

Resource

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150 new species
in Chile

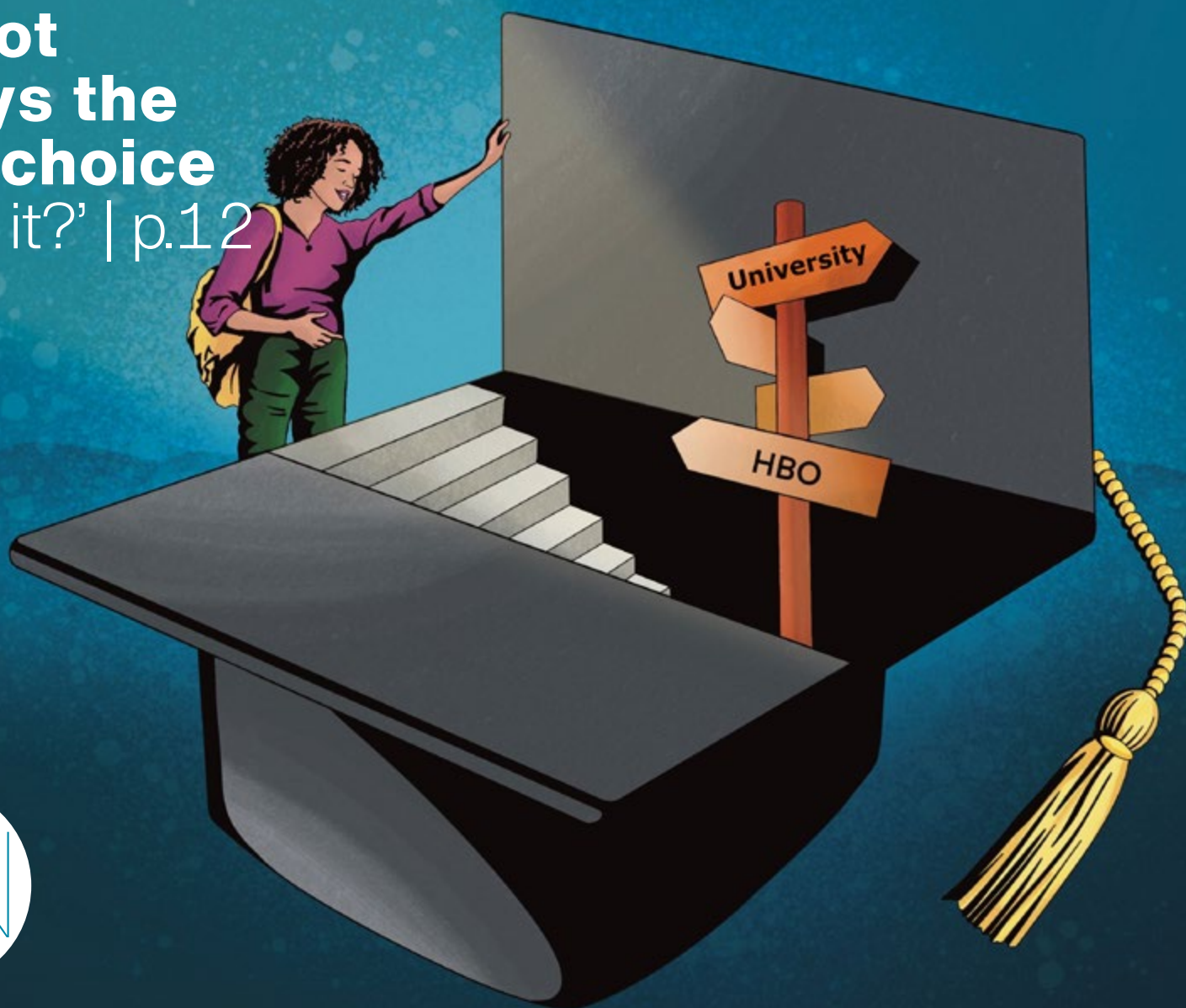
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FOREWORD

Words

If you allow oppression, you are partly responsible for it. I think we can all agree on that. At any rate the 300 demonstrators – mainly students but with some staff – in the 'walkout' on Monday who marched around campus to protest against the violence in Gaza (see page 3). They wanted everyone on campus to hear their message. It reminded me of the opening of the book *A Man* by Oriana Fallaci, in which thousands of people march through Athens like 'a growing octopus' with their fists in the air during the funeral of the murdered poet and resistance fighter Alexander Panagoulis. That protest stayed peaceful. As did the protest on campus, in the typical Wageningen style. But the polarization surrounding this war is clearer than ever. Polarization plays a big role in the farming debate too. For years, the discussions about organic versus mainstream agriculture have been heated, but in the feature article on page 22, Wijnand Sukkel and Gerard Migchels argue that this polarization is actually declining. I also recommend you read Jeroen Candel's opinion piece on how WUR is becoming a corporate university. While it might not be his article's core message, he also makes the case that words matter. They can be the starting point for a new vision on what our university stands for.

Willem Andréé
Editor-in-chief





PROTEST MARCH

Last Monday morning, about 300 students and staff took part in a 'walkout' to protest against the violence in Gaza. Starting outside the Forum, they marched around the campus loudly chanting slogans. The campaigners criticized the Executive Board's refusal to break WUR's links with Israeli universities: 'We have had petitions and several protests since last November, but there doesn't seem to be any moral awareness. We will keep going after this walkout. This isn't the end!' ^{ME}

Photo Guy Ackermans

‘Parallel courses’ workgroup set up

A ‘parallel course’ is a course that recurs throughout the degree programme. This approach is ideal for tackling personal development or skills training across the years of a university degree. But arranging such parallel courses is not easy. Now a workgroup will consider how to improve the situation.

Various degree programmes already include parallel courses, says Marine Sciences programme director Karen Fortuin. ‘We have the Boundary Crossing & Personal Leadership course, which starts in teaching period 2. This course lets students build up a portfolio during

the programme on who they are and what direction they want to take in this domain.’

But parallel courses are difficult to arrange within the WUR system for various reasons, explains Fortuin. ‘One issue is timetabling. Another is credits: when should students get credits for a course that recurs several times across three years and is closely intertwined with other courses?’

Tutors

The remuneration for tutors is also complex, says Fortuin. ‘You can’t book tutors for three years. So we now ask them

whether they are willing to be available for one whole year at any rate.’

A report was produced on parallel courses a few years ago, says Fortuin. ‘At the time, the Board of Education was very enthusiastic about the benefits of parallel courses and the report’s recommendations. But no steps were taken after that. That is why I sent a letter to the Board of Education on behalf of various programme directors who are struggling with the implementation of parallel courses. The board has now set up a workgroup to see how things could be improved.’ ^{LZ}

Marijkeweg student complex ready in September

The new student complex M20 will have 210 student rooms with shared facilities and 140 studio flats. It is being built on the former site of Vakschool Wageningen, which has moved to the opposite side of the road.

M20 is a collaborative project between student accommodation providers Idealis and DUWO, says Idealis director Bart van As. ‘DUWO is the client for the construction and we will be in charge of letting and managing the building.’ The studios have a floor area of 24 m², and the student rooms 18 m². The complex will also have two large communal rooms, an enclosed garden, a laundrette and bicycle storage. The complex will be heated and cooled by a ground source

heat pump and electricity will be generated by solar panels on the roof.

The ratio of ‘non-independent units’ (student rooms with shared facilities, i.e. with flatmates) to ‘independent units’ (studio flats with their own kitchen, bathroom and toilet) is 60:40, says Van As. ‘Surveys show us about 50 per cent of students prefer independent accommodation and 50 per cent want to live with flatmates. But we think having flatmates is good for student welfare. People need social connections and a lively atmosphere. So that’s why we have this ratio.’

Idealis made this agreement with the municipality. Van As: ‘Other property developers have to stick to it too if they want to build accommodation



M20 under construction. ♦ Photo Resource

for students in Wageningen. That way, we and the municipality avoid a situation where developers only build expensive studio flats that they let for high rents because the tenants get housing benefit anyway.’

The rooms will become avail-

able on ROOM at least one month before completion. ^{LZ}

2600

Student Council elections are back

Last year, the Student Council elections didn't go ahead as only 11 candidates were standing for the 12 seats on the Student Council. A 12th candidate was found eventually, but there was no need for an election. This year there are more than 12 candidates so the elections will take place. Wijnand Fredriks, current chair of the Student Council: 'All three parties have submitted lists of candidates, which have been verified. There will now be an election.' Fredriks explains that the Council lets students have a say in the university's decision-making. 'As a student, what do you think is important for the university and which candidate is best able to represent your interests?' The three parties are VeSte, S&I and CSF. The election will be held from 27 to 30 May. LZ

Students in higher education will pay tuition fees of 2600 euros from September 2025, almost 300 euros more than at present.

The fees are going up in line with inflation.

Groceries, clothes and cafe visits have become more expensive, so now the tuition fees are rising too — with a slight lag. Students currently pay 2314 euros, and that will increase to 2530 euros next academic year.

The big increases are due to the soaring inflation caused by the war in Ukraine. HOP

◆ MARINE SCIENCES GETS STUDY ASSOCIATION

The new Marine Sciences Bachelor's, which started last September, is now getting its own study association, called Minoa.

Minoa is currently a subgroup of Biologica, the Biology study association. Joost Bouwman (20), a Marine Sciences student and member of Minoa's first board with responsibility for internal affairs: 'Our first event was last Monday, when we presented our logo and had a sociable drinks do.'

