

FASoS Research Institute Report 2025





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Introduction



In contemporary science policy, the term “impact” is everywhere. It appears alongside notions such as “research uptake,” “technology transfer,” “stakeholder engagement,” and – to use NWO lingo – “knowledge utilization.” These terms suggest a shared ambition: to ensure that academic research matters beyond the university.

Yet what that “impact” should look like is far from self-evident. Often, it is interpreted in relatively narrow terms, associated primarily with marketable outputs: patents, spin-offs, and commercial applications. Recent political developments in Europe, with their strong emphasis on competitiveness, seem to reinforce this view.

For scholars in the social sciences and humanities, however, impact tends to take different forms. Their work rarely results in patents, but it does shape how we understand and navigate the world. Its impact is democratic, societal, and cultural. It informs public debate, contributes to policymaking, enriches cultural life. Research in the social sciences and humanities not only concerns society, but is often carried out in close interaction with society.

This year report offers a glimpse into what such interaction looks like at Maastricht University’s Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences (FASoS). The examples we highlight show how research moves beyond academic publications and enters everyday contexts.

One such example concerns a collaboration with Studio Europa Maastricht, where academic insights about the EU’s Digital Services Act transformed into an accessible policy brief. Input from our faculty focused, among other things, on children’s actual digital practices to help policymakers better understand how regulation plays out in daily life. Another illustration is offered by FASoS colleagues who engage with Natuurmonumenten in the Geul Valley, not through a traditional commissioned study, but through a shared exploration of how to live with a landscape that is at once beautiful and burdened by historical pollution. Here, research becomes a collective exercise in rethinking language, heritage, and environmental responsibility.

Engagement also takes the form of public dialogue. Through collaborations with regional broadcaster L1, for instance, academic expertise on EU foreign policy is shared with a broader audience, demonstrating how global developments resonate at the regional level. And in partnership with Lumière cinema, FASoS researchers use film as a medium to bring students, citizens, and scholars together, with screenings and discussions on themes such as migration, labour, and global inequality, creating spaces where research is not simply presented, but discussed collectively.

These interactions span multiple levels, from the EU Quarter in Brussels to the polluted-yet-beautiful riverbanks of the Geul valley. What connects them is a shared commitment to dialogue: between disciplines, between academia and society, and between different ways of understanding the world.

In a time when many of the challenges we face – digital transformation, environmental change, political polarization – have clear societal dimensions, social scientists and humanities scholars have a clear contribution to make. They do so in interaction with colleagues from other disciplines, policymakers, practitioners, and the broader public.

At FASoS, we seek to create the conditions for these exchanges to flourish. The recently launched Platform for Outreach and Co-Creation is one way of contributing to this, by supporting researchers in building meaningful connections beyond academia.

The FASoS buildings do not have towers – let alone ivory ones. When you visit the Faculty, expect to find open doors, and vivid conversations.

Prof. dr. Raf De Bont
Associate Dean for Research

Research Programmes

FASoS consists of four distinct research programmes, each made up of an interdisciplinary team of researchers.



Arts, Media and Culture (AMC)

analyses the dynamics of cultural change by studying how developments in the arts and the media respond to socio-cultural and political changes, and also how cultural artefacts and practices shape social and political cultures. Research focuses on the practices in which cultural artefacts are produced, distributed, and received. Practicing a form of engaged humanities research, our collaborative methodologies appreciate the participation of artists, communities, and audiences. Approaching these topics from an interdisciplinary angle, the group's research draws on insights from art and philosophy, literary and media studies, cultural history and gender studies, as well as the social sciences.

[Visit webpage](#)



Europe: Society, Politics and Global Order (ESPO)

brings together political scientists, historians, and philosophers with an interest in Europe. The process of European integration since 1945 and questions of European democracy, governance, and foreign policy are central to the research agenda. Researchers study the European Union and Europeanisation, contribute to debates on multilateralism and the global order, and take an interest in transnational history. Methodologically rigorous, the emphasis of ESPO is on fundamental research with societal relevance.

