

CATCH-UP

A Student-led Initiative



**Ambassadors' Meeting
Students As Partners
Coral Beach
Travelling Seminars
And More!!!**

LIST OF ACRONYMS

	UNIMC	University of Macerata
	MRU	Mykolas Romeris University
	NBU	New Bulgarian University
	EUV	European University Viadrina
	SWPS	SWPS University
	ULPGC	University of Las Palmas de Gran Canaria
	UAEGEAN	University of the Aegean
	UP8	University of Paris 8
	ERUA 2	Current EU-funded ERUA Project 2023-2027

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EDITORIAL

Welcome to the second edition of the ERUA magazine.

As we continue building this platform, we find ourselves reflecting on the core purpose behind it. To us, the magazine is one of the most meaningful ways we can demonstrate what ERUA truly represents. At its heart, ERUA is about connection - between people, institutions, ideas, and experiences. The magazine serves as a space to make these connections visible. It allows us to craft stories that intertwine the personal with the academic, the local with the transnational, and the reflective with the analytical.

Each contribution - whether it's a student's account of a traveling seminar, a personal insight sparked by a moment abroad, or a deeper academic exploration - adds another layer to the evolving narrative we are shaping together. In doing so, we're not just documenting events or ideas; we're building an archive, an archive that reflects how we think, move, collaborate, and grow within and across our universities.

That's why this project is open and evolving. We want the magazine to remain a space where every ERUA voice can be heard. With that in mind, we warmly encourage students, faculty, and staff from across the alliance to get involved. The more diverse the



Elena Georgieva,
NBU



Muhammad Ismail,
EUV



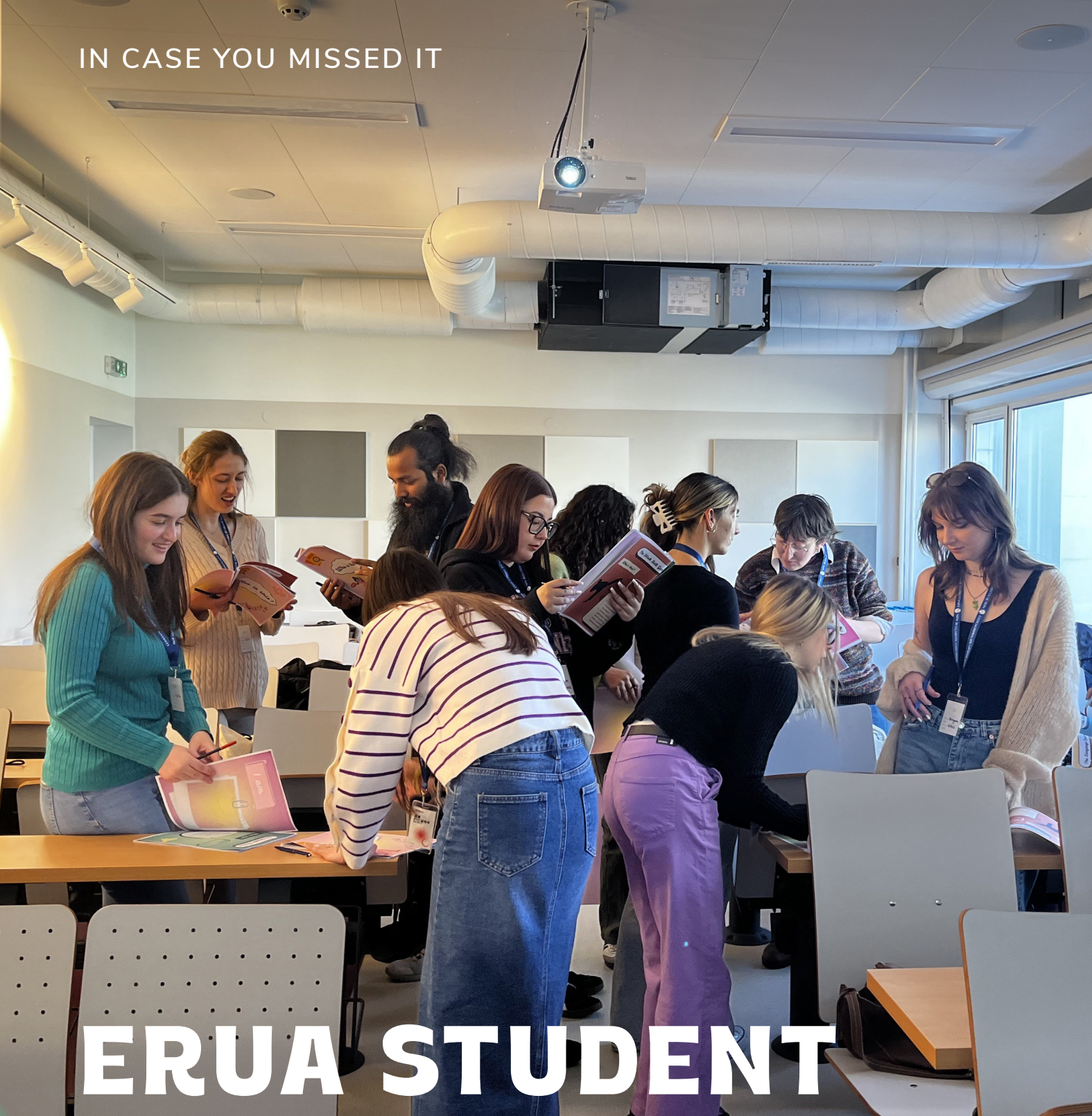
Diana Venkova,
NBU

voices, the richer the tapestry we're able to create.

Finally, we're very happy to welcome a new member to our editorial team - Diana from New Bulgarian University, who is bringing her skills and vision as a graphic designer to help us shape the magazine both visually and conceptually. We're excited to have her on board.

Our aim remains clear: to create a space that genuinely represents the ERUA spirit - a spirit of openness, curiosity, critical thinking and shared creation. We hope this edition offers a glimpse into those values. What awaits you ahead reflects diverse perspectives, disciplines, and forms of engagement across our network. Through them, we invite you to see how ERUA continues to grow - not just as a structure, but as a lived experience.

Thank you for reading, and we hope you'll be part of what comes next.



ERUA STUDENT AMBASSADORS' MEETING AT NBU

Emilia Mozołowska, SWPS



During the weekend of April 11–12, the ERUA Student Ambassadors had the opportunity to visit the beautiful capital of Bulgaria, Sofia. The purpose of the trip was to hold their first in-person meeting. It was hosted by New Bulgarian University (NBU) and organized by the ERUA members from NBU, who warmly welcomed students from other universities.

These two days were intense and extremely productive. The Ambassadors brainstormed a variety of topics and addressed important areas such as event organization, communication between universities and ERUA, and plans for the future. Although the meetings were scheduled to end at a specific time, the Ambassadors were so engaged in the discussions that they ran much longer. This only highlights their determination and commitment to making a difference.

In addition to the brainstorming sessions, the students recorded a video in an amazing studio at NBU. It will soon



be available on ERUA's social media—so stay tuned!

There was also time to have some fun in Sofia! On the first day, the Ambassadors were invited to dinner at a lovely restaurant with delicious food and a magical atmosphere. It was a great chance to get to know each other better. On the second day, after a full schedule of discussions at the university, the NBU students invited the Ambassadors on a city tour. They visited Sofia's most important landmarks and even had the chance to explore the freshly opened Spring Fest!

Although the weather was windy and rainy during the trip, each day ended with sunshine and beautiful sunsets.

The Ambassadors will definitely remember this productive meeting, the delicious traditional food, and, of course, the amazing new friends they made. It was a huge boost of energy for them to make changes, improve ERUA, and, while doing it, have fun!



IMPASTO AND ABSTRACT PAINTING FOR EVERYONE

CREATIVE WORKSHOP “THE SEVEN SINS OF
EUROPE” LED BY MAESTRO ALBINO PITTI
“ART AS RESISTANCE: A CRITIQUE OF
IDEOLOGY THROUGH FORM”

Kris Serginov, NBU

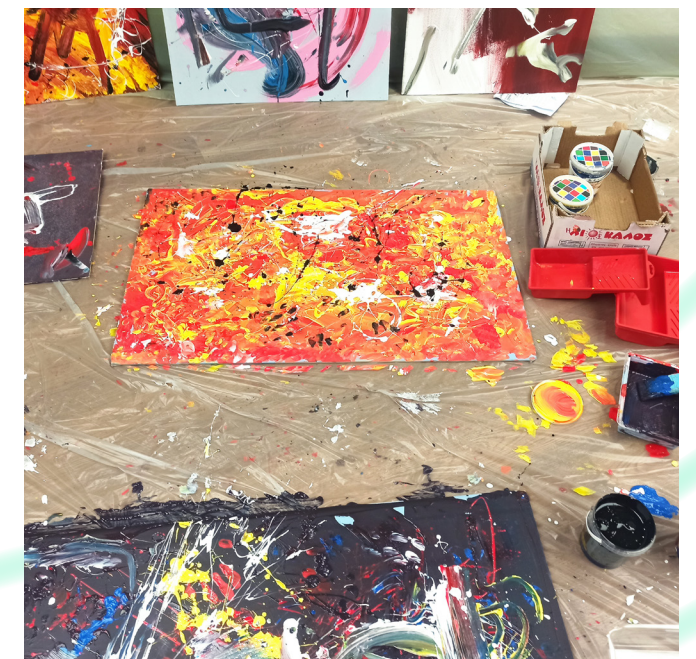
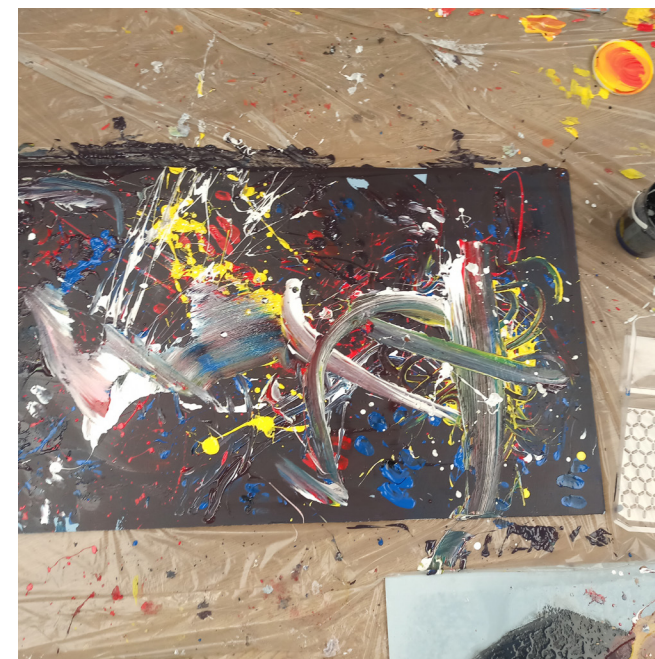
On May 14, 2025, as part of the “Summer Days of Artistic Design” and with the support of the Research and Artistic Activities Fund at the NBU Board of Trustees, the creative workshop “The Seven Sins of Europe” was held, led by the Italian artist and theorist Albino Pitti. The event was made possible thanks to the efforts of Stanimir Bozhilov, lecturer and main organizer.