Minoa refers to an ancient European civilization that focused entirely on overseas trade, including with Crete and Sicily, says Bouwman. 'All Marine Sciences students were able to vote for their favourite name. Other options were

Thalassa, a sea goddess from Ancient Greek mythology, and Nemo, from the Disney film *Finding Nemo*.'

Bouwman started as a student at Wageningen studying Soil, Water, Atmosphere. 'So I knew its study association Pyrus. When I switched to Marine Sciences in September, I missed having something like that. When the idea of starting Minoa came up, I immediately applied to be on the board.'

Aquarius

A lot is involved in starting a new study association, says Bouwman. 'Fortunately Biologica helped us. That is why we are officially a kind of sub-association of theirs at the moment, but we are really just the Marine Sciences study



'All Marine Sciences students were able to vote for their favourite name'

association.' Incidentally, there is already a study association — Aquarius — for the MSc in Aquaculture and Marine Resource Management that follows the Marine Sciences BSc. 'It is a

sub-association of Veetelers, the study association for the Animal Sciences,' says Bouwman. 'But there was no room for us for some reason.' There is a chance that Minoa and Aquarius will merge in the future to form one study association for both Bachelor's and Master's students. 'That would indeed be logical,' says Bouwman. LZ

Tile for TOTY

Birgit Boogaard

WUR lecturer Birgit Boogaard was the nationwide Teacher of the Year last year. To celebrate this, on 21 May she will get a tile in the Campus Walk of Fame. There will also be a video artwork on display in the library.

The tile celebrating Teacher of the Year (TOTY) Boogaard has a quote from the South African philosophy professor Mogobe Ramose: 'Education for liberation is the direst need of our time.' Ramose is one of the sources of inspiration for Boogaard, for example in her African Philosophy course. He will be there in person when Boogaard's tile is laid outside Impulse.

In addition, the video artwork I M U, which also features Professor Ramose, will be on display in the library from 21 May. The artwork was created by the video artist Juul van der Laan. It consists of a kind of box that provides reflections, literally and metaphorically, by means of a mirror and AI. That results in a 12-minute video experience where the content is different for each viewer. 'You should definitely try it out!' says Boogaard. ME



Fun way to end your Master's

'Help, my community is starving!' There were plenty of such cries during the concluding stage of the Redesigning Global Farming and Food Systems Master's course, in which eight 'serious games' developed by the students were played. Despite the relaxed atmosphere at the tables, people were fully aware these games were based on real-life situations.

The course, coordinated by Federico Andreotti and Hannah van Zanten, teaches students how to develop serious games that can help in the design of complex agricultural and food systems. The results were on show in Plus Ultra II at the start of May. Eight tables were set up with games on the topic of how to allocate scarce resources – water, food, control. The players had to overcome realistic obstacles, from natural disasters to a lack of money, and from the abuse of power by other players to discontent within the community.

According to the jury, the most successful game was Swiftville, based on the SWIFT project (Supporting Women-Led Innovations in Farming and Rural Territories) on gender equality in agriculture, led by Jessica Duncan. 'Serious games are particularly well suited to a transdisciplinary approach,' says Andreotti. As the coordinator of the WUR Games Hub, he is only too happy to tell people more about the use of serious games in education and research. ME • Photo Resource

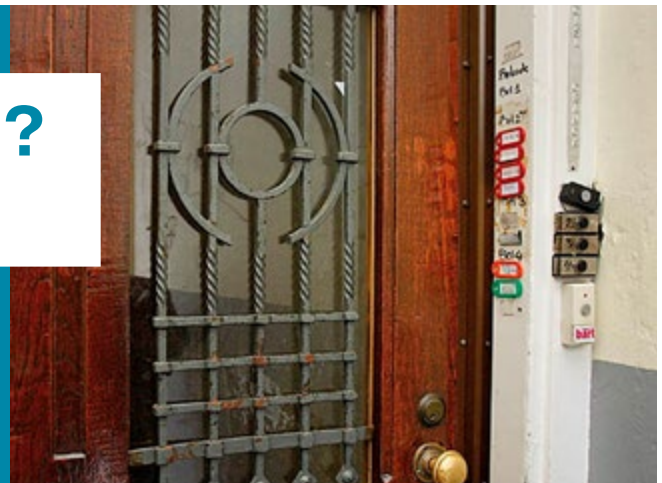
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Resource



NMR on the cheap

NMR spectroscopy uses nuclear magnetic resonance, the same principle as an MRI scan. NMR spectra reveal the structure of a molecule. This currently requires extremely expensive equipment, but Sander Baas shows it can be done a lot cheaper. Text Roelof Kleis

Baas got his PhD in early May for his thesis entitled *DIY NMR*, in which he shows you can build an NMR spectrometer using everyday materials. According to Baas, the materials for his prototype cost 1500 to 2000 euros, which is a lot less than the million euros for the 'real thing' in the lab. Baas: 'Plus you have to pour in several thousand euros worth of liquid helium every four months to keep the magnet cool.'

It is precisely the magnet that makes NMR spectrometers so expensive. The NMR signal is obtained by putting a substance in a very strong magnetic field and subjecting it to pulses of radio waves. The signal emitted by the substance contains information about its molecular structure. That signal is weak but can be enhanced by using stronger magnets. 'A rather crude method,' says Baas. 'It works, but it's incredibly expensive.'

Tiny coils

Baas takes a totally different approach. First, he has gone for miniaturization of the probe, the coil that contains the sample as well as emitting the radio pulses and picking up the returning signal. 'If you make that coil smaller, the voltage of the pulse it emits (and receives) per unit volume increases. So a smaller coil increases the sensitivity of the detection.' And a smaller coil also means you need less of the substance in question. Baas: 'In a normal NMR measurement, you have a tube with a diameter of 5 millimetres and a volume of half a millilitre. I use tubes with diameters of 0.3 to 0.8 millimetres and volumes of 40 nanolitres to



The NMR spectrometer stands in a metal cage in the lab to protect it from interfering FM radio waves. Researcher Sander Baas, the designer of the instrument, explains, 'The NMR radio pulses are at around 90 MHz, and FM radio broadcasts at 87-108 MHz. That's why we have this Faraday cage.' ♦ Photo Guy Ackermans

0.5 microlitres. That difference is a factor of between 1000 and 10,000.' In fact, the coils Baas uses can barely be seen with the naked eye.

Dye

In addition to scaling down the probe, Baas used hyperpolarization to increase the strength of the NMR signal. He added a dye to the sample. The light falling on the sample then puts the dye in an 'excited' state, making it interact with the sample, which makes the NMR signal stronger. 'You can amplify the signal by a

factor of up to 1000 this way.'

Thanks to the miniaturization and hyperpolarization, the instrument Baas designed doesn't need such a strong magnet. He has called his device an LF NMR, where LF stands for 'Low Field'. It is not yet as sensitive as the standard, expensive apparatus, but Baas is working on that. 'Anyway, you don't always need really sharp spectra,' he adds. 'Certainly not for NMR practicals, for instance. It would be fun and educational for students if they were given a kit to build such an instrument.'

[Live&Learn]

A botched experiment, a rejected paper: such things are soon labelled as failures in academia. As for talking about them – not done! But that is just what WUR scientists do in this column. Because failure has its uses. This time, we hear from Climate programme leader **Tim van Hattum.**

Text Nicole van 't Wout Hofland • Illustration Stijn Schreven

'A few years ago, I gave a presentation about climate-proof cities at a climate adaptation conference in South Africa. The country was suffering from severe drought, so it was extra relevant. I had seven minutes for my presentation. As 200 people lapped up my story, suddenly one of the organizers held up a sign saying "four minutes left". I jumped out of my skin. My heart started racing and I broke out in a sweat. I was only halfway through my introduction and I still had so much to say. That sign put me off my stroke so much that I lost the thread of my story completely. Stammering and with a dry mouth, I rushed through the rest of my presentation. Every minute, the sign popped up again announcing the remaining time. Afterwards I thought: "That was the worst presentation ever." I was totally fed up, but it did teach me that short presentations are the hardest to give, and that in that situation, less is more. The previous evening I had worked for hours in my hotel room to make my presentation more comprehensive, but more comprehensive is not necessarily better. In short presentations you have to make

your core message very clear and drive it home. You leave out lots of nice details. And that takes more preparation than a long talk. Last year I faced the challenge again: a 15-minute presentation about our vision on a climate-robust and future-proof Netherlands in 2120. There were 3000 people

'Thanks to that learning moment in South Africa, last year I could give a concise, strong presentation'

attending, most of them mayors and councillors. I thought back to my flop in South Africa. I don't stick to the one-slide-per-minute rule like some other researchers, but through good preparation I now know exactly how much time I need and at which slide I am halfway through my presentation. It's a question of practice and fine-tuning. Thanks to that learning moment in South Africa, last year I *could* give a concise, convincing presentation. A clock or a warning doesn't take me by surprise anymore.'



New tool evaluates meal protein content

Assistant professor of Nutrition and Ageing Pol Grootswagers and his team have developed a tool to involve the elderly in the protein transition. 'The Alpha tool helps them come up with meals that are complete in terms of the amino acid composition.'

For each ingredient of a particular meal, the tool shows the amount of each essential amino acid you get and what percentage that is of your daily protein requirement. 'That soon shows you where there are deficiencies and where you could add protein sources,' explains Grootswagers.

'The diet of elderly people requires particular attention because muscle mass and bone density decline in old age,' says Grootswagers. 'That effect is exacerbated if they don't eat enough protein. What is more, the amino acid profile of plant-based proteins

is often less comprehensive than that of animal-based proteins. Plant-based proteins are not absorbed so well either. So you have to take all this into account if you want the elderly

The tool will help the elderly have a plant-based diet that is also healthy

to have a plant-based diet and still stay healthy.'

