

Marion Draxler, MA
PR-Manager
University Communication

T +43 732 2468 3019
M +43 664 60 2468 352
marion.draxler@jku.at

PRESS BRIEFING

“Festival University – Ideas for a University of the Future”

When: Friday, 17 September, 10:00 am
Where: Ars Electronica Center, Deep Space

Christopher Sonnleitner

M + 43 664 8126 156
christopher.sonnleitner@ars-electronica.at

Your interviewees:

- **Students from the first Festival University**
 - **Chiara**, 23, from Italy, she studies Industrial Design at the University of Johannesburg
 - **Kai-Jui**, 20, from Taiwan, he studies an interdisciplinary program of Technology and Art at the National Tsing Hua University in Taiwan
 - **Merle**, 23, from Germany, she studies at the European University Viadrina in Frankfurt Oder
 - **Nathan**, 22, from France, he studies Industrial Design at the Technical University in Eindhoven
- **Univ.-Prof. Dr. Meinhard Lukas**, Rector of Johannes Kepler University Linz
- **Gerfried Stocker**, Artistic Director and Managing Director Ars Electronica

Students present their “Ideas for a university of the future” as part of the Festival University of JKU and Ars Electronica

What should learning and teaching look like at a “university of the future”? This question is being intensively discussed in connection with the founding of a new technical university in Upper Austria. Students at the first Festival University organized by Johannes Kepler University Linz and Ars Electronica are now presenting their ideas and visions in Deep Space at the Ars Electronica Center. The result is an authentic, international and unbiased view whose essence absolutely should flow into the design and development of a new university.

The first international Festival University, the new visionary joint project of Johannes Kepler University Linz and Ars Electronica, is a field test and prototype of a “university of the future” that impressively demonstrates the potential of establishing a new university in Upper Austria in the 21st century:

“An incredible creative force emerges when science and art embark on a journey of discovery together. That’s how JKU and Ars Electronica gave birth to the first international Festival University. Their ‘baby’ grew up over the past three weeks and gained valuable experience that absolutely should be incorporated into the design and development of the new Technical University in Upper Austria,” explains JKU Rector Meinhard Lukas.

He adds: *“From 230 applicants, we have selected 100 students from 40 countries for the Festival University. Their professional backgrounds are diverse and range from social and natural sciences to art, business, law and technology. Guided by internationally renowned scientists, artists and managers, they experienced an exciting and innovative program over the past three weeks that transcended disciplinary boundaries and united new technologies, science and art with the major social issues of our time.”*

Gerfried Stocker, Ars Electronica’s Artistic Director, is equally enthusiastic about the first Festival University: *“The last three weeks have been very exciting, not least because the outcome of a pilot project like the Festival University can be neither planned nor predicted. But that’s precisely the point. You can philosophize about the university of the 21st century, you can consult experts and look at best practice examples – and you should undoubtedly do so. But all of this is no substitute for a field test like the one we did. The Festival University was a successful attempt to not only talk about contemporary learning and teaching with young ambitious people from all over the world, but to rehearse contemporary learning and teaching: Not just at a university, but in and around a festival of art, technology and society. Not just in a lecture hall, but in an industrial plant like voestalpine, a spiritual place like St. Florian Abbey and a memorial site like Mauthausen concentration camp. And not just with professors from their own discipline, but with artists, designers and activists. How much the students take away from this is clear from their great results.”*

Thinking outside the box together

The Festival University scholarship holders come from countries such as Guatemala, Vietnam, Montenegro, Japan, Egypt, Austria, Germany and the USA and are studying art, technology, social or natural sciences, business or law. Under the motto “Transform your world,” they have been developing strategies and tools to effectively initiate change since August 30 in hands-on workshops, interactive talks and exciting lectures on six key topics (one group is working online on “Investigative Journalism,” the other five groups are working on site in Linz on the topics “Autonomous Vehicles,” “Circular Economy,” “Creative Robotics,” “Drones & Swarm Behavior” and “Transforming the Body”). They will be guided by internationally renowned scientists, artists and managers, such as

Josef Penninger, Kilian Kleinschmidt, Joseph Herscher and JKU professors Elke Schüzler and Cristina Olaverri-Monreal.

The Festival University's ambitious program takes advantage of JKU's expertise and spatial resources and Ars Electronica's international network — and combines that with the opportunities in Linz and the surrounding area. Participants will visit voestalpine Stahlwelt, St. Florian Abbey and the Mauthausen concentration camp memorial.

Today, September 17, the students present their results and provide insight into three eventful weeks:

“There were overwhelming and inspiring personal moments and encounters at Festival University. It was really good after a period of distance learning,” says Nathan, 22, from France, who is studying industrial design at Eindhoven University of Technology.

And Merle, 23, from Germany, studying at the Europa Universität Viadrina in Frankfurt Oder, adds, “For us to be effective in driving change and progress, we need to engage in dialogue — it takes different opinions and views. All of that was possible at Festival University and it was very exciting for me.”

Architects of the “University of the Future”

What makes a university attractive in the 21st century and what does it stand for? What do students miss at the universities where they are educated today, what would they design differently if they could? During a day-long workshop, the participants of the Festival University outlined what they consider to be the most important characteristics of a “university of the future.”

One phrase that comes up is: “It doesn't matter what a person learns, but what they do with the knowledge.” The students believe that the “university of the future” must always be mindful of society as a whole. New technologies and achievements must not be an end in themselves, but must be considered in the context of their social, economic, health and legal framework and consequences.

