University Connections With Society: An Urban Planning Perspective

Ernesto L. Acosta

Virginia Tech

Virginia Tech's Global Perspectives Program (GPP) 2018 provided opportunities to examine university connections with society, from an urban planning perspective. My urban planning areas concentration areas are transportation planning and environmental planning. "The goal of planning is to maximize the health, safety, and economic well-being for all residents. This involves thinking about how we can move around our community, the businesses and attractions in our community, where we want to live, and opportunities for recreation. Most of all, planning helps create communities of lasting value" (APA, 2018). The GPP 2018 included visits to universities in Switzerland, France and Italy. The visits revealed university connections to society that are relevant to urban planning. The connections are the built environment, community services, economic and international development. This essay will address these connections. Quotes from university websites are included.

Built environment

Urban planning addresses the built environment (the physical layout of cities). Some universities have long standing historical connection to their cities. For example, at Universität Basel, the space of the university has always been intimately intertwined with the space of the city" (Basel, 2010). Such universities can trace the physical development of their cities over time. It is interesting to note that some universities may be located in planned cities. And libraries at these universities may have access to early version of city plans, which show physical city layouts. Universities libraries may store historical documents about the built environment.

The library at the Universität Basel stores over eight million items, including maps, diagrams, pictorial documents, manuscripts, and other media types. "In terms of its inventory, it is one of the largest libraries in Switzerland" (Basel University Library, 2018).

Universities may utilize urban planning tools (master plans) to manage long term growth. Universität Zürich (UZH) provides an example. According to a 2014 article, "To increase efficiency, UZH has set itself the goal of consolidating its operations at its City and Irchel campuses. To reach this objective, the master plan foresees increased building density and flexible use of new and redeveloped spaces on the University's two largest campuses" (UZH News, 2014). The article mentioned this master plan called for financial investments over twenty years (UZH News, 2014). The expansion of universities can require collaboration with government. Universities can expand by renting existing spaces, or with new building construction. It is interesting to note that renting space has economic benefits for owners. It also highlights a preference for the reuse of existing buildings. The demolition of university buildings was not observed.

It is worthwhile to mention that university buildings can be aesthetically prominent structures in cities. Universities buildings are not only for instruction, or for laboratories. Buildings are often necessary for the housing of students. It is important to note that housing in some cities can be expensive, so university operated housing mitigates this condition. Students living in such housing benefit local communities by purchasing goods and services.

Universities are popular destinations for students and workers, making these institutions hubs of transportation. Transportation infrastructure must be built or introduced to support these trips. Universities can be destinations for various modes of transportation, including automobiles,

buses, trams, rail, bicycles and walking (active transportation). I paid special attention to aspects of transportation because I am interested in transportation planning.

Community Services

The urban planning discipline considers community services. The provision of education and research are important community services. Universities also have missions which include assisting communities to "give back." Such projects can improve quality of life. It is important to note that university assistance is not limited to local communities. Assistance can be provided internationally, such as international water projects.

Universities can contribute to local communities in many ways. At Università della Svizzera italiana (USI), "In addition to hosting guest lecturers and public events, the Academy of Architecture organises regular exhibitions open to the public and is well known for its publishing activity of artistic and architectural culture" (USI, 2018). At Université de Strasbourg, "The University takes an active part in the local cultural life by organising seminars, debates, exhibitions, shows, round-table conferences and symposiums" (Strasbourg, 2018). These examples provide evidence of these universities functioning as part of their communities.

Universities may also operate hospitals or be affiliated with them. Such mutually beneficial services provide students and doctors with experience, while addressing community health needs. According to the UZH, its "hospitals and clinics contribute considerably to the excellent health care system in Switzerland" (UZH Hospitals, 2018). Universities may also provide veterinary services, another important service. These institutions may also engage in research that benefits community health. Examples include the development of pharmaceuticals and research about mosquito borne diseases.

Citizen Science facilitates important services that benefit both universities and citizens. The ZCH and the Eidgenössische Technische Hochschule Zürich (ETH) jointly operate the Competence Center — Citizen Science (CCCS, 2018). The "Center aims at engaging academic scientists and the public in next-generation citizen science projects, tackling problems from fundamental physics to human health" (CCCS, 2018). According to the center's website, "Citizen Science complements traditional scientific expertise by engaging the general public in the scientific process, and provides new knowledge by supporting collaborative intelligence and co-creation" (CCCS, 2018). Universities benefit from the data collection efforts of citizens. And citizens engage in personal interests, while contributing to research efforts. It is important to note that many citizens do not want to receive formal credit (in publishing) for their contributions to this research.

Economic Development

Urban planning addresses economic development. Universities are large employers (they hire professors, administrative and support staff) and are users of local services. Local communities also benefit when universities rent space in privately owned buildings. Universities may have connections with technology hubs, or specific industries such as fashion. For example, Politecnico di Milano is situated in a fashion hub.