In the Alpha tool, users (such as dietitians, researchers and chefs) can fill in the ingredients of a dish, including the quantities. 'Then they can play around with the amounts, for example increasing the quantity of nuts, seeds or pulses, to get to the required 100 per cent. The tool works the other way round too: if a meal contributes more than 100 per cent to the amino acid requirement, you can cut down on ingredients. Reducing consumption is also a sustainable choice.'

Culinary

Eventually the Alpha tool will be able to make recommendations as well by using AI. 'That feature is still being developed. We still have to teach the algorithm what are logical combinations from a culinary perspective. At present, the algorithm makes recommendations that are ideal in terms of protein quality but don't make sense in culinary terms.' ^{DV}

WUR student finds new species in Chile

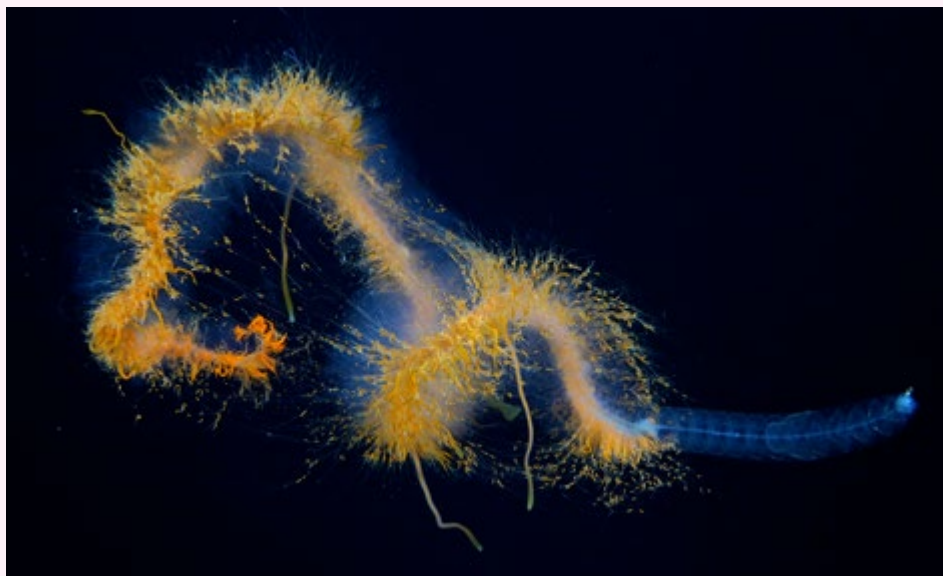
Ecology student Rosanne Dodde recently went on a deep-sea expedition to the Pacific Ocean for her Master's internship. She was part of a research team that discovered some 150 new species in the underwater mountain ridge Salas y Gómez. She is now back on dry land. She shared her experiences with us in a video call from Chile. Text Dominique Vrouwenvelder

The team discovered species ranging from deep-sea corals and glass sponges to sea urchins and amphipods. 'Mind-blowing' was how the researchers described it to the press. Dodde: 'We sailed on the Schmidt Ocean Institute's research ship Falkor Too from the coast of Chile to Rapa Nui, also known as Easter Island. That is nearly 4000 kilometres. En route, we followed the Salas y Gómez mountain ridge and performed our measurements. We were at sea for about 40 days. It was a really special experience.'

'We used a diving robot to see what life there is on the sea bed. Not much research has been done on the organisms that live around the seamounts,'

'The site our expedition explored in the Pacific had never been visited before'

says Dodde. 'All kinds of unique species live on such seamounts in the open sea. The site our expedition explored had never been visited before. We discovered underwater islands: each depth and each mountain had different species.' 'During the two expeditions our team carried out — I was on one of them —



Galaxy Siphonophore ♦ Photo Schmidt Ocean Institute

they found over 150 species that are new to science,' she explains. 'I think we could have found far more, but we had reached the diving robot's maximum capacity.'

Walking encyclopaedia

The diving robot — 'the size of a small car' — could take samples at depths of up to 4.5 kilometres. It was equipped with various gripper arms, a kind of hoover and pots in which to store the samples. 'We did shifts in the ship's control room. That was where the pilots sat who operated the robot and its arms, together with the scientists and other experts. You could actually follow the whole expedition via a dive stream — including commentary from the research ship.'

'In the control room, we logged the depths and our coordinates. Other people recorded what they saw on the screen: what species, genus or family they recognized. That meant we soon knew which sample was in which pot once the robot was brought back on board,' explains the student as she talks

about her work on board the ship. 'The experts who joined us on the expedition were walking encyclopaedias: they knew exactly what had already been spotted and could soon identify potential new species. Now we are back on dry land, we can analyse and document the collection properly.'

Dodde acknowledges that it is difficult to confirm the discovery of new species. 'You compare the specimens with information from the archives and what you already know. Sometimes it looks a lot like something that has already been documented but you see a different colour. Then it's not clear whether that is a new species or not. Species research is all about making choices.'

Scan the QR code for the expedition dive stream.



PhD theses **in a nutshell**

Rhythm of the dunes

Dune formation in the river beds of deltas influences the currents. The rougher the riverbed, the greater the resistance to the flow. Sjoukje de Lange studied the dynamics of the dunes. Those dynamics depend partly on the material they are made of: the fineness of the sediment determines the length and height of the dunes, and sediment that sticks together reduces dune formation. A faster current (due to rain coinciding with an ebb tide, for instance) leads to bigger variation in the height of the dunes. De Lange's findings will help improve hydraulic modelling. *The Rhythm of Rivers* Sjoukje de Lange ◀ Supervisor Ton Hoitink. ^{RK}

Yummy!

We eat too much fatty food and it makes us get fat. Is that because fatty foods smell nice? Matjaž Pirc from Slovenia proved experimentally that humans can indeed smell fat. We can even distinguish between milks with different amounts of fat. But this is only partially confirmed by brain scans: yes, the brain 'smells' fat, but it doesn't perceive differences in degrees of fattiness. Test subjects enjoy low-fat food if a fatty aroma is added to it. But in Pirc's experiments, that made no difference to eating behaviour. You cannot nudge consumers toward low-fat choices with a fatty aroma alone. *Stop and smell the fat!* Matjaž Pirc ◀ Supervisor Sanne Boesveldt. ^{RK}

Common liverwort

The growth hormone auxin is indispensable for the growth and development of plants. The protein ARF (auxin response factor, a transcription factor) plays a key role in this. The protein binds to specific parts of the DNA and switches off genes there that are important for growth. Juriaan Rienstra studied that binding in the common liverwort. Only six nucleotides (TGTCGG, letters from the genetic code of the DNA) are crucial for that binding. Mutations in the first four letters cause the ARF to stop binding, and the plant is then no longer viable. Those six letters are actually key not only for this moss, but for the entire plant kingdom.

Conservation of ARF-DNA binding during evolution. Juriaan Rienstra ◀ Supervisor Dolf Weijers. ^{RK}

THE PROPOSITION

PhD candidates explain the most thought-provoking proposition in their thesis. This time it's Ivonne Servin Balderas, who received her PhD on 5 March. In her study, she investigated the carbon transition as a prerequisite for a smooth and rapid energy transition.

Text Ning Fan



'Environmental science enables a healthy environment in a nonstop polluting society'

'Pollution comes in many forms in our daily consumption, from the clothes we wear to the fuel we use. But it's not just consumer choices that are to blame. Even worse are the supermarkets, which often throw away perfectly good products that are approaching their sell-by date. What a waste. Changing consumer behaviour is difficult. We can't expect people to suddenly give up the conveniences they're used to, nor can we expect supermarkets to change overnight. But we must act quickly to prevent further damage to the environment. That's why I believe that harnessing waste is the most realistic and effective approach

to a carbon-neutral society, and this can only be done with the aid of environmental science. Through environmental technologies we can capture CO₂ from the air, recover discarded food and recycle household wastewater. This offers a rapid solution to society's irreversible problems of over-consumption and waste, effectively preventing pollution and mitigating the effects of climate change.'

Wolves

We live in Zeist and my daughters often play in a playground in the middle of the woods in the Utrechtse Heuvelrug. I enjoy seeing my little girls having fun, but I can't help thinking about the news a couple of days ago that a wolf had come up to someone walking their dog there and attacked the dog.

Just to be clear: as a vet, I like pretty much all animals and I think the wolf is an impressive beast. But what I find problematic about the wolf issue is the lack of nuance in the

'We need to learn how to live alongside wolves but I can't find any WUR publication that tells us how to achieve this'

to the police after it was shot dead following a biting incident in Wapse. Meanwhile, anti-wolf groups are itching to hunt down all wolves and chase them out of the Netherlands, regardless.

Both positions are completely untenable. Whatever we do, wolves will continue to come to the Netherlands and stay here. But we are constantly being told the wolf is a shy shadow that you never actually see

debate. Animal welfare organizations reported the 'cowardly, brutal murder of a wolf'

and won't really notice. That too is rubbish. It's awful if you find mauled sheep in your field in the morning (your own livestock!) and the first reaction from some people is not 'How terrible!' but 'How can you be sure it was a wolf? And why didn't you install a proper wolf-repellent fence?' Another example. While someone was still in hospital being treated for a wolf bite (even though the Wolves in the Netherlands platform was telling us in 2018 'there is no need to fear that happening'), people were worried not about how the patient was doing but about the legal situation. The mayor was criticized for giving an exemption to allow the wolf to be shot and the farmer was criticized for attacking the wolf.

