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“Good management is inconspicuous management”

PROFESSOR MARK WAER ELECTED NEW RECTOR OF K.U.LEUVEN

KATHOLIEKE UNIVERSITEIT
LEUVEN

LUDO MEYVIS

On 8 May, Professor Mark WAER (*centre*) was elected to the office of rector of K.U.Leuven. As the vice-rector for Biomedical Sciences, he had already been a member of the previous rector's (*Marc Vervenne, to Waer's left*) team. As always, the announcement of the new rector drew quite some media attention, but in his new function Professor Waer doesn't intend to place himself in the spotlight constantly. Fortunately, he made an exception for *Campus Insight*.

“In the past four years, I have watched a management culture develop in many healthy ways,” Waer says. “There is a great deal more openness and more appreciation for the individual; call it more ‘warmth’. More attention is also being paid to the societal relevance of what we do here, but also to our interdisciplinary approach. These are trends I would certainly like to maintain and strengthen. However, I would also like to rectify a number of unclear aspects in the management structure. Work has already begun in this area, but there is a great deal still to do.”

“I would also like to implement changes in certain aspects of the institutional culture. For example, I get somewhat annoyed by unhygienic meetings. What I mean by this is that there are too many meetings, that they take too long, that they often take place at very in-

convenient times and especially, that they do not always produce the desired results. A recent satisfaction survey also indicated that the tension between the professional lives and the personal lives of staff members is a pressing issue. I would like to do something about this; by having fewer and more productive meetings, for example. Why should we not implement a meeting-free day for example? Or why should we insist on always holding important meetings on Mondays, forcing the participants to prepare for them during the weekend?”

“Dissatisfaction is also stimulated by excessive administrative responsibilities. We strive for zero tolerance and no risk in our work, and supposedly this should be safeguarded by a rigid administrative framework. To be honest, I do not completely agree with this approach. Do not misunderstand me, I do not mean to

suggest that we should just adopt a *laissez-faire* attitude, on the contrary. I advocate the strictest quality control for the things that really count, but not for everything. If, in a hospital, you are confronted with a situation in which lives might be endangered, you must put in a great deal of very hard work to solve the problem, endeavouring to ensure the highest possible quality. But should one apply the same standards to the purchase of a few plastic files? We must learn to prioritise again, instead of trying to regulate and optimise everything.”

“Many of the problems are the result of deficient communication. Generally speaking, there are four layers in an organisation such as K.U.Leuven. There are the people who do the work, teach, conduct research, provide clinical care, etc.; the ground floor let's say. The second layer consists of people who provide targeted, local support; secretaries' offices and technical services, for example. Then there are the general services, which provide organisation-wide systems. In the fourth place there is the management layer. Communication between these four layers does not always operate as it should.”

“Why shouldn't we establish an Administration Council, whose job it would be to tackle the biggest problems with respect to the excessive administrative workload? I repeat, I am not arguing in favour of an ill-considered dismantling of the structure we have now, I am arguing for a more selective approach to our administration. A simple example: why should each and every expense be documented down to the last cent? Would it not make

more sense to carry out spot-checks, to develop procedures whereby that last cent *can* be documented rather than that it *must* be documented?”

“Imperfection is part of life, perfection is not. You might have a good employee, but the next day you might find a better one and an even better one the day after that. Should you give each successive employee their notice? This approach would cause enormous problems on the level of continuity and stability. Such an untenable urge for perfection would also compromise loyalty, and that is one of our univer-

sity's strongest points: attention to and involvement in the university as a whole.”

“Increasing the mobility of students and professors will guarantee varied programmes and the formation of open and critical minds.”

RECTOR MARK WAER

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Oncology

Immunotherapy research shifts into higher gear thanks to FIRST US FUND

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Fine Arts

'Master of passions' ROGIER VAN DER WEYDEN opens Leuven's new Museum M

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Beeronomics

Leuven organises the world's first conference about the ECONOMY OF BEER

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DEAR READER

“After my first semester in Leuven, I felt as though I had found my place in the universe”, one of our alumni says in the ‘Leuven Favourites’ column of this magazine. We hope that the many new students and researchers who are currently arriving in Leuven from all corners of the world may soon experience the same. We wish you all the best of luck and great joy, living *and* learning in Leuven. You are not the only ones embarking on an exciting and undoubtedly very enriching journey; as you commence this new academic year at K.U.Leuven, you will be joined by a new Executive Board. In our interview with the new rector, Professor Mark Waer, he sheds some light on his plans for his term in office.

Also in this issue of *Campus Insight*, Indologist Winand Callewaert reveals how he dedicated a large part of his life to his 2,200-page *Dictionary of Bakhti*. The eight pages you are reading now may seem rather slight in comparison, but we assure you, they were prepared with equal care. Though the result may not be an exhaustive *Dictionary of K.U.Leuven*, it does offer a varied sampling of our university: a fifteenth-century master-painter shares these pages with Filipino twins doing doctorates, a ‘beeronomist’ and the founders of the first Fund from the United States.

Thus, as always, your *Campus Insight* is a colourful magazine for a colourful readership. We hope you all – both newcomers and veterans – enjoy reading it very much.

Reiner Van Hove
 Editor-in-chief



Leuven Favourites

City Hall

REINER VAN HOVE

“When I first saw the Stadhuis (*city hall*), I felt the weight of history upon me and its architectural beauty made me sigh”, alumnus Martha SAÑUDO VELÁZQUEZ from Mexico writes.

“The contrast I experienced when I arrived in Leuven was phenomenal”, she recalls. “Monterrey, the city where I was born and where I live now, is situated in a valley in the desert of northern Mexico. It is surrounded by huge mountains, has a population of three million and an average temperature of over 35 °C. The greenery, humidity and silence of Leuven were a welcome novelty. When I first saw the Stadhuis I felt the weight of history and its architectural beauty made me sigh. I felt a desire to be connected to a deep, solid academic tradition.”

“Above all, I thought of Leuven as an intellectual oasis. I had found my philosophical vocation early on in my life but could not express it fully in my home town, where pragmatism and commercial savvy were valued more highly. I arrived in Leuven at age 18, with only 300 dollars, an introductory French course and much eagerness to learn. It was 1986, years before the internet provided global access to information. I had heard of Leuven because someone had lent me a Spanish book on the history of philosophy, which mentioned that Leo XIII had established an Institute of Philosophy there in 1889.”

