institutions. It is the largest international network focused particularly on university civic engagement” (Talloires Network, 2022)³⁰.

It was founded in 2005 at the Talloires conference at Tufts European Centre in France. This was the first international meeting of heads of universities committed aimed at engaging higher education in civic and social responsibility.

The network contributes to a global civic movement among universities by promoting university-community collaborations by adopting “an action research framework because we aim to support methods of inquiry and action that bring about societal change while encouraging reflection on the process and outcomes of change to inform and improve future practice. Our programs encourage solidarity, dialogue, and exchange, and critical reflection and learning among all participants” (Talloires Network)³¹.

According to The Talloires Network³², higher education institutions:

“Exist to serve and strengthen the society of which they are part. Through the learning, values and commitment of faculty, staff and students, our institutions create social capital, preparing students to contribute positively to local, national and global communities. Universities have the responsibility to foster in faculty, staff and students a sense of social responsibility and a commitment to the social good, which, we believe, is central to the success of a democratic and just society”.

³⁰ Source: <https://talloiresnetwork.tufts.edu/who-we-are/> (2022).

³¹ Source: <https://talloiresnetwork.tufts.edu/programs/> (2022).

³² Source: <https://talloiresnetwork.tufts.edu/who-we-are/talloires-declaration/?c=7> (2021).

4.3 Coalition of Urban and Metropolitan Universities (CUMU)

The Coalition of Urban and Metropolitan Universities (CUMU) is an international organization of universities located in metropolitan areas. It was established in 1989 at Wright State University, “to recognize and affirm their shared mission to use the power of their campuses in education, research, and service to enhance the communities in which they are located” (CUMU, 2022)³³.

Moreover, several activities and strategies that support research, teaching, learning, and visibility have been developed focusing on anti-racism, equity, and inclusion, driving innovation, and deepening engagement and partnerships.

According to CUMU³⁴:

“Our campuses are on the edge of what is happening in higher education and society. The power of CUMU is our ability to connect and convene members to address critical challenges, share impactful solutions, and gain national visibility”.

Tab. 5 illustrates the mission values guide the action of CUMU³⁵.

³³ Source: <https://www.cumuonline.org/about-cumu/history/> (2022).

³⁴ Source: <https://www.cumuonline.org/membership/> (2022).

³⁵ Source: <https://www.cumuonline.org/about-cumu/mission/> (2022).

Mission

Mission: The coalition of urban and metropolitan universities is dedicated to its member institutions and to the creation and dissemination of knowledge on the issues that face our urban and metropolitan campuses and the communities we serve;

CUMU's mission ensures sustained attention to exchange of information and ideas among member institutions about higher education's role in urban and metropolitan settings, generates a unified approach to the resolution of common challenges, and develops a clearer understanding within the higher education community and among public policy makers and the public about the distinctive roles played by urban and metropolitan institutions.

Tab. 5 | The attributes that guide CUMU. Source: table developed by the author, 2023.

4.4 University Social Responsibility Network (URS)

On 9 October 2015, the Hong Kong Polytechnic University (PolyU), together with eleven other universities across the world, formed the USR Network to provide guidance and tools to make the world a better place. The USR Network serves as a platform that connects and cultivates partnerships between members and “shares ideas and resources to develop collaborative USR projects with varied scope and scale, advancing higher education as a catalyst for social change through education, research, and community service. (URS Network)³⁶.

The University's Social Responsibility strengthens the institutional capacity to develop solutions that address economic, social, and environmental issues by guiding a global discussion and development in higher education.

According to USR Network³⁷, universities:

³⁶ Source: <https://www.usrnetwork.org/2015/10/inauguration-ceremony-of-the-university-social-responsibility-network/> (2022).

³⁷ Source: <https://www.usrnetwork.org/about-usrn/background-introduction/> (2022).

“Have obligation to work together to address the economic, social, cultural and environmental challenges in the world and to find solutions so as to make our world more just, inclusive, peaceful and sustainable”.

Tab. 6 illustrates the mission and vision that guide the activities of the University Social Network³⁸.

Mission and Vision	Mission: To provide a platform for exchanging ideas, resources, policies, practices, problems and solutions to foster USR among member institutions;
	To develop collaborative USR projects with varied scopes and scales within the network;
	To contribute to the global discussions and development of USR through networking and partnership within the network, as well as with other networks and alliances.
	Vision: Be an effective collaborative platform for all USR network members in pursuit and fulfilment of university social responsibility;
	Be an important global player in spearheading USR strategic development for the betterment of our universities and of the world.

Tab. 6 | The main attributes that guide University Social Networks. Source: table developed by the author, 2023.

³⁸ Source: <https://www.usrnetwork.org/about-usrn/vision-mission/> (2022).

4.5 National Co-ordinating Centre for Public Engagement (NCCPE)

In 2008, the National Co-ordinating Centre for Public Engagement (NCCPE) was established as part of the Beacons for Public Engagement³⁹ initiative, which cooperates; with the public, and the University of Bristol and the University of the West of England to promote and support engagement of universities.

The NCCPE support community-university partnerships as a way to create mutual benefits among them and to develop a two-way exchange of knowledge, experiences, and skills between universities and communities. Therefore, engaging with the public is a strategy that is becoming essential for higher education in terms of strengthening responsibility, accountability, relevance, and building trust.

In this sense and according to NCCPE⁴⁰:

“Public engagement, as a term, appeared in the UK higher education policy lexicon in the early 2000s, linked to debates about science and society. It was argued that we needed to move beyond ‘public understanding’ (implying a deficit in the public) to ‘public engagement’, which emphasizes dialogue and mutuality”.

Therefore, NCCPE⁴¹ supports that engagement generates mutual benefits, which are:

³⁹ Beacons for Public Engagement’s aim is “to inspire a culture change in how universities engage with the public. Six Beacon partnerships and a National Co-ordinating Centre for Public Engagement (NCCPE) were funded by the Higher Education Funding Councils, Research Councils UK and the Wellcome Trust. The Beacons were at the forefront of efforts to change the culture in universities, assisting staff and students to engage with the public. Their partners included further education colleges, museums, galleries, businesses, charities, TV and press, and public bodies”. Source: <https://www.publicengagement.ac.uk/nccpe-projects-and-services/completed-projects/beacons-public-engagement> (2022).

⁴⁰ Source: <https://www.publicengagement.ac.uk/about-engagement/current-policy-landscape> (2022).

⁴¹ Source: <https://www.publicengagement.ac.uk/about-engagement/what-public-engagement> (2022).

“An important part of our definition as we are keen to emphasize that high-quality public engagement benefits all those involved. Benefits might include learning, developing new skills, gaining new insights or ideas, developing better research, raising aspiration, or being inspired.”

Tab. 7 illustrates the mission, vision and strategic aims that guide the NCCPE⁴².

Vision, Mission and Strategic aims	Vision: Our vision is of a higher education sector making a vital, strategic and valued contribution to 21st-century society through its public engagement activity.
	Mission: Our mission is to support universities to increase the quality and impact of their public engagement activity.
	Strategic aims: Support excellent public engagement practice;
	Create the conditions for public engagement to thrive in universities;
	Build strong networks and partnerships to amplify our impact.

Tab. 7 | The main attributes that guide NCCPE. Source: table developed by the author, 2023.

Tab. 8 and Tab. 9 illustrate two projects developed within local communities⁴³ in Manchester and Dhaka, to demonstrate how these organizations and networks provide opportunities to promote the work of universities. The reason for selecting these projects is to reinforce the positive impact that working with communities has on the development of better solutions for their needs. In 2016 both projects were awarded the NCCPE Engage Award.

⁴² Content source: <https://www.publicengagement.ac.uk/> (2021).

⁴³ Source: <https://www.publicengagement.ac.uk/do-engagement/inspire-me/case-studies/researching-age-friendly-neighbourhoods>; <https://www.publicengagement.ac.uk/do-engagement/inspire-me/case-studies/lived-experience-climate-change>

**THE LIVED
EXPERIENCE
OF
CLIMATE
CHANGE**

Shortlisted for
the NCCPE
Engage Awards
2016 in the Arts,
Humanities &
Social Sciences
category

This project looks at the everyday challenges and the effects of climate change on individuals.

We are, perhaps, all-too-familiar with the economic and political challenges that climate change poses. By following people living in the slums of Dhaka in Bangladesh for several months, Dr. Joanne Jordan dug deeper into how they responded to its effects, and what this might tell us about wider issues such as equality, culture and gender.

Dhaka in Bangladesh is on the front line of climate change. Dr. Jordan, from Manchester University's Global Development Institute, spent several months talking to over 600 people in their homes, workplaces, teashops and on street corners, to understand how climate change is linked to many other problems experienced in their 'everyday' life.

Her findings are explored in collaboration with the University of Dhaka through a 'Pot Gan'; a traditional folk performance, featuring melody, drama, pictures and dancing, which encouraged slum dwellers, researchers, practitioners and policymakers to reflect on the day to day realities of living with climate change.

Tab. 8 | Project developed with a local community in Dhaka. Source: table developed by the author, 2023.

RESEARCHING AGE-FRIENDLY NEIGHBOURHOODS

Winner at the NCCPE Engage Awards 2016 in the Working in Partnership category

This project involved older people in Greater Manchester as co-researchers. It was just these people who led this study, designed to improve the quality of life in low income communities.

They were trained as co-researchers and played a leading role in the key sections of the research – from design through to implementation and analysis.

The project led to tangible outcomes – such as the return of a much-loved local bus service – and was supported by Manchester City Council in its efforts to promote ‘age-friendly’ communities.

Tab. 9 | Project developed with a local community in Manchester. Source: table developed by the author, 2023.

4.6 European Observatory of Science Learning in Higher Education (EOSLHE)

The European Observatory of Service Learning in Higher Education (EOSLHE) “was created in January 2019 as a permanent space for cooperation and exchange among the members of the European network Europe Engage for mapping the use of, collecting data and evidence and promoting the use of this learning methodology as well as its institutionalizing processes”⁴⁴.

The main idea is to disseminate S-L knowledge as an innovative educational approach in higher education in Europe. According to EOSLHE⁴⁵:

“Service-learning in higher education is an experiential educational method in which students engage in community service, reflect critically on this experience, and learn from it personally, socially and academically. The activities address human, social and environmental needs from the

⁴⁴ Source: <https://www.eoslhe.eu/what-we-do/> (2022).

⁴⁵ Source: <https://www.eoslhe.eu/what-we-do/> (2022).

perspective of social justice and sustainable development, and aim at enriching learning in higher education, fostering civic responsibility and strengthening communities”

Tab. 10 illustrates the key initiatives and the S-L practice that guide the activities of EOSLHE⁴⁶.

A good S-L practice is an experience that meets the main characteristics of this methodology and Key initiatives	Main characteristics: Integrates meaningful service and meets real needs.
	The service is linked to the academic curriculum.
	Reflection is part of the learning process.
	Community organizations are valued as partners.
	Students have a strong voice.
	Key initiatives: European Network Distribution Interactive map Research Impact measure Updated Knowledge management Dissemination Service-Learning experiences

Tab. 10 | The key initiatives and the main attributes that guide EOSLHE. Source: table developed by the author, 2023.

⁴⁶ Source: <https://www.eoslhe.eu/what-we-do/> (2022).

4.7 Campus Engage

Campus Engage work in common with “the Irish Universities Association (IUA), Campus Engage is dedicated to supporting Irish higher education institutions to embed, scale and promote civic and community engagement across staff and student teaching, learning and research”⁴⁷.

Seven Irish universities and the Technological University of Dublin are represented on the Steering Committee and are enrolled in activities, such as Community-based Teaching and Learning, Engaged Research and Innovation for Societal Impact; Student Volunteering, and Planning for Impact.

In this sense and according to Campus Engage⁴⁸:

“Campus Engage works to embed, scale and promote accredited student community-based learning and teaching (CBLT) on campuses across Ireland. Community-based learning and teaching are academic approaches that seek to enhance student learning outcomes while working in partnership with civic and civil society organizations (CSOs) to act on local and global societal challenges”.

Therefore, it is important to highlight that Campus Engage⁴⁹ believe that to deal with society’s challenges “knowledge generated in partnership with policymakers, product, service users, civic and civil society is more likely to be useful to society and have an impact”.

In addition, “Civic and community engagement impact relates to the benefit higher education makes to society” (Campus Engage, 2022)⁵⁰.

⁴⁷ Source: <https://www.campusengage.ie/about-us/about-campus-engage/> (2022).

⁴⁸ Source: <https://www.campusengage.ie/our-work/students-learning-with-communities/resources/> (2022).

⁴⁹ Source: <https://www.campusengage.ie/our-work/researchers-working-with-society/resources> (2022).

⁵⁰ Source: <https://www.campusengage.ie/our-work/making-an-impact/engaged-research/> (2022).

4.8 Urban Rooms Network

The Urban Rooms Network was launched in 2015 and is “a network of organizations who are involved in Urban Rooms across the UK. Our members are drawn from the arts, planning, architecture, education, heritage, community and local government. The Urban Rooms Network shares best practices gathered from innovators in the field, to promote the inclusive and creative engagement of local communities in placemaking. We offer support to those within the network, working together to promote the value of Urban Rooms to others”⁵¹.

Therefore and according to Urban Rooms Networks⁵² definition:

“Every town and city should have a physical space where people can go to understand the debate and get involved in the past, present and future of where they live, work and play. The purpose of these Urban Rooms is to foster meaningful connections between people and place, using creative methods of engagement to encourage active participation in the future of our buildings, streets and neighborhoods.”

4.9 Organizations and social network: valuable connectors between Universities and Communities

The main goal of this content was to demonstrate how internationally recognized organizations and networks might help disseminating the social and civic approach, as well as demonstrate the relevance of the theme of community engagement and offer a tool for mutual learning and strengthening of specific experiences.

The approach of these networks and organizations is essential to this thesis. Through case analyses, it made it possible to address engaged activities and civic awareness as social strategies to deal with urban issues of fragile local communities.

It is important to emphasize that the organizations and networks reviewed herein also provide a better understanding of the role of universities for developing learning environments aimed to build knowledge, ideas, and

⁵¹ Source: <https://urbanroomsnetwork.org/network/> (2022).

⁵² Source: <https://urbanroomsnetwork.org/network/> (2022).

perspectives. In addition, these organizations and networks help address societal issues while opening the eyes of essential actors to the urban changes that society is facing.

They have different conceptions based on the shared knowledge and experiences between universities and society, and some of the cases as 'places outside' of the academic field, but with the same approach of spreading the idea that actors from all levels are crucial in the development of engaging activities to improve research.

In that direction and by approaching fragile territories, these networks can show different interventions, projects, concepts, and tools to deal with the public. In some cases, they gather universities worldwide to discuss the social approach on their campuses; others deal with public engagement with different institutions, organizations, and partnerships, and others co-design solutions in an interdisciplinary approach.

For that reason, they are essential to guide to understand the needs of fragile local communities to create an environment of proximity between universities, their communities, local organizations, and partnerships. These networks provide tools to be accessed at different levels and by diverse actors.

Concerning this thesis context, they highlight the importance of all different actors in the collaborative process, and proposed changes in the educational process, changes that are to be made by means of research, teaching, learning, and engagement and through more meaningful, reflective and critical thinking.

Another aspect to point out is that although the role of these networks is relevant, there is little recognition outside the academic field. In other words, there is still a barrier between universities and society regarding sharing knowledge and merging research with public activities.

Finally, getting knowledge about these social organizations and networks has revealed the possibility of investigating different cases showing how the

engagement activities conceived in the academic field may provide more motivational learning environments.

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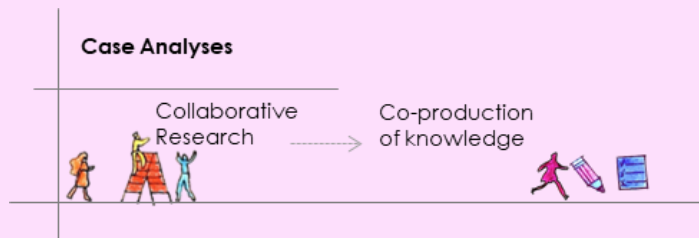
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Universities as Potential Social Agents in the Urban Regeneration of Fragile Local
Communities: A Mutual Learning Process

Ph.D. in Urban Planning, Design and Policy

Chapter 5 | Case Analyses

Collaborative research between universities and territories:
fragile local communities



The main aim is to highlight and show what actions are being put into practice that aim at innovating educational process through the social approach, with the development of projects which involve local fragile communities in order to achieve urban regeneration.

