

Culture

When I came into office in 2013, Culture became a fully-fledged *KU Leuven* department with its own Vice Rector. Culture is intrinsic to a major university, in the same way a university is intrinsic to the culture of a region or country. *KU Leuven* too should be a place where inspiration, creativity and change are nurtured, recognized and stimulated; a place where culture is not only welcome but thrives.

Science and culture are inextricably linked, and that bond must never be broken. Both inspire us to make this world a better, more beautiful place. During the Renaissance, culture and science were very much on the same page. They touched and cross-fertilized each other. A Renaissance man like Leonardo da Vinci was both artist and scientist. That ideal will probably always remain the exception, yet our fragmented world needs this kind of impassioned link between art and science more than ever. From a historical perspective, the two grew apart in a first phase, after which science broke up into increasingly segmented fields. These last few years we have once again grown to appreciate cross-border research as the driving force behind scientific progress. Today's artists and scientists are indeed forever in quest of unexpected connections. Art and culture do not exactly 'overlap', but they undeniably influence each other. The wonderful *Utopia* exhibitions that were held in the course of this academic year at Museum M and the Central Library convincingly brought this to our attention. Even though culture and science use different methods, they are spurred on by the same longing, the same creative force.

Both encourage critical and constructive thinking. To do so, room for change and personal development is needed. During my second term in office - and together with you - I intend to help our cultural policy flourish, bring certain issues to the fore and explore newly emerging horizons.

1. Cultural participation

Needless to say that culture is something both students and staff should participate in. For years now, *UurKULTuur* - itself sourced from *Cultuurkaart* revenues - has been held to a full house on a monthly basis. Its formula doubles up as a major incentive to help people find the way to other local cultural players (*Museum M*, *het Depot*, *OPEK*, *Fabuleus..*), with whom special arrangements have been made. The initiative will be prolonged and special attention paid to offering both an innovative and accessible programme. The structural two/three-monthly dialogue between the municipality (mayor and aldermen) and the university (rector and executive board) is a great help in this.

Our eight university ensembles - three of which receive structural funding from the university (*Leuvens Universitair Koor*, *Universitair Symfonisch Orkest* and *Universitair Harmonieorkest*) - are the pride of our university. Our choirs too boast a long tradition; and all of them are places where friendships form, co-operation grows and love buds. We will increase our support to the university's ensembles and intend to have them brighten up even more celebrations and academic ceremonies. Three years ago a number of alumni set up ESOF (European Symphonic Orchestra Festival), which brings together European university symphony orchestras and choirs. The first ESOF festival took place in Leuven.

Initial steps towards developing the concept of ‘Culture at the Campus(es)’ have also been taken. Culture can indeed act as the glue in a fully-fledged multi-campus model. By the same token, it also enhances *KU Leuven*’s presence in the many sites where we are already present, as a university - like the traditional concerts at the Antwerp Carolus Borromeus Church.

2. Stronger ties between art and science

Cultural creation mainly springs from ‘Art and Science’, the importance of which is highlighted above. A university characteristically sets up and analyses various experimental forms of cross-fertilization between art and science. Our engineers collaborated with artists during the *Artefact Festival* at STUK and created the *Heliofoon*, an artwork that transforms sunlight into sound. The faculty of Arts also set up a Dance Studies course, again in collaboration with arts centre STUK. The latter now has its own profile as a house for Dance, Image and Sound. Our connection with STUK – whose roots lie within the university – is a long and privileged one. *Pilot 1*, a joint project of the municipal conservatoire (*Conservatorium van de Stad Leuven – SLAC*) and the university, revolves around scientists and visual artists co-operating across an entire academic year.

3. Creative development of students and staff

As part of *KU Leuven*’s comprehensive cultural policy we intend to boost our student and staff’s creative development. The faculties successfully helped reinvigorate the *Faculty Stars (Student Artists in Residence)* project, which we intend to update in order to transform it into a major tool for having art and culture bloom in faculties and on campuses.

The *BAC-Atelier*, situated in the beautiful Bacteriological Institute (itself in dire need of restoration), offers *KU Leuven* students and staff room for experimental artistic creation. The *Cultuurdienst* manages its studios and a steering committee oversees the whole. Within this programme, PhD students from LUCA School of Arts are allocated studio space where they can create art that forms an intrinsic part of their doctoral project. While the Bacteriological Institute is being restored, we will continue to offer them a roof - albeit it possibly, and temporarily, elsewhere. On New Year’s Day 2017 a fire destroyed part of the complex, but that will not affect the building’s promising future as an Institute for the Arts. We indeed intend to turn the *BAC-Atelier* into a fully-fledged art institute with exhibition spaces and workshops for students and staff alike. It is most definitely a place where the School of Arts and the university meet and join hands.

