



# human nature

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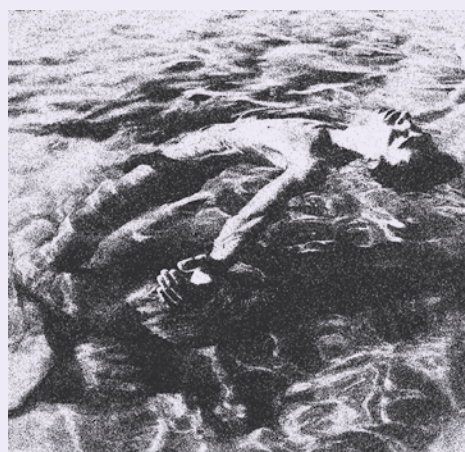
**Leuven & Beyond**

European Capital of Culture 2030  
Candidate City



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## A brief glossary to start with

Dear Reader,

In this bid book we introduce a number of concepts and ideas that we'd like to run through with you before we go any further, as they form a common thread through the following pages. Some of the words are in Dutch, but don't worry: they're all explained here and can act as a signpost as you read on.

### Human Nature (mass noun)

Human Nature asks what it is to be human, with humanity's good and bad sides, its instincts for survival and death, its eros and thanatos. But if we broaden the concept, we derive the potential inherent in both words: human versus nature, our behaviour versus our environment, our impact on nature and climate. To this, we link an image of the future: how will future generations deal with the tension between humans and nature, and which sustainable (social and technological) innovations will then be required?

Human Nature is not only a celebration of what unites us as Europeans; it's also a game plan for confronting the challenges that every town and region in Europe faces – polarization, pressure on our democratic values, global climate change – and which force us to make a socially equitable transition.

### LOV (noun)

LOV is the name for Leuven's candidacy to become European Capital of Culture in 2030. Older Leuveners pronounce the name of their city as *leive* [leivə], which sounds like *leven* or 'life', while young Leuveners say *luive* [luivə], which sounds like the English 'love'. Life and love, both contained in the name of our city. LOV2030, we LOV it!

We haven't chosen this name by chance, for love is essential to fulfilling our mission: striving together for a better future for Leuven and the entire region, by creating radically new connections.

LOV means looking for what we don't see, for our blind spots, so that we can break through the bubbles we live in. LOV stands for radically living together (*samenleven*), for embracing friction and uncertainties. LOV connects rich and poor, highly and poorly educated, city and countryside. It combines culture with education, innovation and sustainability and bridges gaps that we may not even be aware of yet. LOV means working together as one single region and reaching out to Europe and far beyond.

**Samenleving** [society] (noun),  
**Samenleven** [to live together]  
(intransitive verb)

In Dutch there are two words we can use when we talk about society: *maatschappij* and *samenleving*. *Maatschappij* is the literal equivalent of 'society', *société* in French or what the Germans call *Gesellschaft*: at its core is the 'socius', the associate, the *associé*, the *Geselle*. Socius means 'comrade', someone whose example you follow. The Dutch word *maat* also means 'mate' or 'companion' but is the word for 'size' or 'order' too. In that sense, *maatschappij* is a very normative and exclusionary word. Static and passive too. On the other hand, *samenleven* is active (it's about life!) and inclusive (we do it *samen*, which means together!).

*Samenleven* is also a verb and so describes an action. You have to do it with everyone, whether you want to or not, whether someone conforms to your norms or not. *Samenleven* is not to deny difference; *samenleven* is done in diversity.

**Radical** (adjective), **radically** (adverb)  
**Radically new connections**

'Radical' comes from the Latin *radix*, root. So something that's radical goes back to the root, the foundation, the essence. Radical does not mean fierce, inflexible or violent, therefore, but meticulous, essential and sustainable. It doesn't relate to iconoclasm or destruction, but to care and dedication.

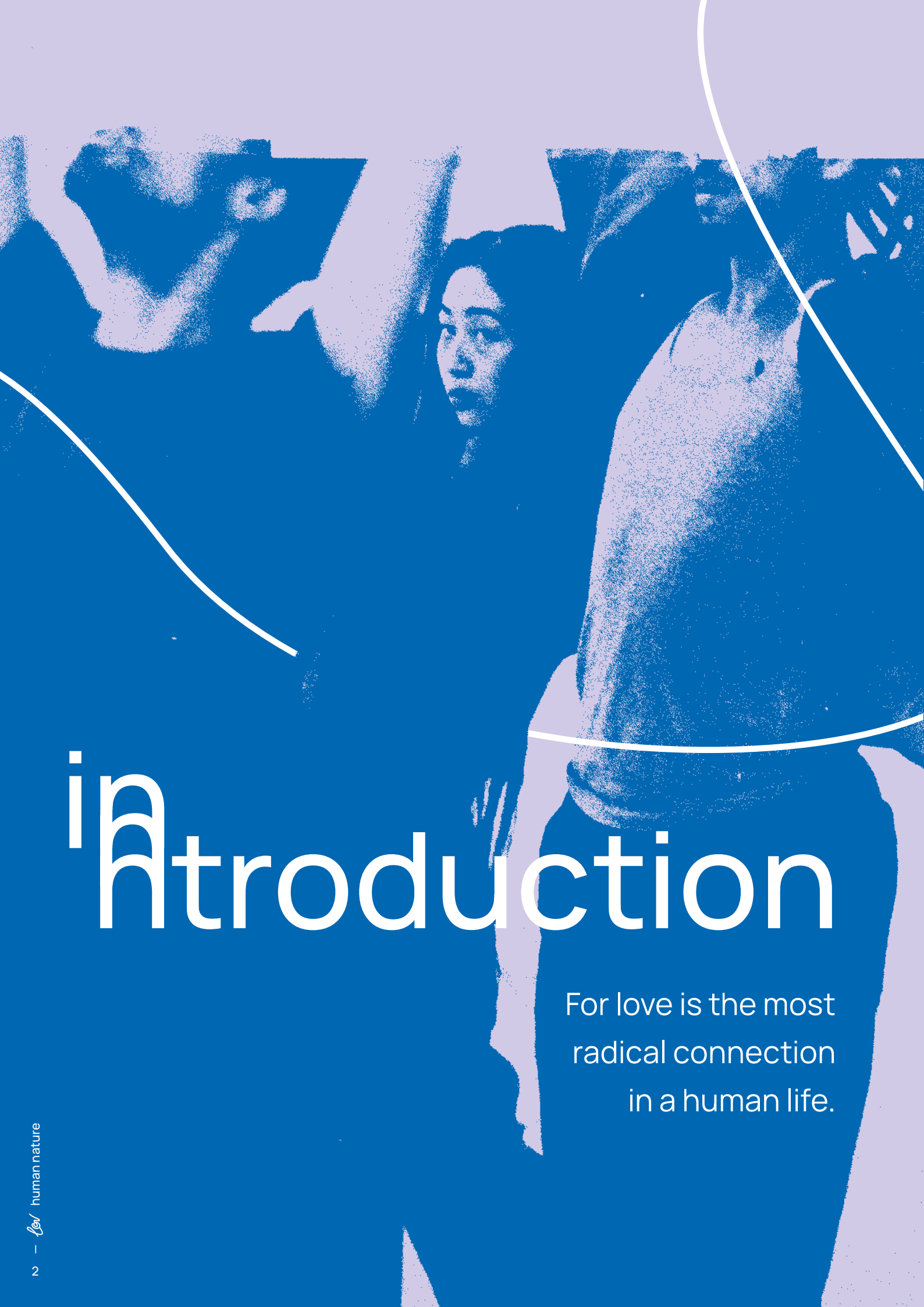
In Leuven we are virtuosos of networking. There are networks involved in culture, education, innovation, in sustainability, in representation. That's a tremendous resource. But often those networks don't extend beyond their own circle. And that carries a risk. The risk that it's always the same people doing the talking. That people and initiatives fall outside our orbit. That we ignore blind spots and wounds. If you do what you've always done? You get what you always got.

So we need to innovate socially. That requires radically new connections: the network – the fabric of our society – needs more nodes. It must be woven more densely, like a real net, so that it retains its resilience and no one falls through. Radical living – or loving – together, in fact. After all, is there a more radical relationship than love?

### Leuven & Beyond

Leuven is a central city – which is to say a densely populated city at the centre of a large region – with 103,802 inhabitants plus 60,000 students, in a green region, where a total of 565,049 people live. All too often, Leuven has turned its face towards Brussels and presented its backside to the region. In putting together our bid we have done a complete about-turn and are looking our region square in the eye. Twenty-four towns and municipalities have joined us in this candidacy, thus heralding a new era of cooperation. LOV is not only Leuven, it's wholeheartedly Leuven & Beyond.





# in Introduction

For love is the most  
radical connection  
in a human life.

## Q1 WHY LEUVEN & BEYOND WANTS TO BE EUROPEAN CAPITAL OF CULTURE

## Q2 WHY LEUVEN IS INVOLVING ITS SURROUNDING AREA

Polarization is spreading in our society. Democracy is under pressure throughout Europe. In Belgium - a founding member of the EU - the big winners in the recent elections were the extreme parties. The European Parliament will also look completely different in the coming years.

That polarization is not only between people. Oppositions are all around us: between humans and nature, town and countryside, science and populism, conservative vs progressive, local vs global...

But what's brought this about? Why are people seemingly losing faith in our *maatschappij* (society)? Even in a country where so much is going well? Why are we so alienated from one another? Has every connection between us been lost? Do we need more *samenleving*? How do we reconnect with our common humanity?

Human Nature celebrates what unites us as Europeans, but it's also a game plan for confronting the challenges we face and which force every city and region in Europe to make a transition that is socially equitable. To do that, we must have the courage of our convictions, look beyond our humanness and question our human dominance: how do we find a way to live in harmony with other ecosystems? A way that's socially, ecologically, and economically fair?

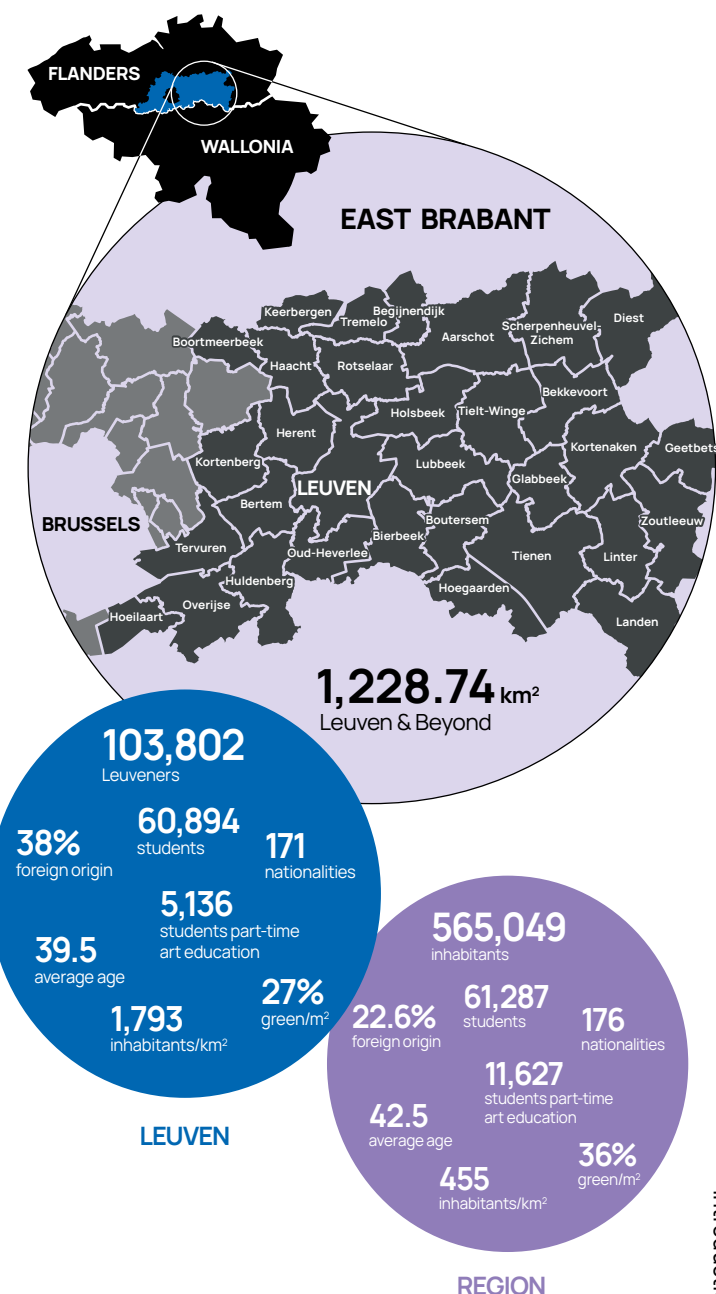
If the recent election results in our district reveal anything it's precisely that growing gap between the city and the countryside. The municipalities view with distrust the rich and rapidly changing city with its students and large international population; the city can sometimes seem disdainful of the surrounding countryside.

Our candidacy is a springboard for creating a radically new connection between city and region. Such a new connection is necessary. For years we have taken our hinterland for granted, seeing it almost as a kind of colonial outpost, simply because it was there and often because we come from there ourselves.

Villages are losing their service providers: banks, post offices, and railway stations are closed, bus routes are discontinued, bakers and grocers are going out of business. In Tienen, a city of 35,000 inhabitants, the railway station has had immovable heritage status for years. Yet the mayor has just closed it, due to... the danger of collapse. Working couples in the region need two cars to take the kids to school and get themselves to work, so the municipalities are reduced to dormitory villages. The older residents, who in many cases grew up in those villages, become lonely and alienated. This too is wealthy Flanders.

It's our belief that we can begin to resolve the challenges facing Leuven, on the one hand, and the region, on the other, by radically connecting them, by forging closer, person to person relationships between them. The ECOC title would be a substantive and social driving force in that endeavour.

The cultural programme in the city and region makes the entire area an attractive place to live in and visit. Committed cooperation in the areas of mobility, public transport, and cycle traffic acquires a solid reason as we approach the title year. In that way, we not only attract talent and visitors to the city, but also create an awareness of the whole area, with a fruitful new dialogue between city and countryside as a result. We call it Leuven & Beyond. Because we see the region as an ever-expanding universe, not only as a geographical datum but also as a constantly evolving image of the future. The region - that's us. >>>





An above-average number of children are born in Leuven. We'll tell you why that happens below. But every birth brings with it hope, the chance to act, a peep at the future. Hannah Arendt calls it the miracle that saves the world from destruction. New life that cries out to be born. But if we expect salvation from future generations, what are we giving them to work with?

Here, as we journey towards European Capital of Culture 2030, we're making a commitment in the belief that art and culture can contribute to a new forward-looking narrative, to a wider social movement towards a fair and sustainable society. No matter how complex and multilayered that process may be. That we can rebuild trust and ensure connection. Our aim is to employ our artistic view, imagination, and craftsmanship as mechanisms for the development of Leuven & Beyond. Culturally, socially, economically, ecologically and humanly.



We also see the title European Capital of Culture as a chance to exchange experiences with every other European. The problems and challenges that present themselves in Leuven & Beyond – a city of more than 100,000 inhabitants in a rural region where more than 500,000 people live – also occur in many places in Europe. We also aim to use our candidacy to become a future-factory, to test projects and strategies, then pass them on to other parts of Europe. Something is being born here. And it screams to be heard.

## Q3 THE OVERALL CULTURAL PROFILE OF LEUVEN

Kaboom! This story starts with a bang. Time is about to begin. In Naamsestraat in Leuven a force field suddenly appears, an ear-shattering eyeball-sizzling flash. The Big Bang, right there, right then. In a small office, Naamsestraat 61, Professor Georges Lemaître is working on his theory of an expanding universe. As Albert Einstein hears about it in 1930, he can't believe his ears. At a stroke, Lemaître broadens our temporal horizon, from 13.7 million light years into the past and forwards into eternity. So dizzying we're seeing stars.

That critical exploration of the inconceivable, that searching gaze from our earliest origins to our furthest future, is perhaps typical of this city. Centuries old; very much alive and kicking. Leuven has caused many a big bang to be heard around the world. Caused by humanists like Vesalius, More, and Mercator, all the way to Lemaître. Names as wonderfully alliterative as the Big Bang itself.

From Lemaître's expanding universe, we return to solid ground. Today we can do that with a simple click on Google Earth. Search for 'Leuven' and the satellite image zooms in until you recognize the shape of a medieval city with its historic fortifications. Suddenly the city looks like a pincushion.

Fifteen years earlier, across the road from Lemaître's office, German troops had burned the University Library to the ground. A thousand unique manuscripts from Antiquity, the Middle Ages and the Renaissance, 800 incunabula, and 300,000 books were lost. The Old University's foundation bull of 1425 and a copy of Vesalius's *De humani corporis fabrica* also perished in the flames.

Even further back in time – in 1516 – in the same street, Thomas More had his *Utopia* printed by his friend and fellow humanist Dirk Martens. Martens's house, opposite the old library was also reduced to ashes - today it's a tandoori restaurant. Time does not stand still.

But that two concepts like Utopia and the Big Bang, which would forever change our view of society, the world and the universe, were published not only in Leuven but in the very same street, says a lot about our city's DNA. That humanist spirit, which attaches prime importance to man and the world, still persists here.

The founding of the university in 1425 - now 600 years ago - has shaped the city. It's the oldest and largest university in the Low Countries and since 2016 has continually been named the most innovative university in Europe. Today, Leuven is a hub of innovation, home to global players such as the nanotechnology institute imec and 3D developer Materialize.

With 104,000 inhabitants plus 60,000 students, Leuven has a distinctive demographic. Almost 40,000 Leuveners are under 30: add those students and you have a remarkably young city. With 171 nationalities, almost every country in the world is represented here. Thirty-eight per cent of Leuveners have a diverse background. In the region, with a combined population of another half million, the picture diverges: relatively well-off dual-income households on one hand; a rapidly aging group on the other.

Leuven's international community, which has always been vibrant with students and lecturers from all over the world and expats involved in KU Leuven's many spin-offs, has grown considerably since the refugee crisis of 2015. In absolute figures Leuven received the greatest influx of refugees after Antwerp. In percentage terms Leuven took in the largest number. Three-quarters of Leuveners think the diverse backgrounds of those who live here enrich the municipality. It's not surprising that Leuven is the first central city in Flanders whose mayor has a migration background.

Back to the pincushion. Google's location pins also pinpoint Leuven's 'M' museum, Great Beguinage, and Park Abbey. Google knows what you want to see. In any case, the historic splendour and rich heritage smack you in the eye. But if you look closer you'll also see a host of pins identifying the many young culture spots that have sprung up in recent years. Close to the station are Het Depot, Stelplaats and HAL 5, and a bit further towards the Vaartkom (the canal zone) an entire bloc of cultural hotspots is developing. Here, in just a couple of years, OPEK and Cas-co have opened, along with the BAC Art Lab, the historic bacteriological institute (now artists are creating where vaccines and other kill-or-cure remedies were once produced), and the maakleerplek. With event centres such as De Hoorn and the iconic Manhattan Studios this is also the epicentre of the audiovisual sector and the creative industries. All achieved in the last ten years. Things are moving forward in this city. And that was needed.

Because for centuries, the University has also saddled Leuven with a rather stuffy image of dusty libraries and eternal students. If Stefan Zweig described Leuven as 'cheery and tranquil', Charlotte Brontë condescendingly called it 'Bouquin-Moisi' or 'Musty-Books'. Around the year 2000, Leuven's then mayor, Louis Tobback, said that Leuven had to rid itself of its 'Ernest Claes character', alluding to the exponent of Flemish regional literature. Chaff, corn, birch pollen – turns out they give you hay fever.

The first cracks in that stuffy image appeared with the student revolts of May 68. In the slipstream the students founded STUK as a professional arts centre. In STUK, theatre makers and choreographers for whom the major classical structures in Antwerp, Brussels and Ghent held no appeal got their first chance to stage their works in the early 1980s. The Flemish Wave was born.

Yet it was the mid-1990s before other professional arts organizations emerged in Leuven. By the late nineties there was an exciting scene, though one that was consistently overlooked by the Flemish Government. Even today there is still massive inequality in the distribution of cultural budgets. If you draw a line from Antwerp via Mechelen to Brussels, 91% of all Flemish cultural resources fall on its west side. The east side of the country, with East Brabant, the Kempen, and Limburg (which together make up one third of the Flemish population) has to make do with a measly 9% of the budget. The Province and City of Antwerp (29%), Brussels (27%), East Flanders and the City of Ghent (21%), and West Flanders (14%) take the lion's share, Flemish Brabant (with Leuven) gets 6%, Limburg less than 3%.

This means that the Leuven arts sector is constantly having to punch above its weight. For limited resources also mean difficult working conditions for artists, too few support staff, insufficient capacity for setting up international or European collaborations.

But what the young arts sector lacked in financial resources in the early 2000s, it made up for in drive, ambition and perseverance. Far-reaching cooperation, co-housing and knowledge-sharing became the norm. Thus costs were saved, audiences and expertise shared. The Leuven Model – the term was coined by Ghent-based journalist Wouter Hillaert – was one of energetic collaboration, with Leuven organizations seeing each other not as competitors but as partners. Generosity is key. Cooperation instead of competition. It was inspirational, and that inspiration was felt far beyond the city limits. Everyone came – not only from Antwerp, Ghent, Bruges, and Hasselt, but from the Netherlands, Germany, Denmark and Finland as well – to learn how Leuven does it.

The stimulating presence of a globally renowned university is an important factor in the integral and international verve that has typified the Leuven arts sector since the turn of the century. A good decade ago, the City, university and cultural sector came together to create a Cultural Charter which led to KU[N]ST Leuven, an organization that orchestrates biennial city-wide festivals and is now the executor of our candidacy.

Since 2013 that model of cooperation in searching for solutions to common challenges has culminated in the creation of three organizational networks. This is how Leuven Mind-Gate, which brings together top players from the high-tech, medical science and creative sectors, came to be established. A partnership was developed with Leuven 2030 that concentrates on sustainability and landing a Climate City Contract (Leuven is a Mission City). SOM (Samen Onderwijs Maken) is the education network, also has cooperation and experiment at its core. The three organizations link Leuven players with each other, across local and international sectors, with the focus on the future. With these three organizational



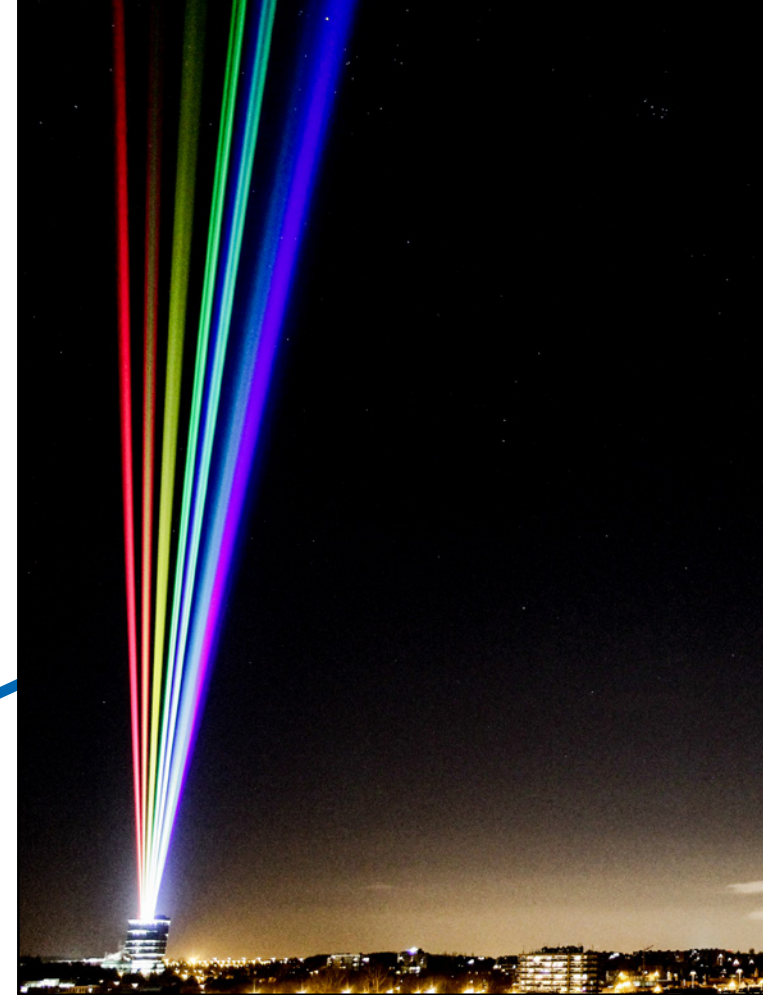
networks, Leuven illustrates how the major social changes that are needed require connections between the various social sectors. Radically new connections to facilitate necessary innovation, so to speak.

