

At KU Leuven, a new research group called Transform was recently established. Administratively and organizationally, it is part of the Department of Sociology within the Faculty of Social Sciences, but in terms of its composition and approach, it breaks through the traditional boundaries between the social sciences and the natural and technical sciences.

Transform stands for 'Transdisciplinary Research for Advancing Next-generation Societal innovation Fostering Opportunities for Responsible and Meaningful change.' "We bring together different disciplines and types of knowledge to understand, shape, and guide transformative processes in key societal domains such as health and care, employment, work organization, urban development, and community-based practice," says Professor Dr. Geert Van Hootegeem, who leads the research group. "Our team includes six professors from the Faculty of Social Sciences and around forty staff members, including twelve postdoctoral researchers."



Prof. Dr. Geert Van Hootegeem, who leads the research group - © KU Leuven, Faculty of Social Sciences

Multidisciplinary Collaboration

"The six professors are all specialists in work organization, healthcare and welfare, or societal issues. The rest of the team is not limited to sociologists. We also work with physicians and engineers from various countries. Together, we pioneer new ways of thinking, learning, and being within the material, digital, and imagined worlds we inhabit. We use creative, qualitative, and mixed-method research approaches, drawing from a range of fields including design, urban sociology, and healthcare."



The Faculty of Social Sciences building at KU Leuven, featuring a poem by Paul Van Ostaijen on its façade. © KU Leuven, Faculty of Social Sciences

Sustainable collective future

“Our research centre focuses on the social dimensions of innovation in the life sciences, with a specific emphasis on emerging biotechnologies, data-driven medicine, and innovative care models.” Transform not only investigates the characteristics of societal changes but also actively seeks to guide those changes in positive directions. “We aim to develop advanced theories and methodologies to study, facilitate, and shape societal transitions—both globally and locally. We help shape the collective future. Our goal is to create pathways for innovation and change that support a society that is healthy, inclusive, and sustainable, and that values well-being, justice, and quality of life,” Van Hootegeem explains.

Care Sector Pilot Projects

“For example, the Flemish government asked us to develop a future vision for long-term care. This research spans the industrial, knowledge, and care sectors. Over a four-year period, we are organizing fifteen pilot projects focused on cross-sector collaboration. The current system—with its various subsectors and operational standards—results in significant inefficiencies and bottlenecks, especially at the intersections between sectors. By breaking down these silos, we aim to address these challenges.”



The Transform research group regularly collaborates with the business sector. © KU Leuven, Faculty of Social Sciences

About Geert Van Hootegeem

Geert Van Hootegeem holds a PhD in Sociology from KU Leuven, where he defended his dissertation *The Bearable Slowness of Management* in 1999. A specialist in work and organization, he has long been active at the intersection of research and social innovation. Remarkably, he was once the youngest certified nature guide in Belgium and also earned credentials while affiliated with Radboud University Nijmegen.

Until 2022, he served as General Director of the Higher Institute of Labour Studies (HIVA) at KU Leuven. His academic work has been widely recognized, receiving awards such as the triennial Humanities Prize and the prestigious Francqui Chair. His research focuses on organizational structures and strategies and their broader societal impact. The role of automation in shaping work and organizational change is a central and consistent thread in his work.

**TRANSFORM (OG)**

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