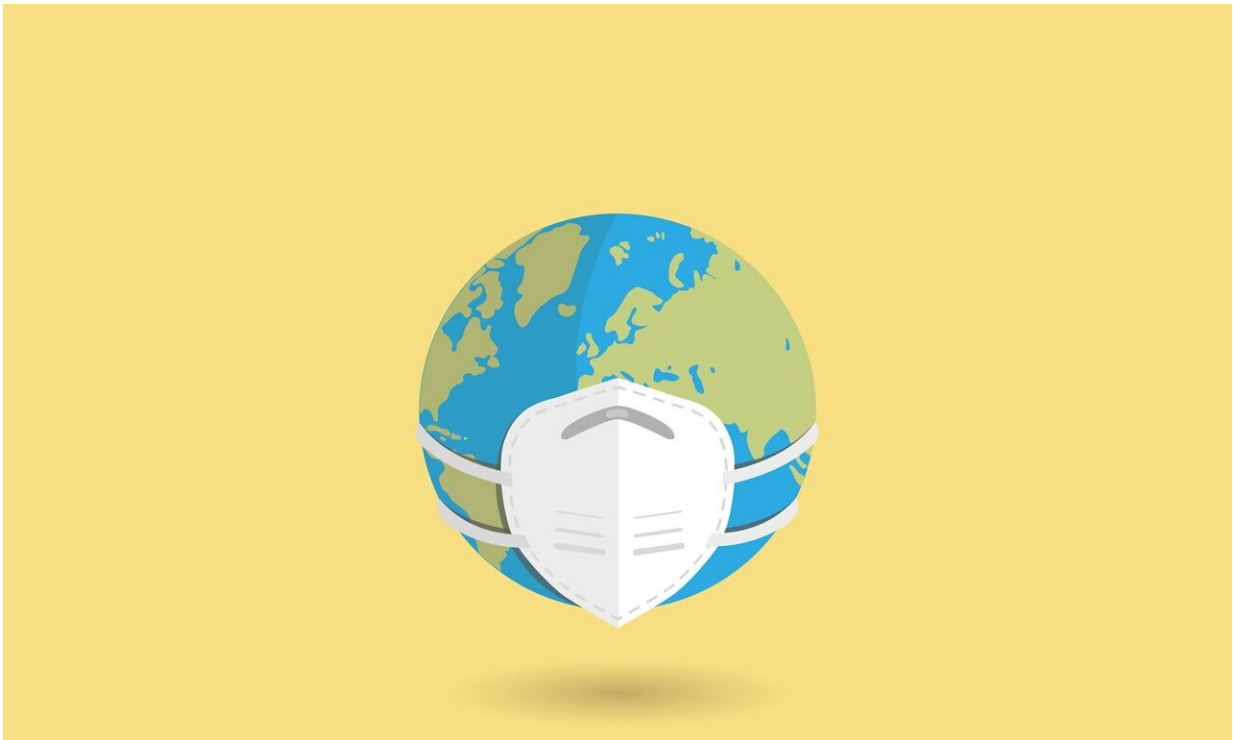


Dutch outdoor classes avoid coronavirus 'digital misery'

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A Dutch university is holding open-air classes in parks, public squares and parking lots to limit the number of lectures taking place online because of the coronavirus pandemic.

At the foot of a majestic church in the historic centre of the city of

Middelburg, science professor Edward Nieuwenhuis demonstrates an experiment on a bench in front of 25 students bundled up in jackets.

With a noisy street-cleaning lorry in the background, and a group of tourists nearby, Nieuwenhuis has to raise his voice so the students from University College Roosevelt can hear.

It's the first time he's given his introduction to life sciences outdoors since the university returned from a shutdown because of the spread of COVID-19. Until now classes have been half in person, and half working from home.

"I think it's really great because you can move around, you can see each other without a screen and digital interfaces, so it's wonderful. I really like it," Nieuwenhuis told AFP.

"It's more relaxed, it feels like you're not in class, you're just learning because you want to."

The Netherlands, which has recorded more than 75,000 [coronavirus](#) cases and 6,244 deaths, has lighter restrictions than many other European countries but the government has warned people to be careful after a recent resurgence.

Nowadays in Middelburg, it's not uncommon to see a philosophy professor under a tree discussing Socrates or a history teacher by a car park talking about the fall of the Berlin Wall.

Nieuwenhuis said [outdoor learning](#) could be the future.

"I hope that it will stick even when corona disappears. I'm sure that we will give a lot of classes outside," he said.

'Inspiring and fun'

Students at the university, where around 60 percent of students are from countries outside the Netherlands, are also enjoying the fresh air.

"I really like the feeling of being outside. And just knowing that you can keep enough distance, which you just can't do in a classroom," said Anje Boswijk, a 21-year-old Dutch [student](#).

"Whenever I'm following a lesson online, I get more distracted, and I get less motivated to pay attention."

Ediz Klont, 18, a Dutch-Turkish-American student who wants to be a surgeon, said the outdoor classes were "very engaging".

"After many months of quarantine and online classes, this is really inspiring and fun to have classes outside," Klont said.

"Outside, we have more [social interaction](#), so people feel happier, like me, I'm very happy when I see people next to me," he added.

'Bring an extra sweater'

The only hitch in the plan is the Dutch weather. The low-lying country bordering the North Sea has a famously windy and rainy climate that can quickly ruin plans for any outdoor gathering.

But in a country where people love to tell anyone complaining about the rain that "you're not made of sugar", attitudes are practical.

"Today it was a little bit cold to be outside. But if you come prepared for that and just bring an extra sweater. For the next time, I'll be better

prepared. But it was really doable," said Anje Boswijk.

"I think that as long as it doesn't rain, it should be ok. Everybody should just bring enough layers. We can all bring umbrellas."

Nieuwenhuis, the teacher, even pictures camp fires and blankets for when winter sets in.

And after months of enduring "eternal problems" with online classes "this is nothing", he adds.

"Compared to the digital misery that we are in, this is really wonderful," said Nieuwenhuis.

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