

WUR from within: straight, sharp, transparent

No 08

Resource

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The journalism platform for all at Wageningen University & Research

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protected status

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What drives them?

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goes to Utrecht

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FOREWORD

Resistance

You who live safe in your warm houses, never forget that this has happened. Every year, when the Netherlands remembers the dead and celebrates Liberation Day, I reread Primo Levi's heartrending book *If This Is A Man*. These lines come from the poem with which Levi starts his collection of essays about life in Auschwitz concentration camp. Each time I read them, I am moved. How can someone write such beautiful words about something as awful and incomprehensible as Auschwitz? I visited the site two years ago. Standing in the only remaining incinerator, I was overcome by an overwhelming sadness. If I had stayed one minute longer, I would have burst into tears. This year, we are celebrating 80 years of freedom. 'Never again' was the slogan, but look at the world now. Once again, the far right is on the rise everywhere. Someone who recognized the threat posed by fascism early on was Organic Chemistry professor Simon Olivier. His resistance started even before the war broke out. You can read his story in this issue (page 12). I felt honoured to be able to share it: he is a shining example to us all. *You who live safe in your warm houses, never forget that this has happened.*

Roelof Kleis

Science editor





DON'T DO IT!

The nationwide rotating strikes in higher education reached Wageningen on Monday 14 April. The FNV trade union, which is organizing the strikes, said about 2000 WUR researchers, lecturers, support staff and students turned up to express their disapproval of the higher education cuts. That morning, they gathered in the field between Atlas, Orion and Forum. Then they marched in a long procession, with a lot of red and green flags and protest signs, via Leeuwenborch to the Market square in the town centre. On a stage in the square, there were speeches from the mayor, a student board member, an alumnus and Teachers of The Year Ignas Heitkönig and Hannie van der Honing, among others. It was the first time Van der Honing had gone on strike: 'It is time to draw a line. We can't just sit back and accept these cutbacks.' ^{DV}

Photo Guy Ackermans



Comment

The higher education cuts will hit WUR too. The Executive Board has to find savings of 80 million euros and that means making hard choices, with jobs at risk as well. It is hardly surprising that employees are so worried. They are concerned about their job, increasing work pressure and the growing threats to academic freedom. Reason enough to mobilize in protest against The Hague's sledgehammer. Last Monday (14 April), it was Wageningen's turn in the rotating strikes taking place between 10 March and 24 April. From Leiden to Nijmegen and from Maastricht to Groningen, staff at academic and applied universities are taking up the strike gauntlet.

That raises the question of whether there is any point to these strikes. After all, the plans of Education minister Eppo Bruins have already been approved by the Upper House of Parliament. Was the long procession of protesting WUR students and staff from the campus to the town centre merely a symbolic act, a ritual without any real effect? That thought must have crossed a lot of people's minds. Even so, some 2000 students and staff (according to the organization) turned up to the protest. Even Wageningen, not known for its activism, has clearly had enough. They were there not because of some naive optimism but because of a sense of solidarity and a shared vision of higher education. They believe these cuts are not unavoidable but the consequence of the wrong choices and misguided political arguments. And while the fact that the Upper House has given its consent is a blow, all is not lost. Politicians are bickering over the Spring Budget, and anyway the present government will eventually come to an end. We need to continue to voice the shared opposing view that universities are not education factories and that the cuts are an attack on the future and development of society. The belief in that message unites us.

This Comment presents the views and analyses of the editorial board, formulated following a discussion with the editors

Wood gets protected status

The cultural value of Dassenbos wood, next to Aurora, is so great that it is getting protection by being listed as municipal heritage. This decision was taken by Wageningen's mayor and aldermen. The oak scrub wood, covering about four hectares, has a characteristic drainage system of ditches and ridges. In the past, it was a production wood. The oaks grew on the ridges. The timber was used as fuel and the bark was used to produce tannin for the tanning industry. Ten years ago, Dassenbos was in danger of being felled to make way for a campus ring road. Following pressure from politicians and civil society, the provincial authority decided five years ago on an alternative approach: revamping Nijenoordallee.