I want my daughters to still be able to play in the woods and I also want room for wolves in the woods. I keep reading 'We need to learn how to live alongside wolves' but I can't find any WUR publication that tells us how to achieve this. All the people who assume wolves will always avoid humans have apparently forgotten how we ended up with chihuahuas. I expect WUR to come up with a clear viewpoint on this issue, preferably as soon as possible.



Guido Camps

Guido Camps (40) is a vet and a researcher at Human Nutrition and OnePlanet. He also enjoys baking, beekeeping and unusual animals.

University is not always the right choice

'IS THIS IT?'

Between 10 and 15 per cent of students at the official research universities in the Netherlands would be better suited to other institutions such as one of the applied science universities, says Education minister Dijkgraaf. How are such students faring in Wageningen? And how can they find their niche more quickly? Text Luuk Zegers • Illustration Valerie Geelen



Text Luuk Zegers

As a study advisor, Lieke de Kwant (International Development Studies) sees a lot of different students. The group the minister is talking about – those on the wrong kind of degree course – can ‘roughly’ be divided into two groups, she says. ‘The first group take the programme in their stride but gradually realize they would rather train for “a vocational profession”. They often transfer at some point to a HBO [applied sciences, ed.] degree course.’

Then there are the strugglers. She worries more about that group. ‘As a study advisor, I sometimes see students who only just pass their first year, but after that get maybe 30 to 60 study points per year. Then you are still ploughing your

way through second-year courses when students who started the same year as you might have finished their Master’s already and have a job. That affects your mental health.’

Exhaustion

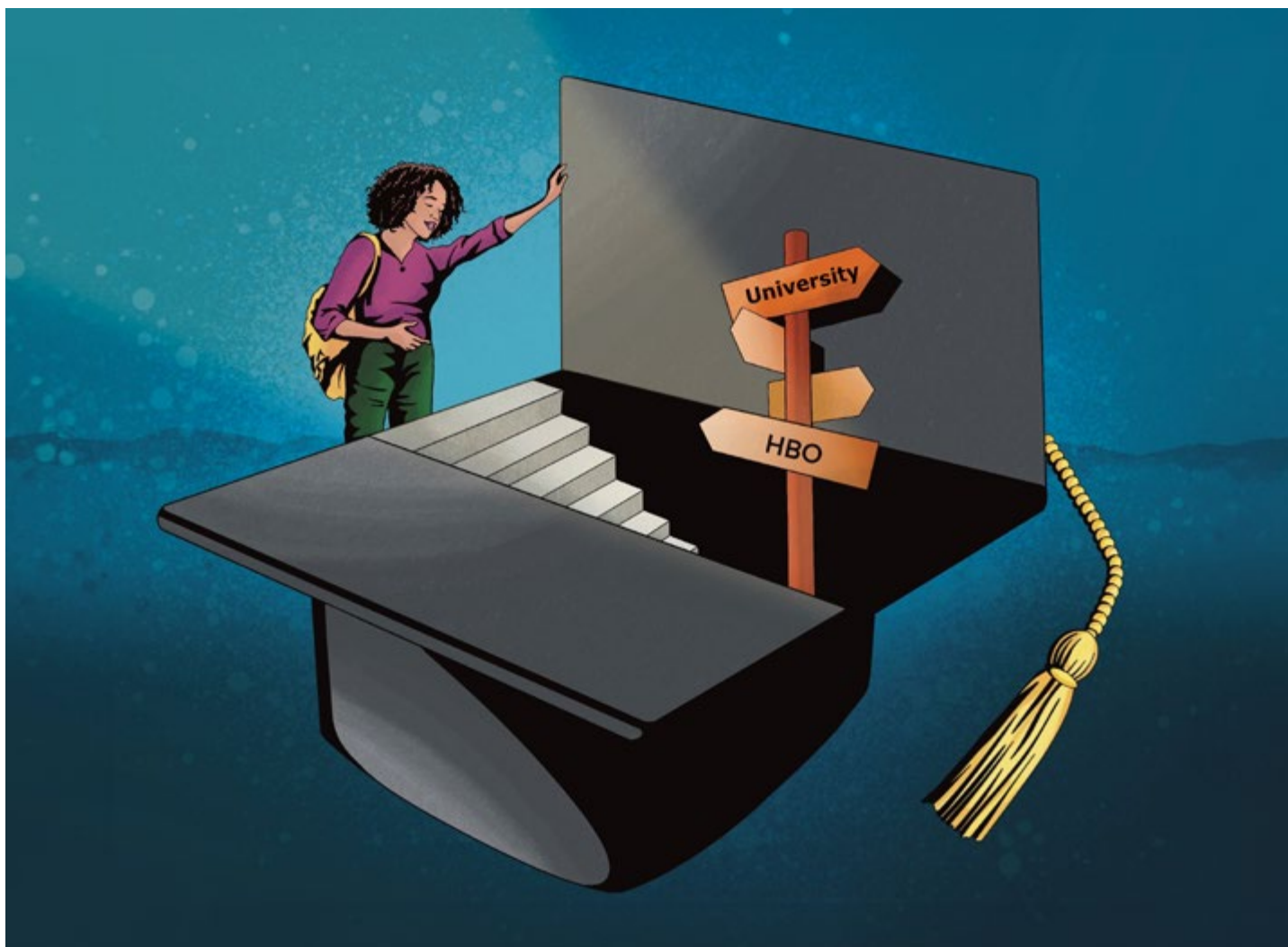
These students often put themselves under tremendous pressure, says De Kwant. ‘Struggling students think they ought to be able to reach “the standard”. As though you are a failure as a human being if you don’t get an academic

degree.’ The further these students get with their degree, the louder the internal voice that says they must finish it. ‘Even if they have only got half the study points after three years. Struggling like that can totally exhaust you.’

De Kwant wants to impress upon struggling students that there are many roads to Rome. ‘I know the stories of WUR students who transferred to a HBO degree and blossomed there because of the more hands-on learning style. If you are struggling now: talk about it with your friends, fellow students or your study advisor. And another tip: sign up for Personal Motivation Assessment – a short course in which you learn to systematically examine how you learn and what your main driver is. It can help you to discover what *would* suit you.’

Other study advisors see the picture De Kwant sketches too. Petra den Besten has been the stand-in study advisor in several programmes (she’s currently with Marine Sciences). ‘It seems as though in our society, young people choosing their degree course always go for the highest

‘I know stories of WUR students who transferred to a HBO and blossomed there because of the more hands-on learning style’



'Struggling students think they ought to be able to reach "the standard". As though you are a failure as a human being if you don't get an academic degree.'

'We had classes about a communication model and all I could think was: what use is that?'

possible: if you've been in the academic stream in secondary school (VWO), you automatically go to a theory-oriented university.' As a result, she thinks, many VWO students don't even consider applied sciences programmes. 'Instead of thinking: I want to do something to do with biodiversity or nature, and this is the highest level possible for me, they should think: I want to do something to

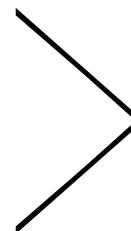
do with biodiversity and preferably work with my hands out of doors – so which programme fits the bill?'

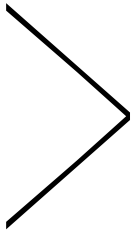
Choosing a degree

Daniëlle Vogels is WUR's advisor to mentors and deans in secondary schools, and to the parents of prospective students. She thinks outgoing minister Dijkgraaf is doing his best to help students make the right choice. 'Final exam candidates all get a letter sent to their homes, which now mentions that when you choose a degree programme, it is important to consider what you get pleasure and sat-

isfaction from, to increase the chances of successfully finishing the course.'

Teachers and parents can also help pupils make better choices, says Vogels. 'Last January we at the Pre-University programme and others including Van Hall Larenstein and Aeres (both applied sciences universities, ed.) held a study day for secondary school deans. We discussed the fact that VWO careers counsellors can make sure their pupils consider applied sciences programmes. I hear stories about deans who do that,





but then the pupil's class teacher tells them they'd be crazy to choose an applied science degree. Of course, that makes a big impression on the pupil.' The parents of pupils making this choice add to the pressure too. 'They want the best for their child and they often think that is an academic university education,' says Vogels. 'What they might not know is that there is a very high drop-out rate.

Nationwide, 30 per cent of students in higher education drop out of their programme in the first year. Of those, 38 per cent say they stopped because "the way it is taught" doesn't suit them.' The drop-out rate in Wageningen is actually a lot lower than the national average: here 13 per cent of first-year Bachelor's students drop out, although there are big differences between degree programmes.

Theoretical or practical?

To ensure that VWO pupils consider applied sciences degrees as well, the government is funding projects aiming at lowering the dropout rate, says Vogels.

In that context, WUR is working with Van Hall Larenstein, Aeres and the Christelijke Hogeschool Ede, says Vogels. 'On a set of cards, for instance, that gets pupils thinking about what learning style suits them. Is it theoretical or more practically oriented?

Although they still feel under pressure to go to an academic university, says Vogels, 'more VWO pupils now say that they are considering applied sciences options, although some are still told by those around them that that would be "stupid". Luckily, though, more and more people say: look at what suits you.' ■

'I am totally in the right place at the music school'

Marion van Leusen (22) studied International Development Studies at Wageningen. She got her Bachelor's degree in 2023 and started training to be a music teacher in Zwolle.



'VWO went well for me at secondary school, so I went to university. Wageningen appealed to me because it uses science to do good for the world. On paper, I thought my degree course was great too. You might work on a case study about how fishers in Mali can improve their catches, for example. I like the idea of tackling that in a nice practical way, but for me it was too much theory and reading of academic papers rather than getting together with NGOs to solve practical problems.