The entire workshop focused on critical theory, discussion, and practical exercises using the technique of creating fast, gestural art. The event was presented in the spirit of the new movement revived by Pitti through his abstract expressionist techniques — so-called “Espansionismo” (Expansionism). This approach to painting was described by the artist as an elegant fencing match, a kind of dance with the brush — a harmonious and fluid gesture akin to the movement of a saber in a duel. Yet in this context, the artist’s tool does not become a weapon of destruction, but a gentle, disciplined method through which

he expresses an initial spark or emotion about a specific social topic he wishes to discuss, critique, or highlight.

The workshop offered an alternative where art becomes a bearer of messages and a field of tension between power and subjectivity. “Pollock was baroque; I’m a romantic — I create lyrical abstractions,” Pitti shared, emphasizing the importance of a personal artistic stance as a critique of the global standardization of cultural forms — such as music, cinema, painting, and so on. Students were encouraged to recognize their role as active creators who generate new content rather than merely reproducing already established aesthetic models.

Albino Pitti turned the creative atelier into a stage for experimentation, where different visual, historical, and political dimensions could intersect. In conclusion, the workshop introduced the ideas of Espansionismo, demonstrating how artistic techniques can be used through the lens of critical thinking and concepts that go beyond ideological clichés, affirming an authorial synthesis through the artistic gesture.



PICNIC FOR WASTE:

AN ANNUAL NBU COMMUNITY INITIATIVE

Elena Georgieva, NBU

In line with its mission to support positive change, New Bulgarian University once again organized its annual clean-up campaign “Picnic for Waste.” The 2025 edition of the initiative took place on May 17, continuing a growing tradition of environmental and social engagement that brings together students, faculty, local institutions, and residents of Ovcha Kupel—the neighborhood where the university is located.

The event was part of NBU’s persistent aim to achieve tangible social change and contribute to the creation of a greener, more sustainable campus and neighborhood. This year, the gathering point remained the same - the courtyard in front of

Restaurant “Gozba” on the NBU campus. Starting at 09:30, participants were provided with gloves and trash bags before heading out to clean the green spaces surrounding key areas.

The cleanup effort was supported by the local municipality of Ovcha Kupel, who provided waste containers and transportation for the collected garbage. In a strong display of community spirit, representatives from the Embassy of Ukraine, the State Agency for Refugees, 66th Secondary School, the Professional High School of Agriculture “Buzema,” as well as many students and professors from NBU took part in the event.

All participants gathered back at the university for a picnic in the campus courtyard. As part of its commitment to the United Nations’ 17 Sustainable Development Goals, NBU aims to use its academic and institutional capacity to actively contribute to local problem-solving and build strong, lasting partnerships in the region. Through such initiatives the university raises environmental awareness and fosters a stronger sense of belonging and cooperation.

The campaign is made possible thanks to the support of FINO Bulgaria and the Ovcha Kupel Municipality.

Let’s keep working together to make our neighborhoods cleaner, greener, and more connected.

Share your good local practices!



IN CASE YOU MISSED IT

LET'S SAVE CORAL: USELESS FOSSILS NBU 2025

“Let’s Save Coral” is an initiative born out of a shared commitment by students, artists, and faculty at New Bulgarian University to protect one of Bulgaria’s last remaining wild beaches — Coral. Over the past fourteen years Coral Beach has become a symbol of resistance against the overdevelopment of the Black Sea coast. It embodies the untamed, natural beauty that many feel is rapidly disappearing. Through land art installations, performances, and ecological interventions, the initiative not only defends a fragile ecosystem but also reimagines the relationship between landscape, memory, and protest in contemporary Bulgaria.

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Coral of Radiation in the Ash
Coral Stories
Game of Resources
Falling in Love

IN CASE YOU MISSED IT

CORAL OF RADIATION IN THE ASH

LAND ART AND PERFORMANCE AS MEMORY, PROTEST, AND WARNING

Installation and performance by Ilian Hristov, Sirma Boyanova, Kris Serginov, Anna Boyadzhieva, and Didi Atanasova



Prof. Boris Serginov,
NBU Department of Art and Design

At the very boundary between sand and surf, where the sea still whispers but no longer soothes, lies the expansive land art installation “Coral of Radiation in the Ash” — powerful, silent, and explosively critical. A work that does not merely occupy the landscape but tattoos it with the symbols of what has been silenced, erased, and buried: radiation, memory, propaganda, and submission.

Created by Ilian Hristov, Sirma Boyanova, Kris Serginov, Anna Boyadzhieva, and Didi Atanasova, the installation transforms Coral Beach into a zone of resistance and a memorial intervention. The radiation symbol projected onto the sand — both a geoglyph and a ritual circle — does not simply mark space; it confronts history. The history of Chernobyl. The history of political cynicism. The history of the body that dances in ignorance in radioactive air.

Here, I would discern a new regime of truth — the bodies in the circle of radiation are neither victims nor heroes. They are post-subjects inhabiting a world where power is expressed through the invisible flow of rays, of information, of systematic suppression. Dancing and digging, they become emblems of social innocence that continues to work, move, and exist — even after the catastrophe, after the radiation.

One might say that what we see here is an “aesthetics of despair, turned into an ethics of resistance.”

The music playing during the performance — “Radioactivity” by Kraftwerk (an idea by M. Metodiev) — serves not just as a soundtrack, but as an electronic liturgy remixing history: from Hiroshima to Chernobyl, from ideological radiation to the in-

formation collapse of our time. Both the song and the installation operate at the intersection of sound, symbol, and body.

We could describe this work as a landscape of discursive crisis — it is not an “aesthetics of nature” but an aesthetics of trauma, inscribed directly into the land itself. And that is its strongest message: the landscape becomes a bearer of trauma, the sand a witness, the waves an archive accompanying and reacting to the performance. In this sense, “Coral of Radiation in the Ash” approaches the concept of “ecological truth,” in which nature is both stage and active participant in the socio-political conflict. I would call it a “territorial folding” where memory, matter, and protest embrace to generate a new sense of reality.

FROM THE ARTISTS:

The installation defines and appropriates the landscape through a reflective visual metaphor — the mirrored sea, onto whose sand the radiation symbol is projected. This visual intervention can be viewed as a geoglyph that raises and problematizes a series of critical questions within the contemporary land art discourse.

One of its central themes concerns mineral resources, explored as tools for sustaining oligarchic structures of power and economic control. Within this critique, the installation offers an anti-oligarchic gesture, expressed through a performative act — the burning of a human figure at the center of the radiation symbol. This act is visually and symbolically comparable to the self-immolation of dissident Jan Palach, who in 1969 set himself on fire in protest against the Soviet occu-

IN CASE YOU MISSED IT

pation of Czechoslovakia following the Prague Spring. Palach's gesture, and those of other students, revealed the profound demoralization of society and triggered a lasting resonance in the struggle against totalitarian regimes.

In a similar way, this installation uses the visual language of protest and self-sacrifice to deliver a critique of contemporary forms of economic and political domination.

Another critical theme embedded in the work concerns the active propaganda and disinformation campaigns surrounding the Chernobyl disaster in the spring of 1986. At that time, hundreds of thousands were mobilized for May Day parades, mere days after the nuclear reactor exploded, due to negligence in maintenance and flawed construction. Soviet leaders instructed their allied states to suppress news of the disaster in the name of preserving the party's reputation.

In this same performative act, we witness two dancers and two diggers (engaged in domestic labor) within the circle of radiation — a mirrored gesture of how, without knowledge or awareness, people inhabit a radioactive environment, con-

taminated both by radiation and by the falsification of everyday life, by deception and exposure to both radioactive rays and fake news.

A vital part of the installation is preserved in the accompanying performative element — music playing during the burning of the human figure in the center of the radiation symbol. This is Kraftwerk's "Radioactivity", a track by the group known for first incorporating electronic sounds into modern and contemporary music. Originally released as a sonic experiment, the song was later remixed by François Kevorkian and William Orbit, acquiring an explicitly critical message in its lyrics, serving as an anti-nuclear protest condemning the tragedies of Hiroshima, Chernobyl, and the Cold War nuclear arms race.

Overall, the installation represents a multi-layered, multimedia project addressing social issues that remain unresolved and urgently relevant today. It reminds us that just as fragile as Coral Beach is, so too is our human world — part of the same vast ecosystem as the Black Sea coast's biosphere.



The Coral Beach has become a battleground between eco-activists and investors with their construction teams. One side sees value in the natural wealth of the beach, while the other — in the potential profits from future development.

- Viktoriya Royanova

CORAL STORIES:

LIGHT FROM WASTE, DESIGN FROM MEMORY

A project by Viktoriya Royanova, Tanya Todorova, and Nadezhda Chervenova

Prof. Boris Serginov, Viktoriya Royanova, Tanya Todorova, Nadezhda Chervenova

We live in a time when waste has become invisible, and art still struggles to be both functional and political. “Coral Stories I: Useful Uselessness” and “Coral Stories II: Buoys” offer a new ethics of form - one that elegantly merges technology, poetry, and ecology.

Built on the beach and in the waters of Coral Bay, these two installations by Viktoriya Royanova, Tanya Todorova, and Nadezhda Chervenova act as romantic, mystical objects, while also functioning as pulsating design and installation environments — material

forms that exist through interaction, not merely through display or presentation. Here, installation and design do not serve utility, but memory, rhythm, and contemplation.

I. Useful Uselessness

We can describe this work as a heterotopia of waste — a space where the discarded acquires new authority and new sensuality.

