**University versus Culture: a global challenge?**

The EU has set out its vision for Europe's social market economy in the *Europe 2020 strategy,* which aims, as you know, confronting our structural weaknesses through progress in three mutually reinforcing priorities, but I would like to remind them here again:

- smart growth, based on knowledge and innovation;

- sustainable growth, promoting a more resource efficient, greener and competitive economy;

- inclusive growth, fostering a high employment economy delivering economic, social and territorial cohesion.[[1]](#footnote-1)

The issue of smart growth occupies a central position in the meeting which finishes today.

The concept of smart specialization is 'smart' for two main reasons:

* Firstly, it links research and innovation with economic development in novel ways such as the *entrepreneurial process of discovery* and the *setting of priorities by policy makers in close cooperation (process) with local actors*.
* Secondly, this process is carried out with an eye on the outside world, forcing regions to be ambitious but realistic about what can be achieved while linking local assets and capabilities to external sources of knowledge and value chains.[[2]](#footnote-2)

What we can see here is the overlap of the process in relation with growth (smart growth, sustainable growth and inclusive growth) instead of the link with concrete social values. What we can see is the priority given to vague concepts instead of clear and easily understandable ones.

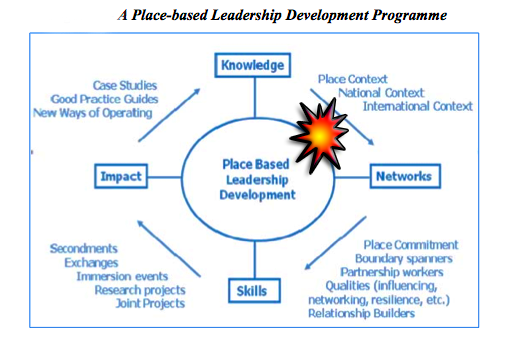
The four Cs of smart specialization are:

* **1. Choices and Critical mass.**
* **2. Competitive Advantage.**
* **3. Connectivity and Clusters.**
* **4. Collaborative Leadership: efficient innovation systems as a collective endeavor based on public-private partnership (quadruple helix) – an experimental platform to give voice to un-usual suspects[[3]](#footnote-3).**

I would like to believe that we are here un-usual suspects!

This intervention focuses on the connection between knowledge and network.

RI S3 Scheme:



And my intervention takes as granted that it is not possible to promote any kind of effective regional development without a non hierarchical cooperation, and network between public authorities, companies and civil society.

* *Differentiation* is at the very heart of RIS3. The key to successful differentiation is to exploit *related variety*, suggesting that a regional economy can build its competitive advantage by diversifying its unique, localized knowledge base (existing specialization) into new combinations/innovations, which are close or adjacent to it. Closeness is important because new combinations must be feasible or accessible given the existing assets, precisely in order to exploit the experience accumulated by regional actors. [[4]](#footnote-4)

**A stepwise approach for RIS 3 design**

* STEP 1. Analysis of the regional context and potential for innovation
* STEP 2. Governance– Ensuring participation and ownership
* STEP 3. Elaboration of an overall vision for the future of the region
* STEP 4. Identification of priorities
* STEP 5. Definition of coherent policy mix, roadmaps and action plan
* STEP 6. Integration of monitoring and evaluation mechanisms

**An alternative stepwise approach for RIS 3 design**

* STEP 1. Analysis of the (local) global context and potential for innovation
* STEP 2. Governance– Ensuring (participation) network and (ownership) share
* STEP 3. Elaboration of an overall vision for the (future) past and present of the (region) sector at global level
* STEP 4. Identification of (priorities) situation
* STEP 5. Definition of coherent policy (mix) statement, (roadmaps) accountability system and (action plan) medium and long term objectives
* STEP 6. Integration of (monitoring) documental and (evaluation) narrative mechanisms.

