

# THE UNIVERSITY FOR THE FUTURE (U4F) INITIATIVE

## REGENERATING EDUCATION, ORGANISATIONS AND COMMUNITIES

[www.u4future.net](http://www.u4future.net)

*Ultimately, higher education should aim at the creation of a new society — non-violent and non-exploitative — consisting of highly cultivated, motivated and integrated individuals, inspired by love for humanity and guided by wisdom.*

*UNESCO World Declaration on Higher Education for the 21st Century*

**A new story is spreading across the globe. It comes in many variants, but in a nutshell it says: We are living on a finite planet — but our consciousness and creativity are infinite. We are consuming the future of our children and grandchildren — but we can join forces for founding a sustainable civilisation. We are now interdependent and interconnected worldwide — but we are also capable of expanding our circles of caring and sharing to the same scale. The *University for the Future Initiative* has been launched to help translate this new story into corresponding new realities. The purpose of our Initiative is to develop a new model of higher education, a system innovation endowed with the power to catalyse the contemporary Great Transition. The emerging *University for the Future* is not envisaged as a single organisation. Rather, it is an expanding *transformative system* in which individuals, groups, organisations and communities synergise their capabilities and activities within and across locations. You are invited to join the growing number of supporters and co-creators of the *University for the Future*.**

### The U4F Initiative ...

## Who?

... pertains to a growing global movement of *conscious evolution*. Our Initiative is carried by a network of individuals, groups and organisations from various contexts. We are scholars and students, activists and consultants, (social) entrepreneurs and representatives of wisdom traditions, among others. We are cultivating diverse and complementary ways of being, knowing and acting. Our talents range from visionary to facilitator, from manager to support staff, from developer to communicator. But we all share a purpose: catalysing the regeneration of education, organisations and communities. We believe that the critical mass for systemic change is already all around. Accordingly, our focus is on overcoming fragmentation among change makers and on unleashing synergies. We volunteer for the U4F Initiative, but many of us see their professional future in the organisations and activities we are now co-creating. We are not in this for money, power or fame. Rather, we share an interest in the art and science of conscious living and learning, in a life of connection with ourselves, others and nature.

### The U4F Initiative ...

## Why?

... is based on the vision that human beings have a higher potential that can be unlocked and cultivated (not only intellectual, but also moral, aesthetic, social, spiritual, and practical), and that higher education should play a role in this to deserve being called “higher”. Our Initiative promotes the vision of a society that works for all, a society that shifts its operating principles from standard of living to quality of life, from social divides to social well-being, from unsustainability to sustainability. Our Initiative is a response to changes in values, technologies and the biosphere. We anticipate that certain future developments will be non-linear and disruptive, moving us into uncharted personal, socio-economic and ecological conditions. These conditions will require a different consciousness and culture. Business as usual is not an option any longer.

Like in historical Great Transitions new institutions are being created. The *University for the Future* is one of them, midwifing in turn the emergence of other cultural, political and economic institutions. We sense that higher education needs to take greater responsibility for individual, community and organisational development and transformation, i.e. for actual future-creation. Higher education needs to inspire and support ethical lifestyles and servant leadership with a long-term orientation for the common good. The yearning for a meaningful participation in the emergent realities needs to be matched with suitable educational and professional opportunities. For all this to happen, higher education has to be trans-formed and not only re-formed.

## The U4F Initiative ...

## What?

... develops, implements and spreads a *system innovation* in higher education. This means that we are reimagining and redesigning all dimensions of higher education at the same time: educational philosophy and curriculum, organisation and governance, academic culture and career paths, information and communication technology, facilities and funding, among others. The U4F thus creates an unprecedented synthesis of the three missions of higher education, teaching/learning, research and service to society.

We believe that education should foster multiple intelligences through creative, visionary and collaborative processes of learning. Such an *Education for the Future* is not limited to intellectual training. It integrates experiential learning, project-based learning, artistic explorations, consciousness development, practical skills, care for communities and ecosystems, and many other dimensions. Whilst most contemporary higher education institutions focus on learning within fixed boundaries, the U4F Initiative promotes a vision of higher learning that transcends boundaries of educational levels, disciplines, professions, types of organisations, geographical locations. The world is the classroom and the Internet the textbook.

