

V Universia International Rectors' Summit

Valencia. Palau de les Arts.

9 May 2023

ANA BOTÍN OPENING REMARKS

GREETING

Mr President of the Government of Spain,

Mr President of the *Generalitat Valenciana*,

Mr Mayor,

Esteemed rectors,

delegates from global businesses and organizations,

young leaders.

1,200 of us have gathered today in this spectacular auditorium: 700 rectors and academics from 14 countries.

Combined, they represent 14 million students, some of whom have joined us, along with delegates from other institutions, our Santander partners, our teams. Welcome, everyone, to Valencia.

INTRODUCTION

When society invests in education, it grows sustainably, is more open and diverse, creates opportunity for everyone, and can tackle the conflicts and challenges of the future.

It fosters collective well-being and prosperity, making personal development more attainable.

When we support universities, the entire community — more than a billion people in the countries where Santander operates — reaps the reward. (If universities make progress, so does society).

There is no better social investment than education. This is why, Santander, decided 26 years ago to focus our efforts on supporting universities. It's part of our DNA. Our commitment to universities is one of the clearest examples of how Santander delivers on its purpose of helping people and businesses prosper.

To date, we have supported over one million people and businesses, and signed agreements with over 1,500 institutions in 25 countries.

5TH INTERNATIONAL RECTORS MEETING

Valencia's inspiring *Ciudad de las Artes y de las Ciencias* is the perfect venue to discuss the vital role universities play in enabling social prosperity during this 5th International Rectors meeting.

We have listened to Tim Berners Lee, whose career demonstrates how far and fast science and innovation are transforming the world.

But it's just the beginning, and as Ignacio, Pilar and Nuria, Sarahn and Olivier have shown: universities are going to have an even bigger part to play.

OBJECTIVES

We want everyone to be inspired to think with ambition about these issues:

- Should we re-think the purpose of universities?
- Should we try new things or stick to tradition?
- And should we do them differently, in new places and environments?

Before we all listen and learn from each other, I'd like to share some of my own experience.

Disruptive digital technology is vastly and rapidly changing the day to day of financial institutions, centres of learning and others whose activities are largely based on intangible assets or values.

Our society works like a network: interconnected with ever fewer barriers between the digital and physical world.

What does this and the new demands and behaviours of students and society imply for our university model?

Which kind of organization can best harness the growing spread of information?

At Santander, we ask ourselves all these questions, and this is why, in 2015, our aim became best open financial services platform, by acting responsibly. And we look to continuously improve our business and how we serve our communities. And to guide us on our transformation, we have embedded some values, which we have actually made our motto: we want to be Simple, Personal and Fair in all we do for our teams, customers, shareholders and society.

Doing things in a **Simple** way means conveying messages clearly to everyone — banks to their customers, you the students — about who we are and how we can serve them.

How can we home in on the demands of students and society? New digital technology enables us to make information, teaching and everything else we do more **Personal**. They help connect universities with other industries, making them more inclusive. Lifelong learning

is in demand in society and among businesses; it is not a luxury, but rather a necessity.

A personal proposition is possible if we know our customers' and students' concerns and demands to make them want to come to us, whether it's to work or to learn.

Finally, **Fair** universities focus on what students of all ages really want, and ensuring their skills and resources, are transparent - improving accountability.

I am aware that, while we're all in this together, we each have our own perspectives. There are no one-size-fits-all solutions. Higher education systems must be increasingly more flexible and open, capable of change rapidly to new competitors in very different environments.

If I have invoked our motto to reflect on and think about which questions, should we be asking ourselves on the challenges and opportunities of today and spoken of "Simple, Personal, and Fair" universities, it is to show that we are poised to continue together on the path that Santander began more than 25 years ago and reaffirmed 23 years ago with the founding of Universia.

We have proved that universities, rectors and Banco Santander know how progress is made, together, by sharing our experiences and, above all, by our commitment to helping the people and businesses in our communities prosper.

CALL TO ACTION

Our host city is home to one of Spain's most popular and spectacular festivals, *las Fallas*. It features on UNESCO's Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity.

During *las Fallas*, the locals build large statues called "*ninots*" that stand on wooden bases and depict parodies on the past year. Then, they are burned in bonfires at the beginning of spring in a ritual that says "out with the old, in with the new".

It's a tradition that started in the days of the great economist, Joseph Alois Schumpeter. Perhaps *las Fallas* inspired him to come up with the concept of "creative destruction", which for him went hand in hand with long-term prosperity and progress and can also spur us to re-think the future.

The debates we will have in the next few days will centre on three topics:

- Lifelong learning.
- Innovation and entrepreneurship.
- And cooperation between universities, and businesses, think tanks and other education institutions.

While education and business have come a long way, further transformation is needed. That sometimes means leaving behind certain things and trying new ones.

This does not mean we can't preserve the essential and unparalleled service of universities to society in looking ahead and shaping the future, beyond the interests of students and stakeholders, with free and critical thinking.

Valencia, supported by a university that dates over five centuries, is a shining example of how open, dynamic and bright society can be.

CLOSING

Those who know me will tell you I am a realist but also an optimist. I am certain that, by the time we meet again, we will have made great strides and that the ideas you will come up with here will have been brought to life through transformative initiatives, just like MetaRed, the “network of networks” created at our last meeting in Santander, with 1,800 universities already participating.

I have always liked this quote by Søren Kierkegaard: “Life can only be understood backwards; but it must be lived forwards”.

That is how we work at Banco Santander. We are reaffirming our rock-solid commitment by extending our university partnerships — to which we have allocated 2.2 billion euros — with a pledge to invest an extra **400 million euros between 2023 and 2026** in education, employability, and entrepreneurship.

Our commitment can be measured in euros – but I believe the impact of our work, and – more importantly – our partnership with you here today – that is priceless. Opportunities created, ideas formed, friendships made. We cannot put a value on this – but all of us know that these are things on which not just our prosperity, but our civilisation is based. So, thank you for coming, for your participation and, above all, your commitment, Together, we can make tomorrow even better than today.

Thank you.