As part of the EU Cohesion Policy for 2014-2020, the European Commission is proposing to make specialization a pre-condition (the so-called ‘ex ante conditionality’) for supporting investments for two key policy objectives:

1. Strengthening research, technological development and innovation (the R&I target); and
2. Enhancing access to and use of quality of ICT (the ICT target).[[5]](#footnote-5)

**I would like to defend culture as an ‘*ex ante* conditionality’.**

* Stressing culture as a framework concept for innovation, creativity and value:
* Culture is the only concept that corresponds to a general human capability to define, interpret, understand and act about himself, the others and the world.
* Culture is the hidden agenda of every community – our departure point, our concepts and prejudices.
* We always think and act culturally.

As already quoted, the OECD report on ‘Higher Education Regions: global competitive, locally engaged’, issued in 2007, states that we are living a parallel process of globalization and localization. In this process, countries are turning their production towards value-added segments and knowledge-intensive products and services, and, consequently, there is a greater dependency on access to new technologies, knowledge and skills.

I would like to focus on knowledge and skills from the perspective of the relationship between universities and culture.

The same report observes that ’In the cultural field, the contribution made by culture to quality of life, the attraction of creative talent and the growth of creative industries are all part of regional development. Higher education can be a major player in internationalizing their regions and making them more diverse and multicultural, but often not enough is made of international links in this regard’.

As it frequently happens, the European Union (also in this field) discovered some years later the same that OECD had proposed before, and as it frequently happens, the way teh EU is designing its programs for the same subject is politically more correct and poorer in some fundamental aspects.

This is reconized by John Goddard and Louise Kempton, who prepared the guide on ‘Connecting Universities to regional growth: a pratical guide’ for the European Commission’, when they say: ‘Furthermore the dominant paradigm has been one of a technology push, which has largely ignored the potential contribution of the Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences to regional development and innovation. Even the terminology and infrastructure of innovation has had a strong bias towards an assumption of a scientific or technological basis (e.g. many universities have “’technology transfer offices’). Many of the examples used to illustrate points in this guide will reflect this dominant approach. However policy makers should consider how this might be challenged going forward, and seek to embed the non traditional players in the innovation process in future programmes.’

And it is pointed out in the Guide that ‘It is recommended that Managing Authorities and Universities adopt a broader definition of innovation to acknowledge the role that arts, humanities and social sciences can play, especially in responding to the ‘Grand Challenges’ (Lund Declaration), and develop mechanisms that draw on the expertise and contribution from these disciplines to issues like regional entrepreneurship, creativity and social inclusion which form key dimensions to territorial development in the round.’

The same guide stresses that ‘Mobilising universities needs to be addressed in a ‘holistic way’.

Holism is a word coined by Jan Smuts in 1926 in relation with the theory of systems. Holism is well positioned to receive our recognition as the concept that turns operative our understanding of reality and our capacity to design schemes that fits our interaction with reality.

I would like to say that I personally prefer an older word. The word Paideia, used in Ancient Greece, which round the 5th century BC acquired the sense of ideal, methodology and objective of education – to prepare future citizens with a general vision of the world as a place of harmony and justice.

This is not a new issue for you and neither is it for me. Between 1992 and 1997 I have organized a program called Paideia in 180 high schools in Portugal.

As Jaeger remarks, Paideia is an equivalent in Ancient Greece to the term culture.

The difference about drawing our attention to the word and concept of holism or to the word and concept of culture when we talk about a general perspective that frames our thinking and action is not of minor importance.

Holism defines a cold and external vision of a system design.

Culture, even if it is a broader and more complex concept, defines an assumption of a perspective, nurtured by values.

Regarding the early years of European universities, during the 11th century, a cosmopolitan audience of students could be found in Paris and Bologna, with teachers coming from different parts of Europe too.

Universities were centers aiming at maintaining, creating and disseminating values.