Embedded in the sands of Coral Beach, this installation gathers plastic bottles, heated and shaped to resemble glowing crystals — corals, elements of a utopian

geology born not of nature, but of error. The light, programmed through digital settings, pulses in real time, synchronized with the biometric rhythms of those present, captured through sensors and projected by a miniature lighting architecture.



Hundreds of people pass through the beach every day, noticing neither the nature nor the potential profit. They come to enjoy the peace and the sea, but the only thing they leave behind is trash.

- Tanya Todorova

II. Buoys

The art objects float so we don't sink.

Buoys is an installation that literally floats in the water, as the sunset reflects its lights on the surface of the bay. Made from the same transformed waste bottles, here the architecture of the installation becomes a floating lightness with critical depth.

Frank Stella once said: "What you see is what you see."

But here, what we see is much more than what we see. This is a programmable presence where design combines software, light, and water into a form of digital sculptural poetry.

We could call this work a simulacrum of bioluminescence — a pseudo-natural light that does not hide its artificiality but elevates it to a political sign: this is not the sea — it is a sea illuminated by our waste, an aestheticized guilt, a designer gesture of memory. Contemporary art here is not an object, but a mode of producing meaning, and these installations function precisely in that way. They do not exist as sculptures, but as a network of projections — visual, social, ecological, technological.

FROM THE ARTISTS:

The "Coral Stories" are narratives. But they are also structures of perception - organisms made of waste and light that ask:

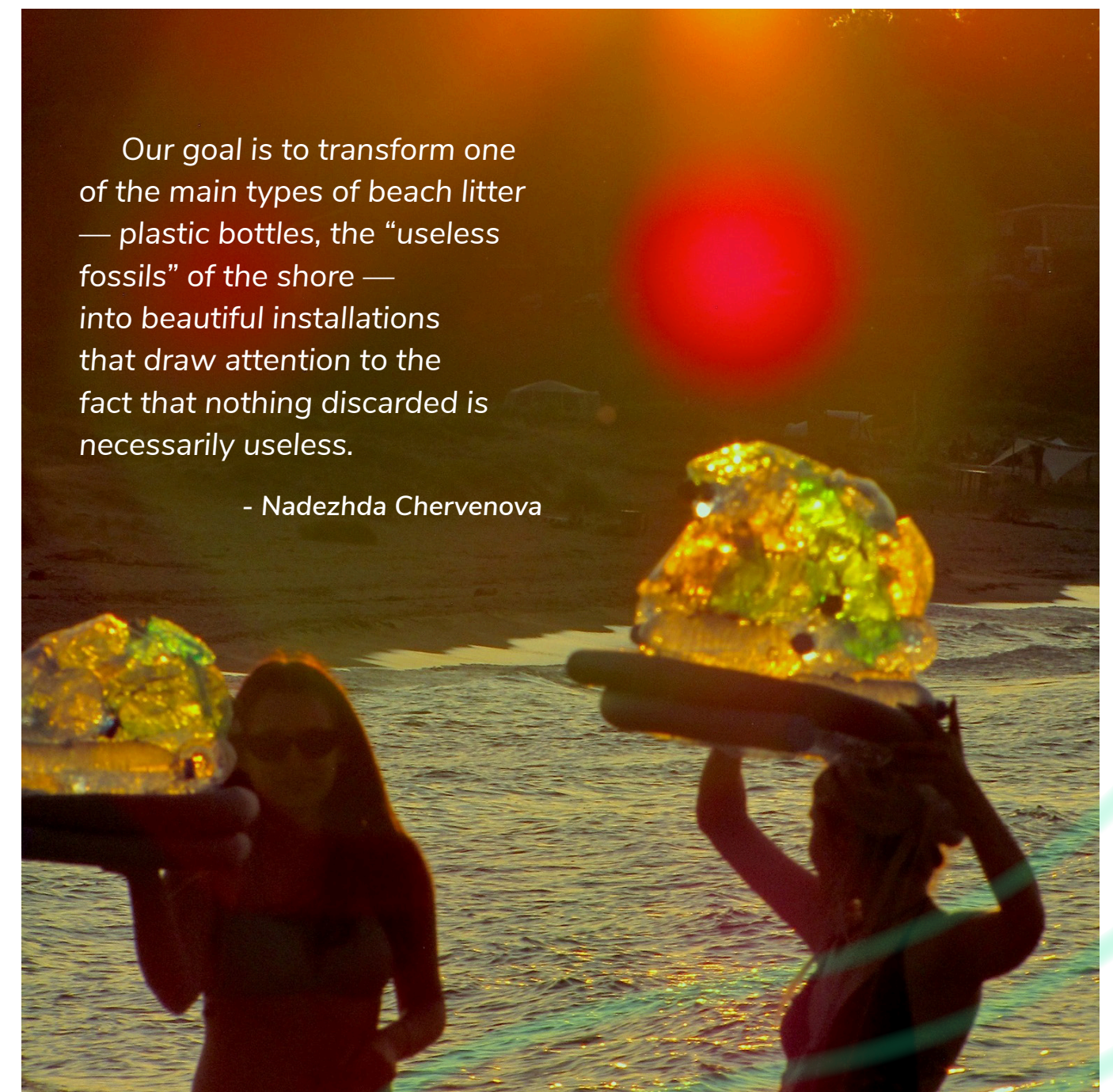
Can the useless be beautiful?

Can aesthetics be digital and still human?

Can plastic shine like truth?

Viktoriya Royanova, Tanya Todorova, and Nadezhda Chervenova, through these installations, embed the future in the sand and make it pulse in sync with us.

And if the sea leaves tomorrow, these lights will remain as a phosphorescent echo - a story of Coral, in which the useless refuse to remain silent.



Our goal is to transform one of the main types of beach litter — plastic bottles, the "useless fossils" of the shore — into beautiful installations that draw attention to the fact that nothing discarded is necessarily useless.

- Nadezhda Chervenova

GAME OF RESOURCES:

VALENTINA STARCHEVA AND THE AESTHETICS OF NON-ACCEPTANCE

Prof. Boris Serginov, Valentina Starcheva

With *Game of Resources*, Valentina Starcheva (a distinctive and long-standing participant in the event) accomplishes exactly what most institutions of cultural memory cannot — she transforms absurdity into a device for unmasking, and uniform ordinariness into an aesthetic field of resistance.

This installation, created on the edge of the wild Coral beach, unfolds an iconography of destruction, dressed in clothes. These clothes are costumes and uniforms, but also plastic traces — remnants of the System's exploitative fantasy, which Starcheva transforms into objects of meaning. It should be noted that here, aesthetics abandons beauty in order to return to its true ethical function: to expose, without preaching.

The installation takes the form of a fashion collection of objects that are not meant to be worn — their function and purpose are to be understood. They are dyed in the colors of toxicity: yellow, black, red — warning codes that transfer symbols from the post-apoc-

alyptic industrial aesthetics of punk into a world where every garment is both fetish and testimony.

We might recognize in this approach an anatomy of normalization — how the garment, originally a tool of care and protection, becomes a carrier of fear. The room in which the clothes are placed simulates a bunker — but a bunker without walls, a symbol of the impossibility of escape from the system, the economy, from ourselves. Thus, the cube filled with resources becomes a hypersymbol — a die that toys with chance, while at the same time revealing the lack of choice. We do not choose

between coal, gas, and uranium — all options are toxic, all are doomed.

The symbolism of radioactivity, exploitation, and play collides in this small object, which carries the greatest message: humanity is trapped in a geopolitical roulette, where resources become an aesthetics of risk. But who holds the die? And is the hand female?

In this installation, we witness the revolt of aesthetics — analogous to that of the Guerrilla Girls, who created the most effective visual strategy for feminist critique with simple black text on a white background. Starcheva does the same — but through a rebellious, post-punk sim-

IN CASE YOU MISSED IT

ulation of fashion, through a visual re-enactment of controlled design, hijacking the power of the symbol and turning it against itself. And so we may see in this work what might be called tactile activism — art that does not rely on distance and theory, but on direct, bodily contact with the materials of catastrophe.

FROM THE ARTIST:

Absurdity has meaning only if one does not resign to it.

- Albert Camus

And perhaps resignation not only deprives absurdity of its meaning but also robs it of its paradox, turning it into order.

The installation *Game of Resources* aims precisely to foreground absurdity.

Tied to the theme of the exploitation of mineral resources, the symbols of resources are paradoxically turned into a game, becoming part of the design of a kind of “fashion collection.” Initially, the clothes used are entirely ordinary and unassuming, but later they are torn, dyed, and completely transformed - and even this intervention by itself speaks to the issue of the potential for reuse and the extension of the lifespan of synthetic products.

On the one hand, their new appearance makes a clear reference to the anarchic and punk styles of the 70s and 80s - and this is no accident. It was precisely during this time that marginalized communities used the wearing of certain symbols as a mockery of their meaning. On the other hand,

the chosen colors correspond to the symbolism of danger and warning signs, and combined with symbols of radioactivity and explosive minerals, create a complete image of tense anticipation.

The clothes are placed in a notional room that creates the feeling of a bunker - a refuge from precisely that which the visual essence of the installation refers to. Yet this space has no walls, nor is it underground. On the contrary - it is located by the sea, on a wild beach, and the burden of its destructiveness is felt all the more intensely.

There's also a bed in the room, whose fundamental purpose as a place of rest and peace is countered by markings with symbols of warning and radioactivity. In the middle of the room lies a discarded cube, resembling a die, with a different resource symbol on each of its faces. Although the smallest in volume, this object speaks the loudest to the meaning of the entire installation.

The excessive exploitation of mineral resources leads to a complete transformation of natural landscapes and the degradation of entire ecosystems. And although this topic is increasingly debated, on a global scale it could be said that humanity is “playing” with the fate of the planet, and the consequences are being neglected. The die passes from hand to hand, but no matter who throws it, its landing is decided by pure chance, and the outcome remains unpredictable and hazardous.



FALLING IN LOVE:

THE AESTHETICS OF THE USELESS AND THE PARADOX OF CONNECTION

A work by Dr. Haled Sabra, Yanita Balusheva, and Ana Radkova

Prof. Boris Serginov

Falling in Love” - a title that sounds almost sentimental, but only until you look closely. Dr. Haled Sabra, Yanita Balusheva, and Ana Radkova present one of the most unexpectedly powerful installations, created not with Talens pigments but with plastic, wood, glass, and memories found on the beach. This material insignificance has been turned into tectonic poetry.

We could say that here we encounter a *negative dialectic of aesthetic value* — beautiful not because it is beautiful, but because it is a remnant, a form of survival, of *that which was not meant to be*.

