

UNIVERSITIES AS METAPHORS III

We have previously seen how the word university is pregnant with an interesting metaphor, that of the unity of its community and oneness of the knowledge embodied in the same community. We have also seen the similarity between *university* and the universe as the former is itself a smaller universe with its own order and meaning, and how movement and motion create a dissemination of knowledge reminiscent of our walking and wandering in a city.

Movement and motion bring about another human practice whose potential and importance in academic and daily life is often disregarded: *CONVERSATIONS*.

Let us first look closely at the word *conversation*. It seems that its meaning is also taken for granted.

It might surprise many that the original meaning of 'conversation' is 'place where one lives', a dwelling. It also means 'the general way of conduct and behaviour in the world', referring here to manners and deportment with respect to morals. Surprisingly as well, the word conversation at one point in history referred to acquaintance and fellowship born in being close to something or someone. These meanings are now no longer in use and obsolescent and most of us hardly ever, if at all, think of conversations as being acquainted to someone or something, as a set of manners or as a place where one lives.

Right as well and looking closer at the word and its root, one will see a striking similarity with the previous ideas discussed.

Conversation is rooted in the Latin prefix 'com' meaning together and 'versare' meaning to turn. Hence, 'turn together' is the literal translation. Conversation, an act that involves two or more people is also similar to *university (to turn into one)* as both highlight an act of turning something into something else. One can say that the act of conversing, hence, speaking and 'emotioning' are one way through which knowledge is spread and through which a certain community is formed. Conversation, that friendly talk-unlike debate and discussions-around a cup of coffee, in a corridor, or even while waiting for your lunch box, can be more fruitful, more tolerant, and inclusive. Conversations can indeed be a fertile space of coexistence and can be the first step to tremendous achievements.

Conversing and conversations involve togetherness. The latter is at the heart of our profession as an academic community.

Again, this is not yet finished as there is more to come about conversations and universities.