The wood's new status won't affect the planned bike path and boardwalk alongside the bus lane. Construction work is expected to start after the summer. The work will include not just the bike path and boardwalk but also the campus access road on the west for cars. RK



Art on view

Wageningen has no fewer than 300 artworks on display outside. Many are on campus. But we usually walk past them without giving them a second thought. The Culture in Wageningen Foundation wants to change that with its *Outdoor Art in View* campaign. It is challenging local residents to come up with an artwork inspired by the sculptures on display in Wageningen. 'All creative forms are welcome,' says Laurens van der Zee, who manages a website with an overview of outdoor art in Wageningen. 'It could be a story, a poem, a painting, embroidery, a sculpture, a photo or video — anything.' He explains that it isn't a competition. 'Our aim is to make the general public aware of the many artworks outdoors in Wageningen.' All the submissions will be included in an exhibition in November. The location will be announced at a later date. Van der Zee says the works may come to the campus. For more information, see: cultuurinwageningen.nl/buitenbeeld. RK • Image ChatGPT

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Only 40 PhD candidates defended their theses in the first quarter of 2025. On an annual basis, that would mean 160 doctorates rather than the 400 predicted for this year. The reason for the fall is a change in the system for booking a date for the defence. Saskia de Boer of the Doctorate Service Centre therefore expects this to be a one-off effect. RK

New resit policy is a success

The evaluation of the new resit policy, which came into effect last academic year, concludes it has achieved its main goal of reducing work pressure among teaching staff. Students also seem to be taking exams more seriously.

The main change in the resit policy was a reduction in the number of times students could sit an exam from three times a year to two times. The aim was to reduce the workload for teachers and to motivate students to make more of an effort. The number of weeks earmarked for resits increased from two to three so as to spread the workload more. The final resit week was also moved from August to July to make it easier for people to arrange their summer holidays. Nelleke Lafeber, education policy adviser at Education & Student Affairs, says that the evaluation of the new resit policy involved talking to study advisers,

student counsellors, programme committees, timetabling officials, examiners and students. Lafeber: 'In addition, the Student Council carried out a survey among students and the Quality & Strategic Information people analysed course data.'

The evaluation shows staff are experiencing less work pressure. Lafeber: 'They

'Teaching staff are pleased they now get a proper summer break and a proper Christmas holiday'

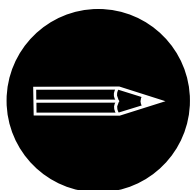
are mainly pleased with how the resit weeks are spread over the year. It means they get both a proper summer break and a proper Christmas holiday.' Study advisers say students are preparing for

their exams more seriously and have got better at planning for them. 'They are now being more realistic when deciding which exams and resits to register for,' says Lafeber. That is also demonstrated by the figures, she says. 'The pass rate for the first attempt has risen from 81 per cent to 89 per cent.'

More stress

However, students are now sometimes under more pressure to pass their exams, says Lafeber. 'If you miss an exam because you were ill, now you only have one more chance that year. I can imagine students thinking they'd rather have three opportunities than two. At the same time, the higher pass rate means students don't have to take so many resits during their degree studies.' LZ

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LETTER TO THE EDITOR

The Snackpocalypse

Working as a researcher often means long hours and the need for an energy boost — especially if you have sports planned right after work. It was therefore no surprise to see colleagues heading to the vending machine in the afternoon for their guilty snack. I was one of them, my go-to treat being a Snickers.

Then, one day, they were gone. Just like that — no warning, no explanation. In their place? Rice crackers with a chocolate topping. But that wasn't the only change. Potato chips were replaced with their healthier, far less appealing cousins: lentil chips. A colleague and I tried them once, and their slogan should have been 'We guarantee you'll eat only a couple'. They were bland, with a bitter aftertaste. The

same happened with the wine gums — so bad that even a gummy-addicted friend couldn't finish them. Sugary soft drinks? Also gone. I realized how much I missed them one afternoon when I felt dizzy from

'The final straw? Lentil crackers with cocoa powder. Inedible'

low blood sugar and found nothing to replace them. But the final straw? The rice crackers with chocolate disappeared too, replaced by an even 'healthier' alternative — lentil crackers dusted with cocoa powder. They were inedible. And now I can't help but wonder what's next. The real milk coffee machine? (Rumour has it that ours is one of the last

to still offer non-vegan milk.)

That's when I said, enough is enough. I don't mind having healthy options. In fact, I think it's great. But replacing everything with only so-called healthy alternatives feels like an imposition. We should have the freedom to decide what we eat. After talking to some colleagues, we agreed — freedom of choice should always prevail in a university. And snacks can be both healthy and delicious, offering the perfect balance of nutrition and pleasure.