Sabra - a lecturer in Architecture, Balusheva - a painter, and Radkova - a designer, create not only a decorative composition, but a dense knot of cultural and natural sediment,

interwoven into a form that appears light but actually carries both decorative and conceptual weight. This “falling in love” is not of bodies, but of the corporeality of materials - not of people, but of concepts.

We can recognize in this approach a semiotic collapse of the love sign. This is not Cupid, not Eros. This is a plastic bottle cap, trapped in a dried sea root, a shard of glass reflecting both sky and trash.

Love here is an impossible act of uniting - the sea in love with the sand, the sand with the concrete, plastic with the landscape, the people with the leader. A kind of ironic political erotics in which bodies and materials meet because they must

and because they have no choice. This is a simulacrum of intimacy - a *falling in love* that no longer carries the original feeling, but its replica, composed of domestic and waste elements.

It is an “aestheticization of displacement” - an act of power-driven rearrangement where objects, having lost their function, begin to speak beyond utility, producing a different discourse. The installation “speaks” and generates knowledge about the unstable. From this perspective, we should place this work within the zone of post-media sculpture and design, where meaning is not in form itself but in the gap between forms - the emptiness, the ab-



sence, the seams between the bottle cap and the wood, between the aesthetic and the discarded.

And yet, the most radical thing about “Falling in Love” is that it refuses to be cynical. Yes, it is made of fragments, of debris, of signs of decay - but it is assembled with care. It is both a composition and an act of suturing, a gesture of connecting despite everything.

We might call it an “architecture of tenderness” - but not the soft, airy kind, rather one that is firm, recycled, painfully pieced together from what we have already thrown away.

“Falling in Love” is an installation meant to be felt, to linger as a question:

What does it mean to unite the irreconcilable? Can there be tenderness between the artificial and the organic? And isn't that what we call 'falling in love' - precisely this: an impossible, but stubborn form of compromise?

In the world of Let's Save Coral, where every work is a voice, “Falling in Love” is an echo. A sound from other eras, other materials, other emotions, gathered together by the sea. Without moralizing, without declaration. Just... falling in love. Plastic, fragmented, sea-borne.



RECENT HIGHLIGHTS

Elena Georgieva,
NBU

Apply before: June 1st

Urban Memory: Industrial Transformation and Cultural Heritage

Summer school of Anthropology

22ND EDITION OF THE SUMMER SCHOOL IN ANTHROPOLOGY

27.07 –
01.08.2025,
Varna, Bulgaria

Notebooks and swimsuits in hand, participants gathered this past July at the sea-side for the 22nd Summer School of Anthropology. From July 27 to August 1, 2025, the coastal city of Varna, Bulgaria hosted this memorable edition, offering far more than the typical classroom experience.

Organized by New Bulgarian University in collaboration with the Regional History Museum – Varna, this year's programme explored the theme of urban memory, industrial heritage, and cultural transformation. Students engaged in hands-on research across the city's industrial zones, took part in thought-provoking discussions about urban change, and uncovered how history and memory linger in Varna's streets.

The school's interdisciplinary, field-based approach stood out once again.

Students from across the ERUA network worked side by side, while participating in workshops, expert talks, and site visits. Local heritage specialists shared insights into Varna's evolution from industrial port to dynamic cultural centre.

Last year, the Summer School took place in Sliven, a historic textile town where students studied everything from medieval fortresses to post-communist glass factories. That edition left participants with fresh research skills, new friendships, and probably more photos of machinery than they expected.

This year, the focus shifted to Varna and it seemed like the perfect place for big questions about how we construct memory, preserve culture, and reimagine space.

Travelling Seminar

Places of Memory: Holocaust in (pop) Culture

TRAVELLING SEMINAR “PLACES OF MEMORY: HOLOCAUST IN (POP) CULTURE”



11.06-
13.06.2025,
NBU, SWPS

From June 11 to 13, 2025, ERUA, New Bulgarian University (NBU), and SWPS University hosted the latest edition of the travelling seminar “Places of Memory: Holocaust in (pop) Culture.” As part of the annual “Places of Memory” initiative, this year's seminar guided students through powerful sites of historical memory while examining how the Holocaust is represented in contemporary culture.

The journey took participants to Krakow and Auschwitz, where visits to memorial sites were combined with discussions on how traumatic histories are mediated through art, film, and popular culture. Before heading to Poland, students

also visited Skopje and Plovdiv, reflecting on World War II memory in Bulgaria and Macedonia, and expanding the seminar's cross-regional perspective.

The programme offered a unique opportunity to approach collective memory through cultural narratives rather than solely through history books. Participants engaged with difficult questions and returned with new insights into how memory shapes the present.

Stay tuned for reports and reflections from those who took part - and watch this space for upcoming opportunities to join future editions of this transformative project.

MISINFORMATION ON SOCIAL MEDIA



Marta Wiewiórska, SWPS

Have you ever watched a video online and felt your breath catch at the shock of what the content addressed? Have you then discovered, perhaps rather disconcerted, that this information was not true at all? Over 37% of young adults report seeing misleading or false information online every day. Fake news seems to infiltrate our lives at every step. As social media becomes more and more meaningful, people fall victim to inaccurate information that they encounter online. This spread of misinformation that we are witnessing with the growing outreach of platforms such as Instagram and TikTok has a tremendous impact on our daily lives. But why and how does fake news expand on social media so easily?

Social media has undeniably been an asset in the business field and in many different areas of personal life. Nevertheless, it poses a significant threat as a contributor to the spread of misinformation. While mainstream media outlets, such as newspapers and radios, tend to have robust safeguards, social media encourages the expansion of viral content with little to none verification. Result? Rapid publication of information that may be interesting and viral, but often absolutely false. Global outreach of social platforms, the number of non-experts sharing unverifiable facts and the novelty of fake news all result in a crushing amount of misinformation. This impedes trust in actual experts, for example regarding health issues, democracy, climate change. The consequences are grave and the awareness of this unprecedented issue limited.

One of the most poignant problems related to the omnipresence of fake news on social media has to do with the public health outcomes. The public is being misled online, for example regarding vaccine programmes, nutrition, smoking. Unfortunately, many brands and influencers spread false and incomplete information online for economic benefit. They market health products of dubious quality that seemingly change your life with their never-seen-before formula. This leads to erosion of trust in healthcare and endangers people's physical wellbeing. An NBC News analysis of the most common fake health news shows that in the year 2019 alone, the top 50 fake news stories generated over 12 million shares, comments and reactions on Facebook. The most prominent false piece of information was a conspiracy suggesting ditching common medical treatments of life threatening diseases, mostly cancer, for unproven cures. The scale of the problem is overwhelming and entails devastating health implications.

Another consequence of the rapid spread of information on social media channels and the persuasiveness of misinformation is political propaganda. In many cases, political misinformation is prevalent among non-English speaking communities, as the little fact-checking that takes place online is mostly targeted towards the English language. People who do not speak the language are consequently unable to access the highest quality information. Exposure to false political news biases citizens' beliefs, generating misconceptions about the true state of the world. Fake news on social media has become a political weapon.

For instance, in 2020, misinformation was a driving force of the decreased confidence in the U.S. political system. Fake news on social media slandered mail-in voting and accused the Democratic Party of engaging in voter fraud. As a result of this misinformation, a subsequent Washington Post survey showed that only 20% of the respondents felt “very confident” in the integrity of the U.S. election system. The majority of respondents said they did not trust that the elections represented the will of the people. This provokes a variety of social issues, such as lacking civic engagement and uncooperative citizens.

From health risks to social problems, misinformation unquestionably negatively affects our lives. The question is, can anything be done about it? There are numerous ways in which we can promote change for the better in this area. The most crucial aspect is holding the responsible people accountable for the problem. Access to data and transparency must be demanded from social media outlets. User data, full inventories of social media posts and understanding how algorithms shape

what users encounter online would allow researchers to study the full magnitude of misinformation. Then, effective interventions could be implemented. Moreover, media literacy is key. Building public resilience to fake news by teaching how to identify misinformation could contribute immensely to solving the issue. This is particularly important among young people as they learn how to navigate the ever-present world of contemporary social media. Educating children about the issue from an early age will raise awareness in society. Next to understanding which information is unreliable, we must impede the spread of fake news by reporting posts and doing our best to amend misperceptions amid those we know.

The issue of fake news on social media is certainly overwhelming, but since social media is here to stay, we should do our best to navigate this online environment in the most efficient way possible. Being critical of the content we consume will help us avoid deception in online communication and stay resilient to the harmful health, political and other fake news stories.

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TRANSFORMING HOW WE DO RESEARCH AT THE UNIVERSITY:

INCLUDING STUDENTS AS PARTNERS

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Introduction

According to a survey, in 2022, Europe's contribution to scientific publications was 650,000. Europe ranked 2nd with an 18.1% contribution overall (European Commission, 2022). Academic articles have always remained the core of quality research publication. Within this context, the workshop titled "Transforming How We Do Research at the University: Including Students as Partners in Academic Writing" was organized at the European Reform University Alliance (ERUA) Summit, June 2024 in Vilnius. The workshop underscored the importance of research in higher education while redefining the role of students.

This two-part workshop was a student-led effort from Zuzanna Siwinska from SWPS University, supported by Andrea Scott from the Center for Teaching

and Learning at the European University Viadrina. The first part of the workshop involved discussion on various aspects of how students can become integral research partners in academia when given appropriate resources and opportunities. The second session was dedicated to exploring the practical implications of recognizing students in this collaborative role.

The participants, consisting of students, faculty, and academic staff members from universities across five different countries, including USWPS (Poland), European University Viadrina (Germany), Universidad de Las Palmas de Gran Canaria (Spain), and University of Paris 8 (France), Mykolas Romeris University (Lithuania), and New Bulgarian University (Bulgaria) then co-authored a reflection piece. It addressed the following broader aspects of research

transformation through the integration of the Students as Partners (SaP):

- Why involve students as partners in research at the university and what does that imply?
- How can this be done? What are the best practices and what changes would they like to see happen?
- How do these identified practices contribute towards social transformation?

This collaborative article compiles the participants' insights in comparison with existing literature and concludes with recommendations grounded in the participants' joint personal experience.

Why involve students as partners in research and what does that imply?

There are multiple definitions of student as partner (SaP). Essentially, when both academics and students actively participate to add value to each other in terms of knowledge, skills, and perspective. Therefore, they are to be considered as partners (Arat, 2011).