Universities as Potential Social Agents in the Urban Regeneration of Fragile Local
Communities: A Mutual Learning Process

Ph.D. in Urban Planning, Design and Policy

Introduction:

Universities must rethink their roles as social agents in order to provide better learning environments and to make a difference in dealing with the urban issues that society is facing.

This chapter presents three case analyses in order to show different perspectives and evaluate how universities are dealing with fragile territories by promoting social strategies in the development of projects within local communities to seek for urban regeneration.

Case analyses:

This chapter presents a collaborative research developed within the Faculty of Architecture of the University of Lisbon (FA.Ulisboa), Urbanism and Territorial Dynamics Laboratory (URBinLAB), the Faculty of Architecture and Urbanism of the University of São Paulo (FAUUSP), Architectural Technology Department (Labaut), and the Politecnico di Milano, Department of Architecture and Urban Studies (DASStU).

Moreover, throughout data collection, it aims to describe what kind of projects and actions are being developed by universities within local communities to understand their vulnerabilities and fragile aspects. Therefore, it aims to better understand the role of universities and communities as knowledge co-producers, considering different approaches for innovative educational practices in creating real environments for students to develop civic awareness and critical thinking.

5.1 Introduction

With the rise of globalization and the advancement of communication technologies, universities began to share knowledge, provide training programs, and realize the possibilities of their role in building a formal relationship with their society in the search for social, economic, and environmental development.

In addition, it is essential to highlight that individual universities worldwide are developing their ways and actions to implement the social responsibility approach in teaching and research. In this sense, some universities are still beginning this path while others are already implementing social responsibility strategies as a mandatory approach in their curriculum.

In this regard, it is relevant to point out that once the importance of their social dimension recognized, universities have been creating opportunities to train qualified graduates, for these to become more responsible citizens. By having the opportunity to work close to communities to develop new skills and to build critical thinking about urban issues.

The main aim at this moment is to provide different examples and perspectives of the universitys' collaborative research strategies as applied to the social approach developed within fragile local communities. The case analyses presented herein are also considered a research method, as they "focus on a contemporary phenomenon within some real-life context" (Yin, 2003).

Throughout the data collection and fieldwork, it was possible to describe what kind of strategies and actions universities have developed within local communities to pursue urban regeneration. Furthermore, the fieldwork also provided a better understanding of the role of universities and communities as co-producers of knowledge, considering different approaches to innovative educational practices in creating natural environments for students to develop civic awareness and critical thinking.

The case analyses presented were developed within different environments by the Urbanism and Territorial Dynamics Laboratory (URBinLAB) of the Faculty of Architecture of the University of Lisbon (FA.Ulisboa), the

Architectural Technology Department (Labaut) of the Faculty of Architecture and Urbanism of the University of São Paulo (FAUUSP), and the Department of Architecture and Urban Studies (DAStU) of the Politecnico di Milano.

The selection of universities and cases took into account their international academic recognition and the relevance of the potential roles of these universities as social and civic agents in dealing with the fragile territories of their, local communities.

The cases have two different perspectives; one regards the innovative educational processes and mutual learning, which is the case of the NoVoid project and the Mapping San Siro (MSS) project. It means that both projects have different methodologies and co-design strategies to deal with the urban issues regarding their territory scale. Still, at the same time, they present innovative educational practices as a strategy to develop critical thinking among students and professors involved.

The MSS project highlights the ‘Off Campus’ as an action-research methodology to understand a specific fragile local community in a neighborhood of the city of Milan. The case of the NoVoid project highlights new ways to understand the (positive perspective) ‘fragilities’ of empty spaces in several cities in Portugal with a robust methodology of communication and different scenarios of urban alternatives.

On the other side is the perspective of learning from the university network’s activities, which is the case of the WC2 University Network. In this case, it shows the importance of university networks as a strong facilitator to develop short experiences for students to work in different backgrounds to understand the reality of urban conditions for a small community in a specific country of a host university.

The social responsibility concept matches the main objective of this research. A vital aspect derived from this concept regarding the university’s role is to build civic awareness and create opportunities for students to become more involved with the public and society’s urban challenges.

In the following, three case analyses chosen are present: first, the NoVoid and the Mapping San Siro (MSS) project, and second, the WC2 University Network.

An important aspect to highlight from these examples is that they have different perspectives. Still, it is possible to perceive the main objective in developing urban alternatives to deal with fragile territories to improve urban policies and interventions to achieve sustainable development and social inclusion for these territories.

Finally, an important statement to emphasize is that with these case analyses, it is possible to achieve results considering not only the description of activities and methodologies of these cases but rather the importance of the impact in the educational processes. The relevance to provide environments of proximity between universities and society as a pathway to seek urban regeneration by affecting the improvement of urban policies, better co-design solutions and the development of social and cultural activities to the development of these fragile territories.

5.2 Innovative educational process and mutual learning: NoVoid Project and Mapping San Siro (MSS) Project

The case analyses of the NoVoid project and the Mapping San Siro project (MSS) will highlight the relevance of innovative educational processes and mutual learning to deal with fragile urban issues of territories, considering the scale of contemporary urban peripheries and local communities.

In this regard, it shows the relevance of approaching fragile territories positively, to understand that the fragile aspects can also represent a potential to be explored with better solutions.

Nonetheless, these two cases show different levels of civic engagement activities to demonstrate universities' crucial role in providing better learning environments. As the leading case present is MSS, it was given a deeper description of its development. However, on the other hand, the NoVoid project, although it is briefly described, can bring significant attention to how universities can find innovative ways to put together theory and practice and, at the same time, pursue community engagement.

The Novoid Project

This case is part of collaborative research within FA.Ulisboa to collect data and interview some of the professors and students that were part of this project, with the aim of investigating a different social approach perspective for the development of projects connected with society and local fragile communities.

“NoVoid is the acronym for 'Ruins and Lands Vacancies in Portuguese Cities: exploring life obscurity of urban spaces abandoned and proposed alternative planning for perforated city'. The acronym synthesizes two ideas.

NoVoid (no void = no empty) because it is our understanding that urban spaces abandoned are not 'spaces blank' in the city but yes integral parts of it, with life and memory. NoVoid (no void = in the void) because we are interested to investigate and we want to understand what spaces are these, what things take place and if produce in them, and it was worth can have for the city”

(NoVoid Newsletter, n. 1, 2016).

The contemporary urbanity of cities can also include the presence of ruins, abandoned buildings, and vacant lots, and therefore, in Portugal, in recent decades urban development has been defined by real market speculation and by the discontinuous growth of cities, which has resulted in a considerable number of vacant lots.

The presence of these vacant lands, abandonment and modern ruins have been seen as an adverse conditions. Therefore, the urban policies and the urban planning approaches have followed actions focused on revitalization, regeneration, re-densification, and rehabilitation as means to correct these negative places and their state.

Therefore, particularly in Portugal, there is a lack of understanding and developing analysis to discover the ruination process, the morphology, and the potential of these spaces. In this regard, the NoVoid project⁵³ focuses on the ruins and vacant lands in Portuguese cities, based on the analysis of the four shrinking cities of, Barreiro, Guimarães, Lisbon, and Vizela, with the main idea of exploring alternative planning proposals for the sheltered life in the urban abandonment of the perforated city.

The analysis identifies different types of urban perforations, i.e., ruins, ruined yards, and vacant land. In this sense, it is worth to quote the following:

“Inspired by the Solà-Morales’ concept of *terrain vague*, we intend to think of the qualities of the abandoned and ruined spaces in the city and to discuss positively their value and potentialities. The approach we propose understands the city as a socio-techno-natural system and sees the abandoned and ruined spaces as privileged sites of socio-natural hybridizations, where the technological and the biological, the human and the non-human, interpenetrate. The biophilic dimension of these spaces will therefore be duly considered” (NoVoid)⁵⁴.

The Project was coordinated by major investigator Eduardo Brito-Henriques from CEG/IGOT-UL and co-coordinator João Sarmiento from CEG/IGOT-UL and by the Univ. from Minho. Moreover, the group comprises Paulo Morgado and Mário Vale from CEG/IGOT-UL, Ana

⁵³ The project is composed of geographers, architects, and landscape architects affiliated with the University of Lisbon and to the University of Minho, and is funded by the Portuguese Research Council (FCT - Fundação para a Ciência e Tecnologia). The project started in May 2016 with 36 months of duration. Source: <https://novoid2016.wixsite.com/novoid> (2022).

⁵⁴ Source: <https://novoid2016.wixsite.com/novoid/blank-1> (2022).

Luísa Soares from CEANB/ISA-UL, and Cristina Cavaco from CEAUD/FA-UL.

Furthermore, Prof. Matthew Gandy from Cambridge University, UK, assisted and monitored the coordination board. The NoVOID management structure included the stakeholder's Steering Group, made up representatives of institutions policymakers, and civil society who operate as consultants to help connection between theory and practice.

Therefore, it is essential to highlight that this Project had a new idea based on the positive vision of interpreting and discovering the meaning of these spaces concerning the context of the city.

On the one hand, the optimistic vision developed by the group for the abandoned spaces and ruins consists in denying the idea that these spaces are empty of life and useless in the city's social life. On the other hand, these spaces have a meaning in the town, where other forms of environmental socialization and of relationship between humans, nature, and non-humans could occur.

Moreover, the methodology provided by the interdisciplinary approach highlighted opportunities to think of exciting solutions in a more imaginative way. In this regard, it was possible to develop intervention tools based on constructing future scenarios for the city and its spaces.

In addition, the workshops organized with the students and their supervisors provided an environment for an integrative look between these collaborators. As a result, it was possible to establish a relationship with the community and develop innovative initiatives for scientific communication.

There was a close involvement with official stakeholders, such as the city council and local organizations, to develop this communication process of transmitting knowledge and for receiving community input. The tools designed for the communication process were the workshops, exhibitions, and a newsletter, which aimed “to be a communication bridge from

NoVOID team within the society, working as a direct dissemination tool, simple and agile about what we're doing" (NoVoid Newsletter, n.1, 2016)⁵⁵.

Therefore, there were also the podcasts and the Pecha Kuchas, which according to Eduardo Britto-Henriques (2022)⁵⁶:

“This was a strategy used in a more dynamic, attractive, and objective way. To present our content to non-academic people and people do not know the subject. And this generated opportunities for reflection and discussion among diverse people in places of sociability”.

The project was made up of three stages. The first stage included the analysis and investigation of the conditions, quantities, locations, and dynamics of the ruins and vacant lands in the cities. The second stage regarded the recognition of the human and non-human actors that are part of these spaces, by considering their social-cultural, material, and symbolic aspects. Finally, the third stage was related to the investigation and discussion of possible planning solutions, which combined innovative urbanistic and architectural proposals and, according to Eduardo Britto-Henriques (2022)⁵⁷:

“Solutions built from a strong paradigm of sustainability, that is, built from a more eco-centric perspective, therefore also thinking about non-human actors, such as animals, plants, those who also intervene in the production of the city and, therefore, solutions that were also ephemeral, temporary, transitory, weighing on human constructions that had these characteristics and that had no ambition”.

⁵⁵ Content from material available from the NoVoid project. Newsletter n. 1, October 2016. Source: <https://novoid2016.wixsite.com/novoid/blank-5> (2022).

⁵⁶ From the interview with the professor, coordinator, and major investigator of the NoVoid project, Eduardo Brito-Henriques made on 22/04/22 as a research tool: the Pecha Kuchas is a kind of short talk, which emerged in Japan and which works as a chat. These Pecha Kuchas were a way of developing a creative design in the communication part where in a few minutes it was possible to convey a message.

⁵⁷ From the interview with the professor, coordinator, and major investigator of the NoVoid project, Eduardo Brito-Henriques made on 22/04/22 as a research tool.

Tab. 11 illustrates the three stages of the project⁵⁸ and related tasks:

Stage 1	Task 1: Concepts, data collection, GIS, database and spatial data analysis.
	Task 2: Dynamics and spatial patterns of abandonment.
Stage 2	Task 3: Biodiversity and human/non-human interactions.
	Task 4: Appropriations, re-significations and social uses.
Stage 3	Task 5: Prospects and projects.
	Task 6: Networking and dissemination.

Tab. 11 | The projects' stages and related tasks. Source: table re-developed from the original by the author, 2022.

The methods and approaches developed within the NoVoid project were based on the combination of fieldwork and “quantitative methods (statistical analysis of census data, remote sensing and vertical aerial photography interpretation, fauna and flora inventories, modern archeology methods), with archival work and ethnographical qualitative methods (observation and interviews)” (NoVoid)⁵⁹. Above all, possible dialogue with local communities and residents was considered essential.

Moreover, it is interesting to highlight some aspects of the stages of this project, such as, for example, the understanding of biodiversity and the interaction between humans and non-humans through identifying the floristic composition of these spaces as a living part of these environments.

Therefore, some analyses were carried out on how these ruins and vacant spaces' everyday life worked, how they were appropriated, their sociocultural aspects, and their symbols and transformations. Another exciting work was

⁵⁸ NoVoid newsletter n. 1. Source: <https://novoid2016.wixsite.com/novoid/blank-5> (2022).

⁵⁹ Source: <https://novoid2016.wixsite.com/novoid/blank-1> (2022).

the development of a sound map as a document to report the life of empty spaces, their appropriations, and how they impact urban ecosystems.

In this sense, the activities developed in general were able to provide for the students, teachers, coordinators, and all the actors involved a collaborative environment and work process based on the study and critical reflection on daily life, physical, architectural, planning, and social aspects for these spaces and their urban context.

Furthermore, considering the interdisciplinary approach and the design process, the main idea was to apply a participatory approach to understand the meaning of empty spaces or empty buildings and what they can represent for people and the environment in which they are inserted. This was based not only on architecture, but also on an artistic point of view, according to which solutions, ideas, scenarios, and possible adaptations to new temporary uses were developed.

In addition, there is a sensitivity to discovering the potential of these places, and especially in analyzing their uses and characteristics and in exploring the elements that are part of these spaces. Finally, it is about understanding these places as vulnerable environments composed of fragile aspects (the negative aspect of the void imposed on them) and how these fragilities can provide a new context in the environment in which they are inserted.

In this regard is worth mention that:

“There is a recurrent look that associates abandonment and ruins urban areas with problematic and marginalized areas of the city, which are waiting for the opportunity to be intervened and returned to the sphere of public use. Our main task was to try to deconstruct preconceived discourses and generics about abandonment, contradicting the detachment and superficial look characteristic of those who “see the ruins from the outside”. We seek to understand abandonment through the human experiences it provides, the relationship between the ruined spaces and the people who appropriate it. The objective was to contribute to the recognition of new readings, often enunciators of the challenge that is the

integration of these sites in the planning of the perforated city” (Sarmiento, Pereira, 2019: 53).

In what follows, a project example is briefly presented, to describe the relationship between the social approach and the urban regeneration of a local fragile community: Intermedi(o)ação

01 **EX**

Mapamento e estatísticas

PLO

02 Lugares

03 **RAR**

Ecologias. Para um reforço da estrutura ecológica urbana

04 Apropriações, Achados, diálogos e percepções: a vida informal das ruínas

Transitoriedade

Indeterminação

Informalidade

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PECU

Renaturalização

Imaterialidade

Participação

Porosidade

Conectividade

LAR

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RUÍNAS E TERRENOS VAGOS

EXPLORAÇÕES, REFLEXÕES E ESPECULAÇÕES

RUÍNAS E TERRENOS VAGOS

EXPLORAÇÕES, REFLEXÕES E ESPECULAÇÕES

RUÍNAS E TERRENOS VAGOS

EXPLORAÇÕES, REFLEXÕES E ESPECULAÇÕES

Images of the book. Source: images from collected material available in Lisbon, 2022.

