



human nature

Leuven & Beyond
European Capital of Culture 2030
Candidate City

HumanNature (mass noun)

HumanNature is the key concept of our programme. Who are we as human beings? What is our human nature? What are our values? How do we look at the world? How do we describe the world and how do we imagine it? In Leuven we have been asking these questions since the time of the Humanists. What perspectives do we see and how do we share those perspectives with each other? How do we live together? What do we experience?

HumanNature probes what it means to be human, with humanity's good and bad sides, its survival instincts and death wishes, its eros and thanatos. But if we start to take the concept apart somewhat the tensions implicit in both words become apparent: human versus nature, our behaviour versus our environment, the city versus the countryside, our impact on nature and climate.

With HumanNature we not only celebrate what unites us as Europeans but also confront the collective challenges that every town and region in Europe faces – polarization, pressure on our democratic values, global climate change – challenges that force us to make a socially equitable transition. So we have to be bold enough to look beyond our humanness and question our human dominance: how do we find a way of living in harmony with other ecosystems in a way that's socially, ecologically, and economically fair?

We link that to an image of the future: how will future generations deal with the tension between humankind and nature, and what sustainable innovations, social and technological, will be needed then?

LOV (noun)

LOV is the name of Leuven's bid 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 [lɜvə], which sounds like the English 'love'. Life and love, both contained in the name of our city. We LOV it!

The name has not been chosen at random, 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 searching for what we don't see, for our blind spots, so that we can burst the bubbles we live in. LOV stands for radical coexistence, for embracing frictions and uncertainties. LOV is not always easy. American thinker Lauren Berlant described this 'inconvenience' as a powerful tool for change and gave love as an example: true connection requires us to make some adjustments to our own desires. Thus, tense and confrontational relationships become a source of renewal.

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* means 'mate' or 'companion' as well, but it's also the word for 'size' or 'order'. 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 together!).

That *samenleven* is also a verb and thus used to describe an action is evident from the fact that 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 new connections

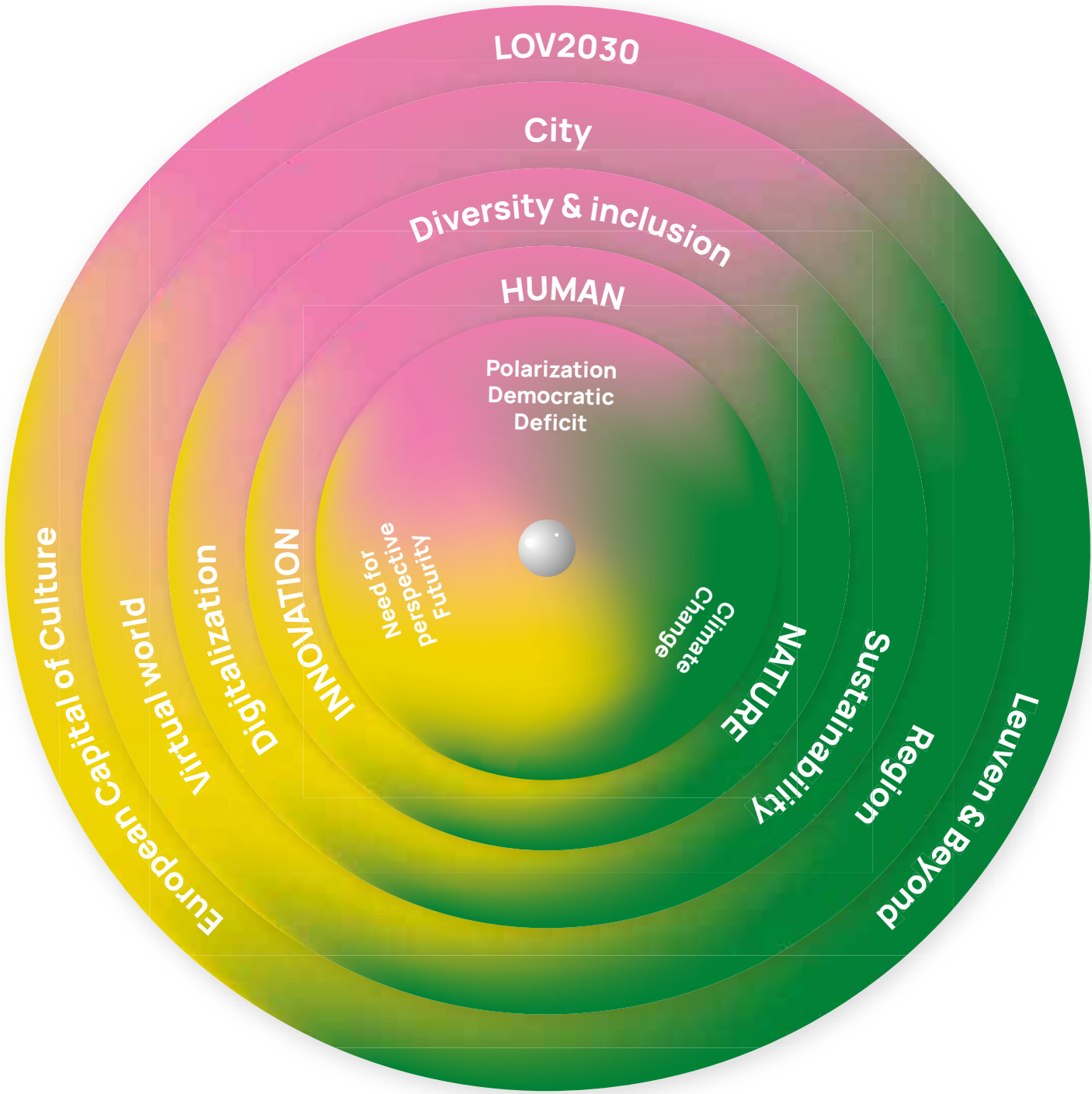
Radically new connections are a constant thread throughout this bid book. 'Radical' comes from *radix*, root. So something that's radical goes to the root, the basis, the very essence of things. Thus 'radical' doesn't mean ferocious, inflexible or violent: instead it means meticulous, essential, and sustainable. It doesn't describe iconoclasm or destruction but care and dedication.

When new connections are made, convergences are created, meeting points, nodes, a social fabric. We call that fabric a network. Working together fosters development, mutual encouragement, shared aspiration, lifelong learning. That's a tremendous resource. Yet often networks don't extend beyond their own circle. And then there's a 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.

It's for that very reason that we need radically new connections: 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 major city with 104,000 inhabitants plus 60,000 students, in a green region, where a total of 600,000 people live. Very often Leuven has looked towards Brussels and presented its backside to the region. In developing our candidacy we've done a complete about-turn and are looking our region square in the eye. Meanwhile, 30 towns and municipalities have joined us in this candidacy, heralding a new era of cooperation – 30 for 2030. LOV is not just Leuven, it's emphatically Leuven & Beyond.

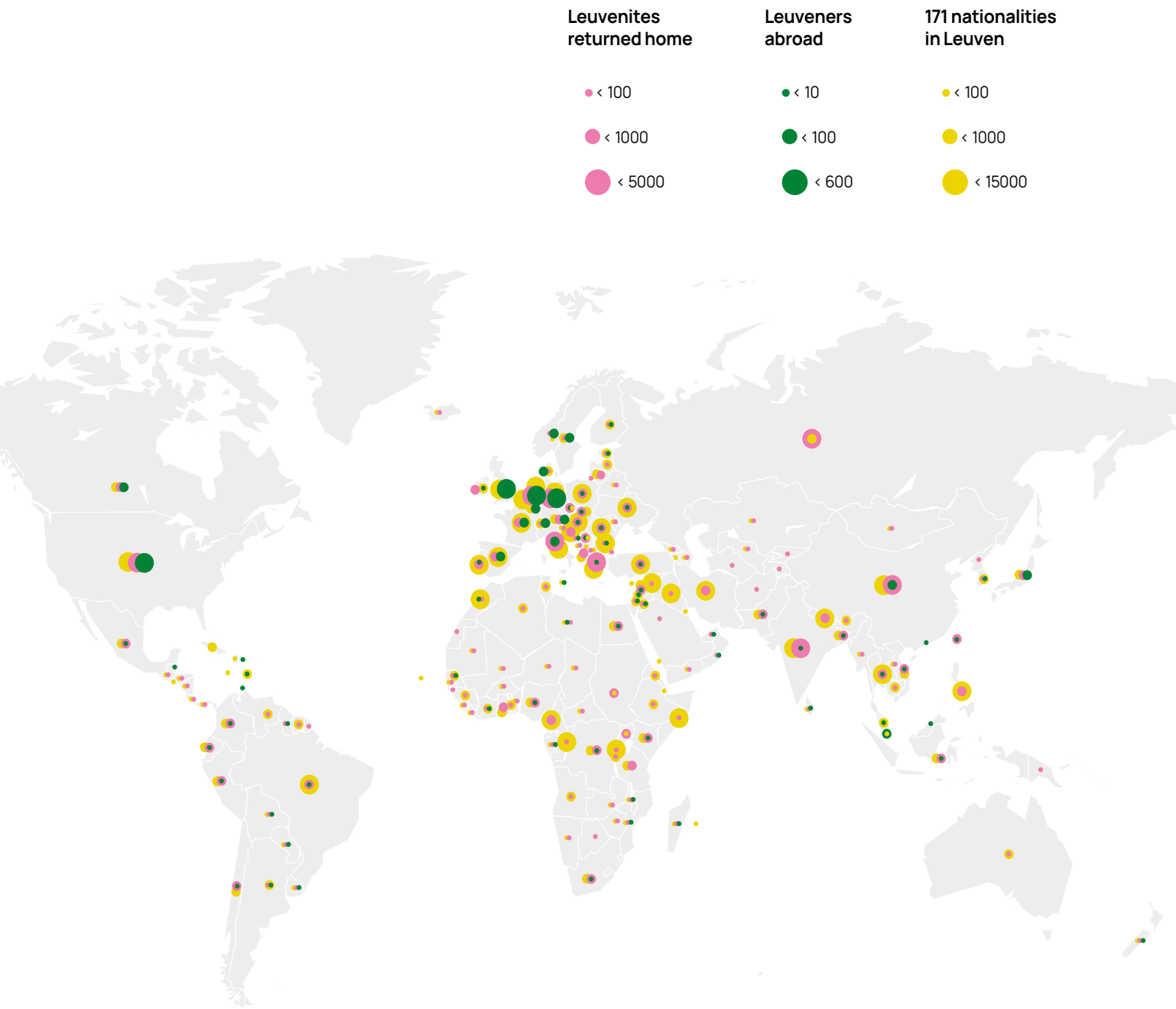


This disk or spinning wheel connects our challenges to our programme and at the same time it links to the current European themes. We position them in relation to our city, region, Europe and the virtual world. Spin the wheel, make your own radical connection, join the LOV.



human nature

3	introduction	56	european dimension
4	contribution to the long-term strategy	66	outreach
16	cultural and artistic programme	76	management
		96	capacity to deliver



Where your heart beats:
that’s where LOV lives

With 104,000 inhabitants plus 60,000 students, Leuven has a distinctive demographic. Almost 40,000 Leuveners are under 30: add those 60,000 students to them and you have a remarkably young city, **the youngest of the whole country, actually.**

Moreover, Leuven’s social fabric is **exceptionally international.** You can hear a different language on every corner of the street. With 171 nationalities, almost every country in the world is represented here. 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, and the network of Leuvenites consists of thousands of Europeans. Leuven really is a centre of European excellence, right in the beating heart of Europe.

Leuven’s international community 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.

By the way, do you know the difference between a Leuveners and a Leuvenite? **Leuveners** are the people who live in Leuven & Beyond. That’s it. Unlike other places in Flanders, it takes no time at all to become a Leuveners. You’re here, that’s what counts. (You’ll recognize this welcoming spirit already in the first projects in our cultural programme!)

Leuvenites is what expats call themselves when they leave Leuven again and return home. For you may be able to move away from Leuven, but Leuven simply moves with you.

Dear fellow humans

Or does that form of address seem too soft? Today, as on the margins of our conscience and the borders of our union bombs are falling on helpless children (helpless, just let that word sink in for a moment: it means without any help), it seems imperative to approach each other with love. And so: dear fellow humans.

Ten days after the press conference in Brussels at which the jury announced that LOV2030 had advanced to the selection phase of the bidding competition and we were still walking on air, on the other side of the world the most important elections of our time were taking place. Elections that not only upended all sorts of democratic relationships but also shook the world’s established order to its foundations.

This is not mere hyperbole. We’re living in brutal times. War is raging, alliances are being questioned, truths distrusted, values abandoned. In the digital world, self-learning systems are accelerating and amplifying all these phenomena. All this challenges European values and everything Europe aims to stand for.

In the midst of this turmoil we, as Europeans, try to keep our cool, to be critical but hopeful.

In a world that is rapidly unravelling, to opt for connection and humanness is not only a symbolic choice but also a strategic one. Choosing to make connections means not giving up. Not giving in to the cynicism and madness that is spreading around us. We can choose kindness. Compassion. Respect. Empathy. Courtesy. We can choose LOV.

And although it may sometimes seem a rather unwieldy process when in order to act, four or five or even all twenty-seven European heads of state must get together to withstand so-called strong world leaders, it is that very same European connectedness that gives us our strength and our value. It says ‘we need each other’.

Today, spreading, defending, and affirming that vision and those European values is more important than ever. In our first bid book we described a number of key concepts that go to the heart of our shared values. Those concepts relate to society, to *samenleving* (that unique Dutch word), to our need for radical connection, to our HumanNature, and yes, also to love. That brief glossary is included once again. And on the inside cover is our handy disk, which makes the coherence between our challenges and our concept clear and links them to the European agenda.

Leuven, with its 104,000 inhabitants and 60,000 students, is an international city in pocket size. You can hear a different language spoken on every corner of the street. This European spirit, with its shared culture, heritage and history, combined with our exceptional innovative strength, makes Leuven a centre

of European excellence, right in the heart of Europe. With our programme focusing on human, nature and innovation, we show our heart, our mind (and our lungs). Listen. Here you can hear the heartbeat of Europe. This is the heartbeat of LOV2030 – Leuven & Beyond European Capital of Culture.

Our concept is treading on time’s heels. Today, more than ever before, we need to think about who we are as human beings, how we behave, towards each other and towards the environment we live in. Here we are shaping the future. For generations to come.

Even if the guns fall silent by 2030, even if large parts of the world experience a democratic thaw, there will still be a huge need for recovery. Connection. In Dutch, *verbinden* not only means to connect but also to bandage, to bind the wounds of someone who’s been hurt, to care.

Obviously we are well aware that the European Capital of Culture title will not solve geopolitical problems. What it can do, however, is amplify a narrative of peace. If European Capitals of Culture have perhaps been inward-looking in the past decade and have addressed primarily local problems, now may well be the time to turn our gaze outward again, conscious of our own background and history, critical of our own problems but with a firm belief in our European values of humanity and peace. Europe is a peace project. We put this at the heart of our HumanNature concept, with a narrative of radical connection and love.

In his seminal book *If Mayors ruled the World*, Benjamin Barber contends that towns and cities are not independent but inter-dependent. Proceeding from their local autonomy, and close involvement of the citizen, they are connected to each other. Like links in a bigger chain. LOV2030 is taking the same outward-reaching approach – by connecting with so many European towns and cities, by connecting 30 municipalities in our region, by connecting with Ghent, Bruges, and Kortrijk, the three Belgian candidate cities that didn’t make it through the first round, by reaching out to Louvain-la-Neuve, our sister city in the French-speaking part of the country, to Molenbeek, to Namur.

2030 is a crucial year for it’s a tipping point for all the climate goals that have been set in recent decades. It’s also the target year of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals set by the United Nations. Coincidentally, 2030 is also the year in which Belgium, our small country with its surreal yet fundamentally peaceful state structure, celebrates its bicentenary. And in which the ECoC action will have been in existence for 45 years. Grown up, fully-fledged, and anticipating 50 with confidence.

We believe that a European Capital of Culture should have a message. One that inspires. Challenges. And offers hope. LOV2030 Leuven & Beyond is ready to be this European Capital of Culture 2030 on behalf of Belgium.

q2 – CHANGES TO THE CULTURAL STRATEGY: HOW LOV2030 CONTRIBUTES TO ITS PRIORITIES

Leuven's Cultural Long-Term Strategy and the overarching Strategic Culture Compass 2035 were approved by the municipal council in June 2024. Since 2019, the strategy has been prepared and underpinned by a wide participatory poll and various cultural mappings. Following the recent municipal elections and the appointment of the new city council, the new political leadership reaffirmed the strategy and confirmed the budget. Also on the regional, provincial, Flemish and federal level the budgets were confirmed. This gives consistency to our candidacy as European Capital of Culture.

The Strategic Compass 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 that goal and offers the opportunity to make our rich cultural ecosystem a fertile place that encourages human encounters, stimulates self-development, social cohesion, and well-being, and motivates creativity and economic development.

In addition to the European dimension and the transversal regional networking that the cultural strategy sets out, there are ten policy lines, which can be summarized as listed below.

INTER-MUNICIPAL COOPERATION

The energy and enthusiasm that our candidacy has generated over the past two and a half years, has steadily grown, and became even greater when LOV2030 advanced to the final phase of the bidding competition. All the stakeholders in Leuven & Beyond now have an even clearer vision of the future and are intent on moving forwards together. It indicates the great consistency between our bid and the Cultural Long-Term Strategy.

Over the last ten months our Outreach Networker has coordinated the establishment of the new Cultural Network of Leuven (CNoL), bringing together 300 socio-cultural organizations.

Our Regional Coordinator and team have been concretizing the radical connection with the entire East Brabant region in a formal **Inter-Municipal Cooperation (IMC)**, using LOV2030 as a lever for structural collaboration.

With the signing of a declaration of commitment, 30 municipalities in our region have agreed to enter into a structural and durable Inter-Municipal Cooperation on culture. Preliminary research in 2024 and 2025 shows that there is a great demand for more structural support through Inter-Municipal Cooperation on local cultural policy and the most important actors in this field, such as libraries, cultural and community centres and cultural services. Such a structural IMC can not only initiate and supervise projects, but also provide support, coordination and stimulation for all the participating municipalities. Within this IMC, there is room to work flexibly and to pool the competences that are not always available in the individual municipalities. Each municipality can participate in terms of content in the way that best suits its needs, but structurally, each municipality is an equal partner within the IMC.

- 1. Leuven & Beyond guarantees the right to culture.** With diverse and accessible cultural activities on offer via the region's cultural centres, museums, public libraries, heritage departments, academies and other municipal players we guarantee culture for everyone in the region, with a firm focus on young people, the elderly and disadvantaged.
- 2. Leuven & Beyond is inclusive in every area.** Diversity is not an aspiration, it's a fact: Leuven & Beyond places great importance on power sharing and real participation, with space for makers and communities.
- 3. Leuven & Beyond puts the public at the centre.** From spectators to co-makers, we strengthen public ownership and seek new forms of cultural experience.
- 4. Leuven & Beyond strengthens social and cultural life** in associations and socio-cultural organizations. More than 2,000 associations are supported with resources and infrastructure, as promoters of a lively, socio-cultural fabric.
- 5. Leuven & Beyond strengthens the arts and heritage sector.** We are developing a powerful cultural ecosystem via support, incentives, infrastructure, communication, networking, and international cooperation.
- 6. Leuven & Beyond creates mental space for culture and creativity,** in particular for young artists and young cultural entrepreneurs. We offer space, guidance, and connections, with particular focus on experimental space and fair pay.
- 7. Leuven & Beyond builds new spaces for culture.** We are providing more and more places for working in and presenting that work, with a focus on sustainability, shared use, and urban and regional distribution.
- 8. Leuven & Beyond takes care of its living heritage** thanks to its dynamic heritage policy. Heritage is part of our daily life. Via digitalization we're making it accessible to a wide local, national, and international public.
- 9. Leuven & Beyond innovates.** We explore fusions between the digital and the physical realm - with art and culture as guides in this new hybrid reality.
- 10. Leuven & Beyond is working on a climate-neutral, circular, and sustainable cultural sector.** Via powerful collaborations we deploy culture as a catalyst for sustainable and socially just changes.

contribution
to the long-
term strategy

Leuven’s candidacy and the broad LOV2030 project are focused on regional cooperation and constitute a strong, substantive lever for developing a structural supra-local cultural programme for Leuven and the reference region of East Brabant. The establishment of the IMC provides the structural foundation for this and aligns its supra-local projects with the themes of LOV2030: Human, Nature, Innovation. It also guarantees sustainable operation, after 2030. As of 2027 the IMC will be structurally funded by the Flemish government by 0.5 million euros per year.

Acquiring the title and jointly developing a broad cultural programme in the region in the run-up to and during the title year 2030 offer new opportunities for social and cultural life in the region and for a major communicative, strategic and economic impact. Former European Capitals of Culture testify to a positive impact on the wider region. We learned from inspiring examples such as Wroclaw2016, Aarhus2017, Leeuwarden2018, Hildesheim2025 and Budweis2028. At the same time we connect to interesting initiatives such as ‘Culture and creativity in rural areas’, part of the recently launched EU initiative Rural Pact Community Platform, that builds on insights from the former IN SITU project.

The collaborations that are being set up within the framework of LOV2030 are opening up additional opportunities to strengthen inclusion, sustainability, and innovation, as well as the regional and European dimensions.

LOV EU ACADEMY

Our **LOV EU Academy**, for instance, aims to enhance the European dimension in culture through knowledge sharing, cooperation and joint learning. The programme is based on two complementary pillars: first, we stimulate the EU reflex among cultural and socio-cultural organizations in Leuven and the surrounding region. Through sessions on European values, policy and funding programmes – the first of which took place in the spring of 2025 – we support them in actively involving Europe in their work. The Academy strengthens the capacity of socio-cultural actors in our region and demonstrates the structural impact of our candidacy on the broader cultural sector. Second, we build sustainable knowledge exchange between (former and future) European Capitals of Culture (ECoCs). Through joint reflection, lessons learned and practical sharing, a learning pathway is created that strengthens the broader ECoC ecosystem. The LOV EU Academy builds on previous capacity-building initiatives and thus translates them into sustainable development within a European framework.

In addition to actively following up on European values and priorities, LOV2030 also monitors ongoing European policy processes in the field of culture. Among other things, we follow the development of the European Cultural Compass, the discussions and decisions of the Council of Ministers, and the priorities of European presidencies in the coming years until 2033. Together with other (former, current and future) European Capitals of Culture (ECoCs), we not only want to share knowledge, but also weigh in on Europe’s future with culture by engaging in key policy discussions.

EUROPEAN CAPITAL OF CULTURE

Over the last few years, we’ve become very aware of how necessary a lever the European Capital of Culture action is to achieving our ambitions. The LOV2030 candidacy works with HumanNature and the three main themes of Human, Nature, and Innovation specifically to enhance social inclusion, sustainability and innovation, and the digitalization of the broad cultural and creative sectors in Leuven & Beyond. By radically focusing on the connection with the region, we bring this network together in a single cultural space, which maximises means, mobility and opportunities. The five Labs (see Q5) that we are developing as a foundation for our artistic and cultural programme, are the pressure points that our candidacy aims to push: democracy, decolonization, sustainable infrastructure, digital transition, and culture & education.

Moreover, taking HumanNature as our starting point and focusing on our need for love and radical connection has enabled us to put in place a number of significant strategic partnerships in the past ten months. Each one of which strengthens the basis of our candidacy, on behalf of all Belgium, when our country celebrates its bicentenary in 2030.

Our bid involves intensive and **extensive cooperation with KU Leuven**. Diverse projects have originated within the university, collaborations have been set up, and knowledge and expertise are shared. Moreover, KU Leuven is also a crucial partner in the areas of communication and community building, involving academics, scientists, students, alumni, and citizens (in a citizen science project among other things). Last but not least, the strategic partnership manifests in logistical, infrastructural, and substantial financial support.

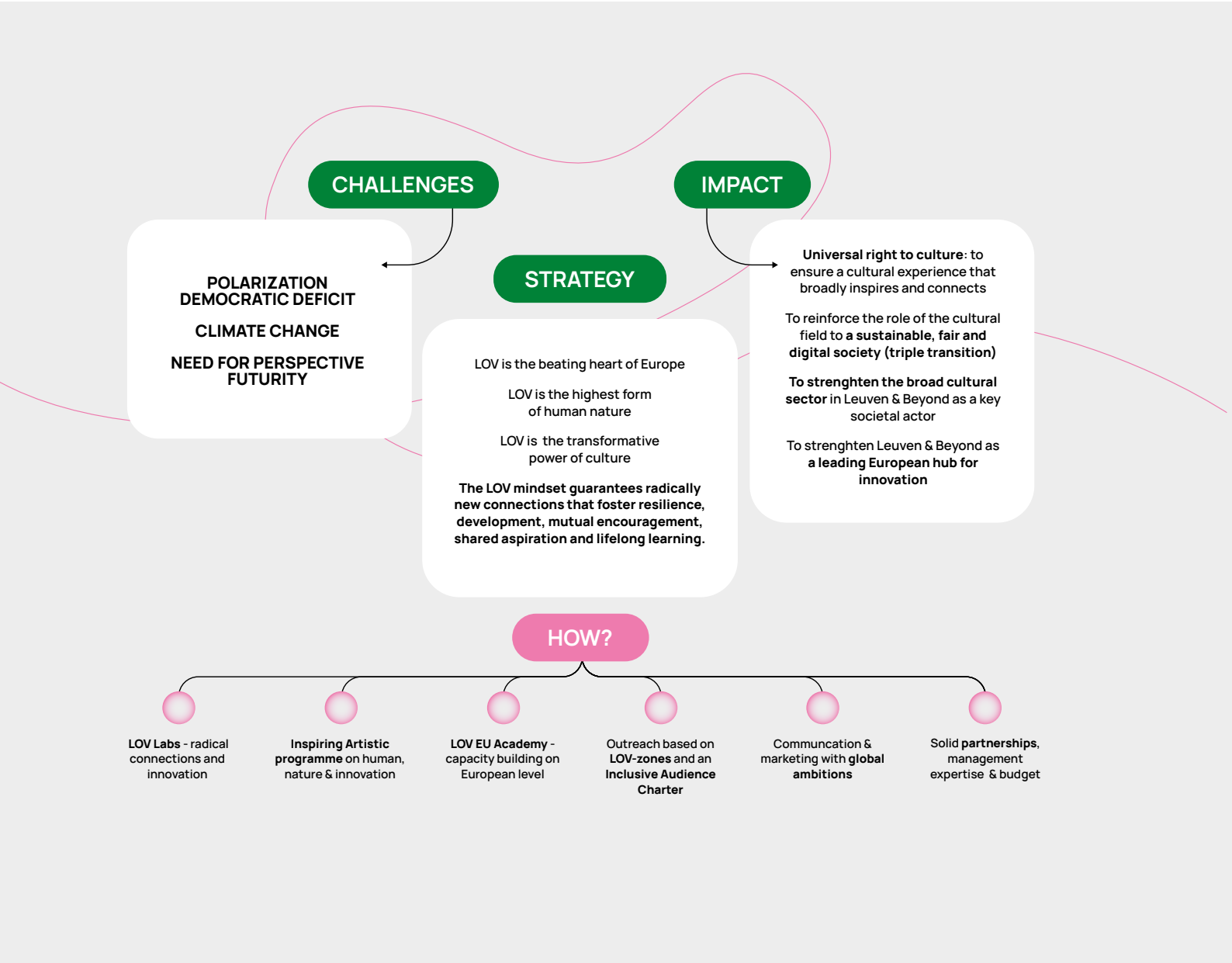
ON BEHALF OF BELGIUM

It’s only a stone’s throw from Leuven yet the border seems so great: with the painful split of the university in 1972 into a Dutch-speaking KU Leuven and a French-speaking **UCLouvain** and the move of the latter to Louvain-la-Neuve, major wounds were inflicted. Today, we hardly know who each other’s politicians, cultural players or athletes are. Yet if we aspire to the title of European Capital of Culture in 2030 on behalf of all Belgium, it seems more than time to rebuild the relationship. And enter into a partnership with **Ottignies/Louvain-la-Neuve**, and the cultural players there.

It was the same idea of connection that prompted us to start discussions with our former fellow-candidates for the ECoC title: **Bruges2030**, **Ghent2030**, and **Kortrijk2030**. Given that the competition was stiff and all three had completed valuable trajectories with main themes that had a fair amount in common, it seemed only right to make connections here too, and to include part of the legacy of our three colleagues in our candidacy.

We’ve also established strategic partnerships with Belgian federal institutions such as the **Belgian National Orchestra** (Brussels) and the **Royal Museum for Central Africa** (Tervuren). In the German-speaking community of Belgium we’ve partnered with the major cultural player, **Theater Agora** (Sankt-Vith).

We’ve pursued our vision of connection with **Namur2030** and **Molenbeek2030** too, putting cooperation before competition in a gentleman’s agreement that whichever city wins the ECoC title, we will jointly develop a programme celebrating Belgium’s bicentenary.



q3 – EXPECTED LONG-TERM IMPACTS

As regards the long-term cultural, social, and economic effects of LOV2030 on our city and region our plans and expectations are essentially unchanged. We have, however, deepened them and defined them in the form of four major impact ambitions. We have specifically reduced these to the core of our narrative and aligned them with our monitoring and evaluation plan. This gives our dossier coherence and brings the requisite depth and consistency.

At the same time, our awareness of what LOV2030 potentially means for Europe has also become more acute. While European values are coming under increasing pressure on the geopolitical stage, on its fortieth anniversary the ECoC action is also entering a new phase. Since for reasons of policy the ECoC initiative is now due for evaluation, and the European Commission is forced to focus on defence and armaments, this is perhaps a pertinent time to recall European values. These values are essential to the foundations of our European society and its future. It is therefore vital to consider the central role that a European Capital of Culture can play in representing, promoting, and implementing these values.

The fortieth anniversary of the title now gives us the chance to be value-driven and forward-focused. Just as the EU has designated Net Zero Mission Cities (a title which, incidentally, Leuven also bears) as integral to its sustainability development goals, perhaps a European Capital of Culture can also be a kind of mission city, **a cultural mission city**, which focuses on the democratic values of the EU, sustainable and future-proof. Can an ECoC once again take on an exemplary function, be a guiding star in a world that is drifting apart?

Leuven is a city of 104,000 inhabitants, in a region in which a total of 600,000 people live. In other words, it’s a city on a human scale. Around half of all Europeans live in a city and region of comparable scale. If we can make the Leuven model a blueprint that is emulated elsewhere in Europe, we can face the future with hope again. Make LOV, not war.

Impact ambition #1: LOV2030 ensures a cultural experience that broadly inspires and connects		
INTENDED OUTCOMES	INDICATORS	DATA SOURCES
Radical connections lead to more diverse cultural participation, locally, regionally & internationally		
More diverse public and international target groups	# participants (city and region; target groups) in active and interactive forms Focus on disadvantaged groups: people with disabilities or special needs, migration background, gender diversity % cultural participants in Leuven & Beyond with an international profile (expats, Erasmus students, international visitors...)	- Participation study cultural centres in Leuven and the region: - Use of UiTPas - Municipal and city monitor - Population survey - Survey International House Leuven
A more diverse representative offering, and more European and international programming	% of activities produced by cross-sectoral collaboration and in co-creation with disadvantaged groups % of activities determined by European/international artists and (cultural) organizations	(Impact) survey cultural sector - Programme monitoring LOV2030 - Survey cultural centres
Stronger geographic distribution and accessibility to what's on offer	% of activities that take place in the region % cultural activities in the public space % language-accessible, wheelchair-accessible, stimulus-free performances	Programme monitoring LOV2030
Radical connections lead to more diverse cultural participation, locally, regionally & internationally		
Strengthening well-being and social cohesion	% of residents who see a positive relationship between cultural participation and well-being % of residents who have a positive attitude towards diversity	- Municipal and city monitor - Citizen science SMILE - Storytelling; narrative reporting
People's resilience increases with regard to social challenges	Strengthened social trust More positive worldview	Outcome harvesting

Impact ambition #3: LOV2030 strenghtens the broad cultural sector in Leuven & Beyond as a key societal actor		
INTENDED OUTCOMES	INDICATORS	DATA SOURCES
The social and economic resilience of organizations and cultural workers increases		
Stronger economic resilience	Entrepreneurial skills in the cultural sector are improved % of EU Academy participants have strengthened their professional competences and network of European contacts	- Survey among artists and cultural organizations - Analysis of allocation of Flemish and European subsidies
Radical connections create more shared resources in sustained networks		
Cultural partnerships in city, regional, and European cultural networks are strengthened. New Governance via LOV2030 network	Mapping of the #, type and duration of partnerships between cultural players from Leuven and the region Enhanced access to European subsidy programmes for cultural actors: # organizations, total amount Evolution in # co-productions with European partners. Development of a long-term strategy for the region	- Compiling a cultural landscape map for Leuven & Beyond - Survey of cultural actors from Leuven and the region (mapping partnerships; perceptions). - Network analysis
The cultural field in Leuven & Beyond takes steps towards climate neutrality	Decrease in CO2 impact of cultural infrastructure and events CO2 impact of the LOV2030 programme	- Energy efficiency toolkit for cultural organizations (infrastructure, events,..) - Carbon footprint calculator

Impact ambition #2: LOV2030 reinforces the role of the cultural field in Leuven & Beyond in the triple transition to a sustainable, fair, and digital society		
INTENDED OUTCOMES	INDICATORS	DATA SOURCES
The cultural field in Leuven & Beyond strengthens its role as a catalyst in the triple transition (development and experiment, visibility) facing our European society		
Structural partner for Leuven 2030 in achieving the Leuven Climate Contract & de Lille-call-to-Action (Eurocities)	# artistic projects that explicitly aim for an ecological impact (directly or indirectly) % participants whose awareness of the ecological transition in our society has been increased	- Survey of participants - Carbon footprint calculator - Survey of participants
Greater role in the pursuit of a just digital transition	% of participants whose awareness of the importance of e-inclusion and digital literacy has been increased	Survey of participants
Greater impact of the cultural sector of the triple transition	Volume of investment in LOV2030 in transition experiments Extent to which participants have gained an increased awareness Learning insights of participants in the five LOV Labs	- Financial reporting LOV2030 - Survey of participants - Reflexive monitoring LOV Labs
The cultural field in Leuven & Beyond is an inclusive space for democratic debate and dialogue on European values and subjects		
Easy-access forum to engage and increase citizens' awareness of the transition to a green, equitable, and digital society	# activities that provide a forum for dialogue with citizens about the transition to a green, equitable, and digital society # participants who want to commit (more) to contributing to a green, equitable, and digital society	- Survey of stakeholders in the five LOV Labs - Storytelling; narrative reporting
The <i>Stadhuis</i> is transformed into a European House for Democracy	# participants in conversations with citizens and exchange programmes extent to which those participants have gained an increased awareness of European values	Survey of participants
The cultural field in Leuven & Beyond plays a groundbreaking role in developing accessible, safe, and inclusive spaces – both physical and digital	# LOV2030 activities in which new digital public spaces for cultural experience are developed # (semi-)public physical and digital spaces in Leuven & Beyond that invest in gaining accessibility certification after LOV2030	- Population survey - Survey cultural actors
Impact ambition #4: LOV2030 strengthens Leuven & Beyond both economically and as a leading hub for innovation 'for all and with all'		
INTENDED OUTCOMES	INDICATORS	DATA SOURCES
LOV2030 enhances regenerative tourism in Leuven & Beyond		
LOV2030 acts as a lever for strengthening the tourist activities on offer in Leuven & Beyond	# overnight stays (multi-day stays) Qualitative growth in the supply of accommodation # tourists who combine visiting Leuven with a visit to the wider region	- Municipal and city monitor - Tourism Flanders & Visit Leuven - Survey of accommodation and other tourist enterprises
Radical connections reinforce Leuven's image as a pioneer in sustainable innovation and transition (innovations for the better and for all)		
International recognition for the investments in new research at the intersection of well-being, culture and nature	# artistic projects linked to research at KU Leuven # collaborations between medical services (Gasthuisberg hospital), faculty of medicine and artists/cultural actors	- Monitoring programme LOV2030 - Stakeholder survey; social network analysis in Cultural Landscape mapping Leuven & Beyond - Data KU Leuven association
LOV2030 ensures stronger cultural connections with and within innovation systems (knowledge institutions, companies, education, governments)		
Cultural and creative actors recognized as valuable innovation partners in the Leuven innovation ecosystem	(Economic and innovation) appreciation for artistic research # cross-sectoral collaborations between knowledge institutions and CCS	- Knowledge partner survey - Enterprise survey (e.g. via Leuven Mindgate); social network analysis - Stakeholder survey

q4 – MONITORING & EVALUATION

Sometimes your impact turns out to be greater than you imagined. Here's an anecdote connected to the artistic excellence of our city. When American pop icon Beyoncé published her videoclip of the number 1 hit *Countdown*, the arts sector in Belgium was dumbstruck. Not only had Beyoncé plagiarized parts of the choreography of Anne Teresa De Keersmaeker's production *Rosas danst Rosas*, even the set design was a clear copy of Henry van de Velde's Technical School in Leuven, which was the original location where the Rosas dancevideo was shot. Plagiarized? Copy? Well, you could also say that both De Keersmaeker and van de Velde just had a major impact on western pop culture. How do you measure that?

VISION

Working with the relevant stakeholders we drew up an ambitious monitoring and evaluation plan that is aimed at accountability, evaluation, and communication, and which is also intended to be a learning and innovative system itself.

We have set our bar high as regards the impact desired. For instance, we aim to sharpen up our vision of desired outcomes and challenge the programme's content: do the various components contribute to achieving the desired outcomes? In that respect, the monitoring plan is consistent with and establishes the link between the Cultural Long-Term Strategy, the objectives of LOV2030, and the general objectives of the ECoC action.

On that basis we identify four major impact domains, which we streamline with the *Guidelines for the Cities' Own Evaluations of the Results* and which we link to existing monitoring systems such as the Municipality/City Monitor, the impact strategy of Event Flanders, and Leuven 2030.

IMPACT AMBITIONS

1. LOV2030 ensures a cultural experience that broadly inspires and connects (universal right to culture)
CLTS: 1, 2, 3, 4 - SDG: 4, 16, 17
2. LOV2030 reinforces the role of the cultural field in Leuven and the region in the transition to a sustainable, fair, and digital society (triple transition)
CLTS: 2, 10 - SDG: 3, 7, 13
3. LOV2030 strenghtens the broad cultural sector in Leuven & Beyond as a key societal actor
CLTS: 5, 6, 7 - SDG: 4, 8, 8
4. LOV2030 strengthens Leuven and the region both economically and as a leading hub for innovation and a laboratory for Europe 'for the better and for all'.
CLTS: 8, 9 - SDG: 8, 9

Monitoring and evaluating a European Capital of Culture is a unique experience for our city and stakeholders. Hence, we aim to make it **a collective learning process and a source of capacity building**. This is why we collaborate with regional and local stakeholders with complementary expertise and involve citizens in the M&E via innovative methodologies that we embed in KU Leuven's broader study areas (Cultural Studies, Innovation Management, Citizen Science). We will not only share the results of our impact measurement but also the methodology we've developed and the experience we've gained from it.

WHO WILL CARRY OUT THE EVALUATION?

A consortium of research partners and stakeholders, with complementary expertise, will carry out the evaluation.

Coordination

- LOV2030 team (practical coordination, data collection)
- IDEA Consult (independent content coordination, extensive experience in evaluation and impact measurement within various social domains, including culture, economy, innovation policy)

Academic research partners

- KU Leuven / ECOOM/STORE (Prof. Bart van Looy) > expertise in monitoring innovation processes, IP (Collaboration with students)
- KU Leuven / Cultural Studies (Prof. Fred Truyen) (Collaboration with students) > expertise monitoring cultural statistics
- AMS, Antwerp Management School (Prof. Bart Cambré and Prof. Sofie Jacobs) > expertise in monitoring governance in organizational networks (Collaboration with students)

Local/regional stakeholders

- City of Leuven > alignment of long-term strategy, existing systems for monitoring and data collection
- IMC > alignment of long-term strategy region
- KU[N]ST Leuven > experience in the field of impact events
- Visit Flemish Brabant > experience in the field of impact events
- Visit Leuven > experience in the field of impact events
- Leuven 2030 > impact measurement climate transition

Stakeholders in Flemish cultural and event policy

- Event Flanders > expertise in relation to impact studies, co-financing
- OP/TIL > expertise in the area of regional impact

Sounding board group with former and future ECoCs (via Culture Next): participation in the SDG Lab (Polyloop / Whitelabel AI).

OBJECTIVES AND MILESTONES

Phase 1 – Bid book selection (2024-2025)

- Stakeholder trajectory with local and regional stakeholders and academic partners
- Development of substantive framework with intended cultural, social, and economic outcomes
- Outline of M&E process

Phase 2 – Monitoring phase (2025-2029)

- **2025-2026:** start-up (immediately after selection)
 - Final design M&E approach: agreements with partners, consolidation of objectives framework in consultation with panel, refinement of indicator set, design of strategy for qualitative and quantitative data collection, set up of a monitoring platform, and management and governance of monitoring, with bearing stakeholder involvement in mind
 - Baseline study: data collection, analysis, and publication of Baseline study
 - Permanent data collection in respect of indicators
 - Real-time dashboard for operational monitoring
 - Alignment with the Culture Next Framework (CNF) indicators
- **2028:**
 - *Body & Soul Festival* as an important interim milestone to further refine the LOV2030 M&E process
 - Analysis report with interim thematic analyses and public presentation
- **2026-2029:** setting up of a permanent learning environment, local and European (via Culture Next), with digital platform, real-time dashboards, and internal feedback loops
- **Biennial progress reports** (2027, 2029) and monitoring discussion with panel

Phase 3 – Title year (2030)

- Insight into the impact of the ECoC title and the LOV2030 programme on the city, region, and residents
- Data collection against the background of ECoC objectives, with attention to
 - Activity participation
 - Audience diversity
 - Media coverage
 - Artists' feedback
 - Checking how far the set objectives have been achieved
- Milestones:
 - Monitoring indicators during peak moments of the ECoC programme.
 - Moments for reflection and intervision with stakeholders during the ECoC programme

Phase 4 – Evaluation phase (2031)

- Substantiated and transparent reporting on output and impact of LOV2030, in light of the set objectives and bearing in mind unexpected outcomes
- Milestones:
 - Ex-post evaluation
 - Final LOV2030 evaluation report to European bodies
 - Public sharing of all insights via various communication channels
 - Concluding conference: 'Share the LOV'

A number of data are continuously updated (such as indicators related to programme development: this can be done via a real-time dashboard. Monitoring of the learning process can be done via reflexive monitoring of the Labs). Other forms of data-gathering and analysis are done at intervals.

- Baseline study (including baseline measurement population screening, 360° stakeholder survey, and Cultural Landscape mapping Leuven & Beyond) (2026)
- Interim analysis report (first update baseline study, population screening, interim 360° stakeholder survey, and regional network mapping (2028)
- Final evaluation report in 2031
- Data research, including population screening and 360° stakeholder survey ex-post, diverse data sources

We maintain a biennial rhythm, the idea being that these analyses can not only supplement the biennial progress reports (2027, 2029) and the monitoring discussion with the Panel, but also the final post-2030 evaluation report.



BASELINE STUDIES & SURVEYS

- Cultural landscape mapping Leuven & Beyond (including system analysis from cultural actors and their inter-relationships (region, Europe), a quantitative analysis of the distribution of cultural activities (different functions) and infrastructure (actual and potential use for cultural activities), sources of income
- Flemish Government survey creatives and cultural workers: socio-economic position, trust and career prospects
- Information from secondary data sources: Event Flanders (on tourism), Municipal/City Monitor (inter alia on participation in culture, feelings about cultural activities on offer, etc.), Flemish Department of Culture, Youth and Media (DCYM) subsidy database, etc.
- Audience research: participation in mapping, background of participants, impact of participation in activities with attention to cultural, social, and economic outcomes
- Population survey: awareness of ECoC, LOV2030, perceptions of Europe
- Thematic study on cultural research: dance heritage, STEAM... cf. LUCA, School of arts, artistic study
- Alignment with the indicators of the SDG Lab (Culture Next)



HOW WILL YOU DEFINE ‘SUCCESS’?

The four impact ambitions that we outlined above are clear and in line with the Cultural Long-Term Strategy of the city and region. Moreover, **the connection between Leuven and the region** is a first major indicator of success: will a new, unified cultural space have emerged in 2030? One that is jointly shaped by citizens, artists, cultural workers, and policy makers?

Culture is certainly **a catalyst for a sustainable and caring region**. With LOV2030 we are also trying to make that relation reciprocal, in which culture is not only instrumentalized to serve society, but where society also treats its artists and cultural workers with care.

Yet, success is not only a matter of measurable goals, success is not only expressed in figures. Nor only in visitor numbers, employment, or turnover.

Success has to do with **a deeper feeling**. What will we fundamentally have achieved? Has Leuven & Beyond become a better place? Will our idea of living together, of radically new connections, of LOV have inspired citizens and policy makers from all over Europe? Do our visitors go home with a sense of fulfilment? With a new perspective on humanitarian and democratic values, with the intention of living more sustainably, at one with the nature around us? Inspired to think about future-proofing and innovation? None of that can be easily measured. But 2030 is certainly an important step in that direction.

Moreover, with KU Leuven we’re setting up a citizen science project, called SMILE (see Q16), that will monitor peoples’ **well-being** in their environment. And, via reflexive monitoring, we’re also aiming to integrate new and innovative methods.

DISSEMINATION OF THE RESULTS

We will share our findings and results at meetings and events of Culture Next and other relevant network organizations such as Culture Action Europe, UNeECC, ENCC, IETM.

The results will be disseminated through the publication of the baseline studies, the progress reports, and the final evaluation report. The studies and reports will be published in print and online and shared with the relevant authorities, the broader cultural sector, finance providers and other stakeholders involved, and the general public. In addition the academic partners in the M&E team will deliver academic papers and conferences.

In 2031 we plan to hold a concluding conference under the title of ‘Share the LOV’.



cultural and artistic programme

q5 - ARTISTIC VISION AND STRATEGY FOR THE CULTURAL PROGRAMME AND CHANGES SINCE PRE-SELECTION

VISION

With HumanNature we examine the ways in which we can use our humanness to fight against increasing polarization and rapidly advancing climate change. The growing distance between citizens and political institutions is reinforced today by ever increasing social fragmentation and ideological fault lines, in everyday life, both offline and online. At the same time, the impact of human intervention on ecosystems is accelerating worldwide, resulting in rising temperatures, a loss of biodiversity, and ecological instability: forest fires, floods, melting glaciers. Earthquakes: both on the democratic and the ecological front.

The world is changing before our eyes and the future is uncertain. Who are we as human beings? What is our HumanNature? What are our values? How do we live together? What behavioural change is needed? While outside the world is unravelling at a rapid pace, LOV2030 opts for radical connections. For we are absolutely certain that the solution lies in ourselves, humanity, and in our relationship with our environment.

We see culture as the engine of imagination. As a way to share new narratives, to make radically new connections and thus create new worlds. 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 can be different. How do we see the future of Leuven & Beyond? What do we pass on to future generations?

What is it to be human, with humanity's good and bad sides, its instincts for survival and death, its eros and thanatos? HumanNature demonstrates our full awareness that as human beings we are always one with the universe – Leuven's George Lemaître's Big Bang from the first bid book, remember? – but that awareness also means that we question our dominant position.

Three major themes ensue: human, nature, and innovation, consistently linked to the past, present, and future of our city, our region, and Europe. These themes are not strictly separate entities, of course, but constantly flow in and out of each other.

In broad outline, our artistic vision remains the same as last year; there are no significant changes to the concept. However, we have strengthened and sharpened up our programme lines. We have sought balance and deepened our conceptual lines: what are our key concepts? What are our keywords? We strived for coherence across human, nature, and innovation:

- *Becoming human*: what does it mean to be human in times of climate change, war, and polarization? We must constantly defend our humanity because it turns out not to be a given. Human-being – being human – is a verb, an action, a task. We need a healthy ecosystem to be fully human, and to achieve that, democracy and ecology are both prerequisite.
- *Being nature*: we are part of nature. We realise that we're not standing at the top of the pyramid. We are interdependent, mutually reliant on and connected to each other, to the soil, the plants, the animals, and the biosphere. We share this earth.
- *Innovation*: we sharpen up the line by opening up to innovative methodologies. Always in the service of HumanNature. For the better and for all.

In the Human section we have made a number of changes. The Place of Birth programme line has been renamed *Plays of Birth*, reflecting a more playful approach to the subject and beyond the exclusionary undertone that some associate with questions about their place of birth. Rather, we're curious about where people's roots lie, or where their tree is (to quote a Ugandan proverb), about the route their life has taken and what stories that has produced. Roots and routes, but foremost: rooting.

We also delve deeper into the legacy of humanism and question its meaning for today. What is the impact of the binary logic that entered out thinking via humanism? Body and mind, culture and nature? And what do we take with us into the future?

We introduced significant changes in the Nature section, adding a line and sharpening up the content. *Down to Earth* questions how we treat our planet and the riches concealed within it. *Crossroads* takes us not only to physical intersections along slow roads, but also to mental meeting places and crossovers. *Listening to the Forest* explores the wisdom hidden in nature and what we can learn from it to improve life on this planet.