COST REDUCTION

The inclusion of students as research partners inherits many benefits. Significant reduction in cost of research is one of them. This is due to the fact that students contribute their labour often without the need for extensive financial compensation. Not only that, this also eases the workload of the researchers.

Holbrook and Sanberg (2013) also indicates that when universities involve students into research, it decreases the need for additional full-time staff.

INTELLECTUAL GROWTH

One of the direct benefits of involving students as research partners is their intellectual growth. This includes but not limited to academic development, written and critical thinking skills. The practical application of theoretical knowledge is what instigates this growth. Academic writing and critical thinking are fundamental skills to do research. Inclusion of students as research partners enhances these

skills. Several studies have shown that research stimulates intellectual growth of students. This is especially evident at

undergraduate level as student's involvement in research has been reported to be positively correlated with their graduate school success. The underlying reasons for this growth include meaningful interactions with the faculty, an opportunity to observe the intellectual life of scholars, and a chance to apply theory and skills to real life problems (Hu et al., 2007).

CO-CREATION OF KNOWLEDGE

In the student as partner model, students gain first hand insight into the process of knowledge creation as well as its validation. This also provides them a sense of belonging by getting recognition as one of the key stakeholders, boosting their con-

fidence as a result. Moreover, it helps the students to understand how knowledge is created.

Student-led research promotes broader dissemination of knowledge, as students often share their findings with peers and the larger community. Social media platforms, in particular, have become powerful tools for spreading scientific information widely and quickly (Castillo et al., 2021). Research has shown that teams with diverse age structures are more innovative. Combining the experience of senior researchers with the fresh ideas of younger members can lead to significant breakthroughs (Paoletti et al., 2020).

FRESH PERSPECTIVES

For students, such opportunities allow them to explore new ventures in research or academia. This creates exchange of ideas, perspectives, and knowledge between students and researchers. Furthermore, it prompts researchers to often question established norms thus leading to innovative approaches.

Students bring unique perspectives to research problems, leading to innovative solutions to societal challenges. The diversity of thought is crucial in addressing complex global issues (Yang et al., 2024). The practical implementation of this idea is evident in the case of the Reinvention Centre co-created by Warwick University and Oxford Brookes University. The center focuses on a unique method of teaching that relies on research-based learning. Not only their undergraduates receive funding to carry out research but also the neces-

sary support (*The Reinvention Centre for Undergraduate Research*, n.d.)

GAINING COMPETENCIES

Student's inclusion as partners in research helps to hone important academic and professional competencies of both researchers and students. Researchers essentially assume the teaching role as it requires them to explain the underlying concepts to the students, whereas students observe and ask specific questions in a learning capacity. Thus, expanding students' opportunities and competencies as it provides them the necessary experience to become more comfortable with research in future.

Research experience significantly enhances students' employability. The technical and analytical skills developed through research are highly sought after in the job market. For example, proficiency in data analysis tools like R and Python can greatly improve a candidate's attractiveness to employers (Burnside et al., 2019). Research projects also cultivate independence, creativity, and critical thinking, traits that are valuable across various professions. Employers appreciate candidates who demonstrate initiative and innovative problem-solving abilities (Halper et al., 2020).

These are the key aspects of why students should be treated as researchers as discussed in the article and verified by the existing literature.

How can this be done? What are the best practices at participants' universities and what changes would they like to see happen?

Based on the authors experiences in the ERUA partner universities, the following main implementation aspects have been summarized in conjunction with the existing literature and good practice example.

JOINT WORKSHOPS

Creating a workshop where students and professors can work together to break down the traditional barriers can serve as a starting point. Organizing Workshop weekends can be used to incorporate this practice into curriculum

This can be validated by the example demonstrated at University of Calgary where an alumni student, teacher, and a course coordinator collaborated to improve instructional strategies in group work. This enabled instructors to generate strategies to support student collaboration and engagement in group work, democratized knowledge-building, and fore fronted students as co-producers of knowledge (Abegglen et al., 2024).

STUDENT CENTRIC TOPICS

To increase student engagement in research, students should be given more opportunities to work on the topics that are aligned with their interests. As identified in literature amongst many reasons

for students to pursue higher education are to acquire qualifications, pursue their interest, get ready for the practical world, and prepare for academic and re-

search careers in higher education (Felix and Gibbs, 2009 as cited in, Arat (2011)). Therefore, treating students as research partners is directly aligned with their long-term goals as well as interests.

BRIDGING THE RESEARCHER- STUDENT GAP

Bridging the gap between students and researchers requires understanding of common interests as well as the right space. This could be possible in a classroom environment but would require a dynamic, in which researchers treat students as their partners rather than consumers of higher education.

Nonetheless, a course or a seminar is not sufficient to address this. Long-term planning and efforts have to be undertaken by the universities to establish best practices. This includes but is not limited to creating a research conducive environment that incorporates research groups, regular article publishing, and generating and sharing ideas within the research community.

Research by Abegglen et al. (2024) demonstrates the practical implications of this approach. Students and faculties of universities from Canada and UK collaborated together to reimagine higher edu-

cation with students as partners. A joint workshop was organized where students and teachers reflected on the present and future of higher education. However, the highlight of this endeavor was that students were recruited as co-researchers, co-designers, and paid partners. The project resulted in creation of an open-source guide towards creation of ideal higher education model with a strong emphasis on constructive failure, trust-building, and equal partnership

RESTRUCTURING THE CURRICULUM

The current structure of the curriculum needs to be revisited. The universities should focus on student-faculty research collaboration, designing courses that have more weightage to research projects, and student research conferences. Furthermore, faculties can play their part by adding more diverse research-based assignments as well as structure seminars that would lead to publications such as an article in a peer-reviewed student journal. The intent is to make these assignments meaningful and practical. Assignments would then not be a product merely for graduating purposes but instead have a real purpose and outreach.

Course-based undergraduate research experience (CURE) is an approach that incorporates the above stated characteristics. CURE provides students the platform that is immersive and engaging but in a course format, sometimes resulting in publication of that research. A qualitative study of 16 students enrolled in CURE at University of Alabama, indicates that they

have perceived this format to be beneficial both in personal and professional capacity. The students co-authored a peer reviewed paper which eventually got published in a journal. These students contributed in various ways, such as conducting experiments, reviewing drafts, and approving the final manuscript, which aligned with authorship criteria determined by the instructors. Not only this format correlated positively with improved academic performance of students but also with their perception of research. (Turner et al., 2021).

CHALLENGES POSED BY TRADITIONAL LEARNING MODEL

Students who either intend to make research a full-time career or would want to pursue a PhD in future sometimes get discouraged by their professors. Such an instance can often be attributed to the traditional learning model (TLM) in which teachers hold authority over knowledge. Students have to adhere to authority and have to rely on constant affirmation from their teachers. Not only does this hinder the collaborative essence of SaP that encourages participative learning environments. It also leads to a decreased student autonomy. This reduced autonomy is negatively associated with a student's confidence, self-esteem, and motivation to take an initiative independently (Symonds, 2021).

Another challenge is the difficulty of switching from the traditional model to SaP. In TLM, the power dynamic in a student-teacher relationship mostly favors the teachers. This makes students hesitant

even when teachers feel like they are more inclusive and encouraging in an attempt to treat students as partners. Further-

more, the vertical nature of traditional student-teacher relationships makes teachers less approachable. As research and academic writing require prior knowledge and preparation as well as a specific aptitude, it cannot be taught within a span of a single academic course. As per Symonds (2021), balancing expectations and expertise between students and teachers is a challenge on its own.

Additionally, each faculty within the same university often has its own distinct culture. For instance, research practices such as when and how students are involved in research can vary significantly between programs. This is further exacerbated by the notion that professors have a heavy workload. According to Symonds (2021), the scheduling conflicts between students and teachers make SaP more challenging to implement. Such a long-term endeavor requires time. The varied commitment levels from student and teachers requires adaptable adjustments as well as intentional efforts. Moreover, partnership roles when forced upon students instead of developing it with mutual understanding and negotiation over time can lead to unfavorable outcomes.

How do these identified practices contribute towards social transformation?

Social transformation is an inevitable societal process that changes how people live, how they perceive life, their wants and needs with respect to time, material, and non-material things. As this process goes on, it impacts how the past and future are perceived. The existing gap between past and future needs drives innovation and creativity (Rabie, 2023). In the past 20 years scientific knowledge's impact on societal context has received more importance than on academia. Societal impact of research is a complex phenomenon and thus, has multiple outputs, forms, and methodological frameworks to evaluate it. In the European Union, it is evident by the direction of future research funding that research plays a key role in an innovation driven society (Soyer, 2021).

It is worth noting that while significant research has been done on the societal impact of academic research, little to no attention has been given to how best practices of research in academia contribute to this impact.

CREATION OF MOTIVATED PROFESSIONALS

Involving students in research early on, results in grooming future professionals. An inclusive environment provides them a chance to handle real world scenarios in a safe environment. This would provide

them an optimistic perception of the world. The sense of belonging in the process also transforms them into future independent thinkers. Therefore, students should be included in the research process right from the first year.

An in-depth analysis of research by Turner et al. (2021) shows that when students who are involved in the research early on, reported receiving familial and peer support owing to the fact that their research got published. It also boosted their confidence and provided them a sense of belonging, resulting in improved academic performance and overall wellbeing. Early engagement in research also helps broaden the pool of future scientists. Universities that offer robust research infrastructure and doctoral programs, along with effective mentoring and opportunities for publication, see an increase in graduates pursuing scientific careers (Smith et al., 2020).

A SENSE OF RESPONSIBILITY AND ACCOUNTABILITY

In a SaP model, both students as contributors and academics as mentors develop a sense of responsibility and accountability. Academics assume the responsibility of shaping student's perception of academia and research. Symonds (2021) states that since students have a shared responsibility for knowledge creation in this model, it instills a sense of accountability among them. Arat (2011), adds that, students are regularly assessed and only the students that fulfil a certain criteria go on to the next educational stage. Such an assessment is

not punitive but reflects the reciprocal nature of the partnership.

Research by Turner et al. (2021), further reinforces this point. When students who jointly co-authored a peer-reviewed research paper were asked about what should be the criteria to be considered as a co-author of the publication? The majority agreed it should depend on the level of effort and time invested outside the class, rather than the type of tasks performed. This indicates when students are trusted with mutual ownership of the knowledge, it results in a sense of self-accountability and responsibility.