[Visit webpage](#)



Globalisation, Transnationalism and Development (GTD)

studies globalisation through the flows of people, goods, capital and ideas that connect localities around the world, with a special focus on flows within the Global South, and between Global South and North. Research focuses on transnational migration bridging migrant sending and receiving contexts, transnational exchanges for development and scientific cooperation, transnational collectives and solidarities, and the consequences of globalisation across different scales (such as the planet, region, country, community and individual). It draws on expertise in anthropology, cultural studies, development studies, history, human geography, political science, and sociology.

[Visit webpage](#)



Maastricht University Science, Technology and Society Studies (MUSTS)

studies how modern societies are shaped by science and technology; and vice versa, how social and cultural conditions shape technological innovations and scientific discoveries. MUSTS research draws on a combination of philosophical, historical, sociological, and anthropological approaches, focusing on cultures of research and innovation. The focus of MUSTS work typically moves between micro-level studies of local practices and macro-level questions of governance, policy, and morality, making it relevant for policy makers, academic debates, and society at large.

[Visit webpage](#)

Aims of shared reading

Enjoying great literature together

Meaningful encounters: meeting people and different perspectives

Creating a safe space for people to tell their own stories

Creating a 'reading revolution' for everyone!



Graduate School

FASoS has its own Graduate School that provides training for PhD candidates associated with all of the research programmes. In 2025, we had 61 internal candidates. We also welcome external PhDs, and currently have 57.

[Visit webpage](#)

Research Centres

The Faculty is home to six dedicated research centres. These centres act as hubs to bring together researchers from FASoS and other UM faculties. They also facilitate interaction with external academic and societal partners.

The Maastricht Centre for Arts, Culture, Conservation and Heritage (MACCH) brings together (art) historical, philosophical, sociological, economic, legal, and practical expertise in response to the increasingly complex challenges facing the fields of arts and heritage today. [Visit webpage](#)

The Maastricht Centre for Citizenship, Migration and Development (MACIMIDE) is an interfaculty and interdisciplinary research centre, bringing together scholars working on migration from various disciplines such as history, law, politics, economics, sociology, anthropology, and development. The centre wants to contribute to a better understanding of the dynamics and consequences of transnational migration and mobility in a European and global context for both policy and academia. [Visit webpage](#)

The Centre for European Research in Maastricht (CERiM) is a distinguished Jean Monnet Centre of Excellence dedicated to advancing interdisciplinary research on EU policies and politics. It serves as a vibrant hub that brings together scholars from the Faculties of Arts and Social Sciences and Law, whose research focuses on the European Union's most pressing challenges by investigating how legal, political, and economic developments shape its trajectory. [Visit webpage](#)

The Centre for Gender and Diversity (CGD) studies mechanisms of inclusion and exclusion from an intersectional perspective. Our feminist research concerns the making of cultural and social differences in cases of embodied experience, art, language, law, institutions, science, and technology. We aim to use our research as a vector of change – to not only describe and explain social issues but to engage stakeholders and intervene for the sake of social justice. [Visit webpage](#)

The Maastricht Centre for the Innovation of Classical Music (MCICM) studies the dynamics behind changing classical music practices and their societal contexts, and works with orchestras and others to actively shape classical music futures. To do so, MCICM combines academic research on innovation of performance practices with artistic research to renew classical music practices and music education in artistically relevant ways. [Visit webpage](#)

Tracé – Limburgs Samenlevingsarchief formerly known as Centre for the Social History of Limburg (SHCL) is a documentation and research centre that focuses on the history of Limburg and neighbouring regions from the 18th century until the present day. It offers expertise and assistance for academic researchers and the general public by providing access to historical sources, maintaining a library collection, and the publication of an academic yearbook. [Visit webpage](#)



Bringing research to the kitchen table

Katleen Gabriels & Studio Europa Maastricht

Whenever digital regulation is discussed in Brussels or The Hague, the same names inevitably come up: TikTok, Instagram, Meta. But while policymakers focus on the largest platforms, much of children's digital lives unfolds elsewhere. On Snapchat, to be precise. And that is exactly what Katleen Gabriels, Associate Professor of Moral Philosophy, brings attention to.