01 **EX**
PERIMENTAR

A partir de Hubert Robert: da ruína como campo indeciso

&

02 Mapeando sonoridades

03 Edifício-cortina, edifício-tela

04 **RE**
FLETIR

A experiência do abandono documentado em vídeo

05 Bosque

RUÍNAS E TERRENOS VAGOS

EXPLORAÇÕES, REFLEXÕES E ESPECULAÇÕES

EDUARDO BERTO HENRIQUES
CRISTINA CAVARCO
MARTA LABATUTIA
2022

RUÍNAS E TERRENOS VAGOS

EXPLORAÇÕES, REFLEXÕES E ESPECULAÇÕES

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2022

Ruínas e Terrenos Vagos Nas Cidades Portuguesas

Exibindo a vida através das imagens urbanas abandonadas a propósito do planeamento urbano numa cidade portuguesa.

outubro 2016

PROF. DR. EDUARDO SÍO

Abandonos e arruinamentos na cidade contemporânea

O problema em debate
A importância de urbanidade contemporânea está vinculada pelo progresso de abandono, do vazio e da desocupação. Ruínas edificadas abandonadas e terrenos vagos são presenças sempre presentes na cidade. O modo de construção urbana em Portugal nos últimos décadas confunde um crescimento descontrolado que detona muitas vezes no interior das estruturas urbanas. Do outro lado, mesmo faces de urbanidade, presença de uma fase para integração de pequenas células abandonadas, quer de edifícios, quer de estruturas urbanas, quer de espaços públicos, quer de estruturas urbanas, quer de estruturas urbanas...



Imagem aérea de uma zona urbana com edifícios abandonados e terrenos vagos.

por estar depois de um período de abandono. O mesmo inclui a intervenção e a desocupação de espaços urbanos e a integração de pequenas células abandonadas, quer de edifícios, quer de estruturas urbanas, quer de estruturas urbanas...



Imagem aérea de uma zona urbana com edifícios abandonados e terrenos vagos.

Imagem aérea de uma zona urbana com edifícios abandonados e terrenos vagos.

Logos of various institutions and sponsors including Faculdade de Engenharia da Universidade do Porto, Faculdade de Arquitectura da Universidade do Porto, and various companies like CMAU, FCT, and others.

Balanco do primeiro ano de atividade

O primeiro ano de atividade do Projeto Ruínas e Terrenos Vagos tem sido muito produtivo. Foram realizados vários eventos, incluindo a publicação de um livro e a realização de uma exposição. O projeto tem sido muito bem recebido pela comunidade e tem gerado muitos debates importantes sobre o tema da ruína e do abandono urbano.

Ponto de situação

O ponto de situação atual do projeto mostra que temos feito progressos significativos. No entanto, ainda existem muitos desafios a superar, especialmente em termos de financiamento e de apoio institucional. É importante continuar a trabalhar em conjunto com a comunidade e com as autoridades locais para superar estes desafios.

NOVID

NOVID é um projeto de investigação que se dedica a estudar as ruínas e os terrenos vagos nas cidades portuguesas. O projeto tem sido muito bem recebido pela comunidade e tem gerado muitos debates importantes sobre o tema da ruína e do abandono urbano.

Nesta Newsletter

Principais resultados do Projeto - um resumo do inventário NOVID. Neste número, apresentamos um resumo dos principais resultados do projeto, incluindo a realização de uma exposição e a publicação de um livro. Também apresentamos algumas reflexões sobre o tema da ruína e do abandono urbano.



Reunião do Projeto Ruínas e Terrenos Vagos, 2017, no Pavão de São João.

Logos of various institutions and sponsors including Faculdade de Engenharia da Universidade do Porto, Faculdade de Arquitectura da Universidade do Porto, and various companies like CMAU, FCT, and others.

Newletters, communication approach. Source: images from collected material available in Lisbon, 2022.

Ruínas e Terrenos Vagos Nas Cidades Portuguesas

Exibindo a vida através das imagens urbanas abandonadas a propósito do planeamento urbano numa cidade portuguesa.

Junho 2019

PROF. DR. EDUARDO SÍO

Finalização dos Trabalhos

As atividades do Projeto Ruínas e Terrenos Vagos chegaram ao fim. Foram realizados vários eventos, incluindo a publicação de um livro e a realização de uma exposição. O projeto tem sido muito bem recebido pela comunidade e tem gerado muitos debates importantes sobre o tema da ruína e do abandono urbano.



Reunião do Projeto Ruínas e Terrenos Vagos, 2019, no Pavão de São João.

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Ponto de situação - trabalhos realizados e em curso

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Sala de aulas do Projeto Ruínas e Terrenos Vagos, 2019, no Pavão de São João.

Logos of various institutions and sponsors including Faculdade de Engenharia da Universidade do Porto, Faculdade de Arquitectura da Universidade do Porto, and various companies like CMAU, FCT, and others.

a) Intermedi(o)ação

“The immense vacant lot located on the border between the center of Barreiro and the old industrial zone was the site chosen for this methodological experience of scenario elicitation. Thirty interviews were carried out with residents, former residents, users, or city enthusiasts to discuss possibilities for the future of this area, marked by its important past and for great projects that never left the paper. Six photomontages suggestive of new uses for the land to the interviewees and they were invited to reflect on the potentialities of these use possible during the vacancy period. Thus, in addition to exploring themes related to the intermediate reuse of spaces abandoned, new forms and methods of community participation in city planning, with the figure of the urban planner transformed into an agent of intermediation” (Costa, 2019: 75).

The Intermedi(o)ação project was developed by Ph.D. student Plabo Costa within the inventories of ruins proposed by the Novoid project as a case study for the city of Barreiro, almost 30% of which is made by ruins and characterized as a former industrial city with giant lands.

This project started with a process of photo-elicitation, interviewing 30 residents of the area. This process was based on showing a selected amount of old and new pictures of the space concerned asking people what they felt and thought about it. The images helped to capture the perception of these people about the meaning of empty and abandoned spaces.

This process was possible because thanks of the support of stakeholders, networks, and especially of the Adão cultural center. In the city there is a strong artistic movement, and according to Pablo Costa (2022)⁶⁰, “a very interesting thing that happens there, about urban art and the city is almost being regenerated by this urban art”.

Therefore, the general idea of the Novoid project was to draw attention to the importance of making people think and understand that empty spaces

⁶⁰ From the interview with the Ph.D. candidate, which is developing a thesis based on a case study of the NoVoid project, Pablo Costa made 29/04/22 as a research tool.

are not empty, and to have people realize that these abandoned spaces often have a function for the city.

In this sense, instead of offering a solution, the idea was to develop six possible scenarios: green spaces and walkability; renewable energy; urban and community gardens; parties and festivals; sports spaces; and creative industries. These scenarios were presented to residents to encourage them to talk about the city and its urban issues.

Fig. 9 illustrates these six scenarios⁶¹, developed as a participatory approach with the local community in the industrial territories of the city of Barreiro.

⁶¹ These images were extracted from the material provided by FA.Ulisboa is specified in the references and reproduced by the author.

Six Scenarios



Green spaces and walkability



Renewable energy



Urban and community gardens



Parties and festivals



Sports spaces



Creative industries

Fig. 9 | Six scenarios. Source: imagine reproduced from the original, 2022.

Therefore, the aim and the hope was to create a kind of pre-urbanism through a participatory process with the residents (other interviews were also carried out), with the main goal of understanding which possible design ideas could be developed for the temporary use of these abandoned spaces.

Another exciting and innovative aspect to be highlighted in this project is the communication approach, used to show residents what the university and the students were doing there and to invite different people to come and discuss together.

An example of this communication action was an event held at the Adão cultural center, the previously mentioned Pecha Kucha, which brought together photographers, graffiti artists, students, people from the Adão cultural center, and people from the NoVoid project, to discuss ideas and to show the work of the university. Moreover, groups of architecture students developed workshops open to everyone's participation, and this action contributed to making people feel part of this project.

According to Pablo Costa (2022)⁶²:

“It was cool because it brought together people from different areas, such as visual artists, and these workshops stimulated the reading of the space, understanding the potential of spaces through more critical analysis, and also served as a bridge of communication with the communities themselves to understand the everyday life. It had this different look at the community, and by having a temporary design approach, it encouraged us to do that, to make things happen”.

Moreover, although the scenarios did not go beyond paper, the important thing to highlight as a legacy of this project, in general, was the possibility to reflect on the conception of these spaces and to be comfortable with and aware of the uncertainties of real-life (a connection with the territorial fragility concept).

The main outcomes of the NoVoid project

The NoVoid project brought a new approach to dealing with empty spaces and vacant lands in several cities in Portugal. On one side, the interdisciplinarity approach adopted created an environment of closeness between students and professors. On the other side, the communication strategy with local organizations and communities allowed the development of critical thinking and civic awareness in the face of the challenges of dealing with urban issues.

⁶² From the interview with the Ph.D. candidate, which is developing a thesis based on a case study of the NoVoid project, Pablo Costa made 29/04/22 as a research tool.

The territories included in the project can be considered fragile, are the result of real market speculation and present discontinuous growth. They also suffer from social exclusion compared to the other spaces in the city's urban fabric.

Therefore, an exciting aspect of this project that identified the vulnerabilities and fragilities of empty spaces and vacant lots as positive aspects to be explored. For example, it acknowledged the potential of human and nature conditions (noises, vegetation, and topography) for finding solutions to achieve urban regeneration of these territories.

Moreover, it was an innovative educational process that the university was not used to offer. In fact, the university has a strong link with the traditional educational process, and this project allowed students and professors to rethink the meaning of research, learning, and teaching.

The engagement and motivation of being part of this project and the interaction among professors and students from different backgrounds, like architects, urban planners, and geographers, was another positive impact identified from the fieldwork.

Regarding the engagement strategy of this project, it is characterized by some aspects, such as being reflexive, sharing and listening, being open-minded and willing to learn, and to develop individual and collective skills by working with local communities.

In short, it can be said that this project left a vital legacy with its communication strategy, which was aimed at highlighting externally the importance of university's work in merging scientific knowledge and common knowledge through workshops, Pecha Kuchas, and newsletters. Most important is the legacy of motivating students to work with the public and to demonstrate how research have a positive impact when addressing society's urban issues.

From an internal perspective, if this type of project can be considered a starting point to implement the social approach inside the university, based on what was presented above; it is possible to confirm that this approach is able of providing a new educational process, then resulting in a positive impact on the training of responsible and civic students.

Fig. 10 is a diagram of the main aspects, features, and challenges of the NoVoid project.



NoVoid Project 	
Aspects and Features 	Challenges
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A Living Lab approach– Universities, Communities • Civic approach • Interdisciplinarity approach • Communication approach • Participatory approach • Innovative educational approach • Cultural and artistic activities (workshops and Pecha Kuchas) • Mutual learning and development of new skills • Building networks with local actors and local organizations • Collaborative work • Critical thinking (given a new interpretation to fragility aspects of empty spaces and vacant lands) • Urban Regeneration 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In the case of Lisbon, it was difficult to build a network with local communities. • To be recognized (inside and outside the academy). • On how to communicate and explain the work of the university within the academy (the university has a strong link to the traditional educational process, it was an innovative aspect to develop this type of project). • In receiving financial and institutional support to develop more projects. • In addressing the social role and innovative educational practices within the university. • On how much this project can impact the university and cities. • On the possibility of replicating in different environments.

Fig. 10 | Diagram of the main aspects of the NoVoid project. Source: developed by the author, 2023.

The Mapping San Siro (MSS) Project

Currently, the university system in Italy already encompasses different concepts related to innovation, culture, and social responsibility, the so-called and previously mentioned third mission. Moreover, the Politecnico di Milano through the Polisocial Program⁶³, to reinforce social, cultural, and educational perspectives, is involved in projects designed to reposition and regenerate not only its campuses but also the urban areas and cities where they are inserted.

Moreover, it is essential to highlight the social aspect of universities as leaders who seek to face the issues of society. This is a motivational approach in the pedagogical and educational process because it can provide environments of interdisciplinarity for students to develop critical thinking about urban challenges.

On the other hand, this opens the way to make more sense of research and learning, combining them with a civic approach and authentic, local actors that can help to improve and learn new skills. Therefore, research can be practiced in a natural context, also with universities and communities serving as a urban living lab able to reach more concrete results that can help understand the great and significant role and impact universities can have on the search of better and sustainable environments for society.

The leading case analyses of the Mapping San Siro (MSS) project will provide a brief context to better understand how the university and communities are working together in the development of new ways of learning, new skills, and co-production of knowledge in order to find alternatives for urban regeneration and to improve the quality of life, thus, presenting the connection between social responsibility, civic engagement, and territorial fragility concepts.

Beyond that, MSS is considered a urban living lab experiment based on co-research, co-design, and local co-production of knowledge and aims:

⁶³ An initiative from the Politecnico di Milano to combine teaching and research with social commitment (engagement).

“At experimenting a pedagogical environment based on grounded, interactive, action-oriented and hybrid learning, reflecting how new approaches can enrich the experience of educational practices for the inclusive city” (Cognetti, Castelnuevo, 2019: 37).

The neighborhood of San Siro⁶⁴ is located in a western area close to the central part of the city of Milan, which can be characterized as an urban marginal context. Despite its diverse living demands and urban issues, it shows up as a wealthy and active environment in that “civil society takes action, promoting interventions and projects, in terms of social innovation, practices and, bottom-up responses to its needs, desires and expectations” (Cognetti, Castelnuevo, 2019: 42).

San Siro can be considered as a learning context for building networks and developing resources, recognized by local organizations and networks, with the participation of community groups, non-governmental organizations, and local institutions. These actors work aiming at the common good for the neighborhood by providing better conditions for living, social inclusion, and cohesion.

This network, although it is considered fragmented and lacking resources, plays a relevant and dual role that deals with “everyday problems, and having a proactive role in terms of the production of shared visions for the future transformation of the neighborhood” (Cognetti, Castelnuevo, 2019: 42). In addition, together with the network, the initiatives promoted by residents and local public institutions can be considered additional players and resources.

The MSS project started in 2013⁶⁵ and the first activity developed was a workshop to identify local conditions and carry out a physical analysis of the

⁶⁴ San Siro was built between the 1930's and 1950's and it is composed of nearly 6.110 dwellings with 11.000 residents and is considered the largest public housing neighborhood in the city of Milan. Furthermore, it is managed by Regional Agency for Public Housing of Lombardy (ALER).

⁶⁵ Under the coordination of Francesca Cognetti from the Department of Architecture and Urban Studies (DASU) from the Politecnico di Milano and with the participation of Liliana

San Siro neighborhood, with the aim to provide better actions and interventions to seek social and urban transformation for the local community. The work developed by the workshop was continued in a second phase by a group of students, young researchers, and teachers, to understand how the knowledge and expertise from the academia could interact with the inhabitants and community partners.

The second phase was based on three themes: living conditions; courtyards and public spaces; and empty residential spaces.

Moreover, the engagement experience offered to the students allowed them to improve their critical thinking and social competences to understand the complexity of urban and social issues.

In 2014, another step to continue the activities of the MSS project was taken by the provision and use, in the neighborhood, of a physical space made available by the Regional Agency for Public Housing of Lombardy (ALER). The space was called Trentametriquadri and was located in Via Abbiati 4.

This location could motivate a change in the research methodology leading to the development of an innovative pedagogical environment. The Trentametriquadri became a living lab of interaction and exchange between the university and community, where “local partners and residents have access to information, data, facts, and products about the dynamics occurring in the neighborhood” (Cognetti, Castelnuovo, 2019: 44).

The living lab approach can be considered as a tool to understand marginal neighborhood context, as well as to figure out if these kinds of projects and methodologies could be replicated. According to Cognetti, Maranghi (2022)⁶⁶ the living lab approach induces reflections “on the one hand, on the skills that researchers and operators should develop involving the development of marginal contexts, on the other hand, on the conditions for

Padovani from IUVA University of Venice and supported by the DASTU and the Polisocial Program.

⁶⁶ Material provided by Prof. Francesca Cognetti: Cognetti, F., and Marangui E. (2022). In QU3 – iQuaderni di U3. Attivare la rigenerazione locale: verso i Social Urban Living Lab. Activating local regeneration: towards the approach of Social Urban Living Labs.

producing a change durable and scalable in terms of local development and regeneration”.

Moreover, the new method derived from the change in the methodology was based on four dimensions:

- a) The situating (staying in the neighborhood), which is linked to understanding and creating relationships regarding the daily life of the neighborhood;
- b) The acting (acting for change, exchanging), which is connected to the co-design and co-creation of small public spaces interventions aiming the engagement of residents, organizations, and institutions;
- c) The inquiring (doing research), a kind of mutual learning that focuses on the co-production of knowledge between the territory and the inhabitants;
- d) The networking (building relations), the strongest dimension, aims to build a trustful environment through the development of projects engaging the neighborhood and the university.