“After my first semester in Leuven, I felt as though I had found my place in the universe. I lived in Leuven for eight years, studying Philosophy and Theology simultaneously. I was an active member of the University Parish, where I made a number of lifelong friends. During my time in Leuven, I developed an appreciation for Flemish humour and even learnt how to recognise the different accents of people from Bruges and Antwerp.”

“My colleagues note the influence of Leuven in the emphasis I place on bibliographical scholarship and the academic rigor that I try to share. However, I know that the true inheritance that I received from Leuven is a profoundly spiritual outlook on life; an awareness that one individual’s life is brief and ephemeral, but



(© Rob Stevens)

that with a little effort, one may access the long tradition of names, dates and ideas that have marked the way humanity proceeds, allowing us to transcend the ‘here and now’. It is this long historical and intellectual tradition that I admired when I stood on the corner of Brusselsstraat and Mechelsestraat, listening to the bells of St. Peter’s Church, letting the beauty of the Stadhuis slowly permeate my being and hoping that one of my dear professors would emerge casually from Café Gambrinus.”

Tell us about your favourite aspect – professor, place, culinary specialty... – of Leuven (max. 400 words). The best entry will be published in the next issue and its author will win a beautiful etching of a university location. E-mail your ‘favourite’ to campusinsight@kuleuven.be

NEW ALUMNI DATABASE

In co-operation with K.U.Leuven, Almuni Lovanienses has developed a new portal site for its alumni. This database is intended to foster and improve communications between alumni and between K.U.Leuven, its alumni and the alumni associations. Each alumnus can decide to what extent his/her information is accessible to other alumni. Alumni can log-in to the database through the website: <http://alumni.kuleuven.be/>

If you log-in as an alumnus, you will be given more options to look up other alumni. To register, send your e-mail address to the alumni secretary and your password will be sent to your e-mail address. After you have logged-in, you can update your information or use the search function. You will also be able to use the portal site to contact your old class mates by e-mail or to search for fellow alumni. Alumni will be able to access and register for all the activities of the alumni associations and of the faculties and departments in their personal files. The portal site is only accessible to K.U.Leuven alumni.

LIBRARY SURVEY

Over 4,300 University Library users – including 3,400 students – took part in a satisfaction survey at the beginning of last academic year. The survey was conducted through the Association of Research Libraries’ LibQUAL+ programme, which is used each year by libraries all over the world to help them to assess and improve their services. The participants were asked questions concerning three main issues: the university library as a place for study, the quality of information provision and quality of the service provision including the customer-friendliness of the staff. From the results, it appears that K.U.Leuven’s University Library is generally quite successful in all areas. The survey also indicated that library users – especially in the humanities and social sciences – would like more ‘learning centres’: places for group work, individual work spaces and quiet study areas. The University Library is already planning several of these facilities in Leuven City Centre, in Heverlee, in Gasthuisberg and in Kortrijk. Many people would also like the libraries to have longer opening hours and would like better access to electronic sources. Specific actions will be undertaken during the next strategic planning period to address these concerns. K.U.Leuven is the first institution in Belgium to have made use of LibQUAL for benchmarking its services and looks forward to co-operating with universities in Wallonia who have also decided to take part. The benchmarking exercise will be repeated in three years’ time in order to measure the improvements in service quality that the University Library hopes to achieve.

Online
<http://bib.kuleuven.be/english/>

“We must turn the fatalism into hope”

FIRST US FUND FINANCES RESEARCH INTO BRAIN TUMOURS

BENEDICT VANCLOOSTER

The JAMES E. KEARNEY MEMORIAL FUND for research into brain tumours is the first fund that is being financed by capital from the United States. Megan and Kathleen KEARNEY, James’ sisters, travelled to Leuven for the inauguration of the fund on 25 June.

Megan told us how the discovery of a brain tumour turned her brother’s life upside down seven years ago. “James used to run ten miles every morning before he went to work, as a banker on Wall Street. He was training for the New York marathon. During one of his training sessions, he suddenly lost his balance. Doctors at the emergency department discovered the cause: a malignant brain tumour. It was James’ 26th birthday.”

The young man lost his job, his apartment and his future. “He didn’t give up hope though”, Megan tells us. “He re-enrolled at Columbia University and spent twelve hours a day in the library reading medical articles about the causes and treatment of brain tumours. He visited research centres across the US and eventually came into contact with Professor Stefaan VAN GOOL in Leuven, via his oncologist in New York.”

Van Gool’s team currently treats patients from sixteen different countries, but James Kearney was his first American patient with a brain tumour. Van Gool: “James and his family always felt very welcome at our hospital, though

ultimately, James’ story did not end happily. James placed infinite trust in immunotherapy, despite the fact that it was still a very recent method of treatment.”

James shared the vision that where a number of tumours are concerned, including some brain tumours, classical oncological therapies fall short. “We will never be able to do without surgery, radio and chemotherapy, but they are insufficient”, Van Gool tells us. He is exploring an additional method of treatment: immunotherapy. “We have sufficient evidence to indicate that the body can actually combat some brain tumours with its immune system. Using this method, we have kept some relapsed patients alive for over five years and counting.”

Van Gool’s challenge is to provide convincing evidence that immunotherapy has additional value. “Our method is unique in Europe, but it is reassuring that our work is currently being reproduced by research centres in Japan and America. We have reached the point where we should be organising large-scale randomised studies to compare, for example, one hundred



The inauguration of the fund. From left to right, starting second from the left: Kathleen Kearney, Megan Kearney, then-rector Marc Vervenne and Professor Stefaan Van Gool. (© Rob Stevens)

patients who receive our treatment with one hundred patients who don’t.”

The scientific development is slow, but thanks to the James E. Kearney Memorial Fund, it will be able to shift into a higher gear. “Usually, our research always gets lost between two poles, with respect to financing”, Van Gool says. “Money either goes to basic science or to clinical applications. We work in the grey zone in between the two: experimental therapy. We have already advanced a great deal thanks to the financing from the Olivia Hendrickx Research Fund and the TBM-programme of the Flemish Government, but the new fund will enable us to take the next big step.”

The Kearney family intends to organise activities on a regular basis, to continually increase the fund’s resources. Despite the fact that malignant brain tumours only affect three or four out of 100,000 adults per year, their social impact is

enormous. “The number of years a patient loses as a result of a brain tumour, relative to the average life expectancy, is higher than in cases of any other cancer”, Van Gool informs us.