Her research on location tracking and young people recently gained a new platform through Studio Europa Maastricht's collection of policy briefs on digitalisation. The collection is part of a broader movement within Maastricht University (UM) to connect academic knowledge more actively with policymaking.

An idea that grew beyond expectations

The initiative for the policy brief collection originated within the UM Academic Board on Europe, affiliated with Studio Europa Maastricht. "They saw that an enormous amount of relevant research is being conducted at UM," says Valentino Vondenhoff, Head of Studio Europa Maastricht. "But that knowledge often reaches policymakers only through individual networks. This could be done in a much more structural way."

That's how the idea to develop thematic collections of policy briefs emerged, each centred on an urgent societal issue. The first collection focused on circularity. The second collection, on digitalisation, was a logical next step. In Brussels, the Digital Services Act had just been launched – legislation stating that actions that are illegal offline are also illegal online. Ten policy briefs, edited by Philippe Verduyn (Faculty of Psychology and Neuroscience), brought together diverse perspectives on the law – from platform regulation to children's lived experiences.

"Everyone talks about TikTok, but kids are on snapchat"

For Katleen, the invitation to contribute immediately resonated. "The digital debate is incredibly skewed," she says. "Everyone talks about TikTok and Instagram, while for children from the age of eleven, Snapchat is often the most important platform."

This observation coincided with a moment of societal unrest. While she was writing her policy brief, a shocking case in Eysgelshoven unfolded, involving the circulation of images of murder and sexual abuse of children. "You really feel how urgent this topic is," Katleen says. "The Digital Services Act aims to protect children, but Snapchat has no real age verification. Officially you have to be thirteen, but in practice an eleven-year-old – or someone even younger – can easily create an account." >>

📄 This interview was adapted to fit the layout of this report.
🌐 [Read the full interview here.](#)

These kinds of blind spots are precisely what Studio Europa Maastricht aims to make visible. “Policymakers often work with abstractions: ‘large platforms,’ ‘risk groups,’” says Magdalena Kohl, who coordinated the policy brief project. “Researchers like Katleen can serve as an important bridge by translating such terms into what they mean in daily life – and conversely by providing policymakers with concrete examples from practice.”