Coralía Manzanilla Pech, researcher in the Animal Breeding and Genomics group

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Classic WUR man gets chair at Utrecht

The ecologist Patrick Jansen studied and worked in Wageningen and has lived here nearly all his life. Yet as of this month he is a professor in Utrecht. Now he will only be at WUR one day a week as a guest professor. Text Roelof Kleis

Jansen never managed to get a position as a professor in Wageningen. His own fault, he freely admits. 'In the normal course of things, I should have become a professor three years ago. I have that ambition but never got round to it. In the tenure track system, you need to build up a dossier, jump through various hoops and tick all the boxes. That approach doesn't suit me; it puts my back up immediately. That's just the way I am.' Even so, it was starting to get to him. 'Colleagues around me were being made professors. And a professorship helps when communicating with the outside world, which I do find important.' Then the Utrecht vacancy turned up. 'It was a perfect fit, so I applied,' he says almost apologetically.

The chair name, Wildlife Ecology & Nature Restoration, sounds a lot like WUR's Wildlife Ecology & Conservation. Won't you be encroaching on WUR's territory? 'No, I don't think so. Over the past ten years, all universities have started paying much more attention to nature and the environment. Other universities too have realized that they don't just need to build up fundamental knowledge about nature and the environment but also need to translate that into applications. Scientists want to do useful things with their knowledge.'

What will be the focus of your chair group?

'The ecology of wild plants and animals and their interactions with humans. I want to see how to apply that knowledge in nature restoration. We are currently living in the UN Decade of Ecosystem Restoration. The aim is to stop the rapid decline in biodiversity and turn it around into nature restoration. I find the link between ecology and nature recovery very interesting.'

Not a rival, then?

'No. It's a small group compared to Wildlife Ecology in Wageningen. Interest in all forms of ecology has boomed. Young people are worried about the future and want

to do something about it. So they study ecology. The job prospects are also really good. When I graduated in the 1990s, all the ecologists were unemployed. Now employers are recruiting them before they even graduate.'

Ecologists are in demand when the current government has no interest in nature. Isn't that weird?

'It is. There's no feel for nature in the ideologies of the coalition parties. The notion that we're all part of the same ecosystem requires a certain level of understanding that has virtually disappeared from our modern society. Nature has turned into a mere source of recreation. Technology lets us ignore nature. That's not going to change, even if ten per cent of students study ecology.'



Patrick Jansen: 'The notion that we're all part of the same ecosystem requires a certain level of understanding that has virtually disappeared from our modern society.' ♦ Photo Sven Menschel

A botched experiment, a rejected paper: such things are soon labelled as failures in academia. As for talking about them — not the done thing! But that is just what WUR scientists do in this column. Because failure has its uses. This time, we hear from **Franshelis Garcia, a PhD candidate in the Health & Society group.**

Text Nicole van 't Wout Hofland • Illustration Stijn Schreven

'Over the past few years, I've been studying how patients experience obesity surgery, such as a gastric bypass. I made an important discovery: patients get a lot of support before the operation, but not enough afterwards. A gastric bypass is not only a physical change but also requires mental and social adjustments. And yet we leave patients to fend for themselves after the operation. I knew this had to change, but I didn't take action straight away.

My data was stored in files on my computer with labels, tags and loads of text. It wasn't yet a compelling story, something I could share. I took the standard academic path of working on a scientific publication because I was afraid healthcare organizations wouldn't take my findings seriously without that article. I thought a link to an official paper would add weight to my arguments.'

'So I immersed myself in the data. I wanted to do everything perfectly, without overlooking any details. I analysed the data, did checks, noted all my thoughts and worked that out in a publication. That perfectionism plus the time it took fellow researchers to

validate my data cost me nearly two years. During that time, new patients had come and gone, without getting sufficient support. I was sitting on a mountain of valuable data, but nothing was being done with it. That felt like failure.' 'With hindsight, I shouldn't have

'I was sitting on a mountain of data but nothing was being done with it'

been so fixated on the scientific publication and should have approached the clinics early on. I think pride and insecurity stopped me doing that. I've since shared a summary of my research (with a link to the publication) with a clinic. They were enthusiastic and have now told their psychologists about my findings. When I heard that, I breathed a sigh of relief. Finally my research is having a beneficial effect on society. Next time, I definitely won't wait so long to share valuable knowledge. You can still make an impact even without a perfect publication.'



Switch to animal-free botulism test

Wageningen Bioveterinary Research (WBVR) is switching to a new *in vitro* method for detecting botulism toxins that doesn't require the use of lab mice.

