

# Una Europa Future UniLab Values Cluster

Which core values should inform the University of the future to avoid the binaries of the traditional ivory tower and rigid managerialism?

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Envisioning report

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## University as a LIGHTHOUSE instead of an Ivory Tower

### University as a LIGHTHOUSE: a strong partner to society

We envision the university not as an ivory tower but as a lighthouse. A lighthouse that is an easily reachable and trustworthy partner, a reliable point of reference, a gentle giant (small universities can be gentle giants as well). The lighthouse is tall, its head extends into the clouds, but its feet stay on the ground. It combines on the one hand vision and imagination, interdisciplinary 'universitas' and a broad and far overview, and on the other hand strong scientific engagement, realism and outreach to society. It is firmly rooted both within academia and within society. The lighthouse embodies integrity. It does not serve itself but society, and we know it must be strong and healthy to be able to do so. This humility makes us stronger.

A BOX as the core: Thinking out of the box by appreciating it

From an early age, we learn box-thinking: Just by experience, we get to know the confines of boxes, to see boxes as something that keeps us inside and restricts us. We then are often taught to think outside of the box, to free ourselves of this box, or at least how to work with or around the box in order to overcome it.

When referring to the box as a metaphor, we rarely consider the positive sides (literally) of the box. We hardly ever think about the reasons for the box's existence, nor do we think of those that make it reasonable to appreciate the box: **Boxes are containers**, they can hold an endless variety of contents and take just as many shapes. Their **walls can provide safety** for our communities and their ideas **and security** against the inconveniences, if not dangers outside.

This is in no way a plea for standing still or sticking to the status quo. Moreover, we are suggesting that new types of boxes be defined and developed. Boxes that are **flexible** and **grow** according to our needs. Boxes with walls that are **transparent** enough to allow for visibility, transdisciplinarity and collaboration while at the same time **strong** enough to provide safety and shield from potential harm.

These boxes may provide a **durable and versatile core** to all the objectives of universities. They can allow universities to find or create the right **balance** between sustainability and profitability, student services that meet needs rather than too much pampering, for research developed in absolute freedom or driven by external demands. A good balance between professionalism and managerialism, structure and innovation.

Our universities as institutions are contained in their organizational environment that influences the conception and, more importantly, implementation of any of its visions, strategies and operations, thus acting as the "box" in which universities exist and act. In many cases, the box's walls are transparent or even invisible like glass, only to be noticed gradually. These walls do not so much influence a university's choice of values and objectives, but rather determine whether and how these can actually be realized. Very often this box "limits", so that well-meant debates, workshops and strategy processes on values and visions for the future merely end in strategy papers, the process itself getting bogged down by everyday operations, internal and external requirements and circumstances. Not rarely are we caught in a status of "if only we could..." Often this box has a problem for every solution.

Thus it is essential to redefine actions beyond the walls of the box. To empower institutions to act rather than being worn out by the mere effort needed to navigate between internal administrative and personnel structures, legislation, traditional and recent power relations within the institutions or in regional, national or even global politics.

Can we redevelop our current boxes - on an institutional as well as on a systemic level - or design new ones that are not imprisoning but rather provide the room future universities need to **maneuver and grow**?

Can we create **universities as boxes** that present **ideal conditions** for their members to strive when learning or teaching?

Can we instigate change and growth where it is needed and manageable, empowering **innovation and the development of values** within this framework?

And finally, can we encourage our universities' communities to also **leave the box**? To use our institutions as havens providing safety that is truly liberating, but rather than becoming too comfortable to feel empowered to take a risk, to venture out for new discoveries.

## University as a COMPASS - especially in times and situations of "ground zero" knowledge - to communicate the directions where to go when no one else has the answer

The world is a complex place, and the future holds frightful scenarios. To be able to navigate towards the future safely and keep everyone on board, we need to have clear bearings. Scholarship and the universities – as the key institutions upholding research and teaching – give us the most refined estimates of what the world will look like in one, ten, or thirty years. They draw the map of the world around us.