Snap Map, streaks and social pressure

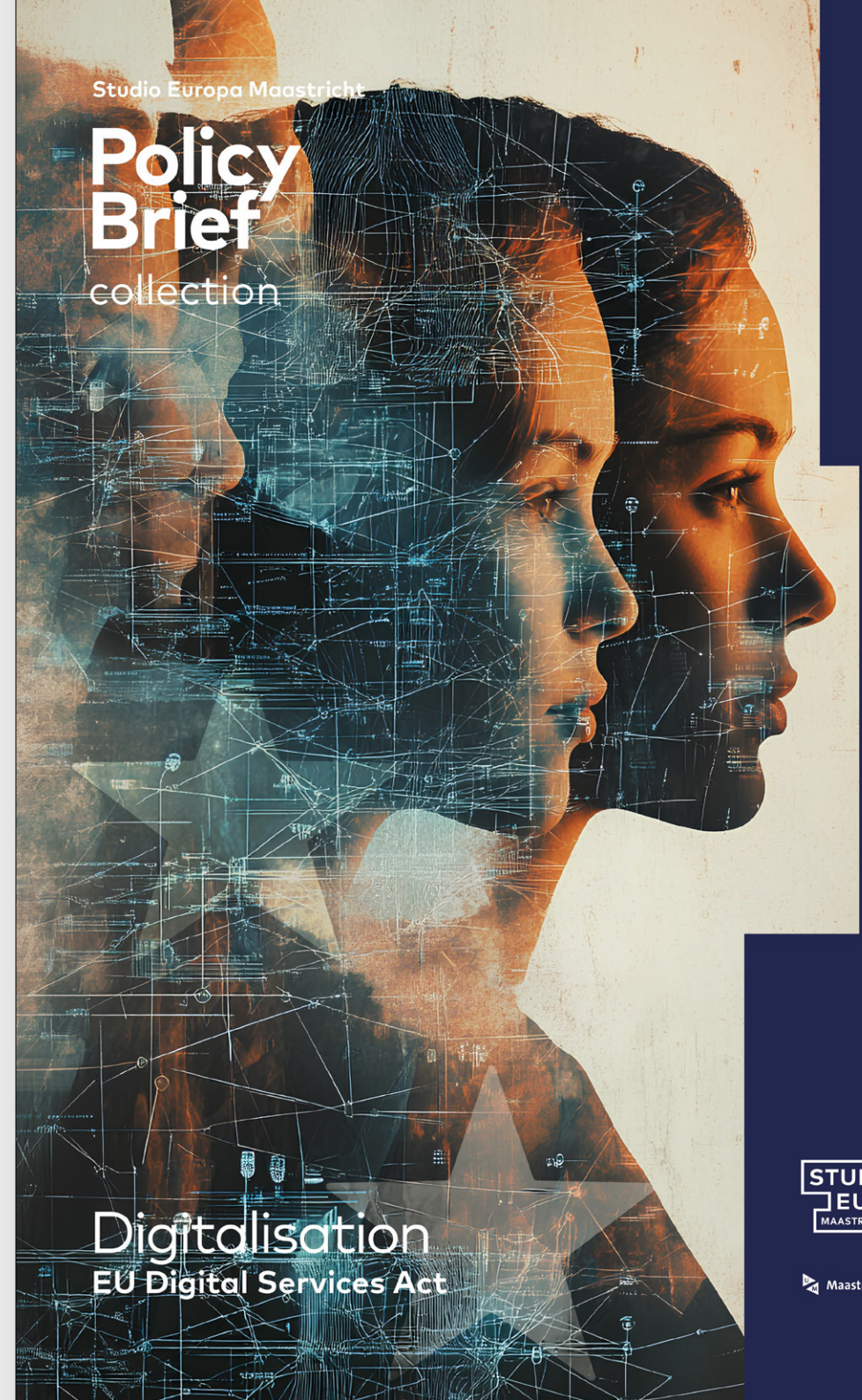
In her policy brief, Katleen zooms in on specific Snapchat features such as Snap Map and streaks – features that may appear playful but deeply affect social relationships. “Parents often don’t realize that Snap Map allows you to see exactly where someone lives,” she explains. “For children, this means their physical world is continuously visible online.”

Conversations with young people reveal how strongly platform mechanisms create social pressure. Streaks – the daily exchange of messages to maintain a score – become a measure of friendship and loyalty. “Children sometimes literally send meaningless messages just to avoid breaking a streak,” Katleen says. “If they go to summer camp, they’ll give their phone to a sibling so the streak can continue.”

Research as a collective exercise

What made this policy brief different from many previous publications was the way it was produced. Katleen involved a Digital Society student as co-author. “She was part of that world,” Katleen says. “I can analyse it, but she experienced the social dynamics of secondary school not too long ago.”

For Magdalena, that is precisely the strength of these projects. “We try to support researchers not only in terms of content, but also in how they collaborate, write, and think about their audience,” she says. “That learning process is just as important as the final product.” <<





How beautiful can a polluted landscape be?

Christian Ernsten, Claartje Rasterhoff & Natuurmonumenten

Anyone who walks along the meandering river Geul sees a postcard scene: rolling hills, half-timbered houses, grazing cows, a watermill giving rhythm to the landscape. Yet beneath that idyllic image lies an uncomfortable reality: polluted sediment, centuries-old mining, nitrogen pressure, and climate change.

It is precisely within this tension between beauty and discomfort that a remarkable collaboration emerged between Natuurmonumenten and researchers from the research programme Arts, Media and Culture. What began as a study of historical watermills grew into a joint exploration of how to manage a landscape that is both beautiful and toxic at the same time.

From jargon to meaning

“Natuurmonumenten wants to protect and develop nature, heritage, and landscapes,” says André Hassink, programme manager for Natuurmonumenten in Limburg. “But as an association we also have to remain socially relevant. We notice that we often speak in jargon – nature development, biodiversity, European regulations. That doesn’t always work. Language needs to be adapted.”

