

Win-win: municipalities and the academic community benefit from more collaboration

Findings from a virtual Connective Cities ad hoc event

Closer cooperation between municipalities and academic institutions offers both sides plenty of potential that has often not yet been fully exploited. Scholars can help municipalities find ways to adapt to new challenges – such as the impacts of climate change. It also creates many high-quality jobs. At the same time, academic institutions depend on the cities in which they are located to provide good research and working conditions, and an attractive environment for their employees to live in.

'Scientific institutions influence a community in many ways. Examples include economic development, socio-cultural forms and the local use of research results.'

Thiago Garcia, Connective Cities

At a glance

- Virtual ad-hoc event with participants from Germany, Jordan, Kenya, Somalia, Indonesia, Tanzania, France, Congo (DRC) and Ukraine on 28/03/2023
- Objective: Identify the potential for cooperation between municipalities and research institutions, and generate recommendations for action
- Organised by Connective Cities in cooperation with the City of Heidelberg.

1. Best practice example: Municipalities and academia – observations from Heidelberg

For centuries, Heidelberg has been a university city whose future lies in its role as an internationally renowned hub of scientific research. Of the 160,000 inhabitants, about 40,000 are students and almost 40 per cent of the population are younger than 30. This has a strong impact on urban development, for example on the real estate market. The high proportion of graduates among the population, a large proportion of whom work in the approximately 200 scientific institutions in the city, also makes the city very attractive for commercial enterprises.

'The success of Heidelberg's development as a city, including its growth and prosperity, is closely linked to the success of the university.'

Jürgen Odszuck, First Mayor of Heidelberg

The success of scientific institutions depends a lot on how attractive the research environment is – for example in terms of transport links and spatial capacities. The City of Heidelberg has responded to scientific institutions' need for land in order to erect new buildings. It has made former military land available for the university and for the construction of an [innovation park](#) for companies in fields such as information technology and artificial intelligence.

To be able collaborate successfully in scientific areas, policy-makers and administrators need to know and understand the needs of scholars.

Furthermore, it is the municipality's goal to integrate the academic institutions, along with their topics and staff, as closely as possible into the urban community.

2. Best practice example: How the City Institute Lviv promotes cooperation with academia

The Ukrainian city of Lviv, where out of 800,000 inhabitants about 150,000 study at one of the city's four universities, has a dedicated City Institute to unite the engagement of the municipality, academic institutions, the private sector and civil society to achieve the city's strategic goals.

The institute builds numerous different bridges between the scientific, urban and business communities. To encourage young people to stay in the city it offers attractive incentives. For example, it has established a start-up centre that promotes start-ups and brings university graduates into contact with local business.

To close the gap between the technical development of innovative solutions and their further development to market maturity, the Institute has set up a technology cluster to bridge the gap between science and industry.

'The City of Lviv sees itself as a facilitator between the scientific and business communities.'
Maksym Terletsky, City Institute Lviv

With projects such as the 'City Makers Lviv' course and the 'Doctoral School in Urban Geopolitics', the Institute brings together students and young professionals in urban development and planning. Together, they develop concrete solutions for the City of Lviv based on jointly elaborated analyses and strategies.

The municipality also requests specific studies from the universities in order to guide policy, and the universities offer members of the city council practical courses in areas such as design thinking.

The example of Kinshasa, Democratic Republic of Congo

Together with a university, the municipality is planning to establish a Smart City Lab on architecture and urban planning, where innovative solutions for urban challenges will be developed.

The example of Moshi District, Tanzania

A local expert with scientific expertise supported the municipal partnership between Moshi District and Kiel under the [Experts Fund for Municipal Partnerships Worldwide](#).

3. Current challenges and how they can be solved

Closer cooperation between municipalities and academic institutions has a great deal of potential, but is constrained by various factors. Identifying these is the first step towards a win-win situation in which both sides benefit more from each other's strengths in the future.

Information deficits and data use

Municipalities often collect data, for example on wastewater quality, which would be of interest to research institutions conducting scientific projects. Conversely, municipalities often have no access to data from local research projects. Often, the problem is that neither side knows anything about the other's activities. The spectrum of research covered by large universities is too comprehensive to gain a quick and easy overview. So what is needed here is better communication, which if possible should be institutionalised. And above all, the two sides need agreements on the mutual use of data.

Interests and conflicts of interest

In principle, municipalities and academic institutions share the goal of sustainable urban development. However, their points of view may vary, for instance in terms of how they see the participation of scholars in policy-making processes, or local transport and land use.

4. Opportunities for closer collaboration between the municipality and the scientific community

Formats for exchange, cooperation and communication

If municipalities and academics wish to intensify their collaboration, they should set up the cooperation strategically and on a long-term basis that goes beyond one-to-one, ad-hoc contacts. The following formats are suitable for this:

- Institutionalised exchange between the municipality, policy-makers, academia and society on overarching issues such as the integration of science in the city
- Establishment of a scientific advisory board in the municipality with the broadest possible representation
- More collaboration in concrete research projects that are relevant to both partners
- Closer involvement of policy-makers, who often underestimate the importance of a flourishing research landscape for the community
- Cooperation in networks such as the [City Diplomacy Lab](#)
- Establishment of a fellowship programme in local governance for young professionals with an academic background

'Municipalities and the scientific community are increasingly interested in closer collaboration, but at the moment efforts in this direction still lack coordination'.
Lorenzo Kihlgren Grandi, City Diplomacy Lab

Opening up science to the population

To step up dialogue between academic institutions and the public, and to promote interest in science, municipalities can take the following measures together with the academic institutions:

- Events, exhibitions or museums on scientific topics, for example with special programmes for children and young people
- Open days with opportunities for science experiments
- Free access to libraries of academic institutions as places of encounter and exchange

5. Conclusion

Closer collaboration can only offer advantages to municipalities and local academic institutions. Therefore, both sides should be more active in approaching each other, and set up their collaboration strategically. There is no lack of ideas and starting points for this, as the examples from Heidelberg and Lviv show. Municipalities can also develop ideas on how best to organise such cooperation through exchange with other cities, for example through networks.

To stay up-to-date with future Connective Cities events on sustainable urban development and other topics, read our monthly Connective Cities newsletter.

-> [Click here for our free newsletter and subscription.](#)

Publication details

Published by:
Connective Cities – International Community of Practice for Sustainable Urban Development
info@connective-cities.net
<https://www.connective-cities.net/en/>

Project coordinator: Thiago Garcia
Text: Dr Susanne Reiff, to the point communication

On behalf of the
Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ)

Last edited: April 2023