On the map, we may orient ourselves by following the light of the lighthouse, but we also need other tools to reach a better future. Not everyone can have their own lighthouse. However, all university members, be they students or employees, can have their **personal compasses**. This compass **points to the right direction, as it is made of shared ideals and values, like freedom, equality, and autonomy**.

**A Compass is impartial.** It is impartial and works the same for everyone who knows how to use it to navigate. But it is useless if one does not look around and take one's environment into account. There are various obstacles on our way, and our path must be adjusted accordingly. Hence, we need to create the habit of checking our reliable, unforgiving and impartial compass every once in a while to ensure that we are on the right track.

A compass helps us to **pursue new knowledge and conquer *terra incognita***. Relying on the tool itself and with the know-how of navigating, we can approach and reach even those points on the map that have previously remained blank.

**The compass turns complexity into clarity and turns uncertainties into possibilities.** Having one's bearings **brings freedom and autonomy**. Finding one's way **encourages creativity**: knowing where one stands and where one is going, allows fruitful detours. Those who have a compass and know how to use it can almost never go wrong.

Using a compass and setting the course comes with a responsibility. Those who have deeper knowledge and understand how to use it are in charge of guiding the others. Just like other fruits of scholarship, a compass can either be used by one individual defining the future course – or **its use can be taught to many, who will then pass the guidelines shown by the compass on to society and the world**. The latter way of sharing the know-how resulting in knowledge is, of course, a more powerful way of setting the future course of mankind.

## A LIGHT of the lighthouse - wise, clear and effective transfer of knowledge to society by creating real communication.

Without the light, a lighthouse is nothing more than a tall house on the seashore. In the dark, all seas are unexplored, and all coasts are made of dangerous rocks. Light has often been used as a symbol of knowledge, but as a 'nautical metaphor' light also means guidance and, most importantly, communication. Each lighthouse, each ship, and each luminous buoy "speaks" with its light through its individual rhythm of flashes that identifies it.

A world as complex and uncertain as the one we live in today, needs clear and effective, open, honest and transparent communication. Thus, one of the most important considerations for a university that aspires to play a relevant role in the creation and dissemination of knowledge is **the construction of clear, true communication**. Often, the phenomena that universities strive to illuminate - in science, in society and in the depths of the human being itself - are particularly obscure and diffuse in themselves. The communication that needs to be established between members of the academic world, consequently, must be particularly strong AND clear.

Without communication, the knowledge achieved in the university stays within and cannot affect progress. Then the lighthouse becomes an ivory tower. To avoid this, it is necessary to **devise an effective and wise transfer of knowledge to society**, overcoming the pitfall of simplifying the complex phenomena studied, but at the same time avoiding blurring clear intelligent content with unnecessary intellectualist hollow academic slang. . A transfer of knowledge that covers all subjects, from the most scientific to the most humanistic ones, but does not identify social benefit with economic profit. For this, communication must be based on research, especially basic research. It is important to note, that for the university community to communicate, first, there needs to be something of relevance to discuss. Communication without content is just noise.

**The light of the lighthouse turns dark terrain into spaces of clarity.** Under the light of communication, universities can be founded on autonomy, integrity, and freedom of thought. Environments can be created for academics to communicate with each other, learn from each other and collaborate, rather than just compete, or be merely working next door to each other. True and effective communication can and should be the backbone of coexistence in the university, together with all its members' ability to learn from each other and improve alongside each other. In the long run, this will help universities to achieve the goals they set themselves, whether in research, teaching or in the social sphere.

With good lighting, the lighthouse safely guides the navigators and the compass indicates the course with precision. This is how the journey is completed.