With over 300 socio-cultural associations, the Leuven is a demonstrably active cultural participant. Our Art Academy and Conservatory (SLAC) form the largest institution in Flanders offering part-time art education to all ages. In Leuven, more young people are affiliated with a dance club than with football. Not to mention booming disciplines like circus (we have the largest circus school in the country, a circus festival and a circus lab) and hip-hop (last year we hosted the World Breaking Championship).

In the last 25 years Leuven has vigorously shaken off its stuffy image and taken confident steps forward. The cultural sector's 'big bang' is also expanding into the East Brabant region, where a growing number of collaborative ventures are being set up between cultural players such as academies and museums, the 14 cultural centres and 35 libraries.

Despite the fascinating arts scene and inspiring environment, many artists still leave our city, precisely because of the limited Flemish subsidies and high real estate prices. In that respect, being awarded the title of European Capital of Culture would bring about a huge change: the city's international character would be enhanced, the European network would be significantly strengthened, and the associated budgets could finally allow the sector to assume its full stature.

The celebration of the university's 600th anniversary in 2025, the opening of the new Vesalius Museum in 2026, the complete restoration of Park Abbey by 2027, the pilot project Body & Soul city festival 2027-2028, the repurposing of the historic Stadhuis (town hall) in 2028 and the impressive new Performing Arts Site (PAS) set to open in 2029 are some of the very visible stepping stones to Leuven's cultural quantum leap and the ambition to become the European Capital of Culture in 2030. We're getting ready. Are you?



## Q4 THE CONCEPT OF THE PROGRAMME

The two biggest challenges facing our city and region, and Europe and the world, are increasing polarization and rapidly advancing climate change. Do those challenges also hallmark Leuven & Beyond? Certainly. In highly urbanized Flanders, which has the greatest population density in Europe, our towns have become heat islands. Concrete stores up heat and makes the earth impermeable. Paradoxically, this has led not only to heatwaves and drought but also enormous flooding in recent years. In the villages around our cities, nitrogen emissions are too high, causing farmers to lose their permits, while crops fail due to persistent rain and flooding. And a second rift is widening on the dividing line between city and countryside: toxic polarization and political extremism.

Will a European Capital of Culture solve all our problems? Obviously not. But it can help create a new solidarity, strengthen society, pass on insight and inspiration, spread new narratives and encourage behavioural change. The world is changing drastically and the future is uncertain. There is a clear task before us. In Leuven European Capital of Culture 2030 we see a great opportunity for tackling it.

European Capital of Culture celebrates cultural life in the broadest sense. That means that we also celebrate our common humanity, our very humanness. We're born, grow up, go to school, fall in love, work, eat, party, dance. We live. And finally we die too.

Who are we as human beings? What is our human nature? What are our values? How do we view the world? How do we describe the world and how do we imagine it? In Leuven we've been asking these questions since the time of the humanists. Which outlooks do we see and how do we share them with each other? How do we live together?

Human Nature not only questions what it is to be human, with humanity's good and bad sides, we can also broaden the concept and derive the potential inherent in both words: human versus nature, our behaviour versus our environment, our impact on nature and climate. To this we then link an image of the future: how will future generations deal with the tension between human and nature, and which sustainable (social and technological) innovations will then be demanded?

For the programme we start from our Leuven strengths: our human capital (it's all we have), our clear focus on nature and sustainability and our specialization in innovation. Those three elements form the triple helix of our DNA. They are the three major themes on which we hang our programme: human, nature and innovation, always linked to the history, present and future of our city, our region and Europe. Each of the three themes is further explored along different programme tracks, always seeking out the tension between humans and nature, innovation and humans, nature and innovation. This is how we make radically new connections. For LOV is the most radical connection in a human life.





A city is not an island. The choices we make now determine the opportunities our children and grandchildren will have.

# contribution to the long-term strategy

## Q 5 LEUVEN'S LONG-TERM CULTURAL STRATEGY

## Q 7 THE EUROPEAN CAPITAL OF CULTURE ACTION WITHIN THIS STRATEGY

Leuven's Long-Term Cultural Strategy aims to make Leuven's cultural sector socially, ecologically, and financially future-proof, inclusive, sustainable, innovative, and socially fair. The title of European Capital of Culture is entirely congruous with those goals and offers the opportunity to turn our rich cultural ecosystem into a fertile place that encourages human encounters, stimulates self-development, social cohesion and well-being, and triggers creativity and economic development.

A city is not an island. The choices we make now determine the opportunities our children and grandchildren will have. Leuven accepts its responsibilities with regard to global challenges such as climate change, wastage of raw materials, migration, and the resilience of democracy. We tackle the major challenges together, with government, residents, organizations, knowledge institutions, and entrepreneurs, and join forces locally, regionally, nationally and internationally.

Leuven is an inclusive city, with opportunities and consideration for everyone, where solidarity and care are rooted in every policy area. Irrespective of origin, domestic situation, political or sexual orientation, gender, age, health condition, you're welcome here. We embrace diversity and we're attentive to the differences. We place trust in initiative-takers and encourage participation. We encourage citizenship and remove barriers so that it's not only the strongest Leuveners who have the right to participate. Social contact fosters mutual understanding and trust, it makes people stronger. It also increases the well-being, quality of life and safety in the city and its various neighbourhoods.

In 2019, Leuven organized a widely participatory poll titled *Leuven, Maak het Mee* (Let's build Leuven Together). It brought together 2,844 citizens of different ages from different backgrounds and neighbourhoods to share their ideas, dreams and desires for Leuven in 2030, not least in the cultural arena. Between 2020 and 2022, the city and the broader cultural sector developed 'landscape mappings' of the arts, heritage and socio-cultural life in the city, with 10 strategic ambitions to be achieved before 2035. The consistency between the Long-Term Cultural Strategy, the 'landscapes', and the ECOC trajectory was outlined in the Strategic Culture Compass 2035, as approved by the Municipal Council of 24 June 2024.

Our candidacy, the route towards the title and the title year as European Capital of Culture augment and accelerate each of these ambitions. In the list below, the Q in which we set out a more detailed description of this topic in its relation to European Capital of Culture is indicated at the end of each item.

- 1. Leuven & Beyond guarantees the right to culture with rich and diverse cultural provision for everyone,** via its own urban cultural institutions. Among the main cultural players in the wide region are city cultural centre 30CC and the new Performing Arts Site, the public library de Bib Leuven, museum M Leuven, the Heritage Department and City Archives, as well as the Art Academy and Conservatory (SLAC), and Park Abbey. (Q11, Q17, Q18, Q19)
- 2. Leuven & Beyond is inclusive** in every area. Diversity is a fact. That's true of society and that's what should be true of our cultural ecosystem. But we're not there yet. We need to share our power and give more space to artists, programmers, associations and citizens who embody diversity. We open up the conversation: no longer talking *about* but talking *with*. (Q4, Q10, Q11, Q18)
- 3. Leuven & Beyond puts the audience in key position.** We have an involved and critical audience. At the same time, we see the shift from passive consumption to active involvement, from spectatorship to usership: televoting, gaming, fiction on demand, self-compiled playlists... Our audience is increasingly becoming the owner of its own experience. Yet the need for direct, physical connection and shared experience has never been greater than during the lockdowns. How do we involve our audience in 2035? How do we increase ownership in every level of the population? Together with the audience we're going in search of new ways to experience culture and heritage. This requires us to leave the stage and stand amidst our audience, to let go of some of our artistic autonomy and share it around. (Q4, Q10, Q11, Q17, Q18, Q19)
- 4. Leuven & Beyond strengthens social and cultural life** in socio-cultural associations and organizations. More than 300 cultural and heritage associations are affiliated with the city advisory councils for non-professional arts, education and leisure. Youth organizations, senior citizens' associations and ethnically diverse organizations are also supported financially, organizationally, logistically and in the area of communication. (Q13, Q17)
- 5. Leuven & Beyond strengthens the arts and heritage sector.** Leuven's broad cultural sector is young and still expanding. Support from Flanders is slow to increase, European resources seem hard to come by. Therefore we fully support organizations and individual artists through subsidy regulations or nominative grants, collective cultural communication, through efficient advice and services. Moreover, we strengthen the network, the



capability and the competences of organizations to work on a supra-local, European, and international basis. With the wider region we are working on a single Cultural Space: Leuven & Beyond. (Q2, Q4, Q6, Q8, Q10, Q11, Q12, Q13, Q14, Q15, Q16)

6. **Leuven & Beyond strengthens the development of talent** and creates mental space for young makers and (cultural) entrepreneurs. With a 360° approach that focuses on fair practice and fair pay, on locations for residency and presentation. We invest in new breeding grounds and free ports and create an attractive cultural climate. By exploring new forms of housing and working together. By developing a range of training courses and collaborations with education. By encouraging entrepreneurship. By forging local and international connections. By protecting space for creative chaos. (Q6, Q8, Q13, Q37, Q38)
7. **Leuven & Beyond is building new space for culture.** In the cultural sector there is still a great need for space for working in and presenting that work. The last fifteen years have seen new places continuously added. Systematically and sustainably we're building our own cultural infrastructure and supporting cultural players in finding or making space for culture. In addition, we encourage the shared use of spaces, for instance via an online sharing platform that we hope to roll out across the region. (Q6, Q8, Q37, Q38)
8. **Leuven & Beyond takes care of our living heritage** via a dynamic heritage policy. Our immovable, movable or intangible cultural heritage is not only a tourist asset, it's part of our daily lives. Historic buildings are inhabited, populated or repurposed, sound heritage such as organs and carillons is played. With digital innovations, heritage becomes both inviting and internationally accessible. (Q12, Q14, Q37, Q38)
9. **Leuven & Beyond innovates.** Society is digitalizing: physical and virtual realities are merging ever more often. Future generations will make hardly any difference between them. Culture has the power to visualise the opportunities that this hybrid world offers: new forms of artistic expression, wonder, reflection and community building. Artists, cultural organizations and heritage players can decide on physical, digital or hybrid forms. Thus, our cultural offering can innovate, deepen experience, and increase and renew audience reach. The virtual world creates an additional place for culture. That requires high-performance IT systems and accessible technology, as well as encouraging cultural players to explore and embrace digitalization in an interdisciplinary way. In this context, connectedness, diversity, accessibility, sustainability and coexistence are our priority. (Q4, Q6, Q8, Q10, Q11, Q12)

10. **Leuven & Beyond is working on a climate-neutral, circular and sustainable cultural sector.** How do we build our stages? How do we organize our tours? How do we use heating and lighting? But above all: are we aware of our creative power? As a cultural sector, we convey stories that can inspire. Which narratives and visions for the future are we prepared to launch? How can we do this in a way that initiates a broader, social movement? With networks such as Leuven 2030, Leuven MindGate, KU Leuven, Leuven Research & Development, we bring together various players who are actively involved in sustainable development. With this powerful collaborative model, Leuven can be a signal example to Flanders and Europe in the designing of a sustainable, inclusive and socially equitable future. (Q1, Q4, Q6, Q8, Q10, Q11)

Our ambition to be European Capital of Culture in 2030 is strong. That ambition acts as a catalyst in reaching the city's and region's long-term aims in the areas of cultural, social and economic development. Our candidacy gives us direction and perspective; it also creates tremendous cultural dynamism and enthusiasm in the city. That dynamism strengthens cross-sector collaboration and offers an important opportunity for regional development and in-depth European networking.

## Q6 STRENGTHENING THE CAPACITY OF THE CULTURAL AND CREATIVE INDUSTRIES AND LONG-TERM LINKS BETWEEN ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL SECTORS

Radically new connections are the common thread throughout this bid book. Between humanity, nature, and innovation. By working together, you develop: you spur each other on, you raise your bar, you steal with your eyes. You reach different audiences than usual. Working together transfers ownership. You can measure the importance of an organization by the strength of the connections with its partners. We call that fabric 'a network'.

To strengthen the capacity of the cultural and creative sectors we're setting up 4 concrete workstreams for the coming 9 years.

## 1. STRENGTHENING THE CULTURAL AND CREATIVE INDUSTRIES THROUGH CITY POLICY

Affordable space for the Cultural and Creative Industries (CCI)

In a city where square metres are expensive, it's not easy for the CCI to start new projects. We have an active policy on sharing available space and repurposing (often historical) buildings to the CCI. In that respect the last years have seen some great achievements, such as OPEK and De Hoorn (which won an *Europa Nostra Award*). Repurposing projects in the pipeline include the Scheut convent and the Centrale Werkplaatsen (Hal 4, Hal 9). Throughout Leuven & Beyond we're investigating how to repurpose churches and old industrial buildings.

Space for night culture is on offer through the development of Stelplaats and Domo. It appeals to an audience that brings a special dynamic of creativity and innovation to the city.

The Open Creatives pilot project, which we're working on with Ghent, Kortrijk and Antwerp, will see the setting up of a digital space-sharing platform where organizations and individuals share available space with young entrepreneurs in the cultural and creative sectors.

Financial support from the CCI

We offer microgrants of up to 7,000 euros for projects in the cultural and creative sector. In addition, the Leuven Entrepreneurs Fund (LEF) grants subsidies to innovative social projects by start-ups, scale-ups, NGOs and SMEs in the broad CCI sector. The support might be up to 80,000 euros per project.

Within the framework of LOV2030, Leuven & Beyond (i.e. the City of Leuven, the municipalities in the region, and the Province of Flemish Brabant) will allocate a budget of 9 million euros between 2025 and 2033 to support cultural and creative initiatives in the region.

Two new landmarks for culture

The new Performing Arts Site (PAS) and the historic Stadhuis (town hall) both have ambitions that transcend the local and reach towards the international.

The Performing Arts Site introduces a radical collaborative model in which the public and the broader cultural sector are given ownership and agency, which makes scaling-up possible for Leuven arts organizations. Stadhuis is reorientating itself as a European House for Democracy.

## 2. LAUNCH OF A NETWORK IN THE CULTURAL AND CREATIVE INDUSTRIES: THE LOV NETWORK

Besides the Leuven 2030, SOM and Leuven MindGate networks, we're building an equally strong organizational network that actively incorporates our cultural capital and our cultural and creative stakeholders, and which can function as an advocate and management coach. In 2023, all the informal networks came together as that

network was established; in 2024 a network coordinator was recruited. This organizational network will be crucial *en route* to the ECOC year and we regard it as an important legacy after 2030.

In this new network we're launching various projects and working groups, with a main focus on:

Sharing business management expertise

The CCI in Leuven & Beyond are young. It's essential that smaller organizations and those just getting off the ground can learn from the experience of the larger and more practiced players. We set up intervision groups and organize job shadowing. We support 'writing tables' for subsidy applications and bring together Leuven expertise in fundraising and tax sheltering.

LOV EU Academy

There's a need for capacity building in everything that relates to Europe. Which is why we're setting up a LOV EU Academy, together with former, future and candidate ECOCs, where we can share knowledge and know-how. We're developing a training programme for the creative and cultural industry, cultural managers, and artists, in which we address European themes, cultural diversity, intercultural dialogue, and transnational partnerships. We offer active support in the submitting of European projects to the various EU Culture Programmes. Given that Leuven is a full member of Culture Next, this network can be a future asset in this project. We see it as an important legacy.



### 3. COLLABORATION BEYOND THE CULTURAL AND CREATIVE INDUSTRIES

We're strengthening our policy on top events.

We bring together the expertise, personnel, and resources that we've utilized in the past when organizing city-wide cultural festivals, innovation conferences, and international sporting events in Leuven. Combining forces, means, and know-how opens up space for reinforcing the crossovers between culture, CCI, and innovation. In 2027-2028 we'll be launching Body & Soul as a pilot project with a view to LOV2030.

We're developing the Vaartkom (canal zone) as a creative hub.

Leuven is providing space for the creative economy in and around the renovated Vaartkom. The existing creative cluster, the proximity of the station, and the existence there of industrial heritage all potentialize the growth of this zone into a fully evolved creative district. In the pipeline is the continuing buildout of maakleerplek, Manhattan Studios, and the old Marie-Thumas factory.

We're standing up for our neighbourhood – collaboration between culture and society.

In the City of Leuven's Stand Up for Your Neighbourhood programme we weave the narrative around Human Nature. For this scheme, which encourages neighbours to work together and develop a sustainable project that will improve *samenleven* in their neighbourhood, the city makes an annual 800,000 euros available.

We're strengthening our relationship with KU Leuven and its spin-offs.

Since 2016, KU Leuven has been consistently ranked number 1 in the renowned Thomson Reuters list as the most innovative university in Europe. In the creative arena the relationship between city and university is also intense: for instance, KU[N]ST Leuven, which has been organizing city-wide cultural festivals since 2014 and is developing our ECOC candidacy, was jointly founded. With the commemoration of KU Leuven's 600 years of existence we're laying a substantial stepping stone along the way to LOV2030. To celebrate its 600th birthday the university entered into sustainable partnerships with artists and entrepreneurs from the CCI and invested in lasting artistic interventions in the public space.

The real sustainable relationship is of course manifest in living together day by day with the many students and researchers, often with international backgrounds, who offer the full potential to work in the CCI. The employment figures in this sector are significantly higher in Leuven than in any other Flemish central city: 37% of entrepreneurs and 6.5% of employees are active in the CCI.

### 4. WE'RE MAKING A RADICALLY NEW CONNECTION WITH THE LEUVEN NETWORKS

Besides partnerships within the CCI, Leuven has also established other important social networks in recent years. In 2017 the innovative collaboration around Leuven 2030 was awarded the European Green Leaf Award, the EU's prestigious climate prize. Meanwhile, Leuven has also become a Mission City and Leuven 2030 received a triple AAA rating from the EU for its Climate City Contract.

The approach is successful in education too. SOM is a network that unites all Leuven education makers, from nursery school to university, in labs exploring an innovative future for education. Jointly with other domains the network sets up ventures such as the Culture x Education Lab, where 50 partners from the cultural sector and education convoke in-depth and structural collaboration.

In 2015 the city established Leuven MindGate, a network comprising 400 organizations and companies that aims to strengthen Leuven's international position as a region with a high quality of life and a leading position in the fields of health, high-tech and creativity.

In bringing together Leuven 2030, SOM, Leuven MindGate, KU Leuven, and Leuven Research & Development, LOV2030 mobilizes several actors involved with sustainable development, with humanity, nature and innovation. With this powerful collaboration model, Leuven can signify a lot for Flanders and for Europe in designing a sustainable, inclusive and socially fair future, in which culture plays an important and connecting role.

Putting this into practice is a challenge of enormous proportions. The goal is to create a movement in which many people feel involved. Making the city sustainable is a joint project. Gaining the ECOC title will be the particle accelerator that makes Europe-wide expansion possible, to make all this come true.

### Q8 LONG-TERM CULTURAL, SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC IMPACTS

By 2035 Leuven & Beyond aims to be a leading cultural region, contributing not only culturally but also socially, economically, and ecologically to the development of the city, the region of East Brabant, to everyone who lives there

and everyone who visits. We aim to be an inspiring example for comparable European cities and regions, today and in the future.

### CULTURAL OUTCOMES

1. The **diversity** of our audience and our cultural programming have increased. Thanks to greater substantive involvement (co-creation) the audience's ownership has likewise increased. That's led to a renewed sense of pride and a reinforced local and regional identity, consistent with European values. The European residents of Leuven & Beyond are locally networked more strongly and feel part of our society.
2. The LOV Network has engendered capacity building and put a new governance model at the heart of its operation, which has increased the sector's reputation **internationally**. LOV2030 has set a new standard in quality and made our arts sector more attractive to artists and cultural workers.
3. LOV2030 has set a new standard for **integral accessibility** of what's on cultural offer: we've done away with barriers, both physical, social, and psychological.
4. Because of LOV2030 the advantages of **cross-sectoral cooperation** have become obvious: CCI, education, sustainability, innovation, science, and the social sector encounter each other via inspiring, cultural projects that offer added value to every party. These radical connections are sustainably integrated in our cultural organizations and the cultural policy of city and region.
5. The win-win potential of supra-local and **European cultural collaborations** has also become self-evident, which means that projects gain not only substantive but also financial support. The ECOC process and the title year impact significantly on the European aspect; European collaboration has been made more robust and durable.
6. Our approach to **heritage** has taken on a visible, new approach based on innovation, sustainability and accessibility, ensuring that heritage contributes to the social, cultural and economic dynamics of the communities.
7. **New cultural infrastructure**: not only landmarks but also workshops and shared spaces, due to the cultural repurposing of e.g. churches and historic or industrial buildings.
8. The broad CCI has made a **sustainability shift**.
9. The **financing of the cultural sector** in Leuven & Beyond is in line with that of the other Flemish regions, meaning that cultural organizations are making a necessary leap in scale.
10. Cultural experience increasingly takes place in **public spaces** – the Brabantse Wouden, the Citadel of Diest, the church in Vertrijk, the Geetbets marketplace...

### SOCIAL OUTCOMES

1. **Samenleving (living together)**: Involving local communities in cultural activities and projects has led to stronger social cohesion. We're more firmly focused on democratic values and living together. As a city and as a region we're learning how to set up remediative programmes.
2. We see **Stadhuis - European House for Democracy** as one of our candidacy's legacy projects. Here exchange programmes with sustainable content are set up to appraise European values, democracy, freedom, the rule of law, dialogue, and remediation.
3. **Physical and mental mobility** in Leuven & Beyond have increased: the region has become one mental and cultural space, where people live, work, and experience culture together.
4. **Structural collaboration with the educational sector** creates culture- educational programmes for schools and so contributes to the development of new talents and the enhancement of cultural education in schools. Young people leave school with greater creative skills.
5. **Improved quality of life**: Human Nature puts particular emphasis on our humanness and on a sustainable environment. With a wider range of leisure activities and a more attractive urban and regional environment, the quality of life increases.



ECONOMIC OUTCOMES & URBAN DEVELOPMENT

1.

LOV2030 will boost **tourism** with a direct economic impetus (higher income for hospitality, accommodation, retail and transport). Our focus is not specifically on growth and economy, however, but on tourism's social and sustainable development and its long-stay and regenerative potential involving meaningful encounters between locals and visitors.
2.

On the international stage the ECOC title enhances the image and attractiveness of Leuven & Beyond as a creative and innovative region and a good place to live and work. Thus we attract (international) talent or human capital for our **labour market**.
3.

The status of Cultural Capital attracts investment in **infrastructure** and **urban renewal**: this includes the renovation of historic buildings, new cultural locations, and improved public spaces. The Flemish Government will prioritize investment in the public space of the titular city. In our case that would include an accelerated reconstruction of the ring road, the main traffic artery around our city.
4.

**Mobility**: investment in roads and public transport make Leuven & Beyond more accessible and attractive for Leuveners and visitors. We aim to promote Leuven as a typical 15-minute city, as a model of modal shift for other European cities.
5.

**Sustainable development**: LOV2030 will function as both flywheel and megaphone for the European Green Deal and specifically for the breakthrough projects of the Climate City Contract, through which Leuven aims to become climate neutral faster. The narrative and agenda of Leuven 2030 will be strengthened and gain support. In the ECOC year these breakthrough projects will become particularly evident to the public at large and could also inspire other cities in Europe, causing a knock-on effect.

Q9 PLANS FOR MONITORING AND EVALUATION

Working with a consortium of research partners, Event Flanders, and stakeholders, LOV2030 draws up a solid monitoring plan in alignment with our objectives and programme as ECOC and the ambitions of the Long-Term Cultural Strategy for Leuven & Beyond. Naturally, the plan complies with the *Guidelines for the cities' own evaluations of the results of their ECOC*.

IF CHOSEN AS ECOC IN 2025, WE WILL DELIVER A SCHEMATIC OVERVIEW WITH:

- the actions and activities that we undertake
- what outputs we foresee: actual results (e.g. numbers, media attention, audience figures, tourism, etc.)
- the outcome: what changes will take place in the short and longer term (e.g. behaviour, new structures, dynamics, employment, etc.)
- the indicators and research methods

PARTNERS & APPROACH

In 2024-2025 a research partners working group will hold 4 meetings to develop this impact and monitoring plan. We will learn from the impact studies of fellow ECOCs and contact international or European experts in this research field.