“With a farmer you talk about agricultural policy,” he explains. “But to a resident you say: this is our tree. That broadening of language – from policy document to shared story – was an important reason to collaborate. We are close to society,” André says. “But how do we shape that? Not only with paper plans behind a desk, but in the field, in conversation with people.”

The research project ‘Rivier Atelier’ (River Atelier), led by Christian Ernsten, Assistant Professor of Heritage Studies, and Claartje Rasterhoff, Assistant Professor of Cultural Policy & Management, offered exactly that space. It was not a classic commissioned study in which an external party answers a question, but a shared reflection. “What was special was that we didn’t constantly think from the perspective of what Natuurmonumenten wants,” says Claartje. “We remained independent, but in direct connection. That makes it more complicated – and more interesting.”

The Geul Valley as mirror

The choice of the Geul Valley as the research site was no coincidence. The area is partly managed by Natuurmonumenten and is considered one of the most characteristic landscapes of South Limburg. At the same time, it is a place where multiple histories intersect: agriculture, nature conservation, tourism, mining, and water management. >>

📄 This interview was adapted to fit the layout of this report.
🌐 [Read the full interview here.](#)

The river Geul is historically polluted by zinc mining. Swimming is not allowed, and agriculture along the banks is restricted. Yet visitors still experience the area as clean and idyllic. That paradox became the heart of the research. The Rivier Atelier studied the historical watermill landscapes along the Geul, including the Volmolen as a case study. For centuries, watermills functioned as smart water management systems. During droughts they retained water; in times of abundance they regulated the flow.

“The mill is not a museum piece,” says Christian. “It’s an example of how people used to collaborate with water.” But during the research it became clear that climate change is making old pollution visible again. Floods bring toxic sediment back to the surface. What started as a heritage study grew into a broader reflection on landscape management.

A newspaper as conversation starter

Instead of aiming for a traditional academic article, the team – together with Natuurmonumenten – chose to produce a newspaper as the first outcome: a thousand copies, intended for workshops, students, and professionals. “Usually, you work towards a book or article,” says Claartje. “Now we had to write along the way, while the research wasn’t ‘finished’ yet. That was exciting, but intentional. Because knowledge doesn’t only sit with researchers – it also lives in the field.”

For André, the tangible nature of the newspaper proved essential. “When you talk to someone, you can make a connection. It invites a follow-up conversation.” The newspaper does not mark an endpoint but an intermediate stage. “You build a network, a connection. People become more willing to collaborate.” He sees opportunities in walks, joint explorations, and conversations in the field. “Decision-makers often make choices based on dossiers. How wonderful would it be if they joined a walk? Step over the threshold, experience the landscape, and then make decisions.” <<



Facts and Figures

Amount of funding received:

€4,489,938

Academic publications:

225

Number of researchers, including PhDs:

158

PhDs awarded:

11

of whom 1 graduated *cum laude*



Between nuance and news: Bringing Europe closer to Limburg

Giselle Bosse & L1

In a time when news spreads at lightning speed and opinions sometimes sound louder than facts, the importance of interpretation and context is growing. What do global events mean for people in the region? And how do you translate complex academic knowledge into a clear story for a broad audience?

For presenter Maurice de Heus of L1 and Professor of EU External Democracy Promotion Giselle Bosse, that is exactly the challenge that makes their collaboration so interesting.

When Europe meets the region

The idea for a programme offering European context arose from a simple observation, Maurice explains. “The situation in Eastern Europe, the war in Ukraine, but also tax issues or projects like the Einstein Telescope – they are all connected to Europe and directly or indirectly relevant for our border region,” he says. “That’s why we wanted to create a programme where we could discuss these kinds of themes.”

This led to the L1 programme ‘Avondgasten Europa’, in which developments in Europe are discussed with an eye on what they mean for Limburg. For that deeper perspective Maurice needed someone who not only followed the news but could also place it in context. Giselle turned out to be the right person. “As a journalist you often know a little about a lot,” Maurice explains. “But Giselle knows a lot about a specific topic. As a regional broadcaster, that’s exactly the kind of depth and interpretation we want to offer.”