We have also distinguished three programme lines in the Innovation section. With MetalOV we have significantly developed the digital innovation line (as recommended by the Expert Panel in the pre-selection report). *Past Forward* is the new title for everything that makes our cultural heritage accessible in an innovative way (see Q8).

Thus, each of the three sections has three programme lines, which makes the entire structure clearer.

As we stressed in regard to the Cultural Long-Term Strategy, we also aim to use our title year to bring about sustainable change in the cultural sector in Leuven & Beyond. We strive for a radical democratization of the sector, in which everyone gets the room to make their voices heard.

STRATEGY

Continuing the work

We are continuing the bottom-up strategy set out in the first bid book. During the pre-selection phase we involved our Dreamers2030, the broad cultural sector, civil society, and civil servants from Leuven & Beyond. We talked with our partners from Leuven 2030, Leuven MindGate, Samen Onderwijs Maken (SOM), Leuven Research & Development and KU Leuven and consulted with other ECoC cities. We issued an open call for Leuveners and residents of the region to submit ideas for community projects that tie in with the various programme lines in LOV2030. We received no fewer than 137 proposals, which we assessed with the Dreamers and an international panel of ECoC experts. Finally, we arrived at the 36 projects that were presented in the first bid book.

During the selection phase, we appointed two skilled curators with broad international experience, who assisted the intendants in developing the programme. They engaged in critical discussions with the cultural partners in Leuven & Beyond and proposed new projects.

The new programme delves deeper into European values, shared European culture, and the diversity of cultures in Europe. We involve both local and international artists and partners. Fifty per cent of the projects are taking place in the region, and fifty per cent in the city, always with an eye to our shared heritage, projects in public spaces, and accessibility.

Under the heading *Artist Forward*, we give artists space to find new pressure points and to make radically new connections. If we say that art enables us to reach beyond reality, we must also reserve space for future projects that will be developed by artists who may not yet be on our radar. We have set aside a special budget for this, to allow for development in the years ahead.

We start from our local strengths: our human and cultural capital, our focus on the environment and sustainability, and our excellence in nurturing an innovative ecosystem: human, nature and innovation. These three elements are wound around each other in our DNA, like a triple helix. Each theme is explored further in different programme lines. We are always **looking for the entanglements and tensions between human and nature, between innovation and human, between nature and innovation**. In this way, we make radically new connections. Radical, in the sense that we go to the *radix* or root, we go to the essence. Radical, too, because we look beyond the norm, beyond the median, beyond what is current. That is essential, it takes courage and is never finished.

Deepening and sustaining the work: the LOV Labs

‘If you do what you always did, you’ll get what you always got.’ You may recall this key sentence from our first bid book. If we want to bring about fundamental change, if we want to generate impact and redistribute power and resources, we also need to adapt our tactics and strategies. Radically new connections should not just be fine words in a beautiful bid book: hands must be put to the plough, the field must be turned over.

To tackle this challenge fundamentally and structurally over the next five years, each Lab starts from a clear need, an urgent social and cultural challenge, and a specific ambition. It is essentially a collaboration between social organizations, cultural institutions, education and civil society, bringing together citizens from across different sectors. Each Lab consists of circa 10 people from relevant sectors, 1 European expert and 1 PhD-researcher. Within the LOV team there will be one curator to oversee all the Labs.

The Labs are the backbone of the artistic and cultural programme of LOV2030. The results of the Labs will feed into the artistic programme and outreach. They are co-funded by LOV2030 and the various participating partner organizations, so that ownership, autonomy, and responsibility are also translated financially. Participating artists and citizens are fairly compensated.

The LOV Labs work according to the following principles:

- **Working in process-based ways:** the Labs are given the time (2025–2030) and resources to work towards sustainable and structural change.
- **Learning together:** the Labs are processes of learning by doing. They leave room for experiment, unexpected twists, and even failure.
- **Pursuing pattern change:** the labs create new relationships and other ways of working together, aiming at redistribution of power.
- **Developing future skills:** by taking part in the Lab process, participants develop skills to deal with the complexities and uncertainties of the future. Everyone is a co-experimenter.

Each of the 5 Labs focuses on a specific pressure point:

1. DEMOCRACY

How to make institutions more democratic and inclusive, giving people from all layers of society a voice in shaping the sociocultural field?

Key Partners: A Soul for Europe (EU), European Cultural Foundation, Antwerp Research Institute for Arts, Culture Commons Quest Office, Erat vzw, Future Generation Studio, Stadhuis - European House for Democracy, Hannah Arendt Network, Performing Arts Site, Publiq, U Antwerpen, Stiftung Zukunft Berlin (DE)

2. DECOLONIZATION

How to translate decolonization into programming, partnerships and methods that challenge power asymmetries?

Key Partners: Avansa East Brabant, BURn, Eurocities (EU), Fabota, KADOC (KU Leuven), Publiq, Royal Museum for Central Africa, TRILL

3. SUSTAINABLE INFRASTRUCTURE

What kind of new (social, artistic, digital, and physical) infrastructures are needed to make sustainable, inclusive, and interregional collaborations possible?

Key Partners: Culture and creativity in rural areas platform via ENCC (EU), Department of Architecture (KU Leuven), Flemish Government Architect, IMC, KU Leuven Engage, Leuven 2030, Miss Miyagi, Pulse, shift, Trans Europe Halles (EU), Warm Alarm (30CC)

4. DIGITAL TRANSITION

What role can art and culture play in digital transition on a local, regional and (inter)national level?

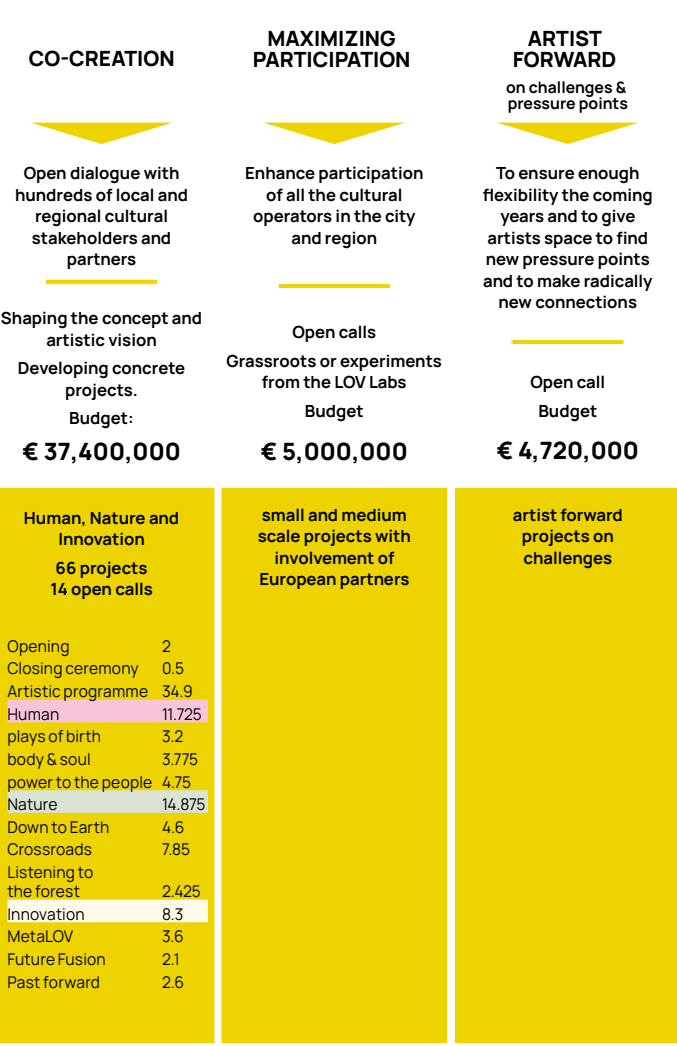
Key Partners: Cultural Studies Research Group (KU Leuven), Digi-punten, imec, Innovation:Lab Utrecht (NL), Hub C, Leuven MindGate, M Leuven, Neighbourhood Dynamics Department City of Leuven, Prof. Fred Truyen, shift, Speerpuntcluster Digitale Beleving Vlaanderen

5. CULTURE & EDUCATION

How can artistic organizations and schools work together to develop students’ future skills? How to move beyond formal education towards a broad mediation approach that engages and connects with all audiences?

Key Partners: CNoL, EduCULT (AT), fABULEUS, Het nieuwstedelijk, KU Leuven, SOM, Stad & Architectuur, STUK, UCLL

BUILDING THE LOV2030 PROGRAMME



q7 - SELECTION OF EVENTS & ACTIVITIES FOR THE CULTURAL PROGRAMME IN THE TITLE YEAR

For the shaping of curated projects in this second bid book the artistic team consisted of the intendants and two passionate curators with European experience in large-scale projects. Together they had deep discussions with professional arts organizations in Leuven & Beyond with a view to co-creatively arriving at a curated programme. They joined forces with our Project manager, our Regions and European Relations officer, our LOV EU Academy coordinator, our Outreach coordinator and several European experts (and former ECoC directors).

Every project in this bid book has a local stakeholder (often a professional arts organization or a knowledge institution) as lead partner: this guarantees professionalism and close involvement in the realization of the programme.

With the Labs as the backbone of our project and the nine programme lines in Human, Nature, and Innovation we have valuable tools to make impactful choices. Radically new connections and radical inclusion are paramount in that process.

The artistic team will take learning and inspiration from the Labs as they curate the programme further. They will not be sidestepping the idea of love as an inconvenience: loving also means that you're being wide open to difficult and confrontational conversations, that you care about people and things, even when there's nothing in it for you. So, there is a particular focus on a number of sore points in our collective memory. You need only think of Belgium's colonial heritage,

q6 – CULTURAL AND ARTISTIC PROGRAMME AND STRUCTURE

In 2030 we open up Leuven – not by unlocking a single door but by opening dozens of gates. Gateways to the city, to the region, to the world.

The Grand Opening

The Grand Opening of LOV2030 will be an unprecedented, multi-layered opening party for tens of thousands of visitors from Leuven, the region and Europe. Call it a LOV parade!

FIRST: THE GATES

Each municipality from Leuven & Beyond will bring together local associations, artists, and schools, to build its own artistic gateway to the city. Thus the existing entry points into Leuven, such as Tiensepoort (Tienen Gate) and Tervuursepoort (Tervuren Gate), will have their own temporary landmarks. We will also invite our colleagues from Namur and Molenbeek to landmark the centuries-old disappeared Naamsepoort (Namur Gate) and Brusselsepoort (Brussels Gate)! Not to mention the international gates created by the various communities in the region: the Eritrean Gate, the Kurdish Gate, the Brazilian Gate... Leuven & Beyond presents itself as a city and a region without borders, connected to its surroundings and to the world. Akwaaba. You belong here.

the relationship between Leuven and the region, the language struggles in the sixties (Leuven Flemish! Walloons Out! as the slogans read, turning against a bourgeois Francophonie). The projects in this second bid book indicate the direction of the programme in the title year. Numerous other projects, both large and small, will be developed over the next four years.

In the region, the Inter-Municipal Cooperation (IMC) will initiate more HumanNature projects that are based on the region's strengths: the socio-cultural field, its nature, its heritage and innovation. We turn a searching eye on the difference between city and countryside. We don't have to hide that, by naming the difference we can explore and strengthen the relationships and the mutual links. Some municipalities finance their own projects, others co-produce and pool money, manpower, and logistics. **The IMC sets up projects with all the participating municipalities. LOV2030 and the province of Flemish Brabant support, finance or co-finance.**

The total artistic budget amounts to €47.12 million, of which we have already allocated 80% to projects. This leaves €9.72 million reserved for future projects and applications, which originate from grassroots in civil society, from the Labs, or with individual artists (under the Artist Forward header). We provide project budgets and microgrants, depending on what's required. We have already defined 14 projects that will issue an open call for European artists. That is a lot. Each open call will be coordinated by the lead partner of the respective project, in close collaboration with the LOV2030 team. This ensures professionalism and efficacy. The selection of the different artists will be in line with the concept and values of LOV2030 and our HumanNature programme, with the principle of radical new connections and with the LOV Charter on Ecological Art Practice (see p. 37) and the LOV Inclusive Audience Charter (see p. 74).

THEN: THE REGION'S JOYOUS ENTRY

In the early morning, colourful processions leave every town and village and head for Leuven. What was once a medieval royal ritual is now turned around: it's not the monarch who enters the city – it's the people. What follows is an eight-kilometre-long LOV parade that culminates on the Leuven ring road: a living garland of dancers, giants, choirs, brass bands, schoolkids, circus artists, Leuven's waacking crew, heritage groups, fashion shows, and student protest. A procession of imagination, polyphony and radically new connections.

NEXT: THE CLIMAX ON LADEUZEPLEIN

Beneath the carillon tower of the university library, a total spectacle of dance, circus, music and light bursts forth. Think of the Belgian circus tradition meeting the Palestinian circus school. A LOV song composed by our seniors. Electronic music beside polyphony. Anne Teresa De Keersmaeker next to Selah Sue, Praga Khan and Walter Verdin, and a breathtaking light landscape.

AND AFTER ALL THAT... THE REAL THING BEGINS

After the official opening, the party spreads across various municipalities in the region. We build unique stages in unexpected places: roofs, abbeys, forests, squares, industrial relics. Each location has its own atmosphere: classical, electronic, experimental, folk. With a smart mobility plan along our crossroads, we connect people with places and places with each other. Human. Nature. And innovation.

FROM GATE TO PARADE, FROM SQUARE TO STAGE: THE FUTURE IS OPENED UP

LOV2030 starts with a party that throws the city open. For the region. For the world. For everyone who wants to join.

Section	Programme line	Opening Ceremony
human	Plays of Birth	Here We Are Now
		You Belong Here
		Pigeon People
		Singing Towers
		Aloha, Damiaan!
		Humanism Today
		A Tale of Two Cities: LOV-la-Neuve
		Lovanium
	Body & Soul	Body & Soul Festival
		Vesalius Unseen
		Mindblowing
		Living Room Live
		Smells Like Teen Spirit
		Paint It, Black
		Dance Dance Revolution
		The Night is Young
		Can You Hear the People Sing?
		Outside the CIRKL
		Dirty Dancing
	Power to the People	In the Neighbourhood
		Stadhuis - European House for Democracy
		Erasmus 65+
		The World's Smallest Queer Museum
		Sisters Doin' It for Themselves
		The Benefit of the Doubt
		Cultivating Dreams in the Rural
		Hip Hop House
		Book by Book
	Down to Earth	Mercator Takeover
		Bunker Ecologies
		Mine. Mind. Museum
		Decolonizing Art Déco
		Save our Soils
		A Hill Called Herman
		Mundo Abrigo
		How to Build a Glacier?
		Earthshakers
	Listening to the forest	30 Ways to LOV
		And they came to the river. And they came from the road
		Take me to Church
		Let's Eat! Biennial of Future Food Cultures
		Toxic Beauty
		Cemeteries of the Future
	Crossroads	To the Roots
		Hear Here
		Master in Disaster
		Starry Nights, Starring Nature!
		The Word for World is Forest
nature	MetaLOV	Hybrid LOV
		Welcome to the Demosphere
		First Light
		The Fantastic Institute for Digital Fabulation
	Future Fusion	Future Generations Studio
		Mutual Expectations
		Performing Arts Site (PAS)
		Bee Europe - Pollinator Pathmaker
		Molenbeek for LOV
	PastForward	and& festival
		Alamire XR Studio
		Dancelab Experience Centre
		LOV Dances: Stories to Remember
		Shakespeare is Dead
		Unmuted: Decolonizing Archives with AI
		ECHO - The European Cinematic Heritage Odyssey
		Kweikersparade
		Afrotronix - Sounding the Future
innovation		

human

We're born, grow up, go to school, fall in love, work, eat, party, dance. We live. And in the end, we also die. Who are we as human beings? What is our HumanNature? What are our values? How do we view the world? How do we describe it and how do we imagine it? In Leuven we've been asking these questions since the time of the humanists. What are the perspectives we see and how do we share them with each other? How do we live together? What do we experience together?

Plays of Birth

UZ Leuven is one of the largest and most innovative hospitals in the world. It attracts expectant mums from all over the world. More babies are born here than anywhere else in Belgium. All those children will soon have Leuven as place of birth on their passport or identity card. Where you're born affects your identity, the person you become. It's something you take with you for the rest of your life. Not all of these new Leuveners stay here: they fan out and so take a little bit of Leuven with them wherever they go. Who are these children? Where are they heading? What's their story?

It's not one-way traffic, for Leuven is also home to 171 different nationalities. That's a lot. We see that host of origins as an inspiring asset. What cultures, traditions and stories do people bring with them from their birthplace to their new home? What brings them here?

Yet, *Plays of Birth* is more about rooting than your roots or routes. When someone asks about your roots you'll all too likely end up talking about nationality. Conversely, your routes seem to turn into a cosmo-

politan cliché because of the emphasis on where you've travelled. No, to us rooting seems more correct: where do we find a place to come home to, even if only for a while? How do students and researchers from all over the world ground themselves in Leuven? A season, a semester, and they're gone again, like migratory birds heading south.

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 like imec, new ideas are born in Leuven every day.

The *Plays of Birth* programme line positions Leuven in the world as a welcoming city. We bring together projects that foster cultural diversity, intercultural dialogue, and greater mutual understanding between European citizens.

Budget *Plays of Birth*: € 3,200,000

HERE WE ARE NOW

STORYTELLING, PODWALKS, SHORT FILM, COMMUNITY ARTS, REGION

The residents of Leuven & Beyond welcome you

Akwaaba artist forward

Akwaaba means welcome in the language of Ghanaian filmmaker **Anthony Nti**. He and his camera travel through Leuven & Beyond for a year, interviewing people of multifarious backgrounds. They welcome you in their daily setting, at home, at work, at school, and they share a wish, a poem, a recipe, a song. On the other side of the world Leuvenites also have their say. You'll see the short films in small cinematic booths across the city and region, putting on a VR headset that gives you a 360° peek into an ordinary day of these extraordinary Leuveners.

1,001 Stories

Did you know that Eritrean road racing cyclist Biniam Girmay lives in Leuven? Or, that up until their election, the mayor of Tokyo and the Congolese president lived in Kessel-Lo? War refugees and leading scientists both find a new home here. Leuven is home to thousands of people with thousands of different birthplaces. What's their story? How did they end up in Leuven and the region? What did they bring with them from their birthplace? What have they found in Leuven? Love? A job? Freedom? Over the course of a year, 1,001 Leuveners, some of whom have been here for a while and others who have just arrived, invite you to coffee bars and bookstores throughout the region and share their story: international artists, scientists, athletes, refugees, fortune seekers, cleaners, cooks, mothers and fathers.

From Braem to Beel

In Sint-Maartensdal (designed by architect Renaat Braem) and the Balk van Beel (designed by Stéphane Beel Architects), two residential areas a stone's throw from each other, people live very close to each other around **shared public spaces** that no group can claim for themselves. Within a single block you'll find very diverse forms of coexistence. This truly compels residents to get along. You simply can't pretend that the whole world looks like you and your family. Radical living together, thus. In co-creation with the residents, the social-artistic theatre company **Cie. Tartaren** is developing two audio-walks in the hundred languages spoken in both residential areas. Written, played, and recorded by the residents themselves, the podwalks show us how the architectural concepts of Braem and Beel translate into a shared everyday life.

Leuven Lens

Each year the Leuven Short Film Festival awards an international prize for the most outstanding short film. In 2030 the festival invites previous winners to make a short film about Leuven & Beyond. During a three-month residency, European filmmakers come together in Leuven. Each of them explores Leuven & Beyond from the point of view of their own background and culture, then makes **a short film with a unique European perspective**. Though maybe confrontational, the films will help Leuveners to know themselves better. For European audiences, this will be a fresh and intriguing look at a lesser-known city. The films will premiere at the Leuven Short Film Festival 2030. After that, these Leuven-European stories will work their way through the many European (short) film festivals, keeping Leuven in the spotlight beyond 2030.

Beats of LOV

What do Leuveners’ favourite places sound like? Do you recog- nize the music of everyday life? What do buskers play; which songs come floating through Leuveners’ windows? *Beats of LOV* makes ‘sound walks’ that explore the everyday sounds and music of our city and region. *Beats of LOV* invites you to discover places in Leuven & Beyond through the ears of people who have a special connection to them. They challenge us to pause in places we’d normally pass by and to listen in a completely different way. **Matrix, centre for con- tem- porary music** collaborates with different community groups – from neighbourhood associations and ethnically diverse organizations to youth centres and children’s groups – to create soundwalks that truly reflect the diversity of Leuven & Beyond, transforming local stories into immersive auditory experiences in unexpected neighbourhoods, far beyond the tourist hotspots.

BE Cie. Tartaren, Cinema ZED, City of Leuven (City Archives, Dalton Distribution, Diversity Department, Economy Department, Cyborn, Elevated Minds, Heritage Department, Neighbourhood Dynamics Department & Public Library de Bib Leuven), Fonk vzw, KU Leuven, Matrix – Centre for Contemporary Music, Radio Scorpio, Regional cultural centres and libraries, ROB (local television), Rondini, senior citizen councils Leuven & Beyond, Welfare Services City of Leuven (OCMW)
INT Centre for Cultural Management Lviv (UA), Cork International Film Festival (IE), Curtas Vila do Conde (PT), FEST - Federation for European Storytelling (EU), Filmfest Dresden (DE), Go Short (NL), Grand Duchy of Luxembourg (LU), Internationale Kurzfilmtage Winterthur (CH), Katowice2027(PL), Kurzfilm Festival Hamburg (DE), Larnaca2030 (CY), Lemesos2030 (CY), Magic Carpets (EU), Netzwerk Kultur & Heimat Hildesheimer Land e.V. (DE), Odense International Film Festival (DK), Oulu2026 (FI), Skopje2028 (MK), Tampere Film Festival (FI), Uppsala Kortfilmfestival (SE), Uppsala2029 (SE), Vienna Shorts (AT), ZINEBI – International Festival of Documentary & Short Film of Bilbao (ES)
CLTS 1, 2, 3, 4
BUDGET €€

YOU BELONG HERE

FESTIVAL, MULTIMEDIA, REGION

Exploring the aesthetics and politics of belonging, empathy, and the unknown

You Belong Here takes a close look at the human condition and what it means to desire, to belong, and to feel welcome on earth in 2030. The exhibition includes works by 40 international artists, a third being newly commissioned. In order to stay up to date with what is happening in art and society, the list of artists will not be announced until 2028, but the work of **Oliver Beer, Banu Cennetoğlu, Eglé Budvytyté**, and **Iván Argote** is certainly a guideline for the project’s development. The international partners will also be confirmed at a later stage. More than a single static exhibition, the festival also includes a series of films, lectures, workshops, performances and concerts in Leuven & Beyond.

Two public installations precede the opening in February 2030. In the spring of 2026, **Tavares Strachen’s** large neon installation *You Belong Here* will welcome visitors as they come out of the train station and into the city. The work raises the question of what it means to belong somewhere. The answers will feed into the development of the exhibi- tion project.

LEAD STUK - House for Dance, Image & Sound
BE Cas-co, Fonk vzw, KU Leuven, M Leuven
CLTS 2, 5
BUDGET €€€



PIGEON PEOPLE artist forward

EXPO, MULTIMEDIA, IMMATERIAL HERITAGE, REGION

A poetic investigation into pigeon racing as an intergenerational and cross-cultural practice on migration, memory and alternative communication

If you cross Belgium by train you’re bound to get a glimpse of the typical Belgian *koterij*: lean-tos, garden sheds, and, very often, pigeon lofts. ‘I love my pigeon loft so much’ – goes an all-time classic Flemish folk song. Pigeon racing is deeply ingrained in our DNA. We are pigeon people.

However, we are not alone. Pigeons have been domesticated throughout Europe and Africa for their remarkable sense of direc- tion, traversing diverse cultural and geographical contexts as carriers of messages and, on occasion, peace. More recently, pigeon racing has become a trending hobby around the world, from Chinese busi- nessmen to young urbanites in Dakar. Far from a nostalgic pastime, it’s a cosmopolitan, dynamic subculture.

With *Pigeon People* **Younes Baba-Ali** explores this rich subculture, defining pigeons not as a racing champion, but as artists. Baba-Ali works with technologies, objects, sound, video, and photography and often exhibits in unusual places, as he’s doing now in the world-fa- mous Herbots Loft.

If pigeon racing is a world-wide sport, Herbots pigeon loft in Zout- leeuw is its beating heart. Four generations of the pigeon fanciers have developed the Herbots loft into one of the oldest and most respected pigeon lofts in the world, a leading centre for enthusiasts of pigeon racing from all over the world.

Baba-Ali sets up his loft at Herbots, training his pigeons to become sound and movement artists. Like dolphins in the water, pigeons fly around with mock manoeuvres and staccato wing beats. The flight of the birds, which are equipped with a tracking chip, is recorded by the artist (GPS coordinates and flight dynamics) and used to generate sound compositions. In this way, Baba-Ali derives sound, clouds and poetry from the pigeons.

LEAD Herbots, Werktank
BE KU Leuven, Linter, Lubbeek, M Leuven, Royal Belgian Pigeon Fanciers’ Federation, Zoutleeuw
INT Afrikadaa (SN), Budweis2028 (CZ), Dakar City Hall (SN), Department of Arts and Culture Munich (DE), Ettijahat (LB), EuroCITIES (EU), European Pigeon Website (EU), Pioneer Works Brooklyn (US), Selebe Yoon Gallery (SN)
CLTS 2, 8, 9
BUDGET €

SINGING TOWERS

MUSIC, OPEN AIR, INTERCULTURAL DIALOGUE, COMMUNITY ARTS, REGION

A transnational carillon project that revitalizes a historic musical heritage through collective composition and intercultural encounters

In Leuven & Beyond, carillon music rings through the city centre several times a week. After Amsterdam, Leuven has the highest number of ‘singing towers’ in the world. In the region, Aarschot, Tienen, Diest, Scherpenheuvel, and Zoutleeuw all still have their historic carillons. Deeply Flemish in origin, yet at the same time the most inclusive musical instrument you can imagine: its music reaches everyone in the area.

Leuven has two Peace Carillons, both of which commemorate the destruction of the city and its University Library during WWI. The values of peace, freedom, and humanity are engraved on those carillons. Together with diverse cultural communities we are building a new carillon repertoire, so that we get to know each other’s music. The score for *Singing Towers* will be sent to carillonneurs worldwide.

During summer concerts there will be performances by carillonneurs from Spain, Portugal, Germany, France, Norway, Ukraine, Poland and Lithuania, who will represent their country’s musical culture and contribute to the score. We will especially invite carillonneurs from conflict zones and areas where human rights are under pressure. We also combine this project with the traditional ‘carillon cantus’: a moment when students and Leuveners sing songs together accom- panied by the *Singing Towers*. Keep calm and carillon.

LEAD Luc Rombouts, Campanae Lovanienses, Heritage Department Leuven
BE Diest, Heritage Programme Carillon Culture City of Leuven & KU Leuven, Holsbeek, Scherpenheuvel-Zichem, Tienen, Zoutleeuw
INT City Carillonneur Rotterdam (NL), International Network of War Memorial and Peace Carillons
CLTS 1, 2, 3, 8
BUDGET €

ALOHA, DAMIAAN! open call

EDUCATION, ART IN PUBLIC SPACE, INTERCULTURAL DIALOGUE, DECOLONIZING, REGION

Art and educational project decolonizing Father Damien and re-con- necting Tremelo to Molokai

Two centuries after his birth in our region, Father Damien (1840-1889) continues to inspire young and old worldwide today, with his radical commitment to people in need in the leper colony of Molokai (Hawaii, US). Damien embodies the Hawaiian, but equally universal human values of *ohana* (family and connectedness), *malama* (care and respect) and *aloha* (love and solidarity).

Aloha, Damiaan! connects Hawaiian artists and experts with school- children from our region. Together, they work to decolonize and broaden our view of Damien, beyond the dominant white Western interpretations of his story. Younger generations are invited to look at Damien with different eyes and, through art, develop new perspec- tives. This co-creative process culminates in performative events and new artistic installations that challenge outdated representations of Damien and bring vibrant new narratives in public space.

LEAD Damiaanmuseum Tremelo
BE BAMMI, Aarschot, Haacht, Leuven, Scherpenheuvel-Zichem, Tremelo, University Archives (KU Leuven)
INT Bishop Museum Hawaii (US), Damien and Marianne of Molokai Education Center Honolulu (US), Hawaii Contemporary (US), EuroCITIES (EU), Ka’ Ohana O Kalaupapa (US), Museum Catharijneconvent Utrecht (NL), Worldmuseum Leiden (NL)
CLTS 2, 3, 4
BUDGET €€

HUMANISM TODAY

EXPO, PARCOURS, HERITAGE, VISUAL ARTS

A historical and artistic enquiry into the legacies, contradictions, and relevance of humanism

Leuven is rightly called a cradle of humanism, with figures such as Erasmus, Mercator and Vesalius who have left their mark on the city. In *Humanism Today* we highlight the historical and contemporary significance of humanism.

As values like critical thinking and scientific integrity are coming increasingly under pressure, the legacy of humanism regains impor- tance. At the same time, however, we should be careful not to glorify humanism, but to critically examine it and bring it up to date. Nor should we be shying away from its darker sides. How do humanist ideals of the past relate to challenges such as colonial legacy and climate crisis?

Humanism Today invites contemporary artists to formulate an artistic response to ten historical masterpieces: from Vesalius’s magnum opus *De humani corporis fabrica*, which in 2024 returned to its alma mater after almost 500 years, and Erasmus’s *Novum Instrumentum* (1516) to Thomas More’s *Utopia*. Each work will be contextualized and displayed in historic buildings, such as the Collegium Trilingue, where Erasmus taught and the Collegium Justus Lipsius, and will be placed in its historical context.

Critical reinterpretations by contemporary artists cast a new light on the relevance and limitations of humanism today. What forms of contemporary humanism are conceivable, desirable, or even necessary?

On the sidelines of *Humanism Today* we will also launch Youtube-Hu- manism – short, humorous clips in which young people take on Humanist Heroes. What do young people champion? And what aspects of the great humanists do they criticize?

LEAD Committee for Contemporary Art (KU Leuven)
BE Centre for Peace Ethics (Faculty of Theology and Religious Studies, KU Leuven), City Archives Leuven, Hannah Arendt Institute, Heritage Library Hendrik Conscience, M Leuven, Metaforum, Mijpleuven, Research in Political Philosophy and Ethics Leuven (HIW, KU Leuven), Vesalius Museum
INT Foundation Erasmushuis Rotterdam (NL), La Bibliothèque Humaniste Sélestat (FR)
CLTS 4, 8
BUDGET €€€

A TALE OF TWO CITIES: LOV-LA-NEUVE

EXPO, ARCHITECTURE, URBAN PLANNING, AWARD

An exhibition route following fault lines, brutalism and connected futures

Leuven and Louvain-la-Neuve: two cities born from a single university, separated by language, history and architecture. LOV-la-Neuve builds a new story, bridging the historical divide and reconnecting them once more.

Following linguistic tensions in the 1960s, KU Leuven split in two and gave rise to a new university and indeed a new city built around it: Louvain-la-Neuve. **How to rescript the narrative? What if Leuven and Louvain-la-Neuve were one city today?** The project creates links between the modernist and brutalist architecture of both cities and expands to European cities that share stories of division, relocation and dreams of a common future. Once upon a time, Nova Gorica and Gorizia were one; so was Nicosia before the Green Line. By 2035, the mining city Kiruna needs to move 3 kilometres away from its historical location, because the largest iron ore mine in the world is threatening to swallow the town.

An exhibition at Musée L will bring the museum’s collection into dialogue with architectural drawings, collages, and models by architects who left their mark or are currently working in Nova Gorica (**Edvard Ravnikar**), Nicosia (**Socrates Stratis**), and Kiruna (**Norell/Rodhe**). A special section will be dedicated to young architects that propose a possible fusion of the two cities – this is where **Leuven and Louvain-la-Neuve become LOV-la-Neuve**.

An architecture walk will connect the modernist and brutalist heritage of both cities. In Louvain-la-Neuve, an architecture walk takes audiences past buildings by André Jacqmain, Raymond M. Lemaire, Jules Wabbes, Simone Guillissen-Hoa. In Leuven, the walk passes by gems like Henry Van de Velde’s Technical School (nowadays the public library) and Marc Dessauvage’s Erasmus House.

Internationally, the project ties in with the **EUmies Awards**. In 2029, LOV hosts the exhibition for Young Talent, in 2030 for Architecture and Emerging, each time linked to the theme of urban imagination.

Through architecture, art, and collective imagination, we build a new shared story. One city, two voices. One future, many forms.

Symbolic detail: your entrance ticket is also your free train ticket between Leuven and Louvain-la-Neuve. A gesture that helps bridge the distance between the two cities.

LEAD Musée L
BE Faculties of Literature and Architecture (KU Leuven), Foundation For the Urban Environment, M Leuven, Raymond Lemaire International Centre for Conservation, Stad & Architectuur, Tourisme Louvain-la-Neuve, VAI (Flanders Architecture Institute)
INT Fundació Mies van der Rohe (ES), Kiruna2029 (SE), Nova Gorica 2025 (SI), Skopje2028 (MK)
CLTS 8
BUDGET €€

LOVANIAM flagship open call

MULTIDISCIPLINARY, INTERCULTURAL DIALOGUE

A cultural and scientific programme in Leuven reclaims Lovanium to centre contemporary Congolese knowledge, innovation and creativity

Lovanium was one of the first major universities in Central Africa. It was founded in 1954 on the outskirts of Kinshasa by the Catholic University of Leuven and the Church. Its name, the Latin translation for Leuven, shows its European roots and its cultural ambitions.

After Congo’s turbulent independence in 1960, *Lovanium* became a focal point of political strife and ideological controversy.

The 70th anniversary of the founding of the campus prompted KULeuven and UCLouvain to create a strategic partnership with the heirs of *Lovanium*: the Université de Kinshasa (UNIKIN) and the Université Catholique du Congo (UCC). The aim is to strengthen collaboration in research, education and outreach to society. Through this cooperation the partners strengthen each other’s capacities.

LOV2030 reflects on this shared cultural heritage, with the aim to connect people and to jointly build a sustainable future. In close collaboration with curators Sorana Munsaya, Gabriella Nugent and Lennon Mhishi and with academics from both UNIKIN (Placide Mumbembele and Kiangu Sindani), and KULeuven, we will develop a programme of exhibitions, workshops and debates that provides an insight into the contemporary artistic and intellectual life in Congo.

The programme aims to strengthen connection, by building sustainable relationships between Congolese artists and thinkers, their Belgian colleagues, and the wider Congolese and African diaspora.

The *Lovanium* project is based on three main pillars:

- Art:** the curators will develop a multidisciplinary programme, with exhibitions, performances, and installations, in different locations across Leuven.
- Debate:** summer schools with lectures and seminars with African scholars and thinkers from a wide range of disciplines will provide a vibrant intellectual environment that reflects contemporary Congolese thinking.
- Heritage:** the programme will critically engage with the complex history of *Lovanium* and the broader colonial legacy and examine how these intersect, displace, and sometimes erase Congolese heritage. In this way, we unravel the concept of ‘heritage’ and question whose stories are preserved and whose are forgotten. By making space for a multitude of voices, we show heritage has the capacity to not only divide but to connect people.

LEAD KU Leuven
BE Committee for Contemporary Art (KU Leuven), Hand in Hand tegen Racisme, KADOC KU Leuven, M Leuven, Royal Museum for Central Africa, UCLouvain (Louvain-la-Neuve)
INT Académie des Beaux-Arts de Kinshasa (CD), Bosangani Festival (CD), Centre d’art Waza (CD), International Peace Information Service (IPIS)(EU), Krithika Artprojects (CD), MuseumLab (DE), Prince Claus Foundation (NL), UCLG Africa (MA), Université Catholique du Congo (CD), Université de Kinshasa (Unikin) (CD)
CLTS 2, 7
BUDGET €€€€

Body & Soul

Close your eyes for a moment. Ask yourself: who am I? What is my body, what is my mind? What are my thoughts? Do I have a soul? What do I feel? And what are my feelings? How does my health relate to my well-being? When do I feel good?

Embodiment, feeling connected to your own body and senses. Being human, beyond the dichotomy of body and mind. Crossing boundaries, beyond the norm and what is deemed normal, breaking out of your shell. Showing resilience. Finding your voice, your body, your ideas. Daring to express your differences. Think: electric bodies, burning souls, dancing at the edge of the world.

In times when fitness and looks seem to dominate social media and our daily well-being comes a poor second in the never-ending rat race, *Body & Soul* are important themes, well worth considering.

BODY & SOUL FESTIVAL pilot

FESTIVAL, VISUAL ARTS, DANCE, MUSIC, CIRCUS, SPORTS, SCIENCE, CONFERENCE, REGION

Reimagining health and wellbeing through art, science, and collective care

Why does a sunset give you goosebumps? Why does music touch a chord? Why do we feel in unison with others when our favourite team wins?

Body & Soul aims to expand Leuven’s long-standing tradition of cultural city festivals: from culture to science, sports, healthcare... Conceived as a pilot project for LOV2030, the festival will launch in 2028 with a view to drawing a number of operational, communicative and strategic lessons. The *Body & Soul 2028 festival* is like a dress rehearsal. After a thorough evaluation, we will continue towards 2030 with the expertise and networks we have built up, and *Body & Soul* will evolve into a LOV2030 programme line with a second edition of the festival. In 2028 *Body & Soul* will have three central themes:

- Backbone:** as humans, how do we deal with restrictive or challenging circumstances? A programme line focused on creativity and resilience.
- Happy places:** where do we feel good? How does the environment influence our emotions and well-being?
- Jump for joy:** a three-day festival-in-a-festival. We get the whole city moving for 72 hours with non-stop dance, (urban) sport, circus, and nightlife. From local initiatives (streets, neighbourhoods, residential care centres, ...) to ambitious international line-ups.

LEAD LEF - Leuven Events & Festivals
BE Bierbeek, EventFlanders, imec, Kortenbergh, Kortrijk2030, KU Leuven, Leuven 2030, Leuven MindGate, Lubbeek, SOM, Tienen, UCLL, UZ Leuven, Vesalius Museum
INT Art & Science Days Leiden (NL), Bielsko-Biala2026 (PL), CultureAndHealth Platform – Culture Action Europe (EU), EFA European Festivals Association (EU)
CLTS 1, 2, 3, 5
BUDGET €€€€

Today, almost a thousand years after the first hospital was founded in Leuven, our region is a bastion of medical and health sciences. Not only physical but also mental health care is a major factor, with three major healthcare institutions in our region.

Health & wellbeing, or put more simply, *Body & Soul*, is a theme that is deeply woven into our city’s DNA. In this programme line, we investigate how body culture relates to our mental well-being and make radically new connections with sectors like science, heritage, sport, environment, sustainability, and so on. We are already planning a broadly based pilot project around this theme line for 2028: the *Body & Soul Festival*.

Budget *Body & Soul*: € 3,775,000

VESALIUS UNSEEN

EXPO, SOUND ART, SENSORIAL & OLFACTORIAL ARTS, SCIENCE

A multi-sensory exhibition that invites us to close our eyes and reimagine what museums could be

The Vesalius Museum is a brand-new interdisciplinary museum that challenges a wide audience to think about the interfaces between science, healthcare and society. How do we understand our bodies and our health? How do science and healthcare influence our lives? And what do they say about the world we live in?

The exhibition Unseen poses unexpected questions. Do smell, touch, and taste have a history? Why have art and science become so focused on sight and hearing? How have people tried to understand, measure, and steer the senses? And what do the senses mean in an age of virtual and augmented reality?

When you think of an exhibition you usually think of artworks on a wall, heritage objects behind glass, well designed room texts. ‘Looking and reading’ – it’s always the same standard formula. Consequently, the blind or visually impaired rarely rush to the museum. Unseen takes a radically different approach, with a universal design for everyone. Visitors listen, touch, taste, and smell. The experience is sensory, stimulating, and inclusive to everyone.

LEAD Vesalius Museum
BE Accessibility Advisory Board City of Leuven, Disability Film Festival, FARO , KU Leuven Engage, Research(x)Design (KU Leuven), STUK, Symfoon, UZ Leuven, vzw W.ith
INT MuZIEum Nijmegen (NL), Rijksmuseum Boerhaave (NL)
CLTS 1, 2, 7
BUDGET €€

MINDBLOWING

open call

CITIZEN JOURNALISM, CO-CREATION, COMMUNITY ARTS, PUBLICATION, EXPO

A journey connecting European initiatives working around radical recovery outside clinical settings

Mindblowing is a creative project by and for young adults with and without a predisposition to psychosis. We openly explore different views of normality, vulnerability, and mental well-being through diverse artistic media such as image, text, music and performance. Equality is key, with embodied knowledge, professional experience, and artistic expression given equal value.

How can we organize recovery in urban and regional communities, yet outside traditional healthcare? To find out, we forge radical new ties between Leuven & Beyond and Europe, seeking out emerging initiatives, collectives, and organizations that are active in wellbeing, creativity, culture, and citizen journalism. Looking for the madness in all of us, looking for the madness across borders. What can we learn from each other? Via Slovenia, Germany, Spain and the UK, we return with a cartload of new insights to Leuven, where we report our journey in a slightly bonkers way, with a publication and an exhibition, through words and images. *Mindblowing*.

LEAD Coconuts
BE CCG Passant, City of Leuven, De Wissel, Similes, STATIK, TRILL, UPC Kortenber, UZ Leuven
INT A Creative Transformation (UK), Alanus Hochschule Bonn Alfter (DE), Bielsko-Biala2026 (PL), El Normal (SI), Katowice2027 (PL), Outsider (SI), Tabakalera (ES)
CLTS 2, 4, 6
BUDGET €

SMELLS LIKE TEEN SPIRIT

FESTIVAL, THEATRE, CIRCUS, DANCE, YOUNG PEOPLE

Young European artists take the stage to co-create and redefine performing arts

Smells like Teen Spirit is a coming of age for young people who, as pre-professional makers, discover their voice, their body, their artistic ability. The radical co-creation of professional performances with young people is a fully-fledged artistic practice in Flanders. The Leuven production house #ABULEUS is internationally acclaimed for its leading work in this field.

Stemming from a new European network for co-creation with young people in theatre, dance and circus, the first European performing arts festival for young people is happening during LOV2030 in Leuven.

Five professional performing arts organizations from five European countries each bring a high-quality theatre, dance or circus performance to Leuven, created and performed by young people between the ages of 13 and 23. Young people put together and organize a programme of workshops, lectures, debates and small-scale performances.

They comment on the world they live in, often with dystopian experiences and fears, but they also dream of and work towards a better, perhaps utopian future.

LEAD #ABULEUS
BE 30CC, Local Network Culture and Youth, OPEK, STUK, Youth Service City of Leuven
INT Aaben Dans (DK), Arts Printing House (LT), Assitej International (EU), Evora2027 (PT), Fabrik Potsdam & X-Plore Dance Network (DE), Festspielhaus Sankt-Pölten (AT), Fokus Tanz (DE), Hellerau (DE), Jonge Harten (NL), K3 (DE), Mercat de les Flors (ES), Moving in November (FI), Schaexpirfestival (AT), tanzhaus nrw (DE)
CLTS 5, 6
BUDGET €€

LIVING ROOM LIVE

open call

MULTIDISCIPLINARY, COMMUNITY ARTS, REGION

A network bringing art, music, and dance into the living rooms of Leuveners

For those who experience barriers to participating in the cultural life we bring art, music and dance into the living room, into people's homes.

A song at the window, dance on the sidewalk, a painting in the letter box - small, poetic gestures that touch and connect people. To this end, we work together with a network of committed (amateur) artists, art students from LUCA School of Arts, regional academies, and participants from local music and dance courses. They develop formats that are mobile, light, and yet intense: art tailored to the living room, the hallway, or the garden, but above all to people.

LEAD Neighbourhood Centres Leuven
BE Art Academy & Conservatorium Leuven (SLAC), ART Academy Region Tienen, Cirkus in Beweging, Dance Centre Aike Raes, Danserie, Hageland Academy, Inter-Municipal Cooperation East Brabant (IMC), Kunst in Huis (Art at Home), Leuven Helps, LUCA School of Arts, Welfare Services City of Leuven (OCMW)
INT Centre for Projects Power Station Timișoara (RO), Cultural Center Mlejń Prague (CZ), Educational and Cultural Centre Broumov (CZ), European Social Network (EU), Kiruna2029 (SE), Lorgenale (EU), Maltfabrikken Ebeltøft (DK), Medeber Teatro Brussels (BE), Narodni Chitalishta Foundation (BU), Spazju Kreativ Valetta (MT), Trans Europe Halles (EU)
CLTS 1, 2, 4
BUDGET €

PAINT IT, BLACK

blockbuster

EXPO, VISUAL ARTS, ROCK'N'ROLL, REGION

A Rock Werchter exhibition exploring the artistic synergy between visual art and music

Rock Werchter is one of the biggest rock festivals in the world, mentioned in the same breath as Roskilde or Glastonbury. Its founder Herman Schueremans is not only a connoisseur of rock but also a dyed-in-the-wool art lover. Together with LOV2030, he is mounting an exhibition with the visual work of top artists from the 2030 line-up.

Many pop and rock icons trained as visual artists before they emerged as musicians. Some are now showing their work for the first time, others are already established names in the arts. *Paint It, Black* is not your classic exhibition. It occupies the intersection of pop, rock, and contemporary art, seducing both festival-goers and art crowds.

Obviously we don't know what the line-up for Rock Werchter 2030 will be yet. But *Paint It, Black* builds on an earlier exhibition that Schueremans organized in Bozar in 2008 with visual work by the likes of Brian Eno, Yoko Ono, Kim Gordon, Patti Smith, David Bowie, Jonsi Birgisson (Sigur Ros), Devendra Banhart, Anohni Hegarty, Fischerspooner, Pete Doherty, TV on the Radio...

The work is inherently in line with the themes of HumanNature. Two artists from the **Rock Werchter** line-up will be commissioned to create work in public space. *Paint It, Black* will take place in the region, both in a museum and outdoors.

LEAD Rock Werchter - Live Nation Belgium
BE City Museum Tervuren, Het Depot, M Leuven, Museum Aarschot, Museum Tienen, Rock Werchter Museum, Rotselaar
CLTS 5, 7
BUDGET €€€€

THE NIGHT IS YOUNG

ELECTRONIC DANCE MUSIC CULTURE, CAPACITY BUILDING, YOUNG PEOPLE, REGION

A future-forward, youth-driven reinvention of night culture as a shared space of creation, inclusion, and translocal exchange

In our first bid book, we dreamed out loud: *The Night is Young* would give rise to a next-generation nightclub — a cultural landmark with a bold identity, a strong international programme, and a tangible impact on Leuven's urban fabric. A space that doesn't just open its doors to talent but launches it. We're proud to say: by 2030, Leuven will have its top-ranked nightclub. Now, it's time to get to work.

With *The Night is Young*, LOV2030 strengthens the nightlife in Leuven & Beyond, building a sustainable night culture that is locally rooted and internationally connected. It ensures that the club will not just be a venue, but an ecosystem. A launchpad for new talent. But, most importantly, a place where young people run the show.

In the nightclub, a community of young people, selected and guided by **Stelplaats**, will take responsibility for the programming and artistic policy. To prepare them for this, we're setting up a European learning and exchange programme. Emerging curators, organisers, and artists from Leuven will travel to other cities and clubs to learn from the inside out — from safety to sustainability, programming to public policy. To conclude this trajectory, Leuven will host a **Night Culture Assembly** in 2030. Here, the new generation of programmers and producers will lay out their vision for an inclusive, collaborative, and resilient nightlife.

Meanwhile, we take the chance to celebrate what's already here, what grows from the bottom up. We will host a **huge open-air rave** – a celebration of night culture where electronic music, performance, architecture, and light art converge at a unique location in the region. We put the organization of the rave in the hands of young, starting collectives, giving them an international platform to showcase their talents. With workshops, information sessions, and specific collaboration trajectories, we strengthen this new generation of Leuven makers.

With *The Night Is Young*, we strengthen the nightlife in Leuven & Beyond, create space for young people, and focus on collective creation.

LEAD Stelplaats
BE Aarschot, Affair, BURn, Chora, Cultural Studies (KU Leuven), De Ambrassade, De Serre, Deep space series, Diest, Dub Unit, Ellende, Flemish Youth Council, gemak!, Glabbek, Grid, Grondslag, Grondwerk, Het Depot, Herent, Holsbeek, Horst Arts and Music, Keerbergen, Kontakt group, Macadam, Microwave, Mijneleuven, Montorollo, Nacht, Nebula, Nightschool, Oud-Heverlee, Queer Leuven, Rotselaar, Slagwerk (workshop), STUK stek, Terras, Tervuren, Tiel-Winge, Tienen, Utopia, Vi.BE, vibelab, What Happens, What-U-On-About, Youth Centres East Brabant
INT Berlin Worx eV (DE), Budweis2028 (CZ), Galway City Council (IE), Institut für Zukunft Leipzig (DE), Kiruna2029 (SE), Lagerkultur Luxemburg (LU), Lemesos2030 (CY), Liepaja2027 (LV), Lublin2029 (PL), Skopje2028 (MK)
CLTS 1, 2, 4, 6, 7
BUDGET €

CAN YOU HEAR THE PEOPLE SING? open call

MUSIC, REGION, CHILDREN

A pan-European celebration of choral traditions, blending collective voice, cultural identity, and civic resonance

Can You Hear the People Sing? brings together all Leuven's ten-year-olds to sing in an insanely grand choral performance in the open air.

