Transdisciplinary humanities for social transformation

The Global Digital Humanities degree at Mondragon University AS Fabrik

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ABSTRACT

The new degree in the Global Digital Humanities has been launched by the Faculty of Humanities and Education at Mondragon University on its new urban campus of Bilbao AS Fabrik. In a time of increasing urbanisation, universities must reflect on their relationship to surrounding cities and regions and develop ways to incorporate the urban and regional setting in their educational offerings. This BA shows the value of a transdisciplinary Action Research approach in facing complex social challenges and contributing to innovative social transformations in the city and region. The new campus also marks the beginning of an internal university process to develop mutual knowledge and greater permeability between different degree programmes in pursuit of a new organisational culture and practice that moves beyond narrow disciplinary models.

KEYWORDS

AS Fabrik, Global Digital Humanities, Mondragon University, social transformation, transdisciplinarity, urbanisation

The rise of cities and their interaction with higher education

We live in increasingly urbanised societies. Cities have become central nodes in the chains of global value production that have emerged as a result of the new digital paradigm – the knowledge society and the platform economy – with their millions of digital interactions. This digital platform reinforces the power and economies of cities such as San Francisco, Singapore, London, Berlin or Barcelona. Some defend this phenomenon without

question, arguing that cities represent the most advanced form of social organisation (Glaeser 2011). Others point to the dysfunctions and imbalances that the growth of large cities generates throughout regional territories (Taibo 2021) along with the pathologies of crime, homelessness, rural depopulation and increased inequality. Both arguments must be taken into account as they reflect different dimensions of a complex reality.

This article focuses on a degree programme of the Mondragon University (MU), a university set up in 1997 in the Basque Autonomous Community in Spain by uniting three educational cooperatives belonging to the Mondragon Corporation, one of the largest groups of labour-owned and managed cooperatives in the world. Among the ten key principles of the overall Mondragon Cooperative Corporation is social transformation for the development of the region (Barandiaran and Lezaun 2017; Calzada 2013). Although MU was a presence mostly in rural and small-town industrial areas, in the last decade it has recognised the increasing importance of cities in the region. Responding to this, MU decided to establish a new branch in Bilbao to give a greater boost to endogenous territorial development through an educational model based on collaboration through networks and Action Research (AR)[1] (Karlsen and Larrea 2014).

Many universities are located in cities and are simultaneously immersed in social innovation processes. In this article, social innovation is understood in the terms defined by James Phills Jr. and colleagues (2008: 39) as 'a novel solution to a social problem that is more effective, efficient, sustainable, or just than existing solutions and for which the value created accrues primarily to society as a whole rather than private individuals'. Keri Facer and Magdalena Buchczyk (2019) have worked on the concepts of learning cities and connected communities, and, as they explain, universities can be key agents in combining both concepts. If we understand the university as an institution integrated into a broader community and as an organisation that also collaborates with other social actors, then its activities need to take place not just in university buildings but also in the community itself. By doing so, in addition to revitalising the university itself (Mullins 2011; Wright 2017), it becomes possible to strengthen the civic commitments of the students. Collaboration between students and communities can strengthen their citizenship education (Simons and Masschelein 2009) and help carry out diagnostics to identify the needs of the urban community and suggest possible remedies (Bendix Petersen 2007; Greenwood and Levin 2007; Hyatt 2015). Such approaches help respond to the long-term

complaints about poor links and relationships between urban universities and their surrounding environments (Addie et al. 2015).

Moreover, both the growing datafication processes that lead to 'big data', 'smart cities' (for a conceptualisation of both terms, see Calzada 2021) and the configuration of universities in the era of digitisation are not without controversy. On the one hand, academics like Susan Wright wonder if, through a range of different reforms, universities have gradually shifted from the responsibility to be the 'critic and conscience of society' to submitting to the mandates of efficiency and productivity and operating as hierarchical and centralised entities. She also questions how students and academics can learn to reflect critically on the present university 'scene' in such a context (Wright 2017: 18).

