

HUMANISTIC INNOVATION BETWEEN VALUES AND SKILLS. THE ROLE OF UNIVERSITIES IN DEVELOPING SOCIAL IMPACT

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Abstract

We are living in a historical moment where universities have a great responsibility to promote the common good of education and humanities skills in the context of interaction with institutions and social policies. The mission of universities given the capabilities demonstrated over the centuries in teaching, educating and training as evidenced in the first part of this article. The second part highlights European initiatives that go in this direction thus creating operational models. In the third part we highlight examples of application, from theory to practice, on the impact of humanistic studies in the European context to arrive at the fourth point where we highlight the convenience of developing an observatory that can follow up on European policies oriented toward social and humanistic development through universities. In the conclusion we emphasize the goodness of this kind of approach in the university and business world nurtured by sound social policies at the European level.

Key words: Humanistic Innovation, Universities, Social Impact, Sustainable Development, Soft Skills, Core Values, Values Metrics.

INTRODUCTION: Historical moment and historical response

University knowledge is distinguished by the study of reality from its causes. We could say that today we have to be careful about the fragmentation of knowledge. The complexity of the world requires an empowerment of the general vision even before developing specialized disciplines. The real risk would be to lose sight of the unity of knowledge.

How can we build bridges between the islands of knowledge we have created? Perhaps we should start putting at the center not the disciplines, but the questions, the problems, the challenges, the meaning of life. This is precisely why the study of philosophy and social and humanistic disciplines are a real priority in the Universities.

The first task of the University is to offer an integral education so that people receive the tools they need to interpret the present and design the future.

It is nice to think that the University generates culture, it generates ideas, but above all it promotes a passion for the search for truth, in the service of human progress. We professors see year after year the change of generations because we have the opportunity to grasp the mental and lifestyle change that is coming. That's why we talk about vocational and human education for a better future where teachers face the challenges of contemporary society and students develop the foundation for a life project.

The historical moment we are living invites us to become aware of the responsibility we all have towards education in order to nurture the spirit of encounter between generations, religions and cultures as well as between humans and the environment.

Celebrating 936 years since the establishment of the first university (*Bologna 1088*) as we know it today, we can say that these institutions have successfully stood the test of time in educating generations of citizens and professionals alike. Universities do not pretend to have a monopoly on knowledge production. Universities can offer the exercise of reflexivity, knowledge and mindfulness.

That's why universities should be rewarded for scientific research oriented not only to production, but also to knowledge. I would like to remember here the saying of the European University of Rome:

- *Knowing how to be, knowing how to do, knowing how to live.*
- *Knowing*, which means, the knowledge
- *Knowing how*, meaning, the skills the abilities and experiences
- *Knowing how to be*, that is, the set of behaviors, attitudes and life-style.

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A. The Mission of Universities in the European Context

In 2004 was born the European University of Rome as a forum for the exchange and discussion of ideas and experience through teaching and research at the highest university level as well as developing interdisciplinary research programs confronting contemporary European society and integral formation.

The notion of Europe has changed in the past years. The very idea of Europe is questioned from different perspectives. The question of values should be at the center of the debate on the identity of our European Community and the integration of all member states.

The issues Europe and the world face today are well known: war, climate change and the loss of biodiversity, shifting geopolitical constellations, security concerns, human rights, migration, the rapid advancement of digital technologies, and the crisis of democracy itself.

These challenges are not isolated, but interconnected and global. These issues would require transnational cooperation and innovative models for generating public value. This includes a much closer collaboration between politics, administration, academy, citizens, business, and civil society. The University has the value of data and research that underlies any political orientation that wants to come to terms with reality and devote itself to the true good of society.

B. Some principles about the goals of the Universities.

Perhaps we have more questions than answers:

- What ethical considerations and what kind of academics, teachers, leaders, professionals, should we train, and what skills do they need in a complex and fast-changing world?
- How can we educate them not just with knowledge, but also with the critical thinking, skills and adaptability required to navigate ongoing transformations and shape the future?

In this difficult situation, universities play an instrumental role by always helping to think through each topic from the causes. The question is: what place does the human being occupy in all this reflection. We need science to find meaning in our actions, and common sense to find balance in our global development.

At this historic moment, our continent needs – more than ever before in its history – a place of reflection, research and exploration to face existential and essential questions. There is Innovation only if we speak about integral innovation: humanistic and technological related to social sciences.