Nothing has a more connective effect than singing together, creating together, standing on a stage together. In *Can You Hear the People Sing?* we want to reach all the ten-year-olds in Leuven – all of them, no nonsense about it. For we've seen that Part-time Art Education still fails to reach many young people. So, in cooperation with the day schools, we're going to them. It's the key to making that connection a fact. On a weekly basis, children practice with their classmates a repertoire in their own school, led by professionals. In this way, we work towards a great moment of pride.

With *Can You Hear the People Sing?*, **SLAC Conservatory Leuven** is developing a radically inclusive project, together with the primary schools in the region. In co-production with Matrix (centre for new music), we are publishing a European-wide open call for composition commissions for singing together.

LEAD SLAC Conservatorium Leuven
BE Aarschot, ART Academy Region Tienen, Hageland Academy, Hoegaarden, Holsbeek, Holsbeek Harmonieus, Koor & Stem, primary schools Leuven & Beyond, SOM, Tienen, Zuidgeluid
INT Bourges2028 (FR), Liepaja2027 (LV), Lublin2029 (PL), Lviv2030 (UA)
CLTS 1, 2, 3, 6
BUDGET €

OUTSIDE THE CIRKL

FESTIVAL, CIRCUS, PARKOUR, YOUNG PEOPLE

An international festival celebrating circus culture

We believe that circus can change the world. Not because it is perfect, but because it is real. Because it is physical, risky, and at the same time accessible – a language without words that everyone understands. Circus brings people together in wonder, excitement and emotion.

Today Leuven is the beating heart of contemporary circus in Flanders. With the creative hub **CIRKLABO** and the annual festival CIRKL, the city is fully committed to artistic development, experimentation, and international cooperation.

In the run-up to 2030, CIRKLABO supports more than 30 companies from Belgium and abroad. In 2030 *Outside the CIRKL* presents a sample of circus in all its forms, across the entire region, from village squares to forests. The eye-catcher is *Building*, a large-scale performance by There There Company, which grew out of a four-year course involving professional acrobats, amateurs, and local participants. In the title year this project will be scaled up to become an international co-production with Compagnie XY (FR) and Gravity & Other Myths (AUS), with up to 300 acrobats on stage.

LOV2030 gives Leuven the opportunity not only to celebrate circus but also to redefine it internationally – as a radical, connecting art form of the future.

LEAD CIRKLABO, 30CC
BE Aarschot, Be Flat Company, Cirkus in Beweging, Circuscentrum Vlaanderen, Circusschool Kortenberg, Diest, imec, Kortenberg, Overijse, Straatrijk, THERE THERE Company, vzwetjetje, Werktank, Tienen
INT Baltic Nordic Circus Network (LT), Scoala de Circ Timișoara (RO), Palestinian Circus School (PS)
CLTS 1, 2, 4, 6, 8
BUDGET €€€



DIRTY DANCING

OUTDOOR FESTIVAL, MUSIC, VISUAL ARTS, ARCHITECTURE

From rubbish dump to visionary playground

For years, Leuven-Noord was a forgotten rubbish dump that had grown into an impenetrable wilderness. No one set foot in this polluted area any longer. Currently, the site is home to the largest concentration of living organisms on Leuven soil. Though it is set to begin its transformation into a science park in 2030, this rugged, transitional area will first serve as the backdrop for *Dirty Dancing*, a groundbreaking music festival under the LOV2030 flag. Five Leuven heavyweights – **Het Depot**, **Het Groot Verlof**, **Horst**, **BURn**, and **Nachtplan** – are joining forces for a summer of arts and music.

Every week throughout the whole summer, one music genre will be highlighted: from hip hop and spoken word to hyperpop, rock to electronic dabke, and jazz from the Middle East.

Horst takes the festival to another level with circular architecture, groundbreaking scenography, and a contemporary art trail. On and next to the dance floor, experimental art and rave merge into a collective experience of space, rhythm, and regeneration. Artists, architects and young people help build installations that pay tribute to and activate the site.

Dirty Dancing is an ode to a place in transition, a celebration of 'wild nature', with open-air installations, documentaries, circular art, zero waste catering, and an EcoLAB for workshops. From waste to future plan, from silence to sound. This is not a festival, but a temporary village where the future becomes tangible.

LEAD Het Depot, LEF – Leuven Events & Festivals
BE 30CC, Affair, BURn, Horst Art & Music, Montorollo, Onkruid, STUK
CLTS 5, 7, 10
BUDGET €€€€

Power to the People

John Lennon sang it, the Black Panthers chanted it. Power in the hands of the people. It's the literal translation of the Greek *demos kratein*, democracy. Today, democratic values are under pressure. Anti-democratic forces in politics, media, and the internet are putting pressure on freedoms, on human dignity, equality, the rule of law, and respect for human rights.

In times of polarization how can we prioritize our common humanity? How can we permanently guarantee and future-proof the rights of minorities (which we translated into six LOV zones (see Outreach))? How do we do away with discrimination and give space to women's rights, to the LGBTQIA+ community, to the decolonization movement?

How do we deal with the psychological mechanisms that lead to fear, mistrust, and even to war?

Power to the People gives space to emancipation and democracy. We are looking for shared leadership and shared governance, for collective ways to assign agency and guarantee joint decision-making. Where do we find each other? How do we come together? How do we practice democracy? How do we share and negotiate between the private and the common? What is the place for the commons?

Budget *Power to the people*: € 4,750,000

IN THE NEIGHBOURHOOD open call

ARTISTS IN RESIDENCE, MULTIDISCIPLINARY, CO-CREATION, COMMUNITY ARTS, REGION

An arts residency programme in neighbourhoods across the region

The neighbourhood is the bedrock of democracy and person-to-person interaction, but it is also where climate change – heat islands, drought, flooding – and polarization become everyday reality.

This residency programme invites artists to immerse themselves in neighbourhoods and to work in close collaboration with residents. Together, they investigate how art can connect, reflect and activate new visions for the future.

Thirty artistic workplaces are spread across Leuven & Beyond, from classrooms to warehouses, from care centres to garages. Artists from all over Europe can apply for a one-, three-, or six-month residency via an open call. The selection is made locally: in each neighbourhood residents and cultural partners decide on the needs and directions together.

During their stay, artists work on urgent questions regarding climate change, living together, or digital exclusion – often with schools or neighbourhood organizations. Each residency ends with a public moment: a studio day, an artistic barbecue, a mini-festival, or a pop-up in the street. These are linked to existing events like the European Neighbours Day, Neighbourhood Festivals, Heritage Day, Car-Free Sunday. The first residencies will be timed to start during the *Body & Soul festival* in 2028.

LEAD Neighbourhood Dynamics Department City of Leuven, co-hosts in Leuven & Beyond
BE 30CC, Aarschot, Architecture Workroom Brussels, BAC ART LAB, Bierbeek, Cas-co, CIRKLABO, Diest, Herent, Kortenberg, Leuven 2030, maakleerplek, Rode Antraciet, Stad & Architectuur, Stand Up For Your Neighbourhood, The Green Corridor, Tienen, Veduta, Body & Soul Festival
INT Artists and Ecologists at Risk (FI/EU), Ettijahat (LB), Kiruna2029 (SE), Larnaca2030 (CY), Lviv2030 (UA), Maltfabrikken Ebelthoft (DK), Maly Berlin Trnava (SK), REZI.DANCE Komarice (CZ), Trans Europe Halles (SE), Izolyatsia Kiev (UA)
CLTS 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 7
BUDGET €€



STADHUIS – EUROPEAN HOUSE FOR DEMOCRACY flagship

ARTISTS AND THINKERS IN RESIDENCE, MULTIDISCIPLINARY, EXPO, CONFERENCE

Leuven’s town hall reopens as a shared space for art, thought and action

In 1469 Leuven’s Gothic town hall or Stadhuis opened for business. For centuries, it was the heart of urban power – the place where battles were fought, where participation was enforced, sometimes with outright defenestrations. From the Charter of Kortenberg (1312), the continental counterpart of the Magna Carta, to the bloody riots for universal suffrage in 1902, history has been written here time and again.

Between 2024 and 2028, the town hall will undergo a thorough renovation. In 2029 it will reopen as a visitor centre and European House for Democracy.

Active citizenship begins with participation. This is why we are symbolically handing over the key to the town hall, transforming this iconic monument into a shared place for the city and far beyond.

Under the heading ‘The Time is Now’, Stadhuis is launching a powerful, three-part programme.

- 1. **Exhibitions** bring critical reflections on the state of democracy, through art focused on activism, the vote, participation, and collective change. With work by artists such as **Begum Erciyas, Alessandra Ferrini, Joseph Thabang Palframan, Dora Garcia**.
- 2. **Artist and Thinker in Residence**
Every three months three European artists, authors, or thinkers receive the key to the town hall. They explore the state of our society, organize workshops, discussions, performances, or presentations.
- 3. **Democracy Summit**
Leuven invites thinkers, citizens, and mayors from all over Europe to a democracy summit in the city. Themes include increasing populism, democratic erosion, social inequality and digital disruption, opportunities for the future, new models of citizenship, resilience, and interdependence. The summit will comprise lectures, panel discussions, debates, and performances. With contributions of politicians, theorists and activists of the likes of Anne Hidalgo, Theo Francken, Yuval Noah Harari, among others.

Let’s make this moment last, with an invitation. To imagine. To get involved. To act. We conclude with the New Charter of Kortenberg, written by young people from all over Europe. A living document that inspires cities, policymakers and citizens to democratic renewal. We form a European network of urban houses for democracy, with Leuven as the hub. Every year we renew the artists’ and thinkers’ programme, with new voices and ideas, from Leuven to Lviv.

LEAD Stadhuis – European House for Democracy
BE b.creative, Bruges2030, De Ambrassade, FlemishCityhalls: Aarschot, Diest, Tienen, Flemish Youth Council, Ghent2030, Hannah Arendt Instituut, imec, KU Leuven, Kortrijk2030, Leuven MindGate, Publiq, Oudenaarde
INT A Soul for Europe (Amsterdam, Belgrade, Berlin, Brussels, Porto, Tbilisi), De Balie (NL), EUNIC (EU), EuroCITIES (EU), Foundation Democracy and Media (NL), Granada2031 (ES), Hannah Arendt Network (EU), Kosmos Festival für Demokratie (DE), Lemesos2030 (CY), Lublin2029 (PL), Lviv2030 (UA), Oulo2026 (FI), Pakhuis De Zwijger (NL), Trenčín2026 (SK)
CLTS 1, 2, 3, 5, 7, 10
BUDGET €€€€

ERASMUS 65+

INTERCULTURAL DIALOGUE, HUMANITIES, SENIOR CITIZENS, REGION

An experimental learning programme offering seniors the chance to be part of an academic exchange

Erasmus 65+ is a project that enables seniors, who never had the chance of going on 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: everything from art history to psychology or European Studies... In collaboration with other ECoCs and the UNeECC we develop short, inspiring programmes that can be followed during a five- or ten-day stay in Leuven.

The exchange is enriched through intergenerational visits to socio-cultural initiatives, workshops with young people and students, and reflections on European values and citizenship. A pilot programme around volunteering will be explored.

For the real Leuven experience we house these senior students in digs with host families. *Erasmus 65+* aims to actively involve seniors in the European cultural project and promotes dialogue, solidarity, and mutual learning across generations and borders.

LEAD KU Leuven, LOV2030, UCLL
BE Adult Learning Centre Volt!, Avansa East Brabant, involveEU, KU Leuven, Senior Citizens Council Leuven
INT Centre for cultural management Lviv (UA), Faro2027 (PT), Granada2031 (ES), Larnaca2030 (CY), UNeECC, Volkshochschule Hildesheim GmbH in Kooperation mit dem Netzwerk Kultur & Heimat Hildesheimer Land e.V. (DE)
CLTS 1, 2, 4
BUDGET €€

THE WORLD’S SMALLEST QUEER MUSEUM

ART IN PUBLIC SPACE, VISUAL ARTS, PERFORMANCE

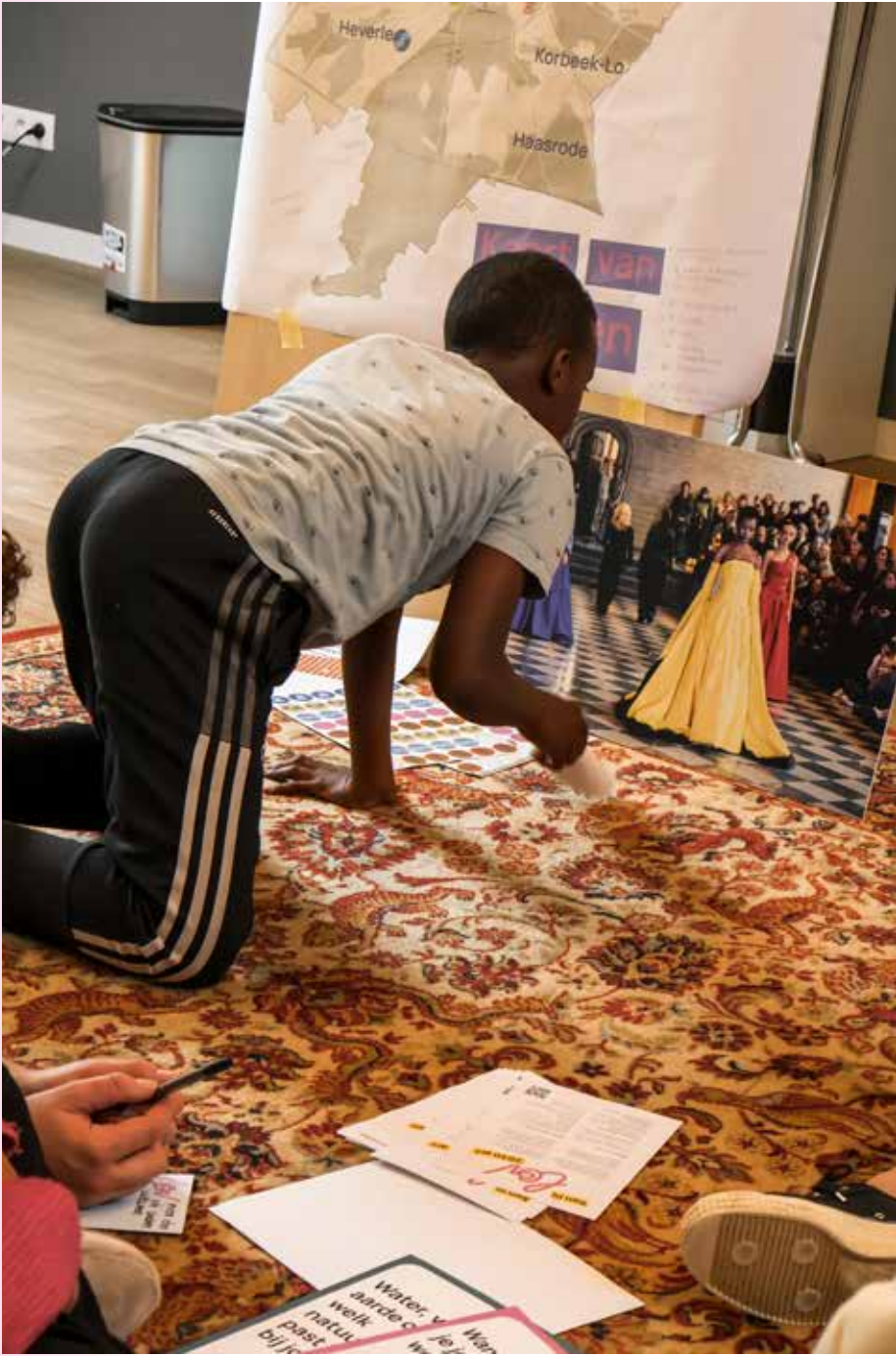
A tiny museum in a former public lavatory that archives and celebrates local queer histories through art, objects, performances, and community stories

Imagine – a monument for the queer community opposite the courthouse in the beating heart of Leuven. You look surprised. Isn’t the statue of Pieter Couterreel situated across the courthouse? Great guy, Pieter. Leader of the popular uprising against the town council in 1360, and what not. But queer? So, take a closer look, and you’ll see three small windows at the foot of the statue that whisk you to an underground world of queerness. Once a public lavatory used by the queer community as a cruising spot, it’s now a queer monument. A museum as a blotch of secrets, laughter, sweat and many, many stories.

A monument, you ask? Yes, a mucky, fantastic, uncensored reminder of everything that has happened here. Remember this spot – where a single wink was enough, where whispers turned into groans, where silent appointments were made with nothing more than a glance, a gasp, an undone trouser button. This space still stands as a raw, unashamed testament to Leuven’s LGBTQIA+ community.

In 2030, we will open the toilet door again as the smallest queer museum in the world. In those same toilets we will show brand new pieces by world-famous artists whose work is connected to the queer scene. By reclaiming a site that was once steeped in suppression and ecstasy, we not only reach back to the messy, powerful, and beautiful history that preceded us, but also create a stable anchor-point from which we can look into the future.

LEAD Queer Leuven
BE Cavarla, City of Leuven, Committee for Contemporary Art (KU Leuven), Dyke* March Brussels, Fonds Suzan Daniel, LeuvenPride, Pride Museum Europe, Queer Arts Festival Leuven, Rainbowhouse UniQue with her 28 associations in Leuven & Beyond, Rainbowfriends Belgium
INT Athens Museum of Queer Arts (GR), Bourges LGBTQIA+ centre BERRY (FR), Budapest Pride (HU), IHLIA-LGBTI Heritage Amsterdam (NL), Kiruna2029 (SE), Larnaca2030 (CY), Lemesos2030 (CY), Liepaja2027 (LV), Lublin2029 (PL), Queer Britain LGBTQ+ Museum (UK), Queers get loud (PL), Rainbow Cities Network (EU), Sofia Pride (BG)
CLTS 1, 2, 4, 7
BUDGET €€



SISTERS DOIN' IT FOR THEMSELVES blockbuster

EXPO, ROUTE, MULTIDISCIPLINARY, DEBATE, REGION

From beguines to radical sisterhoods: the power of female collective action

Sisters Doin' It for Themselves is an ambitious exhibition project about the power of female collectivity, past and present. Starting with the beguines, those often misunderstood laywomen who lived together in medieval beguinages, the project makes the leap to contemporary forms of feminist solidarity, care, spirituality, activism, and entrepreneurship.

The beguines were more than 'pious women': they developed their own economic networks, crafts, rituals, and co-housing schemes that were ahead of their time. Their unusual independence turned the traditional gender roles, patriarchal norms, and social expectations of their time completely upside down. That spirit of emancipation, 'commoning', and care lives on today in cooperatives, queer-feminist networks, and new forms of radical female togetherness – from crafts to cyberfeminism.

Leading Belgian and international female curators and artists are invited to respond to this often unacknowledged heritage with temporary or permanent artworks. In addition to new commissions, the project includes lectures, performances, tours, and collaborations with partners in feminist media, heritage and the social economy.

No country has more beguinages than Belgium: in 1998 13 of the 29 Belgian beguinages were recognised as UNESCO world heritage. The artistic work will be shown in Leuven & Beyond (Diest, Aarschot, Tienen), in Bruges, Kortrijk and Ghent. In this way, visitors can make an artistic pilgrimage that takes them in various beguinage cities. Subsequently, the work can travel to other European cities with comparable heritage.

LEAD PARCUM, Beguinages Network
BE Aarschot, Amazone, Bruges2030, Brugge+, Buda Arts Centre Kortrijk, Cultural Studies (KU Leuven), De Maekerij, Diest, Europa Nostra Belgium, Femma, Ghent2030, Kortrijk2030, Knowledge Centre for Gender and Feminism (RoSa), S.M.A.K., the Municipal Museum of Contemporary Art Ghent, Stad & Architectuur, Tienen
INT Athens Museum of Queer Arts (GR), Begine (DE) Bourges2028 (FR), Bradford 2025 (UK), Brönte Parsonage Museum (UK), Gerdientje Jonker, PhD, Historian of Religion & Author, Global Girl Media, Kiruna2029 (SE), Lemosos2030 (CY), Liepaja2027 (LV), Lublin2029 (PL), ZeroHour Culture (CN)
CLTS 4, 5, 8
BUDGET €€€€

THE BENEFIT OF THE DOUBT artist forward

THEATRE, REPERTOIRE, JOURNALISM, DEBATE

A European theatre project that focuses on truth and doubt in times of post-truth and polarization

Doubt propels the scientist towards new, clearer insights. If we don't have the complete truth, we rely on reasonable doubt to make a decision. That's the benefit of the doubt. But doubt can also be abused and perverted: we call that sowing doubt. Science historian Naomi Oreskes (Harvard) showed how the tobacco lobby, asbestos producers, and the fossil fuel industry deliberately sow doubt in order to, well, cast doubt on the scientific consensus. That lobby already sees a very different kind of benefit of the doubt.

In the era of post-truth and alternative facts, doubt is a perverse system that constantly questions the truth. Consequently, it portrays scientists, authors, and journalists in a bad light.

Hannah Arendt writes that constant lying is not aimed at making people believe those lies, but at ensuring that no one ever believes anything at all. Those who cannot tell the difference between truth and lies any more cannot tell good from evil.

Four leading European theatres join forces to produce a four-part theatre cycle. The four companies assemble a mixed international cast and a dramaturgical research team and commission celebrated European playwrights like **Eric de Vroedt** and **Natalka Voroshbit** to write the piece. The complete cycle will premiere at LOV2030 and then tour European festivals and theatres.

LEAD Het nieuwstedelijk – theaterhuis Leuven, Hasselt, Genk
BE Apache, involvEU, OPEK
INT Basca Theatre Timișoara (RO), Bellingcat (US/NL), Deutsches Theater Berlin (DE), Het Nationale Theater (NL), Independent Theater Hungary (HU), Nafta (UA), Solomon (GR), Qendra Arts & Multimedia (KO), Studio Europa Maastricht (NL)
CLTS 5
BUDGET €€€€

CULTIVATING DREAMS IN THE RURAL artist forward

MULTIDISCIPLINARY, SITE SPECIFIC, EXPO, PODCAST, COMMONS, REGION

A transnational collective exploring alternative rural communities through fieldwork and artistic interventions

Seasonal Neighbours is a collective of artists, designers, and social scientists that explores new ways of living together in rural areas.

For four years, they worked together with seasonal and migrant workers in the agricultural sector. For LOV2030 they shift their focus to communities striving to be self-sufficient, by producing and managing collectively their food and resources.

Between 2026 and 2029, each member of **Seasonal Neighbours** will get hands-on experience by living and working with these communities. In this practice of 'neighbouring', they join collective farms, cooperatives, land trusts, and co-housing projects in rural areas. By working together with them, they map out the dreams and ambitions of people in these communities, as well as the obstacles they encounter in their effort to create a more sustainable future.

The fieldwork takes place at different locations in the region around Leuven and elsewhere in Europe. Each member of the collective develops an in situ art intervention in dialogue with different audiences. Their experiences are communicated along the way online, in podcasts (in collaboration with **Barbara T'Jonck**) and cultural centres in the visiting regions, culminating in 2030 in an exhibition in Leuven.

LEAD Seasonal Neighbours
BE Gache Warache asbl & Compagnie, Geetbets, Herent, Het Abtshof Gingelom, Holsbeek, Linter
INT Casa delle Agricolture (IT), Celadon centre for Arts and Ecologies (CY), Cooperativa Mas La Sala (ES), Ecodorp Land van Aine (NL), Inland/Campo Adentro (ES), Kilobase Bucharest (RO), Longo Mai Co-operatives (FR), MediNA (Mediterranean Institute for Nature and Anthropos) (GR)
CLTS 4, 10
BUDGET €

HIP HOP HOUSE

MUSIC, DANCE, URBAN, POETRY, YOUNG PEOPLE

A new venue celebrating Leuven's rich hip hop culture

Hip hop in Leuven is not a trend, it's a legacy. A living, breathing culture shaped by decades of self-organisation, resistance, and creativity. Its pulse can be felt in open mics and street jams, in battles and workshops, in skate parks and poetry slams, in fashion and flow.

From MC'ing and turntablism to breaking, graffiti, and knowledge: Leuven's hip hop scene has expanded its language to include skating, biking, fashion, and spoken word. It is multivocal. It is intersectional. It is alive.

Leuven has long played a catalytic role in Belgian hip hop. Since the 1990s, the city has shaped national currents, especially in rap and breaking. But too often, this movement has had to work without infrastructure, support, or recognition. Despite its cultural weight, hip hop has been under-resourced, overlooked.

LOV2030 changes that.

In 2029, *Hip Hop House* will open its doors at the new Performing Arts Site (PKS), not as a gesture of inclusion, but as a structural shift. Hip hop will take its place not on the margins, but at the centre.

This house will be led by the community itself – artists, movers, and makers who have built this culture from the ground up: **Vinci, Sarah Bekambo, Laetitia Janssens, Rianne Verhulst, Zino, Jacowbski, Boucif, Hygra, Fred Gata, Tevin, Dysfunkshunal, and more.**

Together, they will define what it means to bring hip hop into an arts centre. Not to dilute it, but to deepen it. To protect its roots while expanding its reach. *Hip Hop House* will be a lab for reflection, creation, and celebration.

For LOV2030, the *Hip Hop House* will curate a year-long programme:

- **Two music events per month**, from raw up-and-comers to genre-bending legends
- A full cycle of **workshops, showcases, and open studio sessions**

A balance of **large-scale productions** and **intimate, experimental formats**. The beat of LOV2030 moves forward – and hip hop leads the way

LEAD Performing Arts Site (PKS), 30CC, Het Depot
BE Black Mamba & Loadstone Management, BURN, #ABULEUS, Het Groot Verlof, Mijnleuven, Montorollo, RAUW, Straatrijk, STUK, TRILL
INT Budweis2028 (CZ), Hip Hop Huis Rotterdam (NL)
CLTS 1, 2, 5, 6, 7
BUDGET €€

BOOK BY BOOK flagship

INTERCULTURAL DIALOGUE, LITERATURE, SOLIDARITY, REGION

Rebuilding libraries in war-torn Ukraine and embodying the EU's mission as a peace project

In war, culture is always a major target. Leuven was hit hard in the First World War. German soldiers systematically burned houses to the ground: 1,530 homes and historic buildings went up in flames, at least 272 civilians lost their lives and many more were deported to prison camps.

The centuries-old university library was deliberately set alight: 1,000 historical manuscripts (from Antiquity, the Middle Ages and the Renaissance), 800 incunabula and 300,000 books were lost. The fire was labelled a war crime. At the start of the Second World War, the new university library also caught fire and again the entire collection was reduced to ash.

The EU is a peace project. And must remain so. Precisely because we know what war means. Three countries delegating candidate ECoCs for 2030 are still all too aware of war today: Montenegro emerged as a country from the Balkan Wars. Cyprus is still divided in two due to the military occupation of the northern part. At the moment of writing, bombs are still falling on Ukraine every day. The burning current events in Europe and the Middle East and the experience we share with our ECoC2030 partners mean that war is more than a daily topic of conversation: it is a bitter reality for many men, women, and children in Europe and Beyond.

Since submitting our first bid book we have had several conversations and meetings with our colleagues from Lviv, who constantly experience the terror of war. Culture is always the first target, they repeated. A book, they told us, is often the last thing a soldier holds on to, a last sign of humanity and civilization, somewhere in a rucksack or under a bulletproof vest. And sometimes, for the prisoner of war, a last beacon of resistance.

In solidarity, we are setting up a campaign involving the entire population of Leuven and our partner cities in Cyprus and Montenegro, aiming to give a new collection to libraries that have been affected in Ukraine. Building up the library book by book.

To put words into action, Leuven's city library will donate a bookmobile to Ukraine. This library bus will leave from Leuven passing several European Capitals of culture on its way. These places will contribute books to the growing library. Once in Ukraine, the library bus becomes a mobile library, providing as many people as possible with books.

At the same time, together with our friends from Lublin2029, we will support Ukrainian publishers in their work and provide our local libraries with translated Ukrainian authors. Because what better way to build connection than through reading each other's stories?

LEAD University Library KU Leuven
BE all municipalities of Leuven & Beyond and their libraries, Europa Nostra Belgium
INT b.creative, in cooperation with the ERSTE Foundation Policy Lab on Ukraine (EU), Eblida (EU), Larnaca2030 (CY), Lemosos2030 (CY), Libraries of Europe Archives (EU), Liepaja2027 (LV), Lublin2029 (PL), Lviv2030 (UA), Nicosia2030 (CY), Nikšić2030 (ME), Oulu2026 (FI), PEN Ukraine (UA), Public Libraries2030, The Aleppo Project (DE)
CLTS 1, 4
BUDGET €€€

nature

We are at a critical moment, a crucial crossroads when it comes to climate action and reversing our impact on the planet. 2030 is a key year: many tipping points will be reached and there may be no way back. 2030 is also the year by which the UN Sustainable Development Goals must be achieved. There’s still a long way to go, and the time is short. In the meantime, the gap between city and countryside grows when it comes to the impact on the climate.

So, when we reach this crossroads do we carry on along the path that has led us to ecological crisis and polarization? Or do we choose a different direction, towards a sustainable and just future? And if we do, how do we set the mechanisms in motion? How do we create new routes, new infrastructures and the right conditions for a just transition? If you do what you always did, you get what you always got.

With Leuven 2030 as a European mission city and as our strategic partner, and a City Climate Contract that offers us a roadmap, we know how to approach that policy-wise. If we also wish to win the hearts and minds of ordinary citizens, we need the imagination, sense of possibility, and future skill that we find in the arts and culture.

If there is one place in Europe, where we have the heart and mind (and the lungs) to put this in motion, it would be Leuven & Beyond. Being designated by the EU as a Climate Mission City and as Capital of Innovation 2020, Leuven is clearly a European centre of excellence in the very heart of Europe. With LOV2030 Leuven & Beyond European Capital of Culture we will put a megaphone on this narrative and win the hearts and minds of European citizens for a more imaginative, fair, sustainable and innovative way of life.

Together with our strategic partner Leuven 2030 we have developed a LOV Charter on Ecological Art Practice, which all partners have to comply with. Experts of Leuven 2030 will monitor the carbon footprint of the entire HumanNature programme.

Down to Earth

At the end of May, the earth began to shift in the Swiss village of Blatten: rapid glacial thawing led to chunks of rock coming loose, causing an avalanche of stone, rubble, mud, and ice that obliterated the village. The earth is moving. It’s shaking us awake.

In times of ecological crisis, it’s unwise to see ‘nature’ merely as an inert background from which resources are extracted. What is needed is a radical shift in our relationship to the earth itself. Down to Earth explores ways of readjusting our worldview, to see ourselves not as rulers of nature but as participants in a shared life on a vulnerable and wounded planet.

Global warming requires not only technology or policy but learning new ways to inhabit the world. Bruno Latour advocated ‘terrestrial politics’: not fantasies of endless growth or abstract globalization but a return to the earth, to the realization that we are part of a living, limited world. Perhaps, more than humans, we need to become Terrestrials, following Latour. What does it mean to land on earth, to stay, to care, to recover?

Art, architecture, and design can help us make that shift. No longer focused on exploitation, extraction, and conquest but on coexistence, repair, and regeneration. How do we design with the earth, not above it?

Down to Earth invites artists, thinkers, and makers to reimagine our relationship to soil, water, air, space, and biodiversity. We see the ecological damage caused by colonization and war, and seek new ecologies of peace, reciprocity, and radical connectedness — with humans, non-humans, and the ground beneath our feet.

Budget *Down to Earth*: € 4,600,000

BUNKER ECOLOGIES flagship open call

ART IN PUBLIC SPACE, PARCOURS, SITE SPECIFIC, HERITAGE, REGION

Reclaiming Second World War bunkers as sites for coexistence and environmental resilience

While the heavy human toll of war is always unmistakable, war also leaves deep and often invisible wounds in the landscape. The damage that war inflicts on soil, water, or air can last for decades.

Bunker Ecologies casts a new light on the KW Line, a series of lesser-known Second World War bunkers, built at strategic crossroads along the River Dijle. It is a testimony to the 88,000 people who were killed in Belgium during the war. Today, some of the bunkers are overgrown with vegetation, people build dovecotes on them, and their damp interiors provide the perfect hotel for bats.

Mona Hatoum and **Doris Salcedo**, two artists with a long practice focused on conflict and loss, create newly commissioned work, as do sound artist **Niko Hafkenscheidt**, who researches war architecture, and poet **Maya Wuytack**, whose work revolves around love and human loss.

Moreover, artists and ecologists selected through open calls and residencies create work about the human and environmental cost of war and the ways in which this military heritage has been reclaimed by humans and non-human alike. Originally intended for survival in times of conflict and violence, the bunkers are now becoming places to restore faith in peace and to propose new ideas for peaceful co-existence in times of climate change.

LEAD LOV2030
BE Aarschot, Diest, Erfgoed Labo, Europa Nostra Belgium, Glabbeek, Haacht, Herent, Keerbergen, Kortenaeken, Leuven, Marilia Breite, Oud-Heverlee, Regionaal Landschap Dijleland vzw, Tienen, War Heritage Institute, Werkgroep, KW-stelling 2006, Wijgmaal, Zoutleeuw
INT Artists/Ecologists at Risk (FI/EU), Bielsko-Biala2029 (PL), Bradford 2025 (UK), Centre for Cultural Management Lviv (UA), ICOM, International Peace Information Service (IPIS), Larnaca2030 (CY), Lemesos2030 (CY), Liepaja2027 (LV), Lublin2029 (PL), Lviv2030 (UA), Nicosia2030 (CY), Nikšić2030 (MNE), The Peace Museum (UK)
CLTS 5,7,10
BUDGET €€€€



MERCATOR TAKEOVER

EXPO, VISUAL ARTS, COUNTER-MAPPING, COMMUNITY ARTS

Alternative cartographies: mapping the earth, climate change and displacement

How do we look at the earth? How do we map it? Posing these questions takes us to the Leuven cartographer Gerard Mercator, who drew the first maps of Europe and the world in the sixteenth century. As a maker of globes, Mercator had understood that a two-dimensional representation of the earth always entailed a distortion.

The first photo of the Earth, dubbed the Blue Marble, was taken from Apollo 17 in late 1972. The astronauts spoke of the beauty, vulnerability and finiteness of the Earth. That same year, scientists from the Club of Rome expressed their concerns about the limits to growth on a finite planet.

Can we, as humans, ever fully see and therefore understand the Earth?

In the *Mercator Takeover* project, artists figuratively ‘take over’ Mercator and show work that critically examines cosmography, astronomy, and cartography. They also literally take over the University Library’s Mercator room and present work in places in the city that have a connection with Mercator.

Mercator Takeover brings together cartographers and artists with organizations that work with climate refugees in Europe. Which routes have they taken? How do they experience the place where they now live? Together, they develop alternative cartographies, mapping a specific environment. Through collage, performance, digital media, and installations, alternative cartographies invite the viewer to experience routes and space in a poetic, political, and deeply personal way.

Every three months, the public can discover a different artist or collective: Aladin Borioli (Apian Ministry of Bees), Annelys de Vet (Subjective Editions), Bureau d’Etudes, Maarten Vanden Eynde.

LEAD Academic and Historical Heritage Office KU Leuven
BE Committee for Contemporary Art (KU Leuven), MAP-Mercator Museum, Research[x] Design (KU Leuven)
INT Granada2031
CLTS 3,8
BUDGET €

MINE. MIND. MUSEUM artist forward

EXPO, ARTISTS IN RESIDENCE, DECOLONIZING, ART & ARCHITECTURE, REGION

Confronting Belgium's colonial resource extraction history in Congo

The history of Belgium is deeply interwoven with the extraction of resources, raw materials and precious metals, including gold, diamonds, copper, tin, cobalt, and zinc in Congo. The wealth accumulated from the exploitation of these vast resources directly fuelled industrial growth and construction projects across Belgium. This legacy remains visible in monumental buildings such as Antwerp's and Ostend's Central Stations, the Palace of Justice, and the Cinquantenaire Park in Brussels. The **Royal Museum for Central Africa** in Tervuren is the ultimate example. Leopold II conceived the museum as a propaganda tool for his colonial project, designed to attract investors and win over the Belgian population. Its origins, its raison d'être, and even its recent renovation continue to be controversial issues. Decolonizing the museum is, therefore, an urgent matter.

During a two-year residency, the Brussels collective **Traumnovelle** will be granted access to the museum's Resource Rooms, where raw materials from Central Africa are displayed. Founded by architects **Léone Drapeaud**, **Manuel León Fanjul**, and **Johnny Leya**, Traumnovelle is a 'militant faction' that utilizes architecture and fiction as tools for critical thinking, social commentary and radical interventions. In collaboration with invited guests and the public, the collective will investigate the invisible relationships between colonial exploitation, knowledge production, and museums.

The starting point for their research will be the history of the Union Minière du Haut-Katanga (UMHK) and its contemporary counterparts. Since its establishment in 1906, UMHK was one of the largest and most profitable mining companies globally. Traumnovelle's work will explore how the extraction of resources profoundly shaped the political, economic, and social landscapes of both Katanga and Belgium, moving beyond a simplistic display of raw materials to one that fully acknowledges the complex histories of exploitation, labour, and resistance.

LEAD Royal Museum for Central Africa
BE Brussels African Art Centre, Hand in Hand tegen Racisme, KU Leuven
INT Académie des Beaux-Arts de Kinshasa (DC), Centre d'art Waza, Lumumbashi (DC), Exhibition Research Lab (Liverpool John Moores University) (UK), International Peace Information Service (IPIS), Krithika Artprojects (DC), Museum of Impossible Forms (MIF) (FI), MuseumLab (DE), UNIKIN (DC), Prince Claus Foundation (NL)
CLTS 1, 2, 5
BUDGET €€€

DECOLONIZING ART DÉCO

EXPO, VISUAL ART, DECOLONIZING, ARCHITECTURE HERITAGE, REGION

A total work of art that uncovers the colonial roots of Belgian stylistic movements

Many of the clients for whom renowned Belgian architects like Victor Horta and Henry Van de Velde worked, made their fortunes trading in so-called 'colonial goods'. Those 'commodities' – ivory, mahogany, ebony, copper – from the Belgian colony were also the very raw materials that both architects used in their designs. Not for nothing was their style dubbed 'Style Congo'. Yet this dual colonial component of financial wealth and geographic resources remains underexposed in art history.

This exhibition aims to give a radical reinterpretation to the term Art Déco: from *Art décoratif* to *Artistic Decolonization*. We invite Leonard Pongo, an artist with a decolonial practice, to create a total installation that combines different media, along the lines of a *Gesamtkunstwerk*, engaging in this way with works of van de Velde in Leuven and Tervuren.

LEAD Royal Museum for Central Africa
BE Brussels African Art Centre, Hand in Hand tegen Racisme, KU Leuven
INT Académie des Beaux-Arts de Kinshasa (DC), Exhibition Research Lab (Liverpool John Moores University) (UK), International Peace Information Service (IPIS), Krithika Artprojects (DC), Museumlab (DE), Prince Claus Foundation, UNIKIN (DC)
CLTS 1, 2, 5
BUDGET €€

SAVE OUR SOILS open call

LAND ART, ARCHITECTURE, SITE SPECIFIC, COMMONS, CITIZEN SCIENCE, REGION

Bringing soil literacy to the fore through public installations and community engagement

Our constant urge to build has severed our ties to the earth. Now that the ground beneath our feet is literally shifting, we need to rediscover our shared foundations. We don't simply live on the earth or stand on the ground; we are part of it. That is our intrinsic relationship with the ground. It's where we ground ourselves.

Ground, earth, soil: a living network of micro-organisms, worms, fungi, insects and plants. It provides the food we eat, the oxygen we breathe, purifies our water. The health of the soil is our health.

Now that more than 60% of European soil is suffering from soil degradation it's essential to increase our soil literacy. Which is why our project starts at the severely contaminated soil of the former Henri Tudor battery factory in Huldenberg.

Save our Soils combines citizen research and educational activities and launches a European open call for four artists and (landscape) architects to develop temporary art, architecture, and landscape installations for this polluted yet curious site.

It will be a participatory, citizen-led process: architecture organization Stad & Architectuur will ride a cargo bike through the region and hold discussions with residents, local governments, interest groups, and urban planners, to jointly draw attention to focus locations. Based on their tours through the region, they will create a cabinet of soil curiosities: this organically growing cabinet invites discussion with those involved and visitors.

LEAD Stad & Architectuur
BE Annelys de Vet (Stemmen uit de Droogte), City of Leuven, de Bib Leuven (public library), National Park Brabantse Wouden, Provinciale Ontwikkelings Maatschappij (POM), Province Flemish Brabant
INT Celadon centre for Arts and Ecologies (CY), Climate Cultures network berlin e.V. (DE), European Forest Institute, Socrates Stratis/LUCY (CY), Urban Dig (GR)
CLTS 3, 10
BUDGET €€€

A HILL CALLED HERMAN

CONTEMPORARY RITUAL, LAND ART, COMMUNITY BUILDING, DEBATE, REGION

A performative climate summit where young people, artists, scientists and local communities envision eco-solidarity from the tops of hills

Once upon a time there was a hill called Herman. He lived in a small town called Bekkevoort. At only 77 metres, Herman was what you would call 'a modest hill'. But modest in size doesn't mean modest in vision. Herman had always dreamed big. Not of becoming a mountain—he was a realist, after all—but of moving them.

You see, mountains and hills are bridge builders, not horizontal ones, but vertical. They connect the earth with the sky, the worms with the birds, people with their dreams in the clouds.

Herman had seen many changes in his natural surroundings in his life, and having a 'top view' he knew many of his fellow hills and mountains had seen these changes too.

So, after 6,500 years, when he was fully grown, Herman decided it was time to rise—not in height, but in purpose: to unite all the hills and mountains across the world and bring them together in 2030 for a summit on climate change. But Herman knew he couldn't do this alone.

So, he called upon allies. First, the young people behind Klimaatwake – a ritual of remembrance and resilience. Born out of a deep care for the planet, Klimaatwake offers a space for young people to process the climate crisis. Not with despair, but with connection. During their gatherings, concern becomes courage, and stories become seeds for action.

The young people responded with heart and fire. Together, they decided to honour Herman's dream by organizing a series of monthly climate summits—not in meeting rooms but on hilltops. Each summit would take place on one of Herman's friends: a local hill or ridge, or on a mountain in Cyprus or Montenegro, with a view of what could be lost if we fail to act. These summits are not just moments of reflection, but rituals of commitment – to listen to the land, and to each other.

Herman also reached out to his old friend, Leuven-grown artist **Rinus Van de Velde**, known for turning landscapes into living stories. Rinus agreed to create an in-situ artwork on one of the region's hills. A silent witness to this unfolding movement. A marker for what we stand to lose—and what we still have time to protect.

LEAD testimonial hills in East Brabant
BE 30CC, Bekkevoort, De Ambrassade, Flemish Youth Council, Holsbeek
INT Budoš Hill - Nikšić2030 (ME), Celadon Centre for Arts and Ecologies (CY), EuroCITIES (EU), European Forest Institute (EU), Troodos mountain - Lemesos (CY)
CLTS 3, 4, 6, 10
BUDGET €€

MUNDO ABRIGO

EXPO, VISUAL ARTS, ART IN PUBLIC SPACE, SITE SPECIFIC

Indoors and outdoors safe havens for a shifting world

In times of climate crisis, war, and social unrest, the need for shelter, both physical and mental, is growing. *Mundo Abrigo* is a double project that makes this need tangible, both inside and outside. Within the walls of M Leuven, *Mundo Abrigo* presents a transhistorical exhibition in which artists such as **Jenny Holzer**, **Isaac Julien**, **Mounira Al Solh** and **Alia Farid** reflect on safety, migration, vulnerability, and resistance. Brazilian artist Hélio Oiticica once imagined a *mundo abrigo*: a world that itself becomes a shelter: a space for encounter, imagination, and autonomy.

Mundo Abrigo also unfolds outdoors: a series of artistically designed green canopies, awnings, mini-forests, hanging gardens, that counteract heat and create new public meeting places. These interventions nestle in narrow, paved urban areas, and activate residents, ecologists; and artists to build a liveable city together.

According to the UN, global temperatures will set new records in the next five years. Cities must therefore prepare themselves against heat, drought and flooding. Greenery offers protection from heat, precipitation and fine dust, promotes biodiversity, and has a proven positive effect on the mental well-being of residents. The experimental academic studio **Atlas of Proposals**, a joint venture by **Studio Gijs Van Vaerenbergh** and KU Leuven Architecture Dept. has five years of experience in establishing dialogue between urban actors and realising productions. It will organize itself around design research for the next five years, from urban analysis to curating and production of the Canopies.

Inside M we rethink space as a 'brave space'; outside we put that concept into practice. The project is the final part of the sustainable redevelopment of the Botanic Garden and M's internal reflection on the role of the museum in a changing society.

Mundo Abrigo connects ecology with imagination, artistic thinking with urban action. Together, the exhibition and the interventions in the city become a shared shelter in which art, nature and life come together. A mundo abrigo for now.

LEAD M Leuven, Kruidtuin (Botanic Garden) & Green Service Leuven, Studio Gijs Van Vaerenbergh
BE BAC ART LAB, Department of Biology (KU Leuven), Department of Materials Engineering (KU Leuven), Leuven 2030, Meise Botanic Garden, National Park Brabantse Wouden
INT Alte Pinakothek (DE), Bayerische Staatsgemäldesammlungen (DE), Bayerisches Nationalmuseum (DE), Bibliothèque Nationale de France (FR), Bonnefantenmuseum (NL), Bourges2028 (FR), Calouste Gulbenkian Museum (PT), Castello di Rivoli Turin (IT), Historisches Museum Frankfurt am Main (DE), Kunsthistorisches Museum Kunstkam Wenen (AT), Leeuwarden2018, Museo Nacional del Prado (ES), Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen (NL), Museum of Art Cleveland (US), Museum of Fine Arts Houston (US), Musée des Beaux Arts Dijon (FR), Musée du Louvre (FR), National Museum Warsaw (PL), Rijksmuseum Amsterdam (NL), Smith College Museum of Art Northampton (US), Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, Gemäldegalerie Berlin (DE), Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam (NL), Suermondt Ludwig Museum (DE), Tate Modern (UK), The Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco (US), The Metropolitan Museum of Art (US), The National Gallery (UK), Victoria and Albert Museum (UK)
CLTS 1, 5, 10
BUDGET €€€

HOW TO BUILD A GLACIER?

MULTIDISCIPLINARY, SCIENCE, PARTICIPATION, INNOVATION

A participatory artistic-scientific experiment that installs a symbolic glacier in Leuven, while testing real glacier-regeneration techniques in the Alps

What else will we be able to create together, when we don't give up imagination?

Building a glacier in the Alps and in the heart of Leuven. Seems like madness, and it is. But madness has rarely felt so democratic and hopeful as in this artistic-scientific initiative by **BAMMI** and the **Altist Centre** (from Altitude, Artist, Scientist and Optimist). The project, which takes place between Leuven and the Alps, combines imagination, climate action, and shared responsibility.

A temporary glacier will be built in the city centre – a statement, not a spectacle. The energy will be generated by an innovative hydrogen panel park, built by a combination of artists, scientists and citizens and later donated to the local cultural sector. High in the Alps, where the glaciers are rapidly melting, the Altist Centre is working with artists and scientists on researching new techniques for building glaciers. Using methods such as atomized water that freezes into ice towers, drones that build ice caps in layers and 'cloud milk installations' that harvest water from mist and wind, the experiment connects age-old knowledge with the latest technology.

This glacier is more than an ecological experiment. It's an artwork that stimulates participation, dialogue, and system change. It invites citizens, academics and even petrochemical companies to take responsibility and dream again. Even if the glacier is never 'really' built, the power of the project lies in mobilizing the imagination as a source of resistance and connection. By literally 'freezing' climate problems in the public space, they become tangible. It challenges fantasies of progress and endless growth, not with finger-pointing but with humour, poetry and an unwavering belief in human social engineering. Democracy lives not only in parliaments but also in art, in cooperation, in an absurd idea that brings people together, that finds optimism and hope even in melting ice.

The glacier becomes a stage, a mirror, a melted manifesto, but also a playground for kids and young people during the Christmas holidays.

Artists confirmed for the trial project: **Maarten Inghels** (BE), **Fatinha Ramos** (PT), **Isabelle Reynders**, **Sibran Sampers**, **Thijs Biersteker** (NL), **Peter De Bruyne**, **Geert Waegeman** (BE), **Heinrich Nicolaus** (Institute 54) (DE), **Michel Van Hove** (De chinezen) (BE), **Vincent Das** (BE), **Inge Rochette** (BE)

LEAD BAMMI, Altist Centre (Doues/IT) – feel the facts
BE Academy Sint-Niklaas, Inclusive art collective, Faculty of Engineering and Faculty of Architecture (KU Leuven), Lander van Tricht (VUB & University Zurich, CH), OPEK, Permekebibliotheek, Solhyd, Institute 54
INT Fondazione Montagna Sicura (IT), University Trondheim (NO), Villars institute (CH)
CLTS 9, 10
BUDGET €€€



EARTHSHAKERS blockbuster

MULTIDISCIPLINARY, PERFORMANCE, MUSIC, DANCE, VISUAL ARTS, FASHION

A multi-media, multidisciplinary production that brings together artists who redefine our relation to the earth

Think of a space dominated by a monumental landscape crafted from hand-tufted wool by Argentine artist **Alexandra Kehayoglou**. This is not just a flat carpet; it is a topographical masterpiece. Its soft hills, valleys and meandering rivers echo the Argentine Pampas, the Amazon rainforest, and the melting glaciers of Patagonia – all landscapes facing environmental distress.