Studying Europe’s Eastern neighbours

That expertise does not come out of nowhere. Giselle is a political scientist and has spent more than two decades researching the foreign policy of the European Union, with a particular focus on EU enlargement and the EU’s democracy support in Eastern Europe. While this may at first appear abstract, recent developments have rendered Giselle’s research strikingly tangible. “Many of the questions I have been working on for years are now in the news every day,” she says. “Russia’s war against Ukraine has underscored just how important that region is for the EU.” >>

📄 This interview was adapted to fit the layout of this report.
🌐 [Read the full interview here.](#)

For a regional TV programme in Limburg, this might initially seem somewhat distant. Yet, according to Giselle, the opposite is true. “What happens in the world inevitably has consequences for the region,” she says. “Think of energy prices, security, industry, or European politics.”

Public broadcasting in an age of distrust

“In academia much of our work is published in specialised scientific journals. Yet universities don’t only fulfil educational and research functions; they also carry a broader public responsibility. In this context, informed public debate is essential to the functioning of democracy. Both researchers and journalists play a crucial role in sustaining such debate,” Giselle says. “As researchers, we strive to be independent and firmly grounded in evidence. This lends a particular form of authority – and especially at a time when public debates are often highly emotional, that role becomes all the more important.”

According to Maurice, cooperation between science and journalism is becoming increasingly important due to changing societal trends. “In the United States you see growing scepticism towards science and ‘the elite,’” he says. “That is dangerous, and it is also drifting over to Europe.” He believes this creates a clear role for public broadcasters. “We have to continue presenting the relationships properly. Putting science into perspective and keeping it relevant.”

But public broadcasting itself is also under pressure. “There is increasing criticism directed at it,” Giselle says, “and that is a concrete challenge for democracy.” Still, Maurice believes that this is precisely where their task lies. “Our role as a public broadcaster is to translate science for ordinary people.” According to Giselle, such translation is key to restoring a place for facts in public debate. “Public broadcasting continues to remain close to people,” she says. “And at times it can encourage individuals to reconsider their views.” <<





Turning film into community

Elsje Fourie, Lauren Wagner & Lumière

When the Globalisation, Transnationalism and Development (GTD) research programme suddenly found itself with a modest surplus of funding, the question was not how to spend it quickly, but how to spend it well. “We didn’t want to simply tick another box,” says Elsje Fourie, Associate Professor of Globalisation and Development. “We wanted to do something meaningful with the money – something that could bring the research group closer together.”

From an early brainstorming session, two ideas emerged: a reading group on the topic of “generous thinking” in academia, and a film series.

From budget surplus to shared idea

Several members volunteered to lead the film series. With support in place, a practical question followed: Should these films be screened privately for staff and students, or opened to the public? “We could rent a room and screen a movie,” recalls Lauren Wagner, Associate Professor in Diasporic Mobilities, “or we could turn it into open, public screenings, where people buy tickets – but we also purchase a block for students and the research group.”

Lauren already had experience organising a film series with Lumière Cinema, Maastricht’s independent cinema known for its art-house programming and strong civic mission. She reached out with the proposal, and Wouter Greven, Head of Programme at Lumière, was immediately enthusiastic.

“We get a lot of requests for co-programming,” he explains. “But we’re the only cinema of this kind in Maastricht. That means it’s our responsibility to consider who to work with to create an interesting programme.”

Opening the doors: research goes public

“Lauren and Elsje came to me with the idea to screen three films, each followed by a Q&A with the director or a roundtable discussion with GTD researchers,” Wouter says. “Every ticket included a voucher for a free drink, so conversations could continue afterward. It’s great how, through film – a popular medium – a broad audience gets in touch with research. It became a place where academics and non-academics met,” Wouter adds. >>

📄 This interview was adapted to fit the layout of this report.
🌐 [Read the full interview here.](#)

The screenings opened research to the city. Themes reflected the group's research interests but required simple labels that researchers are normally careful with, such as "poverty", "activism", and "migration". "We can be quite precious about how we communicate research identities in academic papers," Elsje explains. "Here, you're forced to make labels explicit. It's challenging – how others understand them versus how we see them."

