

# The University and the City. An Agenda for the new Century

Session 1: Urban Context and Cultural Heritage

**Gianmaria Palmieri**

Rector, University of Molise

The horizon of the university is the world: instruction and research are driven by the universal character of our work and our degree students shall be able to move and operate on the global scale. However, every University is always located in a urban and territorial context worth keeping into account, since the University can contribute to its well-being, and as a lab in which analyses, lectures, interpretations and models can be experimented. The hypothesis of the present contribution is that there exists a universal value of the local, of the territory object and subject of knowledge, sphere of convergence of expert and contextual, scientific and humanistic skills, of different disciplines, finally, meeting place of culture and politics. The more one can be present in the global dimension, the more the anchorage to the local (well distinct from the localism) and the attention to territorial topics become elements of strength, not of closure, but of openness. The more one manages to experiment locally, the more one is recognized globally.

This is thus the discussion we propose: strengthening the National and International placement of the universities, of the quality of teaching and research, also passing through a re-definition of the relation university/territory and through the recognition, in normative terms and resources, of the value of the academic presence in the various regional contexts.

The territory of the University can be a big city, a metropolitan system, or a whole region (the three of them, however, conceived as social and territorial systems). For the University from which I come, for instance, the urban context is a regional context: Molise, a small region of south-east Italy, a Mediterranean area, a bridge between west and east, a hinge between north and south. The “lands of oblivion”, as in certain times they have been called, and, unfortunately, as it still substantially happens in contemporary Italy. A land where development has arrived scarcely and in jolts, with a weak identity, hardly to define; an area subject to depopulation and spoiling, that, for this very reason, opens the doors to new paths of knowledge and to the role of the University as a cornerstone for reacting to marginalizing processes and for nurturing phenomena of territorial rebirth.

The establishing and organizing model of a university, in the articulation of the seats as well as in the governance, must therefore display specific traits also with reference to the territorial vocations. The seats, overcoming the function of simple structures of academic decentralisation, must be conceived as elements of attraction and fields of experimentation and innovations, in ongoing relationships with the social, institutional, productive tissue. Viewing the local university as a system makes it possible to avoid the construction of enclosures and to spread widely in society the idea of a more accessible, visible, transparent, but most of all useful university. It also allows to establish networks of not-polarized institutional relations; which is helpful to govern the processes of conflict/integration between issues of the territory and of the academic world. Consequently, we must assume the issue of the internal areas, of landscape and cultural heritage (in a perspective ranging from art. n. 9 of the Constitution to the European Convention on Landscape to the Code of BBCC and of Landscape) as a working axis. It is a issue, we maintain, regarding various Italian regional contexts, seeing in their “own” university the forge of their future: in the phase of

structural crisis of the economic model, it is necessary to turn back and care for the skeleton of the peninsula; no more only in sight of a resistance towards marginalisation, but in the perspective of a re-birth; it is necessary to look for good practices suggesting that something new and better is possible, perhaps with the chance of drawing exemplary insights for the re-orientation of the economic models, and of the social and territorial organization at a more general level. In relation with both the teaching and research functions and the indispensable so-called “Third Mission”, the University is a privileged domain to build scenarios, starting from the territorial vocations, from the resources and the sustainability of their use. This immediately calls for the necessity of impinging on the education of human and social capital. Education, trust and innovation are the elements through which we can contribute to make the Italian economic and social system stronger, fighting against the regional gaps. The ability to innovate the products, the productive processes or the organizational and managerial arrangements represents an important stimulus for an economic system. The innovative activity can be favoured by the presence of the University, in addition to the presence of ITC infrastructures and of the availability of financial instruments.

In the contribution, examples of virtuous relations between university and territory will be displayed, also reflecting on the advantages of a man/environment-tailored dimension, that is, on a setting linked to the strategic role of small-medium size universities for the Country-System and on the necessity, beginning from that recognition, of an up-date of the allocation mechanisms of financial resources.

In a systemic perspective, a further aspect is the one connected to the experimentation of forms of cooperation-integration among universities, directed more on cooperation than on competition, in regional macro-areas (the south east, the centre, the north east, the islands...), without big metropolitan poles. To cooperate, instead of competing, should be a value of even more general worth to govern the National academic system. The relation with the territory, especially as regards the cultural heritage (*l'heritage*), places itself inevitably on a die which is the one of knowledge-conservation-valorisation. In this die play a crucial role the awareness of local resources, the integration of institutional levels, both in the vertical and horizontal meaning, and most of all the integration of the supply of a territory. In this die knowledge-conservation-valorisation the role of the University might be fundamental. The University must stay within this process, identifying and fostering it, drawing from it useful hints for teaching and research. Not a University at the service of the territory, but rather a reciprocal relation, that can strengthen each other and can qualify each University within the National academic system and in the International landscape of research. From there comes a contribution to the restoration of the link between culture and politics, between academic work and training of the ruling class, starting from the identification of methodological hints for the government of the territory. Of the City and of the territory, which in our perspective are one and the same thing.

But to undertake such an enterprise more decisively, there must also be financial resources and political support; it is necessary that the academic system manages to disentangle itself from policies marked by excessive state control, like the ones that we have witnessed in the latest years. But we would need further reflection on the risks that the system becomes more and more juggernaut, exacting, bureaucratic, costly and probably inefficient, finishing, in the name of quality, to low the quality of the Italian University, depressing its differentiations, its richness and above all the autonomy of the single universities. There is no need to tell the universities what they must do, but to go and see what they actually do, recognizing worth to the differentiation instead of to the standardization of the system. It is mostly in the value of the autonomy of the universities, in an

articulated context like the Italian one, that lies the strength of the crucial relation between the University and the territory/City.