WBVR researchers have been preparing for the switch since 2018. One of those researchers is Miriam Koene. 'The *in vitro* test is based on a technique that was described about 20 years ago in the US, but not all the reagents are obtainable in Europe,' she says. 'So we looked to see whether we could make those antibodies ourselves.' That proved possible with llama antibodies. An extensive, multi-year validation process showed that the *in vitro* test was just as reliable as the diagnostic test used up to now. As of 1 April, the *in vitro* method is being used for all veterinary diagnostic tests for botulism. The tests for the human variants, which have many more subtypes, are expected to follow next year when tests developed in Germany become available.

Toxins

The symptoms of botulism — paralysis, sometimes resulting in death — are caused by the toxins in the bacterium *Clostridium botulinum*, which is found widely in Dutch soils. Problems both inside and outside the body arise when the optimum conditions are reached for forming toxins — a specific ambient temperature, low oxygen concentrations and various other conditions. The toxins that are then produced are among the most poisonous substances found in nature.

WBVR is the only lab in the Netherlands to routinely carry out diagnostic tests for botulism. It performs about 1000 such tests a year. Using the old method, that required several dozen mice per year. The switch to the *in vitro* method fits with WUR's aim of using fewer animals for diagnostic tests, research and education. ME

CHEESE WITHOUT THE COW

Laurens Antuma (Food Process Engineering) received a PhD at the end of March for research on artificial casein micelle formation in protein from precision fermentation. The micelles are needed to make cheese. Text Dominique Vrouwenvelder ♦ Photo Shutterstock

‘We can use precision fermentation (a process using genetically modified micro-organisms to create e.g. milk proteins, ed.) to make casein, the key protein in the production of cheese,’ explains Antuma. ‘But that process results in separate protein molecules whereas cheese makers — making hard cheeses — use the protein in the form of micelles, little balls of protein.’ He studied ways of forming micelles from the loose molecules of the non-animal protein, with the ultimate aim of letting producers make non-animal dairy products.

Antuma compares the micelles to hairy tennis balls. ‘Cow’s milk contains four important variants of the protein casein. They are all a bit different, but we can replicate them all using precision fermentation. Three of the protein variants react with calcium phosphate crystals to form the ball’s internal structure. The fourth variant attaches itself to the outside of the ball, sealing it, to create a stable, “hairy” ball, the micelle.’ In the cheese-making process, an enzyme cuts off the micelle’s hairs, making the globules stick together. ‘The resulting sticky mass is curd, an intermediate product in cheese-making.’

Scalable

‘In principle, you could simply put the casein variants together with calcium and phosphate ions in water and get micelles that way,’ explains Antuma. ‘But then you don’t have any control over the process.’ He took a more scientific approach. ‘We started with water and added the four casein variants in varying proportions plus varying amounts of calcium phos-



phate in order to replicate the micelles in cow’s milk. That works fine on a small scale in the lab, but you need more efficient processes to do it on a large scale in the food industry.’

‘Cow’s milk contains four important variants of the protein casein. We can replicate them all using precision fermentation’

Antuma therefore made a scalable experimental set-up with membranes. ‘If you add only small amounts of calcium and phosphate ions and the casein molecules to the water, you don’t get crystallization of calcium phosphate and so no micelles

are formed. Slowly removing water from the solution increases the concentration and so micelles are eventually formed after all. This method gives you very fine crystals and lets you create better micelles in a controlled way. Two other major advantages are that it’s much faster and a continuous process.’

The PhD candidate is leaving the actual cheese-making to others. ‘My thesis contains new fundamental knowledge about micelles and also offers insights and solutions to practical problems. The actual production of cheese using non-animal casein micelles is now up to commercial companies.’

PhD theses **in a nutshell**

Playing with water

It is difficult to maintain the quality of water in a single isolated lake, let alone lakes that are connected to one another. In that situation, everything is interrelated. Lilith Kramer developed a model for predicting the effects of changes in the management of the lakes. She applied it to a series of Frisian lakes, the Friese Boezem. She found that the current management approach is not enough to get the desired ecosystems. It's complex stuff, but she made it accessible by developing a game for water managers, called Flipping Lakes. ^{RK}

Connecting with lakes. Lilith Kramer ◀ Supervisor Wolf Mooij

Now this virus

In the world of viruses, scientists are still explorers. Jirka Manuel Petersen, from Germany, studied the nudivirus genus. Nudiviruses, which have not received much attention from scientists, are a genus of viruses that affect numerous insects and shellfish. Peterson found the genomes of eight unknown nudiviruses in the online genetic data of various host species. He also looked at how nudiviruses infect the ova of a moth and trigger replication of the virus. ^{RK}