## Concrete action points

- Create an “**Anti-Kafka Taskforce**”. This task force acts like a Court Jester, who is allowed to speak about everything and to everyone. It diffuses bombs of useless tasks or unnecessary complexities that easily shift the focus of universities away from their actual aims. It delivers its most critical and inconvenient messages in a non-offensive, more digestible way by using a scientifically underpinned form of stand-up comedy. The Anti-Kafka Taskforce makes the ideal university agile and nimble, even if it is a big one.
- The ideal university of the future needs **critical friends**: associated parties, other universities, organizations from outside of academia, that are close and trusted, and at the same time also outspoken and critical. Critical friends exchange views and best practices as well as pinpoint weaknesses.
- The university needs to be(come) an **active institute** that is present in the debate as an important and **structural advisor and partner** to support governance and policies, and as a fact-checker to assist decision-makers, journalists and social media in the critical review of statements and opinions. To be able to do this, the ideal university will create an interdisciplinary workgroup that brings together research results that are meaningful for society and that also publishes them in a smart, popularizing way.
- **Dare to be idealistic**. Universities are not about banalities but creating visions and developing the world into a better place through versatile knowledge. Universities combine the young and the more mature, enthusiasm and experience. If this combination does not have big ideals, who does?

... ..

## QUOTES OF THE DISCUSSIONS AND EXCHANGES (Cloud throughout the poster)

- Practice positive idealism: if the universities are not idealistic, who is?
- Adopt dignified strong activism, be visible in society, make sure the university MATTERS. Universities should be an important actor in the society of their time.
- Don't make your own magazine. Rather be present in the press and the media.
- Invest in explaining to society why research topics are important.
- Apply thinking and cumulative wisdom as instruments to improve the world.
- A university is a three-legged table that maintains a good balance between research, teaching and practice.
- A university should always think and behave 'universal'.
- Independence and integrity are important bridges to society.
- Semantics is less important than content. Universities need the same freedom of speech as stand-up comedians.
- Avoid intellectualist slang. If you cannot explain a complex scientific concept in simple words, you probably haven't understood it completely yourself.



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# University as a LIGHTHOUSE

instead of *Ivory Tower*

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UNIVERSITY  
ACADEMIA  
SOCIETY

## A LIGHT OF THE LIGHTHOUSE

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A world as complex and uncertain as the one we live in today, needs clear and effective, open, honest and transparent communication. Thus, one of the most important considerations for a university that aspires to play a relevant role in the creation and dissemination of knowledge is the construction of clear, true communication. Often, the phenomena universities strive to illuminate – in science, in society and in the depths of the human being itself – are particularly obscure and diffuse in themselves. The communication that needs to be established between members of the academic world, consequently, must be particularly strong.

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The light of the lighthouse turns dark terrain into spaces of clarity. Under the light of communication, universities can be founded on autonomy, integrity and freedom of thought. Environments for academics to communicate with each other, learn from each other and collaborate, rather than just compete with each other, or be merely working next-door to each other. True and effective communication can and should be the backbone of coexistence in the university, together with all its members' ability to learn from each other and improve alongside each other. In the long-run, this will help universities to achieve the goals they set themselves, whether in research, teaching or in the social sphere.

With good lighting, the lighthouse savely guides the navigators and the compass points the course with precision. This is how the journey reaches its destination.

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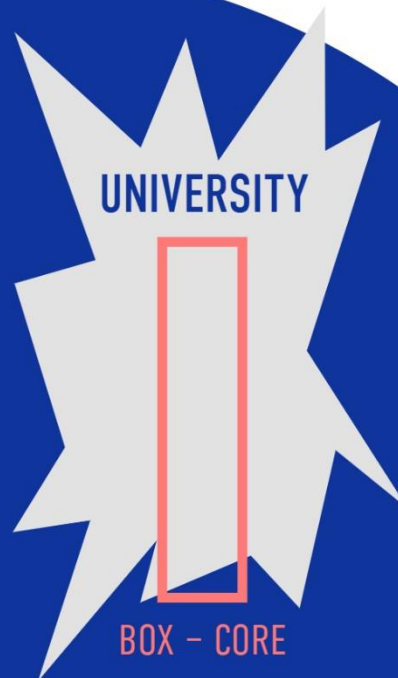
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# A BOX as THE CORE

Thinking out of the box by appreciating it



BOX - PRISON



BOX - CORE

A university is a three-legged table that maintains a good balance between research, teaching and practice.

PROBLEM → SOLUTION

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