1. *Principles related to the traditional mission of the Universities: research, teaching and training.*

The crucial contribution of the social sciences and humanities is to provide solid interpretations of knowledge and collective sense-making. Our work should be driven by a strong ethos rooted in a desire to contribute to what is relevant to our lives and to future generations¹.

Research, teaching and training promoting the values and soft skills that help every human being to find his own identity and the most important thing, the way to participate to promote the common good for the good of the entire community. We should focus on political institutions, economy, well-being, justice, solidarity and equity. We could embrace our mission to rethink and deepen the European project, without falling into the trap of eurocentrism, but assuming Europe's responsibility within and towards the world rediscovering his soul

We could do this developing transversal themes that address complex, interconnected challenges. Research, teaching and training promoting the values and soft skills that help every human being to find his own identity and the most important thing, the way to participate in a very active way to promote the common good for the good of the entire community thanks to the strength and potential of knowledge.

A. From technological to systemic humanistic and social innovation

Innovation approaches are broadening to include technological, social and economic innovation in common agendas. Universities have a central role to play here due to the breadth and depth of their research and education agendas. Businesses, governmental agencies and universities are looking for systemic approaches to pressing challenges, often linked to topics

¹ Cfr. <https://idi-international.org/comitato-scientifico/>.

like digitalization and sustainable development, that can only be addressed with multiple actors' perspectives. Let's see some concrete examples:

B. *Integral Ecology - ESG Principles: Related to Environment, Quality of life and sustainability*

Responsible investment and ESG are the third way to the economic and social future. It is a first step but we will still have to do a lot to move from theory to practice by always identifying and promoting operational models to be replicated and scaled up².

C. *Values Metrics: Development of novel metrics and indicators*

A critical outcome of this project will be the development of innovative metrics and indicators to evaluate the social impact of sustainable finance³:

- *Development instead of infinite growth*: The word development also includes the concept of constant improvement where merit and effort should always be rewarded. On the other hand, development should be integral and in accordance with the principle of the common good to ensure the principles of justice and peace as well.
- *Infinite development in a limited system of resources is impossible*. The earth is a finite system of resources. If we want to understand the future, we have to look at the principle of common good. This is the great mission and true vocation of the university⁴.

D. *Start Up and Spin off*

Connective leadership and Youth. We should continue to develop long-term intellectual agendas while engaging more fully in public discussions. We could actively tap into the potential offered by (traditional and

² Cfr. <https://www.uer.it/economia/postlaurea/master-gestione-della-previdenza-pubblica-e-complementare/>.

³ Cfr. <https://www.valuesmetrics.org/>.

⁴ Cfr. <https://core-values.org/>.

new) media to enhance our impact, without compromising our intellectual rigor. The promotion of best practice with the new generation of entrepreneurs. The development of *Startup at the Universities* is an important challenge for this new generation promoting a network of talents among universities⁵.

The development of *Startup at the Universities* is an important challenge for this new generation. The mission of the University is to spread entrepreneurial culture, create growth and training opportunities for students, and foster a network of talents among universities, both locally and internationally.

E. Sme Development

The roll of universities with a positive interaction with Sme and the territories. Knowledge exchange to innovation systems. In today's innovation ecosystem, universities are no longer just centers for learning but to promote and lead concrete business activities⁶.

Universities play a vital role in bridging academic theory and entrepreneurial practice for three main reasons:

- They bring solutions, services, and products developed in classrooms and labs to the market.
- They create employment opportunities in developing or restructuring sectors.
- They support students and recent graduates in their first entrepreneurial experiences by providing unique tools and opportunities.

F. AI and Integral development: Ethical approach

Going beyond the focus on economic growth, it includes social innovation and the flow of knowledge across organizations as vital factors for effective social and cultural innovation. The roll of human intelligence and the promotion of algorithms of best practice. *The key is to look not for infinite growth but gradual development.*

⁵ Cfr. <https://www.enactusitaly.org/>.

⁶ Cfr. <https://www.smeconnect.eu/working-groups/emerging-markets/>.

G. Social development promoting culture and Art (digital dimension)

Every professor should be a co-creator of knowledge and ideas that continuously enrich our thinking and our learning starting from the historical roots⁷.

We can become a leading European hub to co-create sustainable models of society. We can reinforce our role as an open and reflexive community at the critical intersection of academia, politics, and society, bringing together worlds which are too often separate.