“Consider also that research financing for brain tumours is lower than for any other tumours. From this perspective, it seems as though the battle against brain tumours has been lost before it has even begun. The fund will help to turn this fatalism into hope and to really commit to the problem with James’ conviction and determination.” Or to put it in James’ own words, on the last card he sent for Mother’s Day: “Remember, beauty is in the struggle, not in the outcome.”

For more information

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Environment

A realistic approach to sustainability

NEW RESEARCH CENTRE CLUSTERS EXPERTISE

TINE BERGEN

By 2050, approximately 9 billion people will inhabit the Earth. How can we guarantee that they will all live in acceptable circumstances without our planet suffering the consequences?

It is to questions such as these that the brand-new Leuven Sustainable Earth Research Centre (LSUE) endeavours to provide an answer. Professor Gerard GOVERS coordinates the centre: “Much research concerning sustainability has already been done; it is an extremely topical issue. Through LSUE, we aim to bring together people who research sustainability in different fields; from science and technology to the humanities. The interaction between these various groups will enable us to create more opportunities for high-quality research.”

“Flanders is actually a heavenly place. We are close to the sea, have fertile ground, a stable climate and are faced with very few problems resulting from natural disasters. This is relatively unique; there are very few areas in the world where all these elements are combined. However, all these benefits will not necessarily ensure that nothing will change here. All the predictions indicate that the Mediterranean region will dry out considerably in the next forty years, linked to great population

growth. If we think this will not impact us, we are fooling ourselves.”

“Moreover, global agriculture will face enormous challenges in the next forty years. At the moment, each person has a piece of land measuring fifty metres by fifty metres at his/her disposal. This is not very much and of course not all of it is fertile Belgian land. In forty years’ time, this piece of land will have shrunk to half the size, as a result of the fact that the world population will increase by three billion. There are already six and a half billion people living on the Earth at the moment. Thus, it is extremely important that we analyse what to expect and that we strive to develop technological advancements that enable us to prepare for the changes.”

“You cannot solve a problem without considering the consequences of the solution on a broader social scale. One of my personal top priorities is that we drastically reduce the amount that we fish the oceans. The problem is that we do not see the damage we do there. If we were to have inflicted the same damage on land as we are doing in the oceans, we would have raised the alarm long ago. On the other hand, we must also consider that fish is the most important source of protein for one third of the world’s population. Where are all these people to find their protein if not from fish? Should we drastically increase global meat production?”

“Another example is one of the solutions posited to combat global warming: the stimulation of algae, which absorb the carbon in the atmosphere. Algae are composed of various substances and one of these, iron, absorbs carbon. It was argued that if we were to add more iron to the water, more algae would grow. In reality, however, nothing changed in the long term because the extra algae were eaten as fast as they grew.”

“In the search for viable solutions, we must always keep a keen eye on the possible implications those solutions may have. This demands research that is constantly developing and updating because we cannot experiment. We cannot say: let things heat up for a century to see what might happen.”

“We cannot sustain our society for the next fifty years with the energy sources we have at our disposal at the moment. This does not mean that the situation is entirely hopeless though. For example, in one day the sun produces more solar power than we can use in one year. What we need are enormous technological changes that make the use of that energy possible. This will also require huge social changes as well.”

“We mustn’t expect this to go smoothly. We are inclined to



wait until disaster strikes before we realise we need to steer a different course. On the basis of thorough research, we can make fairly accurate predictions of how the Earth will react. How human beings will react is another matter entirely. That is why I argue in favour of the debate becoming more scientific and distancing it from the emotional arguments that are often still used.”

“At the Centre, we hope to be able to present the bare facts of the situation and the possible solutions. Acknowledging that a great deal needs to change does not necessarily imply that we should be pessimistic about the eventual results.”

Online

<http://www.kuleuven.be/lsue/index.html>

“Good management is inconspicuous management”

[→ PAGE 1]

“The conviction that an interdisciplinary approach is possible, that working on innovation is also possible, that together, we can form an opinion that the outside world takes into account; these are things that are characteristic of the university, for which there is no space in, for example, the world of business. It would be wrong of us to sacrifice our individuality and our surplus value to the glory of a few business principles. This wouldn't be of any use to the business world anyway; they expect us to operate on an innovative level, to which their environment is simply not suited.”

“To a certain extent, a university must have the courage to be pointless and not only to strive for anything and everything with so-called applicability, based on a misunderstood notion of professionalism. Pointlessness may also be professional and enriching.”

“One thing that is certainly not pointless is the K.U.Leuven Association (*consisting of K.U.Leuven and twelve colleges of higher education, ed.*). I do not consider it to be something that transcends the university. Rather, I think of it as a platform of which the university is the supporting element. Many misunderstandings about the Association are bandied about. I prefer simply to stick to describing the Association as a useful construction made by equal partners with some common interests. *Some.* This means, for example, that the Association is indeed a member of the Board of Trustees

of the University, and even represents 60% of the Board's vote, but only in affairs pertaining to the Association, namely academisation. The Association may not make decisions related to university-specific matters, nor should academisation result in complete uniformity and the creation of twelve small universities. Our society needs civil engineers, but it needs industrial engineers just as much, and there is no reason for this to change.”

“I also think the relationships between the universities could be improved, if only with regard to the much-needed rationalisation of the programmes; the fact that a quarter of the programmes have less than twenty students enrolled in them is untenable. These relationships are hindered by the system of financing, which is too strongly item-oriented: we are subsidised per student, per patient, per thesis, etc. This encourages petty competition, and we must keep emphasising that this is wrong. However, we must also be realists and appreciate the fact that the system will not change overnight.”

“On what basis should you measure my success in four years' time? I'm convinced that we will have implemented an assessment system whereby accomplishments in the field of education will be considered to be just as significant in staff member's profiles as research results are. I will also strive for the successful implementation of the modular degree scheme,

creating as much flexibility as possible, without resulting in unmanageability, programme extension or undesirable psychological side-effects. On the level of research, I will venture to find a healthy balance between a broad foundation and an excellent peak. With respect to our social responsibility, I would like our presence in public debate to become somewhat more noticeable; it should become more self-evident that one takes the university's perspective into account. That is something we ourselves must also influence of course, by means of effective communication.”

“Internationalisation is also one of the fundamental tasks of any good university. We live in a globalized world and our students must be well-prepared for the phenomenon of mondialization. Moreover, increasing the mobility of students and professors will guarantee varied programmes and the formation of open and critical minds. For these reasons, a vice-rector whose main responsibility will be to develop internationalisation further, was appointed to the new Executive Board.”