REPUTATION ENHANCEMENT OF UNIVERSITY

Universities enhance their reputation when they involve students in research. These higher education (HE) institutions produce competent and practical researchers that positively contribute to their standing. Additionally, universities that engage in substantial research activities often secure higher positions in global rankings such as the QS World University Rankings and Times Higher Education. These rankings consider factors like publications, citations, and international collaborations, directly impacting the perception of the institution. Research activity also attracts external funding through grants and donations, enabling universities to expand their infrastructure and invest further in research endeavors (MacLeod & Urquiola, 2020).

Moreover, engaging in research, especially applied research, enhances university-industry collaborations. This relationship can lead to additional funding sources and the development of new technologies and practical solutions, thereby boosting the university's prestige (Denning et al., 2022).

DEMOCRATIZATION OF KNOWLEDGE

As mentioned in the prior example, collaboration, knowledge co-creation, and equal distribution of power and responsibilities are the core of SaP model. The idea of mutual ownership of a research project validates students' contributions. Such a dynamic is pivotal in terms of creating a democratic and tolerant society. Since students get an equal say in the research, it is likely that they would go on to practice the same democratic values within the society.

"Student as democratic participant" is a dimension of SaP model that puts emphasis on empowering students by including them in the education institution's governance structure. This allows them to co-shape the education through various quality assurance bodies, program committees or central university boards. The practical implementation of such an instance can be exemplified in the case of "Students as Change Agents" initiative at the University of Exeter. The program entailed empowering students by giving them opportunity to identify issues in learning and teaching and to collaborate with university staff to rectify them. Students became active participants in institutional change, fostering

a culture of dialogue, shared responsibility, and co-creation (Holen et al., 2020).

DISCUSSION AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Research is a high impact practice. From cost reduction, student's academic growth, greater dissemination of knowledge to creating a democratic space to tackle academic challenges, its benefits are indeed high impact. Not only does engaging students early on in research generate fresh perspectives, it also serves as an opportunity for students and researchers alike to learn from each other. The immediate advantages for students are that it prepares them to effectively carry out their thesis and give them a practice ground to hone the essential skills. It also helps them to determine their career trajectory as future researchers.

This can be exemplified by Healey, Flint, and Harrington's model of "Ways of Engaging Students as Partners in Higher Education". The model identifies the four dimensions in which a student can be engaged. One of them is subject-based research and inquiry. Subject-based research and inquiry in particular uses distinct ways of research-rich education to develop student engagement. This entails student-staff collaboration in research, research consultancy, research-based teaching and assignment. Students initiated research projects with staff consultation or vice versa are examples of such an instance. However, this type of approach is rarely embedded at an institutional level but rather at a course or

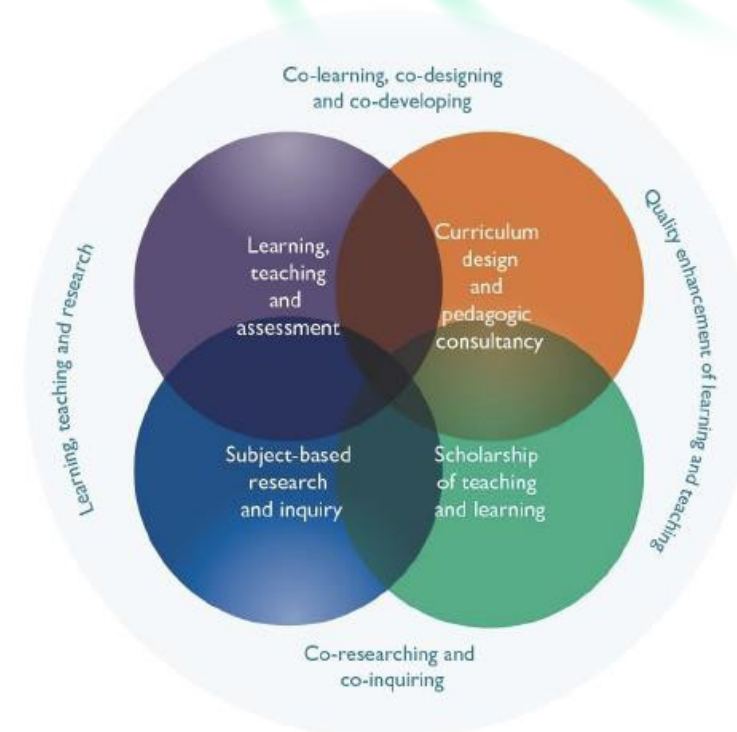


Fig. 1: Healey, Flint, and Harrington's model of ways of engaging students as partners in HE (HFH (2014), as cited in (Stevens, 2022))

mostly at an individual level for undergraduate programmes (Stevens, 2022).

In all likelihood, the best way for a student to learn how to carry out research is by doing together with the research. It motivates researchers to learn a lot as well as that prompts them to explain their findings to students. Thus, improving their teaching skills in the process. As stated earlier when such a dynamic occurs, academics typically assume the role of mentors and students as mentees. Encouraging researchers and PhD students to collaborate can be an effective way to achieve this. The same students could assume this role of mentors when they guide the less experienced students. One of the dimensions of the theoretical framework by Holen et al. (2020) explains this concept as 'student as an apprentice'.

Holen et al. (2020) provide empirical evidence of this dimension. The research analyzed the 'Centres for Excellence in Ed-

ucation' initiative in Norway. Launched by the Norwegian Ministry of Education and Research, the initiative's core theme was students as partners in higher education. Between 2011 and 2017, eight centres were established across various universities to boost student partnership in higher education. Three out of eight centres were evaluated in the research. Findings show that each of the 3 centres had involved students as partners to a varying degree. One of the centres started a research assistant program based on Humboldtian rationale known as "Develop Researcher's Skills". According to that program, professors worked with students to carry out research. Students were treated as less experienced colleagues and were given various research related assignments such as co-authoring articles with the professors. The other two centres focused on developing students as mentors. Experienced students contributed to the program

by teaching and sharing experiences with newer students in the form of additional consultation for specific subjects.

In the broader context of social transformation, engaged scholarship is a mode of teaching that fosters students as partners. It invites students to work with partners from the learning community to develop answers to questions or solve problems of interest to both parties. Da Cruz (2017), further explains this as a practice of knowledge creation focusing on real world challenges that supports the general public. From social issues like racial discrimination to environmental challenges like clean air or sustainability, university and community experts' collaboration can contribute towards alleviation of social challenges.

However, inclusion of students as partners still remains a key feature to carry out such a collaboration successfully.

The implementation of SaP is gradual, time-consuming, and a challenging endeavor. Nevertheless, it creates a multitude of possibilities in higher education, fostering innovation within a socially transformative environment.

The following guidelines are proposed as an initial reference for creating such an environment:

- **EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION:** Research initiatives should be openly communicated to all stakeholders especially students. Systematic and efficient communication about ongoing research projects and the opportunities to join them can be done through various mediums. For example, a dedicated webpage on a university's website can inform students about research

projects that they can participate in. Open calls from the academics inviting students' participation in research projects can be featured through multiple communication channels such as social media, website, information boards, and newsletters.

- **INTEGRATION OF AI:** AI's evolution has positioned it as a tool for research. One of its key applications is the translation of research material in English, thus making it more accessible. However, plagiarism policy concerning AI usage needs to be revisited. The perception of AI remains divisive among academics. Some view its usage as a tool while others see it as a crutch that encourages plagiarism. A mutual understanding and middle ground must be achieved through joint stakeholders' dialog.
- **COMPENSATION:** As previously discussed, there're several intrinsic motivators for students such as intellectual grooming, career development, and competency building to do research. However, compensation whether it is in financial or academic terms cannot be ignored as one of key incentives for students. Therefore, to enhance student engagement in research, a nominal financial compensation or academic credits should be offered as an incentive.
- **RESEARCH FUNDING:** There are various financial costs associated with a research project, which is why funding remains a crucial consideration for researchers. Therefore, establishing dedicated funds to sup-

port student-led research projects, including conferences, studies, and other academic endeavors should be a priority for HE institutions to create a research-oriented environment.

- **ACCESSIBILITY:** As indicated by the literature, involving students in the research process early on yields both short-term and long-term benefits. Enhancing accessibility to research remains a crucial factor towards fostering that involvement. This includes making details such as research topic, technical information, and credentials of the professor who is supervising the project accessible to students. Production of internal publication through an inhouse journal that also translates research material into local languages can also make the knowledge more accessible.
- **MINIMIZING EXISTING BARRIERS:** Traditional learning model summarizes all the main barriers towards implementing SaP model. The research ecosystem in higher education cannot flourish exclusively with a TLM. For example, one of the ways to minimize the effects of TLM is to provide ample research opportunities to students which means that students should not have to compete with each other in order to get involved in research. Smaller class sizes and more research groups can also help reduce these barriers. Furthermore, students should be encouraged to make mistakes rather than putting pressure on them to always get things right. All of these steps contribute towards creating a safe environment where stu-

dents can disagree with their professors without academic repercussions.

- **MENTORSHIP:** PhD students can serve as facilitators and actively involve master's students in their research work. Likewise, faculty and professors should support and mentor undergraduate and postgraduate students interested in pursuing doctoral studies.
- **SEMINARS AND CONFERENCES:** Students should receive financial as well as internal support to attend research focused seminars and conferences. Moreover, students that are already involved in research projects should be given ample opportunities to present the findings. Professors and research supervisors should actively encourage these students to present on their behalf when appropriate.
- **UNIVERSITY-INDUSTRY COLLABORATION:** Collaborations between universities and industry can create meaningful research opportunities for students, providing them with real-world experience. Additionally, engaging alumni who are working in industry to research projects can help students build professional networks within their chosen fields.

These recommendations can be supported by Tytarenko et al. (2024) model of "Technology of Forming Positive Motivation of Higher Education Students for Research". The model identifies the broader aspects and tools that can be used to motivate students to do research.