H. European Network of Universities - From individual to collaborative and interdisciplinary innovation (E-Cost EUROPEAN Cooperation in Science and Technology)

A collaborative interdisciplinary research and development become a necessity. External stakeholders find the university's most important role in innovation having the ability "to incubate interdisciplinary research" and to educate interdisciplinary thinking⁸.

I. Mobility and Erasmus Programs

In the crisis of values and educational poverty that is enveloping our countries, the answer lies in educating youth. The international approach and the social integration are the key. From Emotional Intelligence to Cross cultural intelligence offering innovative English programs of formation⁹.

2. An example of best practice to promote Humanistic Scientific approach

By offering a comprehensive method to recognize and measure the social impact of humanistic knowledge generated by university experts. This will involve:

⁷ Cfr. <https://core-values.org/>.

⁸ Cfr. <https://e-services.cost.eu/>.

⁹ Cfr. <https://www.uer.it/internazionale/>.

- *Multi-stakeholder analysis*: We will engage in reflective discussions involving multiple stakeholders to examine the relevance and adequacy of university functions and missions in addressing today's societal challenges. This approach will provide, for the first time, an in-depth analysis of the relationship between recent social challenges and the humanities' responses.
- *Response to EU priorities*: The framework will address the European Council call (November 2023) for universities to actively promote common human values. We will explore how these values can be advanced by humanities experts and, potentially, by professionals from other scientific disciplines.
- *Broader understanding of knowledge transfer*: Traditional measures of university knowledge transfer, such as patents, technological innovations, and spin-offs, are limiting, particularly in the context of the humanities. This project will redefine the concept of knowledge transfer, recognizing the broader spectrum of societal contributions made by humanities research.
- *Analysis of European national legislation*: For the first time, we will conduct a thorough analysis and compilation of European national legislation related to the evaluation of humanities. This will enhance our understanding of the legal frameworks and how they influence humanities research.
- *Conceptualization and novel research areas*: Progress will be made in conceptualizing under-researched areas such as the "third mission" of universities, the social impact of the humanities, and specific actions for knowledge transfer in the humanities. We will also investigate how European values like sustainability, gender equality, and social inclusion are integrated into these areas, providing new insights.
- *Engagement with research evaluation initiatives*: We will actively participate in ongoing discussions within research evaluation forums such as the Leiden Manifesto, DORA, and CoARA. By inviting representatives from these forums to our seminars, we will share our progress and incorporate their feedback, ensuring alignment with the latest standards and best practices.

3. *Some EU. PROGRAMS to promote Synergies with international initiatives*

- *European Values Study*¹⁰.
- *European Commission: EU policies and documentation*: An interaction with the European Union's policies and documents related to humanistic knowledge and innovation¹¹.
- *International humanistic management Association* to incorporate best practices in the management and valuation of humanistic knowledge¹².
- *Harvard's Institute for quantitative social science – The Human flourishing Program*. This program's comprehensive approach to measuring human well-being will inform about the impact of the humanities on society¹³.
- *Birmingham Conferences on values education*: Insights from these conferences will be critical in shaping our understanding of how humanities education and its impact can be evaluated¹⁴.
- *Humanistic leadership Academy*: Partnering with this academy will allow us to integrate leadership principles into our framework, fostering a holistic approach to evaluating the humanities' impact¹⁵.
- *European Alliance for Social Sciences and Humanities (EASSH)*: EASSH's advocacy for the inclusion of social sciences and humanities in Horizon Europe provides a strategic alignment for our project. Their ongoing dialogue with EU institutions will support our efforts to embed our framework within broader policy discussions¹⁶.
- *HEInnovate – Innovation in higher education*: Utilizing Heinno-
vate's tools and resources, our network will adopt innovative ap-
proaches to education and impact measurement, ensuring our
framework remains cutting-edge¹⁷.

¹⁰ Cfr. <https://europeanvaluesstudy.eu/about-evs/national-partners/>.

¹¹ Cfr. <https://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?langId=en&catId=22>.

¹² Cfr. <https://humanisticmanagement.international/>.

¹³ Cfr. <https://hfh.fas.harvard.edu/>.

¹⁴ Cfr. <https://www.conferenceineurope.org/birmingham.php>.

¹⁵ Cfr. <https://humanisticleadershipacademy.org/about/#academy-background>.

¹⁶ Cfr. <https://eassh.eu/>.

