



# TAM ALUMNI NEWSLETTER 2022 EDITION



## Featured Faculty Member



We recently asked Professor Urban Strandberg of the University of Gothenburg in Sweden to talk to us about his work with the International Youth Think Tank (IYTT) he founded and his work with the TAM students at the University of Gothenburg. This interview took place over Zoom and was later transcribed and edited for publication.

Urban is an Associate Professor of Political Science and Director of several double-degree Master's Programs at the University of Gothenburg. He founded IYTT in 2019. Described as a think tank that "promotes the values of an open society," IYTT gives young people from around the globe the chance to investigate and learn about democracy's value. Please read more about this think tank here: [iythinktank.com/](http://iythinktank.com/)

*Tell me your impressions of TAM students and the program.*

I was so happy that we could start this collaboration from the outset because TAM and the Center for European Studies are, for me, the best institutions for European Studies in the US along with the overseas partners affiliated with the program. As a result, the TAM students understand the program's high caliber. They are clever and well-educated, but they also have a particular spirit. They are more world-changers than pure careerists. They want to do good. They will not hesitate to go overseas. They know that they need to expand their knowledge and make new acquaintances, and they know that the world is not in one country. The world is spread out, and they want to discover that because that is the only way to change the world. The Gothenburg students are the same type of people. So, the collaboration makes very good sense.

*In your opinion, why should people study the EU and the transatlantic relationship right now?*

The EU and North America have a long-standing bond – politically, economically, culturally, socially. The transatlantic link and relations are always a crucial thing in itself, but that also has consequences for the world. Things are now changing. China is gaining confidence in economic and political and military power. Russia is trying to be more powerful. Climate change is something that is common to everybody. The tackling of authoritarianism and nationalism is something which is also a global phenomenon. The cultural-political-economic axis between the EU and North America, which TAM is embodying and studying and trying to do something about, is more important than ever. This is a key relationship in the times in which we are living.

*What do you see as IYTT's relationship to TAM?*

The most important relationship involves the young people – be they students in TAM and at the same time Youth Fellows in the think tank. These are people who are dedicated to being educated very far away from home. They are convinced that academic knowledge is important for the world. The think tank, run as it is by young people, but as every good think tank, firmly embedded in an academic perspective and the research method, it makes so much sense that the same, very driven students, who also want to contribute and make a difference in the world, that they come to the think tanks. You are studying for a degree, but you are going to a think tank to change the world. Because the students have this particular attitude of being both dedicated and world-changers, that is the common denominator between TAM and IYTT. As the Managing Director, I could not think of a better way of recruiting participants who are high caliber individuals who are nice people. We need nice people in the think tank. We have already had several very brilliant Youth Fellows who have been TAM students.

*How are young people doing today? How do you perceive them?*

I think they are doing much better than we think. The young people that I meet are doing much better than we think and possibly much better than other young people. This is not an average category. They are not in numbers the dominant category in their age cohort. They are very decisive in taking in and understanding what we, as adults, see as very huge challenges – nationalism, racism, migration, climate change. We are overwhelmed, but they are capable of bringing the hugeness down into manageable pieces. These students and Youth Fellows are capable of giving a stringent analysis of things and not getting stuck or overwhelmed by the problems or long descriptions of the challenges. They take one small step at a time. If you do that, you can handle big challenges. Take the example from the first IYTT conference – the youth-tank participants, individuals in their early twenties, were discussing nationalism and racism and why adults in their 50s or older would turn to political movements that are highly racist, nationalist and xenophobic. They were saying that these people feel as though they left behind, and they are left behind economically and otherwise. The conference participants noted that many of these individuals need to have a restart in life. We need to redraft the structures of society. We need to give these older people a new chance for education. Maybe we need to change the requirements for university enrollment, maybe it requires different economic incentives.

That was the really hands-on and touching thing – that they who are so young not only were thinking about their own education but thinking about people who are at least 30 years older and understanding that age group's predicaments, understanding the relationship between such a predicament and the political action that some of us would only condemn. We would just be so angry with people going to the nationalist, racist, xenophobic parties; but our youth fellows would do the analysis; they would bring it down. "Well, we would need to help them. We would need to help them restart because that is how we will keep up their trust in a decent democratic society."

*Is there any question that you wish I asked you but didn't?*

The question would be: Why is TAM and the Center for European Studies such a great thing? It is because we are embodying the goal of being ambitious, having high academic standards but at the same time remaining nice, humble and warm-spirited. That is fabulous because that is how you bring the best out of people. I don't like people with sharp elbows, doing harm to others because they want to be so quickly-moving forward in life. That is not my way, and I don't think it brings the best out of everybody. So, being nice and being really good humans and good to one another in combination with having very high ambition is the thing I see in CES and TAM, and that is the thing we are trying to do in the think tank as well.