One example of an active network is ‘Sansheroes’, a local organization that started in 2014 and coordinated by the group with the participation of local actors, to seek the benefit of the neighborhood “aimed at fostering a complex and deep-rooted knowledge of San Siro” (Grassi, 2023: 103; Maranghi 2019).

In this sense, its worth quoting:

“The Sansheroes was able to produce a shared vision of the neighborhood and a coordinated planning laboratory, strengthening its possibility of interacting and appropriating local institutions” (Cognetti, Maranghi, 2022; Maranghi, 2019).

Fig. 11 is a diagram of activities developed regarding the living labs approach, such as themes, approach, tools, goals, learning activities, impact, and outcomes⁶⁷.

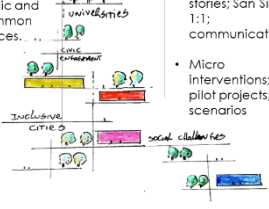
MSS LIVING LAB ACTIVITIES						
Themes	Approach	Tools	Goals	Learning Activities	Impact	Outcomes
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Housing and Living Conditions; Vacant and Empty Spaces; Public and Common Spaces... 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Situating; Inquiry; Acting; (Network). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Setting up a base; Local dialogues; networking; Local education Participatory mapping; Map stories; San Siro 1:1; communication Micro Interventions; pilot projects; scenarios 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Understand complex dynamics and social practices in the neighborhood Build up different relationships with institutions and social actors Reshape the image of San Siro to improve public opinion Provide tools for more effective initiatives and actual projects 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Micro interventions in public spaces; co-design activities Networking with local partners; situated exhibitions; Caffè San Siro (local open lessons); learning activities Interviews; observation; neighborhood walks; workshop with local partners; storytelling www.sansirostories.com Working tables 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> On the neighborhood: acquire more awareness and new knowledge Tighten new alliances and networks; Micro transformations of space 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> For students develop new sensitivities and awareness Be able to understand urban and social dynamics in a critical way Teamwork, communication abilities, cognitive and emotional empathy, problem-solving Develop new capabilities and soft skills

Fig. 11 | Diagram of the MSS living lab activities. Source: image re-developed by the author from a personal archive, 2023.

Later, in April 2019, on the initiative of the Polisocial Programme, this laboratory was transferred to the space named Off Campus (The Cantiere per le periferie) in via Gigante. This physical space was the first among the other three ones in the contemporary peripheries of the city of Milan: Nolo district (September 2020), the San Vittore detention center (October 2022), and the former farmhouse Cascina Nosedo (December 2022).

Furthermore, this physical space considered a living lab could provide an innovative pedagogical environment in terms of collaborative research and mutual learning, enriched by an interdisciplinary⁶⁸ approach between students and professors and, most importantly, providing a place to build connections and proximity with the neighborhood.

⁶⁷ Content extracted from material collected at Off Campus space (2021).

⁶⁸ The MSS project is made up of architects, urban planners and anthropologists.

“The fact of having a space here is fundamental; it is the start point of our work to be valuable. Doing research in MSS is working here in the neighborhood; it is an observatory point of view for the neighborhood and an incredible research laboratory for us. For example, we work among anthropologists, urban planners, and architects, but everyone has different perspectives” (Grassi, 2021)⁶⁹.

This living lab, beyond providing an environment to deep understanding and learning of a complex phenomenon, in this case with issues related to a marginal context and housing policies, therefore, it can provide the students the possibility of “critically reinterpreting what is emerging from communities `knowledge” (Cognetti, Castelnuovo, 2019: 47) provided by community partners and residents.

In this sense, it was a way of demonstrating to the neighborhood residents the possibility of an open window, to build connections and knowledge, share ideas, and understand daily life, and their needs in fragile urban areas.

“It helped us to be reachable every time for people who enter here and also for students; it is interesting to see the life in the neighborhood. Many people are passing by during the day; it is a window into the neighborhood. Sometimes things happen in the everyday life of the

⁶⁹ From the interview with Paolo Grassi, anthropologist, and research fellow at DASTU Politecnico di Milano made 18/11/21 as a research tool.

neighborhood and you have a different image of that and this is very important for the students to understand how the life in the neighborhood is” (Ranzini, 2021)⁷⁰.

The Off Campus activities consist in research: education and culture; co-design; neighborhood archive; coordination of Sansheros local network; and legal help desk and legality education.

The active network of Off Campus San Siro includes, among others: Bocconi University, Region Lombardy Department Social policies, housing and Disability and ALER Milano, Foundations and Companies, local network Sansheros, and the Municipality of Milan.

“One of the aspects during these years to be considered as the main result is the reinforcement and enhancement of the networks. The main role is to try to build these relationships with different kinds of actors and levels of local ones, with institutions and municipalities. The MSS group worked in the reinforcement of local relationships and the construction of local networks and in the role of helping these networks in defining the neighborhood issues and its priorities” (Castelnuovo, 2021)⁷¹.

⁷⁰ From the interview with Alice Ranzini, urbanist, a doctoral student in Urban Planning, IUAV Venezia made 30/11/21 as a research tool.

⁷¹ From the interview with Ida Castelnuovo, urbanist, Polisocial program made 02/12/21 as a research tool.

Fig. 12 shows the Off Campus space layout⁷² and the methodology applied to the activities, such as co-design, responsible research and innovative teaching, and learning (action research).

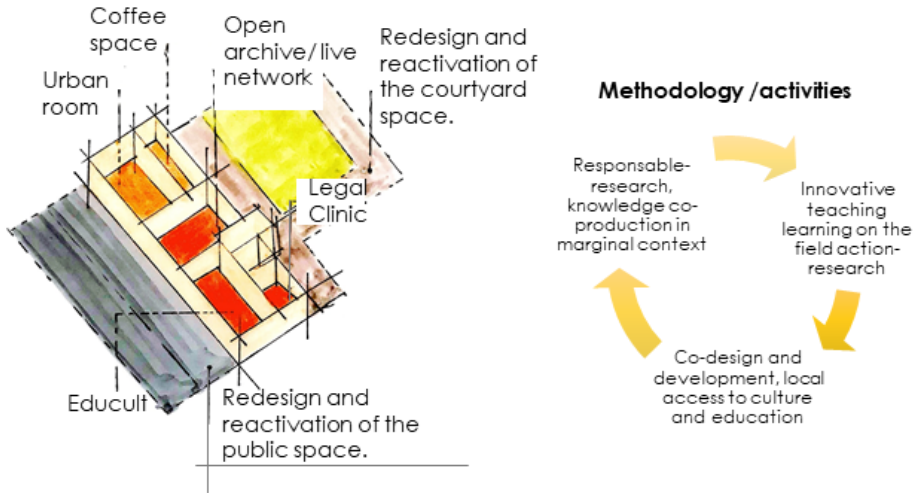


Fig. 12 | Off Campus space layout and methodology. Source: image re-developed by the author from a personal archive, 2023.

The co-designed activity and participatory practices combined with students’ technical skills and the influence of local groups and organizations could result in concrete interventions and in the development of future scenarios for re-activating the neighborhood.

Moreover, the MSS project experience is a transformative method from the traditional research and teaching practice toward forms of “inquiry and experiential learning based on: the proximity of territories, practices of listening, dialogue and knowledge co-production with the local community, and a multidisciplinary approach” (Cognetti, Castelnovo, 2019: 50).

According to Cognetti, Castelnovo (2019: 51):

⁷² Content extracted from material collected at Off-Campus flyer (2021).

“Experimenting in this type of learning environment, students have the opportunity to develop new ways of looking at urban and social issues, questioning the social utility of their role both as practitioners and as individuals, within a process of civic growth. In pedagogical terms, such outcomes reveal the potential of action learning as a training device for future professionals, who become through it more attentive and responsible, and able to critically understand social and urban phenomena”

Most of the projects developed focused on small interventions, like public and abandonment spaces, for their urban regeneration with the participation of local organizations and residents. Moreover, these interventions are capable of creating environments that supports social practices, changing behavior, and new uses to achieve a better quality of urban spaces.



Off Campus space at San Siro neighborhood. Source: images from author's personal archive, 2022.



Caffè San Siro: Periferie? Chiamiamole con il loro nome

A cura di **Francesca Cognetti**, **Paolo Grassi** e **Stefano Pontiggia**, all'interno del gruppo **Mapping San Siro - POLIM**

Ma ancora sempre parliamo di periferie? Questo servizio è ancora utile per mettere in evidenza le criticità di aree urbane sempre più estese per essere parlate e colte. Con un solo "ingegnere" affacciato e dibattito politico non fanno neppure il minimo, la cartografia quotidiana sembra da tempo non essere più disponibile e a un livello qualitativo che non consenta di discutere gli effetti urbanistici e spaziali del "Periferie" secondo una parola teoretica, da mappare con il cuore.

Abbiamo organizzato un ciclo di incontri per leggere sul territorio le discussioni, partendo da questo sito web di riferimento, di quanto riguarda le città. "Periferie" è un termine parlatissimo che sembra non avere mai cessato di esistere, ma che è sempre più difficile da usare, perché il suo significato è sempre più ambiguo e sfocato. Abbiamo alcuni possibili percorsi di discussione e di confronto con gli operatori delle istituzioni, e soprattutto le questioni della loro rappresentazione. Un quarto incontro è una giornata, gratuita e aperta, su un territorio che non cessa di discutere.



programma :

16 dicembre 2020 | 18⁰⁰

Inquadrare
 "Il Quinto Rapporto annuale di Urban@t. Politiche urbane per le periferie", a cura di **Stefano Pontiggia**, **Paolo Grassi** e **Francesca Cognetti**

Giovani **Laura** (Università degli Studi di Milano) **Francesca** (Università di Milano) **Giada** (Università di Milano) **Stefano** (Università di Milano) **Paolo** (Università di Milano) **Francesca** (Università di Milano) **Stefano** (Università di Milano) **Paolo** (Università di Milano) **Francesca** (Università di Milano)

13 gennaio 2021 | 18⁰⁰

Investigare
 "Urban@t. Politiche urbane per le periferie", a cura di **Stefano Pontiggia**, **Paolo Grassi** e **Francesca Cognetti**

Carlo (Università di Milano) **Stefano** (Università di Milano) **Paolo** (Università di Milano) **Francesca** (Università di Milano) **Stefano** (Università di Milano) **Paolo** (Università di Milano) **Francesca** (Università di Milano)

18 febbraio 2021 | 18⁰⁰

Attivare
 "Periferie del cambiamento. Traitorie di rigenerazione in magazzini a Milano", a cura di **Francesca Cognetti**, **Paolo Grassi** e **Stefano Pontiggia**

Francesca (Università di Milano) **Paolo** (Università di Milano) **Stefano** (Università di Milano) **Paolo** (Università di Milano) **Francesca** (Università di Milano) **Stefano** (Università di Milano) **Paolo** (Università di Milano) **Francesca** (Università di Milano)

18 marzo 2021 | 18⁰⁰

Narrare
 "Quartieri. Viaggio al centro delle periferie italiane", a cura di **Adriano Cappelletti** e **Giada Peterle**

Adriano (Università di Milano) **Giada** (Università di Milano) **Adriano** (Università di Milano) **Giada** (Università di Milano) **Adriano** (Università di Milano) **Giada** (Università di Milano)

18 marzo 2021

Programma :

18⁰⁰

Relazione

Adriano Cappelletti
 Università di Milano

18⁰⁰

Discussioni

Adriano Cappelletti
 Università di Milano

Giada Peterle
 Università di Milano

18⁰⁰

Discussioni

Adriano Cappelletti
 Università di Milano

18⁰⁰

Discussioni

Adriano Cappelletti
 Università di Milano

Attivare

"Periferie del cambiamento. Traitorie di rigenerazione in magazzini a Milano", a cura di **Francesca Cognetti**, **Paolo Grassi** e **Stefano Pontiggia**

18 Febbraio 2021

Il titolo della pagina Facebook di Mapping San Siro: "Periferie del cambiamento"

18⁰⁰ Relazione **Francesca Cognetti** Università di Milano **Paolo Grassi** Università di Milano **Stefano Pontiggia** Università di Milano

Incontro con **Francesca Cognetti**, **Paolo Grassi** e **Stefano Pontiggia** all'interno del gruppo **Mapping San Siro - POLIM**

18⁰⁰ Relazione **Francesca Cognetti** Università di Milano **Paolo Grassi** Università di Milano **Stefano Pontiggia** Università di Milano

Inquadrare

"Il Quinto Rapporto annuale di Urban@t. Politiche urbane per le periferie", a cura di **Stefano Pontiggia**, **Paolo Grassi** e **Francesca Cognetti**

16 Dicembre 2020

18⁰⁰ Relazione **Stefano Pontiggia** Università di Milano **Paolo Grassi** Università di Milano **Francesca Cognetti** Università di Milano

Inquadrare

"Il Quinto Rapporto annuale di Urban@t. Politiche urbane per le periferie", a cura di **Stefano Pontiggia**, **Paolo Grassi** e **Francesca Cognetti**

18⁰⁰

18⁰⁰ Relazione **Stefano Pontiggia** Università di Milano **Paolo Grassi** Università di Milano **Francesca Cognetti** Università di Milano

Inquadrare

"Il Quinto Rapporto annuale di Urban@t. Politiche urbane per le periferie", a cura di **Stefano Pontiggia**, **Paolo Grassi** e **Francesca Cognetti**

18⁰⁰

18⁰⁰ Relazione **Stefano Pontiggia** Università di Milano **Paolo Grassi** Università di Milano **Francesca Cognetti** Università di Milano

Off Campus workshops, cultural, artistic and social activities calls. Source: images from author's personal archive, 2020-21.

Sabato 26.09

FUORI CORTILE

Lo spazio comune
 Progetti per micro-spazi, azione locale e attivazione di comunità

h 10:30 - 13:30

Apertura lavori
 Stefania Cappelletti, Stefania Cappelletti, Stefania Cappelletti, Stefania Cappelletti

Spettacolo per indagare lo spazio
 Stefania Cappelletti, Stefania Cappelletti, Stefania Cappelletti, Stefania Cappelletti

L'arte per il progetto locale
 Stefania Cappelletti, Stefania Cappelletti, Stefania Cappelletti, Stefania Cappelletti

Riparare l'apoteosi dell'architettura
 Stefania Cappelletti, Stefania Cappelletti, Stefania Cappelletti, Stefania Cappelletti

Guardare al progetto per promuovere politiche
 Stefania Cappelletti, Stefania Cappelletti, Stefania Cappelletti, Stefania Cappelletti

Proiettare la rigenerazione urbana
 Stefania Cappelletti, Stefania Cappelletti, Stefania Cappelletti, Stefania Cappelletti

Il festival di Cortile Spettacolare: eventi! dentro e fuori i cortili di via Abbiati e delle scuole del quartiere San Siro

h 15:00 - 17:00

Fare spazio al quartiere, nuovi luoghi per San Siro
 Un percorso per raccontare il quartiere e i suoi nuovi spazi

h 17:00 - 18:30

Inaugurazione del Trabucco Gigante

Reading di apertura
 Stefania Cappelletti, Stefania Cappelletti, Stefania Cappelletti, Stefania Cappelletti

Raccontare a più voci
 Stefania Cappelletti, Stefania Cappelletti, Stefania Cappelletti, Stefania Cappelletti

Caffè San Siro: Periferie? Chiamiamole con il loro nome

Here below, two examples of interventions developed to highlight the social approach, the urban regeneration, and the co-design activities are presented:

a) Via Gigante: street front and courtyard redesign

The Off Campus space from the Politecnico di Milano was provided by the Regional Agency for Public Housing of Lombardy (ALER) and is located at via Gigante in the neighborhood of San Siro.

The idea of this project was to redesign empty spaces in the neighborhood as a possibility to provide spaces for new uses, and new activities and to recognize transformations of the public spaces.

This project was developed with an interdisciplinary approach together with The West Road Project (WRP)⁷³ La Strada dell'Ovest, and was conceived as a participatory laboratory between the university and the inhabitants, with the aim to share and care for common places.

Fig. 13 is a diagram of the project's conception and objectives.

⁷³ The West Road Project (WRP) was developed to activate networks and public spaces of the Milanese periphery and it was supported by PoliSocial award 2017 per le periferie by 5x1000 (a donation system to support students and researchers of Politecnico di Milano. For more information: <https://www.dona.polimi.it/>) of Politecnico di Milano. The WRP is based on a research-by-design project and aims to promote active citizen engagement through the development of interventions to improve the use and shape of public spaces.