¹⁷ Cfr. <https://heinnovate.eu/en>.

- *UNESCO's MOST Programme*: Our interaction with the Management of Social Transformations (MOST) programme has confirmed their interest in our initiative. Their support will enhance our global outreach and ensure that our framework aligns with international standards for social impact assessment¹⁸.

4. *Plans for active stakeholder engagement – Permanent European Policy Observatory*

Given the above considerations, the need for the establishment of a Permanent Observatory on European Policies with the aim of monitoring and helping to disseminate information, promote constructive dialogue between EBU and EU institutions is highlighted. The European University of Rome is a guarantor of this thinking by establishing it at the Center for Integral Training-CeF.

This initiative becomes an effective means to help students in their Integrative Training and value orientation to professions in a European horizon of exchanges and future perspectives especially in the fields of business, personal services, institutions, and Associations and the Third Sector, Promoting certain aspects such as:

- *Immersive international workshops*: These dynamic events will not only facilitate dialogue but also include hands-on sessions where stakeholders can co-create solutions, ensuring their direct input shapes the project outcomes. As for example of a networking activity.
- *Interactive working groups*: Stakeholders will play active roles in specialized working groups, collaborating closely on different project facets, fostering deep, interdisciplinary national collaboration, being the National Young Entrepreneurs Observatory a very positive best practice.
- *Advisory think tanks*: We will establish think tanks made up of visionary stakeholders who will provide strategic insight. “Itinerari Previdenziali” as Study Center is a positive best practice.
- *Real-time feedback mechanisms*: Using different means we will implement real-time feedback tools that allow stakeholders to continuously provide ideas and comments, ensuring that our framework

¹⁸ Cfr. <https://www.unesco.org/en/management-social-transformations-most-programme>

evolves dynamically. The Sme Italian as “Capitalimpresa” is a best practice.

- *Interdisciplinary panels:* To enrich our discussions and increase the range of perspectives, panels will include participants from various disciplines. This will ensure a holistic approach to each topic, embracing complexity and multiple viewpoints.

5. CONCLUSIONS

Creating successful environments, initiatives, and programs within or in synergy with universities is vital for helping students and recent graduates enter the world of entrepreneurship equipped with all the necessary tools for success. These programs continue the education that students receive, ensuring that the seeds of ideas planted in academic settings blossom into enterprises that strengthen and enhance the broader ecosystem of entrepreneurship and innovation worldwide.

- To communicate our work and our mission with an efficient interaction with the local area through training and interaction with social policies We should continue to develop long-term intellectual agendas while engaging more fully in public discussions. We could actively tap into the potential offered by (traditional and new) media to enhance our impact, without compromising our intellectual rigor. In the crisis of values and educational poverty that is enveloping our country, the answer lies in educating youth. Vocational Training: it is pivotal point of education and is fundamental and useful for the country. But in order for vocational training to become even more effective in the educational life of the country, new changes and a more effective commitment to active labor policies are needed to follow up both training and job placement and thus a more proactive relationship with businesses.
- The true mission of the University is to become a beacon and a landmark anchored on the constant search for truth, thanks to its method related to the study of data and neutrality to the pursuit of the common good.
- The University is a source of awareness for every generation with special attention to young people who are beginning their responsible inclusion in society and need guidance and support.

- The University should promote integral formation and Leadership formation programs oriented to social responsibility as a mission and meaning of life for the good of social and personal life.
- We must move from a society based only on competitiveness to a society based on greater solidarity. The defense of the common home. And that is why true innovation must be above all humanistic in order to live a life respecting the dignity of the human being in every context and culture.
- The humanistic approach promotes vocational and human education for a better future where teachers face the challenges of contemporary society and students develop the foundation for a life project.
- The mission of the Universities is to develop social impact as a good way to promote integral social development. The word development also includes the concept of constant improvement where merit and effort should always be rewarded. On the other hand, development should be integral and in accordance with the principle of the common good to ensure the principles of justice and peace as well.
- Every professor should be a co-creator of knowledge and ideas that continuously enrich our thinking and our learning. We can become a leading European hub to co-create sustainable models of society. We can reinforce our role as an open and reflexive community at the critical intersection of academia, politics, and society, bringing together worlds which are too often separate.
- From these premises, we can say that the University is a source of hope, and certainly we should be proud to be part of an academic community if it is oriented in this direction. *Aware that knowledge without action is a great waste.*