Prof. Bart Van Looy (KU Leuven) engages with partners from ECOOM-STORE, an inter-university consortium between KU Leuven, UGent, UAntwerp, UHasselt and VUB. ECOOM-STORE (with expertise in monitoring science,

technology/IP, design) can provide relevant indicators for specific sub-domains at Flemish and European level (cf. Eurostat). From Cultural Studies (Prof. Fred Truyen, KU Leuven) we have expertise in cultural economics and cultural statistics. Complementarily, we ask master students to make analyses for monitoring and evaluation (Faculty of Economics and Business Administration, Faculty of Arts, KU Leuven).

Event Flanders uses its expertise in connection with impact studies on international events and conferences. They developed an impact model based on the Theory of Change.

Because our candidacy is expressly aimed at collaboration in the region, we focus closely on monitoring that can evaluate this objective. Given their experience with cultural regions we are involving OP/TIL, the Flemish network organization for supra-local cultural policy. As of 2024 they will map out the effects of an ECOC candidacy on the relationship between the city and the surrounding region.

We appoint colleagues from within the project team to supervise this process. By actively involving students as well, we aim to pass on immediately the knowledge gained to a future generation of cultural managers and researchers.

As measuring instruments we use both quantitative and qualitative research methods geared to the dimensions we want to measure. In the meantime, we evaluate and report. This allows us to make adjustments so that the activities we develop contribute to the impact intended. We make these findings public and share our experiences, also with other European cities. Being a knowledge city we gladly help in building human capital to increase and visualize the impact of ECOC.



WHAT DO WE WANT TO MONITOR AND MEASURE?

We want to measure the cultural, social, economic and ecological impact that LOV2030 has on Leuven & Beyond. This first bid book does not yet include an exhaustive list of objectives and indicators. The monitoring and evaluation system facilitates the analysis and measuring of, among other things, the following:

- The contribution to increasing the variety, diversity and European dimension of the cultural provision of our city and region through, among other things, international collaborations.
- The contribution to increasing co-ownership, inclusivity, access to and participation in culture, also by specific target groups.

- The strength of the connections between the cultural sector and other sectors.
- The contribution of our ECOC year to the city's Long-Term Cultural Strategy. What changes do we see in our cultural climate?
- Regional collaboration: is there a change in the way Leuven and the East Brabant region work together?
- The economic and social impact of the strategy and the investments made.
- Governance: the creation and impact of an independent structure, the LOV Association.
- The contribution of our ECOC year to the Long-Term Cultural Strategy for the East Brabant region.



# cultural and artistic content

Art has the power to reach beyond the sense of reality, which is where the sense of possibility enters the picture. Not only what already is, but also what could be.

## Q 10 ARTISTIC VISION AND STRATEGY

### VISION

With the central theme of **Human Nature**, we prioritize a holistic approach to our challenges. Solutions lie within ourselves, humankind, and in our relationship with our environment, nature.

Through Human Nature we explore how we can draw on our humanness to contribute to the battle against increasing polarization and rapidly advancing climate change. The world is changing as we watch and the future is uncertain. Who are we as human beings? What is our human nature? What are our values? How do we live together? What behavioural change is needed? We forge loving, radically new connections to meet the challenges.

Leuven excels at networking. That's a tremendous asset. But often those networks don't extend beyond their own circle. And that carries a risk. The risk that it's always the same people who do the talking. That other people and initiatives fall outside our orbit. That we ignore blind spots and injuries. If you do what you've always done? Then you get what you always got.

So we need to innovate socially. We need to search for our blind spots and injuries. And we must break the rules and pull apart the structures that are the cause of exclusion. The network – the fabric of our society – needs more nodes. It must be woven more densely, like a real net, so that it retains its resilience and no one falls through.

We see culture as an engine of imagination. As the way to create new worlds, share new narratives. To shape a future – to imagine it. Art and culture can make the impossible possible, the unthinkable thinkable, the invisible visible. Those of us who grew up in the grim 1980s were constantly being told that 'we must be realistic'. But that's the beauty of imagination – it shows you that reality is not set in stone. That everything could be different.

Art has the power to reach beyond the sense of reality, which is where the sense of possibility enters the picture. Not only what already is, but also what could be. That is an exercise in priming for the future. How do we see the future of Leuven & Beyond? What do we pass on to future generations in Europe?

By dealing with the concept of Human Nature in a playful way we don't have to stop at asking what it is to be human, with humanity's good and bad sides, its instincts for survival and death, its eros and thanatos. We can also broaden the concept and derive the potential inherent in both words: human versus nature, our behaviour versus our environment, our impact on nature and climate. Human Nature also demonstrates our full awareness that as humans we are always one with the universe – George Lemaître's Big Bang, remember? – but that awareness also means that we question our dominant position. Now that social scientists have begun to describe our era as the Anthropocene and land take and destruction due to climate-related disasters are spreading, new trends are also emerging that

problematize human dominance. What if we consider nature and the planet beyond the existence of humankind? How can we work towards a Symbiocene, where humans and nature reach sustainable harmony?

Ensuing from this are three major themes: human, nature and innovation, always linked to the past, present and future of our city, our region and Europe.



### STRATEGY

The development of an artistic programme involved our team of Dreamers2030 (see Q13), the broad cultural sector, wider civil society, and civil servants from Leuven & Beyond in a big way. We spoke with our partners from Leuven 2030, Leuven MindGate, SOM, Leuven Research & Development and KU Leuven and consulted with other ECOC cities. We sent out an Open Call for ideas for social and community projects that would correspond with our three themes and involve residents and the region. We received 137 project submissions which we assessed with the Dreamers2030 and an international jury of ECOC experts.

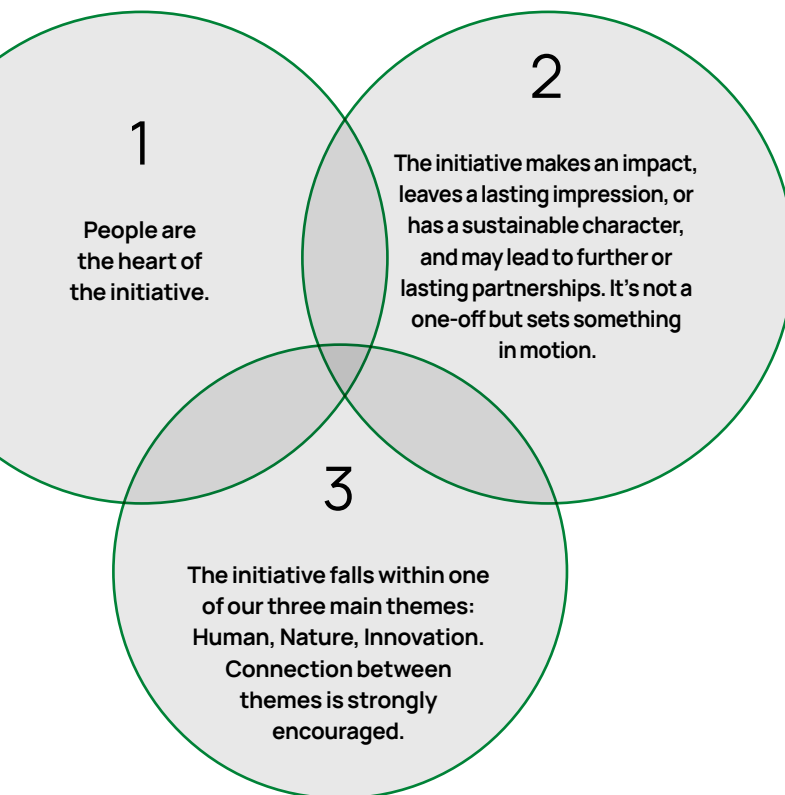
The programme delves deeper into European values, our shared European culture, and the diversity of cultures within Europe. We involve local and international artists and partners. Our ambition is to have 50% of the projects take place in the wider region, and 50% in the city, always in consideration of our shared heritage, projects in public space, and accessibility for all.

We start from our local strengths: our human capital, our clear focus on nature and sustainability, and our specialization in innovation. Human, nature and innovation. Those three elements are like a triple helix in our DNA. Each is followed further along different programme tracks, always seeking out the tension between the three. This is how we make radically new connections. Radical in the sense of getting down to the *radix*, the root; we go back to the essence to tie a knot. Radical too, because we look beyond the norm, beyond the size, beyond what is already current.



## RADICALLY NEW CONNECTIONS

Working with our Dreamers2030, we developed a LOV Mindset for radically new connections, which we take into account when we design our projects:



## Human

Human begins with our **Place of Birth** and what that says about our identity, our shared culture and the diversity of cultures in Europe.

**Body & Soul** delves deeper into the culture of the body, our physical health and mental well-being.

**Power to the People** examines European values, democracy, civil liberties and minority rights. There's no glossing over our colonial past. That dark side (thanatos, Freud would say) brings us to projects focused on war and peace.

## Nature

Nature concentrates on our environment, nature and climate. With **Cultural Climate Change** we not only propose new narratives that can help us alter our human behaviour and reduce our footprint but also look at ways of changing our own cultural climate.

In **Let's move, let's meet** we set our sights on the public space – that most democratic of places, where life can unfold. It's there for everyone. We rediscover the pleasures of pedestrian and cycle paths, offer bicycle sharing, and develop an artistic programme at points where paths cross in Leuven & Beyond.

We also compiled a set of sub-criteria that potentially provide impetus for each project:

- The initiative connects various towns and municipalities from Leuven & Beyond and from Europe and involves local people and organizations.
- Interdisciplinary or cross-sectoral: different art disciplines meet, different social sectors are involved.
- The initiative connects and involves different groups. There are initiators from different communities/ groups/ neighbourhoods/ circles/ places/ companies/ associations/ cultures/... The initiators are not the same old names and faces.
- The initiative attracts a different audience than usual. The initiative involves, reaches or starts from underrepresented voices.
- Existing networks and partnerships offer the advantage of stability and recognizability. By connecting them in a radically new way, the chance to question or reinvent yourself is created, a (re)new(ed) perspective offered.
- The philosophy behind the initiative must be accessible but high quality. Which barriers exist? Which need breaking down? Physical, financial, social and mental barriers? Ask yourself about accessibility, time, about auditory/visual support, about your language and how you communicate.

## Innovation

The theme Innovation is profoundly connected to the enquiring and creative nature of our city. **Future Fusion** sees us seeking out social innovation and questioning future generations about our society. We create an imagined and maybe even ideal version of our city in the Metaverse: **MetaLeuven**.

**Heritage for the Future** brings sustainable and innovative solutions to deal with our cultural heritage. New York, Paris, medieval Córdoba: places that have made a difference in history have always been settings in which ideas could collide. They drew people from all over and proved that the strongest innovation comes through cross-pollination and radically new connections.

The entire **Human Nature** programme is aimed at bringing together people and artists from all over Europe, creating an ideas factory for future generations of Europeans.

The project ideas we explain at this stage are the first outlines for a programme and are indicative, rather than exhaustive. In each case, we include all partners who have already committed or expressed interest. We are very well aware that more than five years remain between 2024 and 2030 and the world may look different. In the second bid book, we would like to elaborate on these projects and perhaps complement them with new projects and additional (international) partners.

## Q 11 PROGRAMME STRUCTURE, INCLUDING THE RANGE AND DIVERSITY OF ACTIVITIES

# human

### 1. PLACE OF BIRTH

More babies are born in Leuven than anywhere else in Belgium. This is not down to something in the water or Leuveners being super-fertile. It's because Leuven has the second largest hospital in Europe and expectant mums from the city, the region, the country and all over the world come to have their babies here. All those children will have Leuven as their place of birth on their passport or identity card. Where you're born affects your identity. It's something you take with you for the rest of your life. Not all those new Leuveners stay here: they fan out and take a piece of Leuven with them wherever they go in the world. Who are these children? Where are they heading? What's their story?

Conversely, Leuven is home to 171 different nationalities. That's a lot. All those people were born in different places and each brings a bit of that birthplace with them to Leuven. We

see this host of origins as an inspiring asset. What cultures, traditions and stories do people bring with them from their birthplace to their new home?

At the same time, Leuven is also the birthplace of new ideas and concepts. Remember Thomas More and his *Utopia*, Georges Lemaître and his Big Bang theory? With the most innovative university in Europe and knowledge institutions such as imec, new ideas and concepts are born in Leuven every day.

The **Place of Birth** programme track brings together projects that address cultural diversity, intercultural dialogue, and greater mutual understanding between European citizens and we link ideas from the past to innovative concepts of the world in which we all live together.

### 1,001 ORIGINS: A LIVING LIBRARY

Did you know that the brilliant Eritrean road racing cyclist Biniam Girmay lives in Leuven? That the mayor of Tokyo and the Congolese president both lived in Kessel-Lo until their election? War refugees and leading scientists both find a new home here. Leuven is home to thousands of people with thousands of different birthplaces. How did they land up in Leuven? What did they bring with them from their birthplace? What did they find here? Love? Work? Freedom?

Over the course of a year we invite 1,001 Leuveners, each with a unique birthplace, to share their story. Some have been here a while, others have just arrived, but all of them – international artists, scientists, athletes, refugees, fortune seekers, cleaners, cooks, mothers, fathers – are pages in a living book. We'll be working with libraries, bookshops and coffee shops in Leuven & Beyond. Join us, have a drink, tell us your story.

*Partners: LOV2030, City of Leuven: City Archives, Diversity Department, Economy Department, Heritage Department & the public library de Bib Leuven, Public Libraries2030, regional cultural centres and libraries, Katowice2029 (PL), Larnaca2030 (CY), Netzwerk Kultur & Heimat Hildesheimer Land (DE), Tampere2026 (FI)*

### FROM BRAEM TO BEEL

In 1970, sociologist Richard Sennett suggested radically condensing population groups around strong public spaces that no one could claim for themselves. Very diverse living conditions are combined in a single building block. This forces residents into an entente. You simply can't pretend that the whole world looks like you and your family. According to Sennett, this is a basic condition for personal growth towards social maturity in a situation of abundance.

In the centre of Leuven, architects Renaat Braem (1910-2001) and Stéphane Beel (1955) developed two high-profile new residential areas that reflect Sennett's ethic: Sint-Maartensdal (1967) and the Balk van Beel (2009), a stone's throw from each other.

In co-creation with the residents we're developing two audiowalks, available in the hundred languages spoken in those two residential areas. Written, played, and narrated by the residents themselves, the podwalks give a glimpse of how the architectural concept of the past translates into everyday life today.

*Partners: Cie. Tartaren, Neighbourhood Dynamics Department City of Leuven, KU Leuven, Radio Scorpio, ROB (local television), Oulu2026 (FI), Lemesos2030 (CY)*



## LEUVEN LENS

For thirty years the Leuven Short Film Festival has been Flanders's largest showcase for new film talent. The highly regarded European competition has been a stepping stone for many European filmmakers.

**Leuven Lens** – a New Perspective aims to ask talented filmmakers who were discovered here to return to Leuven to make a film about the city.

During a three-month residency, European filmmakers (local and international) will explore Leuven and the region from the starting point of their own backgrounds and cultures, thus producing short films about Leuven with a unique European perspective. Though maybe confrontational for Leuveners, the films will help us get to know ourselves better. For Europeans, this will be a fresh and intriguing look at a lesser-known city.

The residency ends with the premiere of the films at the Leuven Short Film Festival 2030. Given the filmmakers' proven capabilities, this is only the beginning for the films. These Leuven-European stories will work their way through the many European (short) film festivals, keeping Leuven in the spotlight beyond 2030.

If Uppsala becomes European Capital of Culture in 2029, candidate selection will take place via the Uppsala Short Film Festival. As the oldest and most important short film festivals in the world, Leuven and Uppsala know each other very well. Collaboration with a fellow Cultural Capital significantly enriches the project's European dimension.

**Partners:** Fonk vzw, Cinema ZED, Dalton Distribution, Uppsala2029 (SE), Uppsala Short Film Festival (SE), Curtas Vila do Conde (PT), Kurzfilm Festival Hamburg (DE), Internationale Kurzfilmtage Winterthur (CH), Tampere Film Festival (FI), Vienna Shorts (AT), Filmfest Dresden (DE), Go Short (NL), Odense International Film Festival (DK), ZINEBI – International Festival of Documentary & Short Film of Bilbao (ES), Cork International Film Festival (IR)

## LOV IS IN THE AIR

In Leuven, carillon music rings through the city centre several times a week. It comes from no fewer than 7 bell towers. After Amsterdam, Leuven has the largest number of 'singing towers' in the world. In the region Aarschot, Tienen, Diest, Scherpenheuvel, Holsbeek and Zoutleeuw all still have their historic carillons. Flemish in origin, the carillon is the most inclusive musical instrument you can imagine: its music reaches everyone in the area and excludes no one.

Leuven has two Peace Carillons, both of which commemorate the destruction of the University Library: the 1928 Memorial Carillon in the University Library, donated by the USA, and the 2018 Peace Carillon in Park Abbey, partly funded by the city of Neuss in Germany. The values of peace, freedom, and humanity are embedded in the carillons' mission.

Together with diverse cultural communities we're building a new carillon repertoire, so that the various communities get to know each other's music. This is how the score for **LOV is in the Air** will be created. Following in the footsteps of the Great Rotterdam Songbook, it will be sent to carillon-neurs worldwide.

The Leuven Bells summer concerts include performances by carillon players from several European countries. Besides the uber-carillon countries Belgium and the Netherlands, excellent carillonneurs are active in Spain, Portugal, Germany, France, Norway, Ukraine, Poland and Lithuania. We invite them to represent their country's musical culture on Leuven's carillons and to contribute to the score of 'LOV is in the Air'.

**Partners:** Belgian Carillon Heritage Committee, Campanae Lovanienses, Heritage Department Leuven, Heritage Programme Carillon Culture City of Leuven & KU Leuven, the towns of Aarschot, Diest, Holsbeek, Scherpenheuvel-Zichem, Tienen and Zoutleeuw, city carillonneur Rotterdam, the International Network of War Memorial and Peace Carillons

## BEATS OF LOV

**Beats of LOV** creates 'sound walks' focused on the sounds and music that are heard in our city today. What do Leuveners' favourite places sound like? Is there music in our city sounds? Is music to be heard on the street, made by buskers or floating through Leuveners' windows? These questions challenge us to listen to our environment in a radically different way.

The sound walks let us experience places in Leuven through the ears of people who have a special connection with them. They make us pause in places that we'd normally pass by or perceive completely differently. By working with neighbourhood associations, ethnically diverse organizations, youth centres and children's groups to develop tracks through different quarters of the city, a broad reflection of our society is created and the stories that live there are translated into sounds and music.

Along these tracks we arrange workshops led by experts in field recording and Leuven and European musicians. We listen to the people themselves, while the walks also invite us to 'listen differently' and lead us to unexpected neighbourhoods, away from the tourist highlights. It's important that the sound walks are as inclusive as possible and that the threshold for participating is as low as possible.

**Partners:** Matrix – Centre for Contemporary Music, Neighbourhood Dynamics Department City of Leuven, Welfare services City of Leuven, Centre for Cultural Management Lviv (UA)

## 2. BODY & SOUL PILOT PROJECT

A sick mind in a sick body. Sex, drugs and alcohol. The clichéd definition of the artist's lifestyle. The complete opposite of the classical credo *mens sana, in corpore sano*. In times when fitness and looks seem to dominate social media and when our daily well-being comes a poor second in the never-ending rat race, Body & Soul are important themes, well worth considering.

Leuven already had a hospital around 1080. The bodily care of the sick was shouldered by monks and nuns who in that process were also looking after the weal of their own souls. In the sixteenth century the Leuven physician Andreas Vesalius published *De humani corporis fabrica*, setting the new international standard for the anatomy of the human body. Today, nearly one thousand years after that first hospital, the city is a mainstay of medical and health sciences. With three major health care institutions, not only physical but also mental health care are tremendously important in and to our region.

The subject of health and well-being, or more simply Body & Soul, is deeply woven into Leuven's DNA. The title makes an immediate connection with visual art, dance, and music. With this programme track we want to look at how body culture relates to our mental well-being and to make radically new connections with other sectors such as science, heritage, sports, environment, sustainability... A broadly based pilot project exploring this theme is already in the planning for 2027-2028: the Body & Soul city festival.



## VESALIUS MUSEUM

**Vesalius** is an interdisciplinary modern museum focusing on science, healthcare and society. Vesalius takes his audience on a journey of discovery and cross-pollination in the worlds of sickness and health, science and innovation, social and societal issues. The correspondence between these things is made tangible through stories and presentations about the human body and the human life cycle.

Vesalius takes a transhistorical approach in which objects and stories about the past, present and future are in dialogue with one another. The museum's crown jewels are a first edition of Vesalius's *De humani corporis fabrica* and the unique second edition, glossed and corrected by Vesalius himself with a view to a third edition (which never materialized).

The new museum will occupy the old Anatomical Theatre and its surroundings on the Hertogen site, which also puts it in close proximity to the new Performing Arts Site and the historic Botanical Garden. When KU Leuven celebrates its 600th birthday the museum will start a short test opening in December 2025, another stepping stone towards LOV2030.

**Partners:** UZ Leuven, KU Leuven, Health House, City of Leuven, Flemish Government, Leuven MindGate, SOM, Centre for Cultural Management Lviv (UA), Charité Museum of Medical History Berlin (DE), Medical Museion Copenhagen (DK), Rijksmuseum Boerhaave Leiden (NL)

## THE NIGHT IS YOUNG

Leuven has been without a nightclub since 2011. Preconceptions about nuisance, noise and substance use constantly hijacked the debate, and for years night owls and politicians were apparently deaf to each other's arguments. Nevertheless, the night is a 'place' where you can find freedom and discover music. Where mainstream and subcultures galvanize each other, where there's room for innovation. Good nightclubs are like cultural centres or museums, which nourish you with culture and creativity. They're places where music, art, fashion, and architecture come together and, besides relaxation, offer time and space for self-development, entrepreneurship and evolving talent.

A group of young Leuveners joined forces to highlight the value of nightlife and build bridges between night-time needs and policy-makers. **The Night is Young** is aiming for a top-rank nightclub with a unique identity and impact on the urban fabric.

A real nightclub brings a strong, international programme to its city and in turn is a springboard for home-grown talent. Even during the day a nightclub is (locally) anchored in society with its music studios, workshops, catering or sports functions. A club is the nocturnal counterpart of a cultural centre. The City of Leuven will facilitate the physical space but leave the content to the young people, thus ensuring a non-commercial, culturally relevant model. The involvement and participation of young people are key, with opportunities for developing talent and social innovation.

This autumn additional participatory workshops will be organized to explore various models and put commitment into practice.

**Partners:** Stelplaats, City of Leuven, mijnleuven, Youth Service, Institut Fur Zukunft Leipzig (DE), Lagerkultur Luxemburg (LU), Majales Festival Budweis2028 (CZ), Vibelab (EU)



## UNSEEN

Do our senses have history? Why is art focused mainly on hearing and sight, and less on smell and touch? How have artists and scientists tried to study and influence the senses? And what is the future of the sensory experience, now that we no longer have only a physical reality but also a virtual and augmented one?

When you think of exhibitions you usually think of artworks on the wall, heritage objects behind glass. 'Looking and reading' is still the norm for a museum visit. This means that a trip to a museum is rarely at the top of a blind or visually impaired individual's wish-list.

That's why we turn things around. Applying the principles of universal design, we create an exhibition in which nothing is visible. **Unseen** closes everyone's eyes and concentrates on feeling instead. We let visitors listen, touch, taste and smell.

This project is in line with the European Commission's Strategy for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities 2021-2030 as it relates to tourism and leisure. We aim to create a benchmark exhibition that inspires other museums. Perhaps they will even consider to host it.

*Partners: Vesalius Museum, Brailleliga, Health House, KU Leuven, UZ Leuven, Charité Museum of Medical History Berlin (DE), ENAT (European Network for Accessible Tourism), Medical Museum Copenhagen (DK), MuZIEum Nijmegen (NL), Rijksmuseum Boerhaave Leiden (NL)*

## MINDBLOWING

**Mindblowing** is a project initiated by people dealing with mental health issues and aims to do away with the artificial division between what's regarded as 'normal' and 'not normal'. Looking for the madness in all of us, across borders. The aim of Mindblowing is to reinvent mental health care.

How can we organize recovery outside healthcare? How do we organize it within the city? We want to push for new ways of recovery by making connections between mental health care, the creative industries, and entrepreneurship. By working not within an institutional framework but with creatives who recognize the shared potential of working with us. Real recovery happens in the city, with people, among people. Urban recovery is mindblowing.