Because I started my degree during the pandemic with a lot of online classes, I wasn't too surprised that I didn't love it from the start. Only when we were

allowed to do more on campus did I realize: this is not what I'm looking for. Only I didn't know what I did want to do.

I started exploring my options and the idea of a music school came up. I could audition in March of my third year at Wageningen and I would be told whether I was admitted in April. Meanwhile, I worked hard to finish my WUR Bachelor's. Which I managed to do, luckily. I am totally in the right place at the music school. I am learning to compose and developing as a musician. You are thrown into the classroom as a trainee teacher early in the course and you just have to figure it out. That suits me, because I want to learn more about myself every day, push my boundaries, and be able to do something for other people.'



'The HBO teaching style took a bit of getting used to'

Maud Ottenheim (23) studied Communication & Life Sciences at Wageningen in 2019-2020. Now she's doing the applied sciences degree in Social Work at the Christelijke Hogeschool Ede. In September she will start a 'pre-Master's' course in Forensic Child and Youth Care Sciences at the University of Amsterdam.



'Because all my friends went to university, it was a matter of course that I did so too: why else would you do VWO for six years? I didn't consider an applied sciences option.

During my first year I realized that Communication & Life Sciences wasn't my thing. We had classes about a communication model and all I could think was: what use is that? I wanted to work with people and I transferred to Ede to do Social Work. The teaching style took a bit of getting used to: it's far more school-like.

In terms of the education approach I actually preferred Wageningen, but I opted for an applied sciences degree because of the practical experience you gain, on two compulsory internships, for instance. I am currently doing an internship with the youth probation service. I am doing a lot of work on criminal behaviour among young people and the best way to deal with it. I'm getting practical experience

now, but an in-depth understanding is important to me, so I'll soon be looking for that at university again. In September I'll be starting my pre-Master's course on Forensic Child and Youth Care Sciences at the University of Amsterdam. For me, that combination of practice and in-depth knowledge is very valuable.'



'I am a lot happier where I am now'

Lotte Aalbers (21) studied Health and Society at Wageningen. In 2023, she got her Bachelor's degree and embarked on an in-service nursing training programme in Utrecht.



'At secondary school I was in a combined stream for two years and the teachers' advice was "just do" the shorter HAVO school programme to qualify for an applied sciences course. That motivated me even more to do VWO, just to show that I could. And when I passed it seemed logical to go to university. I went to Wageningen and enjoyed the freedom you have as a student, but I wasn't excited about my degree course.

I thought: is this it? And then go on to write policy papers, become a consultant or go into research? All useful things but not necessarily right for me. I hadn't been in Wageningen long when I got a First Aid qualification and got a job at a vaccination centre, where I talked to nurses and doctors. I thought: wow, if you work in healthcare, you have a direct impact on the lives of the people you help. I finished my Bachelor's and then started an in-service nursing training programme, which entails working at the university hospital in Utrecht three days

a week, and taking classes at the applied sciences university one day a week. That way I do what is normally a four-year degree in three years. The work pressure is high but to me it's a nice challenge. I was doubtful for a long time before taking the plunge. People think it's funny that I did an applied sciences Bachelor's after getting an academic one, because it's supposed to be "below my level". Actually, that's crazy, because I'm a lot happier where I am now. This is what I really want to do.'





TRIPADVISOR

Marine researcher and enthusiastic amateur photographer Hans Verdaat combines his WUR work with a job as tour guide for Oceanwide Expeditions. He is just back from a trip to the Antarctic. This photo shows a colony of king penguins on South Georgia, an island located between South America and Antarctica. During the trips, data is collected on board for citizen science projects. And any dead birds or mammals that are found are reported for the research on the effects of bird flu. ^{RK}

Photo Hans Verdaat

MOVED BY THE FOREST

The spiritual value of forests deserves more attention, thinks Cathrien de Pater. Forest managers would do well to bear this in mind.



Text Roelof Kleis

Cathrien de Pater obtained her doctorate last month, just before her 71st birthday. The oldest woman PhD graduate yet at WUR, so quite an achievement. At least as remarkable – in Wageningen anyway – is her topic: the spirituality of forests. De Pater studied whether and to what extent forest management takes into account the spiritual value of forests.

De Pater was a late bloomer academically. She graduated in Tropical Forestry from Wageningen in 1979 and pursued a career as a development professional in forestry projects. She started out with the UN's Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) and then worked from 1987 as a forestry advisor for the ministries of Development Cooperation and of Agriculture, Nature and Food. Around 2000, aged nearly 50, she went back to university to study Interreligious Spirituality. She followed this, after taking early retirement 10 years ago, with a PhD with the Forest and Nature Policy group at Wageningen.

Where does your interest in spirituality come from?

'For a long time, I implemented forestry projects for the FAO and the Dutch government. I lived in various tropical countries with different religions. Particularly in Pakistan, a Muslim country, I saw how important religion is in daily life, and how religion determines behaviour. I got hold of books on the cultural value of forests and what people do with them. I wanted to know more about that. In 2000, when I was working for the ministry of Agriculture, I went part-time and started a degree in Religious Studies, taught through evening classes at

Nijmegen. My focus was on the relationship between religion and nature. For my thesis, I interviewed Dutch foresters about their deeper motivations.'

In your thesis, you define spirituality as an inexplicable phenomenon that can only be grasped through experience. Is that a definition?

'You can't define spirituality. That definition indicates roughly what I'm talking about. For me, spirituality is that which moves you deeply, inspires you and guides your actions. It is the spark that prompts you to start something and to carry it through.'

Seen that way, is everyone spiritual?

'Yes, if people recognize that in themselves. But it's okay to say you're not spiritual. It's a question of wording. Actually it's a terrible word because there's something vague and woolly about it. Whereas it can be really down-to-earth. You can look for the essence, the ultimate, far away, in God, heaven or the universe. Or you can look for it nearby, in the earth, rocks, all living beings and nature. For me, spirituality is more of a direction, a learning pathway. You can deepen spirituality through practice.' De Pater thinks that more and more people are looking to nature to find that learning pathway. 'Judging by the experiences and ad hoc observations of forest managers, at least. There is no rock-solid evidence for that increase. People place stone circles or ritual objects at places where they think they will have a powerful effect. Meditation groups often go into the woods. Nature

coaching and healing takes place there. So-called forest-bathing is on the rise at the moment. It involves groups of people going on very slow guided walks in the woods, in silence and rather meditatively, with a view to slowing down and relieving stress.'

The range of spiritually oriented activities is extensive. And theoretically, every forest is a suitable venue. There is no prototype of the spiritual forest, according to De Pater. 'It varies a lot from person to person. For some, the forest must be biodiverse, with lots of indigenous species and a rich structure. For others, a forest with nothing but (non-indigenous) Douglas firs can be meaningful too. The point is to have an atmosphere in the forest that evokes spirituality. Peacefulness is a very important factor. That is the key word that comes up the most in the interviews with forest managers. Peace is crucial for all types of activity.'

Isn't peace precisely what is getting scarcer in Dutch forests?

'That's right. Spirituality can clash with other kinds of forest use. Forest managers are encountering this more and more often. They also increasingly often come across waste from spiritual forest use: flowers, for instance – often grown with toxic substances – that do not belong there, and the remnants of fires and candles.'

'SPIRITUALITY COULD DO WITH COMING OUT OF THE SHADOWS'

You have water diviners who walk right through a quiet zone to follow ley lines. Of course it's nothing like the nuisance caused by things like drug waste, but managers are having to deal with it with increasing frequency.' De Pater researched spirituality in forest management plans by applying methods from religious studies. She formulated 10 dimensions (aspects) of spirituality and looked at how they featured in the plans. And managers of land including natural burial grounds, and owners of private estates were asked about day-to-day practice. 'The main emphasis in the plans was on the aesthetic experience and tourism,' concludes De Pater.

Should spirituality play more of a part in forest management?

'That would be good. Spirituality could do with coming out of the shadows. But I'm not going to tell managers what to do. They are the ones who know a tract of forest best. But I do think more room and more silence for spirituality can help people. And it would be good for managers to know more about spirituality and explore that aspect of forests. That could also be helpful in dealing with conflicts over forest management.' ■



'Spirituality can clash with other kinds of forest use. Forest managers are encountering this more and more often.' ♦ Photo Resource

THE CORPORATE UNIVERSITY

WUR is an extreme example of a corporate university, argues associate professor **Jeroen Candel** in his letter to the editor. That has got to change, and words can help. Changing the corporate language we use is the starting point for a new vision on what our university stands for.

'Corporate communication', 'the client experience', 'business unit', 'corporate social responsibility', 'value creation', 'KPIs: key performance indicators'... These are just a few of the terms I encounter in my inbox and on the intranet on a typical workday. 'Our language is the reflection of ourselves, a language is an exact reflection of the character and growth of its speakers,' said the Mexican-American civil rights activist César Chávez. From this perspective, our university has developed into a textbook example of a 'corporate university'. An excess of jargon and slogans from the business world is evidence of that.

WUR is not alone in this. The New Public Management (NPM) thinking that grew out of neoliberal economics has become the dominant paradigm almost throughout the public and semi-public sector. NPM thinkers have been declaring since the 1980s that 'clunky, slow' government organizations should take a leaf out of the business world's book, mainly by prioritizing measurable goals, efficiency, customer satisfaction, market forces and monitoring and control. In

the academic world, that led to the rise of the corporate university: a model in which administrators and managers run universities with an emphasis on efficiency, market orientation and profit. And often at the expense of traditional academic values such as academic freedom, broad participation in decision-making and a liberal education. In the management of a corporate university, the focus lies on making money, cutting costs, and serving the market and the interests of industry.