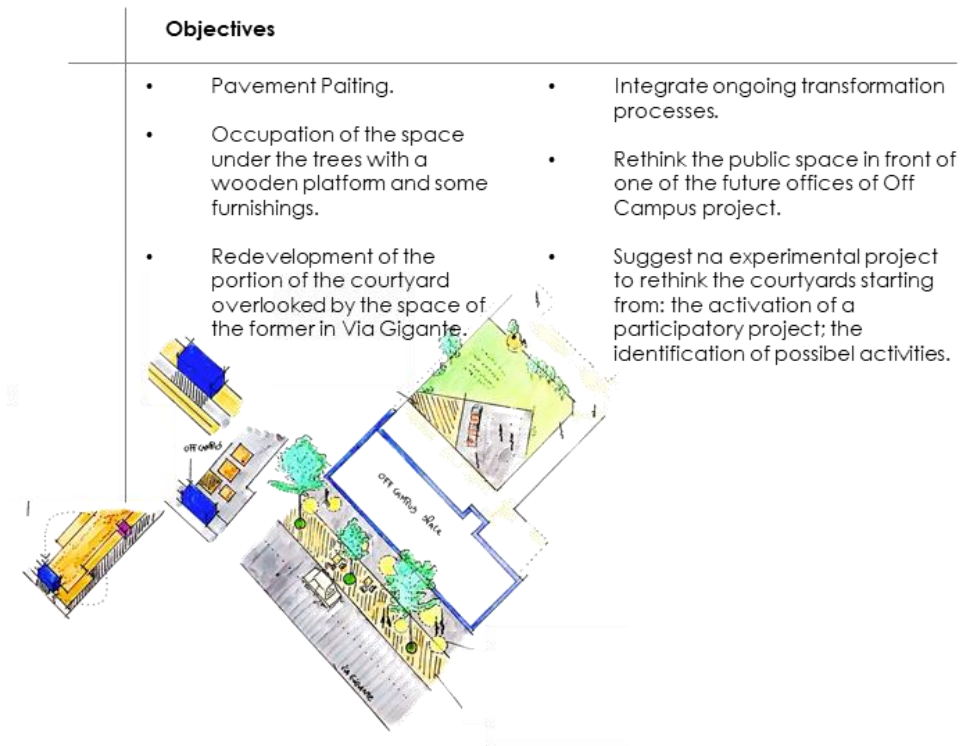


Fig. 13| Diagram of the project's conception. Source: image re-developed by the author from a personal archive, 2023.

b) Via Quarti: the Park-Street

The West Road Project (WRP) La Strada dell'Ovest, Via Quarti⁷⁴: the Park-Street design was realized working with local and institutional stakeholders in a participatory co-design process involving the inhabitants and the third-sector associations from the neighborhood.

Furthermore, the main aim of this project was to provide a reconnection and to improve the quality of life in public spaces between the neighborhood and the 'Parco delle Cave'.

⁷⁴ Via Quarti is located in a suburban area close to the 'Parco delle Cave' and it is a social housing complex with seven towers, built in the 1980s. It is composed of 450 families and 1,100 inhabitants considered as a low-income and fragile population with aspects of illegality.

Fig. 14 is a diagram of the intervention concepts of the project, the actors involved, and technical, social, environmental, and participatory approaches.

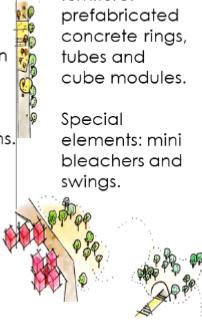

Intervention	Actors	Technical Approach	Social and Environmental Approach	Working Together Participatory Approach
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Transformation in the back of the street of Via Quarti, which divide the neighborhood in two leads of the park. The development of new colorful surfaces and new green space to give a new meaning for the people who lives in Via Quarti. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Local actors, Institutional actors. Project participation with the inhabitants and local organizations. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Development of Public furniture: prefabricated concrete rings, tubes and cube modules. Special elements: mini bleachers and swings. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Comfort quality with green space. Creation of living common spaces for the community. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A co-project pathway within the local inhabitants of Via Quarti. Presentation of international and milanese case studies to provide possible scenarios of transformation and hypotese of share project

Fig. 14 | Diagram Project’s approach and concepts. Source: image re-developed by the author from a personal archive, 2023. West Road Project (WRP) La Strada dell’Ovest, material accessed at Off Campus space, 2019.

It is important to emphasize that there are still social, environmental and economic challenges to be faced, and despite the lack of more general political and institutional support, the role of the university in these local communities can indeed provide a positive impact, to give them a voice and the possibility that things can change.

In addition, there is an important aspect to be highlighted that is, the role of universities as civic and social agents in dealing with issues of urban regeneration and economic development. It can offer opportunities for empowered social actors and universities as communicators and bridges within communities in the co-production of knowledge and the improvement of academic skills.

“We can contribute to urban regeneration and inclusive cities by underling this idea of working close to the territory and people. Usually, when you talk about urban regeneration, you talk about big projects in abandoned areas; however, here we also do urban regeneration, but in a different perspective, by considering what the territory can express” (Grassi, 2021)⁷⁵.

The main outcomes of the Mapping San Siro (MSS) project

The analysis of MSS was very relevant, independent of the social aspect; the Off Campus space can also be considered a living lab while being closer to the residents, understanding their needs and the dynamics of everyday life in the neighborhood. Therefore, as a living lab, it reinforces the importance of innovative educational processes for students to develop new skills and competencies and to model their critical thinking about a fragile local community in a marginal context.

From the personal point of view of this author, the importance of this social approach also emphasizes that the university can indeed play an essential role as an agent of change. Therefore, it should also be emphasized that the development of mutual learning between the university and the community is very relevant to induce the building of networks (a refreshing approach of MSS) and of trust among local organizations, institutions, and residents.

Moreover, in the fieldwork and interviews carried out, the participation and engagement of researchers, professors, and students was of utmost importance for the project. Furthermore, the Off Campus space is a ‘window’ to the neighborhood. Its physical space can not only offer the

⁷⁵ From the interview with Paolo Grassi, anthropologist, and research fellow at DASTU Politecnico di Milano made 18/11/21 as a research tool.

feeling of belonging to the community but can also work as, a living lab of experiences to deal with changes in residents' behaviors through cultural and artistic events with small urban interventions in the neighborhood's public spaces.

In spite of the already mentioned fragile aspects of the neighborhood concerning territorial issues, such as social exclusion, poverty, and urban decay, it is essential to highlight that the local network also provides a legal help desk and legality education. This aspect is another alternative to draw residents' attention to the Off Campus space, as sometimes it is easier to understand how legal work can be more effective than a urban intervention.

In addition, the interdisciplinarity approach among architects, urban planners, and anthropologists adds critical value to the activities developed for the MSS project. On one side, the anthropologists' perspective allows a better understanding of people's behavior. On the other side, the view of architects and urban planners provides the technical skills for urban regeneration and improvement of quality of life in the neighborhood.

However, there is still a challenge: measuring the social approach and how the projects developed can positively impact the resident's well-being and the community. Based on the comments above, the universities should be more inclusive within their fields, offering more opportunities for students to get involved with projects and activities and be more open to an interdisciplinary approach.

In short, having the opportunity to experiment with the Off Campus space and investigate the MSS project effectively added an important value to this research. For example, it provided a better understanding of the potential social role of universities in building civic awareness and inducing critical thinking when dealing with fragile local communities.

Fig. 15 is a diagram of the main aspects, features, and challenges of the Mapping San Siro (MSS) project.



Mapping San Siro (MSS) project	
Aspects and Features 	Challenges 
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A Living Lab approach – Off Campus, Communities • Civic approach • Interdisciplinarity approach • Communication approach • Participatory approach • Innovative educational approach • Cultural and artistic activities (workshops, caffè San Siro) • Mutual learning and development of new skills • Building Networks with local actors, residents and organizations • Collaborative work • Action and Responsible research • Critical thinking (given a new interpretation to fragility aspects based on communities in marginal context) • Urban Regeneration 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Give a voice to the local community. • Building relationship of trust with residents. • How to change the perspective of residents that things can change. • On how to communicate and explain the work of the university to the community. • To be recognized (inside and outside of academia). • To receive more Financial and Institutional support. • To provide permanent researchers and research grants. • On how to continue with the activities during Covid-19. • On how to open the Off Campus space for more projects and students to be more involved. • On the possibility of replicating in different environments.

Fig. 15 | Diagram of the main aspects of the MSS project. Source: developed by the author, 2023.

5.2.1 Soholab Project

Regarding the context of the MSS project, it is also important to highlight that it is also part of the SohoLab⁷⁶ project, which is an interdisciplinary and international partnership between researchers, city partners, non-profit organizations, housing professionals, and architects. The project addresses issues of socio-spatial exclusion, through the ‘living lab’ approach and actions with active actors in the regeneration of large housing projects.

The project was developed with an innovative Urban Living Labs (ULL) approach, which aims to “mobilize the socially innovative potential of co-productive and co-design approaches for the urban regeneration of social housing estates, focusing on the priority themes of ‘social and spatial segregation and ‘social innovation’ in the EU’s Urban Agenda (EU, 2014-2020)” (Maranghi et al., 2020: 7)⁷⁷.

The ULL approach in this project is an open, collaborative, and participatory environment for the development of new tools and methods to achieve better and more effective urban policies and interventions aimed to address the socioeconomic issues of fragile populations. In this sense, the main objective is based on research and action practices to identify which resources the ULL could apply to support the participatory regeneration of large-scale social housing conditions.

Thus, it is important to highlight that the ULL approach was applied in different contexts, related to the housing planning system, urban regeneration, and well-being. For example, the French context is made up of public interventions and participatory tools to renovate social housing conditions on a large scale. The Italian context stands out for the lack of public interventions, but at the same time also for the participatory approach

⁷⁶ It was developed between 2017 to 2020 in partnership with three research units: Bruxelles: Cosmopolis Centre for Urban Research, Vrije Universiteit Brussel, Peterbos Park; Paris: Architecture Urbanisme Société: Savoirs Enseignement Recherche, CNRS 3329, ParisLab; and Milan: Department of Architecture and Urban Studies (DASU), Politecnico di Milano, Mapping San Siro (MSS).

⁷⁷ Maranghi, E., Cognetti, F., Ryckewaert, M., Aernouts, N., Mosseray, J., Lefrançois, D., Wachter, S. and Labied, N. (2020). 5 themes from urban living lab experiences in large-scale social housing estates, Brussels: Soholab. For more information: www.soholab.org (2022).

of local networks and inhabitants to promote bottom-up actions. Finally, the Belgian case is a compromise between the two contexts.

Additionally, the framework of the SohoLab project highlights the aspect of urban regeneration, which aims to explore the territory's resources and aspirations to improve local development. Moreover, in this project, there is a strong approach to the social relationship between the different actors and the possibility of exploring the capacity for reflection, critical thinking, and transformative action by training true actors of change as knowledge co-producers in urban development.

5.2.2 PoliSocial Program

To implement the social approach, the Politecnico di Milano has adapted a new vision, which connects the university with the city and society based on the idea that the university can be the leader in addressing social changes by creating new collective learning environments.

Moreover, the university can play an important role in sharing knowledge, expertise, and resources to achieve real changes in society.

The Polisocial program, previously mentioned was launched in 2012 in collaboration between the Politecnico di Milano and Fondazione Politecnico di Milano, and it can be considered one of the first public engagement academic programs in the Italian context.

The main aim of this program is to build a new way of applying knowledge by combining social engagement and responsibility with teaching and research.

It promotes a diverse range of activities such as teaching-in-the-field initiative, cooperation and development, polisocial award, public engagement, and the Off Campus initiative.

Tab. 12 describes the project activities⁷⁸.

⁷⁸ Content extracted from: <http://www.polisocial.polimi.it/en/home-en/>
<http://www.polisocial.polimi.it/en/projects/> <http://www.polisocial.polimi.it/en/off-campus-3/> (2022).

Polisocial activities

Teaching-in-the-field: The Teaching in the Field agenda promotes interaction between Politecnico's educational mission and local communities, in order to establish a synergy between learning, action and field experience (Polisocial, 2022).

Cooperation and development: As regards 'Cooperation and Development', Polisocial encourages sustainable and equitable development practices internationally, especially in local contexts, while promoting an interdisciplinary culture of cooperation, social innovation and responsibility (Polisocial, 2022).

Polisocial award: The 'Polisocial Award' contest supports society-oriented research at the Politecnico di Milano. The projects are financed through the 5×1000 fund raising mechanism. (Polisocial, 2022).

Public engagement: Create a bridge between the university and the community in order to deal with social challenges.

Off Campus: OFF CAMPUS | Il Cantiere per le Periferie is an initiative promoted by Polisocial with the aim of strengthening the presence of Politecnico in the city of Milan. The underlying concept is that of a more engaged University, targeting social challenges and closer to neighborhoods and communities (Polisocial, 2022).

Within the Off Campus spaces, teachers, researchers and students are engaged in the following activities: innovative learning, focused on work in real contexts as a means to develop new skills; responsible research, seeking a greater inclusiveness of knowledge production processes; co-designing with local stakeholders, to implement projects with a positive impact on the community. Local services are also offered, along with a cultural and educational agenda aimed at communities nearby (Polisocial, 2022).

Tab. 12 | Description of Polisocial program activities. Source: table developed by the author, 2023.

5.3 Learning from University Networks's activities: WC2 University Network

The WC2 University Network will emphasize how university networks bring together institutions, students, and faculty to develop better alternatives to urban issues. Hence, it is possible to highlight the importance of these networks in promoting the work of universities and as a vehicle of communication between institutions and society.

In addition, this case analysis briefly describes another perception of engaging activities that universities can apply as an example of changing behavior on traditional educational practices. Although the results and the time project's development are preliminary regarding civic engagement approach, the main goal is to provide the necessary content to reflect what it can make to improve the relationship between universities and society.

The WC2 University Network

This case is part of collaborative research within FAUUSP⁷⁹ to collect data from the WC2 Summer Symposium Brazil and to understand a different perspective of universities' social approach to the development of projects connected with society and especially, with local fragile communities.

“WC2 aims to advance understanding and recognition of the role of universities in world cities and issues that are of common interest to them, both locally and internationally. The flow of staff, students, and information domestically and across borders contributes to a more comprehensive

⁷⁹ The collaborative research with FAUUSP and the case study analysis were referenced based on the Master of Science' dissertation developed by the author from 2016 to 2018. WC2 University Network was chosen for its environmental and social approach to urban issues in São Paulo, focusing on the fragile local community of São Remo.

understanding of world cities, their universities, and their potential to impact and aid each other” (WC2)⁸⁰.

The WC2 World Cities World Class University Network is a university network established in September 2010 by the City University London, with the primary objective of bringing together universities located in the heart of the main cities of the world to address cultural, environmental, and political issues of common interest to the cities of the world. However, the network concluded its activities in 2021.

Moreover, this network acted as a communication vehicle between universities, local governments, and administrative communities. The following stand out as the main participants, among other: City, University of London, City University of New York (CUNY), Tongji University, Ryerson University, Peter the Great St. Petersburg Polytechnic University, Technische Universität Berlin (TUB), Universidad Autónoma Metropolitana (UAM), University of São Paulo (USP) and RMIT University.

The importance of promoting quality of life within universities and their cities was investigated through, six action themes. These themes aim to discuss and evaluate, through goals and objectives, the urban aspects in which universities are inserted.

Tab. 13 list and describe the six themes⁸¹: cybersecurity; business; transport; global health; knowledge, culture, and urban affairs; and the eco-campus theme as the main focus.

⁸⁰ Source: <https://wc2network.org/about/> (2022).

⁸¹ Source: <https://wc2network.org/themes/> (2022).

Six Themes

Cybersecurity: this is an emerging and growing area of threat as the way we live and work in cities transitions online.

Business: business is one of the crucial topics in World Cities and therefore a focus area for research within universities.

Transport: transport is at the heart of development of world cities, as there are advantages in carrying out economic activities in proximity (often called “economies of agglomeration”).

Global health: health care throughout the world is under extreme pressure to reorganize and improve outcomes for populations with increased demand.

Knowledge, culture and urban affairs: world cities act as global cultural incubators. They are characterized to a significant extent by the particular mix they achieve between different local cultural activities.