“I am conscious of the fact that I am not at the start of a restful period in my life, but that is something I reflected on a great deal beforehand, in dialogue with my private circle. I am committed not to allow my life to be dictated by the public nature of my office. I do want to have time left over to read; preferably classic French literature – Flaubert, Balzac, Stendhal. I also read quite a lot of Italian literature. And

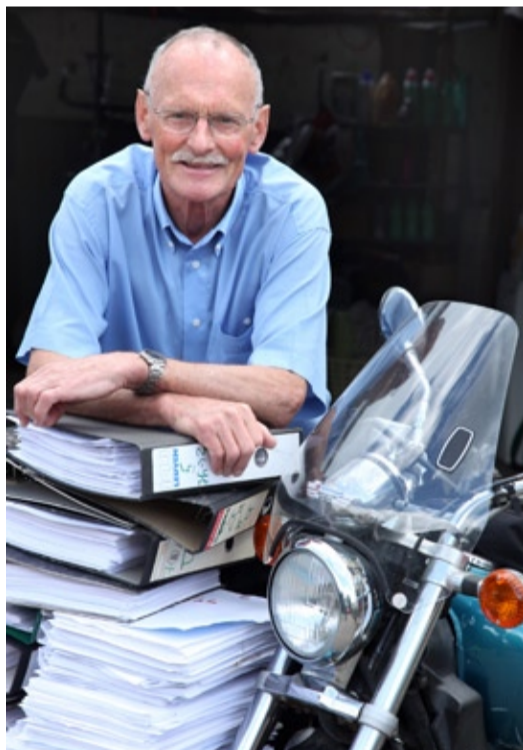


Rector Mark Waer (© Rob Stevens)

music! I am devoted to music; it occupies me both actively and passively.”

“Ah well, the public nature of the office... One is thrown into the limelight, that will be unavoidable. On the other hand, good management is especially inconspicuous management, and in my opinion, this should be reflected in the boss' attitude and behaviour. In a report by the Boston Consulting Group I read that problematic companies, such as Enron for example, are usually directed by CEOs who constantly talk about themselves and want to be the centre of attention. I do not want to do that. So in fact, I have already acted against my own principles...”

Research



Winand Callewaert (© Rob Stevens)

“Bhakti is a mystical tradition which developed in northern India. The tradition emerged in approximately 1300, as a reaction to the rise of Islam but also as a response to ritualistic Hinduism. The bhakti tradition emphasises personal devotion very strongly and rejects the caste system, which is a revolutionary perspective in India. The first texts date from around 1500 and were written in a language that is a mixture of Sanskrit, Persian and local dialects and idioms.”

“Philological interest in bhakti has only developed in the past few decades. As a result, critical editions of bhakti texts have only been published very recently, as opposed to Sanskrit texts. For many years, I undertook numerous journeys across India, armed with a camera and a great deal of patience, to track down and photograph the manuscripts, in between drinking buckets of tea. None of this, of course, took place in comfortable libraries, quite the contrary in fact. Substantial progress has been made in the past twenty years with respect to editions of the texts, some of which I was responsible for, in collaboration with colleagues from abroad.”

A dictionary that cost blood, sweat and tea

INDOLOGIST COMPLETES THE WORK OF A LIFETIME

LUDO MEYVIS

Michelangelo once said, during a break from his chiselling, that if you can't get good tools, you should make your own. Indologist WINAND CALLEWAERT took this advice literally. His magnum opus will be published in the autumn; the Dictionary of Bhakti, three big volumes numbering approximately 2,200 pages, 40,000 entries and 100,000 example sentences. But what exactly is bhakti?

“The bhakti tradition is not researched sufficiently in India itself. The reason is often that contemporary scholars simply no longer have the diverse linguistic capabilities that are required to research bhakti. One other thing that was certainly missing was a decent basic dictionary. Try to imagine being a specialist of the English language but that the Oxford English Dictionary does not exist. It would be an enormous problem. It is this problem that we wanted to address with the Dictionary of Bhakti.”

“I had actually been toying with the idea of writing a dictionary from the beginning of my academic career, in the 70's. However, compiling a large dictionary is a very time-consuming, not to mention an extremely expensive enterprise. Financing for the project was only completed in 1996, so that is when I started. Throughout the entire project, I collaborated with Swapna Sharma from Vrindaban (India), who worked on the dictionary for ten years in Leuven.”

“I had no experience of writing dictionaries, so I was venturing into the unknown. We started by uploading all our manuscripts onto a computer. On the basis of this corpus, a specially developed computer programme then compiled the keyword-in-context index; the source of our reference list. We then had to translate a very long list of words derived from Persian, Sanskrit and other source material. Of course we did not do all these translations ourselves; we were helped by about ten foreign ex-

perts who often worked on a voluntary basis.”

“The project required much diligence, but I am very satisfied with the result. I hope the three volumes of the dictionary will be published by August 2009, by D.K. Printworld (New Delhi). On paper, indeed, not on a CD or a DVD. I'm convinced that, in a hundred years, my books will still be accessible in some library or other, but I doubt very much whether a DVD made today will still work at that time.”

“Proud? Well yes, aren't I allowed to be? This is a project I have worked on for an important part of my life and if the results are good then surely I am permitted to feel proud? In any case, it is a feeling that should reflect on Leuven; the whole project was financed here.”

“I have just become a professor emeritus so the publication of the dictionary has come at exactly the right time. However, I do not intend to get sucked into a black hole now it is all over. Work on the dictionary has been so intense in the past few years that I am rather looking forward to becoming involved in smaller projects; a few small studies or writing some reflections on India, for example. Rest? No, I have no time for that. Or rather, yes I do, when I go diving in the Red Sea or off the Galapagos. It is then that I am at peace. I would definitely recommend it. I have always taken the necessary time to rest and indulge those pursuits.”

FRUIT FLY MODEL

Scientists of K.U.Leuven and the University of Antwerp linked to VIB (Flemish Interuniversity Institute for Biotechnology) have successfully introduced genes coding for a variant of the Charcot-Marie-Tooth (CMT) disease, into fruit flies. CMT is one of the most common hereditary disorders of the peripheral nervous system. The research – directed by Alben Jordanova, Patrick Callaerts and Vincent Timmerman – demonstrates that the flies recapitulate several symptoms of the human disease. By putting mutant genes from human patients into fruit flies, the researchers created the first ever fly model for this kind of neuromuscular disease. Now they have the opportunity to unravel the molecular mechanism behind Charcot-Marie-Tooth, as well as to start looking for substances with therapeutic value.

