



VNIVERSITAT DE VALÈNCIA

**Speech by the rector of the
Universitat de València in
investiture ceremony of prof. Ilona
Kickbusch as Doctor
“Honoris Causa” by this University**

València, 24th of March, 2023

Welcome to the Main Hall of the University of Valencia, a historic Academic Theatre where the performances of classical Latin works took place so that students at our University could learn the uses of classical Greek and Latin.

Since the seventeenth century, there has been evidence of the existence of this space, which, over four centuries, has hosted the main debates, exhibitions and academic ceremonies of the University of Valencia.

It is a protected space that preserves our legacy, a space where the names of the main historic figures of Valencian arts and sciences are brought together in gold letters, a space where portraits of the great men of institutional history are brought together and which, as an example of keeping up to date with the present, also includes the first woman professor at our University.

This is a protected space, like this building, which we have the responsibility to preserve and pass on to the generations that will come after us, as those who have gone before us have done.

“In this venerable place, which from century to century, and from generation to generation, has gathered under its silent vaults the spirit of the times, the voices of the wise and the remains of the genius, that every age has left inscribed in the great book of civilisation,” said our University’s professor of Geography and History, Dr. Vicente Boix, in the opening speech of the 1854-1855 academic year.

However, this is a space that must be alive, it cannot remain inert, and just as it has been updated and restored over the

centuries, today it is a space that has been updated with the latest technology, and with robotic video cameras that allow us to broadcast this signal all over the world.

This is why I take the opportunity to greet all those following this solemn act in which we invest Prof. Ilona Kickbusch as Doctor 'Honoris Causa', following the traditional ceremony of the highest academic recognition established by the University of Valencia.

Recognition that she receives as a committed woman, in addition to being a scientist who has not only researched but, as published in 2017 by the prestigious magazine *The Lancet*, has a distinguished career in the World Health Organization, government and academia, a career that has contributed to shaping global health.

In my speech, I will not talk in detail about in the relevant merits that our new doctor 'honoris causa' brings together, since they have already been brilliantly described by Professor José María Martín Moreno, whom I thank for having exercised this responsibility, necessary in our ceremony, which is to give the 'laudatio', the presentation of the reasons why the Governing Council of our University agreed to grant Prof. Kickbusch this high academic recognition.

Esteemed Dr. Martín Moreno, thank you very much for your contribution.

I would also like to thank the Dean of the Faculty of Medicine and Dentistry.

Esteemed Dr. Chorro, as always, thank you for your institutional commitment, now embodied as you act, together with Dr. Martín Moreno, as a sponsor in this remarkable ceremony.

It is a ceremony that also requires an accompanying committee, which has shown the diversity of knowledge at our institution, as well as the interdisciplinarity of the academic and professional profile of our new doctor 'honoris causa'.

Many thanks to Dr. Ana Sales, university teacher of the Faculty of Social Sciences, and Fabiola Meco, Vice-Dean of the Faculty of Law, Dr. José Luis Alfonso, university teacher of the Faculty of Medicine and Dentistry, and Dr. Jordi Garcés, director of the Polibienestar research institute.

They have formed an accompanying committee with parity of representation that, following the tradition, welcomes the new doctor 'honoris causa' to our University.

I cannot fail to mention the generosity of the deans of the Faculty of Social Sciences, Dr. Albert Moncusí, and of the Faculty of Law, Dr. Javier Palao, for their institutional commitment and, in this ceremony, for their contribution to the organisation of this event.

The University of Valencia of today is a public institution that, starting from the tradition of the Estudi General created in 1499, covers all areas of knowledge: sciences, arts and humanities, health sciences, engineering, social, economic and legal sciences, and education sciences.

This is exemplified by the diversity of the colours of the birettas of the academic dress that our teachers wear today.

We are the leading university in Europe for receiving incoming mobility students because we are a public university which is open to the world, which is present throughout the Valencian community, which projects our identity to the world, and which works from teaching, research, knowledge transfer, innovation and culture for the progress of our society and its people.

