

European student exchange in Brussels VUB students tackle local and global challenges (virtually) with peers from Spain, France, England, Sweden and Slovenia

During the weDISCOVER.brussels week from 29 March until 1 April, some 70 students from all six EUTOPIA universities will join forces virtually. With local partners, they will tackle local and global societal challenges in Brussels. As an urban engaged university, the Vrije Universiteit Brussel is the virtual host and the facilitator of the event, but the true commitment comes from the students.

Connecting, even during the Covid-19 crisis

Students in Brussels already know this: at the end of March, Brussels will be the centre of attention for a week, as a living lab during the weKONEKT.brussels week. As an urban engaged university, the Vrije Universiteit Brussel wants to offer a socially engaged alternative to lectures and an introduction to Brussels. And more. Today in particular, the weKONEKT.week is also a way to connect students during the Covid-19 lockdown. The students themselves are driving the projects: they organise projects together and all the activities are open for participation. They will share and collate their expertise, insights and knowledge in workshops and teamwork sessions.

The Brussels partner organisations with which VUB is working are the link between the student and the city. This year, the students work with organisations such as P&V Foundation, Innoviris, the Municipality of Ixelles, Capital vzw, the Flemish Parliament and Avansa Citizenne. Hassan Al Hilou of Capital vzw: *“It’s crucial for us to work with young people. After all, they are the future. That is why we will investigate together what the challenges of the SDGs [the UN’s Sustainable Development Goals] are. One of those SDGs is decent work and economic growth. But what is decent work and how do you achieve economic growth? The cooperation will certainly improve our own operations as well. I am therefore very much looking forward to meeting the EUTOPIAN students.”*

EUTOPIAN students

There are similar challenges in other European cities and everyone benefits from a broader view. For some of the projects, therefore, the VUB students are joining forces with students from five other urban universities: Warwick, Ljubljana, Gothenburg, Paris and Barcelona. The five universities are the partners with which VUB has formed an alliance and is building the European university of the future: the EUTOPIA university. This will be a university where education is based on local and regional partnerships. Its committed students will help to shape the curriculum and will work with these organisations to find solutions for the future. For example, on 30 March, under the guidance of Nobel Prize winner Prof Lučka Kajfež Bogataj and with researchers from the University of Ljubljana and VUB, EUTOPIA students will participate in an expert session on the P of Planet, one of the five Ps defined by the UN.

CY Cergy Paris Université students Emil Raducanu, Lucie-Anne Soubelet and Paul-Adrien Viala on the weDISCOVER.brussels week: *“We think this European cooperation is essential. Giving students the opportunity to make their voices heard through the weDISCOVER.brussels week is the right way to go. We are convinced that students have an important role to play in decisions about our future world. With our project, we want to try to change the transport habits of CYU students and staff. Our work will focus on the commute between the campus and the homes of students and staff from the Île de France area. We look forward to exchanging with other students!”*

Introduction to European capital

For these international students, it is often a first acquaintance with the European capital and with VUB. The programme therefore also offers a virtual tour of Brussels with a focus on citizens' initiatives and urban development, as well as an online dance party organised by VUB student groups, the Ancienne Belgique and Pilar.

Wout Vanhelden of VUB student society Limburgia: *"It's important to connect people. And what better way is there than through music? We would like to invite all international students to the digital party on 1 April. Through this project, you too can discover the Brussels hip-hop scene! Lefto and Supafly Collective will provide an awesome night with the best hip hop records from the 70s, 80s and 90s. See you there!"*

The icing on the cake is the masterclass on citizen journalism with Waad el-Kateab, the Syrian journalist and filmmaker who won an Oscar nomination with For Sama, her haunting documentary about the Syrian civil war.

VUB rector Caroline Pauwels: *"Without cooperation, we will get nowhere. This is no different in our current high-tech and globalised society. That is why VUB is strongly committed to partnerships. With other universities. With organisations. With the city. With its academics and students. The challenges are too big for one person, one single entity. How do we tackle climate change? The poverty in deprived neighbourhoods? How do we keep our cities liveable and provide quality education for all? Our EUTOPIA students are now putting this into practice. We are particularly proud of their social commitment."*

More information and full programme

weKONEKT.brussels
weDISCOVER.brussels

Contact

(Party in) AB

Wout Vanhelden (Limburgia) and Jorn Jens Denayer (Campina) are organising the party in the AB.

wout.vanhelden@vub.be 0496 59 05 35

The EUTOPIA students will work on the theme of how to transform the AB into an open and inclusive organisation embedded in its environment

Astrid De Sterck, AB: ads@abconcerts.be

Capital vzw

Capital vzw is a one-stop organisation where various projects and organisations work together to empower the youth of Brussels. The man behind Capital is VUB business student Hassan Al Hilou -

hassan@capitalbelgium.be

CY Cergy Paris Université students

Emil Raducanu - emil.raducanu@eisti.eu

Lucie-Anne Soubelet (lucie-anne@soubelet.fr)

Paul-Adrien Viala (pauladnarbonne@gmail.com)

Background on the workshops with local partners

Innoviris: How to increase cooperation with the Brussels scientific ecosystem to increase interest in science among schoolchildren

Foundation P&V: How to reduce the digital gap among young people and how to increase their involvement in higher education and reduce the social gap between the low-skilled and the highly skilled

Municipality of Ixelles: How to address inclusion and broadening of target audiences in citizen engagement calls

Flemish Parliament: How to strengthen the link between the Flemish Parliament and its visitor centre and the European Schools in Brussels

Avansa Citizenne: How to give underexposed populations a voice through mapping of (inter)national examples, conditions and success factors

Boilerplates

As an urban engaged university, the Vrije Universiteit Brussel strongly focuses on partnerships with other Brussels, Flemish, European and international organisations and universities to create a socially engaged educational offering. VUB thanks its more than 150 partners who make weKONEKT.brussels, weDISCOVER.brussels and EUTOPIA university possible. Special thanks go to the Flemish Community Commission, Innoviris and the Humanistisch Verbond for their support.

EUTOPIA

EUTOPIA is an alliance of six leading, like-minded European universities that want to create a connected and inclusive community to tackle local and global challenges. The aim is to contribute to a new model of higher education in Europe. EUTOPIA is made up of Vrije Universiteit Brussel (Belgium), University of Gothenburg (Sweden), CY Cergy Paris Université (France), Universitat Pompeu Fabra Barcelona (Spain), University of Warwick (United Kingdom) and University of Ljubljana (Slovenia). EUTOPIA brings together more than 165,000 students, 30,000 staff, and research centres in 760 fields of knowledge. #EUTOPIA

The World Needs You

The Vrije Universiteit Brussel carries out its scientific and social responsibility with love and vigour. That's why VUB launched the platform The World Needs You. Here, ideas and actions are brought together, started up and developed around six Ps. The first P stands for People, because that's what it's all about: giving people equal opportunities, prosperity, well-being and respect. Peace stands for fighting small and large injustices in the world. Prosperity deals with poverty and inequality. Planet stands for actions on biodiversity, climate, air quality, animal rights, etc. With Partnership, VUB is looking for collaborations to make the world a better place. The sixth and last P stands for Poincaré, the French philosopher Henri Poincaré from whom VUB derives its motto that thinking may not submit to anything except the facts themselves. VUB is an "urban engaged university", strongly anchored in Brussels and Europe and working according to the principles of free enquiry. #DWHJN www.vub.be/dewereldheeftjenodig