Imagine that within this woven landscape, **Aurora** emerges. Her presence feels like a natural extension of the landscape. She stands barefoot on a soft hill or sits cross-legged beside a woven stream. Her gown, a creation by **Jasna Rok**, shifts with the singer's voice. As Aurora experiences joy, excitement or sadness, her emotions are reflected in her dress, offering the audience an augmented and empathetic experience. Around her, a performative spectacle unfolds, directed by **Bosse Provoost** and **Ezra Veldhuis** (Toneelhuis), Belgian-Dutch theatre makers who have been exploring the boundaries between installation, performance and theatre.

Welcome to *Earthshakers*. A multidisciplinary production that challenges distinctions between reason and emotion, body and mind, human and nature, drawing on the notion of *sentipensar*, a combination of 'feeling-thinking', in which head and heart jointly come to understand the world. It explores a world of many worlds, a pluriverse in which diverse forms of knowledge and expression exist side by side. Internationally acclaimed artists meet emerging talent, supported by the **Belgian National Orchestra**. Through performance, music, visual art, and fashion, a compelling experience unfolds that is as intellectual, as it is intuitive, as tangible as it is visionary.

Earthshakers is a multimedia installation and an intimate performance in one, but above all an experience that invites you to feel, think and then act accordingly. An ode to the Earth, and a wake-up call for those who still want to inhabit it. The performance will tour Europe. The premiere? On Earth Day 2030, 22 April in the Brabant in Leuven. Save the date!

LEAD Het Depot, PKS, 30CC
BE Belgian National Orchestra, Horst Arts & Music
INT Muziekgieterij (NL), L'autre Canal (FR), RADIUS European Talent Network
CLTS 5, 10
BUDGET €€€€

Crossroads

Time to pause for a moment. To see which way to go. A crossroad forces you to make a decision: which path do we take? But crossroads are also places where different paths come together and where you can meet people from different corners.

This programme line takes you past literal and metaphorical crossroads. It touches on relationships and connections, rather than on contradictions. Together, artists, citizens, municipalities and regional organizations create new meeting places at cycling junctions, where motorways cross footpaths, where the city borders the village, where water collides with concrete. We follow the meanders and the confluence.

30 WAYS TO LOV flagship open call

ART IN PUBLIC SPACE, CO-CREATION, SUSTAINABLE MOBILITY, REGION

A new art route along slow paths and cycle junctions

How do we move through Leuven & Beyond? Can we rethink our journeys - move slowly, with awareness, in shared ways? More cycling, more walking, more public space along the way? What if we make the routes themselves more meaningful, with places that invite rest, encounter and exchange?

In our region, the E40 and E314 still carve a red line of traffic jam misery through the landscape. We imagine a different road network: a chain of thirty new, permanent art interventions, at intersections, on towpaths, and at cycle junctions. Not hideous roundabout art but active places to rest, picnic, shelter, meet, celebrate.

Each intervention is the outcome of a close collaboration between an artist and the residents of each of the 30 municipalities in the region. Between 2026 and 2030, residents from each of the 30 municipalities will have their turn to form a commissioning group. They come together in a participatory process to decide on a location and function, together with artists selected via a European open call. A steering group with residents, partners, curators, municipal services, monitors the process. New interventions are delivered every year. The function of each co-creation varies – from a rest spot to a mini pavilion – but every time a new reason for choosing the bike, for travelling more slowly crops up. By 2030, the path will form a continuous cultural cycle route.

In the process, we look for the cross-pollination of knowledge and experience from different angles: art, agriculture, heritage, circular economy, social ecology, and mobility, but also recreation and regenerative tourism.

Along routes, paths, long and slow roads, on the way to a just transition, we look carefully at our handling of what has been given to us in the way of movable, immovable, intangible, and natural heritage.

Budget *Crossroads*: € 7,850,000

The project follows the principles of circular economy. In collaboration with the non-profit organization Materialenbank, we use recycled building materials for ecocentric designs that comply with the principles of the LOV Charter on Ecological Art Practice. Thus, each intervention contributes to sustainable recreation and new ways of meeting each other.

Throughout the year, the residents organize activities at their artwork: from birthdays to neighbourhood parties, poetry evenings, or picnics. At different occasions, the **Power Peleton Team** will place their artistic hometrainers, that supply green electricity: energy-generating stationary bicycles will be installed throughout the region, stimulating connections between health, sustainability, technology, and cycling heritage. In 2030, *30 Ways to LOV* will open with a large cycling gathering, with local bicycle heroes such as Eddy Merckx, Remco Evenepoel, Biniam Girmay, Jasper Stuyven, Sven Nys or Thibaut Nys. The project also invites an international Ecotopia Bike Tour heading towards Leuven.

30 Ways to LOV doesn't shift highways, but it does shift perspectives. It proposes an alternative: a region in which our cycling culture is not only embedded functionally, but also imaginatively. Where infrastructure becomes culture. And where a slower pace creates the opportunity for more and unexpected encounters.

LEAD LOV2030
BE all municipalities Leuven & Beyond, Elevated Minds, InterLeuven, Institute for Urban Studies (KU Leuven), M Leuven, maakleerplek, Materialenbank, National Park Brabantse Wouden, Nieuwe Opdrachtgevers/Nouveaux Commanditaires, PARCUM, Province of Flemish Brabant, Regionaal Landschap, Royal Museum for Central Africa, STUK, Timbermerchants East Brabant,
INT Bourges2028 (FR), Ecotopia Biketour (EU), EUNIC (EU), EuroVelo (EU), European Cyclists Federation (EU), European partners via an Open Call (EU), Oulu2026 (FI), The PowerPeloton, VeloCities
CLTS 1, 5, 7, 10
BUDGET €€€€€



AND THEY CAME TO THE RIVER. AND THEY CAME FROM THE ROAD artist forward open call

VISUAL ARTS, PARTICIPATION, WALKS, SITE SPECIFIC, REGION

Participatory and artistic encounters bridging art and water heritage along the region's rivers

The Dijle forms the tranquil backbone of Leuven & Beyond. It meanders past Walloon cities such as Louvain-la-Neuve and Wavre to its confluence with the Demer at Werchter and on to Mechelen. It is a metaphor for flow, separation and connection. For centuries, people have tried to canalize the courses of rivers, but water has always resisted absolute control. 'Water doesn't have only one way. It has infinite ways,' writes Ursula Le Guin (we shall meet her again later).

And they came to the river. And they came from the road is an artistic and social programme that uses the river as a space for imagination and ecological awakening. Artists and communities are invited to question the river: as a waterway, as heritage, as a living body with rights. (We shall meet him again later too.)

Artists **Mira Sanders** and **Cédric Noël (The Mental Masonry Lab)** follow the river and create new work at the waterside. The artworks mark the river as a fluid territory full of shared meanings. Their journey results in a travelogue in the form of a publication, a film with a soundtrack, and an exhibition.

Throughout the year, **Stad & Architectuur, Cas-co** and **Avansa** organize participatory walks and courses about water heritage and the rights of rivers. Guided tours are led by Cas-co's former and current artists-in-residence, among whom: **Bebe Books, Koba De Meutter, Denicolai & Provoost, Lisa Ijeoma, Hussein Shikha, Chantal van Rijt**. Each time the audience gathers at a bridge: during the day for guided tours, lectures and actions focusing on drinking water and pollution; in the evening for silent discos. Convening along the water and on the bridge to meet each other, exchange views, and share new visions of the future.

Open calls, workshops, and collaborations with European partners will lead to an international gathering at the confluence of the Dijle and Demer on midsummer's day, 21 June 2030.

LEAD Cas-co, Stad & Architectuur
BE 019, Avansa East Brabant, Faculty of Architecture (KU Leuven), LUCA School of Arts, M Leuven, River Rights Network (UK), STUK, The Green Corridor, UFO
INT Bourges2028 (FR), Inter-regional knowledge exchange, Kunstpodium T (NL), MediNA (Mediterranean Institute for Nature and Anthropos) (GR), Office for Hydrocommons (GR), Piran Coastal Galleries (SI), Urban Dig (GR)
CLTS 1, 5
BUDGET €€€

TAKE ME TO CHURCH

HERITAGE, ARCHITECTURE, SOCIAL DESIGN, COMMUNITY BUILDING, REGION

A programme reviving empty religious buildings as inclusive and creative community spaces

All across Europe, more and more churches are falling into disuse. Instead of being a nucleus for communal life, their maintenance poses challenges to municipalities and communities. A building that stands empty falls into disrepair. At the same time, creative makers and socio-cultural associations struggle to find space. *Take me to Church* starts from this reality and brings two worlds together: empty churches become temporary breeding grounds for creativity, encounter, and experimentation.

In Leuven & Beyond, we are starting a participatory study: we listen to the dreams and needs of our residents, religious communities and cultural organizations. We launch open calls for architects and designers: they come up with modular, mobile installations that can transform churches into studios, rehearsal rooms or exhibition spaces. Together with makerspace maakleerplek, we build prototypes with recycled materials from the Materialenbank.

The modular installations are easy to assemble and can be moved from village to village, from church to church, thus creating a flexible system that adapts to local contexts and needs.

In 2030, the churches will once again be buzzing with life: from soul repair cafés to exhibitions, from theatre to skate concerts.

LEAD PARCUM & maakleerplek
BE churches in all municipalities of Leuven & Beyond, Heritage Department Leuven, Materialenbank, Province of Flemish Brabant, Platform Future of Parish Churches, Europa Nostra Belgium
INT Centre for Cultural Management Lviv (UA), Eutroplan (Rome, Vienna, Budapest), Lemosos2030 (CY), Trans Europe Halles (EU)
CLTS 1, 3, 4, 7, 8, 10
BUDGET €€

LET'S EAT! BIENNIAL OF FUTURE FOOD CULTURES

FESTIVAL, FOOD CULTURE, INTERCULTURAL DIALOGUE, ART & EDUCATION, BIO-ART, REGION

A new biennial that celebrates and critically engages with future food cultures

Let's Eat! is a new cultural biennial that focuses on the future of food – a sensory, social and political festival that celebrates and challenges the diversity of European and international food cultures. Food connects, nourishes and comforts, but sometimes it also divides. Meat lover or vegan, organic or GMO, artisanal or industrial? Food is love, but also struggle. Food tells stories, shapes identities and creates landscapes, memories and communities. Throughout 2030, we will bring together art, culture, debate and gastronomy in Leuven & Beyond, with a high point in the summer.

The biennial proceeds from two key questions: **What do we eat?** and **What connects us through food in a changing world?** From 2026, using these questions as our starting point, we will build a wide network of producers, chefs, artists, thinkers and citizens drawn from all 30 municipalities.

The programme consists of four pillars:

Feeding the Multitude – Community kitchens and long tables will be set up in churches, museums, and on squares, welcoming everyone to join. Imagine soup ceremonies and collective meals, farmer markets, and an exuberant intercultural pot luck where communities from all over Europe share their flavours! In collaboration with partners such as **La Nef** and **Namur2030**, we organize bike-ride banquets, sustainable dinners and international exchanges. Renowned chefs from both cities, **Jeroen Meus** and **Ludovic Vanackere**, work with local produce to create new menus and food rituals.

The Farm is an Outdoor School – On the historic farm of Farmer Maarten, active since 1866 (the farm, not the farmer), a unique cross-section between agriculture, art, education and ecology is emerging. Run by **NDRGRND** (artist, educator and chef **Sara ten Westenend** and organic farmer **Maarten Van Gool**), *The Farm as an Outdoor School* is an interdisciplinary programme offering short and long residencies for (inter)national creators, thinkers, doers, students, and local residents. Not a nostalgic rural project, but a radical future workshop where knowledge is shared through cooking, conversation, film screenings and dinners. Let's meet each other in the field.

Bio-art food lab – A new generation of artists lets you taste experiments where food and culture, biology and technology come together. This art is not edible: it is a provocation. Here, food becomes a living medium: cultivated and fermented. **Anna Dumitriu** focuses on fermentation and is known for her groundbreaking work at the intersection of art, synthetic biology, microbiology and artificial intelligence. **Matthijs De Block** focuses on bacteria (happiness bacteria) and is known for his innovative environments between physical space and virtual reality. Their work is developed and presented at two locations that hold a history of engagement with bio-art. **BAC ART LAB**, KU Leuven's centre for contemporary art, is located in the former Bacteriological Institute. **TRANSfarm Foodlab** is located in what was once the Zootechnical Centre in Lovenjoel, a place where researchers used to study the influence of the environment on pets.

Apples and Pears – A programme of debates that is not afraid of critical discussions and humour as weapons against polarization. Locations like the social food court Hal 5 and the Wijmaal farm become hubs for conversations, food battles and film nights with recipes from the apocalypse. A short-chain food market with a networking programme for local stakeholders and producers, becomes the ground for sharing, knowledge, best practices and tasting the best regional products.

Let's Eat! makes the connection between food, culture and climate tangible. From food forests to microbreweries, from vineyards to community kitchens: the festival activates existing networks and brings together new tastemakers. Art fuels conversations about agroecology, migration and community building. A biennial that leaves you hungry for more. (sorry about that).

LEAD all municipalities of the region, Hal 5, Citadel Diest & Leuven2030
BE BAC ART LAB, BoerenBuren, Broederlijk Delen, CAW East Brabant, Cas-co, Centre for Agricultural History, City of Leuven, Department Biosystems (KU Leuven), De Wissel vzw, Faculty of Bioscience Engineering (KU Leuven), FEAST partners, Flanders Food, Gezond Leven, Hapje-Tapje, ICAG, KU Leuven, Leuven MindGate, Materialenbank, Nadine, Namur2030, Natuurpunt, NDRGRND, Platform Future of Parish Churches, Province of Flemish Brabant, Rikolto, Ruimtevaart, SAAMO Flemish Brabant, STUK, 't Lampeke, Transfarm, TRILL, UCLL, Veldverkenners, Velt, Vessel, Voedsel Anders Vlaanderen, Voedselteams, Werktank, Wervel, Zorg Leuven
INT Atlantic Technological University (IE), SOLU Bioartsociety (FI), Bourges2028 (FR), Bradford2025 (UK), Budweis2028 (CZ), Centre for Cultural Management Lviv (UA), EIT Food (EU), FoodCulture Days (CH), MediNA (Mediterranean Institute for Nature and Anthropos) (GR), Larnaca2030 (CY), Onya Philips (IE), Oulu Arctic Food Lab (FI), Oulu2026 (FI), Trenčín2026 (SK), Victoria2031 (MT), VOID (IE)
CLTS 1, 2, 4, 10
BUDGET €€€

TOXIC BEAUTY artist forward

ART AND INDUSTRY, MULTIDISCIPLINARY, INNOVATION, REGION

What if industry became an ally in imagining a climate-neutral future?

In our candidacy for European Capital of Culture we strive towards climate-neutrality. This ambition permeates everything we do: from mobility and partnerships to artistic practice. It is in this precise context that we bring art, industry and climate into dialogue with each other.

Leuven is known as a city of knowledge and innovation. But the first thing you see when you approach the city by train is the silhouette of the iconic Stella Artois brewery, an industrial fixture whose roots date back to 1366. Tiense Suiker and various other agro-industrial players in the region have also been defining the landscape and local economy for centuries. Today, they are working on ambitious decarbonization strategies.

Toxic Beauty builds a bridge between art, ecology and industry. We are inviting the international artist duo **HeHe (Helen Evans and Heiko Hansen)** to work on a new project. At the intersection of technology, pollution and politics, their work is at once both playful and critical. Their best-known project, Nuage Vert, saw a green cloud projected onto the emissions of power plants in Helsinki and Paris, linked in real time to the neighbourhood's electricity consumption.

In Leuven & Beyond, they are starting on a new collaboration with Leuven 2030, the city, industrial players and scientists. Together, they explore how art can alight in unexpected places and how 'reverse cultural engineering' can enable art to break into the engine room of industry and policy and generate new images, behaviours and connections. Radical. Uncomfortable. Indispensable.

LEAD LOV2030
BE Leuven 2030, Leuven MindGate, AblnBev, Tiense Suiker
INT Climate Cultures network berlin e.V., Tropical Papers (online platform)
CLTS 9, 10
BUDGET €€

CEMETERIES OF THE FUTURE

CONTEMPORARY RITUALS, PUBLIC SPACE, ECOLOGICAL RENEWAL, GREEN INFRASTRUCTURE, REGION

Transforming cemeteries into shared spaces for ecological renewal and collective remembrance

In the late eighteenth century, the Austrian emperor Joseph II banned burials within city limits throughout the Habsburg empire (which included the 'Austrian Netherlands') for reasons of hygiene. Cemeteries closed down and new ones opened on the outskirts. In this way, a place central to human existence vanished from daily life. As if death was denied.

A cemetery forms a crossroads between life and death. The role it plays in loss and bereavement can hardly be overestimated. People are often connected to this important place and seek solace and tranquility there, for years and years.

Leuven is developing a sustainable vision for the future of its cemetery, one in which mourning and solace go hand in hand with accessibility and openness. We bring life to the cemetery and give parting and mourning a more central place in our lives again. We consider how landscape, architecture and art strengthen the cemetery as a place of mourning and a meeting place where people can discuss difficult subjects like death and loss.

At the same time, the cemetery is a green place where people can walk, meditate, enjoy nature and peace. It is also a place of culture, education and innovation. In this respect, the city is testing the climate resilience of plants, of new native and exotic species, before they are planted elsewhere in the city.

Leuven is developing its City Cemetery into a warm, open, climate-proof green space that artistically connects funeral heritage, the green environment, and the need for ritual spaces. We're establishing a place of solace and remembrance for stillborn and early-death babies, adding comfort chairs and a comfort wall with photos and poetry. During the year, we're organizing special moments of commemoration, with music, theatre and literature. Three artists in residence will be developing rituals for collective human and ecological mourning and healing. Together with Hofheide crematorium and several municipal cemeteries, we expand the artistic programme throughout the region.

LEAD City Cemetery City of Leuven
BE City of Leuven, Green Service City of Leuven, Hofheide Holsbeek, Plant Institute (KU Leuven), Reveil, Studio Gijs Van Vaerenbergh, Troost East Brabant, Writing (with) Plants
INT Bielsko-Biala2029 (PL), Eurocities (EU), Faro2027 (PT), Fragile Society (RO), Kiruna2029 (SE), Museum Tot Zover Amsterdam (NL), Zuylen Begraafplaats Breda (NL)
CLTS 1, 4, 8, 10
BUDGET €



Listening to the Forest

Have you ever heard the song of the yellowhammer? In the Brabantse Wouden that little bird sings the overture that made Ludwig von Beethoven immortal: dadadadaaa. Undoubtedly, Beethoven found the inspiration for the opening of his Symphony No. 5 by listening to the forest.

The Brabantse Wouden National Park is one of the oldest and most biodiverse wooded areas in Western Europe. A magnificent patchwork of ancient forests, sunken roads, fertile valleys and vast plateaus. The spectacular meanders of the Dijle, Laan and IJse ensure that water is stored by slowing down the flow. The Brabantse Wouden not only form a green lung between Leuven, Brussels, Louvain-la-Neuve and Wavre but, surrounded by universities, they are also a future laboratory for ecology, culture and cooperation.

Listening to the Forest focuses on the forest as a conveyer of knowledge, a partner in discussion, and a source of inspiration. How can we listen to the forest, literally and figuratively? What does it tell us about connectedness, balance and resilience? How do we prepare a future together in which humans and nature are not opposed to each other but live with each other?

Artists, ecologists and thinkers explore forms of listening, with the body, with technology, and with imagination. Based on practices such

TO THE ROOTS

EXPO, STORYTELLING, INTERCULTURAL DIALOGUE, HERITAGE, REGION

An exhibition exploring human-tree relationships through personal stories, scientific research, colonial histories, and indigenous knowledge

Trees make the world: they nourish the soil, produce oxygen, provide us with food, building materials, and shelter. If people in Uganda want to know where you come from, they ask: Where is your tree? This exhibition explores how deep the bond between humans and trees goes.

Drawing on the Royal Museum for Central Africa's extensive wood collections and their colonial history, *To the Roots* aims to provide an understanding of tree ecosystems and to inspire people to protect them. The exhibition connects scientific research, indigenous knowledge, and personal stories in four thematic zones:

Trees as Connections: an immersive space full of stories and cultural traditions in which trees play a vital role.

Trees as History: tree rings reveal stories about historical events, environmental changes, and human impact.

Trees as Material: about wood as a conveyer of traditional craft, art, and ethical dilemmas relating to use and origin.

Trees as Protection: here we bring together scientific research and indigenous knowledge.

The exhibition extends beyond the museum: with walks in the Tervuren Arboretum, tours through the Brabantse Wouden National Park and an open call in which visitors can share their own tree stories.

To the Roots is supported by contributions from **Alfonso Maindo** (NGO Tropenbos in Congo), **James Wachira** (storytelling on trees in crisis resolution in Kenya), **Vicky Van Bockhaven** (Do (wooden) statues still speak?), **Mercy Ashepet** (Academic and indigenous knowledge in biology), **George Gumisiriza** (Trees as heritage in South Sudan and Uganda), **Sofie Dierickx** (Wood anatomy and heritage objects), **Aelyn Van Diest** (Taxus, the European sacred tree)

LEAD Royal Museum for Central Africa
BE Agentschap Ontroerend Erfgoed, Arboretum Wespelaar, National Park Brabantse Wouden, Regionaal Landschap Dijleland, Sonian Wood coop
INT Centre d'art Waza (DC), Insight Research Ireland Centre (IE), Kiruna 2029 (SE), Larnaca 2030 (CY), Lublin 2029 (PL), Skopje 2028 (MK)
CLTS 2, 10
BUDGET €€

as Deep Listening (Pauline Oliveros) and practices of attention (Tim Ingold), new ways of being present in the landscape are created.

After listening comes learning. What does the forest teach us about mutual dependency? We explore radical ecology, shared management, and the complexity of living together within ecosystems – from tree to human being, from mycelium to community.

How can we translate what we have learned into action? How do we help to build climate-resilient, just, and connected landscapes? Listening, learning and making.

For all our activities in natural areas and ecosystems, LOV2030, in collaboration with Leuven 2030 and the Brabantse Wouden National Park, is developing a Charter on Ecological Art Practice, which we're also linking to the Lille Call to Action. Every project (festival, concert, landscape art, installation) follows a set of criteria that guarantee a sustainable approach and respect for the forest. Artists work with what the forest offers. The place, the raw materials, the rhythm, the time. We consider crowd flows and forest capacity. We work on a sustainable mobility policy and public involvement. We develop guidelines that embed care, collaboration, and sustainability in every artistic gesture.

Budget *Listening to the Forest*: € 4,425,000.

HEAR HERE

FESTIVAL, SOUND ART PARCOURS, ART IN PUBLIC SPACE, REGION

A sound art festival weaving sonic practices into landscapes and heritage sites

Hear Here is a triennial festival that connects sound art with heritage and nature, during a listening trail, indoors and outdoors. Although sound art is still relatively unknown, *Hear Here* attracts a wide audience thanks to an accessible, free formula and strong audience outreach: from families to day trippers, from hikers to art lovers.

The 2030 edition emphasizes new accents: it emphasizes non-Western sound art scenes, particularly from Asia, Africa and South America, which so far remain underexplored. The trail connects locations where those blind spots and colonial traces in the landscape are made audible. New and existing installations, 'listening stations' and interventions in the environment open the ear to other perspectives.

The five or six kilometre walk starts at STUK. You follow the Dijle, passing the Groot Begijnhof, the Arenberg campus, and the Stille-huis, all historical places with significant heritage value. You walk through the Egenhovenbos deep into the Dijle valley, heart of the Brabantse Wouden National Park. Towards the end you hear something that sounds like the sea. But listen more closely and you'll hear it's the noise of the E40: a motorway that not only disturbs the silence, but also the migration of birds and animals.

LEAD STUK – House for Dance, Image & Sound
BE Body & Soul Festival, National Park Brabantse Wouden, City of Leuven, Concertgebouw Brugge, KIKK Festival, Klankenbos, KorSonor, Leuven 2030, Overtoon, Proximity Music, Q-O2, Visit Leuven, WerkTank
Additional partners will be identified during the research phase.
CLTS 1, 5
BUDGET €€

MASTER IN DISASTER open call

YOUTH CAMP, ART PARCOURS, COMMUNITY ARTS, REGION

A forest university for radical future-thinkers

In 2030, at the centuries-old **Woods University / University of the Forest** and the prestigious **Institut de L'Arbre**, you can obtain a so-called Master in Disaster, even at a very young age.

What if we were not only to tell children and young people what is wrong with the world, but also to invite them to think for themselves about how to improve it? In *Master in Disaster*, an experimental forest camp in the Brabantse Wouden, young thinkers and doers are given the space to think about what is going wrong. They study all the 'wrong decisions' that lead to a dystopian world. From there, they build alternatives: stories, ideas, images, plans. The camp is their classroom, the forest their teacher.

Via a European open call, ten landscape artists are invited to design ten unique 'kiosks', working together with the young people and assisted by local craftsmen: from pavilion to lookout post, from sculpture to meeting place. Each work is constructed from residual wood from forest management, via the circular platform **Hout uit het Woud (Wood from the Wood)**. One of the Kiosks will be developed in the framework of an international youth exchange project.

Together, the various kiosks form an artistic trail that keeps walkers on the right path, away from the most vulnerable parts of the forest. Instead of wandering haphazardly through ecologically sensitive zones, visitors will find an inspiring route of playful works of art. The kiosks become anchor points within walking distance of each other, as links in a route that couples ecological care with youthful artistic imagination.

Master in Disaster is not a lesson in fear, but in imagination and decisiveness. The young people offer a concrete contribution to forest management, as future risk prevention engineers.

LEAD National Park Brabantse Wouden
BE Agentschap Natuur en Bos, BAMMI, Bazart, Bertem, Bierbeek, De Ambrassade, Friends of Heverleebos & Meerdaalwoud, Hoeilaart, Huldenberg, InterLeuven, IGS Vrije Tijd Druivenstreek, Koning Kevin, Institute Child & Youth (KU Leuven), maakleerplek, Materialenbank, Mijneleuven, Natuurpunt, Oud Heverlee, Overijse, Province of Flemish Brabant, Regionaal Landschap, Stichting Zoniënwood, SOM, TRILL, Tervuren
INT EUNIC (EU), European Forest Institute (EU), Friends of the Earth Cyprus (CY), Lemesos2030, Liepaja2027, Skopje2028
CLTS 3, 4, 6, 7, 10
BUDGET €€

STARRY NIGHTS, STARRING NATURE! open call

PERFORMANCE, THEATRE, DANCE, CIRCUS, CLASSICAL, MUSIC, SITE SPECIFIC, REGION

A live arts programme with unplugged outdoor performances shaped entirely by their environments

Imagine a ballet among the trees, an opera echoing across the fields, or a symphonic orchestra gently swaying to the rhythm of the wind above a potato field. Slowly, the sun sets. Here, nature is not only a backdrop, but also a co-creator.

Starry Nights, Starring Nature! presents new stage productions that find their stage in nature. A coalition of cultural centres from the region collaborates with (international) producers to create original work that grows with nature.

The performances embrace the limitations of their environment: no amplified sound, no artificial lighting, no towering sets. They are unplugged and seek creative solutions for playing with nature. They don't colonize nature, but sojourn in and work with it.

Artists are selected via an open call, according to criteria that respect the rhythm and boundaries of the forest, the meadow, and the field. Sustainability is key – from the ecological footprint of the work itself to the way in which the audience moves around.

Regional partners join forces to produce and present the work. Each

partner proposes a specific site and takes the lead in producing the performance there. The opening production (for the early birds) will be a dawn concert with music by Sofia Gubaidulina performed by the Belgian National Orchestra.

This work is intended to leave little or no trace, yet it is meant to make a deep impression. *Starry Night, Starring Nature!* is an invitation to listen differently, to look anew, and to imagine how and where *nature culture* unfolds.

LEAD 30CC and Cultural Centres in the region
BE Belgian National Orchestra, National Park Brabantse Wouden,
INT European Forest Institute (EU), National Landscapes (UK), The Festival Academy (EU)
CLTS 1, 5, 7, 10
BUDGET €€€

THE WORD FOR WORLD IS FOREST

open call artist forward

ARTISTS AND WRITERS IN RESIDENCE, CREATIVE WRITING, ECO-FICTION, SPECULATIVE DESIGN, REGION

A 'colony' of writers, artists and scientists who reimagine the world as a forest through climate fiction and speculative design

In the shadow of the Tervuren Arboretum, writers, artists and ecologists gather for a radical reconsideration of the forest as a space of imagination, connection and resistance.

This artists' colony focuses on climate fiction and harks back to the 'Tervuren School', a nineteenth-century colony of landscape painters. The title echoes Ursula K. Le Guin's novel about the inhabitants of a fictional planet, who live in deep symbiosis with their environment, until the people of Earth (Terrans) establish an exploitative logging colony. Inspired by the novel, in which the word for 'world' and 'forest' are synonymous, this 2030 colony considers the forest not as a source of extraction but as a complex intelligence.

Seven writers selected via open call are paired with seven thinkers and artists for a residency in the national park. Every evening, the forest opens up to the public through lectures, performances, conversations, and radio interviews.

At the heart of all this is the challenging work of **Terra0**. Terra0 starts from the radical question of whether nature can be given legal personhood and investigates how it can then participate in economic structures via blockchain technology and smart contracts. What if a forest were a company, a business concern, focused on infinite growth and conquering market share? If it sought to become ever bigger? In their prototype forest, equipped with sensors and algorithms, the forest itself determines the price of its wood, trades autonomously, and saves capital to strengthen its own resilience.

LEAD Research group on Anthropocene and Climate Fiction (KU Leuven)
BE Avansa East Brabant, BAC ART LAB/Schrijfkamer, de Bib Leuven (public library), De Brabantse Wouden bondgenoten, KU Leuven, Leuven 2030, libraries in the region, National Park Brabantse Wouden in collaboration with Agentschap Natuur en Bos (Flemish Agency for Nature and Forests), STUK, The Green Corridor, Vrienden van de School van Tervuren
INT Apparatus22, Artists/Ecologists at Risk (FI/EU), Celadon centre for Arts and Ecologies (CY), Climate Cultures network berlin e.V. (DE), European Forest Institute, HAU Berlin (DE), Institute for Postnatural Studies (ES), Kilobase Bucharest (RO), Museum of Impossible Forms (MIF) (FI), National Landscapes (UK), Tropical Papers (online platform)
CLTS 5, 10
BUDGET €

innovation

Innovation is deeply rooted in the enquiring and creative character of our city.

In 2020 Leuven was named iCapital, the European Capital of Innovation. The city is an internationally recognized crossroads of innovation, technology, and social imagination. KU Leuven, one of the most innovative universities in Europe, is the beating heart of an ecosystem in which research, entrepreneurship, and engagement come together.

A network of global players has emerged around the university. Think of Leuven Research & Development, imec (world leader in nanoelectronics and digital technology), VIB-KU Leuven (leading institute for biotechnology), UZ Leuven, Materialize (3D printing) and spin-offs and scale-ups in AI, robotics, medical imaging, sustainable mobility, pharmaceutical technology and food. They make Leuven a magnet for investors, researchers and young companies. Supported by hubs such as the Bio-Incubator and Leuven MindGate, breakthroughs are made here every day at the intersection of science, industry and technology.

At the same time, Leuven is a breeding ground for projects that focus on social and sustainable innovation. Innovative networks like Samen Onderwijs Maken (SOM), Leuven 2030 and Leuven MindGate or festivals like and& were founded under the slogan *for the better and for all*. Community initiatives such as *Leuven Helpt*, *De Boomgaard* and *Kom op voor je wijk* actively focus on citizen participation, collective care, and new models of shared responsibility. Here, innovation is not only high-tech but also high-touch.

MetaLOV

With MetaLOV we are building a twin city for Leuven & Beyond, a digital platform that not only complements the regular programming, but also responds to and intersects in it. MetaLOV consists of two major parts: an online application and a 'phygital' – part physical, part digital – infrastructure.

We're building a new online city. Not an exact digital duplicate of Leuven, but an imaginative world that combines fictional buildings with well-known places in the region: historic and modern buildings such as Leuven's town hall, Saint Leonard's Church in Zoutleeuw, and the sugar factory in Tienen, as well as major natural attractions like the Brabantse Wouden and the De Merode nature park. If you click on a location, you'll automatically end up at the right projects.

In addition to the world that you can visit via your laptop, tablet, or smartphone, we're also building a physical – or phygital – infrastructure that lets digital projects enter the real world. This is done via various interfaces:

- **Smart street furniture:** In collaboration with Art Crush, we are taking over smart street furniture throughout the region. These act as gateways in MetaLOV.
- **Empty shop windows:** Leuven and the region are contending with empty shops in the city centre. Together with Barco, we are transforming the empty shop windows into immersive light and sound installations.
- **Digital pop-up booths:** We are building modular, mobile stands that can appear in different spots. They form a tangible connection between Leuven, the region, and MetaLOV.

These tools create a region-wide 'phygital' interface: a hybrid platform where the digital story is interwoven with daily life.

In the battle against climate change, Leuven is a pioneer in a just urban transition. Green innovation and sustainability are paramount. Leuven 2030 aims to make the city climate neutral through collaboration between citizens, companies, science, and government. Green technology, circular economy and climate-resilient design are integral parts of the city's DNA.

You see, LOV2030 stands on the shoulders of giants. It can draw on Leuven's expansive ecosystem of universities, research institutions and leading social partners. Our goal, however, is not only to showcase this innovative potential, but also to use it to imagine fairer democratic societies and future-oriented ecosystems.

LOV2030 strengthens Leuven's ambition to become a leading European hub for the development of technology that is both socially and ecologically sustainable. To support this objective, we are organizing the **EUNIC Climate Culture Creative Lab** together with EUNIC and local partners such as KU Leuven, imec, and&, and Leuven MindGate. In this multidisciplinary think tank artists, researchers and policy makers collaborate on **emerging technologies, sustainable development and the role of culture as a catalyst for innovation**.

We are working on three programme lines: **MetaLOV**, in which we investigate the digital and virtual world and propose an online programme of our title year; **Future Fusion**, which tests social prototypes for the real world, and **Past Forward**, in which we search for innovative applications for our cultural, movable, and intangible heritage and traditions.

Over the past year, we have thoroughly examined the desirability, feasibility and ecological footprint of *MetaLOV* with a consortium of partners. We chose to expand this project on the **HYBR** software, a digital ecosystem that seamlessly integrates physical and virtual participation. Inspired by gaming and social media, HYBR offers a richer and more interactive experience than classic tools. It was developed in Leuven as part of the *and& festival*, with additional support by the Flemish government. By starting from an open-source system, we work locally and sustainably:

- **Technically sustainable:** the platform can be maintained within a broader institutional context
- **Ecologically sustainable:** using an existing infrastructure instead of a completely new system
- **Economically sustainable:** we use our resources efficiently and ensure that previous investments pay off.

HYBR is *MetaLOV's* 'invisible infrastructure'. On top of this, together with partners such as and&, KU Leuven, Howest, and Cronos, we're building an immersive world that transforms HYBR's rather business-like interface into an experiential space for everyone involved.

For the hosting, we are working with **Combella**, a Belgian company that strives for CO₂-neutral hosting. Their data centres already run on 100% renewable energy.

Budget *MetaLOV*: € 3,600,000

BE and&, Artcoresociety, BARCO, National Park Brabantse Wouden, City of Leuven, Combella, Cronos, Cultuurconnect, Democratic Innovations Lab (DIL), DigiSoc (KU Leuven), e-Media Research Lab (KU Leuven), Entertainment Technology Project Flanders, Flanders Technology and Innovation, HUB C, imec, Leuven 2030, Leuven MindGate, Research(x) Design (KU Leuven), Stadhuis, TRANSFORM (KU Leuven)
INT EUNIC (EU), Oulu2026 (FI)
CLTS 1, 7, 9, 10

HYBRID LOV

DIGITAL PORTAL, ONLINE STREAMING, PERFORMANCE, VIRTUAL EXHIBITIONS

An interactive digital platform that brings the LOV2030 programme online

An interactive digital platform that not only streams and reimagines major events in but also fosters social connection, preserves a living archive, and offers immersive insights into Leuven's cultural and historical landscape. Thus, MetaLOV will become the place where people all over the world can go for 'some hybrid *LOVing*'. In a virtual museum or theatre, visitors can attend online versions of particular live events: following a museum tour, dancing at a concert in the metaverse, or watching live streams of lectures, concerts and performances.

It's not simply a matter of streaming or reproduction, however. The platform rethinks and reinterprets the events for the virtual space and searches for the most relevant and engaging forms in which to present them there:

- **Artistic presence:** live streams, virtual exhibitions and digital parties give events a second life online.
- **Social platform:** with matchmaking and avatars, the platform stimulates sustainable relationships and ad hoc communities. One specific idea is a 'roulette' which, based on a short questionnaire, matches you with someone with a different way of thinking.
- **Documentation:** The platform is also a living digital archive of all the events that have taken place.

In addition to streaming events, we inform visitors about our region. When you click on the different landmarks on the map, you get more information about their history. We also organize virtual tours with guides from the past and present. Famous folk from Leuven and the region – from Erasmus and Father Damien to Selah Sue – take you through 'their' Leuven and tell you which LOV2030 events they think you absolutely mustn't miss.

LEAD LOV2030, Artcore Society
BE andS, Art Crush, BARco, City of Leuven, Computer Club, Cronos, Cultuurconnect, e-Media Research Lab (KU Leuven), Flemish Government Architect, Happy Volcano, HOWEST Flanders, National Park Brabantse Wouden, Technology and Innovation, Hub-C, imec, Leuven 2030, Leuven MindGate, Stadhuis, TRANSFORM (KU Leuven)
INT EUNIC, Liepaja2027 (LV), Moco Museum (NL), Oulu2026 (FI), Trans Europe Halles (EU)
CLTS 7, 9, 10
BUDGET €€€€€

WELCOME TO THE DEMOSPHERE

DEBATE, MEDIASTATION, SOUND INSTALLATION

A civic multimedia pavilion that uses avatars to provide insight into online debates

The **Demosphere** is a modular dome that can be erected on different squares in the region: a citizen pavilion, part media station, part listening space, that stimulates democratic debate.

Every two months, one of LOV2030's partners introduces a timely question that lies at the heart of both their own mission and broader societal concerns. This topic is launched through a debate or performance, both physically and online. For instance, Stadhuis kicks off with a lecture on democracy in the council chamber that is simultaneously streamed via MetaLOV. This starts a two-month trajectory of dialogue and involvement. Visitors to MetaLOV can discuss the topic via online chat boards. Leuveners and other participants are also invited to join in through interactive elements: avatars that ask you questions via smart street furniture, posters with questions that you can answer via QR codes, and interactive interfaces that we're developing together with 'Citizen's dialogue kit'... in all these ways, Leuveners can give their opinion and vote on the topic.

In the Demosphere you get a **360° audio experience**: a sonification of the debate. You literally hear the voices of the online conversation, played back in the space. What happens when you can't respond anonymously behind a screen any longer, but are confronted with the sound of your words? What if you're immersed in it? This experience offers a unique opportunity to explore important societal topics while reflecting on the tone and impact of online debate, ultimately helping to strengthen the quality of our digital democracy.

LEAD LOV2030, Stadhuis
BE City of Leuven, DigiSoc, Institute for Work and Society (HIVA, KU Leuven), InZert, Leuven.
AI - Institute for Artificial Intelligence (KU Leuven), M Leuven, Mintlab, Publiq, Research[x] Design (KU Leuven), Werktank
INT Democratic Innovations Lab (NL), Institute of Technology Futures (DE), Perycles: Participatory Democracy That Scales (EU)
CLTS 5, 9
BUDGET €€€

FIRST LIGHT blockbuster

PERFORMANCE, MULTIMEDIA, MUSIC, DESIGN, DIGITAL ARTS

Live XR and spatial audio event with AI storytelling, synchronized visual and audio choreography

MetaLOV opens and activates the above-mentioned interfaces in the city with an online performance by a world-famous artist.

First Light will take place during the student welcoming party marking the start of the academic year at the end of September 2029. This timing means the public will already have had the chance to experience the platform before the start of the title year.

First Light is a 60-minute live, XR, and spatial audiovisual event. A top artist, such as **Björk**, will present a hybrid performance, blending live music with AI narration and synchronized visual and audio choreography. The event will take place live at the Ladeuzeplein (Leuven) and be simultaneously streamed on MetaLOV. By activating the phygital interfaces, the event will also be presented in the region, creating a decentralized experience that weaves itself into the architecture of Leuven & Beyond. Imagine avatars of Björk simultaneously popping up on billboards and in empty storefronts all over the region. This will be Leuven's first cultural 'signal'. In the week after the event, parts of the performance will continue to appear in the city via the various above-mentioned interfaces.

LEAD Het Depot, LEFvzw
BE Art Crush, City of Leuven, e-Media Research Lab (KU Leuven), Entertainment Technology project Vlaanderen, Het Groot Verlof, Leuven.AI - Institute for Artificial Intelligence (KU Leuven), Tomorrowland (WAOW)
INT Amsterdam Light Festival ANBI (NL)
CLTS 1, 5, 7, 9
BUDGET €€€€

THE FANTASTIC INSTITUTE FOR DIGITAL FABULATION

VIRTUAL EXHIBITIONS, DIGITAL ARTS, PHYGITAL ARTS, AI

A consortium that stimulates digital culture and creates new speculative fables in order to understand and shape our (digital) reality

The Fantastic Institute for Digital Fabulation (FIDF) brings together digital artworks that not only use digital means but also deeply reflect on digital culture. The aim is to develop new 'fables' for the digital age, speculative stories that use fiction to help us understand the (digital) world, how it affects us, and how we can relate to it.

The FIDF is not an independent organization, but a consortium of various cultural players in Leuven & Beyond and (inter)national knowledge institutions and companies, with the common aim of developing, promoting and showing digital art. It is a knowledge centre, where artists and researchers come together around specific research questions. The FIDF is not a physical space, but a dynamic digital environment designed to house digitally created art.

From 2026 onwards, FIDF will co-produce three digital artworks per year. The artists will be chosen by the consortium's artistic partners. Those nominated by two of the artistic partners will be eligible for support from the FIDF.

In 2030, the FIDF throws open its doors in the MetaLOV universe and will host three virtual exhibitions. The exhibitions will also have analogue counterparts that extend into the physical world: site-specific pop-ups that showcase digitally created art and phygital artworks, or offer artists the opportunity to present work that benefits from a tangible environment.

- **Echoalia**, a psychological term for the unsolicited repetition of sounds made by someone else, studies the effects of online platforms and the ethical challenges of echo chambers. What happens when digital space only reflects the unsolicited repetition of our own ideas? How do those feedback loops affect our perception?
- **I am AI**: Although AI is often seen as something akin to human intelligence, AI is first and foremost a reflection of society's historical and social structures. This exhibition examines the politics of AI, looks at its biases, and highlights the power relations and hierarchies that this technology reflects and reinforces.
- **The Forest in the Cloud**: Although the natural and digital worlds are often seen as opposites – a place of detox versus a place of hyperconnectivity – this exhibition explores the unexpected intersections between the two ecosystems.

Potential artists: **Dries Depoorte, Mark Musheva, Ahnjili Zuparris, Refik Anadol, Alexandra Crouwers, Kelly Richardson, Joanie Lemercier.**

LEAD LOV2030
BE 30CC, BAC ART LAB, Cas-co, CIRKL, Cultuurconnect, Digital Future Lab, Digipunten, DigitGLAM, Entertainment Technology Project Vlaanderen, Flanders Technology & Innovation, Het nieuwstedelijk, IRL, Leuven MindGate, Link in de Kabel, M Leuven, 30CC/shift, STUK, Werktank
INT European Media Art Platform (EU), Institute of Art and Technology, Liverpool John Moores University (UK), FACT (UK), Innovation-Lab Utrecht (NL), Institute of Technology Futures (DE), Le Fresnoy – Studio national des arts contemporains (FR), M+ (HK)
CLTS 5, 7, 9
BUDGET €€€



Future Fusion

Future Fusion brings together all the projects that connect the worlds of art, future thinking, social innovation, science and/or technology. The programme line focuses primarily on projects that create prototypes for a better, more sustainable future: for the better and for all. It is an important part of our cultural strategy, in which we use innovation to tackle the major challenges of our time.

FUTURE GENERATIONS STUDIO open call

INTERGENERATIONAL DIALOGUE, DEBATE, SPECULATION, YOUNG PEOPLE

A living lab empowering youth to co-create innovative solutions for society's challenges

In the renovated Stadhuis we make room for a studio where urgent social challenges are examined. Here, **young people from across Europe** come together with artists, scientists, policymakers, companies, seniors and thinkers to explore the big questions of our time. As a visitor you don't come to see a finished product but are invited to be part of the making and thinking process and to help shape the future.

In addition to a working budget which they manage themselves, a diverse and international group of young people are also given 'the key' to the Stadhuis. Through an open call, we will select two **young people from each EU member state and accession country**. Together they set out to work. They devise their own trajectory and look for answers to a jointly decided research question. Each research question is approached via three themes, around which the same number of working groups are set up: humans and society, nature and climate, and future and innovation. Each working group is made up of between five and fifteen young people.

The journey begins with a six-month **online preparatory phase**. Then, the group comes together in Leuven. For one full month, they develop a sense of familiarity with the Stadhuis and make it their 'home'. This intense and far-reaching commitment transforms the studio into a place of connectedness and innovation.

In the run-up to our candidacy we successfully set up a first pilot project that laid the foundation for this ambitious initiative.

LEAD Stadhuis – European House for Democracy
BE b.creative, De Ambrassade, Erat.vzw, Flemish Youth Council, Hannah Arendt Instituut, imec, KU Leuven, Leuven 2030, Leuven MindGate, Publiq
INT A Soul for Europe (Amsterdam, Belgrade, Berlin, Brussels, Porto, Tbilisi), Bradford 2025 (UK), CommonWealth (UK), De Balie (NL), Faro2027 (PT), Granada2031 (ES), Leiden (NL), Lemesos2030 (CY), Lublin2029 (PL), Lviv2030 (UA), River Rights Network (UK), Oulu2026 (FI), Pakhuis De Zwijger (NL), Trenčín2026 (SK)
CLTS 1, 2, 4, 6
BUDGET €

The projects below also show a strong link with the five LOV-Labs that support the foundation of our programme and delve deeper into our major societal challenges. Whereas the Labs work on the theoretical, experimental and speculative framework, these projects are already a concrete realization of it.

Budget *Future Fusion*: € 2,100,000

PERFORMING ARTS SITE – ART HOUSE OF THE FUTURE flagship

INFRASTRUCTURE, PERFORMANCE, COLLECTIVE GOVERNANCE

A radical, community-driven cultural hub blending arts with social justice and deep democracy

The new Performing Arts Site (PKS) – our flagship project, conceived as the Art House of the Future – is designed by London architects Sergison Bates. The site comprises two large state-of-the-art theatre and concert halls (seating 450 and 1,100 visitors), a black box seating 165, spacious foyers and cafés that serve as a 'third space'. PKS will be home to technologically innovative initiatives, like the Alamire XR-Studio and the *DanceLab Experience Centre* (see Q8).

The innovation is less in the architecture, however, than in the radical approach to how the place is run: an arts space for and by the artistic community and the general public. We see social justice as key. More specifically, we're experimenting with the management structure and the programme, in which we radically connect the arts field with youth work, social economy, and socio-cultural work.

This radically new relationship is not just about audience engagement in the artistic programme, we strive for democratization of the institution itself. We call it a 'participatory podium'.

For each discipline we set up a circle of stakeholders with a 'motivator'. The motivator builds bridges between the partners, safeguards multi-vocality, with an eye on participation and collaboration. Building on the principles of deep democracy, these circles shape the content of the artistic programme. This guarantees co-creation and a deep connection with the local communities. It creates cross-connections between tradition, heritage, mastery on the one hand and research, development and innovation on the other. The setting up of the *Hip Hop House* (see p. 31) is a nice example of how this works.

LEAD Performing Arts Site (PKS)
BE 30CC, Alamire Foundation, BURn, Cie. Tartaren, CirkLabo, fABULEUS, Het Depot, Het nieuwstedelijk, STUK
INT 101 Outdoor Arts (UK), Aviva Studios Manchester (UK), Beeld & Geluid (NL), Create London (UK), ENCC (European Network of Cultural Centers) (EU), EuroCITIES (EU), FACT Liverpool (UK), HAU Berlin (DE), Le 104 Parijs (FR), Parktheater Eindhoven (NL), Trans Europe Halles (EU), White House Dagenham (UK)
CLTS 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 10
BUDGET €€€€



BEE EUROPE – POLLINATOR PATHMAKER artist forward

LAND ART, ECOLOGY, DIGITAL ART, AI, REGION

A set of land art and social sculptures aimed at restoring biodiversity with algorithm-designed gardens for pollinators across Leuven & Beyond

Imagine if in 2030 traffic news on the radio went like this: 'some slow flying on the lavender route between Leuven and Wijgmaal, no incidents on the sunflower route past Kortenen and for bees heading north towards Aarschot: a strong tailwind might get you home early.' This, my dear friends, would mean our plans came true.