There are several large institutions caring for mental health in Leuven & Beyond: in Leuven, Lovenjoel, Lubbeek and Kortenberg. In the cultural sector there are also various players working with people with mental vulnerabilities, such as Coconuts, Compagnie Tartaren and the FactorY.

With these players we take a tour of local communities in Europe, where the creative and cultural industries work bottom-up with the healing power of the city, where they practice 'Urban Recovery'. What can we learn from each other? From other urban contexts? Via Berlin, Ljubljana, Ivano Frankivsk and San Sebastián we end up in Leuven. Where we report on our journey befittingly, via word and image. Mindblowing.

*Partners: Coconuts, CGG Passant, Cie. Tartaren, City of Leuven, De Wissel, FactorY, Similes, Statik, Trill, UPC Kortenberg, UZ Leuven, Bielsko-Biała2029 (PL), Centre for Cultural Management Lviv (UA), Katowice2029 (PL), Outsider/El Normal Ljubljana (SLO), Oyouun Berlin (DE), Tabakalera San Sebastián (ES), The Possible (UK/UA)*

## 3. POWER TO THE PEOPLE

Power to the People. John Lennon sang it, the Black Panthers chanted it. The people rule. It's the literal translation of the Greek *demos kratein*, democracy. On 18 April 1902, the Belgian parliament voted on universal suffrage. The bill was voted down. Leuveners clamoured for power to the people and riots broke out. That evening six young men aged between 16 and 42 were shot dead by police on the streets of our city. Universal suffrage for men was granted only in 1918. Women in Belgium had to wait until 1948.

Today, our democratic values are under pressure right across Europe. Anti-democratic forces in politics, media and on the internet are putting pressure on our freedoms, human dignity, equality, the rule of law, and respect for human rights.

In times of polarization, how can we prioritize our common humanity, our shared values, and our freedoms? How can we permanently guarantee the rights of minorities and make them future-proof? How do we slam the door on discrimination and give space to women's rights, the LGBTQIA+ community, and the decolonization movement? How do we deal with the psychological mechanisms that lead to fear, distrust, and even war?

## STADHUIS – EUROPEAN HOUSE

### FOR DEMOCRACY **FLAGSHIP PROJECT**

In 1469 Leuven's iconic **Stadhuis** – the town hall – was finally complete and in use. Since then it has been the seat of power in this city. That power has been hard fought for over the centuries, with outright defenestrations, the Charter of Kortenberg (our own continental counterpart of Magna Carta) signed in 1312, bloody riots for universal suffrage in 1902. Until 2008, the building was also the work address of the mayor and aldermen; the monthly Municipal Council still takes place there.

Between 2024 and 2029, the Gothic building will undergo thorough renovation and restoration and be made generally accessible in readiness for its new role as a visitor centre and **European House for Democracy**.

Visitors can get to know the stories of the city and the town hall itself and contribute to new stories. In its operation as a European House for Democracy the emphasis is on themes that are closely connected with the history and significance of the place: democracy, citizenship, justice, and the power of people to make the city and the world a better place.

There will be a wide-ranging residency programme. Every month the Stadhuis key is given to a European artist, a writer and a thinker who are invited to spend a month assessing the state of democracy in Europe and developing new perspectives during public workshops, lectures, debates, presentations and performances. During their residency, the trio will work both individually and together, exchanging ideas with each other. Residents will include international A-listers as well as emerging names from the European artistic, literary, social and scientific worlds. The results of the residencies will be internationally available, online and in literary publications.

*Partners: Stadhuis – European House of Democracy, City of Leuven, LOV2030, Demos, A Soul for Europe (Amsterdam, Belgrade, Berlin, Brussels, Porto, Tbilisi), Generation 29 Bielsko-Biała2029 (PL), De Balie (NL), Dokk1 (DK), Hildesheim2025 Projektbüro Kulturregion (DE), Kosmos Festival für Demokratie Chemnitz (DE), Lemesos2030 (CY), Lviv (UA), Oulo2026 (FI), Pakhuis De Zwijger (NL)*

## PERFORMING ARTS SITE – ART HOUSE

### OF THE FUTURE **FLAGSHIP PROJECT**

The new **Performing Arts Site** (PAS) – conceived as an **Art House of the Future** – is a project designed by the London-based Sergison Bates architects. The site consists of two large auditoriums (seating 450 and 1,100) for theatre and concerts, a flat-floor theatre seating 165, spacious foyers and cafés that can be used as a 'third space', as well as rehearsal studios, ateliers and offices. The Alamire XR-Studio (Polyphonic Dome) and the Dancelab Experience Centre are housed here (see Q12). But the main project is not the new landmark in itself, it's the radical way we want to run it.

We see the Performing Arts Site as a space for and of the arts community and general public, with social justice as its core. We're developing a radically new relationship between culture and society at an urban, national and international level, with quality (inter)national programming. This radically new relationship is not merely a matter of public input in the artistic programme, we're aiming at the democratization of the institution itself. A co-creative podium. (Q19)

For each artistic discipline we put together a circle of stakeholders with a 'motivator'. The motivator must build bridges between partners; make sure each partner has their say; pay particular attention to participation, collaboration, reflection, and education; and work to connect other initiatives within the region. Together we develop the substantive public programme on the basis of these circles.

We cross culture with Leuven assets such as science, healthcare and sustainability. This creates cross-connections between tradition, heritage, and mastery on one hand and research, development and innovation on the other.

*Partners: 30CC, City of Leuven, Alamire Foundation, Burn, Cie. Tartaren, CirkLABO, fABULEUS, Het Depot, Het nieuwstedelijk, STUK – House for Dance, Image & Sound, 101 Outdoor Arts (UK), Aviva Studio's Manchester, (UK), Create Londen (UK), European Network of Cultural Centers, Fact Liverpool (UK), HAU Berlin (DE), Le 104 Paris (FR), Parktheater Eindhoven (NL), White House Dagenham (UK)*

## EUTOPIA

**EUtopia** is a European exchange programme for secondary schools, run by LOV2030, Stadhuis, SOM, KU Leuven and Demos. We invite seventeen year old pupils from European schools (starting with schools from other ECOCs) for a three-day stay in Leuven, to work on and debate the issues of European values and the future of democracy. The project builds on the Leuven tradition of sending students off to Weimar & Buchenwald to exchange ideas about European culture, values, and history.

*Partners: LOV2030, SOM, Stadhuis – European House for Democracy, City of Leuven, Demos, KU Leuven, Bad Ischl2024 (AT), Faro2027 (PT), Katowice2029 (PL), Lemesos2030 (CY), Netzwerk Kultur & Heimat Hildesheimer Land (DE), Tampere2026 (FI), Timisoara2023 (RO)*







## ERASMUS 65+

**Erasmus 65+** is a project which allows people over 65, who never had the chance of an Erasmus exchange – the official EU programme only began in 1987 – to make up for it now by following a crash course in several branches of the humanities or human sciences, spread over the year: art, history, language and literature, social sciences, psychology, law... We develop short, inspiring programmes that can be followed during a five- or ten-day stay in Leuven. We're exploring the possibility of housing these senior students in digs with host families for the real Leuven experience.

*Partners: LOV2030, Avansa, KU Leuven, Senior Citizens Council Leuven, Adult Learning Centre Volt!, University College Leuven-Limburg (UCLL), Centre for cultural management Lviv (UA), Faro2027 (PT), Netzwerk Kultur & Heimat Hildesheimer Land (DE), Projektbüro Kulturregion Hildesheim2025 (DE)*

## IN THE NEIGHBOURHOOD

We want to send artists out into the suburbs and neighbourhoods to consult with local residents, to connect their practice to what's happening in every corner of the region. Through this project we want to bring the artistic gaze to the locals.

We create 30 artistic workplaces, spread across Leuven & Beyond. These might simply be spaces made available by local people (a shed or a garage, for instance), or a company, or a school... This can give rise to a kind of artistic, co-creative, neighbourhood collaboration. European artists can apply for a place in the programme via a European Call. In the selection process we matchmake between candidate artists and local residents.

At district level, major global challenges such as climate change become very tangible and real. We want to use art to make society and its challenges something to discuss, recognize and explore. From an artistic dream we arrive at concrete actions that bring people **in the neighbourhood** together to reflect on living as a community.

*Partners: Neighbourhood Dynamics Department City of Leuven, Stand Up for Your Neighbourhood, BAC Art Lab, Cas-co, maakleerplek, Stad & Architectuur, Time Circus, Architecture Workroom Brussels, European artists via Open Call, Oulu2026 (FI), Tampere2026 (FI), Uppsala2029 (SE)*

## THE WORLD'S SMALLEST QUEER MUSEUM

Beneath an old statue in the centre of Leuven, there once stood a public rest room, renowned as a cruising spot for the local gay community. There we unveil a monument that's not only a reminder of the past but also a beacon of hope and change for the future. Thus the place where so much happened lives on as a memory for the LGBTQIA+ community.

On the outside, three of the former loo's windows are turned into a living canvas on which conversations and interactions are played 24/7. From early morning exchanges to late night reflections, the stories of the Leuven LGBTQIA+ scene are incorporated into the videos and the art installation. The monument thus becomes a vibrant celebration of the community, its diversity and complexity, and its history.

For LOV2030 we're expanding the monument into a mini-museum. This mini-museum – which as **the world's smallest queer museum** is potentially a tourist attraction too – displays historical items and new work by queer artists from Leuven, Belgium and the rest of Europe in temporary and changing exhibitions.

By reclaiming an old site, which for some may once have been steeped in suppression or (sexual) liberation, we re-expose a hidden layer of the city's legacy.

*Partners: Queer Arts Festival, Queer Leuven, UniQue Regenbooghuis Flemish Brabant, LOV2030, Holebi Film Festival, Bielsko-Biała2029 (PL)*

## ART. DECO. FLAGSHIP PROJECT

**Art. Deco.** is short for Artistic Decolonization. With the addition of two full stops to the art-historical term, we reclaim the art movements that typified the early twentieth century: Art Déco and Art Nouveau. At the time, many of those who commissioned artworks made their fortunes from the sale of so-called colonial wares which they shipped from the Belgian Congo. But architects and designers who worked for these wealthy colonials, such as Victor Horta and Henry van de Velde, also made considerable use of Congolese raw materials: ivory, mahogany, ebony, copper and bilinga wood. To the point that the architects' style was sometimes unambiguously dubbed Style Congo.

We want to use this dark side of our history to look the past in the eye and make radical room for a renewed relationship with Congolese Belgians and Congolese artists.

*Partners: LOV2030, 30CC, Africa Museum Tervuren, Leuven Restorative City, museum M Leuven, Africa Film Festival, Performing Arts Site, Stadhuis - European House for Democracy, STUK - House for Dance, Image & Sound, Het nieuwstedelijk*

## BOOK BY BOOK (REBUILDING LIBRARIES) FLAGSHIP PROJECT

Leuven suffered very badly during the First World War. German troops systematically set the city ablaze: 1,530 houses and historic buildings were burned to the ground, at least 272 civilians died, and many more were deported to prison camps.

The centuries-old University Library was deliberately set on fire: 1,000 unique manuscripts from Antiquity, the Middle Ages and the Renaissance, 800 incunabula, and 300,000 books were lost. The fire was declared a war crime. Fourteen years went by before a new University Library could be opened. And then, at the start of the Second World War, that brand new University Library also caught fire and once again the entire collection went up in flames.

The EU is a peace project. For the very reason that we know what war means. Montenegro, whose second city, Nikšić, is a candidate ECOC, emerged as a country from the Balkan wars of the 1990s. Cyprus, which will also have an ECOC in 2030, is still divided in two by a military occupation of the northern part of the island. A UN peacekeeping mission has been active in Nicosia since 1974. Given current events in Europe and the Middle East and the experience we share with these ECOC2030 partners, the subject of war can't be avoided.

As a sign of solidarity, we want to set up an action that involves the entire Leuven population and our partner cities in Cyprus and Montenegro, with the aim of providing libraries that have been destroyed in Ukraine and Gaza with a collection once more. Rebuilding the libraries **book by book**. We'll appeal not only to the ECOC community but also to every visitor to LOV2030 to contribute to this project. For where books burn, an entire culture burns too.

*Partners: LOV2030, KU Leuven University Library, the municipalities of Leuven & Beyond, KEA European Affairs (BE), Lviv2030 (UA), Oulu2026 (FI), Public Libraries2030, Ukraine Policy Lab - Erste Foundation (AT)*

## LOV & PEACE

**LOV & Peace** is an ambitious and visionary project that transforms forgotten bunkers in Leuven & Beyond into dynamic spaces for art and reflection. By improving awareness of these historic witnesses (it's military heritage) in the landscape today, the bunkers are metamorphosed: from vestiges of conflict they become symbols of peace, creativity and commitment.

Transforming the old bunkers into spaces for art can encourage a dialogue of peace. They offer an immersive experience that imparts insight through audiovisual installations.

*Partners: Marilia Breite, LOV2030, City of Leuven, heritage department Aarschot, Tienen & Diest, Bielsko-Biała2029 (PL), Centre for Cultural Management Lviv (UA), Nicosia2030 (CY)*

## CAN YOU HEAR THE PEOPLE SING

**Can You Hear the People Sing** is a radical scaling up of what happens every week in the music school. All 10-year-old Leuveners are brought together to form a choir for an insanely huge open-air performance.

Nothing connects people more than singing together. Can You Hear the People Sing aims to reach all the 10-year-olds in Leuven – no joke: each and every one of them. We see that a sizeable percentage of youngsters are missing out on part-time art education. Going to them, in collaboration with the day schools, is the key to making that connection a reality. We want our kids to form an army of ambassadors, rehearsing a repertoire once a week in their own school, with their classmates, and guided by professionals, culminating in a tremendous moment of pride. As part of Can You Hear the People Sing this joint process of rehearsing and learning would be shared with the residents of and visitors to Leuven & Beyond in a spectacular singalong on a grand scale.

With Can You Hear the People Sing, SLAC Conservatory is developing an inclusive project, working with the educational network SOM and all Leuven's primary schools. In co-production with Matrix (New Music Centre) we're opening a European Call for part-song composition.

In music, technique and skill not only go hand in hand with commitment and drive but also with pleasure and generosity. Encouraging, guiding, and letting kids develop in a professional context is a music school's task. Our ambition is to do this in an inclusive and qualitative way, in which every child is seen and heard.

*Partners: SLAC Conservatory, Koor & Stem, Leuven primary schools, SOM, Zuidgeluid, Katowice2029 (PL), Tampere2026 (FI), Uppsala2029 (SE)*



## 1. CULTURAL CLIMATE CHANGE

Banking crisis, refugee crisis, climate crisis, energy crisis, inflation, war... We never seem to see a way out, or see what we ought to do to prevent things getting even worse. Since we also see ourselves as part of the problem it's hard to come up with solutions. As Einstein pointed out, we can't solve our problems with the same kind of thinking we used when we created them. If you do what you always did, you'll get what you always got. In that sense, each of these crises is a crisis of imagination and a crisis of culture.

With a nod to the core theme of our partners of Oulu2026, we aim to look more closely at how the climate crisis requires behavioural change. This programme track looks for projects that force us to change our perspective on our surroundings and on nature and to reduce our own footprint. At the same time we ask how we can – indeed must – change our cultural climate: walk the talk. In our own cultural sector are we also contributing to the socially fair and sustainable transition that the European Green Deal aims for?

In these programme tracks we work closely with Leuven 2030 and the Climate City Contract of Leuven as European Mission City.

### THE LOV-GLACIER FESTIVAL

To boldly go where no one has gone before. How can we bring together international partners and create momentum in allowing Leuven's arts organizations to switch to renewable energy and at the same time carry out internationally high-profile research? The Altist Centre (from 'Altitude, Artist, Scientist and Optimist'), high in the Italian mountains, is carrying out research into the shift from preserving glaciers to creating new ones. Together with scientific partners from Leuven, Brussels and Zürich, they developed three models which demonstrate the theoretical possibility of building an artificial glacier.

The aim is for Leuven researchers to work with artists from the ECOC network to develop sub-projects in the coming years. This will lead to dance performances, exhibitions, philosophical publications, new artistic techniques... At the end of the ECOC year we'll build a real glacier (e.g. on a small hill called the Kesselberg in Kessel-Lo) and use it as a venue for showing the results. **The LOV-Glacier Festival** is born.

There's a certain moonshot arrogance in aspiring to build a glacier model for LOV2030. To start with, it requires a large energy source and water storage. There's no shortage of water in our area but we need to generate energy. Initial calculations show that we'd have to build a solar park capable of supplying the equivalent of 200 homes with electricity. By 2030 we aim to have Leuven's entire cultural sector switch to renewable energy, which we'll initially allocate to this project.

The project raises awareness and brings together people from different sectors: scientists, artists, visitors, energy cooperatives, youngsters who come to play on the glacier... Thinking far outside the box results in a project that contains all the building blocks of innovation. It also contributes to publicising high-profile scientific research and to a festive momentum driving on Leuven's cultural sector to make the climate change.

*Partners: Bamml, Belgian Alpenclubs (BACA), KU Leuven, Leuven 2030, Factoria (ES), Oulu2026 (FI), Polytechnic University of Turin (IT), Projektbüro Kulturregion Hildesheim2025 (DE), Rifae Italia (IT), Trondheim University (NO)*

### THE EXPLODING WHALE

A large-scale happening centring on a lifelike 'stranded' whale. The project is based on the following premises:

1. The poetic presence of the whale in the streetscape. The whale is between 15 and 20 metres long and is stranded in a public place for a week at a time. It's visibly breathing and blinks its big eyes. We choose places where lots of people pass by, so it's virtually impossible to miss the whale and its performance, or fail to fire the imaginations of passers-by, raising questions about ecology and the way we treat nature, animals and water. It's right in front of you, you'd have to try really hard not to see it.
2. The happenings. Every day the whale ejects through its blowhole something it encountered on its journey. Sometimes the something is small, sometimes it's big, but it's always magical or unexpected. Shoes by the score, eighteen tricycles, a gamelan orchestra that plays a few pieces and then cycles home, a bunch of flowers... The happenings involve various (amateur) music groups, circus artists, florists and all kinds of other artists. We hear music from a multitude of cultures, for the whale is not confined to the North Sea – it swims in all sorts of musical waters.
3. The evening performance. In the evening a twenty-strong choir put together especially for the occasion gather around the whale to perform. **The Exploding Whale** is a parable about a community and a stranded whale. The creature breathes so heavily it makes the ground tremble. But once the fear wears off, the area is fenced in and a real whale craze begins: whale t-shirts, whale onesies, whale balloons. What no one thinks of is helping the whale back into the water. Songs for forgiveness are sung, but it's too late, in the end, the whale explodes.

The size of the whale is symbolic. We recognize that we have a large problem, and thinking about a solution can also be large-scale, proceeding from the hopeful idea that together we can move mountains.

*Partners: Elsa van Dijck, 30CC, Arktos, Cie. Tartaren, Circus in Beweging, public library de Bib Leuven, De Vlaamse Waterweg, Ecowerf, Extinction Rebellion, Figurentheater De Maan, Great Ocean Clean-Up, Grandparents for Climate Action, Het Depot, Het nieuwstedelijk, KU Leuven, Leuven MindGate, LOV2030, Maritime Institute*

### CEMETERY OF THE FUTURE

It's impossible to overestimate the role that cemeteries play in loss and bereavement. People often feel connected to this significant place for decades and seek solace and tranquillity there.

Leuven is developing a sustainable vision for the future of its cemeteries, in which sorrow and solace go hand in hand with accessibility and openness. We bring life to the cemetery and give parting and grieving a more central place in our lives again. We think about how landscape, architecture and art augment the cemetery as a place of mourning and as a meeting place where difficult themes such as death and loss can be discussed.

At the same time, the cemetery is a green place where people can stroll, meditate, enjoy nature and peace. And maybe surprisingly, it's also a place of culture, education and innovation, where the city is testing the climate-resilience of plants, of new native and exotic species, before they're planted elsewhere in the city.

The Leuven City Cemetery is a warm, open, green space in which funeral heritage, the green environment, and room for rituals are artistically connected.

*Partners: City of Leuven, City of Leuven Parks Department, KU Leuven Plant Institute, Studio Gijs Van Vaerenbergh, Bielsko-Biala2029 (PL), Faro2027 (PT)*

### THE WANDERFUL GARDEN

**The Wanderful Garden** is an exceptional work of art by artist duo Gijs Van Vaerenbergh in the park of Arenberg castle. The Wanderful Garden replaces a car park and becomes an installation where art and science literally grow together.

'To wander' represents searching and surprise. Confrontation with the unknown, discovery. Frustration and relief. Taking time. 'Garden' stands for a protected green place, for a piece of controlled nature. For the dynamics of growth, the changing of the seasons, sowing and growing. It's time become visible.

Curved steel grids with many types of climbing plants on them form an open labyrinth. Nature will swiftly overgrow the architecture. The project is a folly and a scientific-botanical collection, an architectural sculpture and a play element, a passage space and a meeting place.

The Wanderful Garden is a project with roots in KU Leuven's Faculty of Engineering, which includes the architectural engineering programme of which Pieterjan Gijs and Arnout Van Vaerenbergh are alumni. The KU Leuven Plant Institute determines which plants are best suited to the project and how The Wanderful Garden can be used for plant research and climate challenges.

*Partners: KU Leuven, Faculty of Engineering Science KU Leuven, Plant Institute KU Leuven, Studio Gijs Van Vaerenbergh, City of Leuven, Flemish Government*



### THE GROUND BENEATH OUR FEET

**The Ground Beneath our Feet** is an ambitious international exhibition in museum M Leuven with wide ramifications in the city and region. The leitmotif is the need for radical reconnection between humans and nature in a world that becomes more changeable by the day. M is working with philosopher Vinciane Despret who co-curates this major exhibition of early and contemporary art, which includes international loans and works from M's own collection.

Despret's essays reject the idea of man as the measure of all things and put the traditional distinction between nature and culture into perspective. Today, artists show a growing interest in eliminating the contrast between nature and culture. Their creations, lines of thought, and artistic visions often reimagine the future of man on earth in relation to the animals, vegetation and natural phenomena that surround us.

Based on their consistent transhistorical practice, M confronts old work with new and shows how the relationship between human and nature is a deeply rooted universal theme that can and must be constantly rethought and reimaged. Centuries-old works of art and new creations by international contemporary artists such as Joan Jonas or Apichatpong Weerasethakul offer a multitude of possible avenues of thought. M draws extensively on a rich collection and an international network to bring together historical and contemporary masterpieces.

*Partners: museum M Leuven, Nature and Forest Agency, Municipal Museum Tervuren, Royal Trust, Leuven 2030, National Park Brabantse Wouden, Province of Flemish Brabant, Van Doren Museum Genk, Friends of Heverleebos & Meerdaalwoud, Buffalo AKG Art Museum (US), Kunstmuseum Sankt-Gallen (CH)*



## 2. LET'S MOVE, LET'S MEET

How do we get around in our region? Can we come up with ways of reducing the impact of our journeys? More greenways? More bicycles and cycle paths? More and better public transport? More sharing systems? Could we maybe organize informal meeting places on these paths, so that slow journeys become more attractive?

Leuven & Beyond is the birthplace of cycling greats such as Eddy Merckx and, more recently, Sven Nys and Jasper Stuyven. Leuven itself is one of the cycling capitals of Europe, alongside Amsterdam, Copenhagen and Oulu. Can we learn from these cities and share what we learn with the rest of Europe?

### CROSSROADS FLAGSHIP PROJECT

Leuven & Beyond covers a total of thirty municipalities that are crossed by two major motorways: the E40 and the E314. The car is still king in this area. Every day the main roads that pass through villages en route to and from Leuven, Aarschot, Tienen, Diest and Tervuren, still form a twentieth-century backdrop of traffic congestion. Nevertheless, there are towpaths and cycle routes connecting the village centres with the cities and they run through greenery. The aim of **Crossroads** is to make these routes more inviting and to encourage more people to take a hike or the bike.

By means of a European Open Call we bring together 30 European artists, designers, architects and landscape artists with local communities, cyclists and commuters from the 30 municipalities. At a junction along a greenway, cycle route, or footpath they jointly develop a place where you can rest, shelter, relax and meet each other in the green space. A shelter, a picnic spot, a neighbourhood bar or a music kiosk.