And we do with the pride of our students' academic performance, which is superior to the average throughout Spain, with the pride of being the third Spanish university according to the research rankings, that we are the leading Valencian university not only in scientific production, but in the productivity of our research.

With the pride of being the leading university in Spain for students with disabilities, because this is a university where they fit in, we all fit in, where no one is left behind.

And in which a healthy lifestyle is cultivated as it is the leading university in Spain for participation in university sports competitions, and the first public university in sports results.

A university with values such as equality, respect for all people, sustainability, solidarity...

We are a public university proud of its past, aware of its contribution to the progress of the Valencian society, to the formation of the human and cultural capital of the Valencian people over the centuries.

A university that has fought for democracy in times of darkness.

For this reason, allow me to highlight Dr. Kickbusch. In times of commotion, as it was in 1968, and influenced by her active involvement in the student movement, our new 'honoris causa' chose to carry out her doctoral thesis in the field of political science and sociology.

Coming back to the present, we live in a time that has been declared by the European Parliament as a climate emergency.

Today's society is paying for the effects of the first and second industrial revolutions, of a society developed from coal and oil, which has caused severe global warming.

The exploitation of natural resources has also had serious consequences, with marine and ocean pollution, as well as transformations of natural ecosystems, and landscapes.

Dr. Kickbusch brought together, in one document, the first in the field of health, the importance of ecology and the environment in public health.

Ladies and gentlemen, colleagues, our society has evolved very rapidly in the last three decades.

At the end of the eighties and the beginning of the nineties in the last century, we were faced with the concept of the end of history when it seemed that there was no alternative economic model to the capitalist one, when the Soviet bloc collapsed.

Our doctor ‘honoris causa’ knows this well, as she grew up in post-war Germany, in a divided country, reunified and turned into an economic power in a democratic framework.

At the beginning of this century no one would have imagined that we would face phenomena such as the global terrorism that struck Western societies with the attacks of 9/11 and 11 March.

Nor that a serious financial crisis would infect the real economy and seriously affect public finances in the second decade of this century.

The powerful scientific development of recent decades has allowed us to live in continuous technological progress that has shaped the development of our societies.

And it has been thanks to science that we have overcome the most serious pandemic that humanity has experienced in a century: the COVID-19 pandemic.

In addition, it has been technology that has allowed us to face measures with a high social impact, such as home confinement, in an easier way.

However, this technological development also has important consequences, and we are still facing numerous challenges, from digital rights to mental health.

Our University develops research in all these fields of knowledge related to this fourth Industrial Revolution that will also have consequences on the environment, taking into account the

need for minerals that will have to be used for technological development.

In the efficiency and improvement of these technologies our University works, and will continue to work with the productive sectors, among them is the Volkswagen group in its gigafactory, of which the foundation stone was laid in Sagunto.

However, we must not forget that the economic development that we have experienced over the last few centuries has opened up gaps.

Gaps between hemispheres, but also within Western societies. This was revealed by Thomas Piketty's research.

And in this way, we see the indicators of recent times, in which war has returned to the heart of Europe, returning to the ghosts of the past, affecting our economies and people's quality of life.

And all this has effects on the health of a population which is suffering the economic effects of the war, which is suffering the consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic, which is making great strides to adapt to a digital society that opens gaps.

Professor Kickbusch, our University is proud to welcome you into our faculty. Please feel at your own university, surrounded by your colleagues. Welcome.

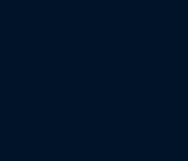
“There is an increasing convergence between digital health and public health – some of which we have experienced during the COVID19 pandemic. And – contrary to expectations and

promises – this conversion is aggravating existing divisions in health rather than lead us towards a common digital future,” said Dr. Kickbusch in her brilliant speech.

We share her desire that digital transformations unfold from the perspectives of health and well-being for all.

Ladies and gentlemen, in this time of uncertainty, we will continue to work from science and knowledge to serve, as always, our society as the public university that we are, as an institution created in the time of the Renaissance to contribute to the progress of the Valencian people.

Thank you very much for sharing this vision, thank you very much for supporting the University of Valencia, thank you very much for making this great University a reality every day.



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