

Urban Sustainability Agendas for Universities

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Energy transition, climate adaptation (including green infrastructure), sustainable land use and nature-based solutions, urban mobility, culture and heritage and safety in public spaces, air quality, urban poverty, housing, circular economy, digital transition, inclusion of migrants and refugees, jobs and skills in the local economy, innovative and responsible public procurement are priority themes of the European Urban Agenda. The Urban Agenda can be seen as a virtuous example of multi-level governance, allowing cities to tackle today's challenges directly on the ground and to propose joint actions for better regulation, financing and knowledge exchange. Success in achieving the Urban Agenda is highly dependent on the action and collaboration of all actors in the territorial, institutional and socio-economic system.

Universities are in a privileged position and have a fundamental responsibility in the green and social transition, not only as institutions dedicated to providing an education that spans all disciplines, reaching hundreds of millions of students/staff, but also as “platform” actors able to act as drivers for the development of new systemic and transformative solutions, through the collaboration of various stakeholders. It is recognized that universities represent for the communities and the territorial context in which they are located a resource and a driver for change, in the direction of a sustainable development.

Even before the strong push for the ecological transition that the European Green Deal and the following National Resilience and Recovery Plan (PNRR) envisage for cities and territories, Italian universities came together in the Network of Universities for Sustainability (RUS) and since 2019 have contributed to the drafting of Urban Sustainability Agendas in numerous Italian cities, in the belief that good practices and lifestyles can radiate into urban contexts starting from campuses and university campuses (for mobility, waste, energy saving, urban green areas, and so forth).

The three studies presented in the followings, considering a multidisciplinary perspective, highlight the evidence that universities are key players in the ecological and social transition of local communities, contributing to the innovation of urban policies and sustainable development of their territorial context.

In particular, the experience coming from the City Environment Networks Territory (CARTA) laboratory of the University of Bologna provides an observatory for the sub-region of Forlì-Cesena, a territorial context that presents varied dynamics, from those affecting the more peripheral portions of the territory, the inland areas of the Romagna Apennines, to the expansion and contraction forms of the Adriatic conurbation of Romagna and the city-region of the Via Emilia, which open up numerous research directions. This study demonstrates that university researchers, in interaction with public administrators and the local community, including student organizations, represent an indispensable element in the implementation of the ecological transition. The second paper also emphasizes the promoting and driving role that can be played by universities in building sustainability in territorial systems, by proposing sustainable local development projects. More specifically, the study is related to the construction and implementation of a walk, called *Cammino del Duca*, proposed by the University of Urbino in collaboration with the CAI-Montefeltro and CAI-Gubbio Sections. The process of realizing this walk highlights innovative aspects and unresolved critical issues, with the aim of stimulating a reflection on the opportunities and constraints affecting universities' sustainability policies in their interaction with the local communities, for the creation and sharing of a culture that is attentive to respect for local specificities, the promotion of health and wellbeing, and care for the environment. Finally, the third study focuses on Renewable Energy Community (REC) and specifically on the identification of all the legal, regulatory and socio-economic requirements for the development of a meta-design approach, aimed at experimenting a virtuous process of accompanying local communities to the establishment of RECs, as a tool for urban and environmental regeneration.

The above mentioned studies are just few and limited examples of the large number of case studies available to demonstrate the important role of universities in this crucial and difficult transition period.