In the wake of the 2008 global financial collapse, corporations have converged on cities around the world to sell technology and collect valuable data that is subsequently transformed into information and merchandised as a new form of value (Calzada 2021: 247). Algorithmic governance solutions currently lack transparency, exacerbated when these algorithms are integrated into already opaque processes of city government. During the last decade, the public and commercial sectors' deployment of sensors and data gathering tools in 'smart cities' has raised political difficulties regarding artificial intelligence (AI), surveillance capitalism and individuals' digital rights to privacy and ownership. This could entail a derailing of public governance and its conversion into the private sector governance of urban life (Mosco 2019). Therefore, Calzada (2021: 246–247) suggests a transition towards 'experimental cities' that are 'more socially constructed (smart) cities' where AI plays a more pro-social role, fostering a bottom-up approach for city governance through the penta helix model. This model is 'a joint interaction of the four established helixes of the so-called Quadruple helix (the public sector, the private sector, academia, and civil society) being intermediated and activated by the fifth-helix (social entrepreneurs/activists)'.

All of these factors are relevant to MU's commitment to the social transformation and development of the Basque Autonomous Community in an era marked by the rise of cities. This has produced a necessary reflection on the role of the university in such urbanised and highly technologically developed environments. To adapt its academic offerings to such a complex environment and to contribute to the development of the Basque region, MU opted for a transdisciplinary degree offered in the city itself. This article describes the way in which the Faculty of Humanities and Education Sciences[2]

of MU has dealt with transdisciplinarity when creating its programme in Bilbao and seeking to increase its impact within the region.

Need for a transdisciplinary approach to face social challenges

Many voices are being raised in favour of more humanistic and sustainable development, and they refer to higher education institutions as necessary agents in achieving this goal (European Commission 2017; Facer and Buchzyk 2019; GUNI 2017, 2019; UNESCO 2015). For this to become a reality, a more holistic university approach is needed, not the mere application of specialist knowledge from separate disciplinary silos. Various steps in the process of cooperation and coordination are reviewed, based on the classification proposed by Erich Jantsch (1970).[3] The adoption of a transdisciplinary model was seen as a necessary aspirational goal within the design of the degree in Global Digital Humanities. Otherwise, it could not achieve its objectives.

Structural imbalances are clearly visible in today's highly technological global society. A variety of systems of production have contributed to the deterioration of the environment, human rights are routinely ignored and cultural intolerance and conflicts relating to religion and ethnic identity are increasing (Martínez Osés 2013; Whitley and Hosein 2010). The overarching issues of climate change and migration/refugee crises, poverty and rural exodus and urban overcrowding are visible everywhere (Leimgruber and Chang 2019; United Nations 2019). In response to these challenges, organisations such as UNESCO (2015) have proposed refocusing education in the direction of policies that recognise the organisation of learning opportunities aimed toward common or collective social tasks, both locally and globally.

The key role of the university in contributing to the development of its local environment and the establishment of a regional strategy[4] in conjunction with local authorities, social agents, and civic representatives has been highlighted (GUNI 2017: 53), along with a call for better quality general education committed to the integration of different fields of interdisciplinary knowledge and learning to achieve the aforementioned objectives (GUNI 2019: 536–538). Jantsch (1970: 411), however, warns us that when speaking of 'the various steps of cooperation and coordination among disciplines', it is necessary to distinguish between different levels, beginning from the lowest one (multidisciplinarity) and gradually growing (pluridisciplinarity-cross-disciplinarity-interdisciplinarity) until finally reaching transdisciplinarity.

Mendeberri 2025, the educational project of MU for the coming years, stresses that interdisciplinarity goes beyond multidisciplinarity and represents an intermediate step to reach transdisciplinarity (García et al. 2019). Ronald Barnett (2022) makes a distinction between *multidisciplinary* and *interdisciplinary*, where the focus is still on disciplines, and *transdiciplinary*, where the focus is on the object of study/research.