Drama by no means gets the attention it deserves, partly for lack of available venues. Alma 3 is the only site where the university has a ‘real’ theatre (*de Coulisse (The Wings)*). The *Interfacultair Theaterfestival (ITTF)*, a student initiative organized with the support of the *Dienst Cultuur*, as well as *Campustoneel (Campus Drama)* bring students and staff together. There is also *LUCA Drama*, a greatly valued partner of our university. We are currently looking into ways of increasing our support to drama and of incorporating related activities into the *BAC-Atelier*.

4. Art and heritage

Huge progress has been made in the field of art and heritage. We indeed have an incredibly rich heritage. Opening it up and enhancing its status, however, is a different kettle of fish. Let's begin with our immovable heritage. The Monuments department is doing a wonderful job managing the more than one hundred monuments owned by the university. In the coming years, government subsidies will be used to carry out new restorations - of the *Maria-Theresiacollege* and the *Pauscollege*, to name but two. *KU Leuven* also owns priceless collections of movable heritage, such as our wonderful Spaelberch collection. Last but not least there is also our immaterial heritage, like the procession of academic regalia and the carillon culture. We plan to further inventory, digitalize and open up this heritage so we can duly flaunt the immense treasures that are the jewels in the university's crown.

In the run-up to our 2025 six hundredth anniversary celebrations we have developed a concept for a decentralized university museum. Elements of our mobile and immobile academic heritage as well as iconic examples of present-day mobile and immobile academic legacy will be displayed in the various sites where they are at home. This will also act as a reminder of the history behind the various disciplines, and the university itself. Instead of organizing *one* temporary exhibition or erecting a hugely expensive, central university museum we have opted for an innovative, decentralized concept that revolves around dynamic interaction between the university and its visitors. As part of the preparations for our six hundredth anniversary, we also intend to give added impetus to research and reflection on the history of the university of Leuven.

In the course of this year, the *Museumzaal* of the University Hall will be transformed into a welcoming, cosy and aesthetically appealing reception area for members and visitors alike. At last, the university will have its very own meeting place. The University Hall and our iconic Central Library in their turn will become the starting points for a visit to the various 'loci' of the decentralized museum, which will include e.g. the *College De Valk*, the site of the Zoological Museum and the *College van Premonstret*, the Anatomical Theatre and the Arenberg Castle.

We also intend to gradually enhance *KU Leuven's* function as a contemporary art museum. To do so, the Arts Committee will propose a strategy for acquiring and integrating works of art into our buildings and spaces. Present-day art, science and education are indeed valuable interlocutors; all of which is in line with the scientific/societal debates conducted by researchers and students.

5. Collaboration between city and university

Last but not least, we will increase the already excellent collaboration between the municipality and the university. This has already yielded, amongst others, *KUnST Leuven* npo, which buttressed and gave invaluable assistance to the citywide Utopia project last year. The '*Op zoek naar Utopia*' (In search of Utopia) exhibition at Museum M, '*Utopia and More*' in the Central Library as well as '*In Search of Utopia*' by the *Commissie Actuele Kunst* (Present-day Arts Committee) received huge praise. All their curators were professors, or working for the university in another capacity. The university was also present in almost all the other municipal projects (over eighty of them). In 2018 the Arenberg project will culminate in exhibitions at Museum M and in the Central Library, as well as activities around the Arenberg Castle and a series of lectures on the future of Europe. In 2018 we will focus on 'May 1968' with – amongst others – a scholarly publication and a unique photo exhibition about what happened half a century ago. It will be *KU*

Leuven's own, essential contribution to raising Leuven's profile as a cultural pole of attraction in Flanders and far beyond.

KU Leuven's cultural policy indeed stretches out beyond Leuven. Thanks to privileged contacts between the Church and our administration, two Flemish top monuments have been donated to *KU Leuven* for all to enjoy. They are *Hof Bladelin* in Bruges and *Roosenberg abbey* in Waasmunster, both of which act as venues for meetings, symposiums, alumni gatherings, lectures and PhD vivas.

The bond between the university and culture has never been stronger.