The project runs in collaboration with the Materialenbank, which makes used building materials available for recycling and reuse. Thus, throughout the region, 30 new artistic meeting places are created. During the day, attractive, surprising, artistic, informal places, which together form a special cycle route through the region. Evenings and weekends the scene for cultural activities, organized by the local residents involved. A concert, a jam, a lecture, a cypher, a quiz.

*Partners: LOV2030, Leuven & Beyond, InterLeuven, maakleerplek, Materialenbank, Province of Flemish Brabant, Regionaal Landschap, timber merchants Oost-Brabant, European partners via an Open Call*

### KIOSK!

Parallel to Crossroads, we're developing a similar route in the Brabantse Wouden, where meetings and inspiration are offered with a view to diverting visitors from the national park's most fragile areas. By creating attractive focal points within walking distance of each other, we encourage visitors to take the less vulnerable route through the forest.

Here too, we're putting out a European Call that brings together 10 European landscape artists with walkers and nature lovers. The artists will have the use of residual wood from forest management with which to design 10 artistic kiosks, which together will form a new art trail.

*Partners: LOV2030, Leuven & Beyond, Friends of Heverleebos & Meerdaalwoud, InterLeuven, maakleerplek, Materialenbank, National Park Brabantse Wouden, Natuurpunt, Province of Flemish Brabant, Regionaal Landschap, European partners via an Open Call*

### LET'S EAT

Brabanters are *bons vivants*. LOV goes through the stomach, we say. Cooking and eating together are aspects of our *samenleving* in which the closest connections are formed. A culture is virtually defined by what and how it eats. At the same time, food culture is very accessible, caring and inviting. Sit down, have something to eat, tell us your story. Round a table we get to know each other, culture to culture.

**Let's Eat** is a programme in which we celebrate different European and international food cultures and share national dishes with each other. But we can also work on political and ecological aspects of food: how do we look at food waste? At empty school lunch boxes? How about large-scale agriculture and monoculture? What could an ecological food strategy be?

The biggest clichés about Belgians relate to our food: our fries, our beers, our chocolate, our chicory, cheese, waffles, pralines. But 171 nationalities live in Leuven & Beyond, so what do we really eat here? Let's Eat is a gigantic invitation to a mega-potluck-party, where we invite the different communities to bring along their national dish and share it.

*Partners: LOV2030, Province of Flemish Brabant, Horeca Flemish Brabant, International Institute of Gastronomy, Cultura, Arts and Tourism IGCAT, Catalonia (ES), Oulu2026 (FI)*

### LET'S TAKE YOU TO CHURCH

Throughout Western Europe many churches are standing empty. Instead of being an asset for a village or community, they become a problem. An unused building quickly deteriorates. At the same time, associations, the cultural sector, the creative industries, and individual artists are struggling with a chronic lack of space. Surely this ought to be a win-win situation.

But churches are tricky customers: they're hard to heat and acoustically difficult to manage. Which is why we want to put out a European Call for architects and interior designers to produce flexible designs that can transform churches into theatres or exhibition spaces in a pop-up setting. The installations must be simple and easy to transport, so they

can be swapped around. Which means that one church can take on the guise of a theatre for a few months, then switch to a different layout for exhibitions or concerts. The various designs are not particular to one church but can be used in any number of them.

Instead of places that are closed and no longer used, the churches – which are often in the very heart of the village – once again become the locus of community and meeting, of emotion and human exchange, where during the title year artistic programmes can be developed.

*Partners: LOV2030, Leuven & Beyond, Heritage Department Leuven, Province of Flemish Brabant, Eutopian (Rome, Vienna, Budapest), Centre for Cultural Management Lviv (UA), Lemesos2030 (CY), Kourion2030 (CY)*

# innovation

## 1. FUTURE FUSION

### METALEUVEN – VIRTUAL TWIN CITY FLAGSHIP PROJECT

**MetaLeuven** is a Virtual Twin City in the Metaverse. Based on Google Streetview we invite an international community of gamers to virtually rebuild and upgrade the physical city via platforms such as Minecraft, Roblox or Fortnite. Thus we create in the Metaverse an imagined and maybe even an ideal version of our city. We can reconstruct historical buildings in 3D and intervene in the virtual streetscape: what happens if we turn a large car park into a new green park? In MetaLeuven we can conceptualize and test these things. A worldwide community of gamers can thus contribute to the future face of our city.

At the same time, MetaLeuven is an interactive streaming platform where you can experience LOV2030's complete Human Nature programme from hospital or a residential care centre or even from the other side of the world. Thus the entire programme, with all its live concerts and exhibitions, is digitally accessible by anyone who can't get to it themselves. In no way is this a 'next best thing' alternative. On the contrary it's a fundamental and fully-fledged platform with added value and depth compared to the live experience. Physical visitors can become the virtual buddy for a friend or even a stranger at home (wherever in the world that may be), onlineers can contribute, intervene, co-create, and help build our city and region.

MetaLeuven offers a journey into the Metaverse and at the same time is an R&D platform for high-tech 3D and AI applications. Moreover, via the platform it's possible to browse the complete title year programme, to look back at earlier events, and to make Leuven's legacy available worldwide.

*Partners: LOV2030, City of Leuven, Cronos, e-Media Research Lab KU Leuven, og studio, Oulu2026 (FI)*

### FUTURE GENERATIONS LIVING LABS FLAGSHIP PROJECT

In the renovated Stadhuis (town hall), we're creating space for living labs that concentrate on urgent social challenges. We're formulating a research question that focuses on the importance of future generations. Here Leuveners, visitors, experts, companies, scientists, administrators and artists come together to experiment and test ideas. As a visitor, you're not just looking at an end result – you're invited to be part of the making and thinking process.

A diverse group of young people are given the key to the town hall and a budget of their own. They shape their own trajectory and look for answers to a research question they've formulated themselves. For seven months, the studio in the town hall is the base for their meetings, brainstorming sessions and peer learning with experts. The young people develop a sense of familiarity with the town hall and make it their 'home' during the preparatory months.

A Future Generation Board of 10 young Leuveners and 10 Europeans takes responsibility for coordinating the living lab. They link their own ambitions and talents to the research question. They use their creativity to experiment and generate an impact on the future of the city and society. Each research question is approached via 3 sub-themes – human & society, nature & climate, and future & innovation – each with its own working group. Each working group consists of 2 board members and between 5 and 15 youngsters. In the course of compiling this bid book, a first pilot project was successfully set up.

*Partners: LOV2030, Stadhuis - European House for Democracy, Demos, Leuven 2030, Leuven MindGate, ANW Brussels, Creativity Lab (EE), Faro2027 (PT), Tampere2026 (FI)*







## SCIENCE PITCH @ DOCVILLE

DOCVILLE is the largest and most highly regarded documentary film festival in Belgium and the only one to have an Academy Award™ qualification.

For the **Science Pitch @ DOCVILLE** we put scientists and directors from all over Europe in touch with each other with a view to producing new, impactful scientific documentaries. From 2025, we'll be issuing two small assignments (short films) each year. For 2030, we plan a high-profile feature film.

This will result in a unique event in 2030 and the creation of author-driven documentaries whose impact will be felt for many years to come. The presentation of the documentaries will be coupled with workshops, lectures, live experiments, exhibitions, and more, including collaboration with our European partner festivals. In this way, we make science accessible and provide European experts with a wide audience.

The documentaries will be released internationally and after LOV2030 they'll be shown at European and international A-list festivals (such as Sundance or Sheffield), in cinemas, on television and on streaming platforms. Experience shows that collaborations between researchers and directors, as well as between researchers themselves, have an enduring character.

**Partners:** DOCVILLE festival, Fonk vzw, Cinema ZED, Dalton Distribution, De Morgen, EOS, Fund for Scientific Research, Departement of Economy, Science & Innovation, university partners (KU Leuven, UGent, UAntwerpen & VUB), Radio1, SABAM, VRT/Canvas, Braga Science Film Fest (PT), CineGlobe (Cern, CH), CPH:DOX Science (Kopenhagen, DK), Krakow Film Fest (PL), InScience (Nijmegen, NL), Olomouc Festival of Science Documentary (CZ), ParisScience (FR), SilverSaltz - Science & Media Festival (Halle, DE), Vienna Science Film Festival (AT)

## WRITTEN IN THE STARS

We don't see or feel it, but the Earth's surface is being continuously bombarded by a constant stream of subatomic particles from space, called cosmic rays. These high-energy particles come from the powerful reactions in our sun, from stars that go supernova, and even from the Big Bang (Georges Lemaître - remember?). The cosmic rays are messengers from the past and have travelled through the infinity of space for millions of years.

On top of the Performing Arts Site, the artists' collective LAB[au] is developing a light artwork in the form of a funnel: it works like a catch basin for cosmic rays, and at the same time as an opening to the sky.

The funnel consists of 26 aluminium frames and 26 sensors that capture cosmic rays, and each displays a letter of the alphabet. Thus the sensors produce a random series of letters, words, sentences - messages from the universe, **written in the stars**.

Scientists, students and young people will continue to work on the artwork in the coming years, so that it can also be used for scientific research in the Department of Astronomy.

**Partners:** Performing Arts Site, 30CC, City of Leuven, Department of Physics and Astronomy KU Leuven, Institute for Nuclear and Radiation Physics, LAB[au], SHIFT, Uppsala2029 (SE)

## 2. HERITAGE FOR THE FUTURE

This programme track is explained in full under Q12.

## Q 12 COMBINING LOCAL CULTURAL HERITAGE AND TRADITIONAL ART FORMS WITH NEW, INNOVATIVE AND EXPERIMENTAL CULTURAL EXPRESSIONS

Leuven is one of the five Flemish art cities, but we don't see our city as an open-air museum for tourists. We regard our heritage as bigger than ourselves, like a starry sky on a clear night or the murmur of the sea. It was there before we were, and it'll be there after we've gone.

Something only becomes heritage if we find it important enough to cherish, to repeatedly give it meaning, to pass it on to future generations. It creates a bridge between present, past, and future: it evolves with the times. Heritages lives. Precisely because it's always a thing of today.

We see our heritage as an important link in developing sustainably. As Stadhuis and Hal 9 are repurposed, an on-site STES (inter-seasonal thermal energy storage) will be created, providing renewable energy not only for the historic building itself but also for the surrounding area. Whereas previously it was a challenge to make heritage climate-proof, our monuments are now becoming a key element in our sustainability policy.

The programme includes a number of noteworthy projects that combine our movable, immovable, intangible cultural heritage with technological or social innovation. In its design as a European House for Democracy, Stadhuis is a groundbreaking socially innovative project in which power is fundamentally shared and residents, regardless of their background, are literally given the key to this symbol of power.

The thorough transhistorical approach to the operation of both museum M Leuven and the Vesalius Museum shows how obvious it is for us to connect.

We also bring together traditional art forms like the typical processions or parades of giant figures in Leuven, Tienen and Hakendover with related but ethnically diverse variants. Leuven, for instance, invites the various communities to add a giant of their own to the parade: the centuries-old Leuven giants are now accompanied by Polish, Philippine and Chinese giants. By 2030, we aim to socially innovate tradition and involve as many European, international, and diverse communities as possible, each coming up with a giant that reflects the rich cultural and social diversity.

Three young theatre collectives aim to breathe new life into the centuries-old but now discontinued tradition of the *Wagenspel*, the pageant wagon play. Itinerant theatre makers travel from village to village co-recreating the local community's stories.

Four high-profile projects show that Leuven's heritage is not only centuries old but also very much alive. At the same time, we keep an eye on recent heritage: young art forms such as contemporary dance and cinema are gradually becoming heritage as well.

## DANCELAB EXPERIENCE CENTRE

Dance is an embodied and ephemeral art form, so how do you pass it on to new generations of audiences and choreographers? This is the starting point for STUK's new exploration of intangible dance heritage. Contemporary dance is vulnerable. If makers stop or dance companies cease to exist, much of that richness and diversity risks being irrevocably lost. This is becoming obvious today, as the generation that has made waves since the 1980s gradually reaches the end of its career. So it's time for action, not just for that generation of the 'Flemish Wave', but for dance in Europe in general.

This is why STUK is developing an expertise and experience centre, where research and practice come together in every conceivable way, familiar and as yet unknown. How do you 'conserve' dancers' embodied knowledge? In what ways can technology, virtual reality, and holograms be used to pass on that knowledge? How do we ensure that European dance archives will represent more diverse artists and genres than they do today?

On the new Performing Arts Site an interactive lab for dance movement and embodied knowledge brings research and dance practice together. The ambition of an expertise centre therefore goes hand in hand with the development of an immersive and interactive experience centre for the general public, where experimenting, performing, exchanging and exhibiting can take place.

**Partners:** STUK - House for Dance, Image & Sound, Performing Arts Site, ASIL - Art and Science Interaction Lab Ghent, De Krook Ghent, IPEM - Institute of Psychoacoustics and Electronic Music UGent, KU Leuven, European Dancehouse Network, Dance On, Pass On, Dream On (DOPODO), ZKM - Zentrum für Kunst & Medientechnologie Karlsruhe (DE)



## ALAMIRE XR STUDIO: THE POLYPHONIC DOME

The **Alamire XR Studio** makes the rich musical tradition of Flemish polyphony (14th-16th century) accessible to the public in the **Polyphonic Dome**.

In Leuven's Gothic Dominican Church an immense dome will function as a recording space for 3D videos and multi-track sound recordings of music from the Middle Ages and Renaissance. Simultaneously the Alamire Foundation is developing acoustic and visual 3D models of historic places where music was (and still is) performed, such as Reims Cathedral and the Sistine Chapel. These 3D recordings and models form the ideal digital building blocks for an innovative and immersive musical experience in Augmented Reality. So you can choose whether you want to hear and see a fifteenth-century composition by Josquin des Prez in the acoustic and visual setting of the Sistine Chapel or some other historical location.

In the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries music from the Low Countries led the international field. But that musical heritage is immaterial and thus very fleeting. If a trace of it still exists it's in the shape of a score, a CD or an old video. With the new technology of the Polyphonic Dome, it's possible to record the whole as a 3D datum, to preserve it and make it accessible in an audiovisual archive of the future. Commercial enterprises in pop music have shown the potential: at ABBA Voyage in London ABBA took to the stage in the form of digital avatars. The technology seems to be future-proof and has great potential for making intangible heritage accessible.

**Partners:** Alamire Foundation, KU Leuven, Huelgas Ensemble (BE), Sollazzo Ensemble (FR), Cappella Pratensis (NL), Micrologus (IT), Leones Ensemble (DE), Tiburtina (CZ), Stile Antico (UK), Park Collegium (BE), IMZ (International Music + Media Centre) Vienna (AT), REMA (Réseau Européen de Musique Ancienne) Paris (FR), Meertens Instituut Computational Humanities and Oral Culture (Digital Humanities) Amsterdam (NL), AES Audio Engineering Society (BE), Lund University (SE), Linnaeus University (SE), Leiden University (NL), UAntwerpen (BE), University of Oxford (UK)

## LOV DANCES - STORIES TO REMEMBER

Dance is universal. It has no language barrier. Dancing creates a connection that can be stronger, more poetic and more binding than spoken language. In this way dance becomes a symbol for radical connection.

In 2029, we'll be putting out a call to all the amateur dance groups in Leuven & Beyond: via **LOV Dances - Stories to Remember**, they'll be professionally supported in learning a dance repertoire that inspires them. The dance groups embark on a one-year trajectory. In that year, they can delve into the specific dance or performance and be taught the dance material by a professional dancer, teacher or choreographer.

The call will be to all forms of dance: contemporary dance, hip-hop, salsa, lindy hop, ballet, tango, modern dance, folk dance, dances from different ethnic-cultural groups... The dance groups themselves decide which dance heritage they'll work with: more bottom-up, less highbrow.

In 2030, all the projects will come together in one big festival in the city, with dances on different squares, with indoor and outdoor spaces connected; a procession in which one group's dance is passed on to the next in one great city choreography. People with no dance experience can enjoy watching, but they'll also be able to join workshops and take their first steps themselves.

We're talking to various European partners with a view to rolling out the project in Europe as well.

**Partners:** STUK - House for Dance, Image & Sound, Heritage Department Leuven, CEMPER - Centre for Music and Performing Arts Heritage, Danspunt (support centre for non-professional dance and movement in Flanders and Brussels), Centre National de la Danse Paris (FR), European Dancehouse Network, Dance On, Pass On, Dream On (DOPODO)

## ECHO - THE EUROPEAN CINEMATIC HERITAGE ODYSSEY

ECHO, the **European Cinematic Heritage Odyssey**, is a new network of film festivals from four European countries, each with a rich film history. That history includes films whose impact on the development of cinema can be traced through the decades and felt in contemporary works. ECHO aims to promote and disseminate European cinematic heritage, to celebrate European cultural heritage through film, and to emphasize the role of film as an integral part of our shared cultural identity.

By screening films that are part of the national heritage of each participating country, linking them to contemporary programming, and inviting spellbinding speakers to discuss the films of the past and compare them with those made today, the network aims to create a dialogue between the classic and the contemporary. Untapped collaborations in Leuven & Beyond and across national borders connect international film festivals with local heritage initiatives. In the coming years this network will grow in membership and activity. The first programming will already be starting in 2025, culminating in a large-scale festival, European in scope, in 2030. What does it mean to be European?

ECHO aims to connect the rich film history of each country with the present cultural landscape, foster transnational audience reach, and increase a sense of shared European identity.

**Partners:** Cinema ZED, Fonk vzw, Leuven Short Film Festival, STUK - House for Dance, Image & Sound, Athens International Children's Film Festival (GR), Icedocs (IS), PLAY (PT)



## Q13 INVOLVEMENT OF LOCAL ARTISTS AND CULTURAL ORGANIZATIONS IN THE CONCEPTION AND IMPLEMENTATION OF THE CULTURAL PROGRAMME

Together the three intendants behind this candidacy have a huge network and combine experience in policy-formulating with extensive knowledge of the cultural field. Two are internationally active artists themselves. From the outset the trio involved the broad cultural sector, arts organizations and individual artists. Here too we employed a circular methodology (with increasingly wide concentric circles).

We set up a number of major events targeting the broad cultural sector and held hundreds of info sessions, meeting moments, and workshops for artists, cultural workers, arts organizations and civil society.

On 28 June 2023, during a large-scale brainstorming event involving 200 participants, we put out a call to widen the pick-up range of our invitation to nominate people with the potential to become one of a 30-strong team of 'Dreamers' looking towards 2030. Self-nomination was not accepted. The call was aimed at the nomination of inspiring bridge builders and artistic and social connectors who can actively contribute to our journey and narrative. By tapping into the broad network's hive intelligence, we were also able to reach people who we might otherwise miss. The call was widely communicated in local and social media.

The result was a list of 300 substantiated nominations, from which we selected a diverse team of 30, based on gender, age, ethnic-cultural background, place of residence, education, expertise. The Dreamers2030 team now consists of 30 people between 18 and 83 years old and includes students, artists, social workers, scientists, business managers and heritage specialists who were born in Leuven or the region or Europe or anywhere else on the planet. In the autumn of 2024 we will increase the number of Dreamers threefold.

The artists among the Dreamers2030 include musicians, rappers, visual artists, writers, theatre makers, street artists, a choreographer, an Oscar-nominated filmmaker. Several of them – architects and designers – also work in the creative industry. In the past year the team has been involved in developing the narrative, distributing the invitation, critically questioning the track, setting up events and devising and launching projects and formats.

On 20 March 2024, together with the Dreamers2030, we organised a cultural Summit of LOV, at which 300 professionals from the cultural arena, education, civil society, business, academia, politics and ECOC network sat down together to probe and refine the narrative of LOV2030 and to inspire each other.

At this Summit, we opened a Call for Projects for 30 ideas for 2030. We received 137 ideas, submitted by local artists and cultural organizations from the region. In three assessment rounds, we presented these projects to the Dreamers2030, the intendants of LOV2030 and a panel of European experts from, inter alia, Leeuwarden2018 and Uppsala2029.

Several projects can't wait until 2030. We think they're valuable enough to be put into immediate practice. These projects are now being set up and supported substantively, logistically and/or financially. In the last year, moreover, we opened two large labs and organized 'writing tables' (see Q17).

In the Future Generations Lab we brought together 30 artists and adults between the ages of 17 and 27 to consider the question 'What will talent mean in 2030?' In the Lab they assembled their ideas, made a documentary, music, designs, constructions, prototypes, physical or virtual. They showed the results at Future Fusion, a public event that included a fashion show, hip-hop concert, community activities and artistic and architectural installations in and around Stadshuis: 3,000 people took part.



Documentary  
Future Fusion

In the Culture x Education Lab we brought together 50 people from schools and professional cultural organizations. Here directors, teachers, artists and cultural workers think of structural and radical new partnerships between schools on the one hand and theatres, museums, and art centres on the other. We built on the pilot project *De Kunstbrug*, a multi-year, in-depth exchange between teachers and pupils of a primary school and artists and staff in museum M Leuven. Each child became the 'owner' or 'sponsor' of a work of art in the museum's collection, the teacher became teacher in residence, artists guided the kids to a deeper understanding of the work of art (see Q19).

It goes without saying that we'll continue involving local arts, cultural and heritage organisations, as well as individual artists from Leuven and the region, when further developing the programme of the title year.



LOV2030 promotes cultural diversity and intercultural dialogue. It puts the current European themes of diversity and inclusion, sustainability and digitalization at the very heart of the programme.

# european dimension

## Q 14 GENERAL OUTLINE OF THE ACTIVITIES FORESEEN IN VIEW OF:

**A - Promoting the cultural diversity of Europe, intercultural dialogue, and greater mutual understanding between European citizens.**

**B - Highlighting the common aspects of European cultures, heritage, and history, as well as European integration and current European themes.**

**Human Nature** is not only a celebration of what unites us as Europeans but also addresses the common challenges that all cities and regions in Europe are facing – polarization, pressure on our democratic values, global climate change – challenges that force us to make a socially equitable transition.

**Place of Birth** examines the cultural diversity found in our city and region, and indeed the rest of Europe: we zoom in on the difference in origins and zoom out to our shared future. **Body & Soul** bridges the gap between health and well-being on one hand and the arts on the other: cross-sectoral and transhistorical. Visual arts, dance and music, from soul music to celestial polyphony. Beauty for body and soul.

**Power to the People** is focused on European values such as freedom, democracy and the rule of law. It also includes projects covering LGBTQIA+ rights and decolonization. Stadhuis – European House for Democracy brings together European thinkers, writers, artists and citizens to consider our shared conditions for democracy in the future. EUtopia brings students from former ECOCs to Leuven to learn about the history of our city (and the first edition of Thomas More's *Utopia*), and to think about the future of our European Union. The Future Generations Board is made up of 20 young people, 10 from Leuven & Beyond and 10 from elsewhere in Europe. Erasmus 65+ makes an Erasmus exchange possible for a generation that never had the chance in their youth. Art. Deco. takes an unflinching look at the dark pages of our history and studies how artistic decolonization can be put into practice.

Book by Book uses a painful part of Europe's past to build a more hopeful future together. Hope is in the DNA of our city, so we also glance back at the origins of our European values and the history of the humanists, those first true Europeans, who travelled the continent to improve their understanding of man's place in the universe, hone their knowledge, and share their insights. Erasmus, Vesalius, Justus Lipsius, Gemma Frisius, Mercator – they all lived and worked in Leuven. Now they're off on their travels again by means of the programme.



**Nature – Cultural Climate Change** and **Let's move, let's meet** are programme tracks that address the greatest challenge of our time and the subject now preoccupying Europe: climate change. Working closely with Leuven 2030 we translate Leuven's Climate City Contract into concrete cultural actions and accessible artistic projects for the general European audience. We view Leuven as a laboratory for the future, where solutions are developed that can be passed on to other cities in Europe. In doing so we inspire European visitors to contribute actively to a shared future and to convert their visit from a gratuitous one to a regenerative one: if you take the legacy of Leuven & Beyond home with you, your own city (and therefore the whole of Europe eventually) will be all the better for it.

MetaLeuven mirrors the whole programme in an online, virtual and digitized world. The entire programme is made digitally accessible for those who can't take a physical part in it. This is by no means a next-best-thing alternative – it's a fully-fledged platform that has added value and depth compared to the live experience. Onliners can contribute, intervene, help build, and co-create. And via the platform, of course, it's possible to browse the complete European Capital of Culture 2030 programme at any time, to look back at earlier events, and to spread Leuven's legacy worldwide.

Thus LOV2030 not only promotes cultural diversity and intercultural dialogue; it not only emphasizes the common aspects of European cultures, heritage and history. For it also embeds the current European themes of diversity and inclusion, sustainability and digitalization at the very heart of the programme.



