

The 2010 European Charlemagne Youth Prize: Profiles of the Dutch, German and Belgian nominees

May 6, 2010

The German city of Aachen has a longstanding reputation for its international atmosphere. Situated on the border of the Netherlands and Belgium and not far from Luxembourg and France, it was aptly the seat of the Holy Roman Empire and today attracts top talent from around the world as home of one of Europe's best engineering schools, Rheinisch-Westfälische Technische Hochschule (RWTH) Aachen.

But even by the standards of "Charlemagne's City," the coming days will see a vast score of scholars, designers, artists and diplomats as Aachen prepares to award the [2010 European Charlemagne Youth Prize](#) while recognizing all national winners of the competition from each of the 27 EU member states. The Dutch, German and Belgian nominees shared their submissions with Crossroads.

Background on the European Charlemagne Youth Prize

First awarded in 2008, the [annual European Charlemagne Youth Prize](#) is a byproduct of its more well-known parent competition, the International Charlemagne Prize of Aachen, which has been recognizing international leaders such as Winston Churchill, Pope John Paul II, Bill Clinton and Angela Merkel since 1950 for extraordinary efforts in forging European unity. The [International Charlemagne Prize](#) will also be awarded next week.

The youth-focused version of the prize is a creation of former European Parliament President Hans-Gert Pötering and Dr. André Leysen, the former chairman of the Foundation of the International Charlemagne Prize of Aachen, which oversees both awards.

"[Former President Pötering and Dr. Leysen] are convinced that the young people are the future of Europe and that we must win over the young generation," said Bernd Vincken, manager of the Foundation of the International Charlemagne Prize of Aachen. "As we award great Europeans with the traditional Charlemagne prize, we must also award young people the Charlemagne Youth Prize for a great job with regard to European understanding."

Vincken added that young Europeans have a unique vision of the future because they grew up when the EU already existed, and many of the European institutions' principles were self-evident.

The criteria for winning the prize focus on how well each candidate, often in the form of multinational group projects, practically encourages European youth to develop a consciousness of identity issues such as integration and co-existing as one community.



The screenshot shows the website for the European Charlemagne Youth Prize. The header includes the title "European Charlemagne Youth Prize" and navigation links for "Rules of the Competition", "National winners", and "Previous Laureates". Below the header, there are several buttons: "Download the Declaration by the Applicant form", "Previous laureates", "European Charlemagne Youth Prize video", and "facebook". The main content area is titled "Rules of the Competition" and features a photograph of three young people. Underneath, "Article 1: Theme of the competition" is detailed, stating that the prize is awarded to projects that promote European and international understanding, foster a shared sense of European identity, and serve as role models for young people living together as one community. The projects can focus on organizing youth events, exchanges, or internet projects with a European dimension.

Eligible participants include any citizen or resident of the 27 EU member states, and contributions may not be submitted by people working in any of the shared European institutions or the Foundation of the International Charlemagne Prize of Aachen.

More than 200 projects were submitted this year, with only one national winner from each member state advancing to the final round of the competition. The jury is comprised of four members of the foundation and four members of the European Parliament including President Jerzy Buzek. The grand prize winner receives EUR 5000, and the runner-up and third-place recipients receive EUR 3000 and EUR 2000, respectively. All winners receive an invitation to tour the European Parliament in either Brussels or Strasbourg.

The Netherlands: Atelier Tipografic 2

The Dutch national winner, [Atelier Tipografic 2](#), is the second iteration of a project that began in 2007, when graphic design students from six different art academies in the Netherlands travelled to Bucharest to develop, along with Romanian graphic design students from the National University of Arts, an exhibition and a series of workshops focusing on visual representations of European politics and identities.

Presented by a group of professional and academic designers and art historians in association with the Association of Dutch Designers (beroepsorganisatie Nederlandse Ontwerpers BNO), the current phase of the project is comprised of 34 design students from the Netherlands, Romania and, now, Austria via the Typographische Gesellschaft in Vienna.