Eco-campus: the industrial world has reached a point in its development where the undisciplined exploitation of natural resources and the predominant generation of energy.

The goal of the Eco-campus group of WC2, in its commitment to addressing the global issue of environment management and the challenges of climate change, is to develop the “Zero Emissions Urban University Model.”

Tab. 13 | Six Themes. Source: table developed by the author, 2023.

To put into practice the discussion of the six actions themes, symposiums and, large annual meetings, were held in different locations, involving the cities of member university develop solutions for the city’s urban issues.

The exciting aspect of these symposiums was their interdisciplinary approach gather together students and professors from all around the world, and providing an ideal environment for innovating and improving the educational process and to develop participants’ critical thinking on the issues facing cities. Moreover, the host university and the other participant

universities provided scholarships for Master of Science and PhD programs to participate.

Tab. 14 lists and describes the Symposiums held⁸²: the 2016 Berlin Symposium, the 2017 Sao Paulo Symposium, the 2018 Toronto Symposium, the 2019 St. Petersburg Symposium, the 2020 Virtual Programmes, and the 2021 Virtual Symposium: Connecting Global Cities.

⁸² Source: <https://wc2network.org/activities/> (2022).

Symposiums

2016 Berlin Symposium: hosted by the Technische Universität Berlin, the 2016 Symposium brought together 140 participants (70 students and 70 staff) from 10 member universities.

2017 Sao Paulo Symposium: hosted by the University of São Paulo, took place from 14-18 August. Representatives from WC2 members around the world gathered to discuss urban regeneration and how to build an environmental city.

2018 Toronto Symposium: hosted by Ryerson University, it took place in August 2018 in Toronto, Canada. Representatives from WC2 members around the world gathered to discuss the theme of 'Migration, the City and the University'.

2019 St. Petersburg Symposium: this successful Symposium was hosted by Peter the Great St Petersburg Polytechnic University from 29 July- 2 August 2019, with the overarching theme of 'Smart Cities and Digital Society.' The timing co-incided with the University's 120 year anniversary celebrations.

2020 Virtual Programmes: WC2 took the decision to postpone the 2020 Symposium due to Covid-19 instead hosting a series of open webinars on the WC2 themes. The first Urban Futures virtual event took place in October 2020 on the theme of Cybersecurity. The next virtual event will take place on 26 May 2021 on the theme of Transport.

2021 Virtual Symposium: Connecting Global Cities: the 2021 Symposium was hosted virtually by RMIT University from 9 August – 12 August 2021. Faculty, students, staff and the broader community gathered online throughout the week to explore topics related to the overarching theme of 'Connecting Global Cities'.

"The network provides an exciting platform for leading universities from around the world" (Professor Stanton Newman, former chair of the wc2 network)⁸³.

Among the various Symposiums held, the 2017 São Paulo Summer Symposium was chosen to be described to highlight a different perspective on the social approach of universities on the development of projects for a fragile local community in the search for urban regeneration. Moreover, it connects with the aims of the previously presented networks and organizations to promote the work of universities.

5.3.1 2017 São Paulo Summer Symposium: design proposals for a community center

The Summer Symposium in São Paulo had the theme: Building the Environmental City: the case of São Paulo. It, addressed urban issues related to the city of São Paulo, debating its problems and possible solutions considering social, economic, and environmental aspects. Based on these references, the Eco-Campus theme determined its work program based on the designing of a 'Community Center for the São Remo community (favela)⁸⁴ in the city of São Paulo.

This community occupies one of the lands belonging to the university town, but it has no connection with the University. Therefore, the development of the project could consider the possible integration or non-integration between the community and the university.

Moreover, the proposal provided participants with a broader approach to the project, encompassing not only issues related to the development of

⁸³ Source: <https://wc2network.org/> (2022).

⁸⁴ In 1960, the São Remo community was born due to the construction of the University of São Paulo (USP) and is located on the borders of the Butantã and Rio Pequeno neighborhoods in the city of São Paulo. The community has about 11,000 residents and some of them worked to the construction of the University and remained there after its completion.

sustainable buildings, but also social and cultural issues present in the local community.

Two significant challenges were initially identified for the development of the project. The first one⁸⁵ was the participants' understanding of the needs of people living in the community, considering what the city provides and makes available in terms of infrastructure, transport, and services in general.

Furthermore, this community can be considered a fragile territory due to already existing problems such as, poverty, social exclusion, and lack of infrastructure, accessibility, water, public spaces, indoor housing conditions, and quality of life.

The second challenge was a more detailed study of the terrain's topography, which led to different approaches regarding the variations of contour lines present in the location. The topography conditions can also be considered a fragile aspect of this community because they have led to illegal and inadequate construction of housing, with periodic sliding of inhabited hills.

During the entire week of the Summer Symposium, lectures and readings were presented that helped in the development and conception of the projects developed by each group of Master of Science and Ph.D. students and professors from different research fields. The five projects designed are briefly described below.

a) Proposal 1 | Portico of Favela São Remo – USP

Initially, the project this group developed had its concept based on studies of connections, accesses, and permeability, seeking to connect the existing constructions in the surroundings and promote the integration of the community with the university.

Based on the study of the land's topography, one of the focuses for the design of the project was defining the different levels of access to the building, thus bringing the community into the project.

⁸⁵ The students didn't have direct contact with the residents. It was possible only to visit from outside the community site.

Therefore, essential concepts were incorporated into the project, such as energy, water, accessibility, economy, environment, and innovation. An attempt was made to transfer the knowledge of these concepts to the community, thus also contemplating the social approach in the proposal of the community center.

Fig. 16 shows the design concept of The Portico da Favela São Remo – USP project⁸⁶, the site plan, and the perspective.

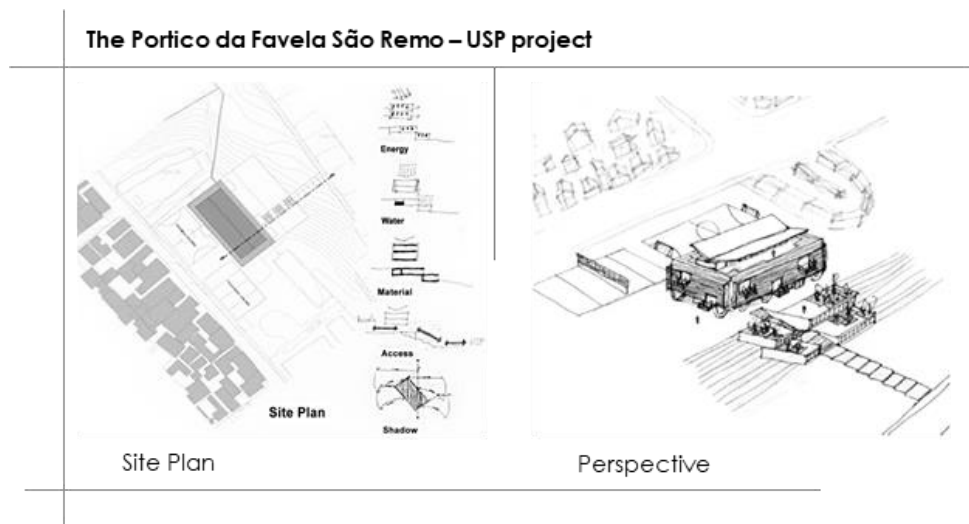


Fig. 16 | Design concept. Source: imagine developed by the group and reproduced by the author, 2023.

b) Proposal 2 | Bridging Border Communities: the Case of Jardim São Remo Favela

The project developed by this group approached the concepts of community integration with the University, exploring the existing topography in order to make this connection.

For the development of the project, based on the topography study, different forms of access and use were created for each level of the

⁸⁶ All images were provided by material collected at FAUUSP.

community center. Therefore, fundamental studies of passive conditions of energy, such as sunlight and natural ventilation, and the use of local materials exemplified by ceramic blocks, were assigned to the project.

Another critical point to highlight was the project's social aspect, which had to take into account the community's basic needs, such as basic infrastructure, transportation, and access to general and technological knowledge, among others.

Fig. 17 shows the design concept of The Bridge between Border Communities: The Case of Favela Jardim São Remo project, the site plan, and the perspective.



Fig. 17 | Design concept. Source: imagine developed by the group and reproduced by the author, 2023.

c) Proposal 3 | San Remo Community Center

The project developed by this group for a community center also worked on concepts linked to the land's topography, determining the structuring of the building in four access levels as a starting point.

Therefore, environmental and sustainable ideas were also incorporated into the project, such as using solar panels to capture energy, studies of sunlight and natural ventilation, taking advantage of cross ventilation within the environments and using awnings and brises as a form of sun protection.

Moreover, the introduction of a bicycle rack and the creation of a local vegetable garden highlight the social aspects of the project aimed to connect within the community center.

Fig. 18 shows the design concept of The San Remo Community Center project, the site plan, and the perspective.

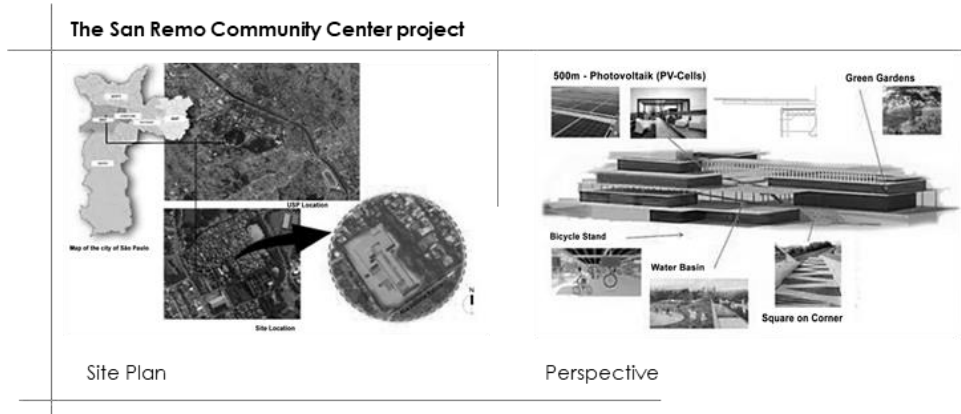


Fig. 18 | Design concept. Source: imagine developed by the group and reproduced by the author, 2023.

d) Proposal 4 | Bela Favela

The project developed by this group proposed the community center to be designed as an extension of the community itself. One of the architectural characteristics of the project was that it brought a bit of the concept of the favela into the building, configuring it as a set of multiple buildings and not just a single installation. It allowed for more excellent permeability through the block and facilities, as well as the use of raised floors, thus accentuating this permeability and the lightness of the buildings.

Therefore, encompassing the environmental and sustainable part of the project, studies of sunlight and natural ventilation were carried out, as well as the use of sunshades, panels, and materials that allowed thermal comfort of the buildings.

Moreover, the inclusion and use of technological tools to improve access and communication between community residents sought to address the social issue of the project.

Fig. 19 shows the design concept of The Bela Favela project, the site plan, and the perspective.

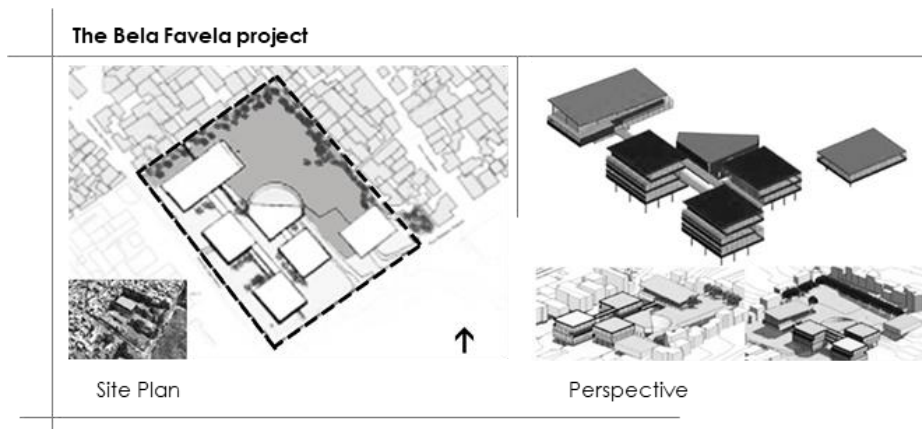


Fig. 19 | Design concept. Source: imagine developed by the group and reproduced by the author, 2023.

e) Proposal 5 | Beco Flow

The project developed by this group had as its starting point the integration of the community within the community center through studies of the topography of the land, thus defining the accesses and connections between the buildings. One of the concepts to be developed the new building was fragmentation into several blocks/modules by incorporating the characteristics of the houses in the community.

Furthermore, encompassing the environmental part, studies of sunlight and natural ventilation were carried out, through hollow elements, also known as cobogós and pallets. Such factors also insert characteristics of the local culture into the project. Moreover, workshops and knowledge about environmental education for residents contributed to the social aspect of the project.

Fig. 20 shows the design concept of The Beco Flow project, the site plan, and the perspective.

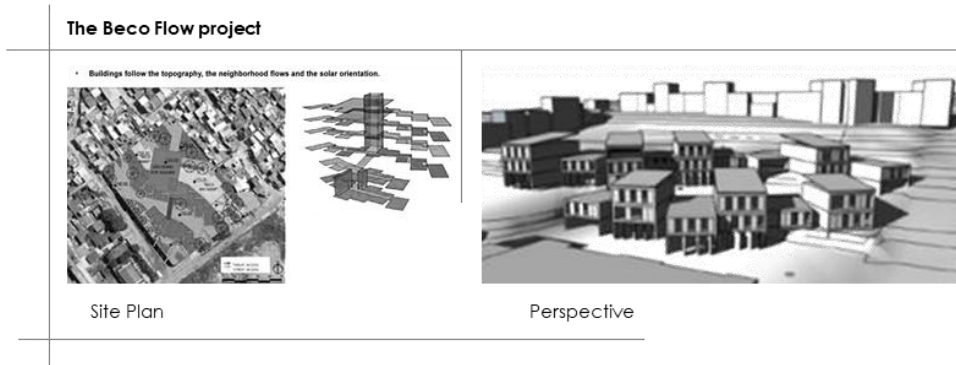


Fig. 20 | Design concept. Source: imagine developed by the group and reproduced by the author, 2023.

The main outcomes of the WC2 University Network

The WC2 University Network provides engaging environments involving students, professors, and local governments to conceive ideas and develop projects for sustainable cities.

The WC2 Summer Symposium São Paulo proposed creating a community center for the San Remo community. The project allowed students to elaborate critical thinking about a “favela,” a different reality of a typical housing condition in Brazil.

Therefore, a challenge that this project faced was finding an alternative to improve the interrelationship between this community and the university, as both are isolated environments surrounded by walls.

Different ideas and perceptions about the needs of this community came out. In this sense, and although this symposium was more focused on the sustainable approach, the social aspect was considered as well because of the necessity to understand the fragile condition of the community, due to the lack of basic infrastructure, access to water and sanitation, social exclusion,

lack of public spaces and lack of suitable indoor and outdoor housing conditions.

Moreover, in this case, the topography could also be considered as a fragile aspect, as the illegal and inadequate housing conditions and occupation are vulnerable to periodic sliding of inhabited hills in the rainy season. Therefore, this uncertainty and vulnerable environmental conditions are critical urban issues of these fragile territories, which are normally considered “places that do not matter” in the city’s urban planning.

It is worthy of mention a common feature of the favelas in Brazil. These communities (favelas) are in central urban areas and connected to wealthy neighborhoods, a situation that characterizes them in the context of the contemporary peripheral regions of the city.

In this regard, providing an opportunity for students worldwide to think together about different urban regeneration solutions and engage with society by acting as agents of urban change is an effective way to create civic awareness.

Once again, it is interesting to emphasize the actions and roles of these networks, which provide opportunities to promote the work of universities. Through granting scholarships, the networks also provide students participating in these symposiums to act as potential connectors among institutions, organizations, universities, and local governments.

However, the biggest challenge for these networks and organizations is to continue receiving institutional support. In the case of the WC2 University Network, for instance, its activities closed in 2021 due to the Covid-19 pandemic.

Despite this, the network left a strong legacy of innovative educational processes and an effective contribution to a better future for our communities worldwide.

Fig. 21 is a diagram of the main aspects, features, and challenges of the WC2 University Network.