Universities may offer services or partner with industry on innovative technology projects (technology transfer), which produce economic benefits. According to ETH, "A company's economic success depends on its ability to develop innovative products and ensure cost-effective production. ETH Zurich's research contributes to the development of future-oriented production processes and manufacturing technologies" (ETH, 2018). Universities can also be help create companies. At USI, "the Start-up Promotion Center (CP Start-up)," "has

contributed to the creation of 45 companies currently operating in the region, generating around 150 jobs" (USI2, 2018). In addition, some universities conduct sustainability related research. "The University of Zurich already contributes to a both regional and global sustainable development through its research and teaching and is committed to systematically expanding its efforts" (UZH SUS, 2015).

Some universities combine part time instruction with employment. They may have executive programs for when industries want to develop their own employees. Other arrangements include student internships. These arrangements with employers vary, and internships may be paid, or unpaid. A strong emphasis on employment can be demonstrated by hiring professionals to teach. This is the case at Scuola Universitaria Professionale della Svizzera Italiana (SUPSI). "The faculty of SUPSI is composed in a balanced proportion, depending on individual disciplines, of internal teachers-researchers and of active external professionals" (SUPSI ORG, 2018). I believe half of its staff are professionals. Another example is when universities conduct efforts to support lifelong learning. "SUPSI offers continuing education programs for professional operators who, in the course of their life (Lifelong learning), wish to attend refresher, development or specialization courses" (SUPSI ED, 2018). Such lifelong learning can have significant impacts on employment and related economic benefits.

International collaboration (development planning)

The universities are uniquely positioned (including geographically) to engage in international development planning. They have initiatives to attract students from other countries. The universities also hire foreign staff (professors and administrative). These institutions have international partnerships and strategies for international networking. "Eucor – The European Campus is a trinational consortium of five universities on the Upper Rhine nestled

in the border region between Germany, France and Switzerland. The members include the Universities of Basel, Freiburg, Haute-Alsace and Strasbourg as well as the Karlsruhe Institute of Technology (KIT)" (EUCOR, 2018). As another example, "Politecnico di Milano currently has more than 500 active international agreements with non-EU Institutions" (POLI, 2018).

Connections

The university connections mentioned are interrelated. For example, private space rented (built environment) for university use impacts the local economy. And the presence of universities (with their populations) and related jobs also benefit local economies. On a related note, universities can grow by linking their departments with those of other institutions. The connections between universities and society are many. "Alongside its academic teaching and research, the University of Basel also engages in lively interaction with society, culture and the economy. The university's facilities share their knowledge with the general public, so the adventure of research becomes a part of society" (Basel2, 2018).

Conclusion

GPP 2018 broadened my understanding of university connections with society, from an urban planning perspective. My observations were reinforced by conversations with faculty and students. As a result, I learned more about the built environment, community services, economic development and international development. I look forward to incorporating these experiences and knowledge into my future teaching.

References

About Eucor – The European Campus (EUCOR)

http://www.eucor-uni.org/en/eucor-european-campus

American Planning Association (APA)

https://www.planning.org/aboutplanning/

Basel University Library

https://www.unibas.ch/en/University/University-Society/University-Library-Basel-.html

Citizen Science Center Zurich About Us (CCCS)

http://citizenscience.ch/en/about.html

Continuing education (SUPSI ED)

http://www.supsi.ch/home_en/fc.html

Cultural activities (USI)

https://www.usi.ch/en/cultural-activities

Culture and sports (Strasbourg)

http://www.en.unistra.fr/index.php?id=21705

Dialogue with the general public (ETH2)

https://www.ethz.ch/en/industry-and-society/dialogue-with-the-general-public.html

Innovation and start-ups at USI (USI2)

https://www.usi.ch/en/innovation-and-start-ups-usi

International agreements (POLI)

https://www.polimi.it/en/the-politecnico/university-projects/international-projects/

Main focus areas (ETH)

https://www.ethz.ch/en/research/main-focus-areas.html

Once-In-A-Lifetime Project Starts to Take Shape (UZH News, 2014)

https://www.news.uzh.ch/en/articles/2014/ein-generationenvorhaben-bekommt-konturen.html

Organisation (SUPSI ORG)

http://www.supsi.ch/home_en/supsi/organizzazione.html

Places of the University (Basel, 2010)

https://translate.googleusercontent.com/translate_c?depth=1&hl=en&prev=search&rurl=translate.google.com&sl=de&sp=nmt4&u=https://unigeschichte.unibas.ch/behausungen-und-orte/behausungen-und-orte.html&xid=17259,15700022,15700124,15700149,15700168,15700173,15700186,15700190,15700201&usg=ALkJrhiwi9_tIIiUiD5n0mJadR4fCSd7SQ

Sustainability (UZH SUS)

http://www.uzh.ch/en/about/basics/sustainability.html

University & Society (Basel2)

https://www.unibas.ch/en/University/University-Society.html

University of Zurich Hospitals (UZH Hospitals)

https://www.uzh.ch/cmsssl/en/outreach.html