

Hello, my name is Flora Carrijn and I am from Flanders, Belgium.

My original discipline is cognitive linguistics, but I have been in university management for almost thirty years now and as such I have come to know and appreciate many other fields of research and education. At present I am Provost of KU Leuven (the University of Leuven) for the campuses in the province of Antwerp and Managing director of the Flanders Business School by KU Leuven.

But it is in my capacity of President of UNeECC, the University Network of the European Capitals of Culture that I welcome you to this Online Special Issue entitled European Capitals of Culture : The Art of Reimagining and hosted by the Centre for Creative Arts Research at the National University of Ireland Galway's Moore Institute for Research in the Humanities and Social Studies (a whole mouthful).

The University Network of the European Capitals of Culture, written UNEECC but pronounced 'unique', is indeed a unique network. First, its members are all universities and institutes of higher education located in cities which have been, are, will or might be designated as European Capital of Culture. Secondly, the scientific interest of the network is transdisciplinary in nature as the focus lies on Europe, culture and the collaboration of university with the different stakeholders in the European Capital of Culture context.

The collaboration of 'town' and 'gown', the local authorities, socio-economic and cultural actors and the inhabitants on the one hand, and the universities on the other hand, creates an absolute added value to the European Capital of Culture movement. Since universities are per se internationally oriented, this co-ownership of the ECoC-status also allows for a better dissemination of local and European culture beyond borders and language communities. As such, UNeECC not only aspires to stimulate regular academic cooperation, but we also aim at developing and reshaping our university members' regional position and international outreach.

In 2021 UNeECC will celebrate its foundation 15 years ago by 15 founding members in Pecs, Hungary. We now have about 50 member universities from 20 countries around Europe in a truly European mix of long-established universities and recently founded institutes of higher education, located in north, south, east and west. Every year participants from the member universities can meet at our Annual Conference organized by the colleagues from the university in one of that year's ECoc.

This year the University of Galway was to accommodate the Annual Conference, but unfortunately that dreadful pandemic COVID-19 threw a spanner in the works. Both the Irish colleagues' enthusiasm to organize the conference and our hopes for an annually renewed interchange of ideas on revised scientific approaches to the study of ECoC and its societal implications were shattered. But thanks to the resilience, creativity and dynamism of Catherine Morris and Patrick Loneragan, 2020 will not pass by without a UNeECC event. Many thanks to both of them.

This online issue namely is the positive answer of our Irish colleagues to the pandemic that prevented us from meeting in Galway this year for our Annual Conference. Notwithstanding the difficult situation of most colleagues' academic assignments, they succeeded in collecting contributions from different countries. And of course, we are grateful for the intellectual contributions of these colleagues as well.