It is also in Paris with the Sorbonne Declaration in 1998 and in Bologna with the Bologna Declaration in1999 that the most dramatic change to the European higher education system in the last hundred years occurred. The Bologna Declaration, signed by 29 European countries, sets the following specific objectives:

* the adoption of a **common framework of readable and comparable degrees**, ‘also through the implementation of the Diploma Supplement’;
* the introduction of **undergraduate and postgraduate levels in all countries**, with first degrees no shorter than 3 years and relevant to the labour market;

**- ECTS-compatible credit systems** also cover lifelong learning activities;

* **a European dimension in quality assurance**, with comparable criteria and methods;
* the **elimination of remaining obstacles to the free mobility** of students (as well as trainees and graduates) and teachers (as well as researchers and higher education administrators).

The Bologna Declaration is built upon the concept of holism and not upon the concept of culture.

Bologna wants comparable degrees, relevance to the labour market, compatible credit systems, free mobility.

All these objectives are valuable.

But what is extraordinary is that European universities, quite focused and most of the times, enthusiastic about Bologna, forgot the meta-objectives that Bologna could not express: a core of values leading the openess and development of the European university system.

Now, it is said that the core objective, under the 2020 Strategy flagship initiave Innovative Union, is ‘The knowledge triangle: education, research and innovation’.

Culture is not there. As it is not referred to even a single time in the Europe 2020 Strategy document.

Culture has become a dangerous word and concept in Europe.

Because religion is culture and it is assumed that religion divides. Because beliefs are culture and beliefs divide. Because history is culture and history divides. Because ethnicity is culture and ethnicity divides.

But, as Colin Mercer is saying, *the cultural field, in the new global and post-national environment, is newly and dramatically strategic in its effects*.[[6]](#footnote-6)

We have created a functional Europe, a Europe of bureaucrats, programs and measures. And we have tried to throw the heart in the garbage or, at least we neglect it.

The heart is in religion, beliefs, history and ethnicity. The heart is culture in its different dimensions, those ones and others. The heart is the beginning and the end of knowledge – as we know, scientific knowledge is an interpretation of the truth, not the truth itself and because of this, different forms of knowledge are cultural manifestations and none of them can easily define themselves as higher than others in all aspects. Of course, because we assimilate scientific knowledge with technology and technology with development, we associate education and research succeeding in technological fields.

Technology is only a tool. Without heart, technology is as poor as a stone, even if it is bright and powerful.

Of course, with the market fever that constitutes our framework, technology means competitiveness, added value, power.

The commodification of culture, or the transformation of every cultural asset in a cultural good, is similar to the transformation of the universities in factories that are fighting for revenues.

But as we know, the industrial model design implies scale and low prices for competition. Or highly competitive training programs to fill market needs, abandoning non-competitive programs, even if important knowledge domains.

Is this the model European universities will follow?

From what we know about demographic concentration scale, we cannot compete at that level with American universities and with what is happening in Brazil, China and India.

The Bologna Declaration prepared Europe for networking. This is critical and positive. But what about the competitive advantage of European universities? If it is not in this scale, where is it?

We are moving in a global arena, and there, Europe is a region. Therefore, the first smart specialization strategies at regional level must be thought about Europe as a region.

What makes Europe different? What are the fields in which we are better or even the best?

It is a question of result? A question of process? A question of framework?

Are our history, beliefs, ethnicity not relevant in the construction of a successful equation?

Culture is not only about heritage and arts but is also about heritage and arts.

Cultural heritage and arts are essential to understand ourselves and therefore to act.

We are living a moment where culture is considered a commodity as another one. Cultural goods are evidence on the market. But it is a terrible mistake to reduce culture and its presence in contemporary societies to the market.

The symbolic value of culture and its role to link ideas, persons, institutions, and societies cannot be ignored. If you want, it is too expensive to ignore it.

Do you want any examples?

The assimilation of Arabs in France is a cultural problem. Extremist political movements in Europe are a cultural problem. The lack of authority of adults in relation with children is a cultural problem. The accountability in political systems is a cultural problem. The role of men and women in societies is a cultural problem.

We cannot reduce the cultural field to the money it provides through cinema and audiovisual industry, fashion design industry or cultural tourism.