## C - Featuring European artists, cooperation with operators and cities in different countries, and transnational partnerships

In developing our cultural and artistic programme we've been firmly focused on Europe. Despite the fact that the arts sector in Leuven & Beyond is still very young and must increase its output if it's to work in an innately European context, many of our organizations do have a widespread European network of partner organizations, individual European artists, and collaborators. Preparing the LOV2030 candidacy has proved to be an excellent incentive for strengthening those networks and partnerships.

Several projects will involve an EU call for projects. For the Crossroads project, in which we're developing 30 informal meeting places along cycle trails and footpaths, we invite 30 European artists and designers to design these places in co-creative partnership with local residents and volunteers. In Stadhuis we invite an artist, a writer and a thinker from another European member state to stay for a month and develop an intrinsically artistic programme, with performances, lectures, and debates. A total of 36 European artists will be in residence. EU project calls are also put out for Leuven Lens, Science Pitch, and Beats of LOV.

Only a limited number of engagements with European artists has been confirmed at this stage. But in most projects, European cooperation is the predominant factor. At the end of each project description in Chapter 2 are the names of the various European partnerships. We're getting everything ready for further development in the selection phase.

The KU Leuven and its cooperation with international artists is already an immense asset. As a legacy to the 600th birthday of the university, KU Leuven donates a complete new Arts Tour to the city of Leuven and its citizens, with a view on LOV2030. Permanent works by 9 renowned international artists such as Gijs Van Vaerenbergh and Jaume Plensa will be placed in the public space as of 2025. They might reveal the ambition level of our bid.



## Q 15 OVERALL STRATEGY FOR ATTRACTING THE INTEREST OF A BROAD EUROPEAN AND INTERNATIONAL PUBLIC

Leuven's social fabric is extraordinarily international. It includes 171 nationalities, 38% of Leuveners have a diverse background, tens of thousands of expats work or study at our university and high-tech companies. Since 1987, thousands of Erasmus students have studied in Leuven, while the network of Leuven Alumni (KU Leuven Connect) also consists of thousands of Europeans. The many members of this international community will become ambassadors for the Human Nature programme, passing it on to their networks in their home countries, or becoming a host family for international visitors in Leuven. Thus we ensure an authentic experience and meaningful encounter between locals and visitors.

Leuven is a hidden gem. A best kept secret. That may be a weak spot, but on the other hand it could be a great asset: Leuven is a pearl just waiting to be discovered. Foreign visitors to Flanders often think no further than 'Bruges, Ghent and Antwerp', the 'big three' cities that are groaning ever more loudly under the weight of tourism. Whereas in Leuven there is still so much to discover.

Here you stroll along historic streets, past the iconic town hall and the university colleges, treading the very cobblestones on which Erasmus, Vesalius and Mercator once walked. Leuven breathes history. Yet contrary as it may seem, Leuven is also a very young city, a global hub of knowledge, high-tech and innovation. So, Leuven also breathes future. Many of the tracks in the Human Nature programme build on of this startling duality.

Stadhuis – European House for Democracy, the new Performing Arts Site, and the Vesalius Museum are not only architectural landmarks but, more importantly, they are highly innovative in their programming. The centuries-old Gothic town hall, Leuven's most iconic building, is getting a complete makeover in readiness for its new role.

Leuven & Beyond, with the Hageland and Brabantse Wouden, is effectively the city's green lung. The villages and towns in the area are loaded with heritage, both historical and natural. We connect that natural beauty with the serenity of the region's abbeys. The Crossroads project offers active routes between artistic stops, nature, and heritage. Routes are of varying length and can be followed on foot or by bike.

For the bicycle is not just a means of transport, it's part of our culture. On the way to Eddy Merckx's birthplace enthusiastic cyclists can indulge their passion on the Hageland slopes and cross a new wine region with centuries-old roots. But say Leuven and what springs to mind, of course, is beer. Beer culture not only embraces Stella Artois and the dozens of student cafes but also the Longest Bar in the World on the Oude Markt and the dozens of microbreweries throughout the region.

With the EUtopia and Erasmus 65+ projects, we place European values at the heart of our programme: we invite students for an exchange on democracy, and give more senior citizens the chance of a real Erasmus experience in Leuven. In this way, we want to realize meaningful encounters between locals and visitors and organize regenerative tourism: where the visitor not only gets something out of Leuven, but also contributes to the city's social fabric.

We actively look for links with other ECOCs, from previous years and the title year itself. Whenever we have a substantive collaboration with Bourges2028, Budweis2028, Uppsala2029, Bielsko-Biala2029, Katowice2029 or partner cities in Cyprus or Montenegro, we'll also capitalize on it by redirecting visitors to Leuven & Beyond in 2030. We also plan pop-up events in our various European partner cities and twin cities.

MetaLeuven, our Virtual Twin City, lets us reach an international audience via an online platform, so that those who can't come to Leuven still can enjoy the programme. In this way we make connections, with a total online experience and an online community feel. And here, too, we focus on interaction and co-creation: gamers from all over the world can literally help build the platform, while physical visitors can become the virtual buddy of a friend or family member back in their homeland.



Leuven is an active member of various **European Networks**, such as Eurocities, Trans Europe Halles, ENCC (European Network Cultural Centres) and Culture Next. Since the moment our candidacy was inaugurated we've been establishing contacts with former and future European Capitals of Culture to gain inspiration, share experiences, learn the tricks of the trade, and build a network.

The two most obvious partners initially were **Leeuwarden2018** (because of the language) and **Mons2015** (because of proximity). We've learned a lot from Leeuwarden about working with the region and creating a strong and lasting legacy. LOV2030, Leeuwarden2018 and the legacy organization Arcadia have built up close contacts over the past two years and are often in touch.



We met the directors of **Esch-sur-Alzette2022** and received delegations from **Timisoara2023**, **Bourges2028** and **Uppsala2029**, with whom we enjoyed a close dialogue. Bourges's ideas about climate neutrality and alternative public transport and Uppsala's tracks and intersections also link directly to our Nature programme track. With Cultural Climate Change, we are of course giving a big nod to the **Oulu2026** programme. We first met the Oulu team at the Culture Next conference in Leeuwarden, then visited Oulu itself, and we're setting up a joint project based on cycling culture. We also involved the teams from **Leeuwarden2018** and **Uppsala2029** in the selection of the projects submitted by cultural organizations following our Open Call.

With **Århus2017**, **Leeuwarden2018**, **Veszprém2023** and **Bad Ischl2024** we exchanged experiences of mobilizing an entire region, in every possible area. We drew inspiration from the experience of **Hildesheim2025** regarding the networking of cultural organizations, universities and civil society in city and region. We invited our colleagues from **Brussels**, **Bruges**, **Ghent** and **Kortrijk** for consultations in Leuven and for negotiations with the Flemish Government. Then visited Cyprus together (at the invitation of Brussels and **Larnaka2030**) and met the Cypriot and Montenegrin candidates there: **Lemesos2030**, **Nicosia2030**, **Kourion2030** and **Nikšić2030**.

**Budweis2028** programme track Care and Connect links directly to our concept of radically new connections. With both **Bielsko-Biala2029** and **Katowice2029** we see potential links to our Body & Soul and Power to the People programme tracks. **Nikšić2030's** re:start programme focuses on mental well-being, so there we have an organic link to our Body & Soul. With re:connect (streets, networks, routes & roots), links can be made with Let's move, let's meet. Projects involving creative industries, innovation, and digital arts on the one hand and public space on the other are also consistent with our programming. The central theme of **Larnaka2030** Common Ground is very similar to our concept of *samenleving* (living together), our common humanity, our human nature. Demographically, 'place of birth' is very relevant to Larnaka. Book by Book and LOV & Peace also set up strong resonances in both Larnaka and Nicosia, where a UN peace-keeping force is still part of the daily cityscape.

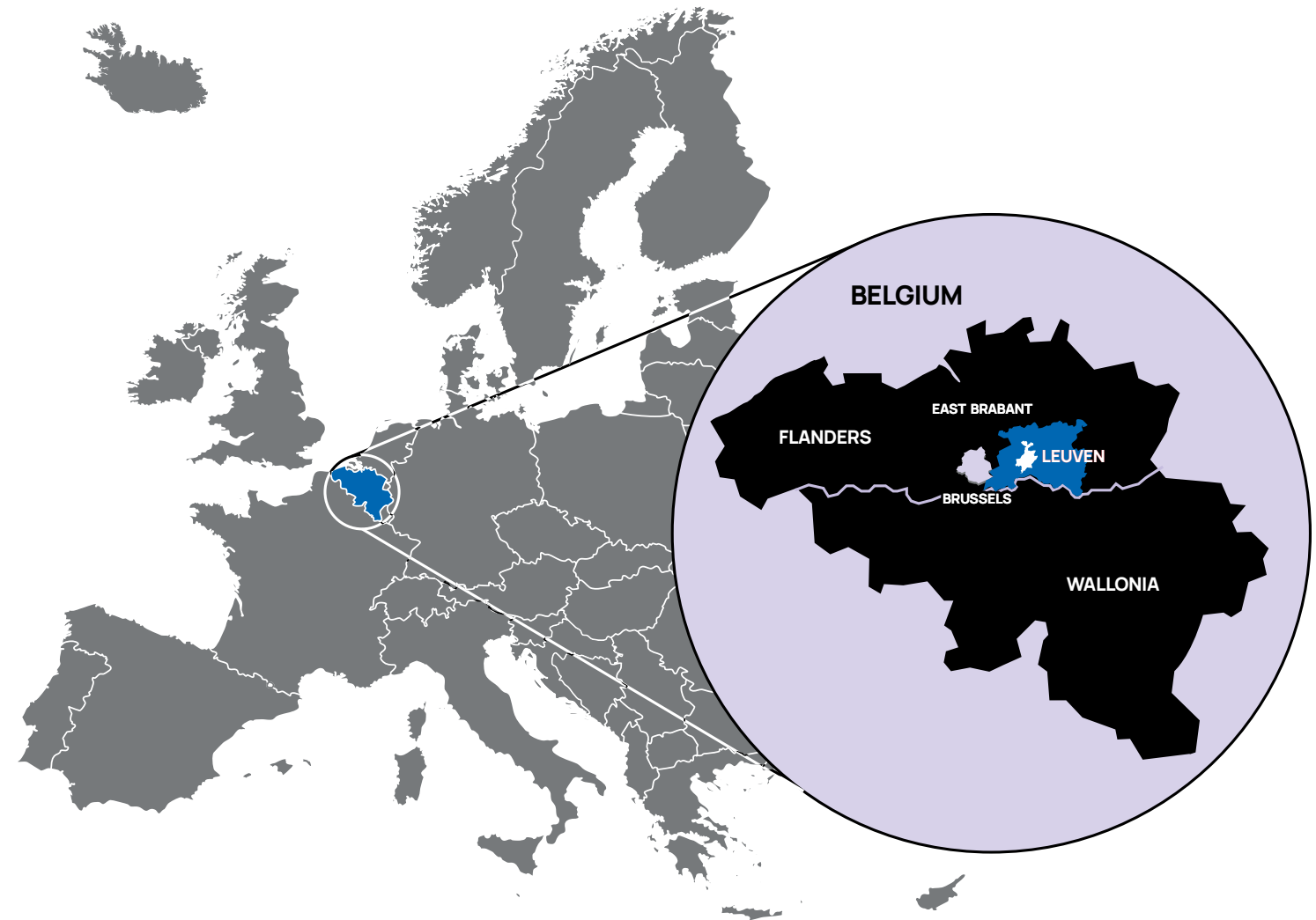
Like Leuven, **Lemesos2030** is one of the European Mission Cities for accelerated net zero. There are several similar elements in our bids and we'd aim to collaborate on them, but also on Place of Birth and Body & Soul.

In the meantime we're happy to take the future candidate cities **Leiden2033** and **Nijmegen2033** in tow, sharing not only our steadily accumulating know-how but also our great enthusiasm. For we see the dynamics that our candidacy evokes in our city and region, and how rich the network called Europe is.

## LEUVEN & BEYOND IN EUROPE

### Collaboration with former and future ECOC candidates

- Århus2017 (DE) - 689.60 km
- Bad Ischl2024 (AT) - 735.76 km
- Bielsko-Biala2029 (PL) - 1,022.86 km
- Bourges2028 (FR) - 454.55 km
- Budweis2028 (CZ) - 730.34 km
- Esch-sur-Alzette2022 (LU) - 178.81 km
- Faro2027 (PT) - 1,832.57 km
- Hildesheim2025 (DE) - 389.72 km
- Katowice2029 (PL) - 1,011.86 km
- Kourion2030 (CY) - 2,874.76 km
- Larnaka2030 (CY) - 2,917.82 km
- Leeuwarden2018 (NL) - 269.05 km
- Leiden2033 (NL) - 142.92 km
- Lemesos2030 (CY) - 2,900.50 km
- Mons2015 (BE) - 70.87 km
- Nikšić (ME) - 1,424.91 km
- Nicosia2030 (CY) - 2,881.23 km
- Nijmegen2033 (NL) - 133.64 km
- Oulu2026 (FI) - 1,973.29 km
- Tampere2026 (FI) - 1,658.15 km
- Timisoara2023 (RO) - 1,344.42 km
- Uppsala2029 (SE) - 1,285.85 km
- Veszprém2023 (HU) - 1,050.00 km



### Twin cities Leuven & Beyond

- Diest: Breda (NL), Buren (NL), Dillenburg (DE), Orange (FR), Steenberg (NL)
- Kortenberg: Parcé (FR)
- Leuven: 's-Hertogenbosch (NL), Rennes (FR), Lüdenscheid (DE), Krakau (PL), Ottignies-Louvain-la-Neuve (BE), Cristian (RO)
- Lubbeek: Lalin (ES), Lalinde (FR), Linden (DE), Linden (NL), Sankt Georgen am Walde (AT)
- Overijse: Bacharach (DE), Bruttig-Fankel (DE), Lecco (IT), Mâcon (FR), Modra (SK)
- Rotselaar: Bad Gandersheim (DE)
- Tervuren: Dachau (DE), Oosterbeek (NL), Kloster Lehnin (DE)
- Tienen: Lunéville (FR), Soest (NL), Valkenswaard (NL), Hergiswil (CH), Bielsko-Biala (PL), Huy (BE), Admont (AT), Benešov (CZ)

### Other Belgian candidate cities

- Brussels - 24.93 km - 1h38 by bike
- Bruges - 109.54 km - 6h49 by bike
- Ghent - 71.48 km - 4h34 by bike
- Kortrijk - 100.97 km - 6h58 by bike
- Namur - 43.37 km - 3h14 by bike





# outreach

If we want to pinpoint our blind spots, if we want to break out of our own bubbles, we have to be prepared to hand over and redistribute power

## Q 17 INVOLVEMENT OF THE LOCAL POPULATION AND CIVIL SOCIETY

In December 2017, in a packed Stadsschouwburg, during a major get-together of the broad cultural and creative sector, Leuven announced its ECOC candidacy. That ambition was promptly endorsed by a range of players, from the city council and broad CCI to KU Leuven and Leuven MindGate.

Between 2018 and 2022 (a period punctuated by Covid 19), the first discussions with the region took place, facilitated by, among others, OP/TIL, the network organization for supra-local cultural policy. In 2019, the city organized *Leuven, Maak Het Mee*, a large-scale poll in which Leuveners could share ideas, pose questions and propose projects for the Leuven of the future.

Between 2020 and 2022 we followed a process involving the broad cultural and social fields, and the heritage and arts sectors, in order to ascertain by means of public sessions how the land was lying, to record the existing situation, and also to formulate objectives for 2035.

At the end of 2022, the city appointed three **intendants** to shape a process that would potentially lead to Leuven becoming European Capital of Culture. All three are from the region and each has a different background, age and network. They include an educationalist and network architect, a cultural worker and spoken word artist, and a theatre maker and cultural entrepreneur. The strength of the intendants team lies in that varied range of backgrounds, whose combination means that a larger network can be reached.

As mentioned in Q13, the intendants at once organized a number of large-scale meetings at which they brought social actors together and immediately involved the stakeholders of **Leuven 2030**, **Leuven MindGate**, **SOM** and **KU Leuven** and shared the invitation with **the wider region of East Brabant**. **Leuven & Beyond** was born.

To create maximum involvement, the intendants and their team talked to as many potential stakeholders as possible in the city, the region, and civil society, in education, and among citizens. The objective was to gather maximum input and feedback from within our society and gradually develop a LOV community.

The intendants also have a fantastic team of sparring partners, the **Dreamers2030**. Since you never dream alone, it was not long before the idea of having a group of locals to swap ideas with was being mooted. At one of our very first events a call went out for nominations of potential members of the Dreamers team – the only condition being that you could not nominate yourself. The response was tremendous. Out of 300 nominations 30 very diverse profiles were eventually brought together and since then have acted as a very frank, candid, and valuable sounding board. The 30 ‘Dreamers’ share the invitation to collaborate with their network. Thus, ever wider concentric circles ripple through civil society.

In the spring of 2024 we sent out an **Open Call** for project ideas, encouraging civil society to devise and submit new cultural social projects. Various working sessions were organized for the purpose.

Working with the city youth service we organized ‘**writing tables**’, where 30 young people were first encouraged to articulate their dreams, then transform them into written project proposals. At the same time, various partners were asked to set up trajectories that would give young people from different backgrounds greater opportunities as cultural entrepreneurs.

Working with Leuven Restorative City, STUK, 30CC, Avansa, SOM and the City of Leuven, we held ‘**democratic dialogue sessions**’ to start up a democratic debate on polarizing themes in society. Meanwhile, the **Culture x Education Lab** got going. This involves 50 partner organizations. We set up a pilot project dubbed **Future Generations Lab**, in which 10 young people were literally given the keys to the historic town hall to develop a festival based on the question ‘what will talent mean in 2030?’ They and an additional 30 peers were given trust and a budget that they could spend as they wished. Five working groups were established, focusing on community, art, fashion, music and architecture. The resulting festival, which included a lecture by Sophie Howe, Future Generations Commissioner for Wales, attracted 3,000 visitors. The lab was a significant test case for our methodology, which aims to give trust, autonomy, space to develop, and resources in order to facilitate genuine agency.

This is where we are today. In the process of getting here we’ve already reached a couple of thousand people. But there’s still much to be done. As you read this bid book we’re already working on the next step. One of our main difficulties (shared by every cultural organization) is that our networks are still not open enough. We might think we’re reaching everyone, but that’s not the case. An anecdote to illustrate the point: one of our Culture x Education Lab’s pilot projects took primary school kids on a journey through museum M Leuven. At the end, the kids (who were often other language-speaking) received a diploma before being collected by their parents. One mum arrived just in the nick of time, her smartphone chirpily announcing ‘you have reached your destination’. Our first reaction was to see it as a poetic metaphor for our journey: we had reached our destination, guided new target groups to culture. But even as we smiled, the prosaic reality hit us: though she lives right in the centre of Leuven the mother needed a GPS to find her way to the museum.

If we want to pinpoint our blind spots, if we want to break out of our own bubbles, we have to be prepared to hand over and redistribute power. That requires processes and labs where, with trust, space for development, a budget, and autonomy, we can leave the classic participation model behind and grow towards true **co-creation**.

In autumn 2024, we will enlarge our Dreamers2030 team. Here too, we’ll provide a budget, power to make decisions, trust, and autonomy to radically connect, to develop and to programme.



We're drawing up a governance structure with built-in guarantees for the creation of labs and an experimental space that can operate like a free port, where groups of people are given a budget and the autonomy to set up radically new connections between city and region, rich and poor, left and right, highly and poorly educated, and to work with Human Nature themselves.

## Q 18 OPPORTUNITIES FOR THE PARTICIPATION OF MARGINALIZED GROUPS AND DISADVANTAGED GROUPS



If we really want to work inclusively, we should not be thinking about how to create opportunities for participation by disadvantaged groups but rather about how disadvantaged groups themselves can help develop programmes and contribute according to their talents and experience.

Passing on the invitation from the intendants to the Dreamers2030, from the Dreamers to wider civil society, across various sectors, has rapidly created a compound effect. Our network of radically new connections is gradually getting bigger and stronger. We saw this in the attendance at our events and the 137 entries that followed our Open Call. Projects were submitted from ethnically diverse organizations, the LGBTQIA+ community, senior citizens associations, etc.

## RADICAL ACCESSIBILITY

One of the principal elements of the Human Nature programme is radical accessibility. That means that co-creation starts today. It means that the public space is seen as the most democratic stage. It means that as many activities as possible are free and that language is not a problem. That we bring artists to the people, not vice versa. In our communications we use Simple Dutch and the accessible usage forms of other languages. For paying activities there's the UiTPAS, a widely available leisure pass: for a basic amount it gives access to people in financially vulnerable situations and develops strategies to overcome the shame of poverty.

Working inclusive means that the entire programme must be accessible to everyone, regardless of background, vulnerability or limitation. A healthy audience mix integrates marginalized and disadvantaged groups. Co-creation, and the removal of barriers are crucial.

## GUIDANCE AND CO-CREATION

If we aim to develop a vision for new audiences, a vision that allows new makers to flow through and frees up space (on stages, in programming, and budgets) is also required. We need new perspectives and therefore expertise other than the purely artistic. Rather than accept the normative concept of 'artistic quality' (as if there's only one fixed standard), we open it up to multiple and more inclusive 'artistic qualities'.

If we want to connect radically and adhere to the 'don't act for us, without us' credo, projects should not be developed for a target group, but by that target group, so co-creation also needs room for experiment. This must be guaranteed through governance, which ensures trust and autonomy and provides financial and production resources. Redistribution is key. These are the first building blocks of social innovation.

The setting up of the hip-hop circle is a great example of a first step. An initiative in which LOV2030 is also involved, it was originated by 30CC and the community builders from the hip-hop community in Leuven & Beyond. It brings together people from hip-hop's various sides: Urban Sports (Skate, BMX), Rap/MC, Breaking, DJ, Producing, Dance, Graffiti, Knowledge, Culture (Fashion). Hip-hop is an art form that stemmed from a cultural movement, from activism, from protest. Given its marginalized position in the arts field the group seldom works together long term. Nonetheless it's exploring what it means to bring hip-hop into a new arts centre that also has a role as a municipal podium – without disowning the origins and values hip-hop derives from the grassroots movement. What sort of role can a hip-hop house play on the new Performing Arts Site from 2029? In the meantime, the *hip-hop circle* is already creating involvement among the broad hip-hop community in East Brabant by holding events and meetings in public spaces.

We approach marginalized and disadvantaged groups through intermediaries and guides. Our go-to partners are the Accessibility Advisory Council, the Diversity and Inclusion Learning Network, the Seniors Council, mijnleuven, the Neighbourhood Offices and the Diversity Service's Community programme. We also work with a host of partners in the field. They know the audience best, so we can add their expertise.



This means that from the beginning we intensify contacts with organizations providing first-line assistance to vulnerable people. It's essential that they develop co-ownership from the start and are given enough autonomy, responsibility and say, including in the area of finance. It's crucial to have them on board as equal partners.

To that end, we organized a round table involving the welfare organizations and providers from the culture and youth sectors. The most striking comments recur in every organization.

1. We invest more time in working closely together, using a buddy system or mentorship and sponsorship. We work on one-to-one, because one person is not the same as the other. Moreover, 'poverty is a clusterfuck'.
2. Cross-sector collaborations are crucial: we involve partners early on in the process, not at the end of it. We think about processes rather than events.
3. Don't wait for a programme to be completed before thinking about taking part. Take an active part in the process. Make nothing for us, without us.
4. Encourage contact and connection between people as people, rather than always as welfare organization employee and client. We are equal as people (as parents, brothers, sisters, neighbours, sports fans...)

## LEARNING NETWORK DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION

This is an open and inclusive network for and by Leuven cultural organizations, professionals and volunteers. The initiative was set up as an action after completing the path towards the Long-Term Cultural Strategy, and we consider it an important legacy of this strategy and of our candidacy. The primary objective is to make diversity a matter of course in the Leuven cultural sector, so that based on trust, everyone can relate to each other and diversity is translated into every facet of the sector (in (artistic) production, personnel, programming, public, participation). Each cultural actor is responsible for this themselves, supported by the learning network.

The network's purpose is to ensure that the cultural sector in Leuven & Beyond becomes more diverse and reflects the diversity of the region. In addition, we focus on building bridges between the sector and the communities (by connecting organizations and individuals who would otherwise never meet) and on playing a mediatory part in demonstrating the communities' needs. LOV2030 aims to continue to play a driving role in networking and anchoring its operations to cultural organizations and houses.