In a world where insect buzzing is fading, and biodiversity is under pressure, artist **Alexandra Daisy Ginsberg** asks a radical question: can we design gardens, not for humans, but for other life forms? Pollinator Pathmaker is a living algorithmic work of art, designed from the perspective of bees, bumblebees, butterflies and other pollinating insects. A conscious attempt to restore a disrupted relationship. The Pollinator Pathmaker's algorithm generates a planting scheme that meets the needs of local pollinators throughout the seasons.

From 2026 onwards, we will work with green services, bee keepers, local communities and volunteers to develop new pollinator gardens across the region. Residents of Leuven & Beyond can get involved themselves: through MetaLOV, you'll receive a plan for your own version of the artwork and become part of a growing network of pollinator-friendly gardens.

But that is not all. Together with Oulu2026, we're building an ambitious European corridor for pollinators: from Landen in our region to Oulu in Finland, over 2,500 kilometres away. This cross-border route connects two European Capitals of Culture - not only symbolically, but also ecologically. In 2026 we will launch a joint kick-off. This way, we strengthen both local ecosystems and sustainable. European mobeelity. A bee can dream, right?

LEAD LOV2030
BE Beekeepers East Brabant, Climate Gardeners Project (KU Leuven), Leuven 2030, Linter, Mijn Tuinlab, M Leuven, Natuur en Bos (Nature and Forest), Natuurpunt, Regionaal Landschap
INT Apian – Ministry of Bees (CH), Oulu2026 (FI), Oulu Art Museum (FI)
CLTS 4, 9, 10
BUDGET €€

MUTUAL EXPECTATIONS open call

EXPO, DIGITAL DEMOCRACY, SOCIAL DESIGN, HACKETON

Collaborative platform for the creation of digital prototypes to democratize and decentralize digital power

Democracy doesn't stop at the ballot box. Even in the digital world, rights, access and control must be fairly divided. *Mutual Expectations* brings together European artists, activists, academics and engaged citizens to think about an equitable digital future.

Over a nine-month period, six multidisciplinary teams will work on innovative artistic prototypes: from playful apps to critical data visualizations, from installations to alternative AI tools. They all pose questions about digital power and technological inequality. Who controls the data? What happens about our privacy? How do we turn technological progress into a social project?

By developing prototypes that can be playful and speculative, yet also have solid technological base, we want to make the general public and policymakers aware of the crucial digital challenges of our time, from privacy and data mining to artificial intelligence and surveillance. How can governments play a more active role in protecting digital rights, and how can we, as engaged citizens, researchers and artists, support that effort?

The process starts with a hackathon in which participants get to know each other and develop ideas, followed by guided online co-creation sessions. A second hackathon opens the prototypes for public feedback and connects them with local actors in Leuven.

In 2030, *Mutual Expectations* presents an exhibition and reflection programme in collaboration with the Stadhuis and KU Leuven's Digital Society Institute (DigiSoc).

The core focus of *Mutual Expectations* is not technology but people. Through collaboration, creativity and critical dialogue, we build a digital space in which ethics, equality and democracy are not ideals, but principles.

LEAD Werktank
BE DigiSoc (KU Leuven), Privacysalon, Stadhuis
INT Athens Biennale (GR), Brachland-Ensemble Projekte (DE), Elektron (LU), Impakt Utrecht (NL), Innovation:Lab Utrecht (NL), Institut of Technology Futures (DE), Ljudmila (SI), Node Forum (DE), Noschool Nevers (FR)
CLTS 2, 5, 9
BUDGET €€

MOLENBEEK FOR LOV artist forward

LAND ART, ARCHITECTURE, COMMUNITY ARTS, ECOLOGY, REGION

Reimagining urban water resilience through holistic art, architecture, and ecosystem collaboration

Among the large valley structures that cut through the Belgian landscape, it is the smaller waterways that give identity to a place: as vital connections between hamlets, as sources of energy, carriers of identity, spaces for recreation and as regulators of the microclimate.

At the heart of our project is the Molenbeek: a river that cuts across our region, past various culturally important locations, such as Park Abbey and Rinus Van de Velde's atelier. Within the network of stream valleys, the Molenbeek is the most common and emblematic of all. It represents a cultural and historical water landscape, referring to the river as a source of hydropower to drive mills. Due to extensive human intervention, the "brook by the mill" evolved into the most altered and exploited watercourse in the country.

Today these heavily modified waterways face a wide range of environmental challenges: from severe drought and increased flood risks due to rapid water discharge, to biodiversity loss from warming and blocked fish migration caused by weirs, sluices, and mill wheels. How can we restore the natural dynamics of rivers and create space for water again?

In 2030, Belgium will celebrate 200 years of independence. What better way to honour our territory than with a project focusing on the emblematic waterways that flow through Belgium? A project that strengthens the ecological resilience of the Molenbeek valleys and radically redefines their legal status.

Bureau Bas Smets brings together local communities, artists, legal experts and designers to transform the Molenbeek in Leuven into a living laboratory. Our pilot project builds on the European Nature Restoration Law, specifically the 'Free-Flowing Rivers' initiative. To better protect these areas, the idea of granting legal status to rivers is gaining global attention. In only a handful of countries outside Europe have rivers already been granted legal personhood. As a pioneer within Europe, this project aims to recognise the rights of the Molenbeek within Europe's complex legal framework.

LEAD Bas Smets Architects
BE City of Leuven, DMOA Architects, Faculty of Law and Criminology (U Ghent), Green Service (City of Leuven), KU Leuven, Province of Flemish Brabant, Natuurpunt
INT Bourges 2028 (FR), Royal Haskoning (NL)
CLTS 3, 5, 10
BUDGET €€€

AND& FESTIVAL

FESTIVAL, DEBATE, SOCIAL INNOVATION

A future-creating city festival for change-makers, artists and families

and& is a future festival for curious minds of all ages, with more than 30 activities taking place throughout the city. For five days Leuven transforms into a living laboratory for ideas that shape our future, with talks and inspiration, encounters and art installations.

During the festival week, we bring generations together to brood on innovations for our rapidly and ever-changing world. We're going for the long term and for sustainable solutions: which technologies will make the lives of the next generations better? Their bodies healthier and their mental well-being greater?

Every year since 2018, thinkers, entrepreneurs, researchers, artists and innovators have come together at the *and& festival*, the biggest innovation festival in the country. *and&* continues within the framework of Flanders Technology & Innovation. With this ambitious project, the Flemish Government aims to emphasize that technology and innovation are crucial for the future of Flanders.

and& will host a multitude of low-threshold '600 seconds talks' by top scientists and researchers and guided tours on the different hightech & science campuses and incubators. The festival also organises a youth exchange programme with our fellow ECoCs in 2030.

LEAD Leuven MindGate
BE City of Leuven, Flemish Government, imec, KU Leuven, STUK, UZ Leuven, Vesalius Museum
INT Global Futures Literacy Network UNESCO
CLTS 3, 5, 10
BUDGET €€€

q8 - COMBINING CULTURAL HERITAGE WITH NEW, INNOVATIVE AND EXPERIMENTAL CULTURAL FORMATS

Past Forward

Everything passes, except the past. So how do we deal with it? Something only becomes heritage if we cherish it, repeatedly give it meaning, pass it on to future generations.

The programme includes a number of striking projects that combine our movable and immovable, intangible cultural heritage with technological or social innovation. In its concept, Stadhuis – European House for Democracy is a groundbreaking, socially innovative project, where power is fundamentally shared and Leuveners, regardless of their background, are literally handed the key to this symbol of power.

We also connect the traditional giant figure processions of Leuven, Tienen and Hakendover with contemporary creations that embody the ethnic and cultural diversity of today's communities. For instance, Leuven invites the various communities to add a giant of their own to the parade: meanwhile, the centuries-old Leuven giants have already acquired Polish, Philippine and Chinese siblings.

ALAMIRE XR STUDIO 2030

INFRASTRUCTURE, MUSIC, HERITAGE, RESEARCH & TECHNOLOGY

A cutting-edge XR studio, bringing Flemish polyphony to life

The *Alamire XR Studio 2030 (AXRS30)* makes the rich musical tradition of Flemish polyphony (14th to 16th century) accessible to everyone. Commercial initiatives in pop music have shown great potential: at the ABBA Voyage in London, the band members are 'on stage' in the form of digital avatars. The technology seems to be future-proof and offers interesting possibilities for making intangible heritage 'tangible'.

AXRS30 builds on the high-tech research of the two existing Alamire Sound Labs, where polyphonic music from the Low Countries is studied and brought to life. In the Analytic Sound Lab, the complex, polyphonic structures of this music are digitally disentangled: each voice is separately visualized, listened to, and analyse. The Interactive Sound Lab, on the other hand, investigates what music sounded like in its original space. Using advanced auralization techniques it reconstructs the acoustics of buildings that have vanished or been altered. This means that music can once again be heard as it sounded centuries ago, in a medieval chapel, for instance, or the great hall of a palace.

The two labs are now being combined in *AXRS30*, a cutting edge XR studio in the Dominican Church, on the Performing Arts Site in Leuven. Here, 3D video, immersive audio, and virtual space merge into a total experience. *AXRS30* will be a hybrid space for research, exhibitions, and concerts – for a new way of experiencing music.

The first concrete test will be presented at the end of 2025 in M Leuven with an immersive installation based on the *Leuven Chansonnier*. This case will be the springboard for a large-scale rollout by 2030. In this way, *AXRS30* makes polyphony tangible again in a contemporary audiovisual culture.

LEAD Alamire Foundation
BE Huelgas Ensemble, KU Leuven, Park Collegium, UAntwerpen
INT AES Audio Engineering Society, Cappella Pratensis (NL), International Music + Media Centre (IMZ) (AT), Leiden University (NL), Leones Ensemble (DE), Linnaeus University (SE), Lund University (SE), Meertens Instituut Computational Humanities and Oral Culture (Digital Humanities) (NL), Micrologus (IT), Réseau Européen de Musique Ancienne (REMA) (FR), Sollazzo Ensemble (FR), Stile Antico (UK), Tiburtina (CZ), University of Oxford (UK)
CLTS 5, 9
BUDGET €€

HERITAGE AND THE FUTURE

Eight high-profile projects make it abundantly clear that heritage in Leuven & Beyond is centuries old but very much alive. Heritage doesn't stop at our regional border. A theatre tradition here is a European tradition. And the music of the African diaspora – that's becoming our heritage too. We also keep an eye on more recent heritage: young art forms such as contemporary dance and cinema (and even electronic dance music) are gradually becoming heritage as well.

In addition to our programme, in 2030 we will organize an international symposium on Digital Cultural Heritage and AI, in collaboration with Europeana and Una Europa.

We emphasize the importance of this heritage line (which links sustainability to future skills) by not treating it as a separate issue but instead making it an integral part of our artistic and cultural programme, and by looking for innovative ways to keep this heritage alive.

Budget *Past Forward*: €2,600,000

DANCELAB EXPERIENCE CENTRE

INFRASTRUCTURE, DANCE, HERITAGE, RESEARCH & TECHNOLOGY

An experience centre for dance that combines research, technology, and practice to preserve embodied knowledge

Dance is an embodied and ephemeral art form, so how do you pass it on to new generations of audiences and dance makers? Contemporary dance is vulnerable. If makers stop or dance companies cease to exist, the richness and diversity of dance are at risk of being lost. We're seeing this happen today, now that the generation that has been causing excitement since the 1980s is approaching the end of its career. So it's time for action, not just for the 'Flemish Wave', but for dance in Europe as a whole.

This is why **STUK** is developing an expertise and experience centre, where research and practice come together in every conceivable way, both familiar and as yet unknown. How do you 'preserve' 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: a centre of expertise hand in hand with an immersive and interactive experience centre open to the public, where experimenting, performing, exchanging, and demonstrating can take place

Since 2025, STUK has been part of the Horizon Europe project DanceMap, which explores innovative paths and policies in order to promote European dance heritage at home and abroad. This helps us to take the first steps towards the *DanceLab Experience Centre*. (Not to be confused with the LapDance Experience Centre.) (Sorry about that. Again.)

LEAD STUK - House for Dance, Image & Sound
BE ASIL - Art and Science Interaction Lab Ghent, CEMPER - Centre for Music and Performing Arts Heritage, Counterpoint - Interdisciplinary Centre for Dance Research (KU Leuven), Danspunt (support centre for non-professional dance and movement in Flanders and Brussels), Heritage Department Leuven, IPEM - Institute of Psychoacoustics and Electronic Music UGent, KU Leuven, Performing Arts Site (PKS)
INT C-daRE - Coventry University (UK), Centre National de la Danse Paris (FR), CODA Cultures of Dance, DanceMap Europe, European Dancehouse Network, EUNIC (EU), Motion Bank (DE), ZKM Centre For Art And Media Karlsruhe (DE)
CLTS 5, 7, 9
BUDGET €€

LOV DANCES – STORIES TO REMEMBER

COMMUNITY ARTS, DANCE, LIVING HERITAGE

A participatory project supporting amateur dance groups across Leuven and other European Capitals of Culture to revive diverse dance heritages

Proceeding from its structural work on dance heritage, STUK is also developing participatory practices to pass on and embody dance heritage.

In 2029, we will be putting out a call to all the amateur dance groups in Leuven & Beyond and other (former) ECoCs. *LOV Dances – Stories to Remember*, will support them professionally for a year to learn a dance repertoire that inspires them. We're opening up the call to include all dance forms: 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 work with: more bottom-up, less highbrow.

At the same time, Leuven choreographer **Zoë Demoustier** will develop a playful way to pass on the Flemish Wave of the 1980s to residents of the entire region via a performative 'pass-it-on game', a choreographic 'game of whispers', in which Zoë selects a dance phrase from an iconic 1980s choreography and teaches it to six people. They then pass it on to another six people, creating an organic chain of movements.

In 2030, all the dancers come together for one big festival day. They will dance on various squares, in indoor and outdoor spaces. In a procession, the dance of one group is passed on to the next in one great city-wide choreography. An enormous flash mob in which everyone dances along. People with no dance experience can enjoy watching, but they can also join workshops and take their first dance steps themselves. We're in talks with several European partners to roll out the project in Europe as well.

LEAD STUK - House for Dance, Image & Sound, Heritage Department Leuven
BE CEMPER – Centre for Music and Performing Arts Heritage, Danspunt (support centre for non-professional dance and movement in Flanders and Brussels)
INT Centre National de la Danse Paris (FR), DanceMap Europe (EU), European Dancehouse Network (EU), Festival Academy (EU)
CLTS 2, 3, 5, 8
BUDGET €

SHAKESPEARE IS DEAD (GET OVER IT)

FESTIVAL, THEATRE, REPERTOIRE, PLAYWRITING, INTERCULTURAL DIALOGUE

An international theatre festival that focusses on building new repertoire for theatre

The king is dead, long live the king. That also applies to the GOAT. For while many folk claim that Shakespeare is alive (as is Elvis, by the way), a lot has happened since 23 April 1616. Since the advent of the motion picture in the late nineteenth century, television in the twentieth, and social media in the twenty-first, the theatre has constantly reinvented itself. Yet the old Western linear narrative tradition, the white, male perspective, still dominates. This is why *Shakespeare is Dead* searches for new voices and narratives, underrepresented writers, and subjects. Because the new theatre texts of today, are the repertoire of tomorrow.

Shakespeare is Dead focuses on talent development, repertoire-building, and the internationalization of playwriting. Previous editions in 2022 and 2024 brought to Leuven playwrights from China, Iran, Cameroon, Burkina Faso, Canada, Kosovo, Ukraine and the entire EU. In the three upcoming editions (2026, 2028 and 2030), the festival will focus on a theme that ties in with LOV2030. In 2026 that theme will be 'Future Narratives for Planet Earth' and a Creative Europe project will come to Leuven. In 2028, the key theme will be democracy, and in 2030 we focus on AI and digital innovation. Each festival will also see bridges built to other contemporary forms of writing for performance: such as spoken word, slam, rap and hip hop.

Shakespeare is Dead is publishing an open call for international texts via our worldwide network of theatre professionals. Authors are nominated by a professional from their own country or language area. A multilingual panel reads the texts in English, French, German, Dutch or Spanish (translation). Ten international authors are selected and their theatre texts are translated and presented. In collaboration with publishers in the Dutch, French, German and English language areas, the texts will also appear in print. In this way, we're building a repertoire for the twenty-first century.

LEAD Het nieuwstedelijk
BE 30CC, Cie. Tartaren, Creatief Schrijven, deAuteurs/SACD, Eurodram, fABULEUS, Faculty of Arts KU Leuven, Het Kwartier, Kunstenpunt, Literatuur Vlaanderen, LUCA Drama (MA writing for performance), OPEK, Open Doek Vlaanderen, SABAM, Theater Agora (Sankt-Vith), Théâtre Le Vilar (Louvain-La-Neuve), WISPER
INT Cesie (IT), De Brakke Grond (NL), Fonds Podiumkunsten (NL), Het Nationale Theater (NL), Het Toneelschrijfhuis (NL), MHT Consult (DK), Nafta (UA), Qendra Arts & Multimedia (XK), The Fence (UK/Sweden), Theater Bellevue (NL), Theater Marburg (DE), Théâtre Transversal Avignon (FR), UniT/dramaforum Graz (AT), Vlaams-Nederlands Huis deBuren
CLST: 5, 6
BUDGET €€

UNMUTED: DECOLONIZING ARCHIVES WITH AI

AI, DECOLONIZATION, ARCHIVE, RESEARCH & TECHNOLOGY

Using AI and citizen science to identify and correct biased, offensive metadata in heritage collections to promote inclusive cultural representation

Heritage catalogues reflect who had the power. Throughout history, archives, museums, and libraries were built and described from the perspective of those in power. Heritage from marginalized communities was less often preserved. Or it was described in words which nowadays feel offensive or problematic.

Hence the *Unmuted* project. Its aim is to work towards a more honest and inclusive representation of cultural heritage via citizen science, and artificial and human intelligence. DIGITGLAM (KU Leuven) and KADOC are building on a European collaboration in which a multilingual thesaurus of loaded terms is being developed. Now follows the creation of a digital tool that automatically detects problematic language use in visual archives and suggests alternative descriptions.

This unique approach involves citizens, schools, and communities in workshops in which they help to train AI models. In this way, we combine technology with collective wisdom.

The project culminates in an exhibition in M Leuven in which historical imagery is critically and creatively questioned. *Unmuted* is an exercise in rereading, renaming, and commemorating together – an example of how heritage, digital innovation, and participation can strengthen each other in an inclusive future.

LEAD DigitGLAM, University Library & Agora KU Leuven
BE Heritage Department Leuven, KADOC, LUCA School of Arts, M Leuven
INT Archives Portal Europe Foundation (NL), Centro Europeo per l'Organizzazione e il Management Culturale (IT), Datoptron (GR), Europeana (EU), DFF - Deutsches Filminstitut & Filmmuseum (DE), European Fashion Heritage Association (IT), Europeana Foundation (NL), Michael Culture Association (EU), Ministère de la Culture et de la Communication (FR), Netherlands Institute for Image and Sound Foundation (NL), Thinkcode (CY)
CLTS 1, 2, 8, 9
BUDGET €

AFROTRONIX – SOUNDING THE FUTURE

EXPO, FESTIVAL, MUSIC, EDM-CULTURE, INTERCULTURAL DIALOGUE

Celebrating African electronic music and culture through an immersive exhibition and a music festival

Afrotronix is not only a musical genre but a multidisciplinary concept that embodies an Afrofuturist vision. Based on the experiences of Africans in the diaspora it explores themes of identity, liberation and technological progress, often challenging colonial narratives. *Afrotronix* imagines a future in which black people take centre stage in innovation and imagination. Writer and filmmaker Kodwo Eshun says: Blacks in the diaspora experienced the alienation that sci-fi tells us about in everyday reality.

In Europe, we often associate techno with Belgium and Berlin, whereas its origins are actually in the African-American communities in the US. 'Make Techno Black Again' is a slogan that the Ugandan electro scene has meanwhile taken to heart.

In LOV2030, *Afrotronix* opens up as a diptych of African electronic music, carefully constructed in dialogue with African makers and thinkers.

1. **An exhibition** in collaboration with curator Ntshepe Tsekere Bopape, takes visitors on an immersive journey into contemporary African electronic music, with vivid video and sound material. It tells the story of the musicians, the scene, the labels. In addition, the Royal Museum for Central Africa invites musicians to work with samples and field recordings from its (complex in every respect) ethnomusicological sound archive. In this way, African musicians today can reclaim historical heritage and give it a new musical future.
2. **A music festival** with concerts, workshops, and discissions. From *Afrotronix* artists like **Black Coffee** or **Prince Kaybee** in Het Depot, via **Nyege Nyege** label nights in Stelplaats, to co-creations with jazz students in STUK: the program highlights diverse voices within the African and diasporic EDM scene. Documentaries, talks and a symposium in collaboration with KU Leuven and the *Lovanium* project amplify the public conversation.

LEAD Het Depot, Royal Museum for Central Africa
BE Belgian National Orchestra, Bozar, Horst Arts and Music, KU Leuven, LUCA Jazz, MIM Music Instruments Museum Brussels, SOJO Sounds, Stelplaats, STUK
INT ILAM International Library of African Music (ZA), Nyege Nyege Tapes (UG), Pan African Music (FR)
CLTS 2, 5, 6
BUDGET €€€

ECHO – THE EUROPEAN CINEMATIC HERITAGE ODYSSEY

FILM FESTIVAL, EUROPEAN NETWORK, INTERCULTURAL DIALOGUE

A network of film festivals from four European countries that celebrates and connects European cinematic heritage with contemporary cinema

ECHO, the European Cinematic Heritage Odyssey, is a new network of film festivals from four European countries with a rich film history. It includes films whose impact on the development of cinema can be traced through the decades and felt in contemporary works. *ECHO* aims to spread European film heritage, celebrate European cultural heritage through film and highlight its role in our shared cultural identity.

By showcasing films from each participating country's national heritage, linking them to contemporary programming, and inviting exciting speakers who contextualise the films in relation to films today, *ECHO* aims to create a dialogue between the classic and the contemporary.

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

LEAD Cinema ZED, Fonk vzw
BE Kortfilmfestival Leuven, STUK
INT Athens International Children's Film Festival (EL), Icedocs (IS), PLAY (PT)
CLST: 5, 8
BUDGET €

KWEIKERSPARADE

CONTEMPORARY RITUAL, IMMATERIAL HERITAGE, COMMUNITY ARTS

Using participatory artistic practices to reimagine an age-old tradition

The *Kweikersparade* is the pride of Tienen: giants, floats, brass bands, and neighbourhood groups parade festively through the streets, telling the age-old story of Saint George and the dragon: the classic contest between good and evil. For LOV2030 we're building on that tradition but rewriting the story.

As we move towards 2030 we're running an intensive participatory process in Tienen in which artists, neighbourhood associations, schools and civil society organizations work together to create a new narrative for the age-old parade. *De Zwerm* – an initiative for young people in vulnerable situations – will be at the heart of this endeavour. They will take over an old school building, which will become the *School voor Samen-Leven* (School for Living Together), and use it as both the project's base of operations and an artistic seedbed for imagining a new, inclusive city.

A European Open Call invites artists to design a part of the procession in co-creation with a neighbourhood or organization. Inspired by the city's historical processions the parade brings centuries-old traditions to life in a contemporary form. By working together on costumes, music, and performances, the connection between neighbourhood residents and generations grows.

The parade that passes through Tienen in 2030 will be a collective celebration of identity, difference, cooperation, and the future. Not your classic procession, no, a progression.

LEAD Stad Tienen
BE Alexianen Zorggroep, ART Academy Region Tienen, Bietenclub, De Wissel (OverKop), Dream! vzw, FOS 213 Tienen, Foundation Delacroix, Gezinsbond Vissenaken, KH Sint Genoveva Oplinter, Pasform, Residential Care Centre Twee Poorten, Vader Hageland, Wilma Tienen
INT Lemesos2030 (CY)
CLTS 1, 4, 8
BUDGET €€

q9 & q10 - INVOLVEMENT OF LOCAL ARTISTS AND CULTURAL ORGANIZATIONS AND COOPERATION PLANS

From the very first event, in February 2023, at which we presented our candidacy as definite, we have closely involved the local cultural scene, both individual artists and cultural organizations, in shaping our project. At big events for several hundred people, we worked with break-out rooms, where people were actively involved. But we also organized smaller meetings, such as our LOV cafés, where people could swap ideas in a more personal setting. We involved a large number of individual artists in the content and artistic design of all these events, large or small.

When putting together LOV2030's operational team we made sure that here too the artistic view would be represented. In addition to their work for LOV2030, four of our team members are also active as artists.

Out of 300 nominations we put together a team of ‘dreamers’ – the Dreamers2030 – made up of 30 citizens from the region with different social backgrounds. Among the Dreamers are musicians, rappers, visual artists, writers, theatre makers, street artists, a choreographer, an Oscar-nominated film-maker. A total of nine artists. Plus a number of people who work in the creative industry, such as architects and designers. Over the past two and a half years the Dreamers2030 have worked on the development of the narrative, spreading the invitation, critically questioning the way we were heading, setting up events and devising projects and formats.

In March 2024, we launched an Open Call for projects and received 137 submissions from local artists and organizations. The intendants, the Dreamers2030, and an international panel of ECoC experts selected 36 projects that formed the grassroots programming outlined in our first bid book and which have been further developed for this bid book.

For the shaping of the projects we had deep discussions with professional arts organizations in Leuven & Beyond with a view to co-creatively arriving at a curated programme. Every project in this bid book has a local stakeholder (often a professional arts organization) as lead partner: this guarantees close involvement in the realization of the programme.

We then involved six individual international Leuven-based artists as critical allies to give feedback on our programme.

In parallel with the development of our programme we worked on the setting up of two network organizations that should ultimately lead to the informal LOV Network: CNoL (Culture Network of Leuven). CNoL brings together more than 300 professional and non-professional cultural organizations and the East Brabant IMC, which collates the cultural organizations of 30 municipalities in the region. CNoL organizes recurring sector days and launched the Open Creatives platform, on which cultural players can share workspace, knowledge, and projects.

At the start up of the LOV EU Academy, 67 cultural organizations took part in order to build capacity and to network the organization at a European level.

- **Artists from Leuven & Beyond** in the core LOV2030 team: Abigail Flores Holgado (visual artist), Georgy Chtchevaev (performance artist), Kathryn Cops (documentary maker), Stijn Devillé (writer and theatre maker)
- **Artists from Leuven & Beyond among the Dreamers2030:** Ronny Mosuse (musician), Ornella Ngomba (poet and spoken word artist), Fred Gata (musician), Bisser (visual artist and street artist), Sahim Omar Khalifa (film-maker), An Olaerts (writer), Joseph Palframan (visual artist), Roberta Santucci (theatre maker), Zoë Demoustier (choreographer), Judith Caeyers, Katrien Rycken, Michael Cloet (architects)
- **Artists from Leuven & Beyond involved in LOV-events:** Kids with Buns (musicians), Zakaria Ridouani (actor), Jennifer Regidor (choreographer), Jo Zanders (musician), Noémie Schellens (soprano), Joelle Francis (singer), Ugo Dehaes (choreographer), Lore Stessel (photographer), Jente Waerzeggers (photographer), Violet (musicians), Kaat Van Straelen (singer and spoken word artist), Kobe Baeyens (musician), Luka Walgrave (musician)
- **Artists active in Leuven & Beyond involved in Artist Day Feedback:** Yorgos Karras (digital arts), Vitalija Povilaityte-Petri (transdisciplinary), Maya Wuytack (theatre maker and poet), Begüm Erciyas (choreographer and sound artist), Ingrid Vranken (artist), Kurt D'haeseleer (digital and visual artist), Amina Iddrisu (dancer)
- **Art organizations from Leuven & Beyond involved in programme development:** STUK, M Leuven, Het nieuwstedelijk, fABULEUS, Cie. Tartaren, Stad & Architectuur, Royal Museum for Central Africa, Damiaan Museum, Vesalius Museum, KADOC, Rock Werchter, 30CC, de Bib Leuven, Studio Gijs Van Vaerenbergh, PARCUM, Werktank, Alamire Foundation, Fonk vzw/Cinema ZED, Performing Arts Site (PKS), CIRKLABO, Belgian National Orchestra, Musée L, Le Vilar, La Ferme, Theater Agora
- **Artists active in Leuven & Beyond with their own projects in the bid book:** Bas Smets (landscape architect), Rinus Van de Velde (visual artist), Zoë Demoustier (choreographer), Anthony Nti (film-maker), Amina Idrissu (dancer), Mira Sanders (architect, visual artist) Sara ten Westenend (visual artist) Pieter-Jan Gijs, Arnout Van Vaerenbergh (landscape artists)

TIMELINE





european dimension

Putting Europe on the map. That is literally what the Leuven cartographer Gerard Mercator did in the 1550s. Mercator was already a celebrity in Leuven, when, in 1544, he was arrested for heresy (he was a Lutheran) by the Spanish Inquisition. For months he and a group of Leuven citizens were imprisoned in a dank dungeon. Mercator was released, his fellow captives were beheaded. Antonia van Roesmale was buried alive on the Grote Markt in Leuven, opposite the magnificent town hall. Dark sides, it seems, are to be found in that shared European history.

Mercator worked in Leuven for another eight years then moved to Duisburg, taking with him the first map of Europe, which he was still working on. Who knows, maybe he used his own map to find the way. The map in question is now in the British Library in London.

If you walk from the place where Antonia van Roesmale was buried alive (and where now buses and thousands of cyclists unheedingly thunder past every day), along the side of the Gothic Stadhuis and on down Naamsestraat for about 250 metres you'll travel through a time warp. For this is where you pass through 500 years of European culture, history, and heritage and come to the very beginning of space and time. In our previous bid book we've already told you about the tandoori restaurant that was once the place where Thomas More had his *Utopia* printed, about the burning down of the University Library across the street, set ablaze by German troops in 1914: the first edition of Vesalius's *De humani corporis fabrica* perished in the flames. Fifty metres further on, in the Baroque St Michael's Peace Church, you can hear the sounds of the unique Contius organ (twin brother of the historic organ in Liepaja), and in the college next door is the small room where, between 1921 and 1930, Georges Lemaître developed his Big Bang theory. Beam me up, Scotty. Time to go back to the future.

Leuven & Beyond is packed with this kind of European history, heritage, and culture. Sometimes shiny and glittering, sometimes with a dark underside. But the question today – to stick with the cartographic metaphor – is how do we put Europe back on the map?

Today a European Capital of Culture cannot be a mere celebration of chirpy Europeanism. In many places in the world, Europe has lost its moral credibility. If we aspire to propagate European values again we also need to take a critical look at ourselves, to reflect on the dark sides of European history, on the sometimes reluctant or – not to mince words – the outright opportunistic attitude when geopolitical positions have to be taken.

In less than a year it's become clear that the world order can change quickly and radically. That values that were considered unshakable are suddenly under pressure. Peace, human rights, democracy, freedoms are threatened worldwide. Europe must now act as a stronghold of democracy, freedom and equality. Culture plays an essential part in this, not least as a crucial factor for social cohesion and resilience (see also Eurobarometer May 2025).

With LOV2030 we are explicitly and radically committed to this.

We believe in the power of a narrative that carries people along, that challenges them and causes them to reflect, that offers hope and perspective. **LOV2030 not only aims but also can and must contribute to just such a new and powerful narrative, that represents the EU values, precisely because we take those values as our own guideline:** equality, freedom, democracy, the rule of law and human rights, human dignity. The European priorities are at the forefront of our vision. Active citizenship, diversity and inclusion (human), sustainability (nature) and digitalization (innovation) are at the very heart of our bid. We put them dynamically opposite each other (give our disk another turn) and click them together. Eyes firmly fixed on the future.

The European story of Leuven & Beyond can contribute to a new narrative for the European Capital of Culture action. What Leuven does is what the ECoC '40 Recommendations' White Paper describes as a European Phoenix, heralding an era of European rebirth and change. If we were thinking in astrological terms our ascendant would certainly be the 'Rising Beaver', which also brings about strong local changes.

LOV2030 aims to dig deeper, develop more of a vision for the future, pick up on the weak signals and trends, and especially to look at the broader picture.

In Q11B, you will find an overview of how each of our projects meshes with the different aspects of the European dimension. Everything in this bid reflects the Europeaness of our city.

That European (and even international) perspective is also paramount in the composition of our team, our Dreamers2030 and our advisors. Several team members have a bicultural or migration background. This brings in perspectives from the Netherlands, Austria, Greece, the UK, Peru, Russia, China, Morocco, Senegal, Iraq, Congo, Rwanda, Palestine, Romania, Portugal, Poland, South Africa, Brazil, Italy... Leuven is an international city.



Approximately half of all Europeans live in a city the size of Leuven. This is why we call it a city on a human scale. Situated in a green belt of forests and farmland, you can also find the tension between town and countryside here, in which political polarization and climate change are two self-reinforcing elements.

With its centuries-old university and its all-pervading spirit of humanism, but particularly with its innovative strength and with the youngest population in Belgium, Leuven has the means to tackle these two major challenges. The means? Yes, but even more importantly, the responsibility. And inherent to that responsibility is the obligation to include everyone. 'For the better and for all', as the city itself puts it. To which we could add the coda: 'and with all'. For not everyone is rich, not everyone is involved, not everyone feels like they belong. So the coda, 'and with all', makes it clear that it's not a matter of charity or paternalism but of cooperation, of *joint action*, *synergy*, and *common goals*, in which everyone bears ownership and responsibility, to which everyone can and may contribute. Regardless of age, origin, education, religion, disability, gender, or preferences.

With LOV2030 we are creating a strategic compass, tracing a roadmap, for ourselves, our city and our region, for everyone who lives here and everyone who visits, so that we know which way to go when that future takes unpredictable turns: geopolitically, climatologically. That's why we call our Cultural Long-Term Strategy a Strategic Compass for Culture. That Mercator chap will be jolly useful.

LEUVEN & BEYOND IN EUROPE

Collaboration with former and future ECoC's & candidate cities

- Athens1985 (GR)
- Århus2017 (DK)
- Bad Ischl2024 (AT)
- Bielsko-Biała2029 (PL)
- Bourges2028 (FR)
- Budweis2028 (CZ)
- Chemnitz2025 (DE)
- Elefsina2023 (GR)
- Esch-sur-Alzette2022 (LU)
- Evora2027 (PT)
- Faro2027 (PT)
- Granada2031 (ES)
- Hildesheim2025 (DE)
- Katowice2029 (PL)
- Kiruna2029 (SE)
- Larnaka2030 (CY)
- Leeuwarden2018 (NL)
- Lemesos2030 (CY)
- Liepaja2027 (LV)
- Liverpool2008 (UK)
- Lublin2029 (PL)
- Lviv2030 (UA)
- Mons2015 (BE)
- Nikšić2030 (ME)
- Nicosia2030 (CY)
- Nova Gorica/Gorizia - Go2025 (SI)
- Oulu2026 (FI)
- Skopje2028 (MK)
- Tampere2026 (FI)
- Tartu2024 (EE)
- Timișoara2023 (RO)
- Trenčín2028 (SK)
- Uppsala2029 (SE)
- Veszprém2023 (HU)
- Victoria2031 (MT)

Collaboration with partners in:

- Aachen (DE)
- Amsterdam (NL)
- Arnhem (NL)
- Athene (EL)
- Avignon (FR)
- Barcelona (ES)
- Bradford (UK)
- Beirut (LB)
- Belgrado (RS)
- Belmont (UK)
- Berlin (DE)
- Bilbao (ES)
- Bonn (DE)
- Broumov (CZ)
- București (RO)
- Budapest (HU)
- Charkiv (UA)
- Cork (IE)
- Courmayeur (IT)
- Courbevoie (FR)
- Coventry (UK)
- Dagenham (DK)
- Dakar (SN)
- Den Haag (NL)
- Dijon (FR)
- Doues (IT)
- Dresden (DE)
- Düsseldorf (DE)
- Ebeltoft (DK)
- Eindhoven (NL)
- Garges (FR)
- Graz (AT)
- Frankfurt/Main (DE)
- Gdansk (PL)
- Galway (IE)
- Groningen (NL)
- Hamburg (DE)
- Hellerau (DE)
- Helsinki (FI)
- Joensuu (FI)
- Karlsruhe (DE)
- Kiev (UA)
- Kinshasa (DC)
- Köln (DE)
- Komařice (CZ)
- København (DK)
- Leiden (NL)
- Leipzig (DE)
- Lille (FR)
- Linz (AT)

- Lisboa (PT)
- Liverpool (UK)
- Ljubljana (SI)
- London (UK)
- Luxemburg (LU)
- Madrid (ES)
- Maastricht (NL)
- Mainz (DE)
- Manchester (UK)
- Mannheim (DE)
- Molokai (USA)
- München (DE)
- New York (US)
- Nicosia (CY)
- Nijmegen (NL)
- Northampton (UK)
- Odense (DE)
- Palermo (IT)
- Paris (FR)
- Piran (SI)
- Potsdam (DE)
- Praha (CZ)
- Pristina (KO)
- Ramallah (PS)
- Roma (IT)
- Roskilde (DK)
- Rotterdam (NL)
- Sankt Pölten (AT)
- San Sebastian (ES)
- Sofia (BG)
- Stockholm (SE)
- Timisoara (RO)
- Tokyo (JP)
- Trnava (SK)
- Trondheim (NO)
- Turino (IT)
- Utrecht (NL)
- Valetta (MT)
- Vila do conde (PT)
- Villars-sur-Ollon (CH)
- Vilnius (LT)
- Warszawa (PL)
- Wexford (IE)
- Wien (AT)
- Winterthur (CH)
- Wuxi (CN)
- Zagreb (HR)
- Zürich (CH)



LOV2030 AS EUROPEAN CAPITAL OF CULTURE, ON BEHALF OF BELGIUM

Even though Leuven's Stadhuis is only 25 kilometres away from the European Quarter in Brussels, the heart of Europe seems so close and yet so far, both at the same time. Mentally, European Brussels certainly doesn't feel close to everyone in Leuven & Beyond. That's why personal connections on the one hand, and shared history on the other, are crucial in many projects. Europe only becomes conceivable when you discover something concrete that you recognize, from person to person.

In order to strengthen that link in every project we have set up the LOV EU Academy we announced in our first bid book. Its local pillar is primarily aimed at organizations from the broad social and cultural sector, to guide them in their European 'awakening'. What themes are involved, where can I find partners, how can I get funding? The LOV EU Academy focuses on training and networking and puts participants in touch with important stakeholders. It works together with EU funding experts and national contact points. In this way, we not only enrich our programme but also sustainably increase the capacity of our civil society, long after 2030.

Our ECoC ambition also incorporates a responsibility towards Belgium itself. As European Capital of Culture we would also be presenting our country as an EU co-founder. That the title would be held in 2030 lends even more lustre, as it's also Belgium's bicentenary. Highlighting Leuven as a centre of European excellence would link together all the Europeaness our country has to offer.

Today's Belgium looks nothing like the Belgium of 1830. What was then created as a unitary state has now become a complex tangle of communities and regions, a mini-Europe in itself: with federal states and regional governments that may or may not get along with each other. In Belgium's national motto, *Eendracht maakt macht* - *L'union fait la force* or 'Strength lies in unity', perhaps that European longing for 'unity in diversity' also resonates. In our bicentenary year we're more than happy to second that and have initiated plans with our fellow-candidate cities Namur2030 and Molenbeek2030 to celebrate the 200th anniversary of the creation of Belgium together - whatever the result of the ECoC competition.

q11 - ELABORATE ON THE SCOPE AND QUALITY OF THE ACTIVITIES

q11 A - Promoting the cultural diversity of Europe, intercultural dialogue and greater mutual understanding between European citizens;

The *Plays of Birth*, *Power to the People*, *Crossroads*, and *Future Fusion* programme lines are aimed entirely at promoting Europe's **cultural diversity** and **intercultural dialogue** and at creating more **mutual understanding between European citizens**. They are sharply focused on themes such as **freedom (of movement and expression)**, **equality**, **democracy and the rule of law**, **respect for peoples' dignity**, and – **crucially** – **respect for human rights**. Today, it seems, these fundamentals need restating more than ever.

Home to 171 nationalities, nearly every country in the world is represented in Leuven & Beyond. No less than 38% of Leuveners have an ethnically diverse background. Leuven's international community has long been influenced strongly by students and lecturers from all over the world and expats involved in KU Leuven's many spin-offs, but since the 2015 refugee crisis that profile has changed. In absolute figures Leuven received the largest influx of refugees, being second only to Antwerp; in percentage terms Leuven took in the largest number. Walk through the streets of Leuven today, sit on a bench in the park or on a terrace in the sun and the world passes you by. Prick up your ears, listen to the conversation next to you. You hear a different language every time.

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 major city in Flanders whose mayor has a migration background. It is not your origin that counts here, but your future.

Our **Plays of Birth** programme line plays with that notion of birth-place. Not as a datum that should determine your life (or, God forbid, as a reason for exclusion), but as a playful opportunity to talk about the diversity of old and new cultures in Europe. Where is your tree? asks the Ugandan proverb. How are you rooted? Roots and routes: what path have you taken? Be welcome, sit down, tell your story. *Plays of Birth* and the various projects in this programme are explicit invitations to intercultural dialogue and mutual understanding. With a project like *1,001 Stories*, we focus explicitly on personal encounters, bringing people together.

We don't skirt around difficult chapters from the past but establish ties with the French speaking community who were sent packing from Leuven more than 50 years ago, set up projects with Congolese artists and scientists, and follow Father Damien to Molokai.

Power to the People is all about democracy and the rule of law, emancipation, freedom, and equality. *Stadhuis – European House for Democracy* not only focuses intrinsically and thematically on these topics but also continues the line in the programming of speakers, writers, thinkers, and artists, and in the collaborations at local, national and European level. In the other projects that are part of this programme freedoms are often central, but even more often minorities: war refugees (*Book by Book*), people in poverty, the queer community, women, the elderly.

Crossroads concentrates on movement and encounter: here, sustainability is key. Stopping at a crossroads and considering which way to go. We move about the region, discuss food culture, and look for a new role for the empty churches. And in *Cemeteries for the Future* we try to imagine death. Not an exclusively European theme but certainly a universal one.

In **Future Fusion** we look for innovation in our democratic values. How do young people see the future of democracy (*Future Generations Studio*), how do we make an arts centre a truly democratic and inclusive place (*Performing Arts Site*) and how do we guarantee democratic values in a digitalized world (*Mutual Expectations*).

Being the youngest city in Belgium, but also home to many active seniors, many projects in our bid involve a strong intergenerational and youth action, which puts resilience and flexibility first, and which aims to put young people from Leuven & Beyond in touch with (young) people in Europe. Think of *The Night is Young*, *EUtopia*, *Stadhuis*, *Future Generations Studio*, *Smells like Teen Spirit*, and even *Erasmus 65+*.

The **LOV EU Academy** specifically supports socio-cultural organizations in giving their youth actions an explicit European boost and aims to increase exchanges and partnerships. We take advantage of DiscoverEU programme (Leuven is already on its Green Route and Digital Route) to allow young people to travel throughout Europe (and to meet in Leuven!). Our youth projects frequently focus on inclusion and democracy, specifically addressing young people in a vulnerable position. We use Erasmus+ Youth and the European Solidarity Corps strategically as cooperation and subsidy instruments to support the LOV programme.

LEAD: LOV2030

BE: Creative Europe Desk Flanders, InvolvEU, JINT, LEADER Hageland, province Flemish Brabant - Dienst Europa, EU subsidies coordinator city of Leuven, VLEVA Liaison Agency Flanders Europe

INT: Bourges2028 (FR), Budweis2028 (CZ), Centrul Cultural PLAÎ Timișoara (RO), Culture Action Europe (EU), EUNIC (EU), EuroCITIES (EU), Granada2031 (ES), Kiruna2029 (SE), Lemesos2030 (CY)

Q11 B - Highlighting the common aspects of European cultures, heritage and history, as well as European integration and current European themes;

As a part of our cultural strategy, all the projects in this bid book have a European and/or international connection. This is evident in our partnerships with European artists, organizations and networks, but especially so in the link with one or more European values. Those values must be actively preserved, defended, and promoted: in that respect we see the title of European Capital of Culture as a bulwark against global polarization, both online and in person.

LOV2030 AND THE SIX EUROPEAN VALUES

- **Democracy:** Democratic values are reflected in the participatory approach of the project. Citizens are involved in the planning and implementation of cultural activities, citizen panels and co-creation processes.
- **Freedom** (movement and expression): Freedom is reflected in the pursuit of artistic expression and cultural participation. LOV2030 includes programmes that promote creative freedom, that provide space for different voices and perspectives.

- **Equality** is striven for by promoting equitable access to cultural events and facilities. Maximum efforts to reduce barriers to participation, such as free events and programmes that focus on underrepresented groups and less heard voices.
- **Rule of law:** LOV2030 promotes transparency and accountability in the organization of cultural activities. Emphasis on the importance of cooperation with local authorities and institutions.
- **Human rights** and **minority rights:** celebrating cultural diversity and integrating it into the programme. Specific events and projects focus on the heritage and traditions of different minority groups.
- **Human dignity:** LOV2030 emphasizes the importance of human dignity through inclusive projects that focus on different target groups in the different LOV zones (see Outreach). Initiatives such as participatory art projects and community-based events are designed to respect and enhance the dignity of every resident.

Programme line	Project	European diversity	inter-cultural dialogue	mutual understanding	common history & heritage	European integration & other themes	European values
Plays of Birth	Here We Are Now	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
	Humanism Today				✓	✓	✓
	Lovanium		✓	✓	✓		✓
Body & Soul	Mindblowing	✓	✓	✓			✓
	The Night is Young	✓	✓				✓
Power to the People	Stadhuis	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
	Erasmus 65+	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓
	Smallest Queer Museum	✓		✓	✓		✓
	Sisters Doin' It For Themselves	✓	✓		✓		✓
	The Benefit of the Doubt	✓		✓		✓	✓
	Book by Book		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Down to Earth	Bunker Ecologies	✓			✓		✓
	A Hill Called Herman	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓
	How to Build a Glacier?	✓	✓	✓			✓
Listening to the Forest	To the Roots	✓	✓		✓		✓
	Starry Nights, Starring Nature!		✓		✓		✓
Crossroads	30 Ways to LOV	✓		✓			✓
	Take Me to Church	✓		✓	✓		✓
	Let's Eat!	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓
MetaLOV Future Fusion	Hybrid LOV		✓	✓		✓	✓
	Future Generations Studio	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
	Mutual Expectations	✓	✓	✓			✓
PastForward	Unmuted		✓		✓		✓
	LOV Dances: Stories to Remember	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓
	Kweikersparade	✓	✓		✓		✓

Our programme is based on **European priorities**: you can see the connection between **active citizenship, diversity and inclusion, sustainability and digitalization** and our main lines respecting human, nature, and innovation on our disk at the front of this bid book. European priorities are woven into our programme and concept through and through. We believe that you can't view them separately any more – they are dynamically connected to each other. Projects are simultaneously sustainable and innovative, or digital and inclusive, they promote active citizenship and sustainability, and so forth. All our projects reflect this multi-perspectivity and the radical connections that prepare us for the future.

At the same time, our projects also feed back into the **common aspects of the cultures, heritage, and history of Europe**. In **Plays of Birth**, for instance, we tell the tale of humanism and what it still means today, we get swept up in the inspiring story of Father Damien, but we also look at elements of European folk culture like pigeon racing or carillon music. On the other side of the programme we look at how we can renew artistic traditions (**Past Forward**) in projects such as *Alamire XR Studio* (polyphony), and the *Dancelab Experience Centre* (contemporary dance – or better: today's dance). *The European Cinematic Heritage Odyssey* puts the spotlight on European cinema, *Shakespeare is Dead* zooms in on the European literary landscape on stage.

HUMAN

Active Citizenship and Democracy

LOV2030 promotes empowerment, democracy, participation, and co-creation. It encourages dialogue about Europe, fosters awareness of European values, invites critical engagement, and supports individuals in shaping their own perspectives.

LOV translation

- **Projects centered on participation and co-creation**
 - Future Generations Studio
 - Performing Arts Site
 - Hip Hop House
- **Projects exploring democracy and raising awareness of European core values**
 - Stadhuis
 - Erasmus 65+
 - Benefit of the Doubt
- **Projects on war and peace**
 - Book by Book
 - Bunker Ecologies
 - Singing Towers

Linked EU policies: EU action plan for European Democracy, European Democracy Shield (EDS - in progress), Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union, Article 2 Treaty on European Union

In the table on the left, we provided an illustration of how our project lines align with the European Dimension and EU values. But all boxes are ticked in EU Values? Indeed, when developing the projects with our partners, the different EU values were embedded from the onset, strengthening their importance and raising awareness on them. Below, we walk you through how LOV translates into the EU priorities and connects to relevant EU policy.

Inclusion and Diversity

LOV places a strong emphasis on inclusion, diversity, and accessibility for all. It promotes co-creation and peaceful living together, embracing differences across ethnic backgrounds, migration background (refugees, people with a migration background, expats, internal migration), and cultural divides – whether academic and non-academic, urban and rural, or across generations.

