

## City-University Cooperation as a Driver of Demand-Driven Innovation: Lessons from Amsterdam

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Cities are increasingly recognized as key drivers of economic growth, innovation, and climate transition within Europe. As hubs of talent, entrepreneurship, societal challenges, and policy experimentation, they form strategic arenas where Europe's major transitions—digitalization, sustainability, mobility, and social inclusion—are shaped in practice. The EU Agenda for Cities underscores the need for stronger, mission-oriented collaboration between urban authorities and knowledge institutions to accelerate these transitions and ensure that research and innovation serve societal needs. In this context, Universities of Applied Sciences (UAS) play a crucial, yet often under-explored, role. Their problem-oriented, practice-based research approach positions them as vital intermediaries between place based societal challenges and implementable solutions. This session presents insights from structured cooperation between the Amsterdam University of Applied Sciences (AUAS) and the Municipality of Amsterdam, illustrating how city–university collaboration can generate demand-driven, high-impact research and strengthen European competitiveness.

The partnership between AUAS and the Municipality of Amsterdam demonstrates how a UAS can be embedded in a local innovation ecosystem while operating as a strategic knowledge partner for urban transformation. By aligning municipal priorities with AUAS' research agenda, both partners co-develop applied research projects that directly address pressing urban challenges—ranging from the energy transition and circular economy to urban mobility and digital inclusion. These collaborations leverage AUAS' expertise in practice-based research methodologies, living labs, field labs, and co-creation, ensuring iterative development of solutions in real-world contexts with citizens, companies, and public organizations.

The cooperation model is built on three pillars:

1. **Joint demand articulation:** The city and the university jointly identify research needs emerging from policy agendas, local and regional challenges, and societal developments. This ensures that project proposals respond to concrete, timely demands.
2. **Cooperating support structures:** Dedicated liaison teams and project development support units facilitate the alignment of European funding opportunities and stakeholder engagement. These structures reduce barriers to collaboration and increase the quality and competitiveness of European project proposals.

3. **Mutual learning and capacity building:** Continuous exchange of knowledge and best practices strengthens both organizations' ability to innovate.

An important added value in this ecosystem is provided by AUAS' participation in the U!REKA (Urban Research and Education Knowledge Alliance), one of the 64 European University Alliances. U!REKA brings together a network of Universities of Applied Sciences and their partner cities across Europe, enabling Amsterdam to learn from and collaborate with urban regions facing similar transitions. Through U!REKA, AUAS and the Municipality of Amsterdam integrate international expertise into local projects. The alliance fosters mobility of students, staff, and ideas, helping to build a shared European capacity for tackling complex urban challenges in a coherent and competitive way.

Ultimately, the Amsterdam case illustrates that strong city–university cooperation represents a powerful model for demand-driven innovation in Europe. When municipalities, Universities of Applied Sciences, and international alliances such as U!REKA jointly design, develop, and implement research and innovation initiatives, they create tangible impact for industry and society, strengthen regional ecosystems, and contribute to Europe's broader strategic goals for sustainable, resilient, and competitive urban futures.