## AUDIENCE DEVELOPMENT



For life! That's not just for the worst villains in Leuven's Central Prison. Our audiences get a stretch as well. As a concept, lifelong learning comes from the educational sector, of course. But virtually all the actors in Leuven have integrated it into their artistic activities, as organizations such as Wisper and Avansa (socio-cultural work with adults), and Trill, Bamm!, Bazart and Koning Kevin (youngsters) have just about the largest penetration rate in Flanders. SLAC, the Art Academy and Conservatory, is the largest part-time art education institution in Flanders, where people of practically all ages can specialize in an endless range of artistic disciplines after school or work. SLAC also has departments in various municipalities in the region. Academy Regio Tienen and Academy Hageland are also active in various municipalities. Working with these partners, we develop specific programmes that allow for deeper delving into different disciplines.

At the same time, there has been a conspicuous shift in society in general from passive consumption to active involvement, from 'spectatorship' to 'usership'. During the successive lockdowns, the arts sector had to reinvent itself in order to reach an audience. Streaming, podcasting, and online events offered new possibilities. **MetaLeuven** mobilizes a community of gamers to help build the virtual city and so participate actively and artistically.

## PERFORMING ARTS SITE AS A CO-CREATIVE PODIUM

The new Performing Arts Site – our flagship project, conceived as the Art House of the Future – is fully committed to taking a co-creative approach to its programming. More concretely, this 'co-creative podium' is built on several 'circles' or working groups of involved players. We see social equity as the heart of it all, with a radically new relationship between culture and society. That relationship is not merely a matter of engaging the public in the artistic programme; what we're aiming at is the democratization of the institution itself.

Per discipline we put together a circle with a 'motivator'. The motivator's role is to build bridges between the partners, monitor multiperspectivity, pay extra attention to participation, collaboration, reflection, and education, and work to connect other initiatives within the region.

We also aim for international excellence in the area of participatory art practices. Throughout Europe, more and more artists are exploring the art of co-creation, of direct interaction with the local environment, actively taking on their social role as radical connectors.

## EDUCATION AND SCHOOLS

Leuven is the region's education hotspot: with KU Leuven we have the largest university in the Low Countries; University College Leuven-Limburg (UCLL) has the largest teacher training course in the country. Both are major strategic partners in our candidacy.

The SOM network brings together 79 educational partners from infant school to university and sets up labs to confront the most complex educational challenges. As part of this network, in April 2024 LOV2030 set up the Culture x Education Lab, in which 50 educational institutions and cultural organizations participate. The result should be at least 10 sustainable and far-reaching collaborations between schools and cultural players, in which pupils complete a multi-year programme at the art institution. Two pilot projects have already taken place.

In the pilot project dubbed **De Kunstbrug**, for a period of six years, children from the Mater Dei school received a privileged position at museum M Leuven: they were given introductions, guided tours, and behind-the-scenes interactive workshops. Each child also became the 'godparent' of a work of art from the museum collection, so that they could develop a deep – even personal – relationship with the work of art. At the end of the six years the children took the official guides' exam and thus became guides and ambassadors of the museum. This pilot project yielded strong didactic impact figures and is the basis for the new **Culture x Education Lab**.



**Where is the LOV** is a pilot project devised by the Dreamers2030, Stad & Architectuur, and LOV2030, involving 30 students from St-Pieterscollege working on the design of spaces for connection: which places in Leuven & Beyond inspire them and have the potential to become informal meeting spaces. In the design challenge, students and teachers were supported by professional designers, architects, urbanists and the non-profit organization Stad & Architectuur. It became a mutual learning process for both students and professionals.

We learned lessons from each of these pilot projects. Hence we aim to multiply and forward these best practices to other schools and arts organizations in Leuven, the region and Europe in order to set up sustainable and in-depth collaborations. We see this as an important legacy of our candidacy.

**EUtopia** and **Erasmus 65+** are two special exchange projects which we're developing for young people and seniors respectively.



# management

The great strength of this bid is our ability to set in motion an immense mobilizing force to achieve shared goals. The generators of that force are the vibrant arts and cultural organisations combined with Leuven's strong political engagement.

## Q 20 CITY BUDGET FOR CULTURE

| Year | Annual budget for culture in the city (in euros) | Annual budget for culture in the city (as a % of the total annual budget for the city) |
|------|--------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 2020 | 18.1 m                                           | 8.7% (of 208.8 m)                                                                      |
| 2021 | 18.6 m                                           | 9.0% (of 206.8 m)                                                                      |
| 2022 | 20.0 m                                           | 8.9% (of 224.3 m)                                                                      |
| 2023 | 20.2 m                                           | 8.2% (of 245.7 m)                                                                      |
| 2024 | 21.7 m                                           | 8.4% (of 260.1 m)                                                                      |

## Q 21 PLANS TO USE THE CULTURAL BUDGET TO FINANCE LOV2030

Between 2024 and 2033 the total budget for culture will increase by a total of 46 million euros, spread over 10 years.

Of that total, 10 million will be used specifically for the LOV2030 candidacy, 9 million coming from the cultural domain and 1 million from other policy domains.

## Q 22 POST 2030 CULTURAL SPEND

After the title year, the city plans to spend the following amounts on culture:

| Year | Annual budget for culture in the city (in euros) | Annual budget for culture in the city (as a % of the total annual budget for the city) |
|------|--------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 2031 | 30.5 m                                           | 10.3% (of 295 m)                                                                       |
| 2032 | 31.0 m                                           | 10.4% (of 300 m)                                                                       |
| 2033 | 31.5 m                                           | 10.3% (of 305 m)                                                                       |

The commitment of 10 million euros for the European Capital of Culture was approved by the College of Mayor and Aldermen on 7 June 2024 and unanimously ratified by the Leuven Municipal Council on 24 June 2024.

## Q 23 INCOME TO COVER OPERATING EXPENDITURE

| Total income for operating expenditure (in euros) | From the public sector (in euros) | From the public sector (in %) | From the private sector (in euros) | From the private sector (in %) |
|---------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------|-------------------------------|------------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| 72.5 m                                            | 62.5 m                            | 86%                           | 10 m                               | 14%                            |

| Preparation Phase |      |      |      |      | Title Year | Evaluation & Legacy |       |      | Total  |
|-------------------|------|------|------|------|------------|---------------------|-------|------|--------|
| 29 m              |      |      |      |      | 29 m       | 14.5 m              |       |      | 72.5 m |
| 2025              | 2026 | 2027 | 2028 | 2029 | 2030       | 2031                | 2032  | 2033 | =      |
| 1 m               | 3 m  | 5 m  | 7 m  | 13 m | 29 m       | 6 m                 | 4.5 m | 4 m  | 72.5 m |
| 40%               |      |      |      |      | 40%        | 20%                 |       |      |        |

Naturally, the emphasis is on a qualitative realisation of the title year 2030 itself. In the preparatory phase, we ensure a solid deployment of resources for the gradual enlargement of the team, the support of pre-ECOC activities and lab operations, continued focus on participation, extra effort with regard to European projects, partnerships and networks, and the roll-out of a strong marketing strategy. The pilot project Body & Soul city festival in 2027-2028 is also an important stepping stone en route to the title year.

But of course we will also be focusing on the legacy phase, starting with the 3 years from 2031 to 2033. In 2031, we concentrate on monitoring and evaluation (impact measurements, lessons learned, etc.) as well as embedding the lessons learned in our governance structure and operation, Regional Cooperation for Culture (IGS) and making a number of ECOC's key principles more sustainable in the city and region. Our experience shows that this not only requires operating resources but also a sufficiently strong legacy organization with a team, such as Arcadia in Leeuwarden, for example.



Q 24 BREAKDOWN OF PUBLIC SECTOR INCOME TO COVER OPERATING EXPENDITURE

| Income from the public sector to cover operating expenditure | In euros | In % |
|--------------------------------------------------------------|----------|------|
| Federal Government                                           | 15 m     | 24%  |
| Flemish Government                                           | 30 m     | 48%  |
| City                                                         | 10 m     | 16%  |
| Province                                                     | 3 m      | 5%   |
| East Brabant Region                                          | 3 m      | 5%   |
| EU (with exception of the Melina Mercouri Prize)             | 1.5 m    | 2%   |
| Total                                                        | 62.5 m   | 100% |

Q 25 FINANCIAL COMMITMENTS TO COVER OPERATING EXPENDITURE

The City of Leuven's financial commitment of 10 million euros was unanimously approved at the municipal council meeting of 24 June 2024. All parties were in favour, there were no abstentions.

The Belgian Federal Government has ordered the National Lottery to set aside an annual 3 million euros in 5 consecutive years (2026-2030) for the Belgian city that is elected European Capital of Culture. This brings the total amount to 15 million euros. The decision was approved at the Council of Ministers meeting on 17 May 2024.

Minister-President Jambon has announced the Flemish Government's commitment of 30 million euros for whichever Flemish city wins the title. The amount is included in the long-term budget. This, however, will only be approved after the future government's September Declaration in the autumn of 2024.

Twenty-four municipal authorities from the region have signed declarations of intent covering a financial commitment equivalent to at least 6 euros per inhabitant in the period from 2025 to 2033. Some declarations were approved by the respective Colleges of Mayor and Aldermen, others at municipal council level. Additional municipalities have indicated their intention of joining, but will wait for the elections of 13 October 2024.

The provincial government has agreed to match or exceed the total contribution of the municipalities to support cultural projects in the region as well as to organize additional events itself. Given that provincial elections are also due to take place, the exact budgets will be approved only after the installation of the new government on 1 January 2025.



Q 26 FUNDRAISING STRATEGY FROM PRIVATE SPONSORS

Sponsorship acquisition, in our view, is not a purely financial transaction but proceeds from a substantive connection with the Human Nature programme through which we look for ways to connect and strengthen our region culturally and economically. In the first instance we look for partnerships with local players who focus on a European market.

For LOV2030 our ambition is to raise 10 million euros in private funding and to strengthen the bond between the business world and culture. With a view to legacy, we invest in sustainable relationships and solid collaborations. We aim to raise 7.5 million specifically from fundraising. We aim to achieve 2.5 million from ticketing, co-productions and partnerships in the CCI. That may involve input from cultural organizations and/or investment in a project by creative companies.

We take a three-pronged approach to fundraising: sponsorship (3 million euros), tax sheltering (4 million euros), and patronage (0.5 million euros).

SPONSORING

Sponsorships fall into two categories, financial and in kind. At this stage we don't capitalize in-kind sponsorship. For financial sponsorship, we look at branding and image, content and hospitality.

We're looking for at least two principal sponsors, each providing 1 million euros. We've benchmarked this amount with other (comparable) ECOCs. At present we're negotiating with AB InBev and KBC Bank. Both have their origins in Leuven; both are headquartered there. Talks are going well and both companies have indicated a willingness to make a deal.

AB Inbev is the largest brewery group in the world. Stella Artois, one of the largest brands in the group, is within a stone's throw of Leuven's city centre. Beer culture is part of our heritage and identity. It connects people. Which is why AB Inbev seeks to enhance encounters via culture. We're counting on 1 million euros cash as well as drinks and logistical support for events in the title year. AB Inbev is committed to the narrative and also has great climate ambitions for net zero. We're also discussing potential substantive collaboration (guided tours, workshops, experiences, etc.).

KBC Bank wishes to bolster its name as an ethical, innovative and green bank. Several of the Human Nature programme tracks are therefore very much in line with the values and content that KBC itself promotes. KBC is a European pioneer in working with a virtual assistant, called Kate, in a highly interactive banking app. Ticket sales for LOV2030 can be done via the banking app, for instance. KBC Bank is also working on a European strategy and sees, in collaborating with LOV2030, added value in terms of branding, content and hospitality.

Besides two principal sponsors, it's also important to have broad branches. We've started talks with the business networks VOKA, Unizo and Leuven MindGate and also see opportunities in local companies that have an international scope, such as imec, Materialise, Tiense Suiker, Citrique Belge, Harol, Dstny, Duracell and Frisk.

In the development of our programme, Leuven MindGate is already a substantive partner in everything that relates to innovation and high tech. The network of 400 innovative companies is an enthusiastic supporter of our candidacy and encourages its members to contribute financially. The cultural development of the city and region increases the attraction for international high potentials who are needed for growth at imec and other companies. We are developing a sustainable partnership for the period 2025-2033, based on the following principles:

- An annual contribution as a partner (in exchange for visibility and hospitality).
- Matchmaking between artists and companies, whereby the company invests in the artist's project in cash and in kind. The artist provides input on the operation of the company. We're assuming a multi-year commitment so that a sustainable result can be achieved.
- Knowledge and logistics in one of the programme tracks, e.g. MetaLeuven Virtual Twin City. Leuven is home to many technology companies that can contribute to this.

TAX SHELTERING

Since 2018 the Belgian Federal Government has developed a Tax Shelter measure that allows companies to invest in artistic creations in the performing arts (theatre, opera, dance, classical music), audiovisual productions (film & television) and gaming. The investor can deduct the amount invested from his tax return at a particularly attractive tax rate, resulting in a guaranteed net return of between 8.5% and 10% on top of the investment. The producer (who receives the money) can thus cover between 25% and 30% of his production costs.

A number of large and medium-sized productions we're developing in the context of LOV2030 can be co-financed in this way. To that end we're working with KBC Bank and Gallop Tax Shelter. The system is a particularly interesting way to raise funds locally from small companies, the self-employed, and the liberal professions, who support the project. Based on our experience, a yield of 4 million euros is more than feasible and is even a rather conservative estimate.

PATRONAGE

Finally, we look at patronage, donations, legacies, crowd-funding... Among those with whom we're already in contact is the Baillet-Latour Fund. We're calling on specialized knowledge in our network and aim to raise 500,000 euros here.



Q 27 BREAKDOWN OF OPERATIONAL EXPENDITURE

| Programme expenditure (in euros) | Programme expenditure (in %) | Promotion and marketing (in euros) | Promotion and marketing (in %) | Wages, overhead and administration (in euros) | Wages, overhead and administration (in %) | Other (in euros) | Other (in %) | Total operating expenditure |
|----------------------------------|------------------------------|------------------------------------|--------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------|------------------|--------------|-----------------------------|
| 47.12 m                          | 65%                          | 11.6 m                             | 16%                            | 12.33 m                                       | 17%                                       | 1.45 m           | 2%           | 72.5 m                      |

Our greatest investment is in the artistic programme: with over 47 million euros we can accomplish a high-quality programme. From our own experience with large international projects and from benchmarking with other ECOCs, we know that 15% to 16% is a minimum for international

marcom. Since employer contributions in Belgium are notoriously high, wages take a relatively high percentage (17%). We foresee a residual amount (2%) for a detailed impact study and research, purchases, and travel costs.

Q 28 INCOME FROM THE PUBLIC SECTOR FOR CAPITAL EXPENDITURE

| Income from the public sector to cover capital expenditure | In euros | In % |
|------------------------------------------------------------|----------|------|
| Federal Government                                         | -        | -    |
| Flemish Government                                         | 78.2 m   | 40%  |
| City                                                       | 95.4 m   | 49%  |
| East Brabant Region                                        | 20.2 m   | 10%  |
| EU (with exception of the Melina Mercouri Prize)           | 1 m      | 1%   |
| Other                                                      | -        | -    |
| Total                                                      | 194.8 m  | 100% |

Q 29 FINANCIAL COMMITMENTS TO COVER CAPITAL COSTS

The City of Leuven will be making a considerable investment in cultural infrastructure in the coming years. The largest amount will go to two ECOC-flagships: the Performing Arts Site and Stadhuis. These projects will be carried out irrespective of Leuven's ECOC selection and are covered by the city budget.

Dossiers for both projects have been submitted to the Flemish Government in the sums of 55 million euros for the PAS and 18 million for Stadhuis. Late 2024 we will likely learn more about the commitment of this Flemish support (see Q25).

Several interesting infrastructure projects are also underway in the region: a museum on the Panquin site in Tervuren, renovation of Tienen's town hall, the Orleans Tower in Aarschot, Horst Castle in Holsbeek and the Citadel in Diest. Flanders has already pledged 5 million euros for the Citadel. It is also in the preselection phase for 1 million euros Interreg Flanders-Netherlands, which will be decided in march 2025.

Q 30 FUNDRAISING STRATEGY FOR EU FUNDS TO COVER CAPITAL EXPENDITURE

The City of Leuven examines every major investment project to see whether it's eligible for support from the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) or Interreg. Thus far, we have not yet submitted a big subsidy request to the European Union to cover capital expenditure. An application for 1 million euros for the repurposing of the Citadel in Diest is currently with Interreg.

The City of Leuven is in the final stages of concluding a 'Framework Loan' of 100 million euros with the European Investment Bank (EIB). In early July 2024, representatives of

the EIB came to Leuven on an appraisal mission. This 'framework' should allow us to finance investments more cheaply and smoothly and to diversify our financing sources. The two largest projects that it covers are the Performing Arts Site and Stadhuis. As one of the 112 selected European Mission cities, Leuven is also strongly committed to fundraising in to fulfill their Climate City contract. This contract consists of 86 breakthrough projects that will make Leuven move towards climate net zero. An investment fund will be created to meet the projects' financial needs.

Q 31 SPENDING ON NEW CULTURAL INFRASTRUCTURE (SEE TABLE Q38)

Q 32 PLANNED GOVERNANCE AND DELIVERY STRUCTURE

We're developing a future-proof organizational model with three main objectives: (1) inclusivity, (2) collaboration between city and region in a European context, (3) the joint tackling of shared social challenges, such as democratic deficit and polarization (human) and climate change (nature).

These common objectives take sustainable shape in the major purpose-driven LOV Network in which civil society, the cultural sector, the city, the region, knowledge institutions, the business community, and individual citizens all play an active part based on shared responsibility for tackling the common challenges. The LOV Network is run by a formal structure, the LOV Association.

Our ECOC candidacy is submitted by KU[N]ST Leuven. This non-profit organization brought together Leuven's cultural sector, the City of Leuven, and KU Leuven with a view to the organization of city-wide cultural festivals.

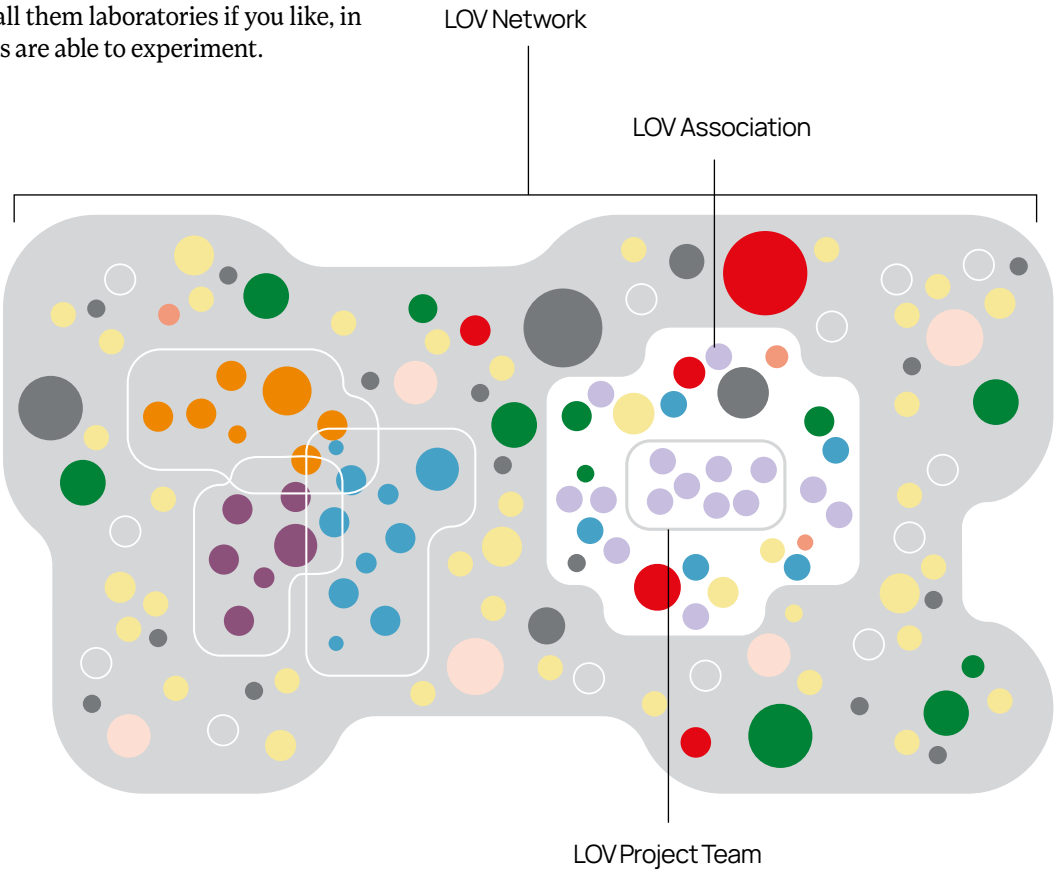
Our candidacy will see KU[N]ST Leuven converted into the formal LOV Association. This is part of a Core Periphery Network that represents multiple partners who are trusted to work flexibly and smoothly throughout the network (as shown in the diagram below). The LOV Association guarantees that the LOV Network's objectives are achieved.

LOV NETWORK

The LOV Network consists of the LOV Association with a board, a LOV Project Team (connects business, artistic, and operational teams), and an independent advisory group. It also includes spaces, call them laboratories if you like, in which the different teams are able to experiment.

- Organizations
- Foundations
- Individuals
- Artists
- Public Government (city, region)
- Knowledge Institutions
- Business community

- Networks
- Leuven 2030
  - Leuven MindGate
  - SOM





LEGACY

- A LOV Network that guarantees systemic change, a paradigm shift based on four fundamentals:
- An innovative **artistic programme** which provides the inspiration that's needed: Human Nature, a philosophical, social and artistic framework giving direction to policy plans and production processes.
  - **Laboratories** (studios, workshops...) that offer development space in which to set up processes and practical research stemming from radically new connections: we need different sorts of expertise to find answers to the challenges we face.
  - A collaboration between region and city that finds **answers to European challenges**: increasing loneliness, polarization, getting youngsters more active, climate challenges...
  - An inspiring **future-proof organizational model**, the purpose-driven LOV Network in which new ways of working together, the redistribution of power and resources, city and region, are key.

Q 33 MAIN STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESSES AND MITIGATION PLANS

Around the year 2000 the drive to renew and reinforce the Leuven cultural sector and shake off its underdog position brought the cultural players together in a spirit of cooperation rather than competition. A new drive and dynamic was sparked off, dubbed from the outset the 'Leuven Model'. That same drive also fired other sectors in the city, lifting all the players to a higher level on the international stage. As to climate and innovation, at the European level Leuven was already showing the way.

The great strength of this bid is our ability to set in motion an immense mobilizing force to achieve shared goals. Lending weight to our narrative are several committed and inspirational strategic partners. But the generators of that mobilizing force are the vibrant arts and cultural organizations combined with the City of Leuven's strong political engagement. Its Long-Term Cultural Strategy and, the investment in the operation of LOV2030 and new cultural infrastructure, give the city's commitment the necessary weight.

Our collaboration with the East Brabant region, which in this bid we call *Beyond*, has great potential and room for growth, and we see it as a strong point in our candidacy. We ourselves were bowled over by the great gusto and enthusiasm with which the civil servants and policy makers of the 24 towns and municipalities accepted the invitation to join us on the road to 2030. Importantly, that energy also segues into the legacy of our bid – the reconnection with our closest neighbours and the formation of one common cultural space.

WHAT DO WE NEED TO ACHIEVE THIS?

- A clear perception of paradigm shift: what are the changes that need to be made? How do we impact all levels: socially, politically, economically, culturally. (see Q8)
- Impact study with baseline measurement: what's the situation as is, what impact will we make?
- Trust in the LOV Association and the coordination of the LOV Network through balanced partner representation.
- Representation of innovation experts, target groups, region, and European dimension in the LOV Association.
- A transparent description of the roles and responsibilities and the decision-making processes in the LOV Association and LOV Network.
- Know-how in building a Core Periphery Network. Prof. Bart Cambré's team (Antwerp Management School and University of Antwerp) is involved in this part of the process.