Engineering mentality

Although WUR is no exception, our university is an extreme example compared with most other Dutch universities. The business-minded approach was a good fit with the already highly applied focus of many of the academic disciplines Wageningen is home to. And demand from the market dictated the direction of its work. It is therefore no surprise that our campus has

become more and more of a business park. The can-do mentality found here also lent itself to a more commercial management approach in which looking for effective, usually technical solutions to urgent societal questions was the driving force behind the engineering mentality. Academic debate and critical reflection have often been seen by managers and publicity officers as an annoying necessary evil when trying to formulate clear-cut and broadly supported paths to solutions. Not to mention the idea of allowing room for public criticism of your own organization. 'The government and the general public expect answers from WUR,' was what I was told on more than one occasion when I had expressed fundamental criticism of the agricultural and food system in the media. Yet the value of science lies precisely in the power

'LET'S STOP PLAYING AT BEING A PRIVATE SECTOR COMPANY AND REINVENT THE ACADEMY'



'It is no surprise that our campus has become more and more of a business park.' • Photo Resource

of debate amongst scientists, critical reflection and even normative theory. (Did anyone ever ask Spinoza for clear-cut solutions?) And the same certainly goes for the social sciences and the humanities too.

Persistent

Don't get me wrong: almost every colleague I know has the interests of WUR and contributing to a better world at heart. That is what makes our university such a great and unique workplace. And yet the frames and the language we use are not innocuous. They are institutionalized in the practices, procedures and systems that shape our day-to-day work. Take the emphasis on individual excellence (the KPIs in the tenure track) and the pressure that goes with that; the proliferation of monitoring and control systems that are increasingly restricting our professional room for manoeuvre (Osiris!); the excessive emphasis on economic value creation and the ubiquitous

market thinking in which groups 'purchase services' within their own organization (leading to massive cash flows circulating within WUR) and must compete with each other to be allowed to offer courses in our degree programmes. Every one of these processes and developments undermines the original *raison d'être* and the societal role of academia. While neoliberalism is increasingly being declared economically and morally bankrupt, and while in Dutch academia movements like WOinActie argue for a change of course, the corporate culture within WUR is proving extremely persistent. It is high time we stop taking that culture for granted and have more discussion about what our core values are as an academic community, and how we can make them central again. Let's start by subjecting our language use to critical scrutiny. Try saying 'colleague' instead of 'client', 'valuable research and education' instead of 'valorization',

and 'science communication' instead of 'corporate communication'. Let's stop playing at being a private sector company and reinvent the Academy. Or should that be: Let's recalibrate our corporate identity and organize a strategic repositioning? ■



Jeroen Candel (34) is an associate professor in the Public Administration and Policy chair group. In his teaching and research, he seeks answers to the question of how governments can steer food systems towards more sustainable, healthier and fairer outcomes.

Organic versus mainstream

The gap is closing

The eternal debate about organic versus mainstream agriculture has entered calmer waters. At least, that is the experience of researchers Wijnand Sukkel and Gerard Migchels. They themselves take a 'radically nuanced' view of the gulf that seems to separate the two camps.



Text Tanja Speek

Migchels (dairy farming) and Sukkel (crop farming) recently wrote a report together about the prospects for organic farming in the Netherlands. The response was predictable: criticism from the mainstream camp and praise from the organic one. Yet the researchers observe that there is less polarization and the two camps are closer to one another than in the past.

What was the report about?

Migchels: 'It was about the prospects for organic agriculture in the Netherlands: what the impact of expanding organic crop and dairy farming is on the climate, nature and animal welfare. Per hectare, many emissions, such as CO₂ and ammonia, are lower in organic farming. But per kilogram of product, emissions of many substances are lower in mainstream farming because that sector produces more, on average, per hectare. The research question was to look at whether expanding the share of organic agriculture in the Netherlands to 15 per cent would help the country meet its targets for reducing CO₂ and ammonia emissions. And total emissions would indeed go down.'

What reactions did the report get?

Migchels: 'The mainstream farming sector submitted a request under the open government law, and all correspondence with the ministry was made public. On

the other hand, organic players published articles on the report leaving out the nuances about emissions per kilogram of product. And I got questions about Europe's self-sufficiency – not the question addressed by the report, but a valid point. Switching to more organic farming would mean we would produce nearly one billion litres less milk. If milk consumption stays the same, that's a problem.'

Sukkel: 'But some of that difference in productivity comes from imported concentrates. That should be factored into the calculations.'

The discussion about mainstream versus organic goes back a long time, even at WUR, doesn't it?

Migchels: 'In the old days, you were either on Aalt Dijkhuizen's side or on Jan Douwe van der Ploeg's. Personally, I always refused to choose. Both men were right from their own perspectives: Dijkhuizen with his plea for efficiency, and Van der Ploeg on market forces.'

Sukkel: 'And I thought both of them cherry-picked. For example, Aalt tweeted about the carbon footprint of chicken-farming systems, which was lower in the most intensive systems. But the difference was small and he didn't say anything about other factors such as animal welfare. And Jan Douwe tends to focus on the social and community elements and say nothing about yields, efficiency and costs.'

'In the old days, you were either on Aalt Dijkhuizen's side or on Jan Douwe van der Ploeg's'

And yet you both say the sectors are coming closer together.

Sukkel: ‘The advantage of organic farming lies in its systems thinking. Twentieth-century thinking was all about combatting diseases, pests and weeds by ploughing and applying other products besides fertilizer. Organic agriculture thinks more in terms of co-existence, such as useful soil life and insects. The old paradigm has gradually shifted in mainstream agriculture too.’

Migchels: ‘Even the idea that ecology and technology don’t go together has long been proven wrong by modern organic farmers. Many of the techniques used in precision agriculture were developed precisely within the organic branch.’

Sukkel: ‘Pest and weed control without synthetic products is possible, but labour is too expensive. That led to the development of technical solutions using GPS technology. In organic crop farming, the lower yield is mainly caused by losses due to diseases and pests. For a long time, not enough attention was paid to breeding for resistance. Most investment was in mainstream agriculture, where there was less call for breeding for resistance since crop protection products were available.’

So what differences remain?

Migchels: ‘I note mainly that there is a lot of variation between farms in the same category. I know a farm that only produces 600 litres of milk per hectare, and another that produces 15,000 litres – both of them organic. The first one is a classic organic farm, like the pictures you see on the milk cartons – extremely extensive. The second is a very different kind of farm, with innovations like its own grass dryer, thanks to which the cows absorb the protein from the grass better, and production is higher.’

Where do the best opportunities lie, with a view to the future?

Sukkel: ‘In both sectors, there is plenty of room for improvement in terms of sustainability.’

Migchels: ‘The big eye-opener for me was that I always thought cows on an organic farm live longer than those on a mainstream one, but that is not the case. The variation is bigger, that’s all. The animals often live longer, but because organic farmers make less use of antibiotics, more of their cows die young. Improving that takes a lot of skill, but it is certainly possible.’

How about polarization among farmers themselves?

Sukkel: ‘In spite of persistent extremes, I find a lot less polarization around organic versus mainstream agriculture nowadays. Formerly, mainstream farmers saw

organic farmers as the other side, as a threat. And there was no collaboration. Nowadays, organic and mainstream neighbours work together fine and use each other’s machinery, for instance. I notice more mutual respect. More farmers are open to switching to organic farming, as long as they can earn enough.’

Migchels: ‘And farmers are often not convinced that there is going to be enough consumer demand for organic products.’

Sukkel: ‘The two sectors need each other. Policymakers sometimes seem to be looking for a single type of farming that works everywhere. Just as we want biodiversity in nature, we should see diversity in the farming world as a good thing too.’ ■



Gerard Migchels (left) and Wijnand Sukkel: ‘Formerly, mainstream farmers saw organic farmers as a threat. And there was no collaboration. Nowadays, organic and mainstream neighbours work together fine. We notice more mutual respect.’ • Photo Guy Ackermans

Researcher seeks test subjects

A long-term nutrition study started at the end of April, with 114 test subjects taking part. At the same time, there are at least 15 more WUR studies ongoing, all of which need test subjects. Where do the people come from who are willing to contribute to science for a modest volunteer's fee?



Text Dominique Vrouwenvelder

PhD candidate Roos van 't Spijker (Human Nutrition & Health – HNH) is coordinating the EXPLAIN study in which over 100 test subjects – aged 45 to 75 and with a BMI of between 23 and 40 – eat only the food provided to them by the researchers for two periods of eight weeks. She hopes the results will enable her to compare the health effects of plant-based meat substitutes with those of meat. 'We are looking for a lot of participants and we ask a lot of them,' says Van 't Spijker. 'What is more we are looking for a specific group of people who meet all the criteria. I think at the information meetings and screening sessions, we must have seen four times as many people as will take part in the end. A lot of them drop out or turn out not to be suitable.'

One of the recruitment methods available to Wageningen PhD candidates is a test subjects database. This database, which was digitalized in 2018, is intended to bring together all the recruitment of test subjects within WUR. 'Annually, WUR

needs between 650 and 800 test subjects,' says Maartje van den Belt of Wageningen Food and Biobased Research (WFBR). She and her colleague Anne van de Wiel (HNH) manage the test persons database. Van de Wiel: 'Because we need so many test subjects year in year out, it's handy for us to be able to sign up a lot of people at the same time. The departments of Human Nutrition and Health and of Food Health and Consumer Research use the database a lot, but other departments do so occasionally as well.'