At the core of the project, ten teams of three students from each participating country – which together represent Western, Central and Eastern European history – are assigned different examples of how European identities and processes are communicated through visual contexts, such as football teams, airlines or national anthems. Team members then analyse their assigned topic in terms of how it represents a unified Europe and, conversely, individual countries. After twelve months of research, participants present their findings in the form of movies, lectures, essays and a travelling exhibition in Bucharest, Vienna and Amsterdam.

2010:
10 teams of
designstudents
from Romania,
Austria and the
Netherlands
will work
on design
assignments
in Vienna and
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PARTICIPANTS FROM THE NETHERLANDS



Kees Bekkers (M)

Academy: CABK ARTEZ Art
& Design Zwolle
Department: Stories &
Design (2nd year)



Eris Malbak (F)

Academy: CABK ARTEZ Art
& Design Zwolle
Department: Stories &
Design (3rd year)



Geertje von Tiller (F)

Academy: Hogeschool
Zuid Academie Beeldende
Kunsten Maastricht
Department: Graphic
Design (3rd year)



Peter Szostka (M)

Academy: Hogeschool
Zuid Academie Beeldende
Kunsten Maastricht
Department: Graphic
Design (3rd year)



Abigail Baastens



Robby Warring



Jasper Staal (M)



Lara Blackwood (F)

Atelier Tipografic 2, Dutch participants

Lidewij Veenland, a project manager for Atelier Tipografic 2, explains that the project leads participants to question the meaning of democracy, what influence designers have on democracy, and how designers can support the European Union. "I hope this will stimulate young people and designers to think about visual culture and democracy," she said.

One of the project participants, Laura Dumitru, focused on the history of Romania and how the country's identity has come about as a result of the constant pull from both Eastern and Western worlds and, most recently, globalization. Her research, she says, led her to view the country as a confused collage of many different histories and individual identities, which she summed up in the movie, "I am Romania." Working on the project has allowed Dumitru to focus on the differences that still exist among Europeans despite globalization and what she calls "the increasing meaninglessness of distance".



Atelier Tipografic 2, Romanian participant Laura Dumitru (Photo: Johanna Riess)

"It seems the place you live in and [your] background does make a difference even if we can speak a universal language and have the same traffic signs or other common things," she said.

When asked about the future of Europe, she said Europeans must protect their own country's identity or else it will be lost to globalization.

"I think the future depends a lot [on] how people act within these next years and how further they are willing to go to keep their own country on the map."

Germany: Europäisches CNC-Netzwerk - Zug für EUROPA

The German submission, "Europäisches CNC-Netzwerk - Zug für EUROPA" (European CNC-Network - Train for EUROPE) carries the distinction of being the largest project ever sponsored by the EU. An estimated 1800 students and 250 teachers from 21 countries created a fully-functioning model train and, for the most part, carried out their work remotely.

To do that, a website called CNC Network was created as a platform for participants to exchange ideas and knowledge of Computerized Numerical Control (CNC) technology, the technology used to enable automated production of machinery.

The project began in November of 2006, when representatives from Berufsbildenden Schule Technik Gewerbe Hauswirtschaft Sozialwesen (TGHS), a vocational school in Bad Kreuznach, Germany, visited 13 local schools to gauge interest in a Comenius project (an EU-sponsored youth project aimed at fostering European unity). From there, it was determined that the project would rely on CNC technology to create a train, with each participating country building its own wagon with unique characteristics indicative of its national origin.



Train for EUROPE

While each wagon was designed and manufactured by its corresponding country, information on the mechanics, technology and related training was constantly exchanged through the CNC Network website. Participants also met on four separate occasions throughout the project, with the last meeting in April of 2009 resulting in the complete assembly and successful operation of the train. In total, the project took two years to complete. To project coordinators, the project symbolized the potential in European countries cooperating as one.

Martin Kress, a member of the coordinating team in Bad Kreuznach, says that the project participants are happy to be recognized by the European Charlemagne Youth Prize. "Winning the grand prize] would definitely mean a great honour for all students and educational institutions as well as for the European Union itself, as their financial support made it all possible," he said. "In our eyes, in [a] project like Train for Europe, we can really bring the spirit of Europe to young people." Kress added that the CNC Network team is currently developing multilateral projects for the future, including a second Train for Europe.