We're well aware that we don't have the biggest bidding team in this competition. Frankly, it's small. But we're versatile and determined. That's also a strength. And we feel supported by all those concentric circles around us. Our young, eager-to-learn population, with that large international community in Leuven & Beyond are often the ones who usher in change and provide the impetus for our future ambitions. The team of Dreamers2030 put together to help shape our bid unites all these voices. We can rely on the existing networks and major players in the city and region, so if we need to we can swiftly switch track. We feel ready to enter the second phase.

That second phase starts by clearly defining the challenges we still face and formulating solutions for tackling them. These are summarized below. We rate impact and probability on a scale from 1 to 5.

| WEAKNESS                                                                                                                                                                             | ACTION                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           |                                                                                                                                                                                                                     | CONTINGENCY |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------|
| RESOURCES                                                                                                                                                                            |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  |                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |             |
| <b>New political coalitions at regional, provincial, Flemish, Federal, and European level could put pressure on promised financial commitments</b><br><br>Impact: 4 / Probability: 1 | Statements of intent by municipalities in the region and province prior to elections; renewal of commitments after elections, with jointly developed projects that strengthen the region.<br><br>Flemish Government decision.<br><br>Strengthening sponsorship commitments in the 2nd round.<br><br>Strengthening cultural players' know-how as regards EU subsidy applications. | Strategic Culture Compass 2035 strengthens Leuven through contacts with Flemish policy.<br><br>Strategic Culture Compass 2035 strengthens Leuven through regional cooperation and vision for cultural region (IGS). |             |
| <b>Infrastructure resources too dependent on local government</b><br><br>Impact: 3 / Probability: 2                                                                                  | Flemish Government decision regarding infrastructure projects Performing Arts Site and Stadhuis.<br><br>Research and application for European subsidy.                                                                                                                                                                                                                           |                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |             |
| GOVERNANCE                                                                                                                                                                           |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  |                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |             |
| <b>The LOV Association is not established on time or there are difficulties with establishing it/ the team is not put together on time</b><br><br>Impact: 3 / Probability: 2         | In round 2 we'll start talks with all the stakeholders and draw up a phased plan of approach so as to re-start in 2026. We hire legal advice.<br><br>Bring together lessons learned from other ECOCs.                                                                                                                                                                            | We develop the principles and values that will be the backbone of the LOV Association and have them approved by stakeholders and local government.                                                                  |             |
| CULTURAL PROGRAMME                                                                                                                                                                   |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  |                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |             |
| <b>Low local participation</b><br><br>Impact: 3 / Probability: 1                                                                                                                     | Join the LOV to be carried out in full in all its facets (communication, programming...) in the selection phase. Emphasize the importance of the ECOC, make it visible.                                                                                                                                                                                                          | Develop the LOV mindset; make it visible.                                                                                                                                                                           |             |
| <b>Low participation by art and cultural organizations in city and region</b><br><br>Impact: 3 / Probability: 1                                                                      | Extra focus on workshops, communication, the importance of ECOC in the selection phase.<br><br>Develop solid projects.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           | Commitment to a sustainable network culture (for the long term).                                                                                                                                                    |             |
| VISITORS                                                                                                                                                                             |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  |                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |             |
| <b>Tourist capacity is too low</b><br><br>Impact: 2 / Probability: 2                                                                                                                 | Together with Visit Leuven, Leuven Convention Bureau, Tourism Flemish Brabant, Visit Flanders & Event Flanders, draw up a plan to increase capacity, in collaboration with the wider region, possibly expanding capacity in Mechelen, Hasselt, Antwerp and Brussels.                                                                                                             |                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |             |
| <b>Annual inflow and outflow of part of the (international) student population, one generation every 4 to 5 years</b><br><br>Impact: 1 / Probability: 5                              | Focus on sustainable relationships with student associations, communities and faculty bars, rather than aiming at individual students.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           |                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |             |
| <b>Too little diversity</b><br><br>Impact: 3 / Probability: 2                                                                                                                        | Highlight radically new connections through specific profiles in the team and focus in round 2.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  | Develop radically new connections – 'how to'.                                                                                                                                                                       |             |
| UNFORSEEABLE CIRCUMSTANCES                                                                                                                                                           |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  |                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |             |
| <b>New pandemic</b><br><br>Impact: 4 / Probability: 1                                                                                                                                | Social distancing measures, limit audience capacity, increased focus on outdoor activities, digital programme.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |             |
| <b>Climate catastrophe (heavy rainfall, flooding)</b><br><br>Impact: 4 / Probability: 1                                                                                              | Increased focus on activities in covered infrastructure, digital programme.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      |                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |             |



## Q 34 AN OUTLINE OF OUR INTENDED MARKETING AND COMMUNICATION STRATEGY

Fall in LOV with Leuven & Beyond. Right from the start we've been passing on the invitation to take part in this great cultural endeavour. From the 3 intendants to the 30 Dreamers, from the Dreamers to the wider community, from the city to the region. Always on the lookout for radical new connections to multiply our values and amplify our narrative.

For our marketing and communication strategy we're developing three focus domains and a clear phased plan. We've earmarked 16% of the total operational budget for rolling out the marcom strategy in Europe.

### 1. WHAT IS LOV

LOV is the most radical connection of all. LOV - a name that conveys what our message is all about and at the same time refers to the very special place that is Leuven. Thus we embed our narrative in heads and hearts in a clear, coherent and inclusive way and allot an important ambassadorial role to every stakeholder and target group.

LOV is not only our name or our brand, it's also our mindset. It goes beyond logo or label, it's an immersive brand evoking perception, experience and feeling.

LOV is simple and accessible and appeals to the imagination. It's low-threshold and action-oriented. And it's consistent with the values and DNA of Leuven & Beyond and Europe.

### 2. PEOPLE OF LOV

We mobilize as our ambassadors the residents of Leuven & Beyond and the students, not forgetting the international and European network of tens of thousands of Leuven expats, alumni and Erasmus students. They are our greatest, most priceless asset.

We want to make radical connections, paying particular attention to target group communication. Intermediaries such as the cultural sector, as well as companies and community centres, have a critical part to play. Integrating the content and programme of Human Nature with communication ensures participation, co-creation, co-ownership and therefore strong audience recruitment. This is how LOV spreads.

#### Feel the LOV

- Now we share our invitation with you, tell you our story, start a dialogue. Imaginative, inclusive, accessible and approachable. You're welcome, we're listening.

#### Be the LOV

- Be part of our community and help create Leuven & Beyond together. We involve various target groups, noting in particular vulnerable groups, young people and senior citizens. We collaborate with welfare organizations, youth organizations, civil society, education and the university. We embrace non-traditional communication tools and content formats and new digital technologies, not to mention authentic user-generated content created by the partners themselves.

#### Spread the LOV

- Help us to spread our story. Together we create a new circle that surrounds the previous ones. We increase our visibility - with LOV influencers like our Dreamers2030. Online, we also deploy the development of MetaLeuven to mobilize a gaming community.

#### Join the LOV

- The final invitation to the public at large: in Leuven & Beyond, in Flanders, Belgium and Europe. Together, we're aiming at 3 million visitors, who strengthen the LOV narrative (regenerative tourism) and take a piece of our LOV mindset home with them to spread it across Europe.

### 3. WEB OF LOV

We're setting up a LOV communication network, where regional, participation and diversity experts collaborate with marketing and communication professionals in a multidisciplinary network. It focuses on new (digital) communication tools and inclusive communication.

Consistent with the Human Nature programme, human relationships are at the heart of the programme, beginning with word of mouth and storytelling. We also use sustainable media (printing with sustainable inks and paper types, for example; no single-use marketing tools) and embrace digitalization.

The network promotes sustainable commitment and involvement beyond 2030. The aim is not only knowledge-sharing and meeting but also the joint development of a widely supported and coherent communication and marketing strategy with a more direct link to residents and the groups we want to reach.

We also have our sights on cooperation with the Cypriot ECOC and the title holder from the third country to reinforce collective European communication.



### 4. PHASING

#### Phase 1: Conceptual phase, pre-selection (2022-2024)

- Focus strongly on stakeholder communication to inform, create support, and engage sustainably.
- The importance of co-creation: only when there is real involvement and a sense of belonging can public communication get underway.
- First and foremost, use of our owned media (website, newsletter, socials) to communicate the various actions and events. Close contacts with the local, regional and national press.
- Develop strong branding based on the narrative.
- Target groups: arts, culture and heritage sector, region and province, education, youth, community work, SOM, Leuven 2030, Leuven MindGate, KU Leuven, students, tourists.

#### Phase 2: Project phase and selection (2024-2025)

- Focus on the three fundamentals of our communication strategy: What is LOV, People of LOV and Web of LOV. Enhance corporate communication (city magazine, mini-campaign what's your LOV... ) and communication through intermediaries.
- Reaching everyone is impossible, still we cast our net as widely as possible.

- Focus on co-communication with as many professional partners as possible: Visit Leuven, Leuven Convention Bureau, Tourism Flemish Brabant, Event Flanders and Visit Flanders, International House, KU Leuven, OP/TIL, the professional cultural and heritage sector, city and region communications teams.
- B2C communication: by working bottom-up (user-generated) to create a greater and more sustainable impact.

#### Phase 3: Towards the title year (2025-2030)

LOV2030 becomes increasingly visible in Leuven & Beyond. Crucial stepping stones towards 2030:

- 600 years of KU Leuven in 2025.
- Opening of the Vesalius Museum in 2026.
- Pilot project Body & Soul in 2027-2028.
- Opening of Stadhuis - European House for Democracy, the Performing Arts Site and the restored Park Abbey, all in 2029.

#### Phase 4: Beyond the title (Legacy: 2030-2033)

- We ascribe value to the lessons learned over the past 10 years of operation and ensure the sustainability of the network and expertise in the LOV Association.



## Q 35 HIGHLIGHTING THE EUROPEAN CITY OF CULTURE AS A EUROPEAN UNION INITIATIVE

From the very start Human Nature focuses on the key issues of two of the most important EU challenges. Addressing polarization is one, tackling the challenge of climate change is the other.

With our cultural and artistic programme we bring Europeans closer together precisely by taking on those two key challenges, by seeking out our shared European values and shared European culture, by promoting their diversity. We breathe Europe.

Leuven & Beyond is intentionally looking further than 'Leuven and the region'. Beyond exceeds boundaries. It's a gesture to time and space. It relates to the future. It relates to Europe, with LOV.

In our project we try to forge many links with the stories and experiences of other cities and people in Europe. How do we differ? In what ways are we similar? What can we learn from each other? To us, this dialogue is at the heart of everything. In that respect, Stadhuis, aims to make a fundamental contribution. We think Europe.

Before the title year starts we'd like to invite our fellow ECOCs from Cyprus and a third country to hold a joint programme presentation in Stadhuis, followed by a visit to the European Parliament, where we'll present a joint artistic intervention. These two houses of democracy are only 25 kilometres apart.

At the Opening and Closing of the title year, we'll bring together choirs, dance and circus groups from all over Europe and Leuven & Beyond. This is also the first opportunity to bring MetaLeuven into general use as an interactive streaming platform. It goes without saying that we'll invite all the representatives of the EU, the EU Parliament and the Commission, as well as former and future ECOCs. We'll celebrate Europe Day and the presentation of the Melina Mercouri Prize, and between 2025 and 2033 we'll help to promote the selection of other European cities as ECOCs.

And we will of course guarantee the visibility of the ECOC endeavour and the EU by using the logos and EU flag in all our communication channels and marketing tools. We also ensure that our partners likewise scrupulously follow all these guidelines.

It's important that we can spotlight how the contribution and achievements of the EU and the ECOC programme have enhanced our residents' everyday lives. The many Erasmus students in Leuven are living proof of that. Through our vigorous approach to increasing co-creation and co-ownership among the various communities in our city and region, and particularly among young people and schools, we can also increase their connection with the EU and the ECOC endeavour during events, debates, lectures and so forth. Our European identity lies in sharing our stories. That, after all, is what LOV is all about.



## Q 36 POLITICAL SUPPORT AND SUSTAINABLE COMMITMENT FROM THE PUBLIC AUTHORITIES

Over the last few years the City of Leuven has already invested heavily in the development of this candidacy. The bid book you're holding now was approved unanimously by the College of Mayor and Aldermen on 7 June 2024. It was subsequently submitted to the Municipal Council Committee on 11 June 2024 and the Municipal Council on 24 June 2024, in both cases being unanimously approved, with no abstentions.

The Standing Committee and the Governor of the Province of Flemish Brabant signed a statement of intent on 18 June 2024 expressing provincial support in the strategic, communicative, financial, organizational and logistical areas.

Over the past eighteen months 24 towns and municipalities in the East Brabant region have made substantive commitments. At a press event on 28 June 2024 they signed a statement of intent that includes a financial commitment of at least 6 euros per inhabitant. The Flemish and Federal governments received a delegation from the candidate cities and pledged their support to whichever city wins the title.



## HOW LEUVEN & BEYOND WILL MAKE USE OF AND DEVELOP THE CULTURAL INFRASTRUCTURE OF THE CITY AND REGION

The Human Nature programme will take place in public spaces and semi-public places as well as cultural infrastructure. In Leuven & Beyond we have a modern, flexible, and lively cultural infrastructure, which after earning the title we aim to enhance even more. Mainly to increase its accessibility and familiarity, augment cooperation and shared commitment, and intensify co-creation and co-ownership.

### Public space & semi-public places

We regard the public space as the most democratic stage (and the most democratic rehearsal place). We develop programmes that take place on the streets and squares of the region, in its beginnages (Leuven, Diest, Tienen, Aarschot and Overijse), in the historic university colleges, the region's abbeys, the Botanical Garden, the Brabantse Wouden. For the Crossroads programme, which will see the creation of 30 new informal meeting places in the region, local residents will collaborate with 30 European artists to create artistic pavilions for meeting and culture.

The Thresholds project is a threshold-lowering programme that will manifest on the pavements and doorsteps, in porches and the entrance halls of larger cultural centres. It bears an underlying message to all passers-by: be welcome, come in, join the LOV.

### Cultural infrastructure

The region has 14 recognized cultural centres, 35 public libraries, and dozens of museums and heritage sites. They will all be actively involved in the title year.

Leuven itself also has high-performance cultural infrastructure, both existing and new.

### → THEATRE AND CONCERT VENUES

In addition to the new Performing Arts Site with its two auditoriums seating 450 and 1,000, café theatre, and lots of flexible space, there are around 8 venues (like the city theatre, STUK, OPEK, Het Depot, LUCA School of Arts,...) spread throughout the city able to accommodate between 60 up to 800 people. The 14 theatre auditoriums in the region's cultural centres accommodate between 280 and 450. For larger events (up to 5,000 attendees) the Brabant-hal is available.

### → MUSEUMS & EXHIBITION SPACES

Museum M Leuven, PARCUM and the Africa Museum are major crowd pullers. The new Vesalius Museum will open in 2026. Space for visual arts is also guaranteed by STUK, the artists' studios Cas-co and BAC Art Lab, etc. The region has dozens of smaller museums and exhibition spaces.

### → LIBRARIES

Libraries are probably the most accessible cultural place you can imagine. Not only do they provide space for literature and meeting, they're also venues for exhibitions and events. Architecturally, the most high-profile are the iconic University Library and the public library designed by Henry van de Velde.

### → ABBEYS & CULTURAL HERITAGE SITES

There are several magnificent abbeys and cultural heritage sites in the region and we plan to make full use of them in the programme. Park Abbey, Vlierbeek Abbey, Keizersberg Abbey and Averbode Abbey are all undergoing extensive renovation and/or repurposing that will be completed between 2026 and 2029. The Panquin site in Tervuren, the Orleans Tower in Aarschot, the Citadel in Diest and Horst Castle in Holsbeek will also be renovated by the title year.

## REGIONAL, NATIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL ACCESSIBILITY

### Getting to Leuven & Beyond

Leuven is a great city for walking and cycling. It's easily accessible by rail from the rest of Europe. We strongly encourage visitors to come by train and get around the region with a bike-share bike or e-bike.

### By rail

Leuven's central location in Belgium and Europe gives it excellent (international) rail accessibility. High-speed trains bring you from European capitals to the centre of Leuven in practically no time. It takes less than half an hour to reach Brussels South Station from where many international trains depart for Amsterdam, Paris, London, and elsewhere.

From Liège-Guillemins railway station there are frequent ICE trains to Cologne, Frankfurt and on to Berlin, Munich, Vienna, Prague, Budapest.

### By international bus

Leuven is served by several international bus lines. OuiBus will take you to Leuven from France – there are departure points in Paris, Bordeaux, Nantes, Rennes and Tours. In the Netherlands you can board the Flixbus in Eindhoven, Groningen, Apeldoorn, Nijmegen and Maastricht, from the UK in London, from Germany in Koblenz, Worms, Bonn, Karlsruhe, Nuremberg, Munich, Cologne, Würzburg and Frankfurt.

### By car or campervan

The historic centre is traffic free, but on the ring road around the city there's efficient signage to peripheral car parks. Free shuttles run from these to the city centre.

Campervans can park close to the centre in the beautiful Provinciedomein Kessel-Lo and there are also several campsites in the region.

## ONCE YOU GET HERE

### A city for walking and cycling

The compact city centre and proximity to cultural activities make walking and cycling the ideal way to get around. There's also a wide range of shared mobility: you'll find bike-share and car-share points throughout the city. For the title year, we're providing 5,000 additional shared bikes and e-bikes, so that LOV's visitors can get a taste of what a real cycling culture is.

### Strong urban public transport network and autonomous commute to the city centre

From January 2025 Leuven's public transport network will get a significant upgrade with high-frequency bus connections (every 10 to 15 minutes) that run until late in the evening. Furthermore, from 2030 a self-driving bus service will connect to the city centre.

### Coming from further away?

For visitors coming from much further afield there are regular trains from Brussels Airport (Zaventem). Journey time to Leuven is just 13 minutes. Charleroi Airport (Brussels South) is also easily accessible by train (75 minutes).

### Regional net

In addition to the bus network, many towns and municipalities in the region are also easily reached by train. You can reach towns such as Aarschot and Tienen in 13 minutes, Diest in 26 minutes.

We're developing special provision for visitors:

- Waymarked walking routes connecting the main cultural attractions.
- An area-wide e-bike system with a variety of bike sorts (cargo bikes, tri-bikes, ordinary bikes, etc.). A total of 5,000 bikes will be available on-street and via hotels, B&Bs and campsites.
- Cycle-rickshaw, robo-taxi, and self-driving shuttle services.
- A (tourist) shuttle bus service that connects the main attractions.
- We're working with the public transport sector to develop specific day-, week- and combination tickets for the various events in the LOV programme.

## CAPACITY TO ACCOMMODATE TOURISTS

Leuven currently has 22 hotels, 17 B&Bs, 2 hostels, 126 holiday homes, 158 Airbnbs and one campervan site. All together they provide just under 4,000 beds. There are also 791 providers of accommodation in the region offering almost 6,000 beds in total. When everything is taken together there are more than 9,500 beds available in Leuven & Beyond, not counting the 32 campervan and camping sites.

With a view to developing regenerative tourism, with meaningful encounters between locals and visitors, we're also appealing to residents and expats to act as host families

and asking those who lodge students to make their rooms available during the holiday periods – thus visitors can get the real Leuven experience.

Our ECOC candidacy also provides a great opportunity for accommodation-booking companies to begin operations in Leuven. At present there are three projects in the pipeline.

And if all that is not enough, Belgium is only the size of a hanky, and visitors can easily stay overnight in Mechelen, Hasselt, Brussels or Antwerp, which are all within a 20 or 40 minute train ride of Leuven's historic centre.



Q 38 PLANS FOR CULTURAL, URBAN AND TOURISM INFRASTRUCTURE PROJECT

| PROJECT & TIMING                                                                  | DESCRIPTION                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| CULTURE & TOURIST INFRASTRUCTURE                                                  |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    |
| Performing Arts Site 2029                                                         | Construction of the Performing Arts Site (see Q11).                                                                                                                                                                                                                |
| Stadhuis 2029                                                                     | Repurposing of the historic Stadhuis (see Q11).                                                                                                                                                                                                                    |
| Park Abbey + entrance to the Brabantse Wouden 2026                                | Renovation & repurpose - heritage site and refuge for art and culture, history, religion, tranquillity, meeting, nature, sustainable short supply chain, urban agriculture, and home to the PARCUM and Alamire museums entrance to the Brabantse Wouden (see Q37). |
| Stelplaats 2031                                                                   | Temporary use of the old bus depots - will be renovated between 2025-2031 as part of The Night is Young (see Q6 and Q11).                                                                                                                                          |
| Domo 2026-2030                                                                    | Renovation - connecting with Het Depot as a music centre and locus for night culture (see Q6).                                                                                                                                                                     |
| URBAN                                                                             |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    |
| Brabantse Wouden 2024                                                             | National Park linking all the region's forests and woodlands between Tervuren and Leuven, an area with exceptional natural value and international appeal.                                                                                                         |
| Leuven Ring Road - start 2025                                                     | Aspirational development for the Leuven Ring Road as a space for mobility and living.                                                                                                                                                                              |
| Rebuilding of the Vaartkom 2025                                                   | Construction - a car-free zone between the cultural infrastructure of OPEK and the Vaartstraat, with a wooden deck over the water.                                                                                                                                 |
| Scheut site 2030-2031                                                             | Renovation of the convent - spaces for socio-cultural associations, both for storage and studio activities.                                                                                                                                                        |
| KU LEUVEN                                                                         |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    |
| Vesalius Museum 2025                                                              | KU Leuven newbuild, an interdisciplinary museum (see Q11).                                                                                                                                                                                                         |
| 600 years of KU Leuven art route 2025                                             | Art route in the public space, with additional permanent interventions by 9 renowned international artists, such as Jaume Plensa and Gijs Van Vaerenbergh (more names to be communicated late 2024)                                                                |
| IN THE REGION                                                                     |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    |
| Furia Museum (working title) - redevelopment of Panquin site - Tervuren 2026-2030 | A new museum on the edge of the Brabantse Wouden national park. Focus on the symbiosis between the experience of art and nature.                                                                                                                                   |
| Stadhuis X - Tienen 2028                                                          | Masterplan for the renovation of Tienen's town hall. The library and the City Archives will also be housed there.                                                                                                                                                  |
| Horst Castle - Holsbeek 2026                                                      | Structural renovation works at Horst Castle and re-evaluation of the historic rural environment as an open castle with a meadow for events.                                                                                                                        |
| Citadel of Diest 2027                                                             | Repurpose - a new part of town with a mix of urban functions - Hageland Academy of Visual Arts, housing, etc. - while preserving its unique heritage value.                                                                                                        |
| Orleans Tower - Aarschot 2024                                                     | Restoration of the tower, also adding a staircase to reach a lookout point, and renovation of the park around the tower.                                                                                                                                           |



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LOV for all

LOV has grown out of interactions with an enormous number of people. Radically connecting is, after all, at the heart of our process. This bid book is thus the result of the intensive work of many individuals, from those met by chance along the way, to the attendees at stakeholder meetings.

To everyone who provided input, gave us the benefit of their critical thinking, or formulated insightful comments, whether at an event, a workshop, a meeting, or in a café – thank you. It's your time and energy that has enabled us to create this bid book.

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Team

Lore Baeyens - Intendant

Sarah Bekambo - Intendant

Stijn Devillé - Intendant & Bid Book Author

Kathryn Cops, Evi Gillard,  
Kristel Salaets, Hanna van Zutphen

Dreamers2030

An Olaerts, Arne Knaepen, Barbara Struys, Bisser, Camille Keukeleire, Dirk Masquillier, Ela Grabiec, Fred Gata, Georgy Chtchevaev, Jan Paesen, Jessika Devlieghere, Joachim Nijs, Jonathan Symons, Joseph Palframan, Josée Lehon, Judith Caeyers, Katrien Rycken, Koenraad Van Balen, Marília Breite, Michaël Cloet, Nadia Nsayi, Ornella Ngomba/Muabana, Piet Jaspaert, Roberta Santucci, Ronny Mosuse, Sahim Omar Kalifa, Sieg Pauwels, Simon Sterck, Teresa Wouters  
I Zoë Demoustier

Steering committee

Mohamed Ridouani  
Mayor of the City of Leuven

Bert Cornillie  
Alderman for Culture, Tourism, Events, Part-Time Art Education and Senior Citizens, City of Leuven

Geertrui Vanloo  
General Director, City of Leuven

Piet Forger  
Director for Culture, City of Leuven

Steven Dusoleil  
Director for Communications and City Marketing, City of Leuven

Intendants

Photography

Lore Stessel

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