Nudivirus Nexus. Jirka Manuel Petersen ◀ Supervisor Monique van Oers

Baby intestines

The gut flora of a baby develop fast in its first 12 months. Polysaccharides in the mother's milk play a key role, according to research by Athanasia Ioannou, from Greece. Bacteria help one another: the bacteria that can't break down the polymer sugars themselves use the breakdown products of fellow bacteria that can. Ioannou studied that interplay by designing her own gut flora ecosystems. The simulations are a useful representation of what happens in real life. But she has a warning: small differences in the simulation composition can have a big impact on the results. ^{RK}

Paving the way. Athanasia Ioannou ◀ Supervisor Clara Belzer

THE PROPOSITION

PhD candidates explain their most thought-provoking proposition. This time it's **Matthijs Wessels**, who received his PhD on 6 March. His research was about irrigated urban agriculture in the city of Dar es Salaam, Tanzania.
Text Ning Fan



'Science flourishes in the ritual of a coffee break, but only when the coffee is undisputed.'

'I like to drink coffee and I even run a small coffee roastery, sourcing beans from all over the world and roasting them myself. Coffee breaks are therefore valuable to me, and I think science can benefit too from this ritual.'

'Having coffee breaks at work lets you get away from your desk and connect with colleagues in an informal setting. These moments can spark new ideas and collaborations. I am not saying a coffee break always leads to big eureka moments, but even short conversations can sharpen your thinking and give a fresh perspective on your work. 'However, you only benefit from coffee breaks when they are "undisputed". If you are overwhelmed with tasks or feel

stuck in academic competition, a coffee break can start to feel like a burden. You will end up not taking the time for a shared coffee break, which means you won't have these nice and inspiring interactions with others.'

'Do I like the coffee on campus? Well, I appreciate the university's choice to consider sustainability aspects. But as a coffee roaster, I think there is a lot of room for improvement in the flavour. I still drink the campus coffee, but sometimes I bring my own beans to share with colleagues. On those days you see more people joining the coffee break, and I love that!'

Bitterbal battle!

Being a sustainable university with a focus on food and agriculture is a recipe for never-ending discussions about the catering on campus. One person might be concerned about their bank balance after a lunch in a WUR restaurant, while another is calling for a completely vegan assortment and — of course — a ban on guilty pleasures such as deep-fried snacks. Every time we organize an internal session on campus, we

'It's still a sticking point: can the *bitterbal* ever fit with sustainability?'

taste, price, sustainability and inclusion, preferably using local produce? Is it even possible to satisfy all these conflicting wishes at once? Last year, an attempt was made to resolve the matter with the *Bitterbal* Dialogue. But it's still a sticking point: can the classic Dutch meat croquette snack ever really fit with sustainability?

In that context, we need to examine the *bitterbal* more closely. Because let's be honest, the *bitterbal* that everyone gets so worked up about is perhaps the ultimate use case for hybrid food as part of the protein transition. While it is difficult to persuade

face a dilemma: what can we serve our guests that satisfies all the requirements in terms of

de consumers to eat most hybrid products (take Lidl's pea-mince mix), the *bitterbal* has been a successful staple for decades. Mix some animal protein with wheat gluten and wheat fibre (i.e. flour or breadcrumbs) and there you have it! A product with relatively cheap animal protein. The traditional beef *bitterbal* is at risk of being banned from WUR canteens after a noisy campaign, and yet the meat content is only 5 per cent (less meat than most hybrid products!). You could eat 42 of these meat croquettes a day and still be below the limit for red meat according to the guidelines for healthy and sustainable nutrition!

The real lesson? Let's not make life unnecessarily difficult for ourselves at WUR with our canteens and vending machines. Things are already hard enough. Perhaps we should allow ourselves a dish of *bitterballen* to snack on while brainstorming about the impending cuts of 80 million euros. Financially, I'm hoping for a solution that is as hybrid as a *bitterbal*: a bit of salami slicing, a slightly smaller workforce, minor cuts in overheads and perhaps slightly less expensive catering. After all, there's no such thing as a free lunch, even if it's *bitterballen*.