LOV views diversity as a source of strength and potential. It actively seeks to bridge (perceived) distances and tensions between groups by bringing people together.

LOV translation

- **Projects addressing colonial history and promoting the decolonization of art, culture, and heritage – using culture as a tool for equity:**
 - Decolonizing Art Déco
 - Mine. Mind. Museum
 - Lovanium
 - Unmuted
- **Projects fostering social cohesion and an inclusive society in Leuven and the region**
 - 1,001 Stories – a living library
 - Kweikersparade
- **Initiatives involving marginalized or disadvantaged groups as active, equal partners and participants in the programme:**
 - Vesalius Unseen
 - Mindblowing
- **Projects that emerge from the diverse fabric of LOV itself, e.g. working with communities including young people, seniors, students, and residents of rural areas:**
 - Here We Are Now
 - The World's Smallest Queer Museum
 - Cultivating Dreams in the Rural

We are planning a collaboration with **LEADER Hageland**, which, in their next work programme, will focus on strengthening connections between Leuven and the surrounding region. LOV2030 also leads by example – developing an **Inclusion and Sustainability Charter** (combining the LOV Charter on Ecological Art Practice and the LOV Inclusive Audience Charter). and implementing an **outreach strategy** that targets diverse groups across all six LOV zones.

Linked EU policies (selection): European pillar of social rights, LGBTIQ Equality Strategy 2020-2025, Gender Equality Strategy 2020-2025, Strategy for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities 2021-2030, EU Anti-racism Action Plan 2020-2025

NATURE

Climate and Sustainability

Climate change was identified in the preparatory phase as a key challenge the LOV2030 programme needs to address. LOV2030 responds with a strategic partnership with Leuven 2030 and its Climate Mission City status. Our projects engage with climate, sustainability, and nature in both innovative and inclusive ways, promoting a just transition. We highlight nature as a vital and equal partner to humankind.

LOV translation

- **Artistic projects created with respect for nature and the landscape:**
 - Save our Soils
 - Starry Nights, Starring Nature!
 - Master in Disaster
- **Projects raising awareness around climate and the natural environment:**
 - A Hill Called Herman
 - And they came to the river. And they came from the road
 - Earthshakers
- **Landmark initiatives developed with and within nature:**
 - 30 Ways to LOV
 - How to Build a Glacier
- **Innovative projects around sustainable food and agriculture**
 - Cultivating Dreams in the Rural
 - Let's Eat!
 - Food for Thought (see p. 68)

Also here, we lead by example, ensuring the ECoC implementation is as sustainable as possible. Our **Inclusion and Sustainability Charter** includes a **LOV Charter on Ecological Art Practice** to guide our practices.

Linked EU policies: European Green Deal with, inter alia, Biodiversity Strategy 2030 and From Farm to Fork strategy

INNOVATION

Digitalization

LOV collaborates with partners who bring strong expertise in digitalization, including the innovative use of AI and XR and Green IT. Together, we explore how digital tools can help address societal challenges such as polarization and climate change. We strive to use digitalization as a means of improving access to culture and heritage.

At the same time, we are mindful of the challenges digitalization poses, including its environmental impact, the unpredictable development of AI, and its influence on information integrity, disinformation, and democracy. We address these challenges (as the panel requested) in Q6 under *MetaLOV*.

LOV translation

- **Projects making radical connections between digitalization, sustainability, inclusion, and heritage:**
 - Alamire XR Studio
 - Mutual Expectations

- **Partnerships with leading institutions contributing digital expertise, including imec and KU Leuven:**
 - Hybrid LOV
 - The Fantastic Institute for Digital Fabulation
- **Innovation that goes beyond the digital – exploring new societal models and links between sustainability and innovation, aligned with the New European Bauhaus:**
 - Cultivating Dreams in the Rural
 - Molenbeek for LOV

Linked EU policies: European Digital strategy, European Digital Rights and Principles, Digital Compass 2030, ‘Artificial Intelligence act’

In addition to actively following up on European values and priorities, LOV2030 also monitors ongoing European policy processes in the field of culture. Among other things, we follow the development of the **European Cultural Compass**, the discussions and decisions of the Council of Ministers, and the priorities of European presidencies in the coming years until 2033.

q11 C - featuring european artists, cooperation with operators and cities in different countries, and transnational partnerships

European Capital of Culture is the most important international cultural project our city has ever competed for. Which is why, from the very outset, we conceived a plan to stimulate international collaboration in the region and support sustainable partnerships between local and international cultural players – in short, our LOV EU Academy, which supports and challenges broad civil society in Leuven & Beyond in European networking.

But Leuven is a European city in itself, of course: with 171 different nationalities and over 30,000 expats and international students you can hear a different language on every corner. Same thing with the arts. Structurally the professional arts organizations – such as STUK, Het Depot, M Leuven, Cas-co, fABULEUS, Het nieuwstedelijk, the Alamire Foundation, and so on – all work internationally. That gave our project a head start. The cultural houses work with international artists and they're often active members in European networks such as EDN, IETM, Assitej, Dopodo, etc. as well.

As we've already described in answer to Q10, a number of international artists active in Leuven challenged us in the composition of our programme.

In Chapter 2 we noted whether we have contacted European or international artists and who they are. Several projects are specifically **artist-led** by individual artists or collectives, such as **Anthony Nti** (*Akwaaba*), **Younes Baba-Ali** (*Pigeon People*), **Seasonal Neighbours** (*Cultivating Dreams in the Rural*), **Traumnovelle** (*Mine. Mind. Museum*), **TerraO** (*The Word for World is Forest*), **Mira Sanders** and **Cédric Noël** (*And they came to the river. And they came from the road*) or **HeHe** (*Toxic Beauty*). We have chosen these artists because they emphasize the perspectives that the programme lines deal with: diversity and shared values; new intergenerational and transcultural connections. Artists who also build bridges between city and region and explore alternative forms of living and working together. Others confront us with contemporary colonial processes or speculate about an equitable future for both humans and non-humans.

In addition, **we commission artists directly**: think of **Doris Salcedo** with *Bunker Ecologies* or **Begum Erciyas**, **Alessandra Ferrini**, **Joseph Thabang Palframan**, **Dora García** with *Stadhuis – European House for Democracy*, theatre maker **Eric de Vroedt** with *Benefit of the Doubt*, or **Anna Dumitriu** and **Sara Ten Westenend** with *Let's Eat!* We have chosen to invite artists whose work touches on the core values of each



project and sets the tone for what we want to achieve. That choice, and our many open calls, ensures that we get both artistic quality and a process that is always open and transparent. In total, we engage with 78 artists.

Also consistently mentioned when applicable is whether we will be issuing a European open call, for instance for projects where a co-creative approach is required. At present we foresee a total of fourteen open calls, which will be published via our European networks: EUNIC and Culture Next are both preferential partners here. We also work together with the Prince Claus Fund to reach artists in the Global South. For the selection and curating of the open-call submissions we work with an advisory panel consisting of international curators and professionals and, where applicable, also with local residents and involved parties from civil society. Each open call will be coordinated by the lead organization of the respective project (as indicated in Q6). Selection criteria will be in line with the HumanNature concept, the radical new connections principle, the LOV values and the LOV Charter on Ecological Art Practice and the LOV Inclusive Audience Charter.

Sometimes an open call is also linked to an **artist residency** (there are thirteen of these). For the funding and mobility of the artists, we call on *Culture Moves Europe*, *Artists and Ecologists at Risk*, *Res Artis*, *Etijjahat Independent Culture* and *On the Move*, among others.

Below each project description is a list of all the local and European partners and hosts involved: these may be co-producers in the case of a stage performance or exhibition project, networks within which a project is created or can travel further, international lenders, etc. Building these partnerships is part of our strategy to strengthen the European capacity of our projects and organizations.

Leuven is active in several **European networks**, such as Eurocities, Trans Europe Halles, European Network Cultural Centres (ENCC) and Culture Next. During the preparations these alliances have become even stronger and plans have been made for further cooperation. Leuven signed the Eurocities *Lille Call to Action* and has used that as a template for its own charter for sustainability and inclusion. We are bringing the *EUNIC Climate Culture Creative Lab* to Leuven in 2030 for *The Future of Living*, an interdisciplinary meeting between artists, scientists, and researchers on emerging technologies and sustainable development.

We connect Cas-co with **Artists at Risk**, which as yet has no Belgian partner city. This collaboration will contribute to Cas-co's internationalization and Leuven becoming the first host city of **Artists at Risk** in Belgium.

Each year between now and 2030 we will invite a European network and host at least one **European conference**. In 2026, for example, as a stepping stone to the *Body & Soul Festival*, we will organize a conference on Health and Wellbeing in collaboration with *Culture Action Europe*. In June 2027, we host the annual meeting of the ENCC and in that instance will also invite ten partners from cultural networks outside the EU. In 2028, we will organize an international conference on human rights with International Council of Museums (ICOM) and Network of European Museum Organizations (NEMO). In 2029, we will be receiving the University Network of the European Capitals of Culture (UNeECC), of which, incidentally, Leuven is Chair, for its Annual Conference. In 2030 Erfgoedlabo will host an international conference on Postwar Societies: Social Reconstruction and Mental Resilience, as a context programme related to all of the war and peace-related projects in our programme.

And of course, once Leuven has been awarded the title of European Capital of Culture 2030, we expect to host several key network meetings – including those of e.g. Culture Next, Culture Action Europe, EuroCITIES, IETM, the European Festivals Association and Trans Europe Halles. We are also open to hosting the IFACCA World Summit on Arts and Culture.

In the course of developing this bid we held hundreds of telephone conversations, digital meetings, and meetings in real life with European partners. Each of those calls and conversations met with great generosity and brought us closer together. We inspired each other, linked our projects together, and encouraged each other. We each shared our ideas, our insights, and our networks. That we regard as a great gift.

Artists commissioned to create new work

Younes Baba-Ali (MA) artist forward, Bureau Bas Smets (BE) artist forward, Matthijs De Block (BE), Eric de Vroedt (NL), Anna Dumitriu (UK), Zoë Dumoustier (BE), Alexandra Daisy Ginsberg (UK/ZA) artist forward, Niko Hafkenscheid (BE), Mona Hatoum (UK/LB), HeHe (Helen Evans and Heiko Hansen (DE/UK/FR) artist forward, Alexandra Kehayoglou (AR), NDRGRND (Sara ten Westenend and Maarten Van Gool) (NL/BE) artist forward, Anthony Nti (BE/GH) artist forward, Bosse Provoost and Ezra Veldhuis (BE), Jasna Rok Lab (BE), Doris Salcedo (CO), Mira Sanders and Cédric Noël (The Mental Masonry Lab) (BE/FR) artist forward, Terra0 (Paul Kolling, Paul Seidler) (DE) artist forward, Traumnovelle (Léone Drapeaud, Manuel León Fanjul, and Johnny Leya) (AU/FR/BE/DC) artist forward, Rinus Van de Velde (BE), Gijs Van Vaerenbergh (BE), Seasonal Neighbours (BE) artist forward, Nataalka Voroshbit (UA), Maya Wuytack (BE)

Artists invited to show (existing or new) work

Aladin Borioli (Apian Ministry of Bees) (CH), Apparatus 22 (RO/BE) Iván Argote (CO), Bebe Books (BE), Black Coffee (ZA), Stéphane Beel Architects (BE), Oliver Beer (UK), Renaat Braem*(BE), Thijs Biersteker (NL), Eglė Budvytytė (LT), Vincent Das (BE), Bureau d'Etudes (FR), Denicolai & Provoost (BE), Marc Dessauvage* (BE), Banu Cennetoğlu (TR), Peter De Bruyne (BE), Koba De Meutter (BE), Annelys de Vet (BE), Dysfunkshunal (BE), Begüm Erciyas (BE/TR), Alessandra Ferrini (IT), Dora García (ES), Sofia Goebaidoelina*, (RU), Simone Guillissen-Hoa* (BE), Hygra (BE), Lisa Ijeoma (BE), Maarten Inghels (BE), André Jacqmain* (BE), Laetitia Janssens (BE), Prince Kaybee (ZA), Raymond M. Lemaire* (BE), Heinrich Nicolaus (Institute54) (DE), Léonard Pongo (BE/DC), Norell/Rodhe (SE), Fatinha Ramos (PT), Edvard Ravnikar* (SL), Isabelle Reynders (BE), Inge Rochette (BE), Sibran Sampers (BE), Sergison Bates architects (UK), Hussein Shikha (IQ/BE), Tavares Strachen (BS), Socrates Stratis / AA & U (CY), Joseph Thabang Palframan (NA), Maarten Vanden Eynde (BE), Michel Van Hove (De Chinezen) (BE), Chaantal van Rijt (NL), Ryanne Verhulst, Vinci (BE), Jacowbski (BE), Boucif, Fred Gata, Tevin, Dysfunkshunal, Jules Wabbes* (BE), Geert Waegeman (BE), Zino (BE)

*deceased

q12 - ATTRACTING THE INTEREST OF A BROAD EUROPEAN AND INTERNATIONAL PUBLIC

THE NARRATIVE

Look, Europe! Something marvellous is happening here. Starting from the historical power of this city, with its magnificent heritage and glorious past, from the story of those first humanists, we have written a story of today. A story of radical connection, of love and responsibility. Our story is deeply human and challenging at one and the same time. It is relevant and urgent. As a European Capital of Culture, we aim not only to offer inspiration and perspective to people and cities across Europe, but also to learn from the diverse practices, insights, and experiences of other countries and cultural contexts.

THE PROGRAMME AND THE CALL TO ACTION

We are building a programme around that story, with a number of large-scale connecting projects. And we invite you to join us – not just as a visitor or tourist but as a co-creator, an active participant. We appeal to your citizenship, to your values, to who you are as a human being. Come in, be welcome, tell your story. Let’s learn from each other. This city is a laboratory where there’s much to discover.

With projects like *EUtopia*, *Mindblowing* and *Erasmus 65+* we’re issuing a call to action to an audience that is not the usual one. In Stad-huis – European House for Democracy we will debate with you. In our brand new Performing Arts Site the visitor is central to everything. In the Vesalius Museum we link care and well-being to innovation. And large-scale high-profile exhibitions delve deeper into the various themes: *You Belong Here* is a powerful invitation, *Mundo Abrigo* promises protection in turbulent times.

THE PLACE

We explore nature as a source of life, as inspiration, and as a stage. We send you off on your bike on an art route at intersections and along slow ways or straight to the Brabantse Wouden National Park. The curious can discover Flanders’ beguinages and what their emancipatory and artistic import can be today. Off-route adventurers will likely want to go and see the surprising visual art that their favourite rock or pop artist also happens to make, in addition to his or her performance at Rock Werchter.

In that combination of city and nature, of the buzzing international heart and the plethora of inspiring places in the rolling countryside around it, is exactly where the appeal of LOV2030 lies.

THE NAMES

This is how we build a strategy, with the focus on our narrative and only then on the programme with its projects and call to action, so that then we can come to the magical places in Leuven & Beyond. And we use the big names, *dead or alive*: the humanists, Erasmus, Vesalius, Mercator of course, and Father Damien, as well as contemporary Belgian artists with international resonance: Rinus Van de Velde, Gijs Van Vaerenberg, Berlinde De Bruyckere, Rosas, Alamire, Huelgas Ensemble. International artists, too, of course.

ACTIVE VISITOR, REGENERATIVE TOURISM, INTERNATIONAL CHARACTER

Our starting point is the active participation of the visitor, regenerative tourism that revolves around essential (but unexpected) encounters and contributions, and sustainable travel (by train, bus or bicycle in the first place).

Leuven’s fundamentally international character, with its large expat community, its many hundreds of Erasmus students, and the global diaspora of tens of thousands of Leuvenites, means that there is a large group of ambassadors who can fire family, compatriots, and colleagues with enthusiasm for a visit to Leuven, now that it’s being fully prepared for a fantastic festive year. Our structural collaboration with KU Leuven and the KU Leuven Connect programme give us direct contact with this huge international community. Want to become a Leuvenite yourself? You’re very welcome at LOV2030 Leuven & Beyond European Capital of Culture.

STEPPING STONES TO 2030

From 2025 we will gradually build up this strategy. With the celebration of the university’s 600th anniversary and the associated Art and Science route *And So, Change Comes in Waves*, we’re taking the first step. This sculpture trail through the city, shows work by nine international artists: Jaume Plensa, Gijs Van Vaerenberg, Ugo Rondinone, Sammy Baloji, Clara Spilliaert, Alicja Kwade, Elif Erkan, Berlinde De Bruyckere and Yu Ji.

The next stepping stones are the opening of the Vesalius Museum in 2026, the complete restoration of Park Abbey in 2027, then our pilot project *Body & Soul* city festival in 2028, and the repurposing of the Gothic town hall in 2029. With each stepping stone we will have learned a lesson about how to reach the international public (and international press). And each occasion is also an event that will make Leuveners and Leuvenites proud and keen to announce that next big date, LOV2030 as European Capital of Culture.

TOURISM STRATEGIES

Of course, all these stepping stones are also aligned with the communication and tourism strategies of Visit Leuven, Visit Flemish Brabant, Visit Flanders and Event Flanders. By also linking our programme to the legacy of former fellow-candidates Bruges, Ghent and Kortrijk and setting up projects with them (the Beguinages and art routes), we can extend visits and so make tourism more sustainable. Likewise, the joint projects with Namur and Molenbeek. This way we are building up a tourism roadmap, and strategic partnerships with other Belgian cities. The proximity of historical cities like Antwerp, Mechelen, and of course Brussels can also be a reason for visitors to extend their stay in Leuven (or in Belgium in any case).

ACCESSIBILITY – LIVE AND ONLINE

Leuven’s central location and its easy accessibility are undoubtedly assets. The easiest way to get there from neighbouring countries (France, Germany, the Netherlands, Luxembourg and the UK) is by train. But even from further away (Austria, the Czech Republic, Spain) you can easily get to Leuven by high-speed or night train. And there’s is a wide range of international buses that serve Leuven.

With two motorways passing close by Leuven the city is of course also easily accessible by car. And visitors coming from further afield can reach Leuven from Brussels Airport in just 13 minutes by direct train.

For those who can’t physically get there we have a complete digital programme: *MetaLOV*. Here you’ll not only find live-event streaming but also original digital projects that are hosted online on net zero servers and will sweep you into the innovative city that is Leuven.

q13 - LINKS AND COOPERATION WITH OTHER EUROPEAN CAPITALS OF CULTURE AND CANDIDATES

In the past two and a half years we have invested a lot in meeting and collaborating with other European cities that have held the title. Leuven also joined the Culture Next network as a full member early on and followed the conferences on a regular basis.

We hosted **Timisoara2023** in Leuven, likewise **Leeuwarden2018**, **Mons2015**, **Bourges2028**, **Uppsala2029**, **Lublin2029**, **Tartu2024**, and **Oulu2026**. We exchanged experiences on mobilizing an entire region in every possible arena with **Aarhus2017**, **Leeuwarden2018**, **Veszprém2023** and **Bad Ischl-sk2024**. We drew inspiration from the experience of **Hildesheim2025** in networking cultural organizations, universities and civil society in the city and region. We went to Leeuwarden, Oulu, Larnaka, Bielsko-Biala, Nikšić, **Elefsina2023**... We were in **Chemnitz2025** several times and also in **Nova Gorica/Gorizia2025**. We delved into the programmes of the nine cities that will hold the title of European Capital of Culture between 2026 and 2029, and made concrete agreements on cooperation with many of them. The LOV themes offered many starting points.

We also contacted some candidate cities for the years after 2030 – such as **Granada2031** and **Victoria2031**. Proposals around knowledge exchange and capacity-building, as we are developing with the LOV EU Academy, were enthusiastically welcomed by several of these ECoCs.

We met with our fellow candidate cities **Larnaka2030**, **Lemesos2030**, **Nikšić2030**, and **Lviv2030**, and of course with our Belgian colleagues from **Namur2030** and **Molenbeek2030**. The collaboration with the other candidates for 2030 widened our view of Cyprus, Montenegro, and Ukraine, as well as giving us some excellent meetings and good contacts. Things always start with people and their stories. That’s the case here too. During a multi-day meeting with the **2030 finalists** in Chemnitz, we drew up a joint manifesto that puts cooperation above competition.

In that spirit we set up a strong collaboration with our Flemish colleagues from **Bruges2030**, **Kortrijk2030**, and **Ghent2030**, who now officially support our bid.

All concrete collaborations with previous and upcoming ECoCs and candidate cities are listed in detail for you at the end of this chapter.

In 2030, the European Union will celebrate the 80th anniversary of the Schuman Declaration: how is Europe developing, from one milestone to the next? In 2030, the EU’s ECoC programme will also celebrate its 45th anniversary – well on the way to its half-century – LOV2030 is committed to actively contributing to the continued strengthening of the European Capital of Culture title and brand, aligning with many of the key recommendations outlined in the White Paper *40 Recommendations from 40 Years of European Capitals of Culture*.



ECoC	Projects	Description
Bruges2030 Ghent2030, Kortrijk 2030 (not selected)	- Sisters Doin' It For Themselves - LOVEU Academy - Capacity Building	The former Belgian candidate cities will join <i>Sisters Doin' It For Themselves</i> , our project on the Belgian Beguinages. We agreed to continue our structural cooperation among our cities.
Larnaca2030 (candidate city)	- Bunker Ecologies - In the Neighbourhood - Sisters Doin' It For Themselves - The World's Smallest Queer Museum - Let's Eat! - Future Generations Lab	With Larnaca we foresee cooperating on reconciliation after conflict. <i>The Pyla Project - UNFICYP (United Nations Peace Keeping Force)</i> will join our <i>Bunker Ecologies</i> . <i>Our Neighbourhood</i> , <i>Mahallart</i> will join In the Neighbourhood. On female empowerment, <i>We female</i> will join <i>Sisters Doin' It For Themselves</i> . <i>The World's Smallest Queer Museum</i> will collaborate with <i>We less heard voices</i> . <i>1,001 drinks</i> will join <i>Let's eat</i> . <i>We the future</i> will join <i>Future Generations Lab</i> .
Lemosos2030 (candidate city)	- Future Generations Lab / Stadhuis - Can You Hear the People Sing? - The Night is Young - And they came to the river. And they came from the road - A Hill Called Herman - The World's Smallest Queer Museum	With Lemosos we share common themes like childrens' and youth participation and the climate crisis. A common Erasmus+ Youth project was submitted and approved for <i>Stadhuis / Future Generations Lab</i> . <i>Arts Out There: Sessions Audacious Acts and Encounters</i> will join <i>The Night is Young</i> . <i>Trodos mountain</i> will join a <i>Hill Called Herman</i> and <i>Imaginary Water</i> links strongly to <i>And they came to the river. And they came from the road</i> . <i>The Cost of Democracy</i> and <i>1,000 Voices</i> will join <i>The World's Smallest Queer Museum</i> and <i>Can You Hear the People Sing?</i>
Lviv2030 (candidate city)	- Book by Book - Bunker Ecologies - Future Generations Lab / Stadhuis - Can You Hear the People Sing?	With Lviv we are developping a flagship on rebuilding libraries called <i>Book by Book</i> . Their <i>Natura project</i> will also be strongly involved in our <i>Bunker Ecologies</i> project. <i>MoloDvizh Platform</i> will join flagship <i>Stadhuis</i> and <i>Future Generation Lab</i> in our house of democracy and following Lviv's great Homin Choir will join our <i>Can You Hear The People Sing?</i>
Nikšić2030 (candidate city)	- Bunker Ecologies - A Hill Called Herman - And they came to the river. And they came from the road	Nikšićs' plans for an <i>anti-war museum</i> will join our <i>Bunkers Ecologies</i> and <i>Budoš Hill</i> , which has rarely seen snow in recent years will befriend a <i>Hill Called Herman</i> . Nikšićs' activities related to the themes of river drought and water resource preservation will join our rivers' project.
Kiruna2029	- A Tale of Two Cities - Starry Nights, Starring Nature! - Living Room Live - The Night is Young	The story of Kiruna shows a fascinating parallel with the history of origin of Louvain-la-Neuve and they will join <i>A Tale Of Two Cities</i> . <i>100 Stages - Culture Knocks at Your Door</i> will join <i>Living Room Live</i> and <i>The Night is Young</i> connects to the <i>Arctic Fire Festival</i> . In our Nature line <i>Norrbotten Music</i> joins <i>Starring Nature</i> .
Lublin2029	- LOV Dances: Stories to Remember - Let's Eat! - Book by Book - Stadhuis - The World's Smallest Queer Museum	<i>Lublin Dance Theatre</i> will join <i>LOV Dances: Stories To Remember</i> . <i>Future Food Festival</i> will inspire <i>Let's Eat!</i> . Lublin2029 will join <i>Book by Book</i> by providing publishers and more. <i>Re:Union into the Future</i> will organize conferences on democracy together with <i>Stadhuis</i> . And <i>Queers Get Loud</i> join <i>The World's Smallest Queer Museum</i> .
Bielsko-Biała2026 Katowice2027 Polish Capitals of Culture	- Stadhuis - Body & Soul Festival	Bielsko-Biała's <i>Culture for health conference</i> and Katowices' <i>Choirs for Depression</i> will join our <i>Body & Soul Festival</i> . With <i>Narrative laundry</i> Bielsko-Biała will join <i>Stadhuis/Future Generation Lab</i> .
Bourges2028	- The World's Smallest Queer Museum - LOV Dances: Stories to Remember - Can You Hear the People Sing? - Let's Eat! - And they came to the river. And they came from the road - Molenbeek for LOV 30 Ways to LOV	The Bourges LGBTQIA+ centre will partner with our <i>The World's Smallest Queer Museum</i> . <i>Redécrouvrez nos dances</i> will join <i>LOV Dances: Stories to Remember</i> . The Bourges music and dance conservatory will partner with <i>Can You Hear the People Sing? Intergenerational canteens</i> will join <i>Let's eat</i> . <i>The European Parliament of Rivers</i> will join both <i>And they came to the river</i> and <i>30 Ways to LOV</i> .

ECoC	Projects	Description
Budweis2028	- The Night is Young - Pigeon People - Bee Europe - MetaLOV - Let's Eat! - Sisters Doin' It For Themselves	Budweis' young creators project will join <i>The Night is Young</i> . The flagship and legacy project <i>Ars Biologica</i> joins <i>Bee Europe</i> , <i>Pigeon People</i> and <i>MetaLOV</i> . <i>Roots and flavours</i> will join <i>Let's Eat!</i> . <i>Womenpedia</i> will join <i>Sisters Doin' It For Themselves</i> . Budweis also inspires us with their <i>Hospoda</i> project around the café culture.
Skopje2028	- Plays of Birth - Sisters Doin' It For Themselves - The Night is Young - To the Roots - A Tale of Two Cities - Master in Disaster	<i>Art 4 hope</i> will join <i>Plays of Birth</i> . <i>The autonomous festival of women</i> will gladly join <i>Sisters Doin' It For Themselves</i> . <i>Neet group of youth</i> will join <i>The Night is Young</i> , <i>Master in Disaster</i> and <i>The tale of a tree</i> will join <i>To the Roots</i> . A new project on <i>Brutalist architecture</i> will join <i>A Tale Of Two Cities</i> . <i>Culture at universities</i> will join our outreach to students at the university.
Liepaja2027	- Bunker Ecologies - Can You Hear the People Sing? - Master in Disaster	Both <i>Karosta-Radosta</i> and from <i>Military Port to Creative port</i> will join <i>Bunker Ecologies</i> . We connect <i>The Latvian Song and dance festival 2027</i> to <i>Can You Hear the People Sing?</i> Liepaja will also join the youth paroproject connected to <i>Master in Disaster</i> .
Faro2027 Hildesheim2025	Erasmus 65+	Both Faro and Hildesheim are enthusiastic about <i>Erasmus 65+</i> . Faro guarantees lovely weather, Hildesheim can't make any promises.
Oulu2026	- Let's Eat! 30 Ways to LOV - Hybrid LOV - Bee Europe	<i>Arctic Food Lab</i> will join <i>Let's Eat!</i> . As winter cycle capital of the world, Oulu will join <i>LOV cycle</i> . <i>Hybrid LOV</i> : an educational project together with Oulu University of Applied Sciences to offer education and training to cultural professionals to be able to produce hybrid events. Beekeepers and local residents in Oulu will join Bee Europe.
Trenčín2026	30 Ways to LOV - A Hill Called Herman - Let's Eat! - Bunker Ecologies - Toxic Beauty - Stadhuis	<i>Green line flagship</i> will join <i>30 Ways to LOV</i> . <i>Green summit</i> will befriend <i>A Hill Called Herman</i> on Facebook. <i>Rural fermentations/degustories</i> will join <i>Let's Eat!</i> . As an old military city, Trenčín will join <i>Bunker Ecologies</i> . <i>Laboratory of sustainable fashion</i> can be linked to <i>Toxic Beauty</i> . <i>Sounds of democracy</i> will join <i>Stadhuis</i> .
Tartu2024	Master in Disaster	<i>Wild bits</i> , a legacy of artworks in a forest in their region, joins <i>Master in Disaster</i> .

Future ECOC candidates

Victoria2031	Let's Eat!	Victoria2031 likes to connect <i>Toghmiet</i> to <i>Let's eat</i> as this ties with their Gastronomy-related projects in 2031.
Granada2031	- Stadhuis - Erasmus 65+ - Mercator Takeover	Granada2031 shows great interest in collaborating on mentioned projects.

Encountering. Participating. Contributing. Living together. *Samenleven*. Creating radically new connections is a key aim of our project. For we see LOV2030 as European Capital of Culture essentially as a societal project (*samenlevingsproject*). If we want to tackle polarization we need to look each other in the eye, reach out a hand, join forces.

These goals are clearly set out in our four major impact ambitions. The detailing of those ambitions is expanded by the Labs that are developing as a strategic plan for our cultural programme. Those elements clearly recur throughout our entire outreach operation. HumanNature is about who we are as human beings, how we relate to each other. We do that with love and tons of co-creation.

q14 – INVOLVEMENT OF THE LOCAL POPULATION AND CIVIL SOCIETY IN THE PREPARATION AND IMPLEMENTATION OF THE YEAR

From the outset of our candidacy we've focused on co-creation with civil society, local artists and cultural organizations. As we explained last year, we've been sharing our ambition to become European Capital of Culture with Leuven & Beyond's entire civil community since 2017. A large-scale public survey followed (in which 2,844 people took part), substantive events in which we mobilized the residents of our region, landscape maps in which we described the state of our cultural landscape and the opportunities we see for the future.

We received 300 nominations for our 30-strong Dreamers2030 team. For the last two years this diverse group of inspirational bridge-builders hailing from every sector of society has accompanied us as critical fellow travellers. You met a couple of them at our first jury interview. The Dreamers2030 team was given the means with which to set up their own initiatives: shop windows became pop-up exhibition spaces for young artists; LOV-Radio broadcast live from the kiosk in the city park; the LOV-terraces (see below) were set up, and the Food For Thought platform was launched. Easily accessible initiatives that continuously reach out to civil society.

Meanwhile, on top of our 30 Dreamers2030, the number of critical fellow travellers has grown with the addition of a group of 30 civil servants (named Citizens of LOV and City of LOV) and we are assembling a delegation of 30 Dreamers from the wider region and a representation from the student community.

In spring 2024, in response to our Open Call for projects, we received some 137 submissions. They came from individuals, associations, and organizations that joined forces ('consortium' sounds far too corporate for the enthusiastic partnerships that simply happened). The 36 projects that we selected for the first bid book came from the grass-roots. It showed how broadly our narrative is supported. The fact that their projects were selected (and that LOV2030 then advanced to the selection phase of the bidding competition) unleashed tremendous energy among the various players. In the past year we strengthened the content and strategy of each of the projects with knowledge and know-how and with partnerships formed both locally and in other parts of Europe (inter alia through our LOV EU Academy). **The projects are now ready to be rolled out and the agency of the organizers has been increased and their ownership confirmed.** That guarantees a deep involvement in realising the title year.

The creation of the Cultural Network of Leuven – CNoL for short – has been a particularly important step. Over 300 organizations, be they amateur groups, leisure organizations, professional players in the arts, heritage associations or CCI, have joined forces in the network. Together they're building a single cultural space for Leuven and sharing knowledge, expertise, space and resources. The network's operations are coordinated by the LOV2030 outreach networker. That network is an important step on the way to the LOV-network, which aims to unite cultural organizations from the entire region. This is a significant legacy of our candidacy and should sustainably strengthen the sector well beyond 2030.

The discussions with civil society and the cultural sector and likewise policymakers of the 31 different municipalities in the East Brabant region also shifted up a gear: not only did we hold dozens of lengthy bilateral discussions, we also brought all the players together for meet-ups in Aarschot, Tienen, Diest, Lubbeek, Haacht, Tremelo, and Leuven. Ultimately, 30 municipalities supported our candidacy and to celebrate they all flew the LOV flag on Europe Day. Together with the signing of the declaration of commitment for LOV2030, the municipalities also approved the structural financing of Inter-Municipal Cooperation (IMC). That funding will significantly strengthen the regional projects, which also guarantees the structural participation of supra-local cultural players and civil society in the title year.

LOV LABS

The involvement of individual citizens and civil society is structurally embedded in our Labs. As explained in chapter 2 (Q5) when describing the strategy for the title year's cultural programme, LOV2030 will set up at least five Labs, each of which will address the challenges posed by polarization and climate change and our need for future-proofing. Naturally the Labs tie in with our four impact ambitions and are consistent with our long-term strategy, the elaboration of the European dimension and, above all, outreach.

LOV TOOLS

Not everyone has to commit themselves as deeply as in a Lab, of course. Civic engagement can also be found in community centres and at neighbourhood get-togethers. We developed a number of interesting and multi-purpose tools to use in dialogue with individual citizens, neighbourhoods, district offices, and informal clubs. We organized numerous **LOV cafés** ourselves to create low-threshold opportunities for meeting each other and we invite the people living in our region to host **LOV terraces** themselves: you provide the date and place, we provide the drinks and whatever music you choose.

At the **LOV-a-fair** we create a mini market, with stalls themed around the content of our programme. Team members, volunteers, or Dreamers2030 members share their insights, have conversations with passers-by, collect feedback on our plans, and gain new input.

We ride our **LOV cargo bike** from neighbourhood to neighbourhood and let people draw a LOV card: this is a kind of ‘trick-or-treat’ card game that shares elements of our story with the players. You’re challenged, but you always win. The **LOV card game** has now been distributed in 286 neighbourhoods: we did this on Neighbours Day, which we organized with the City of Leuven. LOV ambassadors paid a visit to thirty of the various neighbourhood initiatives.

LOV COLLABORATIONS

To increase the involvement of the general public we also engaged in more structural collaborations in the past year in addition to one-off events, all of which makes LOV2030 visible on a larger scale.

On the spot where the new Performing Arts Site will soon be built, the former velodrome was repurposed, becoming the **Olevodroom**. Named after Olivio, a young Leuven parkourist and free runner who suffered a fatal fall while climbing the University Library, the aim of the Olevodroom is to be a port of call for people finding expressive ways of self-development. Olevodroom invites low-threshold artistic encounters encompassing all kinds of new-urban artistic forms, from hip hop to parkour, dance to circus, slam to drag. Every week in July and August we invite two different artists, associations or organizations (and their audiences) to engage in an artistic encounter.

q15 — OPPORTUNITIES FOR LESS PRIVILEGED GROUPS

In our first bid book we introduced the concept of radical accessibility and explained how we put a premium on the basic principle of inclusion: do nothing about us, without us. Real inclusion goes beyond participation; fundamentally it revolves around equity and co-creation. We create something together. Our preparatory phase, our methods and our programme have engaged with senior citizens’ associations, young people, ethnically diverse organizations, and the LGBTQIA+ community, for example. Many projects take place in public spaces, which are (or should be) freely accessible to everyone: we regard the street, the pavement, the square, the park as the most democratic stage. As many projects as possible are freely accessible and without words. They speak the language of the imagination.

But much as we would like it to be otherwise, the harsh reality is that today not everyone is treated equally. There are still physical, mental, social, cultural and financial barriers and, consciously or not, discrimination prevails. Hyperdiversity is everywhere and in Leuven we prefer to see that as an asset rather than a liability. We present it in the form of a flower.

THE LOV ZONES

Civil society is of course a very large and vague concept. At the centre of it is everyone in a community linked by common interests and collective activity – citizens, workers, consumers, volunteers, you name it. Further out, towards the margins of society, we find so-called ‘marginalized’ or ‘disadvantaged’ groups. For all manner of reasons they are further removed from that centre. Thus further from where decisions are taken and money is made, further from where the power is. We must dare to name that and make it visible.

The queer community joined us for **Rainbow-wishes 2030** to co-shape the approach of 2030. Speakers shared their personal dreams and wishes for the future for LGBTQIA+ people in Leuven & Beyond, considering subjects such as education, work, family, going out and sports.

When the European Running Championships (marathon and half marathon) were held, LOV2030 partnered with a local running club and organized in preparation the **LOVrun**. Those taking part in the training session received a LOV running shirt, which ensured strong visibility during the European Running Championship itself. In this way, we created a fine link between our *Body & Soul* theme and the sports sector. In the meantime, you see the LOV-runners on the streets almost every day.

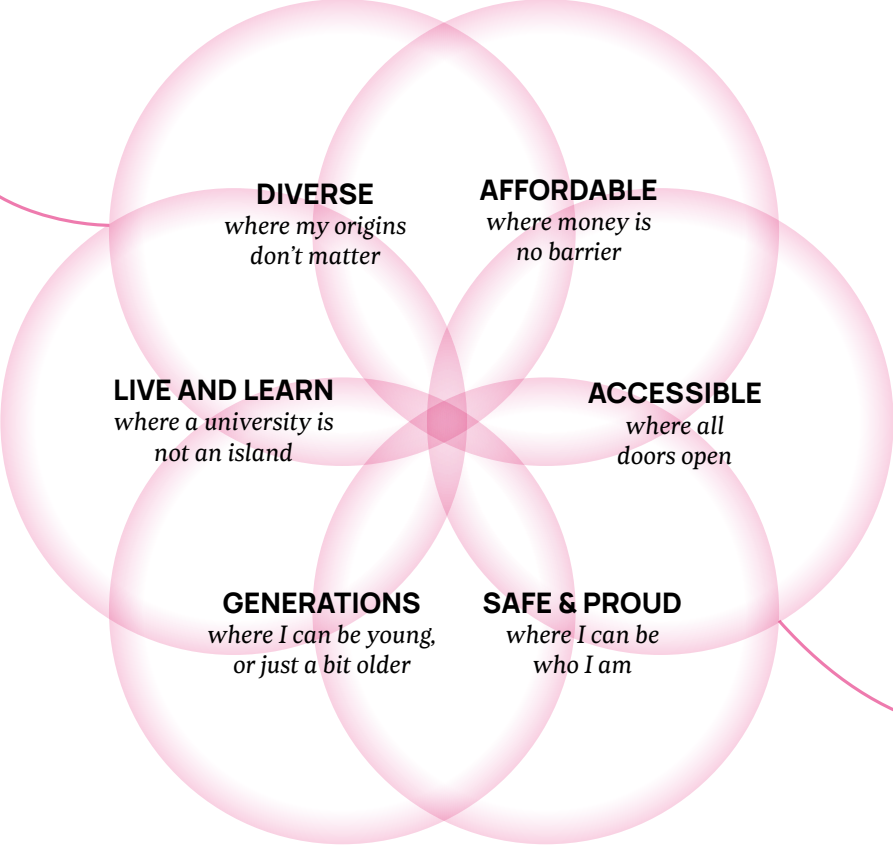
Food for Thought was conceived and implemented by our Dreamers2030, in collaboration with Hal5. Here we bring together food producers, retailers, the catering industry, and consumers to think about food. Locally and sustainably produced, close to people. What food strategies are we developing as we approach 2030? How do we deal with food waste? With surplus? We explore the interaction between producer, consumer and policy, investigate how we can strengthen each other, and how LOV2030 can be a lever for a sustainable local food policy in which farmers and producers can develop in a future-proof way.

In total, we organized hundreds of meetings and discussions with individuals, associations, and organizations from civil society as a whole.

At the same time, something like that creates tension, because naming goes hand in hand with labelling. And a label risks confirming a position and therefore perpetuating it, perhaps even reinforcing it. For instance, following the publication of our previous bid book, we got a dressing down from Leuven’s senior citizens. They were not amused to find that they were described as elderly in the terminology of the questionnaire and therefore as a ‘disadvantaged group’. The seniors see themselves as an active group with a voice and a desire to contribute. It’s a completely different way of looking at demography.

It got us thinking. And led us to the formulation of needs and contexts and the realization that we should not personify those needs and contexts. People are always more than the sum of their talents or limitations.

We defined 6 domains or contexts in which we must be particularly aware of thresholds. For each of those domains (which we formulate as LOV zones), we bring the relevant stakeholders together in a circle and based on their experiences we define specific points of attention. Together all these LOV zones form a kind of fan, or a flower, and they also overlap. By radically connecting the different LOV zones we illuminate the intersections, for one need often comes with another. This enables us to strengthen the collected expertise in relation to radical accessibility, which we then share with the civil society in our region in a capacity building process. Thus we guarantee the universal and constitutional right to culture for everyone.



6 LOV zones developed by LOV2030

1. DIVERSE

where my origins don't matter

LOV2030 aims to make diverse cultures seen and heard:

- Through our **Decolonisation & DEI Lab**, we involve diverse voices in programming.
- Content options are **culturally sensitive in design**: we take heed of religious and cultural customs, adapted meals, family-friendly formats.
- We stimulate **buddy programmes** for newcomers who would like to experience culture together.
- We offer **multilingual communication** and support 'language no problem' projects (they don't use words).
- We design **formats that don't assume prior knowledge of 'Western' culture**, and create space for **critical reflection on colonialism and exclusion** through debates and public events.

2. AFFORDABLE

where money is no barrier

We make as many activities as possible freely accessible. Because for many people, money is a major barrier.

- For activities with a charge, we do away with that barrier in Leuven & Beyond with the widely accessible UiTPAS, which gives people in financially vulnerable situations the chance to participate in culture and at the same time designs strategies to overcome poverty shame.
- One problem: the UiTPAS is only available to people who live in our region, not to those from further away. The '**Pay what you can**' or '**Pay what you want**' model provides an answer to that. Leuven & Beyond's cultural sector has years of experience with it and the system works. There is a spontaneous redistribution of resources: well-off visitors voluntarily pay a little more, those who are struggling pay a little less. For the organizer, the proceeds remain roughly the same.
- We're developing a **map** of free and budget-friendly events, with handy search filters on the website. **International visitors** will be aided by a digital guide with tips for affordable travel to Leuven & Beyond, the best times to book your train, and places to stay or eat.
- For people less digitally skilled or without access to the internet we provide a **live service centre** that can be dropped into or called by phone in the good old-fashioned way. Person to person. Talk about radically connecting!

3. ACCESSIBLE

where all doors open

We make sure that infrastructure, information and communication are low-threshold, in every way.

- We do our utmost to choose locations with **wide entrances, lifts, suitable toilets and clear signage**. If a location is not (fully) accessible, we communicate that clearly, if possible with photos.
- **Transport for people with reduced mobility** is made possible via existing services such as Leuven's Riksja's or Mobitwin Leuven, with a view to expansion towards international visitors or specific target groups.
- **EU Disability Card** holders enjoy the same advantages as UITPAS users and can bring an assistance companion free of charge.
- For people who are not mobile and are in **hospital, a residential care centre, or in prison**, we provide part of the programme on-site live or via streaming.
- We encourage partners to provide **low-stimulus spaces, autism-friendly events**, and to provide clear information about that in advance.
- We provide **accessible formats**: audio description, Flemish Sign Language (VGT) interpreters, subtitling, and simple versions of programme texts.
- Our website and communications are **accessible to people with a visual or hearing impairment**: compatible with screen readers, provided with alt text, subtitles, and available in multiple formats.

4. SAFE & PROUD

where I can be who I am

LOV2030 is explicitly inclusive of LGBTQIA+ communities and actively contributes to a safe and open cultural environment:

- We implement a non-discrimination policy that explicitly addresses sexual orientation, gender identity and expression.
- We provide safe spaces, gender-neutral toilets and changing rooms.
- We use gender-inclusive language in all our communications.
- We provide training on inclusion via KLIQ and the Rainbow House, among other bodies.
- We continuously monitor representation within the programme and reach out more generally via open calls.
- We support existing initiatives such as Leuven Pride, Queer Arts Festival Leuven, Sino Queer Film Festival and Queer Asian Month.

5. GENERATIONS

where I can be young, or just a bit older

Children & Young People

- We work together with the **Mijnleuven** youth working team, **Veto** student magazine, **and the student associations** in the **Leuven student body** (LOKO) to actively involve young people and students as **makers, storytellers and ambassadors**.
- BAMB! (Bazart, AmuseeVous, Mooss & Mastiek), Koning Kevin, BURn, and De Garage are all cultural education organizations actively working with children and young people on art experience. They are all active partners of LOV2030.
- Part-time art education in Leuven & Beyond is also an important intermediary with ten thousands of participants: City of Leuven Art Academy and Conservatory (SLAC), Hageland Academy, ART Academy Region Tienen.
- At a European level we explore partnerships via Eurodesk and the 'Pool of Young Journalists in Europe' initiative, to enable youth-friendly reporting and strengthen international voices.
- To motivate young travelers visiting Leuven, we will organize DiscoverEU meet-ups in cooperation with JINT. In particular, we will invite young people from other ECoC cities in these meet-ups, in order to strenghten links between young ECoC citizens.
- Via the **buddy programme** we're connecting generations and dismantling the walls of isolation.
- UitX-card, EYCA card.

Seniors

- We coordinate with the senior council and service centres.
- Our partners from the city and municipality departments on senior citizens, Avansa East Brabant and KU Leuven develop specific guidance for seniors.
- Live streams and live performances in community and residential care centres bring culture to the elderly that are not as mobile anymore.
- We distribute printed LOV programmes with clear information and provide contact points in local service centres, libraries and via neighbourhood newspapers.
- Collaboration with Leuven & Beyond's digi-points makes cultural guidance possible.

Education

- Via the **Culture x Education Lab** we build sustainable partnerships between schools and cultural centres. In 2024-2025, eight pilot projects start, sharing their operations with the public.
- International Teacher Identity Card.

6. LIVE AND LEARN

where a university is not an island

LOV2030 connects Leuven's student world and culture:

- We are building on structural collaboration with KU Leuven, UCLL and LUCA School of Arts, following 600 years of KU Leuven, through programmes such as **KU Leuven Connect**, which connects students and alumni with respect to academic and cultural life in Leuven and '**Guess Who's Back**', an initiative that connects students and city residents.
- We deploy Leuven & Beyond students and alumni and the 'Leuven-ites' expat community as **ambassadors** for LOV2030 among their supporters at home, near or far.
- We are visible at **student events**, organize **flyer campaigns** on campuses, and offer **internships** in cultural and social projects.
- **KU Leuven Engage** enables students to participate in service learning, where they gain practical experience and create added social value.
- **Job student opportunities** and a **student volunteer community** are being expanded in the run-up to and during the title year.
- **Citizen science projects** and collaborations with initiatives such as the **Ithaka Student Arts Festival**, **Pangaea** and **Minos** strengthen the link with culture from the student community. Pangaea plays a specific role in relation to the international community, for instance by a buddy system that takes new internationals (the so-called 'Leuvenites') in tow.
- **BAC ART LAB**, **STUK** and KU Leuven's **Cultural Service** make an active connection between the general student population and what Leuven & Beyond's cultural scene has to offer.
- Students at KU Leuven, UCLL, and Luca School of Arts receive info about what's going on cultural-wise as well as discounts and special offers via the **Culture Card**.



CAPACITY BUILDING PROCESS

LOV2030 is working with the specialized organization Konekt to design a process by which organizers can develop knowledge and skills in relation to inclusive events. We take them on a training course in inclusive design: we learn to look at diversity in a way that highlights its strengths and to acquire a thorough familiarity with the groups that represent the different LOV zones and their intersections. We make the process accessible to 5x40 participating organizers.

Thematic sessions are structured around talent-oriented work, co-creation and inclusive design, and intervision and reflection on practice.

We often see organizers focusing first and foremost on obstacles: oh dear, he doesn't speak Dutch; oh dear, she can't read; oh dear, that wheelchair is going to be a problem. How do you make sure that your starting point lies in potential and talent? An event is only inclusive if you involve the diversity of voices both from the start and at every step along the way.

There are challenges to be met in every event, but as it progresses inherent strengths are also discovered. Not only can you learn from this yourself, you can also share those lessons. During the process a number of organizations get the chance to test theory against practice (in try-out events) and thus to opt for a more informed path towards radical accessibility. They become our trail-blazers: we bring their experiences together in our tool for inclusive events.

We're designing this tool with the specialists from Konekt and with a co-creative committee of European experts comprising the LOV2030 organization and representatives from the various LOV zones.

European exchange

Our ambition is to exchange this Outreach work with other European Capitals of Culture and build a network of European partners with expertise in accessibility, co-creation and inclusion. For instance, we plan knowledge-sharing or practice exchange between each LOV zone and a European partner. Eventually, during the *Body & Soul* pilot project in 2028, we will organize an intersectional European networking moment in Leuven as a prelude to the title year, where we share co-creations, good practices and insights from different countries with each other.