WC2 University Network 	
Aspects and Features 	Challenges
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A Living Lab approach – Symposiums, Universities • Civic approach • Interdisciplinarity approach • Communication approach • Participatory approach • Innovative educational approach • Mutual learning and development of new skills • Building Networks with local governments, organizations and institutions • Collaborative work • Critical thinking (given a new perspective of the the social approach, regarding the fragile aspects of the community) • Urban Regeneration 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To be recognized (inside and outside the academy). • On how to continue with activities after Covid-19. • On how to leave a legacy. • On how to provide more scholarships for different projects to engage more students. • On how to receive more institutional support. • On how to measure the social impact of these projects and whether they can be replicated in other similar conditions and to understand how they can be evaluated.

Fig. 21 | Diagram of the main aspects of the WC2 University Network. Source: developed by the author, 2023.

5.4 The social approach as a relevant strategy to develop engagement activities within fragile local communities

The main aim of this section was to present case analyses in order to highlight the positive nature of both conceptual and practical aspects involving the links between social responsibility and territorial fragility in the different contexts and perspectives.

The cases' contents was developed following a descriptive and exploratory literature review, data collection, fieldwork, and interviews. In this sense, through the main objectives, activities, and methodologies applied in each case example, it was possible to emphasize the potential role of universities as social agents in urban regeneration.

Although the cases present different perspectives, all of them address a common goal of the interdisciplinary approach combined with an innovative educational process, therefore connecting the university's work with society to induce critical thinking and to conceive better alternatives for the urban issues of local communities.

Furthermore, when connecting research and community engagement, other aspects can be identified like that of being reflexive, developing individual and collective skills and competencies, project design, sharing and listening, as well as the development of processes to support knowledge creation⁸⁷. It is essential to highlight that these engagement activities involve, in addition to participatory co-design in urban interventions, cultural and artistic events, and the induction of networks as a tool to connect the community with organizations, universities, and local institutions.

Based on the previous comments, one may conclude that the social approach can result not only in creating opportunities for students to develop critical thinking and explore curiosity about urban issues but also in a mutual learning and collaborative process based on co-designing, co-producing knowledge, and inducing networks. In this sense, the networking activity is worth mentioning, "also means working to take collective action and build relationships at a supralocal level" (Grassi, 2023: 103).

Fig. 22 shows the common aspects the selected cases presented and related to the social approach, regarding the communities as active agents and universities as social and sustainable anchors.

⁸⁷ Based on: Community engagement in international research is discussed by Aysha Fleming (2022), this material was provided by Professor Gabriele Bammer National Centre for Epidemiology and Population Health ANU College of Health and Medicine The Australian National University from the group of emails shared by the NCCPE community. Source: <https://i2insights.org/2022/07/26/community-engagement-in-international-research/>

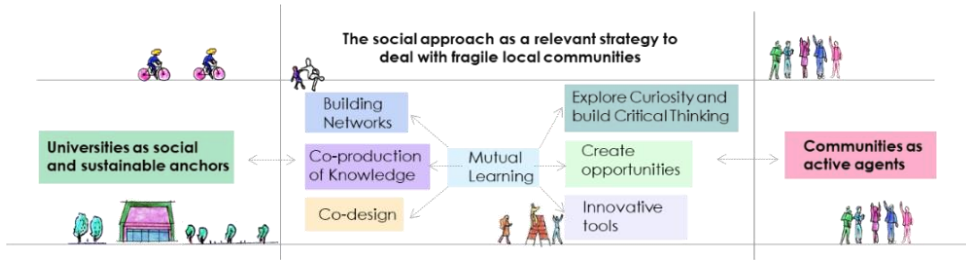


Fig. 22 | The common social project's aspects. Source: image developed by the author, 2023.

Of course, all these cases have challenges to be faced, for instance, the recognition of their importance inside and outside the academia and how to integrate more students, researchers, and professors from different areas. Moreover, universities generally tend to keep strong links with traditional educational practices, and therefore; are not confidence enough to face the social responsibility call to become natural agents of urban change.

In spite of the mentionade challenges, it is essential to reflect on the advantages and necessity of universities to innovate their educational behavior. For instance, they are bringing students and professors together and making the impact of their research more significant to find alternatives in order to design sustainable cities and communities.

Moving to a deeper reflection on the outcomes and perceptions of these case analyses is essential to mention that they present different realities, scales, methodologies, and so on.

In both two cases of MSS and the NoVoid project, it is a more extensive scale of territory considering communities and their conditions. These examples also reinforce collaborative research with different actors: students, professors, local governments, local organizations, residents, and institutions.

It also leads to different kinds of living labs to share ideas and experiences. One goes beyond the boundaries of university campuses, meaning physically, and the other is open to a broader communication approach that

leads to social interaction environments. None comes at first with a specific design architectural project to be applied in a particular site. Still instead, they provide an opportunity to reflect in a natural context on co-design and co-create urban regeneration alternatives based to mitigate fragile aspects in local communities.

All of these are possible because they persist in an innovative educational practice, which is a mix of mapping technologies and more simple activities to understand how to interact with other actors.

However, these differ from the kind of projects and ideas received at a first site recognition of local institutions and sometimes even inside the university. In addition, more financial support and engagement opportunities must be provided to students and professors.

The university plays an essential social role when building networks among institutions, stakeholders, local organizations, and the community. Nevertheless, at the same time, it is not easy to reach the community and its inhabitants; that is why local organizations are so crucial because they represent the residents' voices most of the time. These two examples show how achieving concrete results takes time and constant reinterpretation of the educational process, collaborative research, and methodology.

From a general perspective, the impact of these projects is positive because they introduce a new way of thinking about the urban problems facing these fragile communities. Still, instead, they induce improved urban policies and the sustainable development of territories.

In the case of the WC2 University Network, it shows that another type of activity, even though a specific architectural design approach defines them, leads to a different perspective of universities providing environments able to put into discussion the urban issues facing society but considering an international opportunity to bring students worldwide to reflect other realities. These networks' importance is crucial to put the work of universities visibly.

However, some only reach it, as universities that participate can only finance small groups of students. Nevertheless, it brings the same idea of the other

two cases, the importance of collaborative research and the social role of universities in building networks among the actors involved.

Finally, what else needs to be added to put these innovative educational processes highlight?

For the future development of these outcomes, it is necessary to approach social indicators as essential validators of how this kind of project positively impacts both the university and the community, in other words, applying more quantitative research and, most relevant, focusing on how students can be affected in their personal research growth.

Hence, as important as quantitative research is to understand how these projects can be used and replicated in different environments and how to mitigate the challenges facing implementing these projects, such as internal institutional support, financial support, and the recognition of its importance among academics.

Fig. 23 is a diagram of the case analysis outcomes.

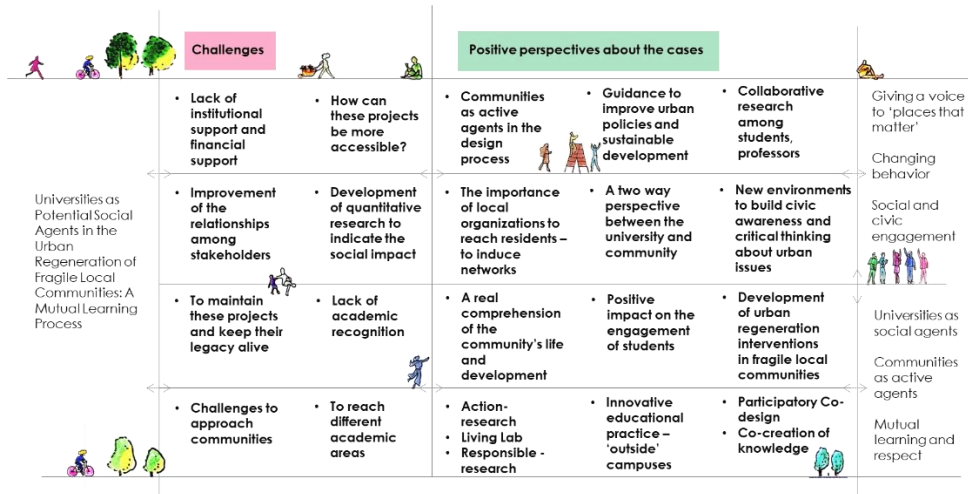


Fig. 23 | Diagram of outcomes. Source: image developed by the author, 2023.

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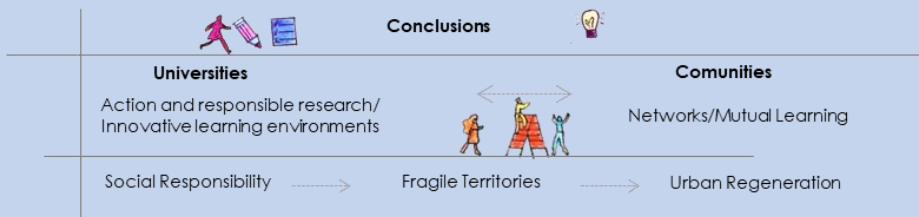
<https://wc2network.org/activities/>

<https://wc2network.org/themes/>

Universities as Potential Social Agents in the Urban Regeneration of Fragile Local
Communities: A Mutual Learning Process

Ph.D. in Urban Planning, Design and Policy

Chapter 6 | Conclusions



The final considerations and futures developments will be presented based on the research question and sub-questions to highlight the importance of exploring the universities as potential social agents of a mutual learning process applied to urban regeneration of fragile local communities.

Universities as Potential Social Agents in the Urban Regeneration of Fragile Local
Communities: A Mutual Learning Process

Ph.D. in Urban Planning, Design and Policy

6.1 Final Considerations

This work was developed during a three-year-long Ph.D. program in Urban Planning, Design and Policy at the Department of Architecture and Urban Studies (DASU) at the Politecnico di Milano.

The theme investigated, the potential role of universities in dealing with local communities of fragile territories to achieve sustainable urban regeneration is too extensive and diversified, and therefore the main goal of this thesis focused on inducing discussion and critical thinking about it, based on gathering and analyzing some fundamental concepts and practical experiences.

It is important to highlight the fundamental conception adopted matches NCCPE⁸⁸ (2022) statement:

“Researchers are encouraged to engage with potential users of their research from the earliest stages – when designing the research and developing the application, though to disseminating the results and communicating the importance of the evidence”.

Thus, this doctoral thesis is a result of a comprehensive study and experience conducted by a systematic process, which included attendance to courses, workshops, and conferences, interviews with researchers and professors, data collection, fieldwork, and an exchange program with FA.Ulisboa.

In addition, the main aspects and propositions were, at a certain level, validated through participation and attendance at conferences and the publication of articles⁸⁹ in journals and proceedings. In particular, the conferences attended were also relevant to understanding how to improve the structure and the methodology of the thesis. These activities were indeed a crucial part of the work because it was possible to receive valuable feedback for complementing the analyses.

Regarding the methodology developed for this research, it was guided by the fundamental question and sub-questions conceived to address the central

⁸⁸ Source: <https://www.publicengagement.ac.uk/do-engagement/funding/pathways-impact> (2022).

⁸⁹ At the end of the text, as annexes, the articles published and submitted will be described.

theme. Then, the conceptualization of the social approach, the framework of fragile territories, the investigation of networks and organizations principles, and the case analyses were the pathway chosen to find answers, as well as to validate the fundamental proposition.

This research highlights how the role of universities is becoming more socially active through promoting the co-production of knowledge and new innovative educational practices combining the engagement of students and communities to build a better society. Such practices are disseminated through “the knowledge of service-learning in higher education in Europe, as an educational approach that enhances students’ civic engagement, brings them closer to different social realities while allowing them to work in a real environment” (EOSLHE, 2022).

It is important to understand the role of universities in social responsibility achievement, “not only as critical educational organizations that impact human society but also by fostering awareness of social responsibility for the younger generations” (Lo et al., 2017: 41; Muijen, 2004).

In this sense, this role can provide new forms of proximity among actors involved by building networks with local organizations, citizens, and institutions, as well as by developing a new approach in the process of teaching and learning to plan cities for social inclusion.

To fulfill this role, universities face challenges in political, cultural, social, economic, and environmental aspects and for this reason, the civic and social role of universities can be recognized as a potential strategy to deal with challenges by serving the public as a dynamic and mutual action. It “presupposes the importance of greater involvement by the public in the design and implementation of collaborative activities and also demands that the faculty draw on their scholarship expertise for the benefit of the public as well as themselves” (Reich 2014: x; Lunsford et al., 2010: 105).

It is important to highlight that the concept of participation has become a relevant aspect, once local communities are playing an important role as active agents that can transform their environment, and social and cultural needs to achieve urban regeneration.

The idea of participation in supporting and transforming citizens and local organizations into active agents of change is a way of providing and creating the necessary proximity for the construction of collaborative research and more importantly in the development of communication networks between the actors involved.

There are still challenges in developing mutual learning, proximity between universities and communities, which is how to better understand and reflect that the role of the university is applied to build relationships and networks with organizations and residents.

One way of creating strong opportunities to develop proximity is the approach of living labs, which provides environments to train the civil capacity as “implies a focus as much on residents and local players as on institutions. All these actors must be put in a position to learn from the local situation, introducing mechanisms that contribute to the redefinition of both the habits and the places of citizenship as well as routines and institutional norms” (Cognetti, 2023: 28).

Moreover, living labs as an environment able to provide alternatives to rethinking new strategies of co-production of knowledge to address sustainability and services in the settings of real-world with a focus on the development of new frameworks “that synthesize their core business or research, teaching, and social responsibility” (Evans et al., 2015: 6).

It is possible to perceive in the case analyses presented in this research that the living lab approach allows, on the one hand, students or the university to learn in a more critical, personal, and sensitive way about the needs of these communities. On the other hand, the community can better understand that university expertise can be recognized through small urban interventions, social activities, and cultural representations.

Although it is not easy to define the social role, it can contribute to a better understanding of how academia can be transformed into a more significant process for providing better learning environments and therefore, as a possible strategy in dealing with the framework of territorial fragility. The social aspect can be considered a relevant tool or way to improve urban policies and achieve more inclusive and sustainable environments.

To help shape the social role of universities, the framework of territorial fragility and the organizations and networks are relevant approaches presented in this research.

On one side, we have the universities and their territories, which in this research are focused on local communities in the urban peripheral context. In this sense, the framework of territorial fragility was presented to highlight how to understand that these communities matter and therefore, how the economic, social, and environmental aspects are important to improve urban policies and provide better alternatives for the urban regeneration of these territories.

It is not easy to define a condition of fragility; however, it is an aspect that provides a necessary reflection on territorial disparity and its condition concerning to socio-spatial issues arising from poverty, security conditions, social segregation, lack of accessibility, and public maintenance. Territorial fragility help to explore “the complex and multiple phenomena that engendered processes of fragilization of the relation between space and society” (Balducci, 2019: 19).

In other words, the territorial fragility approach can help shape the social role of universities, while providing researchers with a critical approach to fragile aspects based on the social aspect, for instance as in the construction of civic awareness of the urban issues facing society, or through the improvement of urban policies and living conditions in these territories.

In this regard, it opens dialogue spaces, seeking feedback from the asocioeconomic system, and exploring the resources and potential of its landscape, culture, and environmental aspects in development policies that achieve economic and social benefits.

On the other side, how it is possible to create connections and recognize that the social role is an important and necessary approach for universities to reinforce their relevance, considering them not only as places that hold knowledge but also as potential connectors between society and its territories?

The main aim of approaching organizations and networks in this research was to highlight the possibility of interaction among universities and local

fragile communities, as well as how to promote the work of universities outside the academic field. Furthermore, it helps to put in evidence that university must be one the agents in the search for a better world, due to its ability to start including social responsibility as a mission to achieve changes in the educational process.

In other words, to arrive at solutions to a real-world problem, the universities must develop actions that connect teaching, learning, and research activities, through reflective and critical thinking, besides serving and creating a relationship with the public, for example, the local communities. Therefore, it highlights how different actors are relevant to work in a collaborative process while proposing changes in the educational process.

It is relevant to point out that once recognizing the importance of its social dimension the universities are creating opportunities to train qualified graduates to become citizens that are more responsible by giving them an opportunity to work close to communities in the development of new skills and to build critical thinking about urban issues.

Moving towards specific conclusions it is important to highlight that social and civic engagement is an approach that motivates universities together with local communities⁹⁰ to develop projects to achieve urban regeneration.

Technically, urban regeneration can be carried out not only through large urban interventions but also as demonstrated by the case analyses, through small urban interventions that facilitate the changing of community behavior once it is easier for them to understand what the territory can express. These interventions can be identified, for instance, in the design of better public spaces, or the development of cultural and social projects exploring the potential of local communities.