Guido Camps

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

Eighty years of freedom thanks in part to Professor Simon Olivier

RESISTANCE OUT OF PRINCIPLE

Chemistry professor Simon Olivier should have his name printed in gold in the WUR history books. His efforts resisting the Nazis — the Netherlands is celebrating 80 years of liberation from the Germans this year — is a shining example to us all. Text Roelof Kleis • Illustration Valerie Geelen

It is half-past one on a Sunday afternoon, on a dark autumn day in 1940. The teacher Frans van der Have gets a knock at the door. He finds Olivier standing there, wearing a sturdy overcoat. There is a large package attached to the rack on his bicycle. It contains parts for a light machine gun. These details come from the book the teacher wrote after the war about the Resistance in Wageningen, *Kleine Kroniek van het verzet in Wageningen over de periode 1940-1945*. ‘When he takes off his coat, it reveals a cartridge belt hanging round his neck. He got hold of all of this in Veenendaal and cycled back to Wageningen across the Binnenveld with his cargo.’

‘Olivier’ is Simon Olivier, professor of Organic Chemistry at Wageningen Agricultural University. At this point in 1940, the Netherlands had been occupied for nearly six months by Nazi Germany. The Resistance in Wageningen was slowly starting to take shape, writes Van der

Have in his book. He himself grew to become a leader of the Resistance during the war. He soon found a like-minded spirit in Simon Olivier. Van der Have recalled their first meeting. Olivier said, ‘I’m an old social democrat and I want nothing to do with that Hitler rubbish. They may be behaving reasonably OK as yet, but you keep an eye on them.’

Inner anguish

‘Old’ was not just a reference to his lengthy association with the social democrats; Olivier was already 61 when the war broke out. The man with the cartridge belt around his neck was no youngster in search of adventure. His resistance was out of principle. ‘His rejection of any form of oppression or restriction in the freedom of the mind caused him inner anguish when faced with the rise of Nazism and Fascism,

whereby he found support with others who, like him, fought the emerging threat from an early stage,’ wrote his fellow chemist Henri Tendeloo in the chemistry journal *Chemisch Weekblad* in 1949 on Olivier’s retirement as a professor. In the years before the war, Olivier was a member of the Neutral Countries Committee, the Free Spain Committee and Aid to Spain. At the invitation of Spain’s Republican government, he visited the country in 1937 to see the Spanish Civil War at first hand. In that same year, he joined the Vigilance Committee of Anti-National-Socialist Intellectuals, founded in 1936 with the aim of warning the Dutch about the dangers of Nazism. The committee members included such

‘I WANT NOTHING TO DO WITH THAT HITLER RUBBISH’



Op Honk

Simon Olivier lived in the Sahara district on Wagenings Berg from 1925 to his death in 1961. He had the impressive house built himself in the Amsterdam Style. The house, now exactly 100 years old, is a municipal listed building these days. The current occupant, Anneke Blokhuis (88), bought it in 1981 from Olivier's widow (he remarried shortly after the war). The house is largely the same as it was in Olivier's day. It miraculously survived the erroneous bombing in 1944. An aerial photograph from that period shows that the neighbouring houses were reduced to bomb craters. The only signs of the bombing in Olivier's house are some repairs in the walls after damage from grenade fragments. The only reminder it contains of Olivier is a watercolour of the house (see page 14). 'Shortly after we moved here, a woman brought us this,' recalls Anneke Blokhuis. 'She used to come here a lot as a child. I don't know her name or how she came by this painting.' The house is called Op Honk in the painting, but it never had that name in real life. The name 'Olivier' lives on in the Sahara district in the street called Olivierlaan just a stone's throw from his former home.

prominent individuals as the historian Jan Romein and the author Menno ter Braak.

Simon Cornelis Johannes Olivier was born in Amsterdam in 1879. He was the oldest of three sons. He lived in Amsterdam until the age of ten, long enough

to keep the typical Amsterdam sense of humour for the rest of his life, according to Tendeloo. After the early death of his father, the family moved to Apeldoorn, where Olivier went to secondary school. In 1901, he graduated as a chemical engineer in Delft. He worked briefly at the agricultural research station in Groningen before becoming a physics and chemistry teacher in Nijmegen. In early 1905, he moved to Wageningen to

become a lecturer at what was then the National Higher College of Agriculture, Horticulture and Forestry. In 1918, when the Agricultural University was founded, he was appointed professor of chemistry. Apart from a short break during the war, he continued in that post until he retired in 1949.