This approach is fundamental in the first cycle of the new degree in Global Digital Humanities. During the first two years, there is always a transdisciplinary project that runs through all the modules. First-year students of the 2022–2023 academic year, for example, carried out, together with neighbours and local social agents, an urban intervention in the island of Zorrotzaurre (the largest remaining industrial site in Bilbao, in the estuary of the Nervión River, an area in serious decline in recent years) throughout the entire academic year within the framework of the T-Factor project.[5] All the modules of the course were put at the service of the urban intervention to be developed. The commitment of the new degree to transdisciplinarity must therefore be understood within this pedagogical framework and as a necessary requirement to address the complex, multi-system problems of cities and regions.

Overcoming the divide

The need to move in the direction of a more holistic approach towards knowledge is increasingly clear (Hartley 2017). The failure to take a transdisciplinary systems view leads to partial solutions to problems, while following a transdisciplinary model that highlights the relationships and connections of different elements of the framework has the advantage of a self-improving model that catalyses transformation in iterative evolutionary cycles (Hashmi et al. 2021).

Some of the challenges of contemporary university systems are to train people for professions that do not yet exist and help them learn to operate in systems with dynamic and permeable boundaries. It is insufficient to have applied or technical training; students also need tools to redefine their skills and abilities in response to emerging problems throughout their lives. Meeting this standard has a major impact on university programmes of study and skills development (GUNI 2019: 543).

Both the knowledge and the challenges faced in the first third of the twenty-first century can only be approached in a holistic and integrated

way linking the sciences and humanities (GUNI 2019: 45). The idea of a divide between the sciences and the humanities in the second half of the nineteenth century (Bouterse and Karstens 2015) was later strengthened in the context of the second industrial revolution and the birth of mass society. This context has now changed. Today we inhabit a global, interconnected and highly automated world. However, 'the academic university system and the research system in general are accused of being unable to tackle and solve society's pressing "real-world problems"' (Schmidt 2008: 65). Jantsch (1970) argues that the challenges faced by this world require a trans-disciplinary approach for a reason that is not just an internal academic but also a societal one. However, as Schmidt points out (2008: 65), for the most part, these new 'transdisciplinary' problems 'do not fit into the established scheme of academic disciplines' not least because university evaluation and reward structures discourage transdisciplinary work.

Interactions between humanism, technology and society are required to guarantee society's sustainable self-renewal referred to by Jantsch (1970: 416). As has been noted 'there are many humanisms'. In this article the concept is aligned with the 'organised secular humanist movement' that seeks the full development of the potential of human beings based on ethics, responsibility, judgement and scientific knowledge along with action-oriented thinking and pedagogy (Norman 2012: 8 and 192). Efforts to do this are still limited but increasing (Frodeman et al. 2007). Eva Infante Mora and colleagues (2019: 70) demonstrate the possibility of using a trans-disciplinary approach to university studies, by combining a multiplicity of kinds of knowledge, methods and experiences within an Action Research paradigm (Greenwood and Levin 2007). Such an approach gives a greater role to experiential learning with the city as a classroom and situates the student at the centre as an active agent of their own learning.

However, as E. J. Pharo and colleagues remark (2012), even when collaboration between teachers is possible and feasible, it is not easy to overcome disciplinary barriers in a university structured around disciplines evaluated and funded by national 'audit culture' schemes. Universities must be aware not just of the need for transdisciplinarity but also trans-institutionality (GUNI 2019: 542), since, as Jantsch emphasises (1970: 414), it is through transdisciplinarity that 'the education/innovation system becomes "alive" in the sense that disciplinary contents, structures and interfaces change continuously through coordination geared to the pursuit of systems goals'.

This section has pointed out the need for a more humanistic education structured around the organisation of learning opportunities oriented towards common or collective social tasks, both locally and globally, and pragmatically using all the different perspectives that are relevant to the challenge at hand. Such an approach necessarily requires overcoming the division of knowledge into separate disciplines to develop a transdisciplinary approach. The Faculty of Humanities and Education of MU took on this organisational challenge when it began to consider expanding its academic offerings in Bilbao.

