

‘The idea is: things can be a bit more ‘us’ than ‘me’. This goes for workplaces, laboratories, catering facilities: you can see that territoriality is shifting.’

Alexandra den Heijer





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Alexandra den Heijer has been researching campuses for more than twenty years. The campus has never been more popular as a place of work, but there is a noticeable shift from private to public space: campus and city are increasingly merging. “That has its advantages, but ‘balance’ is a key word here,” says Den Heijer.

Since 2016 TU Delft and the city of Delft have strengthened their collaboration. A logical step, as city and campus share similar social, economic and spatial responsibilities. In November last year an agreement was signed to formalize this cooperation. Dr Alexandra Den Heijer, Associate Professor in Management of the Built Environment at the Faculty of Architecture and the Built Environment, was asked to explore the theme ‘the city as campus, the campus as city. “In Delft, the physical relationship between city and campus has always been very good. A campus too far outside the city is not advisable, but you have to make sure that you each keep your own identity,” she says. In general, the interrelationship between city and campus is a highly desirable one. “Student cities like Delft have long been accustomed to the buzz that students bring with them. Students spend a lot of hours each day on campus, but they do their shopping in the city, go to the movies there,

visit the sidewalk cafes and so on,” Den Heijer sums up. This is especially true at the weekend, when many campus facilities are closed. Due to the enormous growth in student numbers, it has become important to find a new balance. “We have to figure out together how to maximise the joys and minimise the burden. For example, we may not want to house students in every part of the city. Students often have a very different day and night rhythm than other groups of residents.”

If there would be no students at all anymore, many facilities and catering establishments would have to shut up shop. The university’s economic impact is considerable in any case. “TU Delft is a big employer, and many residents are either directly or indirectly dependent on it.” Start-ups also bring jobs, but here too the question is: city or campus? “TU Delft would like to keep them clustered on campus, close to the research. But the start-ups themselves may also want to share their work with the outside world.” According to Den Heijer, you cannot easily overestimate the university’s economic significance. “Just see how much media attention was generated by the news that the European Medicines Agency with its 900 employees is moving to Amsterdam. TU Delft is many times larger and we also receive a lot of international visitors, people who are not in permanent employment, but stay in hotels, go out to eat and so on. That’s an economic factor of significance.”

Read the full interview at www.tudelft.nl/pos2017