The database now contains details of about 4000 people. 'That sounds like a lot but they are adults between the ages of 18 and 100 living roughly between Den Bosch and Zwolle,' says Van de Wiel. 'Some of the information is out of date. People who have moved without letting us know, or students whose email address isn't right anymore because they've graduated. And then not everyone can take part in every study, because each study has its own criteria.'

Stress

Participants in the 40-60 age range are particularly hard to find, say Van den Belt and Van de Wiel. Van 't Spijker finds the same. 'Besides our internal test subjects database, we used an external platform for test subject recruitment, adverts in local papers and digital media which we

thought our target group would be likely to use.' After three months of intensive recruitment efforts, information provision and screening, Van 't Spijker had about 50 suitable participants, 31 of whom recently started on the study.

'The rest of the volunteers are waiting in the wings to be in the second group in my study, but we have to find at least 60 participants before that group can start in September – while at the same time carrying out the research with the first group,' says Van 't Spijker. 'By the time the second group has gone through the whole study it will be March 2025 and I'll already be two and a half years into my four-year PhD. Then I still have to analyse, write up and publish my research results.' That is not giving Van 't Spijker sleepless nights, though. 'I'm focussing now on the practical work. I think it will be very nice to analyse the data I have amassed myself. And large-scale intervention studies like this one are common in the research group



A participant in the nutrition study EXPLAIN collects the food prepared specially for her for the coming days. ♦ Photo Guy Ackermans

I work in. I know several PhD candidates who had a similar timeline and still managed to round off their projects.’ For the next group, Van ’t Spijker hopes to be able to make use of the database again. ‘Those participants are familiar with nutrition studies and know what they’re signing up for. I think it’s partly thanks to the database that WUR is so good at doing nutrition research. But that success has its downside, because people have a lot of studies to choose from.’

Serial test subject

Yvette Telleman can confirm that there are plenty of nutrition studies to choose from. She has been working for WUR (WFBR) for nearly 10 years now, and can no longer count the studies she has taken part in on the fingers of two hands. ‘I

often took part in small taste studies that just took an hour, but I also participated in long-term studies of six months or longer. I’m a researcher myself, so I know how important test subjects are.’

‘If I feel it will negatively affect my private life, I turn down the invitation,’ says Telleman. ‘I don’t mind giving blood, but I’m not in for any injuries to a healthy body. And I don’t do MRI scans, which are very time-consuming and are often done during working hours.’

During a study she sometimes meets people she’s seen during previous studies, who also take part repeatedly. Van den Belt and Van de Wiel confirm this. ‘In

nearly every study, we see one or more test subjects who have taken part before.’ In spite of the enthusiasm of participants like Telleman, researchers cannot always recruit enough test persons in time for their studies. ‘In that case, researchers have to report to the medical-ethical assessment committee that they can’t get the target number of people,’ explains Van de Wiel. ‘At that point there are two possible emergency measures: adapt the criteria or the number of test subjects.’ That is done in 20 per cent of cases.

In the worst-case scenario, a researcher has to conclude that the study cannot go ahead. Van de Wiel: ‘Because it must be ethically justifiable towards the people who do take part. A study in which you know beforehand that the evidence will be insufficient is pointless, but for junior researchers, it is disastrous.’ ■

**The fee for participants in this study is 1000 euros plus travel costs of up to €7.50 per attendance.*

‘Four times as many people attend information and screening sessions as take part in the end’

The DARE project comes to a close

‘There’s a lot going on below the surface’

DARE, a three-year project to minimize and tackle discrimination, has come to a close. *Resource* talked to three key actors about this project. ‘There’s a self-image at WUR that we are colour-blind, we’re doing well. But below the surface, there’s much more going on.’ Text Steven Snijders

Where does WUR stand after three years of the DARE project?

Schoone: ‘The number of reports of discrimination is increasing: from four reports in 2022 to 12 in 2023. Many of these reports come from Asian people. The two most common forms of discrimination at WUR are racism and sexism. I believe Wageningen has a blind spot for the lack of inclusion, which can lead to people being excluded. There’s this self-image: we are colour-blind, we’re doing well. But below the surface, there’s much more going on. I notice that the

conversation about this topic in Wageningen is different than in other places. The polarization between conservative and progressive voices isn’t expressed as openly as in other universities for example. Wageningen mainly has science degree programmes rather than humanities, and they tend to attract less politically engaged and vocal people. The polarization in Wageningen is much more latent.’

Gabriel García Teruel: ‘The issue of racism has become more visible. For example, there are these “find your way” infographics about social safety and how

to report discrimination, which are displayed all around university buildings. I think in the whole Wageningen community, including the Executive Board, there is a growing awareness and understanding of discrimination. We are more aware of what is happening and what we should do. Racism is systemic, it’s institutionalized. WUR builds upon its past. Often, it is not that we are willingly racist



Jacqueline Schoone
WUR's ombudsperson



Joyce van der Velde
Social Safety Programme Manager and one of the DARE project coordinators



Fernando Gabriel García Teruel
a Master's student of Bioengineering from Mexico and a member of DARE



The #BLM protest in Wageningen on 14 June 2020. ♦ Photo Sven Menschel

here right now, but we carry on a racist tradition. One could say that we are all racist to some degree, some more than others. It is embedded in our thinking because of how we grew up, or our education. We must work together to be less racist by calling it out when we see, hear, or experience it.'

What exactly constitutes racism, and what doesn't, seems to be a point of discussion sometimes.

Schoone: 'Indeed, what constitutes racism is a difficult question. Not all perceived racism is necessarily racism, but the reverse is true too. If somebody says "It was just a joke, I didn't mean it like that," that doesn't make something non-racist either.'

Van der Velde: 'If I identify something as sexist, people tend to react rather

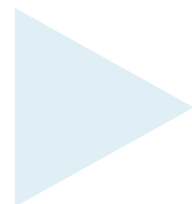
calmly and think to themselves: "Yes, maybe that was a bit sexist." But if I identify something as racism, people often take it personally and feel attacked. People tend to react fiercely: "I'm not a racist!" I'm not saying they are, but racism really is something that happens. The term discrimination doesn't seem to provoke people in the same way. While the DARE project originated in the protests and the petition about racism, the scope of the project broadened to encompass all forms of discrimination, and diversity and inclusion.'

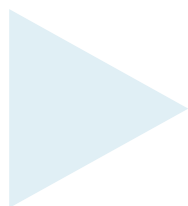
What does discrimination and exclusion at WUR look like?

Van der Velde: 'Sometimes, not all information is available in English, which excludes internationals. Or some students or employees in a group start speaking Dutch, excluding non-Dutch-

'Discrimination can also mean a lack of equal opportunities'

'If I see something as racist, people take that personally'





‘There is a self-image that we are doing fine’

speaking people who are present. People get called names, or stared at. People are left out of meetings. People have been denied access to buildings they should have been allowed into.’

Schoone: ‘Some PhD candidates from non-Western countries feel like they are treated as second-class citizens, that they are not perceived equally. These are signs of structural racism. Moreover, In April, a Chinese student on campus was the victim of an assault, and I’m aware of more cases of harassment on the Wageningen campus and around student complexes. For example, Chinese students have been prevented from entering their

flats, probably by Wageningen youths. Although this is not how WUR students or employees behave, it does add to the feeling of being treated as second-class citizens at WUR. However, discrimination is much more subtle sometimes, such as having lower expectations of a colleague who is a woman wearing a headscarf. It can also be wrapped in a compliment, such as “that is so good for someone of your age”.’

García Teruel: ‘Discrimination can also mean a lack of equal opportunities. Such as the administrative barriers that excluded non-EU students from becoming student assistants, which the university has now changed. We are trying to tackle institutionalized discrimination of the PhD Council, which is only open to PhD candidates with the standard labour contract. Sandwich PhD candidates with a different type of contract are allowed to vote, but cannot be representatives. Many sandwich PhD candidates come from countries outside Europe, leading to the exclusion of certain groups and perspectives.’

Now this project has ended, how should WUR move forward?

García Teruel: ‘We are not there yet, we must keep working on it. I think it is important to have an open and clear recognition of the problem, for example in the new Strategic Plan 2025-2030. I would like to see an explicit commitment by WUR to anti-racism, decolonization, equality and diversity.’

The roots of the DARE project

George Floyd, a Black person, was killed by a police officer in the United States in 2020. This ignited a wave of ‘Black Lives Matter’ protests all around the globe, including the Netherlands. The Anti-Racist Association of Wageningen launched a petition calling for an investigation by WUR into institutional racism within the organization. The petition was presented to WUR in 2020. That prompted the start of a series of dialogues and the three-year DARE project. The main aim was to tackle and minimize racism and discrimination within WUR. DARE addresses Decolonization, Anti-Racism, anti-discrimination, Equity and equal chances. This three-year project came to an end in April 2024.

Van der Velde: ‘This project is ending, but the work isn’t over. And that goes not only for the Diversity and Inclusion team, but for us all. We hope that more people are willing to raise questions and actively search for different perspectives. This might not be comfortable, but it is how we grow and learn as an organization.’ ■

‘It can sometimes be difficult to prove racism’

Discrimination and racism are related terms. How are those two terms defined by the DARE project? Van der Velde, Social Safety Programme Manager and one of the DARE project coordinators: ‘The prohibition of discrimination based on race is stated in Article 1 of the Dutch constitution. “Racism” is not a legal term. However, there are sociological or commonly accepted definitions of racism. The broader term is discrimination, of which racism is a form. Discrimination involves making an undesired distinction, resulting in unequal treatment or exclusion of people. This can occur at an individual level as well as at an institutional level. When it occurs based on ethnicity, we call it racism. It can sometimes be difficult to prove racism because it can be a motive, starting point, or outcome. On a personal level, this includes stereotypes in one’s mind. At an institutional level, it also involves power imbalances within an organization. In DARE, our focus wasn’t so much on proving it, but on recognizing patterns and addressing them.’