Outsider

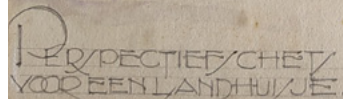
Simon Olivier was politically engaged and outspoken, which made him something of an outsider. According to him, the Dutch intelligentsia were not much



**OLIVIER SIGNED
THE ARYAN
CERTIFICATE.
'QUITE WRONG,'
HE SAID LATER**

made; they are filled with a dangerous explosive,' explained the assistant. 'I came on foot because it's important not to shake them. Look, they've been packed neatly in wood shavings. Be careful because otherwise the whole thing will blow up.'

It was not long before Olivier clashed with the Nazi authorities. When employees of the Agricultural Uni-



versity were ordered to sign an Aryan certificate in October 1940, he refused initially. He signed eventually, but only after he was threatened with dismissal. 'Completely wrong,' he said himself after the war. When this was followed by the first dismissals of Jewish employees, student strikes broke out. Some professors stopped teaching for a few days in protest. Others, including Olivier, used their lessons to draw attention to this injustice. In Olivier's case, this resulted in him being hauled up for a hearing in January 1941 at the Ministry of Education in The Hague. He was let off with a final warning.

Six months later, in July, he was not so lucky. Student supporters of the Dutch Nazi party (NSB) covered the windows of the main university building with posters showing the German V for Victory sign. Olivier had the posters removed immediately. A few days later, he was arrested. He was held in captivity for 11 months, including in the notorious Oranjestad in Scheveningen and the Amersfoort concentration camp. In his own words, this was where he 'got to know close-up the methods used by the Germans to make their opponents see reason'. This was also where he met his former assistant Gèza Berger, who had been dismissed in 1940 because he was Jewish. Olivier and Berger had worked together for years. This would be the last time they saw one another. Berger was deported to Germany, never to return. Olivier was released in summer 1943. He was aged 64 by then and was very weak. He was no longer a professor, and he was banned from publishing and from

A life full of adversity

Simon Olivier experienced a lot of adversity in his private life. The biggest blow was undoubtedly the bombing in 1944 that killed his wife Maria Haitsma and his 19-year-old son Tim. His daughter Jeanne was already married by then and no longer living at home. The names of Maria and Tim are recorded on the monument in Ericaplein that was put up in 2019 to remember the bombing.

Simon and Maria married in 1913 when he was 34 and she was only 23. His first marriage, to Gesina Smit from Wageningen, had ended three years before. He had married her one year after being appointed a lecturer in Wageningen at the age of 25. This marriage produced a daughter, but she died when only one week old. After the bombardment in 1944, Olivier got married for a third time. His third wife was Ida Luyten, the chief assistant in the Laboratory for Plant Physiology. He was 65, his new wife in her early fifties. Olivier's daughter Jeanne had an intellectually disabled daughter from her first marriage, which ended in 1945. She married again later on in life and her step-son-in-law Michiel Moerdijk has warm memories of her. 'She was an important civil servant in the Ministry of Agriculture. A strong, amazing woman. Very modest. But she never talked about her father. She also never said her brother had died in that bombardment.' Jeanne died in 1990.

Despite all this, the name Olivier lives on, as Moerdijk gave one of his children that name. The Royal Netherlands Chemical Society recently established the Olivier lectures. The first two were held last month during the biennial conference in Lunteren.



Simon Olivier around 1938

FORTY WAGENINGEN RESIDENTS WERE KILLED, INCLUDING SIMON OLIVIER'S WIFE AND ONLY SON

entering university towns. He retired to the Betuwe to recuperate. Then he left for The Hague, where he started work again in a laboratory. That was where he experienced the greatest blow the war brought him.

Bombardment

It was Sunday morning, 17 September 1944, a fine autumn day with mist hanging in the trees and a clear blue sky. Planes could be seen ahead, as the Battle of Arnhem was about to start. Then all hell broke loose. No fewer than 160 fragmentation bombs were dropped on the recently-built Sahara district on the slopes of Wageningse Berg. By mistake. The Allied bombs were intended for the German anti-aircraft guns half a kilometre away near the Lexkes ferry. Forty Wageningen residents were killed,

including Simon Olivier's wife and his only son. They died in the front garden of their home on Bergstraat. One year later, Olivier recalled this event in his speech during the reopening of the university, with remarkable restraint. 'The oppression and terror was followed by the violence of war with all its horrors. The parachute landings near Oosterbeek were preceded by an aerial bombardment that hit and almost completely destroyed the laboratory for agricultural chemistry.' Not a word on his own huge loss. ■

Cuts will mean loss of jobs

The cuts will cost jobs at WUR too, as became clear two weeks ago. It was the first time redundancies were mentioned in connection with the planned cutbacks. President of the Executive Board Sjoukje Heimovaara talks of a 'multifaceted challenge'.