VOLUNTEERS

The potential of the many thousands of volunteers in Leuven & Beyond first became obvious during the Corona pandemic, when people started actively volunteering in the many vaccination centres in the region.

In recent years, we at Leuven & Beyond have hooked up with this impressive army of volunteers to organize the huge sports and cultural events in our region, such as the World Cycling Championships, the Gravel World Championships, the World Breaking Championships, the European Running Championships (marathon and half marathon), KNAL! the Big Bang city festival, the major BOUTS festival and of course the celebration of the university's 600th anniversary.

In addition, many professional cultural organizations in Leuven rely on structural volunteer work. 30CC, Cinema ZED, LEF - Leuven Events & Festivals, Het Depot, Het nieuwstedelijk, M Leuven, STUK, the heritage associations, cultural centres, and libraries in the region are all supported by hundreds of volunteers for tasks such as guiding, production assistance, communication, and catering. These volunteers are also the first ambassadors of the artistic programme. Civil society in general also relies on the voluntary input of so many citizens. There are around 2,000 socio-cultural organizations in Leuven & Beyond, each with dozens of members prepared to roll up their sleeves. And there are the scores of neighbourhood workers, who in turn mobilize a lot more people.

At LOV2030 we cherish our volunteers and have done so from the start – the Dreamers2030 being a case in point. If you give your volunteers a pivotal position and regard them as connectors who also have involvement and agency, they immediately become ambassadors who convey the spirit of LOV2030. In this way, they form a connecting link between our project and society and enable a deep embedding of our narrative in the city and region.

For the volunteer work in the run-up to the title year, we will connect all these different operations with each other. We will also be calling on two exceptional volunteer organizations: **Compagnie Cordial** and **Garsons Uniek**. Compagnie Cordial (formerly Refu Interim) brings together talented newcomers, refugees, and asylum seekers with committed organizations through volunteer work and an extensive range of activities focusing on diversity and inclusion. Garsons Uniek is a group of enthusiasts with a disability or chronic illness who like to come together to do meaningful work. Nice to meet you, I'm a LOVer. Are you a LOVer?

At this stage, we've begun building our outreach strategy by partnering with these organizations from Leuven & Beyond: 30CC CultuurSHOCK, Accessibility Advisory Board City of Leuven, Active Intercultural Federation (AIF+), Arktos, ART Academy Region Tienen, Avansa East Brabant, BAC Art Lab, BAMMI! (Bazart, AmuseeVous, Mooss & Mastiek), BURn, Cachet, Cavarla Flanders, CAW East Brabant, Cie. Tartaren, City & municipality departments on accessibility, City & municipality departments on neighbourhood operations, City & municipality departments on senior citizens, City & municipality departments on youth, City of Leuven Art Academy and Conservatory (SLAC), City of Leuven Diversity Community and its network of 55 ethnically diverse organizations, workshop facilitators, newcomer buddies, language volunteers, cultural mediators, community role models, and ethnic-cultural festivals, CNoL and its network of 300+ cultural, heritage and leisure associations, organizations and individual artists, Coconuts, Compagnie Cordial, Cultural Studies KULeuven, CVO Volt, De Boomgaard, De Garage, De Nomade, De Rode Antraciet, De RuimteVaart, De Wingerd, De Wissel, Demos Brussels, Disability Filmfestival, Dito (Garsons Uniek), Djapo, Dwaalzin, Emino, Erasmus Student Network, Erat, Fabota, Factor-Y, FERm, FixAbility, Hageland Academy of Fine Arts, Hal 5, Het Raster, HONK, Huis van de Mens, Huis van het Kind, Inter-Municipal Cooperation, Internationaal Comité, International House Leuven, Ithaka Student Arts Festival, JAC East Brabant, JINT, Kansenfabriek, KLIQ, Konekt, Koning Kevin, Kringwinkels Leuven & Beyond, KU Leuven, KU Leuven STUVO, KUL Culture, KUL Engage, KUL Lifestance network, Lemmensinstituut, LETS Leuven, Diest, Aarschot, Leuven Cares, Leuven Pride, Leuven Restorative City, Ligo East Brabant, Link in de Kabel, LOKO and its network of 80+ student associations, LUCA school of arts, Maakleerplek, Mijneleuven, Minos, Mobitwin Leuven, neighbourhood centre 't Lampeke, No Babes Agency, OC het Roerhuis, Olevodroom, onbepert.Jobstudent, Oostrem, Overkop (Leuven, Aarschot, Tienen, Haacht-Keerbergen), Pangaea, Poverello, public libraries in Leuven & Beyond, Publiq, Queer Arts Festival Leuven, Queer Asian Month, Queer Leuven, Rainbow Cities Network, Rainbow House UniQue, with her 28 associations in Leuven & Beyond, senior citizen councils Leuven & Beyond, Sint-Kamillus Bierbeek, Sojo, SOM and its network of 79 schools, Stelplaats, STUK, Tejo, Tourism for Autism Flanders, TRILL, UCLL, UiTPAS Leuven & Beyond, Untold Asian Stories, Veto student magazine, Volkskeuken 3200, Welfare Services Leuven & Beyond (OCMW), WISPER, Youth House Tveldeke Holsbeek. This is just the beginning – we're aligning these efforts with our wider network of ECOC and EU partners who bring valuable expertise in outreach, with many more collaborations to come.

We are setting up a buddy programme and we are working on a sustainable ecosystem around our volunteers. That is why we focus on long-term volunteers, who don't simply want to stand behind the bar, so to speak, but to become fully-fledged LOV ambassadors. In such a long-term commitment, opportunities suddenly open up: if you want to, you can experience the whole ride and you can also take on more responsibilities. You can bring in new volunteers yourself and train them. Thus experienced volunteers evolve into volunteer coordinators whom we deploy in various domains.

So what do our volunteers get in return? Our eternal gratitude, that's for sure. And of course an incredible opportunity to grow, gain experience, and get to know like-minded people. That's a familiar tune, of course. But we also provide **training** for our volunteers, in diverse areas. We celebrate their input with **exclusive events**. We also link those events to an active feedback system: what do you think we can do better? In general? And what can we do better for you personally? Finally, we honour our volunteers in our **communications** and give them a visible place in our LOV stories and on our social media.

And then of course there's **money**. Expenses incurred by volunteers are always reimbursed. And some volunteers find that more than enough. Because the experience is worth more to them than the dosh. For other volunteers there are financial barriers that make volunteering difficult. Which is why we provide a **volunteer allowance**. In this way we ensure that we reach a broader and more diverse volunteer populace.

European and intra-Belgian exchange

Following the successful example of Chemnitz2025, we offer long-term volunteers the opportunity to go on exchange with other ECoCs for a maximum of twelve months. To that end, we submit an application to the European Solidarity Corps programme, which provides funding for accommodation, subsistence, travel, insurance and some pocket money. Via the intra-Belgian volunteering programme Bel'J young Belgians from the French and German speaking communities are invited to volunteer in Flanders. This stimulates (inter)national exchange, increases diversity within the group, and brings new energy and perspectives to volunteer work.

	1. DIVERSE	2. AFFORDABLE	3. ACCESSIBLE	4.SAFE & PROUD	5. GENERATIONS	6. LIVE & LEARN
HUMAN	Here We Are Now: Akwaaba Here We Are Now: From Braem to Beel Here We Are Now: 1,001 Stories Here We Are Now: Leuven Lens Here We Are Now: Beats of LOV Pigeon People Singing Towers Aloha, Damiaan! Humanism Today	Here We Are Now: Akwaaba Here We Are Now: From Braem to Beel Here We Are Now: 1,001 Stories Here We Are Now: Beats of LOV Aloha, Damiaan!	Here We Are Now: Akwaaba Here We Are Now: From Braem to Beel Here We Are Now: 1,001 Stories Here We Are Now: Beats of LOV A tale of two cities: LOV-la-Neuve Lovanium Body & Soul Festival Vesalius Unseen Mindblowing Living Room Live	 Here We Are Now: 1,001 Stories Here We Are Now: Beats of LOV Mindblowing Living Room Live	Here We Are Now: Akwaaba Here We Are Now: From Braem to Beel Here We Are Now: 1,001 Stories Here We Are Now: Beats of LOV Pigeon People Living Room Live Smells like teen spirit The Night is Young Can You Hear the People Sing In the Neighbourhood Stadhuis Erasmus 65+ Sisters Doin' it for Themselves	Here We Are Now: Akwaaba Here We Are Now: From Braem to Beel Here We Are Now: 1,001 Stories Here We Are Now: Beats of LOV Singing Towers Aloha, Damiaan! Humanism Today A tale of two cities: LOV-la-Neuve Lovanium Living Room Live The Night is Young Stadhuis Erasmus 65+ Sisters Doin' it for Themselves
	Bunker Ecologies Mine. Mind. Museum	Bunker Ecologies Save our Soils	Bunker Ecologies Save our Soils	 Save our Soils	Bunker Ecologies Save our Soils	Mercator Takeover Bunker Ecologies Mine. Mind. Museum Save our Soils A Hill called Herman
		How to Build a Glacier?	How to Build a Glacier?	How to Build a Glacier?	How to Build a Glacier?	How to Build a Glacier?
	Take me to Church	Take me to Church	Take me to Church	Take me to Church	Take me to Church	Take me to Church
	Let's Eat!	Let's Eat!	Let's Eat!	Let's Eat!	Let's Eat!	Let's Eat!
		Cemeteries of the Future	Cemeteries of the Future		Cemeteries of the Future	
	To the Roots	Hear Here	Hear Here	Hear Here		
		The Word for World is Forest	The Word for World is Forest	The Word for World is Forest	Master in Disaster	Master in Disaster The Word for World is Forest
	Welcome to the Demosphere Future Generations Studio	Welcome to the Demosphere	Welcome to the Demosphere	Welcome to the Demosphere	Welcome to the Demosphere Future Generations Studio	Welcome to the Demosphere Future Generations Studio
	Mutual Expectations	Mutual Expectations	Mutual Expectations	Mutual Expectations	Mutual Expectations	Mutual Expectations
INNOVATION	Performing Arts Site	Performing Arts Site	Performing Arts Site	Performing Arts Site	Performing Arts Site	Performing Arts Site
		Molenbeek for LOV	Molenbeek for LOV			Molenbeek for LOV
	LOV Dances	LOV Dances	LOV Dances	LOV Dances	LOV Dances	LOV Dances
	Unmuted	Unmuted Kweikersparade	Unmuted Kweikersparade	Unmuted Kweikersparade	Unmuted Kweikersparade	Unmuted
	Afrotronix			Afrotronix		Afrotronix

q16 — AUDIENCE DEVELOPMENT, EDUCATION AND SCHOOLS

People may sometimes think that culture is not for them. It's 'too difficult', 'too expensive', or simply 'too much cello'. And yet culture is not for a handful of experts. Culture is by and for everyone. For the doubters, the passers-by, the teens dragged along by their teacher. For those who look forward to the first night and those who end up at a performance by accident. For when it comes down to it, everyone is an audience. Or everyone can be a co-maker, given the shift in the last few decades from passive consumption to active involvement, from 'spectator' to 'co-maker'. Yes, even you with the raised eyebrow.

We shouldn't be coy about it. The development of talent and of audiences are two great strengths of our city and region. Leuven & Beyond has the largest concentration of cultural education organizations in Flanders (if not the whole world!), which guide children, young people, adults and seniors in their cultural development. Players like BAMM!, Wisper, and TRILL bring together decades of expertise and have an extensive European network. At a local level and also throughout Flanders, Bazart, Koning Kevin, Avansa East Brabant, BURn, De Garage reach a huge number of people. And the official part-time art education is also very strong in our region, with big players like City of Leuven Academy & Conservatory (SLAC) and ART Academy Region Tienen. They make the cultural skills of the general public their mission. So when it comes to our ambition to involve as many people as possible in our title year the wind is definitely at our back.

The strategy for our audience development is based on the following strong pillars. The decision to have five long-term Labs set up from the start, where cultural players are radically connected to other social sectors, means that outreach and audience development are manifestly consistent with our artistic and cultural programme. The radically new connections with the wider region, the open calls, the Dreamers2030, the volunteer work, and the thrust of the six LOV zones defined above, ensure a high level of engagement and ownership by broad sections of the population.

Whether it's the Inter-Municipal Cooperation (IMC), the Labs, the Dreamers2030 or the volunteers, we always hand over as much autonomy and responsibility as possible, including for project budgets. In this way we bring the various stakeholders on board as equal partners who build programmes themselves.

These programmes not only take place in the major cultural hotspots but also on the street, in the neighbourhood, in the residential care centre, the hospital, at school, the Rainbow House or even the prison. In this way we decentralize operations, redistribute power, and involve our audience from the start as co-owners of our title year. There will certainly be lots of unexpected encounters around the corner, guiding you towards radically new connections...

REDISTRIBUTION OF POWER WITHIN THE ARTISTIC PROGRAMME

At the heart of LOV2030's artistic programme lies a commitment to the redistribution of power. Through open calls and the selection of grassroots projects, we stimulate co-creative trajectories that emerge from the bottom up. In parallel, we have developed an IMC structure – an Inter-Municipal Cooperation – to collaboratively design and co-finance programmes in the region. This ensures a high level of ownership and programming that matches the interests, identities and experiences of the public. It tackles the actual needs of the visitors in the six LOV zones: the public itself becomes a co-programmer of projects and events that not only take place in cultural venues but also in the neighbourhood, around the corner, at school, the residential care centre or Rainbow House. In this way, the programme responds directly to the needs of diverse communities and positions culture as something that is lived, shared, and rooted in society itself.

Alongside our LOV Charter on Ecological Art Practice, we develop a **LOV Inclusive Audience Charter**, which we ask all our partners to commit to. All projects and relationships follow a set of criteria that are in line with our safer space policy and our non-discrimination policy.

PHASE 1: ACTIVATION (2024-2025)

- Dreamers2030
- Lab activities, specifically the Future Generations and Culture & Education Labs
- Open calls and co-creation
- Inter-Municipal Cooperation
- LOV-café

PHASE 2: OUTREACH (2026-2029)

- Baseline studies
 - Each organization maps its current audience.
 - Identification of at least two target groups that are not reached via the LOV zones in their regular programming.
- Pilot projects
 - Test new formats with organizations in the context of bringing culture to the people, in collaboration with the LOV zones.
- Exchange
 - Organizations share best practices, failures, and insights.

PHASE 3: EVALUATION (2029-2030+)

- Evaluation of audience reach by cultural organizations
- Public reporting
 - Organizations publish results.
 - Audience development becomes a visible part of the ECoC story.
- Support in embedding successful practices after 2030
- Audience development evaluation is part of the Monitoring and Evaluation Plan (see Q3)



CONNECTION WITH SCHOOLS

The SOM network (Samen Onderwijs Maken, Making Education Together) is a strategic partner of LOV2030 and unites 79 educational partners, from nursery schools to universities. SOM co-organizes the **Culture x Education Lab**, where schools engage in sustainable collaborations with professional cultural partners. Two pilot projects (with M Leuven and Stad & Architectuur, among others) have now been completed; eight others are still running in the 2025-2026 school year. If we are awarded the title, the Lab can continue to grow, to 2030 and beyond.

There are in addition numerous projects in collaboration with SLAC, BAMM!, LUCA School of Arts, the various art schools, with KU Leuven and UCLL. Think of *Can you Hear the People Sing?*, *Future Generations Studio*, *Erasmus 65+*, but especially the following student outreach projects.

EUTOPIA

EUtopia is a European exchange programme for secondary schools, run by LOV2030, Stadhuis – European House for Democracy, SOM, KU Leuven and Demos. We invite sixth-year pupils from European schools for a three-day stay in Leuven, to work on and debate the issues of European values and the future of democracy.

We have already set up a pilot version of the EUtopia exchange project with students from the Behavioural Sciences teacher training courses at KU Leuven and the University of Marburg (DE). They developed a toolbox with potential activities and methodologies to get seventeen-year-old pupils working on democracy and polarization. The toolbox was distributed to every secondary school in Leuven & Beyond and Marburg. The project received European support via Erasmus+.

SMILE

SMILE is a citizen science project, by KU Leuven in co-production with LOV2030, which brings together scientists, students and citizens. With SMILE, we investigate HumanNature: how and why our environments influence our emotions, and whether this works the same way for everyone. We examine the difference between green and urban environments, and to what extent auditory and visual stimuli impact our emotions. This is only possible with the help of numerous citizen scientists. Together, we can improve our quality of life and maybe discover the places in Flanders that bring the most happiness.

KOTROUTE

Student digs are transformed into exhibition spaces where young artists and musicians (often the students themselves) come to present their artistic creations. Expect fresh art with an edge, surprising performances, and young bands with a unique sound. *Kotroute* is an event for young people, but above all by young people. From step 1, 18-26-year-olds are at the helm. They select the artists, find the rooms, and decide what the *Kotroute* will look like in 2030. The result? An unforgettable evening for the young people who visit the *Kotroute*, but above all a unique experience for the young people behind the scenes.

SCHOOLMETCULTUUR.BE

Communication to schools takes place via the SOM platforms (website and social media) and via the **Schoolmetcultuur.be** website. This digital platform aims to make the cultural offering for schools visible, accessible and bookable. In the last school year it led more than 60,000 pupils under eighteen to professional cultural projects. Schoolmetcultuur.be is intended for all levels and types of education, from nursery school to higher education, including special education and NT2 (Dutch as a foreign language), in Leuven and beyond.



In line with our Cultural Long-term Strategy we have developed our cultural programme, EU-dimension and outreach and we have drawn up a clear and sound budget. With the Culture Network of Leuven and the Inter-Municipal Cooperation, we have established a strong LOV Network of partners, with principles for co-financing and shared leadership. We made strong connections to the business community and tourist sector. We have the structure and the culture to deliver and implement the ECoC, built on a sustainable trajectory and with legacy as ambition.

Following the local, provincial, Flemish and national elections in 2024, we made sure that the newly installed governments at all levels confirmed their political and financial support. The total budget of LOV2030 amounts to 72.5 million euros, this is a realistic and confirmed budget. This basically means that it can only grow, throughout the next five to eight years (up to 2033).

Moreover, our candidacy does not only have the support of the Belgian and Flemish governments, the Province of Flemish Brabant and the Leuven City Council, but we also signed agreements with the 30 municipalities of East-Brabant, stating their political and financial support. The city of Ottignies/Louvain-la-Neuve, and the cities of Bruges, Ghent and Kortrijk have also expressed their support for LOV2030. We have collaborations in place with partners of the Dutch, French and German-speaking communities and in all three official regions (Flanders, Wallonia and Brussels), and throughout all EU-member states, making us ready as the European Capital of Culture 2030 on behalf of Belgium.

q17 – TOTAL OPERATING BUDGET

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

q18 – BREAKDOWN OF INCOME FROM THE PUBLIC SECTOR TO COVER OPERATING EXPENDITURE

Total 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%
Region East Brabant	3 m	5%
EU (with exception of the Melina Mercouri Prize)	1.5 m	2%
TOTAL	62.5 m	100%

q19 – FINANCIAL COMMITMENTS TO COVER OPERATING EXPENDITURE

The City of Leuven's financial commitment of 10 million euros was unanimously reaffirmed at the municipal council meeting of 26 May 2025. 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. The total amount is thus 15 million euros. The decision was approved at the Council of Ministers meeting on 17 May 2024.

In the spring of 2024, the Flemish government committed to awarding 30 million euros to the Flemish city that wins the title. The new Flemish government confirmed that commitment in a decision at the Council of Ministers early summer 2025.

On 27 June 2025, 30 municipal authorities from the region signed a joint declaration of commitment, pledging at least 6 euros per inhabitant in the period from 2025 to 2033.

The provincial government has pledged to at least match the total contribution of the municipalities in support of cultural projects in the region and to organize additional events themselves. This commitment was confirmed in a decision of the Deputation on 26 June 2025.

q20 – FINANCIAL SUPPORT FROM EU PROGRAMMES/FUNDS TO COVER OPERATING EXPENDITURE

An important strategic choice was to recruit an EU subsidy specialist to our team in January 2025 and to set up our LOV EU Academy, where we not only share knowledge with the cultural sector in Leuven & Beyond, but also bring together the expertise available in the sector.

In planning EU applications we take into account the cycle of the EU's Multiannual Financial Frameworks (MFF) and we're very aware that a new MFF 2028-2034 will come into force at a critical moment in the planning and preparation of our title year.

There is therefore a real chance that the particularly relevant cultural subsidy programmes will change in the new programme period as regards (budget)size, priorities, and application modalities. This constitutes an uncertainty factor in our funding planning.

Supported by a network of subsidy experts (VLEVA-Liaison Agency Flanders-Europe, National Contact Points of various programmes such as Creative Europe Desk Flanders, JINT, EPOS, LEADER Hageland region, NCP Flanders, LIFE NCP Nat & Bos, Leuven's EU subsidy coordinator, KU Leuven's international office, IdeaConsult Subsidy Manager) we follow developments relating to new programmes, take active part in the debates, and strive to ensure sufficient European resources for culture and socio-cultural projects. We see a risk in the discussions and developments concerning the possible reduction of EU budgets and European support for the 'soft power' programmes, which go to the heart of the European Union and European cooperation (solidarity, social cohesion, inclusion, active citizenship...). We take an active part in the European debates on European cultural policy, particularly the Culture Compass, and are committed to ECoCs and culture as essential tools for upholding and maintaining these European values.

As soon as the MFF 2028-2034 programmes are known, we will see whether changes in the various programmes impact on the ongoing project application preparations. Whatever happens, we will actively utilize the MFF 2028-2034 for the LOV2030 legacy in 2031-2033. At the same time, we shall still make optimum use of the ongoing MFF 2021-2027 programmes and calls to carry out the 2026-2029 preparatory phase and pilot projects.

With the LOV EU Academy, we are creating a structural and capacity-building platform that empowers organizations in Leuven and the wider region to engage in European cooperation and independently access EU programmes and funding. This approach fosters long-term expertise in co-financing and cross-border collaboration, while laying the foundation for a sustainable European network. At the European level, the LOV EU Academy also contributes to capacity building and knowledge sharing within the ECoC network, supporting strong European connections and high-quality implementation of the European Capitals of Culture. Key local and national partners VLEVA, Creative Europe Desk, Leuven EU subsidy coordinator and JINT will play

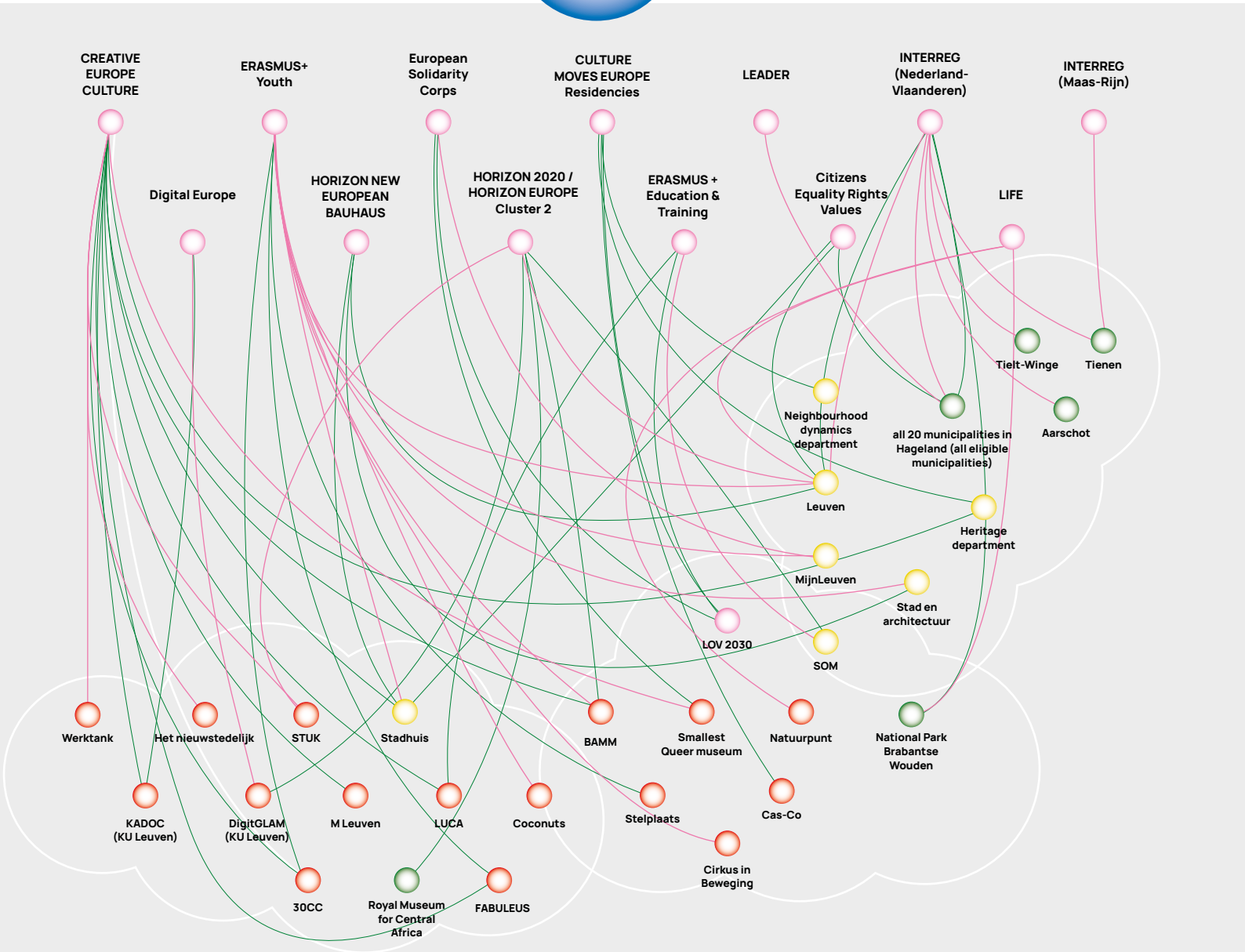
an active role, alongside future ECoCs and candidates and European networks such as EuroCITIES, Culture Action Europe, and EUNIC. Additional expertise in EU funding and project implementation will be provided by IDEA Consult, UCLL, and, of course, KU Leuven.

Relevant programmes for LOV2030 include: Creative Europe Culture and Culture Moves Europe, Erasmus+, European Solidarity Corps, CERV, the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF), INTERREG, EARFD/LEADER, LIFE and HORIZON including New European Bauhaus. We're also exploring programmes such as ESF+/WSE, AMIF and Digital Europe.

In 2025, LOV2030 already became an associated partner in two Erasmus+ Youth projects and a CERV project.

The visual below highlights both the existing EU experience of organizations and institutions in Leuven & Beyond, as well as their potential to apply for EU funding across a range of programmes – based on our analysis of the current EU programme design.

- experience with EU funding
- potential for EU funding
- project lead/partner
- connected to City of Leuven
- region-based



q21 – TIMETABLE FOR RECEIVING INCOME TO COVER OPERATING EXPENDITURE

Source of income for operating expenditure	2025	2026	2027	2028	2029	2030	2031	2032	2033	total (m euros)
EU		0.1	0.35	0.1	0.5	0.45				1.5
Federal government		3	3	3	3	3				15
Flemish government				5	5	18	2			30
Province		0.375	0.375	0.375	0.375	0.375	0.375	0.375	0.375	3
City	1	1	1	1	1	2	1	1	1	10
Region		0.375	0.375	0.375	0.375	0.375	0.375	0.375	0.375	3
Sponsors / private			0.5	1	3.5	4.5	0.5			10
Other										

q22 – FUNDRAISING STRATEGY FOR RECEIVING SUPPORT FROM PRIVATE SPONSORS

We don't see sponsorship acquisition as a purely financial transaction. Instead we start from a content-based connection with the HumanNature programme and look for ways to connect and strengthen our region both culturally and economically. First we look for partnerships with local players who focus on a European market.

Our ambition is to raise 10 million in private funds for LOV2030 and to strengthen the bond between culture and the business world. With legacy in mind, we're investing in sustainable relationships and solid collaborations. We aim to raise 7.5 million specifically via fundraising and 2.5 million via ticketing, co-productions, and partnerships in the CCI. This can involve cultural organizations that make their own contribution or creative companies that invest in a project themselves.

There are three strands to our fundraising strategy: sponsorship (3 million), tax sheltering (4 million), and patronage (0.5 million).

SPONSORSHIP

There are two kinds of sponsorship – financial and in-kind – which we use in different ways. At this stage we don't capitalize on in-kind sponsorship. For financial sponsorship, we look at branding and image, content and hospitality.

We are looking for at least two main sponsors to provide 1 million euros each. We've benchmarked this amount against other (comparable) ECoCs. We're currently in talks with AB InBev and KBC Bank. Both have their origins in Leuven and still have their headquarters here, both companies have indicated that they want to close a deal.

AB Inbev is the biggest brewery group in the world. Stella Artois, one of the largest breweries in the group, is close to Leuven's city centre. Beer culture is part of our heritage and identity. It connects people. Which is why AB Inbev wants to strengthen encounters through culture. We can count on a cash amount of 1 million euros, as well as drinks and logistical support for events in the title year. AB Inbev is totally behind the narrative and is also firmly committed to its net zero ambitions. What's more, we're discussing the possibility of content-themed cooperation (tours, workshops, experiences, etc.). The brewery is also planning an attractive experience centre focusing on beer culture and innovation in its headquarters at the Vaartkom, Leuven's creative district. This offers further substantive, cultural and touristic opportunities for our project.

KBC Bank wants to strengthen its name as a bank that is ethical, innovative and green. So various HumanNature programme lines tie in very well with the values and content that KBC itself promotes. KBC is a European pioneer in working with a virtual assistant, 'Kate', in a highly interactive bank app. You will be able to buy tickets for LOV2030 via the bank app, for instance. KBC is also working on a European strategy and sees added value in terms of branding, content and hospitality in collaborating with LOV2030.

Besides two big main sponsors, it's also important to be broadly branched. We've begun discussions with business networks VOKA, Unizo, and Leuven MindGate and also see opportunities in local companies with an international scope such as imec, Materialize, Tienze Suiker, Citrique Belge, Boerenbond, Arvesta, Harol, Dstny, Duracell and Frisk.

As we've been developing our programme content, Leuven MindGate has already become a substantive partner in everything related to innovation and high tech. This network of 400 innovative companies is an enthusiastic defender of our candidacy and also encourages its members to contribute financially. The cultural expansion of the city and region increases the appeal for international high potentials who are needed in order for imec and other companies to grow. For the period from 2026 to 2033 we're developing a sustainable partnership that is 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 here so as to yield a sustainable result.
- Knowledge and logistics in one of the programme lines, such as MetaLOV. Leuven has many technology companies that could contribute here.

REVENUE FROM TAX SHELTER INCENTIVES

Since 2018 the Belgian Federal Government has a Tax Shelter incentive in place which allows companies to invest in artistic creations in the performing arts (theatre, opera, dance, classical music, circus), audiovisual productions (film and television) and gaming. The investor can deduct this contribution from his tax return at a particularly attractive rate (328%), producing a guaranteed net return of between 8.5% and 10% on top of the investment. This makes the tax shelter a very popular investment product for individuals and companies who can thus reduce their corporate tax. The producer (who receives the money) can thus cover between 25% and 30% of his production costs.

A number of large and medium-scale productions that we’re developing as part of LOV2030 can be co-financed in this way, provided they meet a number of conditions. The productions must:

- be creations
- be European productions
- belong to the disciplines already mentioned above
- be recognised by the Belgian and Flemish authorities
- be produced or co-produced by a recognised production company (one that is subject to corporate tax in Belgium)
- be able to cover at least 70% of their costs themselves (through subsidies, ticketing, co-production funds or buy-out amounts), apart from the tax shelter income
- have at least part of the audience buying a paying entrance ticket
- have production cost primarily be incurred in Belgium, only costs made in the EU will qualify

Within the LOV2030 framework, productions in the performing arts, audiovisual, and gaming sectors will be produced between 2026 and 2033, which will require a total budget of between 13.5 and 16 million euros. This represents 28% to 33% of the total artistic budget of LOV2030, over 47 million euros. Of that maximum 16 million euros, 25% to 30% can in turn be financed by tax shelter resources – in other words 4 to 4.8 million euros.

Given that the tax shelter is a very popular investment product in Belgium and more tax shelter funds are available than there are productions made, a yield of 4 million is easily achievable. In Flanders alone, the government granted a total of 385 recognitions for the year 2023 (8 dossiers were rejected), worth 121 million euros. (cf. the latest annual report on the Flemish government’s 2023 tax shelter. Figures for 2024 are not yet available.)



LOV2030 will collaborate with recognized production companies such as Het nieuwstedelijk and Het laatste Bedrijf (for performing arts productions, theatre, opera, dance, circus) and with De Mensen and de Chinezen (for audiovisual productions and games). Projects by, among others, Het nieuwstedelijk, fABULEUS, STUK, Cirklabo, and Fonk vzw that are included in the bid book are eligible for tax sheltering.

Fundraising is undertaken via KBC Bank and Gallop Tax Shelter. The system is also a particularly interesting way to raise funds locally from small businesses, the self-employed, and the liberal professions, who are very supportive of 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, gifts, legacies, crowdfunding... We’re in talks with the Baillet-Latour Fund, the Cera Foundation, and the King Baudouin Foundation, among others. For this we call on specialized knowledge in our network and aim to raise 500,000 euros.

CO-PRODUCTIONS, PARTNERSHIPS AND TICKETING

As a final source of income there are co-productions, partnerships and, of course, ticketing. Given that the artistic programme has largely been created from the bottom up and we’ve always looked for co-financing, our professional partners all make their own contribution. STUK, M Leuven, Musée L, the Royal Museum for Central Africa, Vesalius Museum, Het nieuwstedelijk, fABULEUS, Fonk vzw, etc. all contribute to the production costs.

In addition, we’ve entered into a strategic partnership with KU Leuven. The university has pledged a contribution of 1 million euros in cash for the development of programme content, as well as in-kind support for academic and substantive input, personnel, logistics, infrastructure and communication.

Although a large part of the programme will be offered free or at a low price, we expect significant ticket revenues from performing arts productions (also due to obligations connected with the tax shelter measure) and major exhibitions in the museums.

q23 – BREAKDOWN OF OPERATING EXPENDITURE

	in euros	in %
Programme expenditure	47.12 m	65%
Promotion and marketing	11.6 m	16%
Wages, overheads and administration	12.33 m	17%
Other	1.45 m	2%
TOTAL	72.5 m	100%

We invest the most in the artistic programme: with over 47 million euros we can realize a high-quality programme and invest fully in the Labs. We know from our own experience with large international projects and from benchmarking with other ECoCs that between 15% and 16% is a minimum for international marketing and communication. Given that employer contributions in Belgium are notoriously high, a relatively high percentage (17%) will go on wages. We foresee a remaining amount (2%) for a sound impact study and analysis, capacity building (LOV EU Academy, Outreach, etc.), purchases and travel expenses. Each of the items will include a buffer for emergency planning.

q24 – PLANNED TIMETABLE FOR SPENDING OPERATING EXPENDITURE

		2025	2026	2027	2028	2029	2030	2031	2032	2033	total
Programme	€	0.6	1.92	2.25	3.55	11	18.5	3.9	2.7	2.7	47.12
	%	1%	4%	5%	8%	23%	39%	8%	5.50%	5.50%	
Promotion & marketing	€	0.1	0.48	0.8	1.15	2	4.75	0.96	0.68	0.68	11.6
	%	1%	4%	7%	10%	17%	41%	8%	6%	6%	
Wages, overheads and administration	€	0.6	0.8	1.2	1.4	2.6	3.53	1	0.6	0.6	12.33
	%	5%	6%	10%	17%	21%	29%	8%	5%	5%	
Other	€	0.02	0.06	0.1	0.14	0.2	0.64	0.12	0.085	0.085	1.45
	%	1%	4%	7%	10%	14%	44%	8%	6%	6%	
TOTAL		1.32	3.26	4.35	6.24	15.8	27.42	5.98	4.07	4.07	72.5

q25 – BREAKDOWN OF THE INCOME TO BE RECEIVED FROM THE PUBLIC SECTOR TO COVER 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%
Region East Brabant	20.3 m*	10%
EU (with exception of the Melina Mercouri Prize)	1 m	1%
Other		
TOTAL	194.9 m	100%

*Increase compared to Bid Book 1: in 2026 the Citadel of Diest received an additional 69k in provincial and ERDF co-financing.

q26 – FINANCIAL COMMITMENTS TO COVER CAPITAL EXPENDITURE

In the coming years the City of Leuven will invest considerable resources in cultural infrastructure. The largest part of that investment will go towards two ECoC flagship projects, namely the Performing Arts Site and the Stadhuis. These projects will be carried out whether or not Leuven wins the ECoC title and are foreseen in the city budget.

Dossiers for both projects have been submitted to the Flemish government. In the autumn, we will probably have a better idea of the commitment of this Flemish support.

In the region, too, a number of extremely interesting infrastructure projects are underway: the museum on the Panquin site in Tervuren, the renovation of Tienen's town hall, the Citadel of Diest, Horst Castle in Holsbeek, and the Orleans Tower in Aarschot. For the Citadel of Diest, 5 million euros have already been pledged by the Flemish Government.

q28 – TIMETABLE FOR RECEIVING INCOME TO COVER CAPITAL EXPENDITURE

Source of income for capital expenditure	2025	2026	2027	2028	2029	2030	2031	2032	total (m euros)
EU				1 m					1 m
Flemish government	5.2 m	5 m	5.35 m	5.35 m	5 m	20 m	20 m	12.3 m	78.2 m
City	7.8 m	6.3 m	14.6 m	16.1 m	12.5 m	24.3 m	13.8 m		95.4 m
Region	8.4 m	6.1 m	5.8 m						20.3 m
Other									
TOTAL									194.9

q27 – FUNDRAISING STRATEGY FOR RECEIVING EU FUNDS TO COVER CAPITAL EXPENDITURE

For each large-scale investment project, the city of Leuven looks into whether it qualifies for support from the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) or Interreg. At this moment we do not have a subsidy dossier with Europe to cover capital expenditure. An application worth 1 million euros is pending with Interreg for the repurposing of the Citadel of Diest.

On 28 April 2025, the city of Leuven signed a 'Framework Loan' of 100 million euros with the European Investment Bank (EIB). The loan can be increased by an additional 50 million euros, and the total budget can be drawn on until the end of December 2029. This should allow us to finance investments more cheaply and flexibly and to diversify our sources of financing. The two largest projects under this framework loan with the EIB are the Performing Arts Site and the Stadhuis.

Moreover, as one of the 112 selected European Mission Cities, Leuven, is also committed to fundraising in order to fulfil the Climate City Contract (CCC). The CCC consists of a portfolio of 86 breakthrough projects, which should accelerate the pace at which Leuven becomes climate neutral. An investment fund will be set up for the purpose.

q29 – SPENDING ON NEW CULTURAL INFRASTRUCTURE

See table Q43

q30 – GOVERNANCE AND DELIVERY STRUCTURE

LOV VZW IS THE DELIVERY STRUCTURE FOR LOV2030

LOV vzw serves as the official delivery structure for the implementation of our European Capital of Culture 2030 candidacy. It is a non-profit organization under Belgian law (vzw), with the standard legal bodies in place: a General Assembly, a Board, and an Executive Committee. LOV vzw is supported by a dedicated team responsible for delivering the full ambition of the 2030 title—both during the year itself and in ensuring its long-term legacy.

LOV VZW IS THE CONTINUATION OF THE EXISTING KU[N]ST LEUVEN VZW

LOV vzw is not a new organization, but the continuation of KU[N]ST Leuven vzw, which has organized major cultural city festivals since 2014. These festivals combine heritage, science, and innovation, and attract over 200,000 visitors from Leuven, Flanders, Belgium, and abroad. KU[N]ST Leuven vzw was co-founded by the City of Leuven and KU Leuven. In light of Leuven's ambition to become European Capital of Culture in 2030, both partners decided in June 2022 that, if selected, KU[N]ST Leuven would evolve into LOV vzw—bringing in more stakeholders alongside the City and University. Preparations have been taken to complete this transformation by 1 January 2026. LOV vzw's mission is to realize the objectives outlined in the LOV2030 bid book and deliver on its impact ambitions.

GOVERNANCE PRINCIPLE OF SHARED GOVERNANCE

LOV vzw builds upon the successful experiences of shared governance models in Leuven & Beyond. The City of Leuven has dedicated itself to placing cooperation and participation at the heart of its policy approach. This reflects a commitment to shared governance that the city strives to apply more broadly, including in such policy domains as economic development (Leuven MindGate), education (Samen Onderwijs Maken (SOM)), health care (Zorg Leuven) and climate (Leuven 2030). All of these organizations are multi-helix governance models and platforms for structural cooperation. With our ambitions in view, a multi-helix network model inspired by these successful experiences seems appropriate.

LOV VZW: DELIVERY STRUCTURE AND NETWORK AS ONE

No single organization, government, or actor can achieve the LOV2030 impact ambitions alone. If we want to achieve them we have to join forces, use each other's strengths, and do more than 'what we always did'. Therefore LOV vzw is not only the delivery structure for LOV2030, it is also the structure that supports our LOV Network, which is crucial for a successful ECoC. The LOV Network is mission-driven, guarantees the fulfilment of the network's objectives and is intrinsically participatory. The LOV Network not only actively seeks radical connections between itself and the below-mentioned partners, it immediately integrates them into the governance model and the functioning of the network. It's the most effective and efficient way for all the stakeholders and partners to achieve the shared mission and goals for LOV2030 and for the legacy thereafter: strengthening our cultural capital, our cultural and creative sectors in Leuven & Beyond; actively bringing stakeholders together; offering a platform in order to work together on shared objectives and social challenges. For LOV vzw we have opted for a governance model based on shared ownership, mutual reinforcement, and shared responsibility. In this way, governance is not only about governing but also about connecting and facilitating. Every stakeholder must show responsibility, ownership and leadership according to the context, expertise, and energy of the actors involved. In this way, LOV is also a laboratory for the future in which redistribution of power and resources in governance is key to arriving at innovative solutions.

EIGHT STAKEHOLDERS GROUPS

In line with the principles of shared governance and shared responsibility, the governance model and bodies of LOV vzw are inherently participatory. Eight stakeholder groups are represented in the decision-making structures:

- The two categories reflecting the legacy of KU[N]ST Leuven vzw
- The City of Leuven and its agencies, and
 - Knowledge institutions, most notably the KU Leuven

Complemented with categories that reflect Leuven's experience with collaborative governance

- Civil and artistic society
- Public and semi-public institutions
- Individuals, artists, and experts

Enriched by categories that are vital for the ECoC project

- The Region of East Brabant – recognizing that LOV2030 is a joint candidacy of *Leuven & Beyond*.
- Belgium – as the European Capital of Culture represents Belgium, it is essential for us to include representatives from diverse Belgian stakeholders.
- Europe and beyond – to safeguard the European and international dimension, our governance bodies also include members from across Europe, and even beyond, particularly within the General Assembly.

GOVERNING BODIES

In both the Board and the General Assembly, each stakeholder category is formally represented and holds an equal number of votes. This ensures that all parties participate in strategy development and decision-making on an equal footing.

The Board consists of two official representatives per stakeholder group, each with two votes —resulting in a compact but broadly supported governing body. This setup ensures a strong mandate from all eight stakeholder categories represented in the General Assembly. The Board meets every two months.

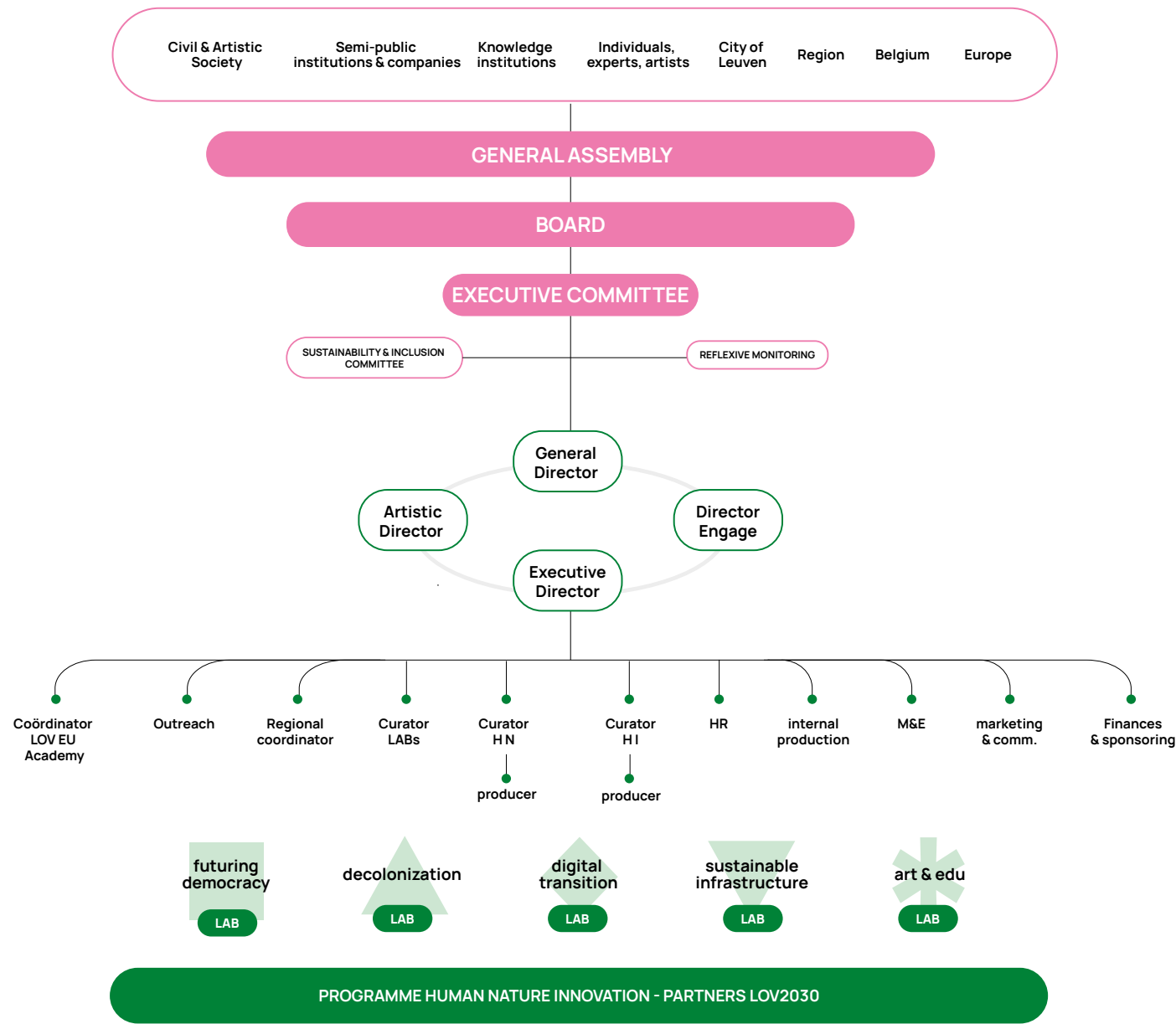
In the General Assembly, the number of representatives per category is unlimited, but each category holds the same number of votes. This unique yet highly effective model draws on more than ten years of experience from *Leuven 2030* - the organization and network uniting stakeholders to make Leuven a climate-neutral city. The General Assembly convenes twice a year.

The Board elects an Executive Committee, which includes a President, a Vice-President and the Management Team. The Executive Committee meets every two to three weeks, providing strategic guidance and operational oversight. It is empowered to act on behalf of the Board, ensuring efficient and agile decision-making within LOV vzw.

Additional principles apply to the functioning of the governing bodies. All members must sign a charter committing to good governance and shared European values. Furthermore, the roles of President and Vice-President are held by individuals of different genders to ensure gender balance in leadership.

UNITING NETWORKS FOR A SUSTAINABLE FUTURE

Moreover, this new large LOV network will enable Leuven and the region to develop and excel further in the areas of human and cultural capital, nature and innovation – the DNA of our city and region – through coordination and cooperation between the four large networks: Leuven2030, Leuven MindGate, SOM and LOV. With this powerful cooperative model, Leuven can be hugely meaningful to Flanders and to Europe as the embodiment of a sustainable, inclusive and socially equitable future. And thus Leuven & Beyond fulfils its ambition as a ‘future lab’ for Europe and the world.



q31 – MANAGEMENT AND GLOBAL LEADERSHIP OF THE PROJECT

MANAGEMENT TEAM & SHARED LEADERSHIP

LOV vzw will be led by a Management Team composed of four directors: a General Director, an Artistic Director, an Executive Director, and a Director Engage. Reflecting our strong belief in and long-standing experience with shared governance in Leuven, the Management Team will operate under a model of shared leadership—making decisions collectively whenever possible. In cases where consensus cannot be reached, the General Director is empowered to make a final decision. The General Director also serves as the organization’s primary leader and the key liaison between the Board and the operational team. For highly strategic or significant matters, a clear escalation procedure is in place. Decisions may be referred to the Executive Committee of the Board.

CLEAR RESPONSABILITIES & BROAD AUTONOMY

We work with a straightforward structure in which clear responsibility and autonomy go hand in hand. Every director is responsible for their own team. At the same time, in the operational team, decisions are taken as far as possible by those involved. Staff are given broad autonomy and can make their own decisions, after asking (a colleague or a stakeholder) for advice. Thus we create shared leadership and honor commitment and responsibility. Besides this, the Management Team and their respective teams are in close contact with the LOV Network’s stakeholders. That means that they also pool expertise and know-how from the sector. Artistic and business leaders from the cultural sector can thus contribute directly, as can outreach associates or community workers. The LOV2030 communication team works closely with their counterparts of Visit Leuven, the various cultural players, and the 30 municipalities in Leuven & Beyond.