⁹⁰ In this case it is specified the local communities, but the social and civic engagement approach also reaches 'the public' in different representatinos, such as organizations, institutions, foundations, and so on.

Regarding fragile territories, universities are indeed instruments for positively impacting urban policies, considering different scales of territories, as well as their economic and environmental conditions.

Through analyzing the cases selected, it was possible to realize how universities may promote social and civic engagement in a mutual learning process by creating innovative educational environments and sharing work with the public.

In the case of Mapping San Siro (MSS), it emphasizes how the development of mutual learning between the university and the community is relevant to induce networks of trust among local organizations, institutions, and residents.

Moreover, the Off Campus space works as a “window” to the neighborhood and the opportunity to go beyond the boundaries of the university campus. Its physical space (also considered a living lab) can offer not only the feeling of belonging to the neighborhood, but as well as, a living lab of experiences to deal with changing residents' behaviors, through cultural and artistic events with small urban interventions in the public spaces of the neighborhood.

The case of the NoVoid project, on one side, it highlights the strong approach of interdisciplinarity, which could provide a proximity between students and professors. On the other side, the strategy of communication with local organizations and communities allowed the development of critical thinking and civic awareness in the face of the challenges of dealing with urban issues.

The case of the WC2 University Network, presents the interesting aspect of the role of these networks as potential connectors, which involves students, professors, and local governments, but also by providing opportunities to promote the work of universities.

Although each case offers different perspectives, all of them present similar aspects when addressing the social approach, for instance, when exploring interdisciplinarity, promoting critical thinking and creating civic awareness.

Furthermore, when connecting research and community engagement other aspects can be identified like being reflexive, developing individual and

collective skills and competencies, project design, sharing and listening, as well as, the development of processes to support knowledge creation. It is important to highlight that these engagement activities involve, in addition to participatory co-design in urban interventions, cultural and artistic events, as well as the induction of networks as a tool to connect the community with organizations, universities, and local institutions.

The social role of universities addressed in this research allowed for highlighting the positive impact of the social and civic engagement connecting the university with its hosting communities in a mutual learning process and inspiring future researchers to contribute to society.

It is possible to say that the social concept can be applied to universities at all levels, that is, whether they are public or private, whether they function as an institution, an economic indicator, or whether they represent a community. The point is that the social aspect is essential at any of these levels.

It is possible to affirm that civic engagement activities are composed, among others, of participatory activities, action research (responsible research), co-design of urban solutions and analysis of urban policies. In addition, to being considered a strategy to deal with the urban regeneration of fragile territories is also a key point in promoting sustainable development.

In this sense, social and civic engagement combines the active participation of communities with issues of social, environmental and economic well-being, fundamental for sustainable development. Thus, it can contribute to sustainable development with citizen participation in decision-making, to strengthen civil society and social innovation. All these aspects can be perceived in the case analyzes presented.

To conclude, universities can indeed be leaders and main communicators in building networks for a better world and, despite the challenges, it is important to reflect on the advantages and the need for universities to innovate their educational conduct. For example, bringing students and professors together and making the impact of their research more significant to find alternatives for designing sustainable cities and communities.

Finally, based on the outcomes provided by the development of this research, Fig. 24 is a diagram collecting the answers to the research questions and sub-questions that guided the study.

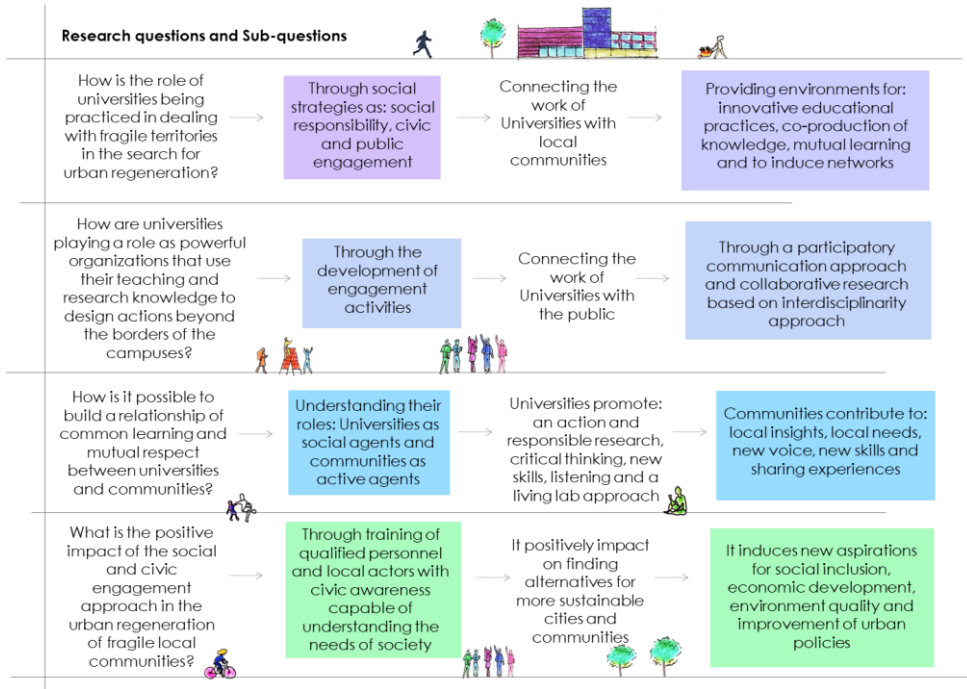


Fig. 24 | Diagram of the outcomes. Source: image developed by the author, 2023.

6.1.2 Future developments

Firstly, it is important to underline that addressing the case analyses was an important choice because it made possible to be part of effective action and to realize the relevant contribution given by it to the students' skills, in particular developing a civic awareness of the issues that society faces.

Actually, through this personal experience, the research gained much more meaning and improved the author's critical thinking. As a whole, it could be perceived that teaching and research provide potential tools to contribute positively not only to the university mission, but also, as hoped, to society.

Moreover, it is important to stress, once again, that the main aim of this work was to emphasize the university's social role as a potential connector with society, among the other different roles that it can play, for instance when considered as an institution, as an economic and sustainable indicator, or as a community in itself.

In this regard, universities have indeed great potential to provide opportunities for changing realities in the territories in which they are inserted, providing more sustainable and inclusive environments.

However, universities still face challenges to play an effective social role due to the lack of more internal institutional support and recognition of their importance as communicators with different types of stakeholders and local actors. On the other hand, how to measure and conceive indicators to contribute to the relevance of the social approach is still a fundamental gap to be filled.

To conclude, based on the challenges identified from the analyses of the cases, as well as the important aspects discussed above, some questions were raised thinking about possible further developments to be pursued in future research.

Fig. 25 is a diagram with the questions for future developments.

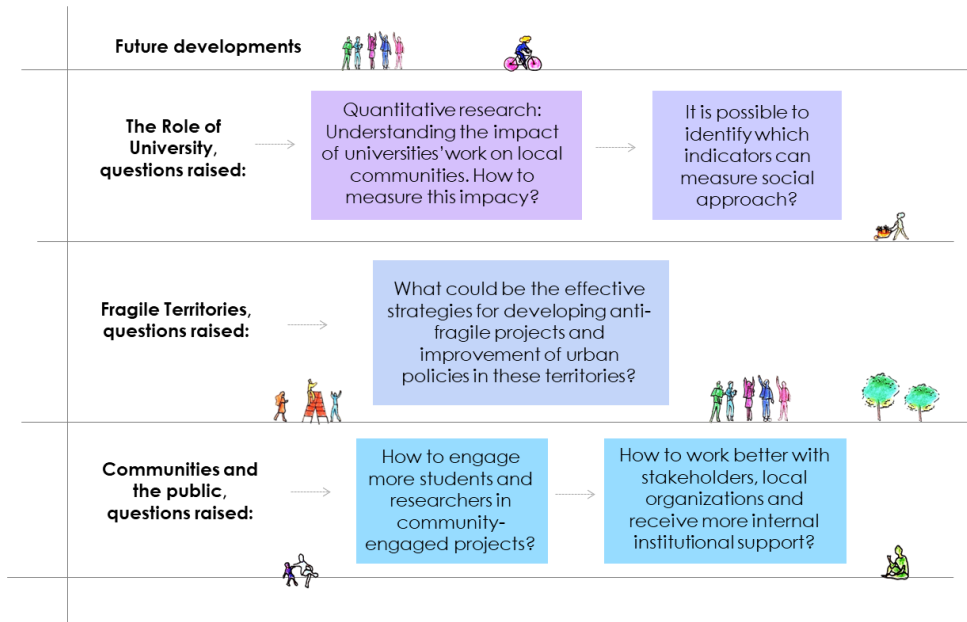


Fig. 25 | Diagram for future developments. Source: developed by the author, 2023.

Universities as Potential Social Agents in the Urban Regeneration of Fragile Local
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Annexes

As previously mentioned, this work was developed and validated considering the participation in workshops and the submission and publication of articles in journals and proceedings. Next, the most relevant conferences and articles developed based on this work will be described.

Collaborative research (period abroad) within the Lisbon School of Architecture, Universidade de Lisboa (Fa.Ulisboa), at the research group URBinLAB: Urbanism and Territorial Dynamics with supervision of Prof. Cristina Cavaco, this research aims to complement of the case study analysis, by developing a report for the NoVoid project, as another case study. Moreover, participating on activities inside the department and a presentation of my work to the research group – From February until July 2022.

The URBinLUNCH 2022 (Fa.Ulisboa) is a series of discussion made at “lunch time” presented by professors, students and researchers with the aim of providing greater involvement between researchers:

URBinLUNCH 2022: Mariana Auad Proença for a conversation with the theme: "The Potential Role of Universities in Urban Regeneration of Fragile Territories", Fa.Ulisboa, 5 May 2022.

Double degree agreement within the Faculty of Architecture and Urbanism of the University of São Paulo FAUUSP: working on the development of a report for the WC2 University Network Symposium with supervision of Prof. Roberta Kronka, with aim to describe the project developed for the San Remo community, as another case study – From July until December 2022.

Fifth WPSC World Planning Schools Congress. 16th APSA Congress Asian Planning Schools Association Congress: “Planning a Global Village: Inclusion, Innovation, and Disruption”- Bali Nusa Dua Convention Center, Bali, Indonesia 29 August to 2nd September, 2022:

- PhD Colloquium (accepted) oral presentation Title: [The Potential Role of Universities in urban regeneration of Fragile Territories] - Monday, 29 August 2022 13.15-15.00.
- Abstract (accepted) oral presentation Title: [The Role of Universities as Social Agents in the Urban Regeneration of Fragile Local Communities] Track 1: Urban, Peri-Urban, and Metropolitan Development - Thursday, 1 September 2022 10.00 - 11.40 | Parallel Session 9 | Room Code: 3.L6-I.

THIRTY-SIX PLEA CONFERENCE SUSTAINABLE ARCHITECTURE AND URBAN DESIGN (Online): WILL CITIES SURVIVE? The future of sustainable buildings and urbanism in the age of emergency – Santiago, Chile – 23- 25 November 2022:

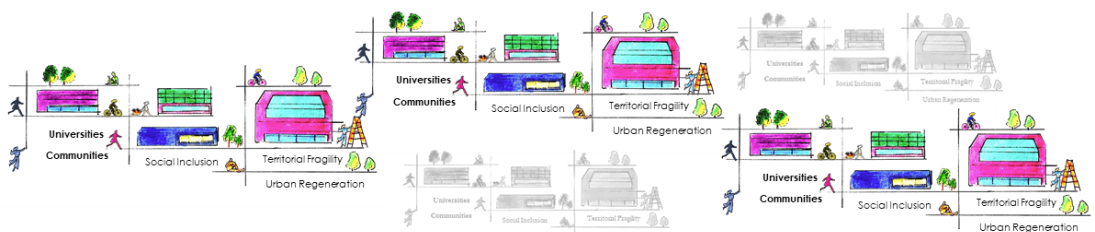
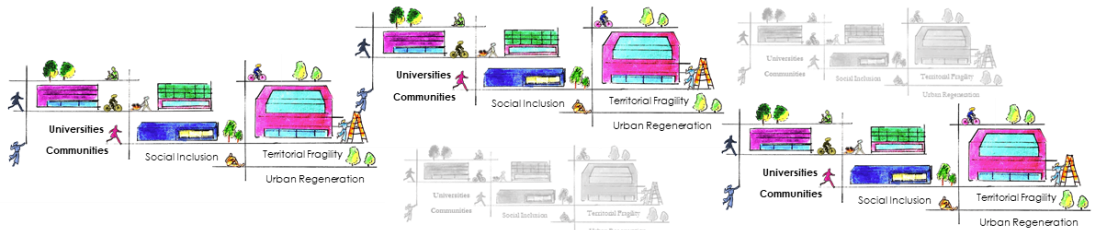
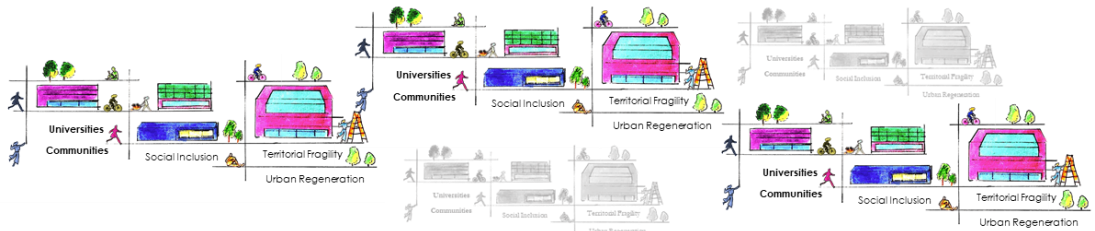
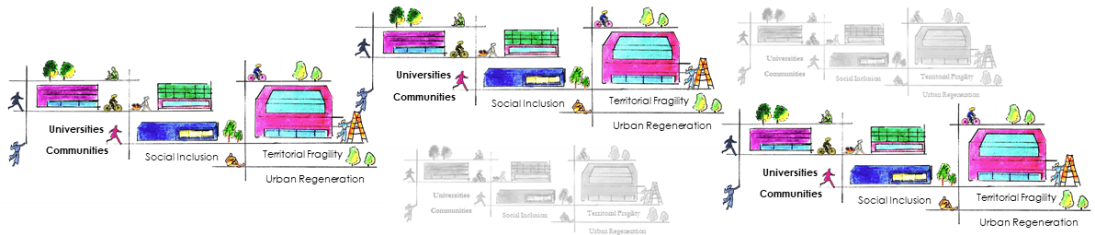
- Oral presentation about the 6LongPaPer Submission accepted Title: [The Role of Universities on Forming Social Inclusive and Sustainable Environments: The importance of University Social Responsibility], Authors: Mariana Auad Proença, Alessandro Balducci and Francesca Cognetti. Source: <https://plea2022.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/03/PROCEEDING-ONLINE-FINAL-MARZO.pdf>

Congress: Le università per le città e i territori organizzato da in collaborazione con con il patrocinio di e la condivisione delle istituzioni del progetto Proposte per l'integrazione tra politiche universitarie e politiche urbane. Convegno Nazionale & Call for paper– Bari, 1st and 2 December 2022. Title: [Universities and local fragile communities as social and active agents in a process of mutual learning to seek urban regeneration]. Paper submitted and accepted on 16 November 2022. Authors: Mariana Auad Proença.

Journal: IN FOLIO_39 | ISSN 1828-2482 RIVISTA DEL DOTTORATO DI RICERCA IN ARCHITETTURA, ARTI E PIANIFICAZIONE DELL'UNIVERSITÀ DEGLI STUDI DI PALERMO - DIPARTIMENTO DI ARCHITETTURA. COESISTERE IN PROSSIMITÀ – paper published, Title: [Universities as potential social anchors in the development of mutual learning in local communities. The importance of proximity between the actors involved in collaborative research]. Authors: Mariana Auad Proença, Alessandro Balducci. July 2022. Source: https://drive.google.com/file/d/1nXwyUvrvfXxgiDcQ_6TfG5u-MJTaMyE7/view

International Seminar presented at Politecnico di Milano. Title: [The Potential Role of Universities in the Urban Regeneration of Fragile Territories]. 4 November 2022.

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**Universities. Communities. Social
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Regeneration**

