

Authorities,

Rectors,

Presidents,

Mayors,

Dear Colleagues,

Ladies and Gentlemen,



On behalf of all the Rectors of the Alliance, I would like to extend my heartfelt thanks to you for being here today at the inauguration of the “Civis, A European Civic University” Office at U Square. This is a true source of pride and satisfaction for us.

The relation between universities and their environment is ancient. The history and evolution of European universities have always been deeply rooted in the urban context in which they developed. In fact, the first universities in Europe were founded in the cities that, free from feudal bonds, gave rise to city-states. Ever since, there have been deep and significant relations between cities and universities: a continuous and prolific circulation of goods, ideas and studies.

Local communities are the locus of production and require knowledge and culture, while universities are the custodians of knowledge and the main vehicle for the diffusion of innovation and change in all sectors. Thus, the two continuously interact in an ongoing process of strong or weak, but inevitable osmosis.

Universities guarantee the growth and improvement of local communities. Indeed, it's their duty. Cities require education, research and local services and, in turn, provide a fundamental stimulus for the continuous improvement of academic activities and the cycles of innovation that are driven by research.

Unlike other countries in which there are both metropolitan universities (such as New York or Shanghai) and stand-alone campuses (Stanford and Berkeley) that are not directly related to a city, the history of European universities is deeply rooted in cities and the rise of "extended campuses" throughout urban areas.

In fact, the issue of the relationship between universities and local communities directly addresses the mission of academic institutions. We must therefore acknowledge that besides their deeply integrated core functions – academics and research – universities are also expected to provide further services: the third mission, above all. "Academic solitude" is of no benefit, neither to the community, nor to the younger generations. The "third mission" concerns the diffusion of the knowledge produced by academia through the development of relations with the external world (politics, economics, civil society) and constant interaction with the local economic system.

The European Union has played a key role in establishing the awareness of the fundamental role that universities can play in the growth and improvement of Europe's many socio-economic contexts.

The first references made by the European Union to the need to improve relations between universities, communities and the working world date back to the beginning of the 1990s, when, in Lisbon, the European Council set the objective of making Europe the most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economy in the world, driving drive sustainable economic growth with new and better jobs and creating greater social cohesion.

Universities are present in all European regions and their activities have a significant local influence at the economic, social and cultural levels. This contributes to making them an important tool not only for European cohesion, but also for regional development.

Although there are evident margins for improvement, the European university system is deeply rooted in the local context. And this calls for the implementation of agreements and initiatives with the world of enterprise to drive technological innovation and increase the number of start-ups.

This, then, means that third mission projects allow universities to move even closer to the labour market and society as a whole. And, in turn, this has benefits on its two traditional missions: didactic activities and scientific research, which contaminate this new reality. After all, excellence in scientific research and didactic innovation constitute the vital bloodline of the “third mission.”

The regional dimension of university activity is destined to grow in the coming years. Nonetheless, this must not endanger international aperture. We are looking at two different souls: a local and a global one. It is not

about choice, but about reconciliation. It is not an “aut aut” but rather an “et et” – or in one word: glocal.

Glocal is one of the challenges of Civis, born to promote that which Kant defined as a “cosmopolitan right” in *Perpetual Peace: A Philosophical Sketch*, to promote the European values, culture and citizenship amongst the new generations of students, advancing cooperation and multilingualism in an interdisciplinary context. In short, we must continue to tirelessly forge the civic conscience of a united Europe bolstered by our history and culture.

The governments of our countries have fully understood the potential of Civis and are committed to supporting financially the initiative. This endorsement honors us and encourages us to pursue our goals.

The challenge is to develop – twenty years after the Bologna Process – the founding concepts of Europe through an integrated and glocal university space for innovative and responsible didactic and research activities, where students, academics, researchers and personnel may move freely and collaborate in a spirit of profound civic commitment because, as President Macron affirmed in his letter to European citizens *For a European Renaissance*, the construction of a European civic identity is a daily commitment.

In this regard, I want to thank Aix-Marseille Université and his honorary President, Yvon Berland, for taking the initiative of Civis and coordinating tirelessly our European alliance.

I am honoured, as President of “CIVIS”, to have the opportunity to introduce you to CIVIS, one of the 17 projects which have been selected in the framework of the “European Universities” call 2018.

Fonti:

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