You can see great-looking people on Wageningen campus. In this feature, we put one of them in the spotlight. This time Frida Ruiz Mendoza, a teacher in the Geoinformation Science and Remote Sensing group. She wore a traditional costume from her home country Mexico during a cultural fair on campus in March. Text and photo Lieke Muijsert



'I am wearing a handmade dress from the Mexican region Puebla, which is worn on Independence Day. The skirt has hand-sewn beads and sequins, which makes the dress quite heavy. On the skirt there's a picture of an eagle on a cactus, eating a snake. This is the symbol on our flag as well. The story goes that indigenous people from northern Mexico were looking for a place to settle. There was a prophecy that said that they should choose a spot where they saw an eagle on a cactus, eating a snake. And that is where Mexico City is now. This dress has the Mexican colours but every state has its own dress. There are many different traditional dresses because of the cultural diversity in Mexico. What I like in particular is that every dress is very colourful. They can have different shapes, colours and patterns and you can normally buy them in downtown stores but I commissioned this one especially to bring it here. Now that I am a teacher, as a more permanent part of this community, I would like to show a bit of my culture during cultural events at Wageningen University.'

Wenyu Hu from China and William Partogi Hamonangan and Asoka from Indonesia also wore traditional costumes at the festival. See the QR code.



You encounter all the flavours of the world in our WUR community. Master's student of Biotechnology Nike Schiavo (27), from Italy, shares a recipe for vegan tiramisu.



Flavours of WUR

Vegan Tiramisu

'When I was younger, my mum's best dessert was tiramisu. Her version had way more cream than biscuits. When I went vegan, I stopped eating tiramisu, until I found a vegan recipe. I decided to change it a bit to make it as similar as possible to my mum's version, so every time I make it, it reminds me a little of my childhood and my mum.'

- 1 Boil the cashews for 15 minutes until tender. Drain and rinse in cold water.
- 2 Put the cashews, plant-based milk and a few drops of vanilla extract in a blender. Blend until smooth.
- 3 Add the condensed coconut milk to the cashew mixture to get a rich and creamy texture.
- 4 Brew coffee using a Moka pot. Dip the biscuits one by one in the freshly made coffee and place them in a casserole dish until you have a complete layer.
- 5 Cover the biscuits with a generous amount of the cashew and coconut milk cream.
- 6 Repeat the process by adding another layer of dipped biscuits followed by another layer of the creamy mixture.
- 7 Put the tiramisu in the fridge for at least 3 hours so the flavours can blend and the dessert set.
- 8 Before serving, sprinkle a generous amount of unsweetened cocoa powder on top.

Ingredients (for 8 people) :

- 300g cashew nuts
- 310g plant-based milk
- A few drops of vanilla extract
- 320g condensed coconut milk
- Unsweetened cocoa powder (garnish)
- Tea biscuits
- Coffee brewed in a Moka pot

Preparation time :

⌚ 60 minutes
+ 3 hours to set



Nike Schiavo

Biotechnology Master's student

Buon appetito!

Spotlight

Not much culture in Wageningen? In this feature we prove otherwise. This time, read about how Studium Generale, the general studies programme, links science with art in three workshops looking at how we frame the climate. Text Steven Snijders



TUESDAY
21, 28 May
and 4 June

19:00 to 22:30
Impulse

Between Art & Science

Students do not automatically encounter the arts through their core curriculum. But exciting things happen precisely at the cutting edge between the arts and the sciences, says Dennis Hamer, programme designer at Studium Generale. So Studium Generale is running three interactive events entitled *Between Art & Science – Reframing the Climate*. The first two events will consist of workshops with all sorts of artists and researchers. Hamer: 'Every participant will be given a cardboard passepartout. That is your frame, which you fill in during the workshops. You ask yourself, what are my explicit and implicit thinking frames?

Becoming aware of these and taking a critical look at them can be liberating. The workshops will help you do that.' Participants can choose between 15 different workshops, such as one by PhD candidate and spoken-word artist Jackie Ashkin: 'Science can be very inaccessible. Knowledge is often hidden in papers that don't reach a broad audience. I look for alternative ways of disseminating knowledge. In my workshop, we will create accessible texts based on scientific summaries.' During the third event, all the participants' frames will be combined in one joint artwork. As well as performances, this

evening will be about reflection. How are all these frames related and what exactly happens between the arts and the sciences? Speakers will include a few prominent scientists such as Tim van Hattum, WUR's Climate programme leader.

The workshops are on Tuesday 21 and 28 May and 4 June, from 19:00 to 22:30 in Impulse. Entry free; register via info.sg@wur.nl. See the full workshop programme at www.wur.nl/studiumgenerale.



Meanwhile in... England - Towards a tobacco ban

WUR is incredibly diverse, with hundreds of internationals working and studying here. In the *Meanwhile In* column, we ask one of them to comment on certain events in their home country. This time, we hear from Plant Sciences MSc student Jem Deakin (26) from England, who shares her views on England's proposed smoking ban. Text Youssef el Khattabi

Deakin: 'When I first heard about England's proposed smoking ban for future generations, I was pretty surprised. The law would prevent anyone born in or after 2009 from legally buying cigarettes or tobacco products. A smoke-free generation will probably never happen in my opinion. In the long term though, the inconvenience of getting tobacco products would probably put more people off smoking. However, this kind of ban could also end up promoting black-market sales of cigarettes. Vaping is quite popular in England; I've seen a lot of young teenagers with vapes. Smoking seems pretty similar to the Netherlands. I think vaping is a much bigger issue for the younger generation, and this policy doesn't outline any strategies to counteract vaping. This kind of policy feels quite radical for England. The government has not historically restricted a lot of personal freedoms

for health reasons. Tax rises for smoking have had public support in the past, as there is awareness that diseases from smoking have a big impact on our publicly funded National Health Service. I am a non-smoker, and everyone in my generation will remain unaffected by the smoking ban. Most of my friends who smoke want to quit though. All of the people I know who are current smokers started underage.

In England, most people don't really expect the policy to work. I do know that they attempted something similar in New Zealand, and it was scrapped pretty quickly.

I think the high level of stress in England, caused by socio-economic problems, probably does quite a lot to promote smoking. If I had the opportunity to advise UK policymakers on this issue, I would suggest actually improving the state of the country. Then smoking might go down naturally.'



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Resource

WUR from within: straight, sharp, transparent



IN MEMORIAM

SJAAK VAN HEUSDEN

We were sad to hear that our former colleague Sjaak van Heusden passed away on 6 March at the age of 70 following a heart attack while on holiday. Sjaak had continued to be involved in external courses after his retirement three years ago. After contributing to a course on Plant Breeding in Colombia, he travelled on to Guadeloupe for a holiday. He was able to enjoy three weeks of holiday with his partner there before his untimely death. Sjaak studied at Wageningen in the 1970s. After obtaining his PhD in Amsterdam, he returned in 1991, joining the Institute for Horticultural Crop Breeding (IVT), where he held various positions. He spent the last 15 years at Plant Breeding, where he worked on genetic studies

of crops including the tomato and the onion, and gave advice and support to many a Master's student and PhD candidate. He also gave courses in countries including Indonesia, Cuba and Colombia and he played an important role in the Green Genetics Summer School. We will remember Sjaak as a friendly and knowledgeable colleague who also played an active role in social events (including Saint Nicholas!) and lab outings. We offer his partner Marieke our deepest sympathy as she copes with this great loss.

*Prof. Richard G.F. Visser
On behalf of all Sjaak's Plant
Breeding colleagues*

Colophon

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Photo Resource



‘UNCONTROLLED SPREAD IN DIALOGUES’

WUR students and staff are having to spend an increasing proportion of their time talking to each another. That needs to stop, says campaign group All Mouth, No Trousers (AMNT).

Food dialogues, agriculture dialogues, climate dialogues and recently even a Dutch-snack-themed *bitterbal* dialogue. The new campaign group AMNT questions the benefit of what it calls ‘an uncontrolled spread in dialogues’. The group says we are waffling too much. Lots of people feel no need for all this hot air, and it is also a huge burden on productivity.

‘The occasional conversation is fine,’ says AMNT chair Cor Deksel. ‘There’s nothing wrong with that. What we oppose is this idea nowadays of setting up yet another dialogue for every single minor issue. You can’t get a decent day’s work in any more. And that’s the problem as far as we’re concerned.’ That is why Deksel advocates de-dialoguing WUR. ‘As our name implies: less talk gets you more action.’

AMNT itself divides opinion though. Several activists say the group is not inclusive. ‘I agree with AMNT’s message,’ says student and inter-sectional activist Allie Love (personal pronouns: they/them), ‘but the name is hugely problematic. The word “trousers” refers to a garment traditionally worn by men whereas “mouth” plays on the

negative stereotype of the talkative female. So the connotations are highly patriarchal.’

Love thinks AMNT should therefore be banned. In their view, WUR should at the very least take a stand on the issue. Deksel denies AMNT is non-inclusive. ‘Whether you are a man, woman, fat, thin, black, white, yellow or purple: everyone is welcome. The

only membership requirement is for you to be fed up with all those WUR dialogues. No one is interested in all that nonsense about our name.’

WUR has since responded in the appropriate fashion. Prompted by the fuss about AMNT’s name, a dialogue on ‘inclusive campaigning’ has been announced. A ‘meta-dialogue’ will also be set up in short order to discuss the benefits of dialogues.

‘These days, a dialogue is set up for every minor issue’