The arrival in Bilbao of MU project

MU was approached by the Mayor of Bilbao in 2013 to contribute to innovation in the city. In contrast to the town of Mondragon's relatively small size and rural location in the Province of Gipuzkoa, Bilbao is the Basque Country's largest industrial city and is located in another province (Biscay). Susan Wright and Julian Manley (2021) have taken an in-depth look at the process that was set in motion after that first contact. As these authors point out, MU was allocated a building opposite the city hall and was assigned the task of establishing an 'Innovation Factory'. This initiative was aimed at producing one thousand social entrepreneurs, four hundred entrepreneurship students, and fifty start-ups. At the same time, the Entrepreneurial Leadership and Innovation BA degree offered by the Faculty of Business at MU was launched in Bilbao.

Once the bases of the project had been established, City Hall invited MU to participate in the next stage of the city's revitalisation. They appealed for assistance in transforming the island of Zorrotzaurre to convert it into a knowledge industry hub establishing there the 'European Advanced Service Factory', Bilbao AS Fabrik (Wright and Manley 2021). Bilbao AS Fabrik aims to consolidate Zorrotzaurre as an innovative ecosystem and a benchmark in the field of advanced services for industry 4.0 and the digital economy, combining university training and a community of people spearheading innovative business and social initiatives.[6]

To that end, BA programmes in Technology, Business, Data Analytics and Global Digital Humanities were created and launched in September 2020. The academic year commenced in a building located in the centre of Bilbao and owned by the city council but then continued at the new Zorrotzaurre campus after January 2021. This was a significant move in the history of

MU since it was the first time that three of the university's four faculties shared the same research and teaching space. The aim was to create an environment focused on innovation projects with companies, associations and communities and inter-cooperative and transdisciplinary research.

Action Research is intrinsically a systems activity that necessarily relies on a transdisciplinary approach. Nevertheless, universities tend to segregate subjects and maintain organised interests that guard against any 'territorial incursions' (Greenwood and Levin 2007: 74). Implementing a transdisciplinary proposal in a university is not an easy task, even in a cooperative university like MU, made up of faculties that, in turn, are also independent cooperative enterprises. Managing the initial emergence of these cooperative faculties was not without its problems and constraints. However, cooperative thinking and action has begun to make it possible to overcome these rigid schemes and create synergies. In the field of education, transdisciplinarity enables restrictions within conventional university education to be adjusted. In short, it could be said that MU's way of working – albeit within a framework of departmental organisation in the faculties – has involved 'informalising the formal' by removing institutional barriers to cross-university collaboration. Teaching staff share spaces, time and subjects that are oriented towards the development of the competences required for a given profession, not by teaching what the teacher knows but by helping students develop the competences – in terms of learning outcomes – that their professions demand and that, above all, will be needed in the future.

The new degree in the Global Digital Humanities has taken initial steps in this direction, especially thanks to the transdisciplinary design of the modules and the Action Research approach. In the first cycle there is always a transdisciplinary project that runs through all the modules: in the first year, the previously described module, focused on an urban intervention that responds to a defined social need; in the second year, the organisation of an event that addresses an emerging social trend (in the 2021–2022 academic year, the event, for instance, carried out together with the Bizitegi association that works for a society without exclusions, focused on mental health[7]). In both cases, professors from the three faculties present at AS Fabrik take part in the development of the projects together with public institutions, social agents and inhabitants of the island.

However, coordination via disciplinary departments still prevails in the ecosystem created in Bilbao AS Fabrik, even though the professors in the different faculties share the same space and several interfaculty commissions have been set up for campus management.[8] Each faculty has its own culture, and the new campus marks the beginning of an interesting process of gaining mutual knowledge and enhancing permeability.

A new degree for a new landscape

The move to Bilbao constituted a major challenge for the Faculty of Humanities and Education at MU (Wright and Manley 2021). The Faculty had to adapt to an environment with different socio-demographic characteristics from its small-town surroundings and in a place where the Mondragon cooperative model was almost unknown. It was necessary to establish relationships between the university and local Bilbao stakeholders to be able to contribute to the social transformation of the area. In addition, the new BA degree in Global Digital Humanities also had to respond to a changing work environment affected mostly by digital technology and growing interconnections between digitisation, social processes and cultural values.