ADVISORY COMMITTEES ON SUSTAINABILITY, INCLUSION & REFLEXIVE MONITORING

In addition to the core management structure, two advisory committees will be set up to anchor LOV2030 in sustainability, inclusion, and reflexive practice. One will focus on Sustainability & Inclusion, advising on how to embed social and ecological responsibility throughout the project. The other will address Reflexive Monitoring, supporting continuous learning by assessing the project’s impact and approach. Both committees will consist of Belgian and European experts, academics, and field practitioners, working closely with the Management Team to help guide the project in a responsive, future-focused way.



q32 – ENSURING THE CAPACITY OF THE STAFF TO PLAN, MANAGE AND DELIVER THE ECOC

European Capital of Culture projects are inherently complex, due to their demanding event production requirements, the rapid and substantial scaling of human resources, and the transition towards a lasting legacy phase.

We believe that a clear and well-structured staff organogram—aligned with the project’s needs and the right professional profiles—is essential. At the same time, drawing from the experiences of previous ECoCs, we highly value the expertise built up by the current team over time and recognize the importance of continuity.

In the pre-selection phase our team consisted of six people and a total of 3.2 FTE (full-time equivalent). Since January 2025, the LOV2030 team has grown and now comprises twelve people and a total of 7.2 FTE. This means that most team members also have another job, usually in the broad cultural sector or civil society. It also makes the team very connected. Recruitment followed open procedures and there were approximately 80 candidates for the various vacancies. Many people wanted to contribute to the LOV2030 project. We put together a diverse team, with different skill sets and backgrounds and a lot of European experience on a professional level.

Based on the knowledge, expertise, network and trust of stakeholders built up during the pre-selection and selection phase, we consider continuity and stability towards implementation to be crucial. At the end of the selection phase (autumn 2025), the Management Team and staff will be evaluated. Following this, in recognition of the need to match the right people with the right roles — while also valuing continuity and stability — new positions will be advertised across Europe through an open recruitment process. The recruitment

and appointment of the Management Team will be overseen by the current LOV2030 Steering Committee, complemented by representatives of key stakeholders and supported by EU experts with experience in European Capital of Culture implementation.

The team will gradually grow, according to the below overview. In this process we shall put particular stress on diversity, complementary skills and talents, and our core LOV values.

We also foresee the possibility of part-time work or secondment so that organizations from the LOV network can share their expertise and, conversely, so that experience gained within LOV2030 is not lost to the sector. In this way we deal sustainably with the development and securing of specialized knowledge for the broad cultural field. We also provide the necessary internships, so that young talent gets the chance to develop.

Within the team we take on shared leadership, where everyone has as much autonomy and responsibility as possible and is mandated to make their own decisions. Obviously that requires a clear consultation structure and framework of values, and clear objectives. We provide coaching and training for the team, so that everyone can focus on developing individual skills, while we also work on team skills (self-management, cooperation, communication, entrepreneurship).

The team will embody the core values of LOV2030. We are committed to promoting gender equity at all levels, including within management roles. In addition, we aim for at least 20% European representation across staff positions, ensuring a dynamic mix of local, national, and European expertise.

FTE	2025	2026	2027	2028	2029	2030	2031	2032	2033
Directors	1.9	2	2	2	3	3	2.5	2.5	2.5
Head finance		0.5	1	1	1	1	1		
Curators	1.25	1.25	2	2	3	3	1		
Producer / projectmanagers		0.5	2	2	2	2	2		
Curator LOV Labs		0.5	0.75	0.75	1	1	1	0.5	0.5
Coordinator LOVEU Academy	0.75	0.75	0.75	0.75	1	1	0.5	0.5	0.5
Outreach	0.5	0.5	0.5	1	2	3	0.5	1	1
Regional coordinator	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
Communication	1.3	1	1.75	2	6	10	1.5	1.5	1.5
Sponsoring		0	0.5	1	1	1			
Production	0.5	0.5	0.5	1.5	5	10	0.5	0.5	0.5
HR & admin		1	1.5	1.5	4.5	4.5	1.5	1	1
M&E coordinator		0.5	0.75	0.75	1	1	1		
Volunteers coordinator				1	1	1			
Facilitators lab		1.25	1.25	1.25	2.5	2.5			
TOTAL TEAM	7.20	11.25	16.3	19.5	35	45	14	8.5	8.5

Indicative, expressed in FTE

q34 – GENERAL AND ARTISTIC DIRECTOR

Once all Management Team and staff positions have been filled, the new structure will be fully operational during the first half of 2026.

In the job descriptions artistic insight, innovation capacity (Labs), management and communication skills will be articulated. Recruitment will follow open procedures, which guarantees inclusion and transparency, and will be published throughout Europe.

The directors must be experienced and inspiring cultural professionals, with at least ten years of experience in a management position in internationally recognized organizations. They are familiar with the artistic and cultural field in Belgium and in Europe and understand the international political framework and European cultural policy. They have led various teams and have excellent communication skills. They have a focus on social inclusion, sustainability, and innovation, and a profound understanding of the HumanNature theme, affinity with the programme and the LOV mindset. Moreover, the General Director has the necessary political, financial and leadership skills to roll out the ECoC.

A clear division of responsibilities will be established between the General Director, the Artistic Director, the Executive Director and the Director Engage. Regarding the division of roles between the General Director and the Artistic Director, the structure is as follows: the General Director holds final authority over the annual programme budget, the implementation timeline, and the overall monitoring of the ECoC objectives. Within these parameters, the Artistic Director enjoys full creative and programming autonomy to develop and deliver the artistic vision outlined in the LOV2030 application.



q33 – COOPERATION WITH LOCAL AUTHORITIES

During the last two and a half years the bidding team has been able to work with great autonomy and has enjoyed great trust on the part of the local government. This is evidenced by the unanimous approval of both the first and second bid book by every level of the City of Leuven’s democratic structure: the board of mayor and aldermen, the municipal council committee for culture and, ultimately, the municipal council. There is also continuous consultation at the regional level which has already resulted in declarations of commitment by the 30 municipalities, in which they express their (financial) support and take the first steps towards the formal establishment of an Inter-Municipal Cooperation (IMC).

There is regular coordination between the political level and the administration. The political level has never interfered in the artistic decision-making process. We organized several workshops with policy officers and civil servants to create the best conditions for the implementation of the ECoC.

It is clear to all policy makers that the artistic programme does not put up with political interference. The role of political decision-making lay in the approval of the Cultural Long-Term Strategy and the project’s budget.

The governance structure of the LOV vzw provides for local authority representation from both the City of Leuven and the region.

As explained above, each category of stakeholder has the same number of formal representatives and the same number of votes in both the general meeting and on the board. In this way we ensure coordination with and input from local authorities in the strategic lines that are set out. Artistic and operational autonomy is guaranteed.

By also providing for citizens, individual artists, cultural players, and civil society organizations, as well as the business community and social networks in the administrative bodies, the management and artistic teams are challenged but also protected.

We foresee regular coordination with the municipal government through connection in the Executive Committee (every two to three weeks) and regular Board meetings (every two months).

Given that the cultural partners from Leuven & Beyond are also involved as hosts and co-producers of the artistic programme, they increase artistic autonomy. They enjoy the broad trust of local authorities. As it happens, this is also common practice in Flanders.

q35 & 36 — RISK ASSESSMENT EXERCISE AND PLANNED MITIGATING MEASURES

Risk	Mitigation
RESOURCES	
Failure to achieve private income targets Impact: 3 / Probability: 1	Diversify sponsor portfolio Early contracting of sponsors Strict budget monitoring Financial buffer
Cost overruns in infrastructure projects Impact: 3 / Probability: 2	Strict budget monitoring
GOVERNANCE	
Delay in establishing LOV Association Impact: 3 / Probability: 1	Accelerated establishment of legal structure Agreement framework stakeholders
In the case of very urgent decisions and crisis situations Impact: 3 / Probability: 1	The governance charter determines who has the mandate to make quick decisions in particular cases: • executive director in case of... • artistic director in case of... • president of the board in case of... • general director in case of...
Unclear decision structures Impact: 3 / Probability: 1	Clear governance charter
Tensions between city and region Impact: 3 / Probability: 2	Strong embedding of regional cooperation
Time-consuming stakeholder management Impact: 2 / Probability: 1	Two-day meeting with all stakeholders in relation to agreements on cooperation culture (e.g. autonomy, trust, etc.)
OPERATIONAL / TEAM	
Understaffing team in run-up to 2030 Impact: 2 / Probability: 1	Clear personnel plan 2025-2033
Loss of key team members / High team turnover Impact: 2 / Probability: 1	Backup for key positions Knowledge management system
Too slow scaling up of organization Impact: 3 / Probability: 1	Phased recruitment Clear personnel plan 2025-2033 Short decision lines and processes
Core team overload Impact: 2 / Probability: 1	Sufficient coaching and support for team
PROGRAMME / ARTISTIC	
Low participation rate of the local population Impact: 3 / Probability: 1	Widely propagate Join the LOV in all its facets (communication, programming...) in the selection phase. Emphasize and exhibit the importance of ECoC Develop and exhibit the LOV Mindset
Low participation of arts and culture organizations in the city and region Impact: 3 / Probability: 1	Extra focus on workshops, communication, importance of ECoC Develop concrete projects. Commitment to a sustainable network culture (for the long term)
Differences of quality in projects Impact: 3 / Probability: 1	Quality control mechanism (linked to independent monitoring and evaluation body)
Insufficient innovative projects Impact: 3 / Probability: 1	Impose innovation criteria
Media furore Impact: 3 / Probability: 1	Conversation team Crisis communication plan

Risk	Mitigation
PUBLIC	
Visitor numbers too low Impact: 3 / Probability: 1	Segmented marketing strategy
Insufficient international visitors Impact: 3 / Probability: 1	International promotion and marketing strategy Collaboration with Visit Leuven and tourist services in the East Brabant region, Flemish Brabant province, Event Flanders
Tourist capacity is too low Impact: 2 / Probability: 1	Together with Visit Leuven, Leuven Convention Bureau, Visit Flemish Brabant, Visit Flanders and Event Flanders, draw up a plan aimed at 2030 to increase capacity, in collaboration with the wider region, possibly increasing capacity in Mechelen, Hasselt, Antwerp, and Brussels
Annual inflow and outflow of part of the (international) student population, one generation every 4 to 5 years Impact: 1 / Probability: 5	Focusing on sustainable relationships with student associations, communities and faculty bars to guarantee continuity
Too little diversity Impact: 3 / Probability: 2	Audience survey Focus on Radically New Connections through targeted profiles in the team Developing radically new connections – 'how to'
EXTERNAL FACTORS	
New pandemic Impact: 4 / Probability: 1	Social distancing measures, limiting audience capacity, increased focus on outdoor activities, digital programme Crisis protocols (cf. Covid pandemic) Crisis communication expertise
Climate disaster (heavy rainfall, flooding) Impact: 4 / Probability: 1	Increased focus on activities in covered infrastructure, digital programme Crisis protocols Crisis communication expertise
Large-scale power outage (cf. Portugal/Spain May 2025) Impact: 2 / Probability: 1	Increased focus on outdoor activities Mobile stand-alone PV installations Crisis protocols Crisis communication expertise
Art theft or vandalism Impact: 1 / Probability: 2	Insurance
PARTNERSHIPS	
Dropping out of key partners / Conflicts between partners Impact: 1 / Probability: 1	Partnership agreements Conflict resolution procedure
Disappointing regional cooperation Impact: 2 / Probability: 2	Support regional coordinators Support OP/TIL (Flemish network organization for supra-local cultural policy) Support and agreement framework mayoral consultation and General Directors of the region
INFRASTRUCTURE	
Delay in construction projects Impact: 1 / Probability: 2	Strict project monitoring Back-up plan
Mobility problems Impact: 1 / Probability: 1	Alternative mobility plans
ICT-infrastructure failure Impact: 2 / Probability: 1	ICT redundancy

q37 – SLOGAN



When you hear the word LOV, does Dionne Warwick’s timeless classic instantly spring to mind? ‘What the world needs now, is LOV, sweet LOV’? If those lyrics weren’t copyrighted we’d have no need to look further for our slogan. (That doesn’t stop us from humming the tune every morning as we bike to our HQ. HQ? Insiders call it the LOV shack.)

The LOV2030 narrative is one of radically new connections, and therefore of unexpected encounters. A *saamenleving*, a connection, a relationship, an encounter. You can’t do any of that on your own; you always do it together. And isn’t LOV the most radical connection a person can make? Our story works not only on interpersonal relationships but also on the relationship between people and nature: together we build a better world for everyone. What the world needs now...

We’ve noticed how happily LOV has burrowed into our communications and made itself at home in the last two years, and how positive its effect is. It always puts a smile on your face. People automatically fill in the word LOV in their favourite song title or poem and constantly come up with their own slogans. Of course you get obvious things like ‘Let LOV rule!’ or ‘Make LOV, not war’. But the good thing about that is that people get connected and spread the message anyway.

For now, we will stick with **Let’s make LOV**. A slogan with a wink, we think, that contains a call to action yet still refers to our deeper values. There could be a longer version with a tag line added: **Let’s make LOV (it’s just HumanNature)**. And 2030 is still more than four years off. We will probably come up with ideas and we are challenging our followers on social media to come up with their own slogans, that might inspire us further.

(One of those ideas is to launch a new slogan in the fall of 2030, when the year is three quarters behind us and the public may be feeling a touch of fatigue: ‘Fall in LOV’).



q38 – MARKETING AND COMMUNICATIONS STRATEGY

CHALLENGES FOR COMMUNICATION

Our communications face three major challenges, which actually go to the heart of one of our key themes, and that is polarization.

The culture break. The cultural sector is no longer neutral territory. From culture wars to woke wars – what’s inspiring to one person is suspicious to another. This polarizes and deters. In many cases, culture sounds elitist.

Trust has vanished. Trust has disappeared from the political and institutional fields. When something comes from ‘the city’, ‘Europe’, or ‘an institution’ many people turn away. They don’t believe it any more, or don’t feel at home there. For many, Europe is an abstract idea. So a ‘European Capital of Culture’ sounds like something that doesn’t concern them rather than something to join in with and enjoy.

So many channels, so little connection. Everyone is on a different platform, in a different digital bubble. One message that reaches everyone? How do we do that? People scroll till they drop. They’re overstimulated, rarely really touched. Everything is an event, a campaign, a must-see. How do you make LOV stand out without shouting and contributing to that information overload?

This is why we are shifting the focus to our audience. The public as a whole must understand and participate in LOV, we are making an emotional promise: one of **unexpected encounters**. We don’t want to attract only the culture buffs but also people who are difficult to reach with the traditional cultural offering. The 2024 Flemish cultural participation survey shows that this non-participant group mainly comprises people living alone, people with low levels of education, and the elderly. As European Capital of Culture 2030, we are of course also focusing on an international audience.

This is why we communicate in a recognizable and human way, in simple language and a fresh and appealing design, and we align our internal agenda with what people are looking for. We don’t release all the information in one fell swoop; instead we do so in stages. We raise awareness of the LOV topics and focus on participation and co-creation. We will be upscaling this strategy to engage with an international audience: if the focus works on a low-threshold level it will also work with other target groups.

During the competition our primary communications languages were English and Dutch, and occasionally also French and German. From the moment we win the title of European Capital of Culture (on behalf of Belgium), our communications will be consistently in English and Belgium’s three national languages, Dutch, French and German. It’s maybe worth noting in passing that this makes our communication immediately accessible to 275 million native speakers throughout Europe, and many more second- or third-language speakers. (Of course, various browsers and platforms increasingly provide automatic translations into your own preferred language.)

MARCOM STRATEGY

1. COMMUNICATION OBJECTIVES OF LOV2030

- We reach, activate, and encourage residents and international visitors to participate.
- We position LOV as an unprecedented movement, by and for everyone.
- We create awareness of the urgent social challenges in our region: polarization and the impact of climate change... We encourage people to tackle these together.
- We increase the fame of Leuven and East Brabant, and strengthen pride in our region and identity.
- We show that the European Capital of Culture is an initiative of the EU and let it shine.

2. TARGET GROUP:

Reaching everyone is impossible, but we still cast our net as widely as possible. We build segments and use a CRM (customer relationship management) tool that collects all the data for targeting. We distinguish the following three major segments:

General public

- Residents, students and expats Leuven & Beyond
- Volunteers and LOVambassadors Leuven & Beyond
- Tourists and visitors from near and far
- Leuveners and Leuvenites in the world

Professionals (local, regional, national, and international) (because they are also communicators - see below - as intermediaries - wearing two hats)

- Intermediaries and local partners in order to reach specific target groups
- Artists, creative partners and the cultural sector
- Companies, funds, sponsors, business networks, and professional organizations
- Collaboration platforms such as Leuven 2030, Leuven Mind-Gate, SOM...
- Schools, colleges, universities, and research institutions
- Policy makers and administrations of all the towns and municipalities involved
- Stakeholders linked to our themes such as climate scientists, inclusion experts,...
- Logistics (catering) and transport partners (mobility)

Press and media

- Classic channels: newspapers, magazines, radio, TV
- Bloggers/vloggers/influencers
- Online platforms that are strong in content,
- e.g. position Leuven as a cycling city > platforms, communities that use bicycles (also include lifestyle and travel)
- e.g. websites that work on nature, sustainability

3. HIGH LEVEL STRATEGY, WITH FOUR STEPPING STONES

One brand, many worlds

You no longer reach the great majority via one channel but via one shared idea that can spread in different forms through different channels.

We build both a classic campaign and **create a brand platform that everyone can easily appropriate**: local neighbourhood organizations, cultural institutions, makers, municipalities, residents, European partners... It’s based on **one recognizable emotionally charged brand idea** - that people will happily share because they see themselves in

it or can help shape it: **Unexpected encounters**. About the happiness and power of unexpected encounters. Between people, between ideas, between humankind and nature. The brand idea immediately equates to our promise. LOV makes it happen.

We make the idea central, and focus on the community. In marketing terms: idea-centric, community-specific.

- LOV is seen, heard and shared by different people in ways that are specific to their environment.
- Recognition is created through shared formats.
- The Dreamers2030, local organizations, partners, and makers receive a toolkit with which they can use the brand themselves. They draw on their own themes to feed it and get the LOV movement going.
- LOV is not a fleeting campaign, but an idea that can live on for years.
- We attract people from everyone’s world to a LOV activity, where the bubbles are burst.

Start in the neighbourhood, grow towards Europe

To many people, ‘European Capital of Culture’ sounds distant or abstract. That’s why we start close by, with recognizable stories and accessible activities.

First touch people, then connect to the bigger story.

First we demonstrate the local value of LOV - in neighbourhoods, in places where people often come.

We focus on accessible formats, recognizable faces, and safe places. We first build trust and involvement. Once interested, once inside, once at a LOV activity, we connect that experience to the regional and European story.

One step at a time

- LOV grows with its audience.
- From something small that you accidentally stumble upon, to a shared project that you’re proud of and that beams out to the region and the rest of Europe. The LOV programme is configured for exactly that.
- LOV provides Unexpected Encounters with Europe during LOV activities: from stories of people who live miles away, but still experience the same thing, to innovations in the region that we achieve together with European partners.
- LOV provides EU/ECOC branding on all materials.

Be where the people are

Besides our own communication channels, we break into places where people are already going. Online and offline. LOV goes to the people. Wherever life happens LOV will be seen.

With a LOV-label we will be visible on the largest online gateway to culture in Flanders: UiTinVlaanderen and UiTinLeuven. Moreover, we will be visible in places where people are not yet looking for culture. In the supermarket, at school, the football club, on their way to work...

Through an unseen network of trusted local partners, we appear in their omnichannel communication (social media, direct mailing, Signal, folders, posters,...). Via link building on their websites, we score highly in search results. LOV is also recognizably present as a visual stamp in the stories of our makers.

We also occupy a prominent place in the streetscape. With pop-ups, LOV-signage, Velocoms driving around and giving people information, a busy bus route run by De Lijn where commuters suddenly find they’ve boarded a LOV experience, LOV locations appearing on Waze maps when people are on the road.

At a later stage we will use this strategy for national and international visitors.

- For the national strategy we’re joining forces with the Flemish cities who bid in the first round: Ghent, Bruges and Kortrijk. Also with Molenbeek and Namur we agreed to strengthen each other, whoever the winner is.
- For the international strategy, we work closely with Visit Leuven, Visit Flemish Brabant, Event Flanders, Flanders Investment and Trade (FIT), Visit Flanders
 - presence in their communication channels
 - international trade fairs (ITB, WTM ...)
 - partnerships:
 - OTA: collaborations with Online Travel Agencies
 - cultural/tourism trade organizations linked to the programme
 - hospitality for international press and bloggers/vloggers
 - presence on theme platforms (see above, under press and media)
 - collaborations with travel providers and transport companies that fit in with slow travel and regenerative tourism:
 - Nightjets/ÖBB
 - NMBS, Eurostar, SNCF, Deutsche Bahn, NSInternational
 - providers of bicycle trips and train trips
 - Blablacar, Flixbus
 - international visibility
 - on carriers (Eurostar, SNCF, Deutsche Bahn, NSInternational, ...)
 - presence at entrances and gateways: train and bus stations (Antwerp, Bruges, Brussels South, Liège, Ostend and Eurostar Calais, Lille Europe...)
 - presence at airports (Brussels National Airport Zaventem, Brussels South Charlerloi and Charles de Gaulle, Frankfurt, Maastricht Aachen Airport, Schiphol...)
- Partnership KU Leuven around networking and communication to international alumni of the association – collaboration to reach everyone who ever studied in Leuven via KU Leuven channels (KU Leuven Connect and CRM, as well as via print, podcast, newsletter).
- We’re attracting extra and specific international attention through a LOVely city campaign. Leuven, Louvain-la-Neuve, Lublin and Lviv of course. But many cities in Europe have LOV in their name, or have a name that simply means love. We’re setting up a visibility campaign for them: Lov (DK), Lovo-sice (CZ), Lovran (HR), Lovön (SE), Lovrin (RO), Lovćenac (RS), Lovćen (ME), Lovinobaňa (SK), Lovrenc na Pohorju (SI), Lovech (BG), Lovyshche (UA), Lovozero (RU) Lovenjoel and Lovendegem (BE). The following cities’ names mean love: Ljubljana (SI) – derived from ljubljena (‘beloved’), Stará Ľubovňa (SK) – from Slavic ľub- (‘love’), Miłość (PL) – Polish for ‘love’, Agapi (GR) – Greek for ‘love’, Lyubov (UA) – Slavic for ‘love’.

Living Lab Methodology

Communication is only successful if it touches people, moves them, or impels them to action. That is why we already involve our audience early in the design process: test fast, improve smartly – together with your audience.

One of LOV’s most distinctive aspects is the development of an unprecedented proportion of the programme by the residents themselves. We also apply this philosophy to our communication process:

- Via the Living Labs methodology, we design and test LOV messages and formats with a cross-section of our residents. This way, we keep our finger on the pulse. We test ‘minimum viable products’ in practice – on a small scale, on the street and online. We keep what works and scale it up. We change what doesn’t. Like this we guarantee communication that gets through and reaches the residents.
- We use a B1 standard language level so that everyone understands our message, including people with language difficulties or who are not very familiar with classic cultural jargon.
- We maintain a network of professional communication personnel, from the content partners and from the 30 towns and municipalities of Leuven & Beyond. This way, we guarantee that what goes out is streamlined. The first workshops to focus on this took place in May and June 2025.

4. PHASING

2025-2026: Feel the LOV

Awareness and curiosity

We stimulate the curiosity of our residents, come in with the emotional promise of LOV, and call on them to participate.

2027-2028: Be the LOV

Accessible participation and co-creation

We start the first projects with residents: first experiences, visible stories in the neighbourhood. We build a culture of collaboration and trust. Everyone can come and watch, contribute as a maker, host or inspirer. We test and optimize.

2029: Spread the LOV

Scaling up and building momentum

Successful projects expand to other municipalities in the region. Residents become ambassadors who spread the story. Exactly one year before the Opening, we make a large-scale announcement of the programme: nationally and internationally.

2030: Join the LOV

Massive celebration and international mobilization

We kick off the festival year at the end of January and invite all Europe. Residents are not spectators but protagonists. We aim for three million visitors who participate and take the LOV mindset home with them.

2031- ...: Cherish the LOV

Remembering and embedding

A look back at our achievements and structurally embedding the recipes for success in the cultural offering.

RESTRAINT

In line with our sustainability narrative, we want to avoid waste and visual pollution, especially in public space. We will favour and empower local producers and cultural entrepreneurs; reduce our ecological footprint by designing materials with dual functionality and reducing the use of toxic inks; restrain any activities that could cause visual pollution in our out-of-home campaigns; and adapt means according to target audiences, the area’s population density, its socio-demographics and its internet access. Our merchandising will be produced by local artisans and we will use shop windows to install LED display screens to promote LOV2030 and other cultural initiatives that will take place in the city and region.

q39 – PARTNERSHIPS WITH THE MEDIA

Because we regard LOV2030 as a societal project (*samenlevingsproject*) we aim to go beyond an obvious partnership with the media and build a close and engaged relationship with them. A radically new connection (we hardly dare to repeat that phrase anymore). As from 24 September 2025, at some point in the afternoon, we want to spend as much time as possible with journalists in order to build a connection and trust. In this way we provide insight into how culture is much more than just an item in the paper’s weekend supplement. That it goes to the heart of society, to the heart of our humanity.

Why only from 24 September? In the past the media have adopted a rather wait-and-see attitude, weighing each of the candidates from pre-selection and selection against each other without voicing a preference for any. Once it’s known who will bear the title in 2030, the media will be interested in precisely what the plans are and how the process will proceed. We’re confident that the title of European Capital of Culture will act as a powerful media magnet.

CELEBRATING THE ECOC BRAND

We’re developing a mobility programme for Belgian journalists from local and national media (both print and audiovisual). In 2030 it will be 28 years since there was an ECoC in the Dutch-speaking part of the country (Bruges 2002). A new generation of journalists and influencers have therefore never experienced an ECoC. So we aim to send journalists on study trips to future ECoCs such as Oulu and Trenčín in 2026, Liepaja and Evora in 2027, Bourges and Budweis in 2028, and Lublin and Kiruna in 2029 to experience what it means to be a European Capital of Culture. Their reports and articles on the subject will rekindle enthusiasm for the concept among the Belgian population. Thus we will lay out a fertile seedbed for LOV2030.



LEUVEN & BEYOND, GETTING TO KNOW FLANDERS AND BELGIUM

For international journalists, French-speaking Belgian journalists and influencers (with at least 250,000 followers), we’re developing a hospitality programme in close collaboration with Visit Leuven, Visit Flanders and Event Flanders. Between 2026 and 2031, we will organize regular moments when we introduce journalists to our city and region, our culture and nature, our heritage, our innovative strength, and our history, while also offering insight into the complex Belgian reality, shaped by three official languages and multiple communities: almost 7 million Dutch speakers, 4 million French speakers, 80,000 German speakers, and more than 1 million residents in Brussels, officially bilingual, and in practice, multilingual.

Not only will we take the journalists through our region, we will also cross the language border to Louvain-la-Neuve and make the link to the other ECoC candidate cities – Bruges, Ghent, Kortrijk, Namur, and Brussels/Molenbeek. In this way, Leuven & Beyond will truly become the European Capital of Culture on behalf of Belgium. In 2028 the city-wide *Body & Soul festival*, which serves as a pilot project for our title year, will be an important step on the way.

INTERNATIONAL EXCHANGE WITH OTHER ECOCs2030

We will not only be sending journalists to the ECoCs up to and including 2029, of course. In consultation with our Cypriot, Montenegrin and Ukrainian colleagues we will also set up exchanges before and during the title year in Nikšić, Lviv, Larnaka/Lemesos and Leuven (look at all those lovely L’s!). In this way, we join forces and strengthen each other’s international visibility.

PARTNERSHIPS

We will effect partnerships with local and national media. The regional broadcaster ROBtv has already signed a declaration of commitment to that end. MO Magazine already agreed to a strategic partnership. With Vlaamse Radio & Televisie (VRT), the Dutch-language national radio and television (four TV channels, five radio channels, a news site and an online streaming platform), we’re developing a three-level collaboration: a structural collaboration (linked to VRT’s strategic goals and public mission), media campaigns, and news gathering.

In addition, we are still looking for a media deal in Flanders and Wallonia with one of the large publishers, who are strongly consolidated in Belgium and expanding internationally (three large competing groups, each with different national newspaper titles and magazines in their portfolio).

q40 — MOBILIZING OUR OWN CITIZENS
AS COMMUNICATORS OF LOV2030



Do you know the difference between a Leuveners and a Leuvenite? Leuveners are the people who live in Leuven (and the wider region). That's it. Unlike other places in Flanders, it takes no time at all to become a Leuveners. You're there, that's what counts. You're a Leuvenite when you leave Leuven again and become an expat. For you may be able to move away from Leuven, but Leuven simply moves with you.

Right from day one we've passed on the invitation to take part. From the intendants to the 30 Dreamers, from the Dreamers to the wider community, from the city to the region, from Leuven & Beyond to Europe and beyond. We're always looking for radically new connections to exponentially spread our values and narrative. By involving the broad social sector as co-creators of our programme from the very beginning, they're also owners of our story themselves.

With LOV as the most radical connection, we have a name that covers the content of our message and at the same time refers to the special place that is Leuven & Beyond. In this way we embed our narrative in minds and hearts in a clear, coherent and inclusive way and give an important ambassadorial role to all stakeholders and target groups.

We mobilize the 600,000 residents of Leuven & Beyond, the 60,000 students and the international and European network of tens of thousands of Leuven expats, alumni and Erasmus students as our ambassadors. They are our greatest and priceless asset.

Leuven's social fabric is exceptionally international. It embraces around 171 nationalities, 38% of the residents have an ethnically diverse background, and 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, and the network of Leuven alumni (KU Leuven Connect) also consists of thousands of Europeans. Through KU Leuven Connect we will be able to contact all Leuven students, alumni and expats, Leuveners and Leuvenites alike, in Leuven, Belgium and the world. The CRM-system reaches 300,000 e-mailaddresses. We want to deploy this international community as ambassadors who promote the HumanNature programme in their networks in their home countries, or as host families for international visitors in Leuven. In this way, we ensure an authentic experience and meaningful encounter between locals and visitors.

Residents become co-creators, hosts, guides. We believe that if you take on a role like that you'll also tell others about it. In person. Or on the World Wide Web. We make sure that your story takes wing: we provide formats, a hashtag, and material to make sharing your story easy. Templates, postcards, posters, you name it. We will also work out a number of specific formats.

Whoever welcomes visitors shares in the LOV

Taxi drivers, baristas, hotel receptionists... Everyone who comes into contact with visitors will receive material and information to pass on the LOV story. And a LOV badge, sticker, or display with 'Just ask me for some LOV'. Visit Leuven and KU[N]ST Leuven have already experimented with this and we're building on those learnings.

365 stories

A series of online video portraits in which Leuveners and Leuvenites themselves talk about what they do with LOV and what LOV does to them. As of 2029, we share one story every day.

Authentic experiences

Tourists can book online for an authentic experience with a local. This is how we initiate surprising international encounters between residents and tourists. We've run this kind of 'Ask a local' campaign before with Visit Leuven and the city's economics department. We're building on what we learned from that.

q41 — HOW TO HIGHLIGHT AS AN
ACTION OF THE EUROPEAN UNION?

From the outset HumanNature has focused on the EU's most important challenges: addressing polarization, by creating new connections, and tackling the climate challenge by appealing to our imaginations. These things infuse our entire bid. Our cultural and artistic programme brings Europeans closer together precisely by grappling with these core challenges, by seeking out our shared European values and shared European culture and promoting their diversity. We breathe Europe.

Leuven & Beyond deliberately looks beyond 'Leuven and the region'. 'Beyond' goes beyond borders. It relates to time and space. It relates to the future. It relates to Europe. As human beings, we look towards that time and space with hope and with love. Our project creates many links with the stories and experiences of other cities and people in Europe. What do we have in common? What can we learn from each other? What are the futures that we can imagine together? We gladly give that dialogue centre stage. Our legacy project Stadhuis - European House for Democracy is aimed at making a fundamental contribution to that. Likewise projects like *EUtopia* and *Erasmus 65+*. We think Europe.

On the Europe Day before the title year begins we will invite our fellow ECoCs from Cyprus, Montenegro and/or Ukraine to hold a joint programme presentation in the Stadhuis - European House for Democracy, followed by a visit to the European Parliament, where we will hold a joint artistic happening. The two houses of democracy are only 25 kilometres apart. From the Stadhuis in Leuven, through the Brabantse Wouden, to the European Parliament in Brussels, thousands of people will shake hands: together they'll form a human garland and they'll each light a candle. A string of light with thousands of EU stars, symbolizing unity in diversity. It promises magical images that will quickly circulate in the (social) media.

At the Opening and Closing of the title year we will bring together choirs and dance companies and circus groups from the region and from all over Europe and create the first opportunity to fully deploy *MetaLOV* as an interactive streaming platform. We will of course invite all representatives of the EU, the European Parliament and European Commission, as well as former and future ECoCs. We will celebrate Europe Day, and the awarding of the Melina Mercouri Prize, and we will promote the selection of other European cities as ECoCs between 2025 and 2033.

We would like to add two fresh ideas. During the title year, we will distribute beer mats in the hundreds of cafés in Leuven & Beyond, asking the question: What have I done for democracy this week? and offering a number of suggestions as answers, in the form of the European flag. Throughout the programme in Leuven and the region we will also hide the twelve stars of the EU flag. Anyone who can spot the 12 stars and take a photo of them will have a chance to win an Interrail ticket, or even a trip to the Cypriot ECoC.

And it goes without saying that we will guarantee maximum visibility of the ECoC action and the EU by continuing to use the logos and EU flag in all our communication channels, our marketing tools, website, socials, and printed matter, our city dressing and merchandise. We will implement a visibility policy at all important entries: railway stations, airports, bicycle rental points. We will ensure that our partners also follow all the guidelines regarding the correct use of the EU flag and logo and ECoC logo.

It's important that we can highlight the contribution and achievements of the EU and the ECoC programme in the daily lives of our citizens. The many Erasmus students in Leuven are living proof of that. Through our extensive approach to increasing co-creation and co-ownership among the various communities that enrich our city and region, and particularly among young people and schools, we can also increase their connection with the EU and the ECoC action during events, debates, and lectures. Our European identity lies in sharing our stories. That, after all, is what love is all about.



q42 – POLITICAL SUPPORT AND COMMITMENT

The city of Leuven has already invested a considerable amount in the development of this candidacy in recent years. The bid book you are now holding was unanimously approved by the College of Mayor and Aldermen on 16 May 2025. It was subsequently submitted to the competent municipal council committee on 22 May 2025 and the municipal council on 26 May 2025, being unanimously ratified by both without abstentions.

On 18 June 2024, the deputation and the governor of the Province of Flemish Brabant signed a declaration of intent in which the province expresses its support on strategic, communicative, financial, organizational and logistical levels. During the selection phase (and after the Belgian elections), the discussions with the Province of Flemish Brabant were further reified. On 26 June 2025, the deputation and the governor confirmed their support.

In 2024, 24 towns and municipalities in the East Brabant region made definite commitments and during a press conference on Friday 28 June 2024 signed a declaration of intent in which they pledged a minimum of €6 per inhabitant. In 2025, 30 towns and municipalities from East Brabant flew the LOV flag on Europe Day and on 27 June 2025 signed the declaration of commitment.

The Flemish and Federal governments received a delegation from the Flemish and Belgian candidate cities respectively and pledged their support to whichever city wins the title.

Early summer 2025 the Flemish government ratified the pledged support.

The candidacy of LOV2030 also received the moral support of Kortrijk, Ghent and Bruges, expressed in the presence of Flemish Minister of Culture Caroline Gennez, on 27 May 2025.

KU Leuven signed a declaration of commitment with the promise of substantive, communicative, logistical and financial cooperation.

The mayor of Ottignies/Louvain-la-Neuve signed a declaration of commitment in support of our candidacy on 23 June 2025.

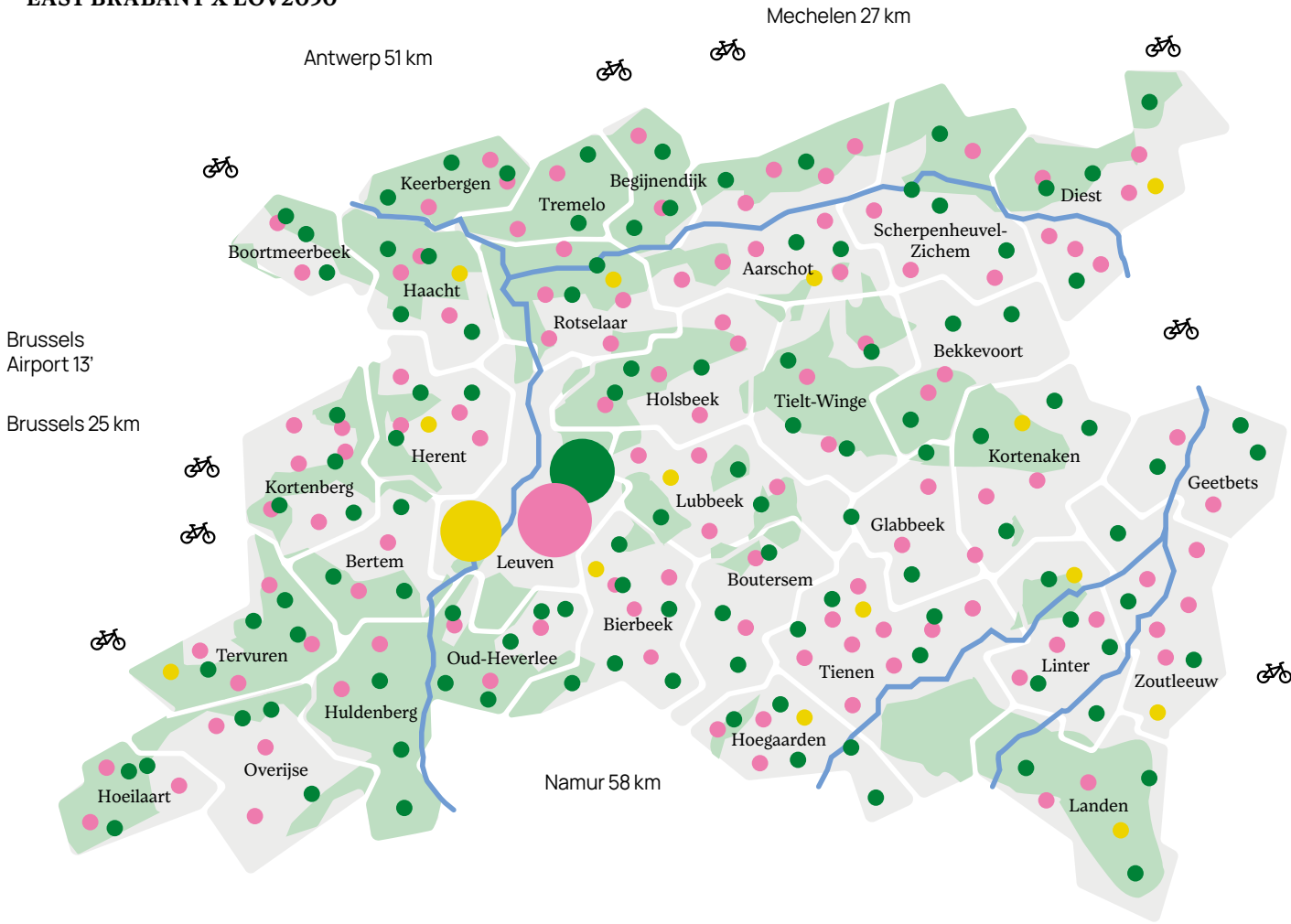


capacity to deliver

q43 – INFRASTRUCTURE PROJECT PLANS

Project	Description
CULTURAL & TOURIST INFRASTRUCTURE	
Performing Arts Site 2029	Construction of the Performing Arts Site (see Q6).
Stadhuis 2029	Repurposing of the historic Stadhuis (see Q6).
Park Abbey and entrance to the Brabantse Wouden 2026	Renovation and repurposing as a heritage site and refuge for art and culture, history, religion, tranquility, meeting, monastic life, nature, sustainable short supply chain, urban agriculture, and home to the PARCUM and Alamire museums. Entrance to the Brabantse Wouden (see Q6).
Stelplaats 2030	Temporary use of the old depots of bus company De Lijn. Will be renovated between 2025-2031 as part of <i>The Night is Young</i> (see Q6).
Domo 2026-2028	Renovation and connection to Het Depot as a music centre and locus for night culture (see Q6).
URBAN	
Brabantse Wouden 2024	Linking of all the forests and woodlands between Tervuren and Leuven to form the Brabantse Wouden, an area with exceptional natural value and international appeal.
Renovation of the Vaartkom canal basin area 2025	Construction of a car-free zone between the cultural infrastructure of OPEK and Vaartstraat, with a wooden deck over the water.
KU LEUVEN	
Vesalius Museum 2025-2026	KU Leuven new-build interdisciplinary Vesalius Museum (see Q6)
600 years of KU Leuven art route <i>And So, Change Comes in Waves</i> 2025	Art and science route with permanent interventions in the public space by international artists such as Ugo Rondinone, Gijs Van Vaerenbergh, Berlinde De Bruyckere, Alicja Kwade, Sammy Baloji, Elif Erkan, Yu Ji, together with poetry installations by, among others, Maud Vanhauwaert, Yousra Benfquih and Dominique De Groen.
IN THE REGION	
Furia Museum (working title) – redevelopment of Panquin site – Tervuren 2026-2030	New museum on the edge of the Brabantse Wouden national park, focusing on the symbiosis between the experience of art and nature.
Stadhuis X – Tienen 2028	Masterplan for the renovation of the town hall. The library and city archives will also be housed there.
Horst Castle 2026	Structural renovation works at Horst Castle and revaluation of the historic rural environment as an open castle with a meadow for events.
Citadel of Diest 2027	Repurposing of the Citadel as a new part of town with a mix of municipal functions – Hageland Academy, housing, etc. – while preserving its unique heritage value.
Orleans Tower Aarschot 2026	Restoration of the tower with the addition of a staircase as a lookout point, and renovation of the park around the tower.

EAST BRABANT X LOV2030



LOV-program in the region

- **HUMAN:**
 - Opening Ceremony, Aloha Damiaan!, Book by Book, Body & Soul festival, Can You Hear the People Sing?, Erasmus 65+, Here We Are Now, In the Neighbourhood, Living Room Live, Cultivating Dreams in the Rural, Mindblowing, Outside the CIRKL, Pigeon People, Singing Towers, Sisters doin' it for Themselves, The Night is Young
- **NATURE:**
 - A Hill called Herman, And they came to the river. And they came from the road, Bunker Ecologies, Cemeteries of the Future, Decolonizing Art Déco, Hear here, Let's Eat!, Master in Disaster, Mine. Mind. Museum, Save our Soils, Starry Nights, Starring Nature!, Take Me to Church, The Word for World is Forest, 30 ways to LOV, To the Roots, Toxic Beauty
- **INNOVATION:**
 - Afrotronix, BEE Europe, Future Generations Studio, Kweikersparade, MetaLOV, Molenbeek for LOV

MOBILITY

- 303.4 km cycle highways**
- 15 cycle highways** throughout the region
- 26 bicycle counting stations**
- daily average cyclists at the Leuven train station: 5,409
- 7 bus stations:** Aarschot, Diest, Landen, Leuven, Tielt-Winge, Tienen & UZ Leuven hospital Gasthuisberg
- 3000 busstations** throughout the region
- 24 trainstations**
- 1 airport**



Dear reader

In our first bid book, we told you about Thomas More, who had his *Utopia* printed in 1516 in what is now a Tandoori restaurant in Leuven. And about how Georges Lemaître developed his *Big Bang theory* exactly 100 years ago, 100 metres further down the same street. Utopia and the Big Bang, two ideas that have forever changed our view of society, the *samenleving*, the world and the universe. Two ideas born in that same place of birth. From the Humanists in the 16th century to the nanotechnology in your smartphone today: Leuven & Beyond is a centre of European excellence, right in the heart of Europe.

We find our humanity, our human nature, in telling stories, building narratives, in *samenleven*, in forging radically new connections. That is why we would like to conclude with two more stories. One is about a *Leuvenite*, you know, these citizens of the world who, after a stay in Leuven, move elsewhere but carry a piece of Leuven with them. It is the story of Raphael Ángel Calderón, who arrived in Leuven from Costa Rica in the 1920s to study medicine. After returning to Costa Rica, he quickly became an important political figure, promoting European ideas. In the 1940s, Raphaël even became president of Costa Rica, opened a university and a university hospital, but more importantly, he established a social security system based on the European model he had learned about in Leuven.

LOV2030 Leuven & Beyond - European Capital of Culture is not about how good we already are, but about how much better we can become together. It is not about promoting the city, but about promoting the values we believe in. For us, those values are about humanity, about how we treat each other and our environment. Human Nature. Love.

So one last story. During the Vietnam war an old man, born in Zierikzee (the Netherlands) stood outside the White House in Washington, lighting a candle, every single night. After a long time, a reporter came to him and asked: "Sir, do you really think your little protest with your tiny candle will change the war? Or change the policy?" And he said, "Oh, but I don't come here to change anything. I certainly don't come to change them. I come here so they don't change me. I don't want this maddening war to wear down my humanity, my humanness. My human nature."

Let's sing that song, shall we? What the world needs now...

COLOFON OF LOV

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.

LOV Team

General lead/intendants: Lore Baeyens & Stijn Devillé (Author Bid Book)

Projectmanager & teamcoach: Evi Gillard

Abigail Holgado Flores (community & socials), Emmelien Monnens (communication & socials), Georgy Chtchevaev (outreach coordinator), Jonas Rutgeerts (curator), Kathryn Cops (creative connector region & Europe), Kristel Salaets (coordination Bid Book, marketing & communication), Melanie Jacobs (LOV EU Academy coordinator), Sevie Tsampalla (curator), Somto Ofor (production leader), Teodora Borghoff (European expert)

Dreamers2030

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

International LOVers

Aleksander Fadeev, Cristina Farinha, Daryna Zhyvohliadova, Immie Jonkman, Piia Rantala-Korhonen, Sabine Zimmermann, Steve Green, Teodora Borghoff, and all our inspiring contacts within the Culture Next network

Thinkers along the road/special thanks to

Amina Iddrisu, An Engelen, Andreas Carrafiello, Anne Loeckx, Anne-lies Verreth, Bart Beuten, Bart Noels, Bart Raymaekers, Beatris Birca, Bert Hatse, Bram Vermeyen, Bruno Lambrecht, Chris Van Geet, Chris Verslype, CNoL & community diversity, Davide Grossi, Delphine Hesters, Dorien Meulenijzer, Dries Wierickx, Elke Knoors, Elke Van Hamme, Eva Wittockx, Frederick Feyffer, Geert Vanhorebeek, Gwennan Dekens, Heidi Mertens, Ingrid Pelssers, Isabelle De Voldere, Isabelle Van Geet, Jamine De Wandel, Joanna Ryckaert, Joasia Krysa, Joris Janssens, Juliet Burns, Karen Raymaekers, Karolien Hellemans, Katleen Van Den Broucke, Kevin Mc Mullan, Kurt D'haeseleer, Laure Weckx, Lennon Mhishi, Lien De Keukelaere, Liesbeth Provoost, Lore Boon, Louise Derre, Lucie Van Gerven, Mara Ambrozic Verd-erber, Maaïke Vanderhaegen, Mats Vanmolkot, Murielle Mattelaer, Nancy Vansteenkiste, Nanou Catry, Paul Herijgers, Prof. Bart Cambré, Prof. Bart Van Looy, Prof. Fred Truyen, Prof. Sofie Jacobs, rector KU Leuven Luc Sels, Robin Ibens, Sarah Happersberger, Sigrid Bosmans, Simon De Coster, Sofie De Maertelaere, Stijn Anthoons, the children from Fabota (among others), Veerle Van Schoelant, working group ECoC seniors, Wim Desmet, Yassin El Attar, Yavor Georgiev Chokoev, youngsters from Erat, Yves Aerts

Interns & Volunteers

Lucca Van Reyment, Luka Boogaerts, Marie-Liese Sterckx, Sam Cloosen, Ziggy Tingjiang Zhu, Yi Liu, Yorgos Karras

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This publication is printed on recycled and environmentally friendly paper bearing the FSC label. The ink used is vegetal and environmentally friendly. The lacquer and adhesive are plant-based and water-based.

LOV2030 – Leuven & Beyond is supported by the City of Leuven in collaboration with many partners from the East Brabant region

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Photography

All photography by Jente Waerzeggers unless stated below.

Other images by: 135MM, Clara Hermans, Marijke 't Kindt, Quenten Chevrier

Branding

Shaved Monkey

Printing

Antilope De Bie Printing

Graphic design

Uncompressed

Website

STATIK

Translation

Lee Preedy





Leuven & Beyond
European Capital of Culture 2030
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