Belgium: L'Europe et Vous

Finally, the national winner from Belgium is "[L'Europe et Vous](#)" (Europe and You), a radio program broadcast in Belgium, France and online. The project got its start more than 20 years ago, when co-host and then-university student Bruno Duboisdenghien broadcast a weekly program on European issues for two local Belgian radio stations. Its current form, which debuted in September of 2007, operates in partnership with numerous stations and organizations across Europe and even a station in the Congo.



Along with co-host Caroline Boccart, Duboisdenghien debates topics of European history, common cultural issues and social realities, such as the most recent show focusing on poverty in Brussels. The show addresses a wide audience but is focused on young listeners, which means content must be universally relatable, inclusive of a broad spectrum of topics, and communicated using terms and concepts that everyone can grasp.



"L'Europe et Vous", Caroline Boccart and Bruno Duboisdenghien, (Photo: Bruno Duboisdenghien)

"What we discuss needs to be understood by the general public," he says. "The show cannot indulge itself in issues that merely exist within a European microcosm." Contributions often come from journalism students at the Brussels-based Institute of High Studies of Social Communications (IHECS), the Catholic University of Louvain and the College of Europe in addition to young reporters from the Assembly of European Regions living in Greece, Bosnia, Lithuania, Croatia, Romania and Sweden.



Interview with "L'Europe and You" in French

Partnerships with other European radio stations also enable a variety of programming from across the continent. In "Mission Berlin" and "Misja Kraków," listeners were introduced to the German and Polish capitals and languages through radio soap operas, which were broadcast in their original languages and supported by Deutsche Welle, Radio France Internationale and Polskie Radio. With Salzburg-based Radio Fabrick, listeners were able to learn about Austrian culture and the German language through the program, "I Speak Football."

In one report, the program collaborated with a local youth centre by taking students to Brussels' Theatre de Poche to see "If This is a Man," a play based on the works of Primo Levi about concentration camps. After seeing the play, the students interviewed the show's actor, Frédéric Haugness, and their report was aired on the radio program. It was an example, Duboisdenghien said, of young people from different social backgrounds approaching European history as one community. "The program provides opportunities for young people to assume the European dimension by relying on a formula that promotes intercultural dialogue," he said. "It opens windows for youth on the cultural richness that is the Europe."

Past winners and ceremony details

Winners from the competition's first two years cover a wide area in terms of both geography and subject matter. Hungary took the grand prize in 2008 with its "Students Without Boundaries" submission, which presented an annual summer camp for children from Slovakia, Romania, Ukraine and Serbia where they participated in leadership workshops and shared their cultural heritage.

Last year's grand prize went to Poland for its "YOUrope needs YOU" project, which trained university students to lead high school workshops on the potential of European unity and the benefit of being active members of society.

Bernd Vincken, the manager of the Foundation of the International Charlemagne Prize of Aachen, emphasizes that national candidates are all considered winners of the competition and will therefore be honoured during the ceremony. He also says that prize laureates will be able to participate in future alumni activities and networking, which are supported by the foundation's internal network on their website and several Facebook groups.

For Natasha Sá Osório, the creator of one of those Facebook groups and herself a former national winner for working on the Belgium-based lifestyle magazine Indigo, attending the ceremony and meeting other participants was an experience she remembers fondly. Now a journalist working in London, she says it's imperative for today's youth to be educated on the EU's structure and vision so that they can become involved in it.



2009 winner Belgium-based lifestyle magazine Indigo

"I know there is a nucleus of us Europeans who understand it and embrace it, but I also know that many young people are detached from this reality," she said. "We need to understand that the future is now – we need to work today to shape the future of Europe."

This year's ceremony will take place at 11 a.m. on Tuesday, May 11 in the auditorium of RWTH's Hauptgebäude, Templergraben 55, Aachen. It will feature music and dance, a speech from European Parliament President Buzek, and a display of all 27 national projects. Anyone wishing to attend the private ceremony should contact the foundation at 49 (0) 241 / 4 01 77 70.

By Luisa Badaracco

Luisa Badaracco is a freelance journalist originally from Brookline, Massachusetts. As of December 2009, she is a resident of Aachen, Germany.