The Global Digital Humanities degree was designed at a time of great change in which new forms of creation, innovation and exchange of ideas were emerging thanks to the encounters between new technologies, creative communities (defined by Anna Meroni, 2007, as spaces where individuals and communities use existing resources in a creative, original way to bring about system innovation), and the consequent new professional profiles that are being created (Roca 2019). The workplace now has become increasingly driven by digital technology, and necessarily emphasises more flexible and complex work systems (European Commission 2017: 2). These changes decreased the importance of working in constant direct proximity, permitting a mix of telecommuting and face-to-face work (Sánchez et al. 2021).

The new scenario has been described as a 'fluid employment environment' (McKie 2019) in which people were expected to acquire a flexible range of transferable skills for problem resolution, all of which were considered imperative for success in the workplace. Among the elements are critical thinking, the ability to make ethical judgements, resilience, systems thinking, flexibility, mental agility, teamwork, communication and collaboration skills along with high-level digital skills, writing and calculation,

autonomy and learning how to learn sustainably (European Commission 2016, 2017; López-Varela 2019; Watson and McConnell 2019).

These skills are considered fundamental in a changing world (European Commission 2017: 4). However, as important as the focus on the skills of managing uncertainty is, it is wrong to justify the deploying of 'the rhetoric of uncertainty to naturalise the unstable labour markets of the early 21st century' (Burke 2021: 5). To be clear, the Global Digital Humanities is a response to complex, dynamic systems problems of long duration, and not merely a response to a precarious and uncertain work environment and to the training of new entry-level workers. Workplace scenarios have changed, and the changes challenge existing organisations to adapt and find employees capable of helping them do so. Organisations need to evolve towards new understandings, methods and interfaces to survive. To do so, the skills previously listed are fundamental (Secanella 2011).

For universities like MU, such perspectives entail questioning rigid hierarchical structures (including the organisational division into departments and tight disciplines) and moving toward transdisciplinary and more community-based forms of management. This is not just a matter for the administration or faculty to enact. It must include staff members and the students themselves in the decisions to be made and their enactment (Wright and Greenwood 2017).

Local stakeholders from the extra-university environment must also be taken into account by higher education institutions including those involved in research and social and civic activities in local communities and contributing to local development (European Commission 2016, 2017). This scenario requires undergraduate teaching to have a broader base than it previously had (McKie 2019). Academic institutions must modify the learning outcomes integrated into their study plans to include the development and improvement of the so-called soft skills (Lavy and Yadin 2013), which, as Rey (2014) points out, are not at all soft but rather as important as the technical skills that have been privileged in the Business Schools. The International Labour Organization (Goll 2021) provides a framework for skills in a changing world that endorses this opinion. Narrow specialisation loses its importance in favour of transversal skills and social transformation while at the same time, strong expertise in a wide variety of subjects is needed. Overall, the education system must adopt the model of learning to meeting concrete challenges and learning by doing (Luis Miguel Olivas, Director of Employability and Educational Innovation at 42 campus, Fundación

Telefónica, cited by Sánchez 2018; see also García Manjón and Pérez López 2008: 11). In creating the Global Digital Humanities course of study, these imperatives were carefully analysed.

Transdisciplinarity for social transformation: the design and organisation of Global Digital Humanities programme

The three core areas signalled by the 7th Report on Higher Education in the World in relation to the changing professional environment constituted the base on which the Global Digital Humanities degree was designed:

1. Conditions for life: habitability, survival and diversity
2. Scientific and technological changes, robotics, artificial intelligence and big data
3. Cultural changes 'in a world where the West and patriarchy are no longer the sole hegemony' (GUNI 2019: 534).

The criteria set by the European Commission (2017), the United Nations (2019) and the Bilbao City Council (2018) in terms of multiculturalism, inclusiveness and sustainability were also taken into account.