What film can do that papers can't

The team learned that researchers and filmmakers are faced with similar dilemmas: Which stories are told? Which lives become representative? Whose truth becomes the truth? "The questions I ask in research are similar to the ones directors ask," Lauren says. "They investigate through film; we investigate through a different machine."

The research group bought around 30 tickets per screening for students and group members and let the rest flow to the city. What emerged was not a closed academic event, but something social and accessible. The first screening, about workers in a Chinese-owned factory in rural Ethiopia, drew 148 people. Roughly half were UM staff or students; the rest came from the wider community, including members of Maastricht's Chinese community. Others were locals simply curious about another country. "My neighbours came to the film about Ethiopia because they had just returned from a trip there," Lauren says. "They just wanted to understand more."

A partnership, not a rental

Lumière was not just a venue but an example of what good partnership looks like: approachable, collaborative, and focused on meaning rather than headcounts. "They were interested in thinking beyond how many people were coming," Elsje says.

Curating the programme meant giving up a little control. Lauren describes sending Lumière a shortlist and theme, but trusting their expertise. "It was nice not to be precious about 'we need to show this film.' Lumière knows how to connect to the public."

"When I don't think a film fits, I say so," Wouter adds. That honesty, they all agree, is what turned the project into a collaboration – not just a rental agreement. <<

Lumière

Globalisation,
Transnationalism and
Development (GTD)



Wednesday 10 September, 19:30

Made In Ethiopia

Q&A with
director
+ free drink

In collaboration with the Globalisation, Transnationalism and Development (GTD) research group at Maastricht University, Lumière Maastricht will screen the documentary *Made In Ethiopia*, about the arrival of a Chinese factory complex in rural Ethiopia, followed by a panel discussion.

Outreach

20 / 01

Hylke Dijkstra (ESPO) publishes an essay in De Groene about the attack on the world order.

15 / 04

Darryl Cressman (MUSTS) and Massimiliano Simons (MUSTS) launch the Society for the History of Philosophy of Technology, after a successful conference on the History of Philosophy of Technology in 2024.

24 / 06

Valentina Mazzucato (GTD) & Gladys Akom Ankobrey (GTD) give a workshop to secondary school teachers and directors in the Limburg Province on how to turn mobility into an asset for youth with a migration background.

**13 / 09 —
16 / 11**

Pieter du Plessis (AMC) co-organises PROTEST exhibition, curated by Bart van den Boom.

06 / 11

As Charlemagne Prize Fellow, Toon van Overbeke (ESPO) chairs a high-level panel on growing pressures on universities in Europe.

17 / 11

Kate Maguire-Rosier (AMC) organises public woodworking workshop and panel discussion on the topic of aesthetic care.

30 / 01

The book *AI voor iedereen. AI ontwerpen die eerlijk, transparant en verantwoord* is published, for which Katleen Gabriels (MUSTS) was interviewed.

05 / 05

Dani Shanley (MUSTS) is interviewed on podcast 'The Data Fix with Dr. Mél Hogan' about hypes.

27 / 06

Ana López Garcia (GTD) provides expert opinion for Newsweek article on Mexicans in the US and how they are sending less money home.

04 / 10

Karlijn Haagsman (GTD) organises session named 'Brenge je Mobiliteit in Kaart' during the Weekend van de Wetenschap.

10 / 11

Yf Reykers (ESPO) launches the 'Coalition of the Willing for Ukraine' tracker with colleagues at NUPI.

1 / 12

Aagje Swinnen (AMC) launches pilot project 'samen dichten' together with De Culturele Apotheek.

Colophon

Interviews: Eva Durlinger

Editing: Eva Durlinger

Pictures: Claire Gilissen, L1, Bob Luijks for
Natuurmonumenten, Lumière, Studio Europa Maastricht

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