PIONEERING BRAIN RESEARCH

K.U.Leuven, IMEC, Europe's leading independent nanoelectronics research center, and VIB, Flanders' leading life science institute, have established a joint basic research initiative to unravel the neuronal circuitry of the human brain: Neuroelectronics Research Flanders (NERF). Supported by the Flemish Government, NERF will look into fundamental neuroscientific questions through collaborative, interdisciplinary research combining nanoelectronics with neurobiology. It intends to push the boundaries of science, by zooming in on the working of neurons at an unprecedented level of detail. In the long run, NERF will generate new insights in the functional mapping of the brain, as well as research methodologies and technologies for medical applications, i.e. diagnostics and treatment of disorders of the central and peripheral nervous system.

SAVED BY JUNK DNA

VIB researchers linked to K.U.Leuven and Harvard University have demonstrated that stretches of DNA, previously believed to be useless 'junk' DNA, play a vital role in the evolution of our genome. They found that unstable pieces of junk DNA help to tune gene activity and enable organisms to adapt quickly to changes in their environments. The researchers conducted a complex experiment aimed at mimicking biological evolution, using yeast cells as Darwinian guinea pigs. They found that only cells with 'repeats' – short stretches of DNA that are repeated head-to-tail – would be able to adapt swiftly to changes, thereby beating their repeat-less counterparts in the game of evolution.

“His art is still as transfixing as it always was”

‘MASTER OF PASSIONS’ ROGIER VAN DER WEYDEN OPENS MUSEUM M

TINE BERGEN

On 20 September, Leuven's new Museum M will open its doors to reveal two new exhibitions. Old and new will be brought together with works by the fifteenth-century painter Rogier van der Weyden and the contemporary artist Jan Vercruyse. Professor Jan VAN DER STOCK of the Research Unit for Art History is responsible for the organisation of the former exhibition.

“There is a long tradition of co-operation between the city of Leuven's museum and the Art History department,” Van der Stock tells us. “There has always been intense collaboration on exhibitions of medieval art in Leuven.”

“This exhibition, *Master of Passions*, aims to confront its visitors with an artist whose message is still relevant today. This message concerns not only the rational, but especially the emotional aspect. Rogier van der Weyden is highly distinctive for his depictions of emotions. His work is very accessible; people are able to identify with his subjects very easily. His Pieta does not only depict the religious subject of Mary with the dead Christ in her lap, but also the very human situation of a mother mourning the death of her son. Van der Weyden produced art that is transfixing, even today.”

“We have opted for dialogue: we will present Van der Weyden's work beside pieces by his contemporaries; sculptors and other painters who were on the same wavelength. Works that were separated for centuries will be reunited, such as the portraits of Philip the Good and his wife. There will also be pieces that have not been in Belgium for centuries, a large tapestry from Bern for example. Furthermore, a number of the works have been completely restored especially for the exhibition, such as the world-famous Seven Sacraments Altarpiece from Antwerp.”

“The whole exhibition also has a scientific component. For example, Bart Fransen, a student of mine, has recently defended his doctorate on the relationship between Van der Weyden and sculpture. We will also be holding a colloquium at which we will discuss, amongst other things, the works that have been restored for the exhibition. Self-evidently, our annual student colloquium, organised in co-operation with the universities of London and Lille, will take place in Leuven this year.”

Preparations for the exhibition began seven years ago, so it clearly took quite some organising. Since 2002, Professor Van der Stock has been negotiating the loan of pieces from over fifty museums across the world and he was also responsible for finding the financing for the whole project. Lorne Campbell, a colleague from the National Gallery in London, is president of the scientific committee, while the project as a whole is coordinated

by Lien De Keukelaere of Artes Leuven: “We refer to ourselves as the engine room. We are responsible for communication, audience development and education, the installation of the exhibition itself, transport, insurance, etc. We translate the university's scientific contributions into accessible, understandable material for the general public. It is already quite clear that the public is responding well. We have already sold over 12,000 tickets (*at the time of the interview in June, ed.*). So far, this has been a coordinator's dream project.”

So, the place to be on 20 September is the brand-new Museum M. “Ten years ago, the city decided to renovate the municipal Vander Kelen-Mertens Museum completely and incorporate it into a large new museum complex: M, designed by architect Stéphane Beel,” Veronique Vandekerchove, the curator tells us. “The architect has designed a composite whole between the old and new architecture. This is also the museum's philosophy; we strive to create a dialogue between old and contemporary art. We will be doing this from the very beginning, displaying Rogier van der Weyden's work alongside that of the contemporary artist Jan Vercruyse. The latter exhibition will consist of works from his youth and new creations made especially for the museum. Though self-evidently, the two exhibitions will be displayed completely separately. The museum also exhibits its own collection in a permanent display, which focuses on two important periods in Leuven's history: the 15th and 16th centuries, represented by a rich collection of images of the Passion and the 19th century, with works by, amongst others, Constantin Meunier (*Belgian sculptor and painter, ed.*).”

“Scientific research is also an important component. For example, a new seminar room has been built near the storage area, so pieces that are not on display can be studied. Another example is the Parallelepiped project in 2010: we will put artists and scientists together in laboratories and exhibit the results. Close co-operation with K.U.Leuven is an asset no other museum boasts, so we intend to make full use of it.”

Online

<http://www.rogiervanderweyden.be/en/>



Rogier van der Weyden, 'Pieta', Brussels, Royal Museums of Fine Arts of Belgium

WHAT LEUVEN'S STUDENTS THINK OF CHINA AND CHINESE STUDENTS THINK OF LEUVEN

TINE BERGEN

A study or research trip abroad is always an exciting undertaking, but especially when the geographical and cultural distance is as great as it is between Belgium and China. How do students deal with all the differences, the rhythms of life, the eating habits, the language, etc? We approached both students from Leuven and China in order to compare their experiences.

