



**40th Conference of
Rectors and Presidents of
European Universities of Technology**
September 23rd-24th, 2022

What are Universities of Technology for?

**Farewell and outlook:
End of an era and perspectives for the future**

Manfred Horvat
Coordinator of the Conference 1981-2022

The conference was initiated by a small group of rectors in 1980 because they found that a special forum for universities of technology was necessary as the general European Rectors Conference (CRE) was not the adequate frame for discussing the specific problems of universities of technology. Universities of technology were confronted with the conflict around nuclear energy, the problems of technology acceptance by the general public, and connected with these issues the reduction in the numbers of young people choosing engineering studies. Over the years, the focus of the conference changed in accordance with new developments and challenges.

The conference was established as an informal forum without administrative structure and it kept that characteristic over the years¹.

Since 1980, the conference took place at host universities located in 17 European countries – 14 EU member states and Norway, Switzerland and Turkey. A rough clustering of the topical choices provides some information about priority issues that were addressed over the years:

- Different aspects of complex challenges and interdisciplinarity: 9 conferences;
- University leadership, structural changes, performance evaluation: 6 conferences;

¹ The acronym “crp” was proposed by former ETH Rector Konrad Osterwalder in 2007.

- European and international cooperation, university alliances: 6 conferences;
- Education, life-long learning, research: 5 conferences;
- University-industry cooperation, innovation: 5 conferences;
- Technology assessment, ethics: 2 conferences;
- Digitalisation, the networked university: 2 conferences;
- The university and regional development, the university in the political arena: 1 conference each.

The conference's long-term viability as a totally informal institution provides evidence of the interest of university leaders in appropriate spaces for "loading their batteries" by expert input, nurturing individual contacts and communication, joining for reflection and brainstorming, and mutual learning. The format of the conference has proven successful: keynote lectures by topical experts, presentations of university leaders, and an attractive social programme supporting individual interaction and exchange.

Networks of university rectors and presidents are the backbone of the European Research and Higher Education Area. The conference supports strengthening existing contacts and forging new cooperation and institutional alliances, and building the Europe of knowledge, ideas and common values. In that context, the European RTD Framework Programmes had an enormous impact. The conference started in 1980 some years before the 1st Framework Programme (FP1) was launched, and European cooperation in research and education became a recurrent topic accompanying the conference directly or indirectly. Transnational collaboration between universities and between universities and industry and other societal actors is one of Europe's unique strengths and competitive advantages on a global scale. University rectors and presidents play key roles developing and safeguarding appropriate institutional environments supporting these collaborations.

It was a great pleasure and honour for me to serve the community of rectors and presidents of European universities of technology since 1981. I highly appreciate the long-term interest of university leaders in the conference. After forty years, there are clear signals from conference participants supporting the continuation of the conference also after the retirement of the long-term coordinator. Considerations for a new arrangement for coordinating crp are under way and will be communicated as soon as possible.