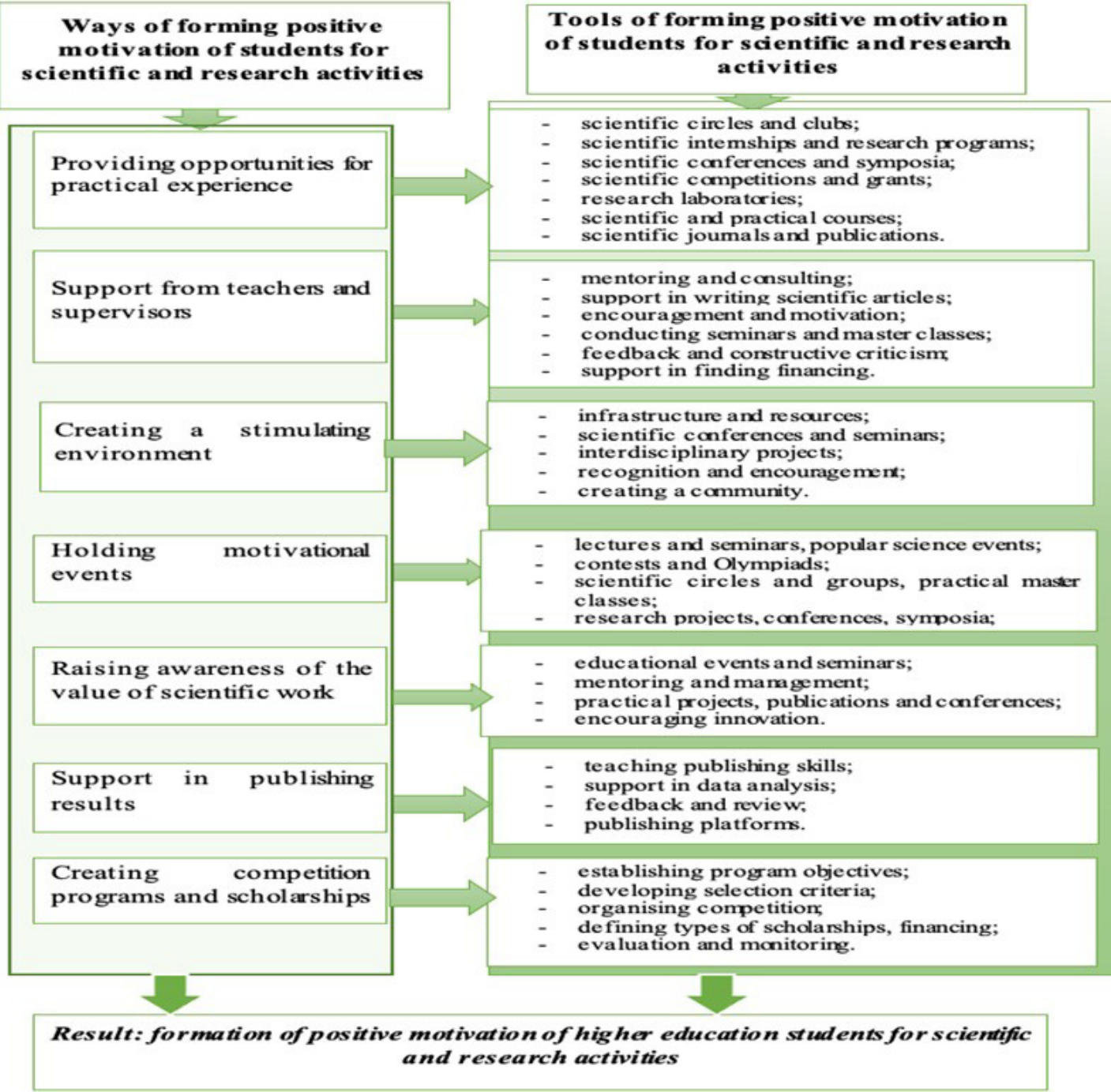


Fig. 2: Tytarenko et al. (2024) model of “Technology of Forming Positive Motivation of Higher Education Students for Research”.

The model is formed as a result of research conducted at Poltava V.G. Korolenko National Pedagogical University in Ukraine. The research studied a sample size of 143 higher education students in a pedagogical experiment setting. The sample was divided into control and experiment groups. The control group with 71 students received no special intervention whereas the experimental group of 72 students underwent structured activities. In a broader context, these activities included access to scientific clubs and research internships, mentorship and support from experienced researchers, participation in seminars, workshops, and competitions, encouragement to publish research and attend conferences, and provision of scholarships and competitive programs.

Results have shown that the experimental group of students showed significant positive motivation in pursuing research. The guidelines stated above are well aligned with the activities performed in the experiment.

RESEARCH LIMITATIONS

The scope of this research includes the analysis of existing literature. It does not include empirical analysis. An empirical study of the aforementioned guidelines in

various controlled settings can give new insights on how students can be included in research. Although literature shows that treating students as a partner is important in increasing their engagement in research, there is not enough research done studying direct correlation between SaP model and research. This article serves as a baseline for further studies to refine and implement SaP in context of research.

CONCLUSION

The inclusion of students in research is mutually beneficial for students and universities alike. However, implementing this endeavor has its challenges. It requires a massive shift from the traditional learning model to SaP model. This shift is gradual and requires a coordinated effort from students and HE institutions. Studies have shown that when executed correctly, SaP model yields long and short-term benefits. Integration of SaP with HE research has also widespread effects on social transformation leading towards a democratic society ingrained in innovation. As authors and the participants of the workshop, we would like to see ERUA and our universities promoting SaP in research more broadly. The present article serves as a starting point for further research and guideline for practical implementation.

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Stanislav Babenko



Aike Myrzaibraimova

LOCAL BOARD: STUDENTS' EMPOWERMENT IN ERUA'S GOVERNANCE STRUCTURE

Muhammad Ismail, EUV

At its core, ERUA is a student-driven project, which is why student representation at all of its governance levels is pivotal. The establishment of Local Boards at ERUA partner universities is another step toward fostering student involvement and representation. At its foundation, these boards empower students to engage directly with institutional decision-making, ensuring that student voices influence not only policy but also the future direction of research, teaching, and collaboration across the alliance. Each Local Board elects its university's two representatives for the ERUA-wide Student Board - the student voice at ERUA level.

To get a preview of a Local Board in action, and how it collaborates cohesively with other local bodies, we chatted with the Chairpersons of the European University Viadrina Local Board: Aike Myrzaibraimova and Stanislav Babenko. Aike Myrzaibraimova is in the 3rd semester of the Master's in International Business Administration program at Viadrina. Aike also served as Vice President for the ERASMUS Student Network. Stanislav, on the other hand, is a student from Viadrina's Law program, with extensive work experience in various student bodies, including Viadrina's Student Parliament.

Let's dive into our discussion with them:

It is a fair assessment that several of Viadrina's student bodies and departments are closely working with ERUA. When asked about how they came to find out about ERUA, Aike stated that she came across it through a mix of social media, Viadrina's website, and regular communication from the Student Parliament (StuPa). Stanislav also got acquainted with ERUA in similar ways.

Both of them expressed excitement and motivation to assume the responsibilities of their new role. Aike's motivation stems from the fact that she wanted to foster and lead a community of students focused on organizing events that are not only fun but also contribute to their professional development. According to Stanislav, his motivation to apply for this role comes from his prior experience in various leadership roles in student bodies in his home country of Ukraine and his current role as a StuPa member. Representing Viadrina students

at the ERUA alliance level is another reason for him.

Student engagement remains at ERUA's core. When asked how they see the ERUA Viadrina Local Board contributing to student engagement, Aike stated that as the Local Board was formed only a few months ago, it will take time for its efforts to bear fruit. She further pointed out that it is a long-term endeavor and that it is perfectly normal for a newly formed structure to undergo a slow process. Stanislav stressed the importance of having active board members to achieve the desired student engagement levels. **"A growing and active Local Board in Viadrina will not only have stronger representation at ERUA's alliance level but will also prove to be essential to ERUA's growth."**

In terms of vision and strategic goals, Aike envisions creating a sense of community for students. She elaborated that while this may be a broad and generic vision, its importance is undeniable. **"I just want to kind of make sure that people can have different events, can have different creative expressions. Just bringing it all together. And I know it's a very ambitious and big goal."** Stanislav's vision and long-term goals for the Board are in conjunction with Aike's. He, however, emphasized that active governance by students needs to be incentivized.

Both Chairpersons expressed a little concern when asked about the Local Board's coordination with the existing student body structure. Aike thinks that it is a natural progression and it will take time to smooth things out. **"I feel like it's okay."**

SPOTLIGHT ON STUDENT VOICES

There's certainly a lack of communication from all parties, but that's to be expected when there's a lot of people involved in things. I feel like we need to establish more communication channels specifically between student organizations, but again, we're very new, so this is to be expected, but that's the point we need to focus on in the future." Stanislav suggested that awareness among students about ERUA is a deciding factor in improving overall cooperation. **"I think our problem is that the awareness of how ERUA adds value to students needs to be improved."**

In regard to current challenges faced by the board, Aike mentioned that as it has not been long since the Local Board was established, they have a lot on their plate. Therefore, desired engagement is lacking from the students. **"I'm doing a lot of work right now as a Chairperson, as Stanislav is doing, and also, of course, you guys as our team, you're always supporting us. That is to be expected, but also engagement from members. But I feel like once we get the ball rolling, it's going to be better from the next semester. That's what I'm hoping."**

Stanislav points out that how the Local Board can add value to students remains the key challenge. According to him, this can be accomplished by launching initiatives that can directly impact their studies—for example, establishing a support

structure that can help students with the research topics they are interested in, or arranging excursion trips that add value to their professional portfolio. However, implementation of such initiatives is always challenging.

Despite all the challenges, both Chairpersons remain optimistic about the future and enjoy carrying out their responsibilities. Aike enjoys the sense of responsibility and challenges. **"I like putting work and seeing the results, even if they're not big enough, objectively or subjectively, still creating something, bringing people together, even if it's two, three people. That's already something. So that's, I think, the most fulfilling thing."** Stanislav also thinks that the Local Board will be the conduit of change for the better.

It is a refreshing change of pace to see Viadrina students bringing their experiences, talents, and skills toward ERUA's growth. This insightful discussion is further evidence of that notion. As the Local Board continues to evolve, its success will depend not only on its dedicated leadership but also on the willingness of the broader student community to participate, collaborate, and take ownership of their role in shaping the future of the alliance. With this strong foundation and a shared vision, the Local Board is well-positioned to become a lasting pillar of student empowerment within ERUA.



FOR ACTION ON SUSTAINABILITY AND CLIMATE CHANGE

Samuel Taviro, ULPGC

On May 20th and 21st, the University of Las Palmas de Gran Canaria proudly hosted one of ERUA's flagship initiatives dedicated to Student Engagement. We are talking about the Young Climate Forum for Action on Sustainability and Climate Change.