“The Belgians are very polite and patient”

“The Chinese are more tolerant”

Counted together, Xuan Luo and Chun GONG have spent almost nine years studying in Leuven. Though China beckons, it seems clear that they have reason enough to stay in Belgium. “I have been in Belgium for six and a half years,” Chun tells us. I completed the first year of my Bachelor’s degree in China and came here the next year. When I had finished my programme, I did a pre-doctoral year. At the moment I am doing a PhD at IMEC (*research center in nano-electronics and nano-technology, ed.*) on solar cells, though I actually studied electronics for my Bachelor’s and Master’s degrees. I did not know very much about Belgium before I came here. I wanted to go abroad anyway because I wanted to broaden my horizons. I knew about Belgium from Hercule Poirot, the detective in Agatha Christie’s novels. Some of my parents’ friends had studied in Belgium and they spoke very highly of the excellent education here. Moreover, Belgium lies at the very heart of Europe. I think Leuven is paradise on Earth for students. Everybody is friendly, the town is full of students of various nationalities and backgrounds and I know I can safely walk the streets alone at two o’clock in the morning.”



Xuan Luo and Chun Gong (© Rob Stevens)

“I came here because of Chun’s great stories,” Xuan laughs. “I had only heard of Belgium because of Duracell batteries and football. I only came here once I had completed my studies in China. I have just completed a second Master’s degree in Material Engineering here, and I hope to be able to stay to do a doctorate.”

“Of course there are things one has to adapt to,” Chun adds. “For example, Belgians often sniff through their noses, which is not considered proper in China. On the other hand, we slurp while we eat, which is simply ‘not done’ here. I also had to get used to the limited selection on the menus at restaurants. In China you can pick from literally hundreds of dishes, whilst here you are lucky if the menu has more than one page.”

“In China we also take very long lunch breaks,” Xuan says. “We take at least an hour and a half to two hours to really enjoy our lunch. At the company where I did my internship last year, we were given thirty minutes to eat a quick sandwich.”

Chun: “In China it is not uncommon for students to share a room with four or even six roommates. People here are very surprised when I tell them that. Belgians are much more individualistic. When I go back to China for the holidays, I have to readjust to all the people and the noise. One needs friends to go out with and to talk to, but sometimes I like to be alone and to reflect on things peacefully. It is at times like those that I miss the tranquillity in Belgium.”

“I was truly touched by the warmth and friendliness with which I was received here. I have made some very good friends who really care about me. One of my professors has become like a second father to me. He has even

“When I go back to China for the holidays, I have to readjust to all the people and the noise.”

CHUN GONG

visited my home in China. He is genuinely concerned about how things are going in my life in general, and not only about my study results.”

“I am still amazed that cars actually stop when you cross the street here,” Xuan says.

“They do not do that in China, even at traffic lights! Belgians are very polite and patient. The way they hold the door open for one another, for example. There is also much less stress here than in China, where you really have to battle for a place at secondary school and then in higher education. If you do not manage to secure a place at a good university, your chances of getting a decent job

reduce drastically.”

“I have started planning things much more since my arrival in Belgium,” Chun says. “Every student has a diary here, whereas in China none of them do. We do write down what needs to be done by the end of the week, but that is as far as it goes. If you want to get anything done here, you have to start by making appointments. The Chinese are more flexible in this respect. I have even learned to plan my grocery shopping. In China, the shops are open until at least 10 pm and sometimes even until midnight, every day of the week.”

Do they never have trouble communicating at the shops? “I enrolled in an intensive Dutch course, so at least I know what I am putting in my trolley at the supermarket,” Xuan says. “There are many similarities to English, which makes things easier. There are also a surprising number of Sinologists in Leuven. I have even heard of someone who spoke to a Belgian in Chinese and was responded to in Chinese as well!”

Bas BROUWERS and Ruben DRIES, students of biomedical science, travelled to Tsinghua University in Beijing for five months to carry out research for their theses. “The laboratory at Gasthuisberg has already collaborated with Tsinghua University’s laboratory for a number of years,” Bas tells us. “We were asked if we would like to go to China for five months and I agreed immediately. I didn’t really know anything about China, but it seemed to be an exciting country; a challenge.”

“I researched the operation of the protein furine. I had been testing it on mice here, but in China I tested it on cell cultures. I focussed on the expression of the protein in certain liver cells and how this is related to hepatic calcification.”

Ruben, on the other hand, researched zebra fish: “Their development shows similarities to that of humans; I manipulated a certain gene, RNF11, in order to discover whether it also influences the way the fish develop.”

“In China we worked seven days a week, which is the custom there. It was not actually that bad. The fact that everyone works so hard is very motivating. The atmosphere is completely different there too. The Chinese do work long hours, but they are always chatting and laughing as well.”

“It was even just business as usual during the Christmas period, and I had no problems with that. I just thought: I’m in China and I have to adapt. We did celebrate New Year twice though, on 1 January and on Chinese New Year.”

Bas: “The Chinese are very curious and want to know everything. We stood out: we are tall, blond and white. People often started shouting when we walked by or they wanted to have their picture taken with us. The language-barrier was problematic sometimes, though. Communication usually took place in ‘Chinglish’. The Chinese are taught English from when they are seven years old and they usually have a very wide vocabulary, but they are often afraid to speak English. Sometimes I would start speaking to someone and notice them getting nervous, or sometimes they would just walk away.”

“We learned about five words of Chinese while we were there. We had been told before we left that five months is not long enough to learn any Chinese. We were expected to take one course in Chinese, which we did for two hours. There is not a single point of contact: their words sound nothing like any language we know so there is nothing to associate them with. Ten different dialects are spoken in Beijing and thus the same word might be pronounced ten different ways, but everyone understands one another. If we were to use that same word, nobody would understand us. Sometimes I thought: please just understand us for once! It was frustrating on occasion, but



Bas Brouwers and Ruben Dries (© Rob Stevens)

overall it was more humorous than anything else. We each had a guide who spoke fluent English and we discovered fairly quickly who we could safely ask questions to in the lab and who not to bother.”

“We stood out: we are tall, blond and white. People often wanted to have their picture taken with us.”

BAS BROUWERS

Ruben and Bas often ate at the dining hall, the Chinese equivalent to Alma. Ruben: “They have an enormous selection and you can have a really good meal for only 80 cents. Though sometimes you would rather not know what you are eating. For example, it happened that we were sitting there enjoying a nice meal until someone came and told us our plates were filled with chicken intestines. There were a few things we didn’t try, such as pigs’ trotters and chickens’ claws. We did try black eggs, however. They are considered to be a delicacy in China. The eggs are preserved in a special way under the ground for a number of months or even years. This makes the yolk turn grey and the egg white turn black. They taste just the same as normal eggs, but after seeing them it is very hard to bring yourself to eat them!”