Universities are, by nature, cultural centers. Even when they refuse their cultural legacy, they are transmitting one to their teachers, students and community around.

What I am challenging is the nature, the value and the result of that legacy.

Again, as it is referred by Colin Mercer, ‘the volume of social capital possessed by an individual depends on the size of his or her network connections and on the volume of economic and cultural capital possessed by those to whom he or she is connected’. [[7]](#footnote-7)

This statement, close to Rancière’s theory about what he calls the ‘distribution of the sensible’ is all about universities: do universities want to be centers for the assessment of economic capital or also of cultural and social capital?

This is not a rhetorical question and I am not looking for a rhetoric answer. Presenting some arts exhibitions, concerts or cultural weeks on the campus is not necessarily the proof of a substantive cultural engagement.

Universities need to go much further to be embodied by culture. It is about genetics. It is about originary codes. It is about ethos.

Any university must care about survival. But being alive and being relevant are quite different things. Being relevant as a knowledge center and not only as a technological school is even another thing.

Each university is now competing on the global market. Of course the focus on the region is necessary. But awareness about competition is needed. However, in Europe, the building of a strong player in the worldwide scene is not, in this context, a question of competition but a question of networking, cooperation and joint projects in a medium and long-term perspective.

It is not only about a double recognition, exchanging teachers and students, producing science together.

It is about creating a concept of empowerment that suits the respect of the identity and project of every university and that stimulates their competition, but, at the same time, generates added value from networking and cooperation for projects.

How does culture relate with this?

Culture is the way we recognize ourselves and the others. Stimulating the presence of culture as part of knowledge building, we replace the Innovation Union triangle by a quadrangle: culture, education, research and innovation.

This simple geometrical change makes a huge difference in our perspective and way to act.

Knowledge and even scientific knowledge it is not a unified way of thinking and acting – try to tell this to a traditional western medical doctor or pharmacologist! Only culture, exposing cultural identity and therefore cultural diversity can introduce this point as a relevant one to the creation, discussion and recognition of the role of a scientific discovery or the role of a university as a whole. Only culture can approach universities from the communities in a strong and permanent way, not only because universities bring employment to community and consultancy to companies, but because universities are a part of community and not community itself. We do not need to create large universities campus as in the USA, like condominiums protected by knowledge of the surrounding communities. We can be a part of different communities, real and virtual ones, building feelings of belonging and trust.

We need to improve social equality through community/cultural development and ‘place making’ as John Goddard and Louise Kempton are defending.[[8]](#footnote-8)

The real cosmopolitan thinking is the awareness about the relative weight of Western culture in the world but at the same time, the recognition of our identity open to diversity as a powerful tool. We cannot be blamed for being Portuguese or French, German or Spanish, British or Swedish. We cannot hide our identity in the name of an aseptic democracy. Only a departure from our own recognition can provide meetings. Without identity, meetings are not possible, because without the self-recognition it is not possible to recognize the others. Identity is a moment on a road, not a fortress. If we can accept this, if universities can accept this, we can make Europe a hub for higher education through regions and networking. The place where the best conditions to learn and to teach can be found, the place that stimulates with its quality of life knowledge and citizenship as an inseparable alliance.

Thank you for your attention.

Jorge Barreto Xavier

Casa de Mateus, May 20th 2012

1. European Commission Guide to Research and Innovation Strategies for Smart Specialization (RIS 3), March 2012. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Idem. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Idem [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Idem. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. European Commission, National/Regional Innovation Strategies for Smart Specialisation’s highlitghts, 2011. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Mercer, Colin (coord.). *Towards Cultural Citizenship: tools for Cultural Policy and Development*. THE BANK OF SWEDEN TERCENTENARY FOUNDATION & GIDLUNDS FÖRLAG, 2002, p. 16. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Idem, p. 47. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Connecting Universities to regional growth: a pratical guide’ to European Commission, September 2011. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)