The academics designing the new programme held several meetings with experts in the social sciences, humanities and educational innovation. Subsequently, a benchmarking process had two main phases: in the first one, the syllabus and structures of forty-seven programmes of Spanish, European, American and Australian universities were analysed. After that, a total of thirteen universities were selected in order to visit their facilities and to interview their coordinators. Finally, interviews were held with several professionals and institutional representatives.

The following conclusions were drawn from this comparative analysis process:

• The vast majority of the experts and academics concurred on the relevance of a four-year degree divided into two cycles of two years each, with its first cycle built around transdisciplinary modules focused on social analysis and experiential learning and with two itineraries in its second cycle focused on the two variables that have the most influence in today's society, globalisation and digitisation.

- The idea of a first cycle that offered a wide range of topics from a transdisciplinary perspective stood out as a way of encouraging students to discover what really motivates them. In particular, McKie (2019: 8) pointed out that 'the absorption of a range of disciplines into a single programme in this way may also help to overcome one salient criticism of the traditional US major-minor model: that the collection of course credits that students are required to accumulate often lack intellectual coherence and fail even to add up to the sum of their parts, never mind surpass them'. To achieve coherence, modules would be structured around the challenges faced by society, along the lines of universities such as Keele in the United Kingdom, Groningen in the Netherlands or Hiram College in the United States.
- Regarding the second cycle, the comparison of different Global Studies programmes revealed that structures around socio-economic and environmental challenges prevailed. It was decided to design an itinerary with several of the Sustainable Development Goals as the backbone. From the analysis of various programmes in the Digital Humanities, it was concluded that this itinerary should be based on computing, socio-humanistic knowledge and design thinking, a process commonly used by designers to find the solution to complex issues, navigate new or uncertain environments and create new products, services and experiences for the world (Black et al. 2019).
- Finally, the professionals and institutional representatives that were consulted pointed out that it was a 'disruptive degree', being different from those so far existing in the Basque Country and showed their willingness to collaborate for that very reason.

Once all these inputs had been received, the degree programme was designed, structured over two cycles, each of two years duration. This programme design was approved by Unibasq (the Basque University System Quality Assurance Agency) as an official university degree in April 2020. The Global Digital Humanities degree was launched in Bilbao in September 2020 with twenty-seven students, in a context heavily conditioned by the COVID-19 pandemic. To face this situation, the Faculty of Humanities and Education Sciences developed an 'integrated hybrid model' (HUHEZI 2020) that included face-to-face on-campus classes, off-campus classes, online synchronous classes and asynchronous classes. During the previous months, it offered specific training to its teachers to work in these four

contexts. Thanks to this, the course could be developed relatively normally, even though not all the activities designed around the concept of extending the campus into the city could be carried out.

In the first cycle, Basque is the language of instruction, with guaranteed contact with English and Spanish via expert talks, workshops, and readings.[9] The first cycle focuses on the conditions for life, habitability, survival and diversity, and works towards this by means of transdisciplinary modules. Transdisciplinarity is encouraged by working on challenges, problems, projects, cases, and so on, which require integrated knowledge of different areas or fields of learning. This requires, on the part of the students, ways of acting and thinking that transcend a specific subject; and, on the part of the teaching staff, support and guidance that is also oriented to this specific subject and to the broader problem, from a global, holistic perspective that goes beyond 'their' narrow subject areas and develops a broader orientation to the work and development of future professionals.

The core expertise in each module is always drawn from the social sciences or the humanities and is complemented with inputs from the sciences or technology, and it involves the interaction between different lecturers and guest speakers. For example, the module *Identities, Culture and Migrations* is based mainly on anthropological perspectives but is also augmented with biology and cultural studies. Special attention is paid to the development of transversal skills and the study of the social phenomena, as will be described later in this article.