Bas: “The Chinese enjoy different tastes than we do anyway, they use many more herbs. According to them, we enjoy fatty and sweet tastes. We once took a Chinese friend to a Belgian restaurant to try steak and chips. He didn’t like it at all and used every little bit of salt and pepper he could find to cover his meal with it.”

Generally speaking, the two think the Chinese are exceptionally tolerant. Ruben: “You need to be, living so close together.”

“Beer means a great deal to our country”

LEUVEN ORGANISES FIRST CONFERENCE ABOUT THE ECONOMICS OF BEER

REINER VAN HOVE

Despite the fact that on a global scale, more beer is produced and consumed than wine, more attention is devoted to the economic significance of wine. Professor JOHAN SWINNEN wanted to rectify this situation. At the end of May he organised the world's first Beeronomics Conference. What could be a better location for such a conference than the land – and town – of beer?

“Normally, my work focuses on food and development issues in Africa, India and China”, Professor Swinnen, the director of LICOS (Centre for Institutions and Economic Performance), tells us. “Whenever I organise conferences on these issues, it is very difficult to generate media interest. The response to the beer conference, on the other hand, was immense.”

More importantly, the sixty participants of the conference were also very enthusiastic. Swinnen: “The success of the conference is the result of a number of factors. We brought the best international economists in this field, and top representatives of the brewing sector together; their presentations were excellent. Leuven is a fantastic location for a conference anyway, but we paid careful attention to the setting and activities. For example, we organised a business forum at the Inbev brewery, followed by a tour, and there were a number of other brewery tours on the programme as well.”

“There will almost certainly be a follow-up conference, though I do not know whether it will take place in Leuven yet. There were a number of enthusiastic guests who want to host the next edition.”

Which speaker interested Professor Swinnen most? “I thought the lecture by Lisa George from Hunter College, NY was fascinating. She demonstrated that the concentration process of the American beer industry in the period from

1945-1960 is partly to be explained by the breakthrough of commercial television. Small breweries were able to survive locally, but it was very difficult for them to compete nationally with the advertising power of big companies. This trend only developed later on in Europe because the development of commercial television also occurred later.”

The beer economy in the US has changed again since then. Swinnen: “Until the 80’s, big breweries such as Budweiser, Miller and Coors dominated the market, but small-scale initiatives – microbreweries – emerged in response to these. Sometimes they were motivated by the values of anti-globalisation. If you go to a bar in a big American city today, you will often be given a choice of ten different beers on tap. This same process is just beginning in Europe as well. For example, the number of breweries in Belgium is increasing for the first time in a very long while.”

At the moment, India and China are the biggest growth markets for beer. Swinnen: “We had a speaker from China and it was apparent



Professor Swinnen (left) and participants of the conference taste the 'Beeronomics beer'. (© P. Vertommen)

from the figures he presented that growth in China is phenomenal. Moreover, Chinese companies have managed to stay in control of a big share of the beer market. This is very different from the situation in Eastern Europe and Russia, for example, where companies such as Heineken and Inbev have conquered the sector almost entirely.”

However, Belgium still remains the pre-eminent land of beer, as Swinnen also confirms: “Beer means a great deal to our country, especially at the moment. The beer market is perhaps the only one we still dominate. It represents no less than 2.11 percent of our country’s GDP and is thus three times bigger than agriculture; just to give you an idea of how important it is.”

“On the other hand, beer consumption in Belgium – as well as in the rest of Western Europe – has decreased substantially, about 25 percent, over the past two decades. Since 2005, we even export more beer than we consume. This is related to the growing popularity of other alcoholic drinks. When I was a student it was very simple; at a café, you only

drank beer. Nowadays, many people prefer to drink a glass of cava or wine.”

However, this pattern may change in times of economic crisis. Swinnen: “When people are struggling financially, they tend to drink more easily, but their budgets impose restrictions on them. Thus, instead of expensive champagne or whiskey, they tend to drink cheap lager. As a result, beer consumption remains constant during periods of economic crisis.”

“Our conference also hosted a speaker who lectured on the influence of beer consumption on individual happiness. Studies have indicated that people who do not drink anything are slightly less happy than people who drink a moderate amount – one or two glasses a day. Obviously, if one starts consuming excessive amounts of alcohol, one will eventually suffer from psychological and physical problems.”

K.U.Leuven has a great deal of in-house beer experience at its disposal. The Faculty of Bioscience Engineering has a Centre for Malting and Brewing Science, which brewed a special beer on the occasion of the conference. Swinnen: “We served it to the participants at a reception at the town hall. The reactions were positive and I also thought it was very good – it tasted a bit like a Triple; stronger than I had expected!”

Online

<http://www.econ.kuleuven.be/licos/>

“Beer consumption remains constant during periods of economic crisis.”

JOHAN SWINNEN

En Español

Cátedra para el salvamento del patrimonio

CONSERVACIÓN PREVENTIVA

LIEN LAMMAR

Al final de marzo la cátedra de la Unesco ‘Conservación Preventiva y Control del Patrimonio’ fue inaugurada. Con ese fin el Centro Internacional para la Conservación Raymond Lemaire (RLICC) colabora con la Fundación para la Conservación de Monumentos en Flandes y con la Universidad de Cuenca en Ecuador.

El profesor Koen VAN BALEN, director de la RLICC, explica: “Cada siete años se evalúan todos los sitios del patrimonio mundial. Cuando en un momento determinado constatábamos que la Unesco necesitaba un peritaje específico, creció la idea de establecer juntos una cátedra para conseguir la conservación de sitios y edificios históricos que están en la lista del patrimonio universal!”

El objetivo más importante de esta cátedra es contribuir a la conservación preventiva del patrimonio. “En museología se habla ya hace mucho tiempo de la conservación preventiva: la conservación de objetos en circunstancias climatológicas óptimas para que se desgasten menos rápidamente. Esto no es aplicable a edificios, por eso la conservación preventiva del patrimonio

inmueble es bastante nueva — y mucho menos fácil. Las experiencias de la Fundación para la Conservación de Monumentos en Holanda y Flandes, un dato único en Europa, nos ayudan en esto.”

“La conservación preventiva es duradera y eficaz en cuanto a costes. Con el mantenimiento de un edificio de manera correcta, por un lado se disminuyen los gastos futuros de restauración y por otro lado se conserva la autenticidad de un edificio. Además se emplea mucha gente con este método de conservación – que tiene su origen en el mantenimiento – en contraposición a la restauración, que en la mayoría de las ocasiones es el cometido de un determinado número de empresas. Por eso, mucha gente se interesa por la conservación de los

monumentos.”