Besides educational and service providers, the *University for the Future* consists of *Learning Villages*, *Social Transformation Labs* and organisations developing the whole U4F system. A *Learning Village* is a site that not only hosts an international higher education institution, but also other organisations: a kindergarten, a school, an old age home, a cultural centre, etc. A *Social Transformation Lab* is a small unit that can emerge in organisations and in communities everywhere. It brings local students, scholars and artists together with (social) entrepreneurs, coaches, retired managers, unemployed mavericks etc. These diverse groups and unlikely partners engage in social transformation projects in their organisations and communities.

Specific organisations are in charge of developing and cohering the whole: *Institutions for the Future* as a launchpad, the recently founded *Alliance for the Future* as the international hub, and the planned *Foundation for the Future* for fundraising, asset management, and strategic investments. Our goal is to develop the overall system into a seamless space for transformative learning, transformative research, transformative art and transformative action, into an incubator of social innovation and sustainable living.

## The U4F Initiative ...

## How?

... progresses through vision-to-action cycles informed by leading-edge integrative approaches. These approaches favour deep learning based on the whole spectrum of human intelligences. They facilitate and connect inner and outer transformation. They unleash collective intelligence across institutional boundaries and facilitate intercultural and intergenerational co-creation of desirable futures.

We develop experimental spaces in which new approaches to individual, social and organisational learning can unfold. Our educational and research programmes allow participants to discover and follow their unique vocation. From the start, they are involved in self-exploration, big picture thinking and real-life transformation projects. These projects are part of long-term transformation strategies and contribute to the sustainability, social responsibility and quality of life agendas of communities and organisations.

This educational approach is based on *emergent curricula* arising in the triangle between individual interests, social needs and joint commitments of students, teachers and community or organisational leaders. A precondition for their implementation is “institutional defragmentation”. The sciences, social sciences, humanities and the art and design disciplines need to be interwoven with each other and with practical fields without barriers. Research shall also be transdisciplinary and transformative.

In order to enable the required agility and participation we flatten excessive organisational hierarchies to only two levels. On this basis, the U4F will become a mixed institutional type combining functions of regular universities, popular universities, continuing professional education providers, incubators and social networks, among others. The U4F online portal is now being implemented to connect affiliated communities, providing the latest collaboration tools, joint databases and a new, open publication system.

The development of learning village sites will be based on strong sustainability and quality of life principles (clean energy surplus, zero waste, on-site permaculture, walkable communities, communal green spaces, etc.) Landscaping and construction of new buildings will be inspired by organic architecture and based on locally available natural materials.

The U4F Initiative ...

## When?

... is pooling decades of professional experience and leading-edge research. Since 2009, we are modelling the *University for the Future*. Since 2011 we have been providing transdisciplinary courses to several thousand students. In 2013 we created the international *Alliance for the Future* as our expandable organisational platform. Currently, we are developing pilot locations, programmes, projects and events. In the next phase, we will launch a new higher education institution with accredited programmes, a shared research and publishing platform, as well as an entrepreneurial incubator.

The U4F Initiative ...

## Where?

... does not intend to emulate traditional local campus universities nor global virtual higher education providers. Rather, our vision of the *University for the Future* is *multi-local*. This means that the members and partners of the *Alliance for the Future* implement local programmes and projects and complement them by international ones that they develop together. The first *Social Transformation Labs* were launched in Murter (Croatia), Banská Štiavnica (Slovakia) and Luxembourg. The first *Learning Village* will be developed in Český Krumlov (Czech Republic). A secluded location for small groups is being explored near Siena (Italy). Other suitable locations can be added on a continuous basis.

## Invitation and Contact

We welcome inquiries from individuals, organisations and other initiatives that resonate with the U4F Initiative. For more information, see <http://contribute.u4future.net>. For further inquiries please contact [info@u4future.net](mailto:info@u4future.net).

How can higher education become a more multidimensional enterprise, one that draws on the full range of human capacities for knowing, teaching, and learning; that bridges the gaps between the disciplines; that forges stronger links between knowing the world and living creatively in it, in solitude and in community? If we cannot find ways to respond to that question—not with a monolithic solution, but by laying down multiple threads of inquiry and experimentation that might come together in a larger and more coherent tapestry of insight and practice—we will continue to make fleeting and fragmentary responses to the hungers and needs of our students, to the abiding questions of the human adventure, and to the social, economic, and political challenges of our time. As large as that agenda obviously is, we believe it describes the high calling of higher education.

*Palmer, P. J., Zajonc, A., & Scribner, M. (2010). The heart of higher education: A call to renewal. Transforming the academy through collegial conversations. San Francisco, CA: Wiley, pp. 2-3.*



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