In addition, the “university of the future” is to be built on this foundation:

Diversity at all levels

Students clearly want a colorful and diverse university that focuses on learning with and from each other. Diversity is a preference — students and faculty should come from different age groups, cultures and regions.

Professors are (also) mentors

Teachers should see the person behind the student ID number and accompany and support students, not only professionally but also personally. In addition to an academic career, professors should also have practical experience and bring this into the classroom.

Chiara, 23, from Italy, studying industrial design at the University of Johannesburg says, “We are passionate students, so we need passionate professors who not only understand but really live what they do with all their senses.” She continues, “Especially with a new university, there need to be real open feedback channels. Students and professors need to learn with and from each other.”

Breaking down disciplinary boundaries

Interdisciplinarity is high on the agenda. Biology and art, technology and literature or robotics and dance — none of these should be a contradiction. On the contrary, the “University of the Future” not only facilitates dialog, but also promotes liaison between the disciplines. It’s about creating, discovering and researching together — interdisciplinary curricula and projects are a fixed part of the studies.

Kai-Jui, 20, who studies an Interdisciplinary Program in Technology and Arts at National Tsing Hua University in Taiwan comments, “Connecting diverse people and an interdisciplinary approach are important building blocks for me in creating a new university.”

Participation and scope for design

Young people want to actively shape their studies, so they want corresponding flexibility and individuality in the curricula. This requires a choice between online and offline courses, native-language courses, or part-time studies.

Transparency

Students want a university on an equal footing, and transparency is important to them. On the one hand, this means transparent selection procedures and grading. On the other hand, they would like to see disclosure of the structure and financing — especially in the area of project funding.

It's about more than technical expertise

The “university of the future” should not be an academic bubble. It should prepare students holistically for (professional) life and therefore not only educate them professionally, but also let them mature personally. To this end, on the one hand, students want courses that equip them with important soft skills (e.g. how to deal with stress, resilience, etc.). On the other hand, they also expect hands-on workshops or mandatory professional internships.

Climate neutrality counts

The ecological footprint of the “university of the future” is important to students. They want a university that is actively committed to sustainability and climate projects and also lives those commitments out on the campus.

A summary

*“Linz has all the prerequisites to become an international center of the digital renaissance - the new TU Upper Austria can be a launch vehicle for this. To make it a reality, policymakers must have the courage to break with conventions. Interdisciplinarity and internationality must become lived cornerstones of the new university. Only in this way will we give young people the tools and skills with which they can grasp our world in its complexity and thus effectively meet the challenges of our time. Created out of the pioneering spirit of JKU and Ars Electronica, the Festival University has shown as a field test how this can succeed,” says **Rector Lukas**.*

Gerfried Stocker continues: *“If we were to reinvent ‘school’ here and now, the result would probably not have much in common with the system that dates back to Maria Theresa’s reforms of 1774. If we want to found a university of the 21st century here and now, it cannot be ‘more of the same’ either, but must inevitably follow a different and new way of thinking. With our Festival University we wanted to address those who bring exactly this thinking with them — young people between 16 and 24 from all over the world who*

want to make a difference. What they have been testing, discussing and developing over the past three weeks, inspired by artists, researchers, designers and activists, is not a concept, an organizational chart or a curriculum for a 21st century university. It is a guide to how we need to conceive and establish learning and teaching at such a university in order to advance our knowledge society.”

Festival University facts

- The Festival University is an international hybrid summer university, initiated by JKU und Ars Electronica.
- **Time frame:** 30 August to 17 September 2021
- **Place:** The first week took place online, the second and third week took place in person at the campus of the Johannes Kepler University Linz.
- **Participants:**
 - **100** school pupils and students between the ages of 16 and 29 years from **40** countries around the world, including Egypt, Guatemala, Germany, Vietnam, USA, Montenegro and Austria. They received a stipend that covers travel expenses, room and board.
 - A total of **230** pupils and students applied for these 100 places.
 - In view of the travel restrictions imposed by Corona, individual participants were also able to participate entirely digitally.
- **Program:**
 - At the heart of the Festival University is the question of how students can overcome global challenges and initiate change. Each week had a different motto: Week 1 - Questioning our thinking, Week 2 - Expanding your horizons, Week 3 - Shaping the future together.
 - Hands-on workshops, interactive talks and exciting lectures with international experts, artists, scientists and managers (e.g. Josef Penninger, Elke Schüßler, Joi Ito, Panashe Chigumadzi, Joseph Herscher, Stefano Rossetti, Adam El Rafey, Cristina Olaverri-Monreal or Kilian Kleinschmidt) educate students about new technologies and innovative (communication) tools and inspire the participants to transcend the borders of academic disciplines.
 - The program is rounded off by excursions and outings in and around Linz, such as to voestalpine, the Mauthausen concentration camp memorial and St. Florian Abbey.
 - Details: <https://www.jku.at/festival-university>
- **Financing:** The Festival University's program is supported by the Federal Ministry for Education, Science and Research as well as the State of Upper Austria with a generous grant of 440,000 euros.
- **Covid-19 Safety precautions:** The Festival University is conducted in accordance with the COVID-19 guidelines of the Austrian Federal Government. In addition, all individuals involved will be tested on a regular basis, even if they have been fully immunized or vaccinated. Testing facilities are either located on site or appropriate testing kits are provided free of charge. Likewise, attention is paid to spacing and disinfectants and protective gear is available for all participants.