Cada vez más países se dan cuenta de que el patrimonio contribuye al desarrollo del propio país, dice Van Balen. “En países como Camboya y Vietnam hay personas, bajo la presión del ‘desarrollo’, partidarias del derribo de edificios históricos. Después de cierto tiempo se distancian de su propio entorno y se lamentan de lo que han hecho. Afortunadamente este modo de pensar está cambiando. Es decir, el patrimonio seriamente puede ocupar un lugar en la sociedad moderna y contribuir al desarrollo. También puede ofrecer una ventaja económica. Por ejemplo, un sitio como Angkor en Camboya atrae a muchos turistas. Esto puede ser también un riesgo, pero no, si administras bien el patrimonio y el turismo.”

Al lado del RLICC y de la Fundación para la Conservación de Monumentos, la Universidad de Cuenca también es socio en este asunto. Van Balen: “Cuenca es una ciudad de patrimonio mundial. Es interesante impartir enseñanza y actividades de investigación en torno a cómo puedes administrar una ciudad de patrimonio universal. De esta manera buscamos también un intercambio pericial entre el Norte y el Sur, algo que la Unesco misma está esperando de la cátedra y que nosotros queremos hacer más en el futuro.”

Apoyo financiero para esta cátedra viene de la Fundación Jansen-Pharmaceutica. “Enseñanza e investigación científica son dos pilares importantes pero con la cátedra esperamos también dar más visibilidad a nuestro centro. En el futuro queremos, por ejemplo, organizar cursos cortos centrados muy específicamente en la conservación preventiva. De esta manera más gente con una formación adecuada podrá controlar el patrimonio. Pues nuestro patrimonio necesita muchísimo esta clase de gente y por eso la Unesco es parte interesada.”

Online

<http://sprecomah.eu/rlicc>



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(© Patrick Holderbeke)

Vivacious Vives

At the beginning of May, the residents of the *J.L. Vives International Residence*, run by the *Study Abroad Programme in European Culture and Society*, organised an informal get-together. They invited then-rector Marc Vervenne (*centre*) and the mayor of Leuven, Louis Tobback (*to his right*), to join them for the party. Both were very happy to attend and enjoyed the international atmosphere at this newly renovated house. The students – who hail from ten different countries – regaled their honoured guests with homemade snacks (Spanish tortilla, Canadian maple cake, Dutch apple crumble, Pizzette alla Napoletana, etc.) and a number of equally enjoyable performances, including a Japanese dance. The Spanish humanist Juan Luis Vives taught in Leuven in the 16th century, during the time Erasmus was also here. The international student residence is named in his honour.

Kick-off in Kortrijk

Members of the Student's Union of K.U.Leuven's Campus Kortrijk cheerfully scooter down the recently completed Spina, a 200 metre spine that connects the campus buildings to one another. The construction is not only practical, it is also symbolic of the interdisciplinary approach the campus is striving to stimulate. Besides the Spina, on 19 May the new C block was also inaugurated. It will house research departments and will be used for new forms of education, especially in the humanities and social sciences. The campus in Kortrijk – a town in West-Flanders, about 120 km from Leuven – was founded in 1965 and aims to provide a 'launch pad' for university studies. With some exceptions, students at the campus take the first two years of a Bachelor's degree and usually continue their studies in Leuven afterwards.

<http://www.kuleuven-kortrijk.be/>

500 words

“We always have someone to talk to, or fight and make up with”

REINER VAN HOVE

Maricel and Malou Ibita (36) from the Philippines are identical twins and are both pursuing PhDs at K.U.Leuven's Faculty of Theology.

Malou: “*We are eternal classmates*: from kindergarten, to high school, to our nursing degrees at university. After graduation, we took on missionary work in Manila, providing training to seminarians and lay church leaders. That paved the way to theology studies.” Maricel: “It would have been boring to choose the same subject again, so when Malou chose the New Testament as her field of study, I decided on the Old Testament.”

Malou: “*Our dean and my promoter had both studied in Leuven*. They recommended that I continue my education here. I came to Leuven in 2004 and my sister joined me in 2006. I wanted to experience Belgium among the Belgians. For that reason – and because I'm a nurse – I chose to live in a residence with differently abled students. Living with locals and with a supportive Filipino community helped cushion any culture shock I might have experienced otherwise. Well, the weather was still quite a shock – but we have learned to live with it and to love it (*laughs*).”

Maricel: “*For my doctoral research*, I'm writing a poetic analysis of the book of Micah, 6:1-8, which contains the familiar phrase: *to act justly, to love tenderly and to walk humbly with your God*. When I worked as a campaign activist, promoting justice, peace and the integrity of creation, I discovered that you can sometimes bring the results of three

years of theologizing straight to people's hearts through a poem or a song.” Malou: “I am writing a narrative-critical study of 1 Corinthians 11:17-34. Through my research, I hope to develop a method of biblical interpretation that pastoral workers can use to address the issue of hunger in the Third World. In our country, we cannot afford to let the results of research end up on a bookshelf; they need to be brought to the people.”

Maricel: “*Belgians and Filipinos experience religion in a very different way*. I realized this when I took part in 'Sharing Knowledge', an initiative of K.U.Leuven's International Office which offers international students and researchers the opportunity to give a lecture to Flemish students. I gave religion classes to two groups of students. We had a discussion about the meaning of love in different contexts – family, community, etc. – but the students had difficulty associating love with the Bible. It seems that spirituality is often translated into volunteerism here, whereas in the Philippines, we still need to commit our religiosity to more concrete social actions. 'Sharing Knowledge' was a great experience. The university has been so good to us and this felt like the ideal opportunity to do something in return.”

Maricel: “*It's an advantage to have a twin sister around when you are living abroad*. There is always someone you can talk to, ask for advice – or fight and make up with (*laughs*).” Malou: “The main disadvantage is that computers often can't deal with two people who have exactly the same birth date and near-identical names. We had problems when we registered at city hall, when we applied for housing, when we got insurance, ...” Malou: “In our childhood we had exactly the same wardrobe, but now we try to stress our own identities. It still happens that people mix us up, though.” Maricel: “When I had my first classes here in Leuven, a professor said he was so happy to see me in his class again (*laughs*).”



Maricel and Malou Ibita (© Rob Stevens)

Online

For more information about Sharing Knowledge, go to <http://www.kuleuven.be/vesta/Intercultural/SK1.htm>