The title says it all. The main focus was to raise awareness on sustainability and to understand it from a broader perspective — in other words, an overarching approach. This may look like a typical event, but what made it unique was that it was a student-led initiative!

As students, we are not familiar with organising such an ambitious event. Nonetheless, thanks to the whole ERUA community and especially the ULPGC team, a group of students were able to create a successfully led Forum. The numbers speak for themselves, as the Forum had more than 100 attendees from all 8 ERUA institutions and beyond!

This group of students, led by Samuel Taviro from ULPGC, is usually referred to as the Blue Commission. Established by twenty ERUA students and supported by a staff member from each institution, this team has been working tirelessly since last November. With regular meetings taking place every one or two weeks, the Blue Commission was committed to fine-tuning the Forum to a tee. Prior to the inception of the Forum, as a curtain-raiser, each institution organised an online workshop on different sustainability topics. This resulted in a total of 8 workshops organised between January and April 2025.



Attendees to these events were given priority as funded participants to join the final in-person event. Other decisions by the Blue Commission included designing several calls, agreeing on the agenda, proposing a budget, and appointing the speakers.

You might be wondering now, what was the goal of this endeavor? The simple answer is to draft a document outlining the best sustainability practices. This document will be proposed to all rectors in ERUA. This comprehensive document is projected to be finished by the end of September 2025. The compilation team has started to draft the document with the input from all participants. It will be officially signed off by all the key stakeholders at the 2025 ERUA Summit scheduled at the beginning of November.

Getting back to the main point, we will now delve into some of the topics that were discussed and to some of the comments and insights from the participants at the Forum.

The event featured lectures, interactive workshops, the screening of the film 'Stolen Fish', and a photo exhibition organized by a student. From technological and scientific themes such as AI, acidification of the ocean, wastewater management, renewable energies, diet healthcare, biomimicry, or the importance of pollinators, to more social and humanistic discussions—including sustainable tourism, environmental law, equality, SDGs, and sustainable job platforms—a wide array of topics was addressed.

Let's see the impressions the Forum left on some of the attendees:

Zohreh Sadati

(Student from UP8 and presenter of the "Silent Hyrcania" photo exhibition.):

"I would like to extend my sincere gratitude to the University of Las Palmas and to everyone involved in organizing the Silent Hyrcania exhibition. It was a true honor and an unforgettable experience to present my work in such a thoughtful and welcoming environment.

This was not only a platform for me to share my personal and visual memories of the forests and wetlands of northern Iran, but also a space for deeper conversations about environmental crises, the role of art in raising awareness, and the urgent need for cross-cultural dialogue around nature, heritage, and responsibility.

I was deeply inspired by the atmosphere of the university, the presence and engagement of faculty, students, artists, and researchers, and the open exchange of ideas that surrounded the event. I believe that moments like these can serve as bridges—connecting different communities, perspectives, and disciplines—and can lead to meaningful future collaborations in research, curatorial practice, and education."

Lucrezia Cinella

(PhD Student from UNIMC and Blue Commission member):

"The Forum was such a refreshing opportunity to connect with brilliant people and have real, practical conversations about sustainability—way beyond the

usual academic talk. As a PhD student, it was inspiring to share ideas with peers and researchers. Speaking at the final round table really boosted my confidence and perspective."

Georgia Kapnoulla

(PhD Student from UAEGEAN and participant in the Forum):

"Participating in the Forum in Las Palmas was an exceptional experience. I felt truly welcomed in a community of individuals who demonstrated empathy, respect for diversity, and a shared commitment to environmental sustainability and volunteerism. It was deeply inspiring to see young participants, distinguished professors, and researchers working together with humility, collaboration, and passion to bring this initiative to life.

The outcome was outstanding. I gained valuable knowledge, created meaningful academic and personal connections, and was impressed by the human approach of the experts who engaged with students with authenticity and care. It was an unforgettable and empowering journey."

Niki Kasis

(Lead of ERUA Student Engagement):

"From the initial ideas to the final conference, the dedication in the Blue Commission—not only to the topic of sustainability but also to their collaboration itself—was a strong booster. We could feel this spirit during the Forum—a real encouraging example of joint action."

SPOTLIGHT ON STUDENT VOICES



Stefano Zamparo

(Speaker at the Forum representing European Youth Press and Legambiente):

“Personally, I enjoyed the combination of activities and presentations. In particular, I enjoyed the dialogue with the author of ‘Stolen Fish’. However, I was less keen on the early morning and late evening schedules, which made it difficult to attend everything. Overall, it was a valuable experience which gave me hope and left me with ideas for new projects and food for thought.”

All in all, the Forum will serve as a new platform that will consolidate students’ right to speak up and to be taken into consideration in all spheres, especially pertaining to sustainability. The event valuably contributed to networking and creating bonds among ERUA students, and we will be sure to reflect that in our future work.

Interested or have any questions?
Feel free to contact:
erua-students@europa-uni.de.



BRIDGING BORDERS:

MY SUMMER SCHOOL JOURNEY IN SOFIA

Bikash Thapa, EUV

When I boarded the plane to Sofia, Bulgaria, I expected a typical academic experience. I signed up for the ERUA Summer School in Marketing: Bridging Theory and Practice (6–7 June 2025), hosted by New Bulgarian University as a part of the international conference “The Economy of the 21st Century: Economic Innovations and Sustainable Growth.” I figured I would present my case study, attend a few sessions, and head back home. Instead, what I gained was one of the most vibrant and unforgettable experiences of my life.

From the moment I arrived, everything felt different. The energy, the people, and the openness — it all clicked instantly. Although we came from different countries across Europe, it felt like we had known each other forever. There wasn’t a need to break the ice; the friendships formed naturally. We bonded over conversations, food, music, and culture, and before I knew it, the strangers became close friends.

The week was packed with engaging sessions on marketing, but the real magic happened outside the classroom. Late-night hangouts, spontaneous laughter, shared snacks, and deep conversations under the Sofia sky made this more than

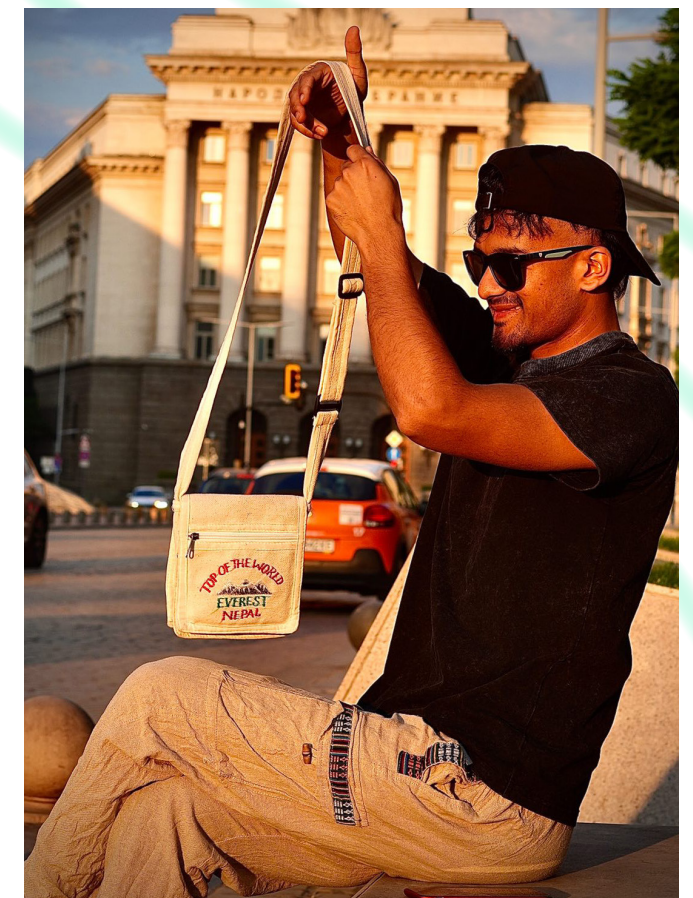
just a summer school—it became a celebration of human connection.

One of my closest connections was with a friend from Poland. She was full of life and had an infectious sense of humor. Despite preparing a wildly ambitious 73-slide presentation for a 7-minute session, she pulled it off with style and confidence. We also exchanged a bit of our cultural proclivities. I learned some Polish words like “Dzień dobry” (hello) and “Dziękuję” (thank you), and in return, I taught her Nepali words like “Dhanyabad” (thank you) and “Tapailai kasto cha?” (how are you?). Those exchanges weren’t just linguistic; they were small moments of cultural understanding that meant the world to both of us.

Then there was my Italian friend who was fascinated by the Sherpas and Everest. He told me that it was his dream to climb Mount Everest one day. That sparked a long conversation where I shared everything I knew about the mountains, the spirit of the Sherpa people, and what Everest means to Nepal. Before we said goodbye, I told him, “When you visit Nepal, reach out to me. I’ll help you make your dream a reality.”

Another touching moment was when a friend from Italy admired my traditional Nepali hat. She loved it so much that I gave it to her. Her happiness in that moment was priceless. Sharing something so personal and cultural and seeing someone truly appreciate it is a feeling that words can’t fully describe.

This week in Sofia reminded me that real learning doesn’t just happen through presentations and lectures. It happens when



Bikash Thapa having a great time in Sofia, Bulgaria

we open up to others, when we share who we are, and when we listen with curiosity.

The people I met during that week were fun, thoughtful, inspiring, and incredibly laid-back. They reminded me that connection is a powerful force—one that can turn a simple academic event into a life-changing experience.

So, here’s my call to you: When the next opportunity comes your way—whether it’s a summer school, conference, or something else—don’t just go for the résumé boost. Go for the stories, the friendships, the unexpected laughs, and the cultural exchanges. You never know—you might come back with more than knowledge. You might come back with memories that will last a lifetime.

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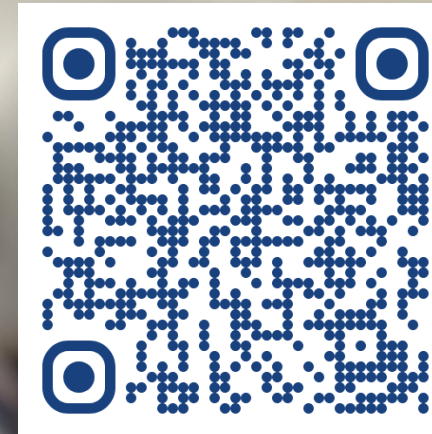
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