During this first year, students analyse the organisation of urban space and its populations (in collaboration with associations, international experts and municipal representatives). They identify societal needs and develop prototypes using 3D printing, video editing, augmented reality and laser cutting that aim to address these needs. The Action Research paradigm (Greenwood and Levin 2007; Infante Mora 2019), together with the development of an active pedagogy in which mentors accompany students on their learning paths (Infante Mora et al. 2019) and challenge-based learning[10] have been the main inspiration behind the course design. Moreover, Wright and Manley (2021: 58) reported on this, saying that 'a conference called *"UniverCity: Educating for and with the City"* brought together faculty members, city planners, commercial and cultural organisations and foreign educators to discuss how they were translating their experience of cooperative education into the new context of Bilbao'. The conference additionally

reflected on how to extend the campus to the entire city and take advantage of the city's educational potential.

During the second year, the syllabus focuses on identifying future trends, paying special attention, among other issues, to the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals. Students commencing their second year in September 2021, for instance, discussed the results of this prospective task with representatives from the non-university organisations that took part in a second seminar, *UniverCity: Organize locally to respond globally* (held in Bilbao on 9 and 10 December 2021).[11] These organisations work on social research and systemic change. Following these discussions, the students began, in January 2022, to organise an event (the one on mental health mentioned earlier) aiming to analyse with experts from various fields the most pressing challenges faced by society in the coming ten years. Held in June 2022, the students, tutored by their mentors, oversaw the event's programming, financing, organisation and communication. This training included a trip to Brussels in which students learned about the global policy of European institutions and visited advanced technological hubs. The trip to Brussels was planned to help students choose between one of the two specialisation itineraries (both in English) offered in the degree in its second cycle (third and fourth years): Global Studies and Digital Humanities. This second-year study visit to Brussels has been repeated in the 2022–23 and 2023–24 academic years.

The Digital Humanities itinerary focuses on the new horizons opened up by robotics, computing, artificial intelligence and big data (Burdick et al. 2012; Terras et al. 2013; Vinck 2018). The Global Studies itinerary aims to prepare the students for the challenges of global society (Baumann-Pauly and Nolan 2016; Emmerij et al. 2001; Garcés 2019; Loyola 2016; Sandler 1997; Shah 2020). The design has focused on the Sustainable Development Goals of a cultural and socio-economic nature (Rasche and Kell 2010; United Nations 2008; United Nations 2020).

Concluding remarks

Among the outcomes of the seminar *UniverCity. Educating for and with the City*, three main challenges were identified that would affect the launch of the new degree and the development of cooperative education 'with and for' any new site (Wright and Manley 2021: 58–59):

1. Understanding properly the way Bilbao (a city that is transitioning from its industrial past to a globalised and technological centre) and its future were imagined. Regarding this challenge, the first cohort of students presented their prototypes at the end of the 2020–2021 course in an event attended by representatives of the Bilbao City Council, along with students and teachers, members of various companies and associations, and the coordinator of the Bilbao AS Fabrik urban laboratory. The degree of satisfaction expressed by all attendees was high and, as a result, students' projects in the academic year 2022–2023 were developed within the T-Factor project mentioned earlier: they worked together with city council and neighbourhood representatives and organisations rooted in Zorrotzaurre to design a space for citizen exchange of resources within the framework of the circular and collaborative economy.

2. Establishing relations between the university and local stakeholders, as a vital feature of the way MU works. During the 2022–2023 academic year, relations were strengthened both with companies, associations and social agents in the city (most students will carry out their work experience with them) and with municipal representatives. The aim was to generate an ecosystem of social innovation (the Bilbao AS Fabrik urban laboratory has also contributed to this) that would have an impact not just in the city but beyond the metropolitan area of Bilbao, reflecting the territorial imbalances and rural depopulation.

3. Supporting students in developing cooperative enterprises. For the international educators gathered in the aforementioned seminar, 'an explicit account of a co-operative pedagogy seemed to be missing: how will the focus on individual development, with a sense of responsibility and leadership…instead come together in a cooperative assemblage?' (Wright and Manley 2021: 59). Mondragon University has organised the main characteristics of its new pedagogical framework, Mendeberri 2025, along six axes in order to put the accent not only on the training of future professionals but also on their human and citizen development. One of the six axes refers to the cooperative person, a person that feels like a member of a community and assumes its principles and values. It puts the common good before the individual good and works for social transformation for the sake of justice and dignity of the people (García et al. 2019: 12). This dimension is worked on during the first cycle of the Global Digital Humanities degree through: (a) individual tutorials, and (b) the development of group projects. During

the second cycle of the degree, the cooperative dimension is developed both in the internship and the Final Degree Project as well as in modules such as *Creation of Organizations and Entities, Shared Leadership and Social Transformation* and *Leadership and Digital Transformation*.

The future, as always, remains to be built and further analysis will be needed to assess how the new degree has addressed the foregoing issues and also to know whether and how it should be altering or expanding its focus of action beyond the city to the region. It will be searching for models that address the drastic economic, political and environmental challenges we all face.

Acknowledgement

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Notes

1. Action research is a way of collaboratively organising the definition, analysis, design of solutions, implementation of the solutions and evaluation of the results with the relevant stakeholders. It involves collaboration among action research facilitators and representatives of the local stakeholders with an aim of generating new knowledge and practical solutions that are more liberating and sustainable for the stakeholders (Greenwood and Levin 2007).

2. In this article the term 'faculty' is used in the sense that the Cambridge Dictionary gives to this meaning: 'A group of departments in a university or college that specialise in a particular subject or group of subjects'.

3. The Centre for Educational Research and Innovation (CERI) of the OECD published in 1970 a volume titled *Interdisciplinarity.* According to Weingart (2000: 25) 'few if any tracts' attained 'the sophistication' of that volume 'in which Erich Jantsch published his seminal study of interdisciplinarity in research and education'.

4. With regard to the case at hand, when we speak of region, we are talking about the Autonomous Community of the Basque Country, the government of which meets the requirements set by UNESCO (n. d.): 'A regional government usually has the fiscal authority to raise taxes within its territory and should have the ability to spend at least some of its income according to its own policies, and appoint or elect its own officers'.

5. The T-Factor project aims to transform historic urban areas across Europe into hubs of entrepreneurship and socio-cultural inclusion through innovation actions. The project has joined cities, universities, businesses and grassroots organisations in the creation of new knowledge, tools and approaches aimed at temporary urbanism that can contribute to inclusive and thriving futures in cities. The T-Factor project comprises eight front-runner initiatives (T-Factor Advanced Cases) and six early-stage initiatives (T-Factor's pilots), one of the latter being the urban regeneration project developed in Zorrotzaurre (https://www.t-factor.eu/).

6. Bilbao Council https://www.bilbao.eus/cs/Satellite?c=BIO_Noticia_FA&cid =1279161882774&language=en&pageid=3000075248&pagename=Bilbaonet%2FBIO_ Noticia_FA%2FBIO_Noticia.

7. See https://kuna.bbk.eus/en/event/taburu/.

8. There are also programmes such as the ChangeMaker LAB, the international programme for foreign students or the platform for university activities in which students and modules of different degrees converge.

9. The Faculty of Humanities and Education of MU was founded in 1976 as a Teacher Training School to prepare teachers who could teach in Basque in the new era that began after the Franco dictatorship. The Faculty is deeply rooted in its environment and firmly committed to the development of Basque, yet open to the world and other cultures. Thus, it considers this degree as an opportunity to articulate gradually the local and the global. The BA begins with the sociocultural analysis of its closest environment, which is why in the first cycle the language of instruction is mainly Basque, to progressively broaden its focus to problems of a more global nature. During the second cycle the transition to more global contexts takes place with the teaching of the itineraries in English, the arrival of international students during both semesters and the departure of undergraduate students to academic stays and final projects abroad.

10. In keeping with the twenty-first century university model and with the intention of getting closer to the employment reality of future university graduates, Mondragon University launched an educational innovation first implemented in the 2015–2016 academic year in the degree in Audiovisual Communication. In it, the subject structure is broken and the course is organised through working sequences aimed at achieving a final challenge (García et al. 2018).

11. UniverCity: Organize locally to respond globally, https://univercity.mondragon.edu/ es/inicio.

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