Text Willem Andréé

We are preparing for a situation in which our income as of 1 January 2028 is ten per cent less than now,' says Heimovaara. 'That is how we arrive at a figure of 80 million euros in cutbacks.' This is due in part to an expected drop of 45 million euros in research contracts and education funding for specific groups. The Board is also planning cuts of 35 million euros to keep the organization financially sound. 'So that we make sure not all of the 80 million in cuts is borne by research and education, leaving us in a vicious circle.'

WUR is facing a multi-faceted challenge, says Heimovaara. The budget cuts proposed by the Ministry of Education, totalling one billion euros, were accepted by the Upper House of Parliament last week. Tilburg University and Radboud University are considering lawsuits. Heimovaara: 'Each university is making its own decision on legal steps. We too are angry that the administrative agreement has now been cancelled unilaterally and we are filing an objection, but we aren't going to court. Even if the lawsuits are successful, the ministry will have to balance its budget somehow and that will affect us.'

'We have chosen not to go to court'

There are also other external challenges. The Ministry of Education has already cut back on funding for the Dutch Research Council. Plus the facts that student numbers are falling nationwide and ever fewer Dutch students are choosing degrees in science.

Plans

Revenue from the Ministry of Agriculture is also under pressure. Much of the funding for Wageningen Research (WR) comes from The Hague. Heimovaara: 'So WR is facing an uncertain future too. Costs are rising due to inflation and wage increases in the collective labour agreement. The question is whether the rising costs can be covered. Those could easily come to ten per cent — but as said, we aren't expecting any extra revenue.' WUR is currently working on the cuts through what it terms parallel processes. 'One process is to look at where we need to make choices due to the impact of external decisions — less money from the Ministry of Education, for example, or fewer contracts from the private sector. At the same time, we are looking at internal processes and habits that we can influence directly.' With that in mind, building opening hours became shorter after the cuts were announced and a critical review was conducted of temporary job contracts and natural turnover due to retirement. Heimovaara: 'We knew beforehand

this wouldn't be enough to make the cuts we needed. That is why we have now asked the central staff departments (including Facilities & Services, CS+ and ESA, ed.) to submit detailed plans for making savings.' To make a long story short, the task for internal services is to become more efficient, using fewer resources. Heimovaara: 'Our funding arrives in the places where we do research and teaching; those are our core activities. If the income falls there, it means there will be fewer people and groups to pay the costs of the support services such as Facilities & Services and CS+.' The staff departments' savings plans will let WUR shield the research and education side for as long as possible, says the Board President. The department directors have been briefed, for example using the savings ideas offered by employees in the Finding Answers Together meetings. They came up with ideas along seven 'routes', for example *Reducing overheads* or *Making research more efficient and effective*. 'As the Board, we have made a selection and we've issued our own assignment.' Heimovaara is unable to say what that assignment is. The deadline for the directors is in May, when the Executive Board will formulate a proposed decision.

Fear

How many FTEs will have to go is not yet clear, says Heimovaara. The Human Resources department also replies, when asked, that it is too early to say anything, for example about temporary contracts not being renewed. One thing is clear though: the cutbacks will have far-reaching effects. The Board President says this is only the start. 'I fear everyone will be affected one way or another. Some people will have to say goodbye to their job here. I have said before how special it is for me to be able to work at Wageningen, and that applies to a lot of people. Some of them might be told there is no future for them here. That's awful. We are fully aware of what this means for people. But we are taking our time to come up with well-considered plans.' The staff departments say they cannot make any concrete statements at present. They will do so at a later date, informing employees first.

Regulations

What does it actually mean when WUR says it isn't ruling out a 'reduction in jobs'? What is possible and what isn't? HR Director Martijn Scheen says WUR is sticking to the regulations in the NU and WR collective labour agreements. Both these agreements have sections on reorganizations that set out the rights and obligations of WUR and its employees during a reorganization. There are also rules on redundancy packages and other measures for the people affected by a reorganization, including reorganizations in order to cut costs for financial

reasons. 'We will be doing all we can to foster job mobility and guide people to work elsewhere. If that isn't possible within the mandatory periods specified in the collective labour agreements, there will be dismissals.' In determining who is surplus to requirements, WUR has to keep to the statutory rules on redundancy. That means the proportionality principle is used to decide who qualifies for redundancy. This principle ensures a fair age profile.

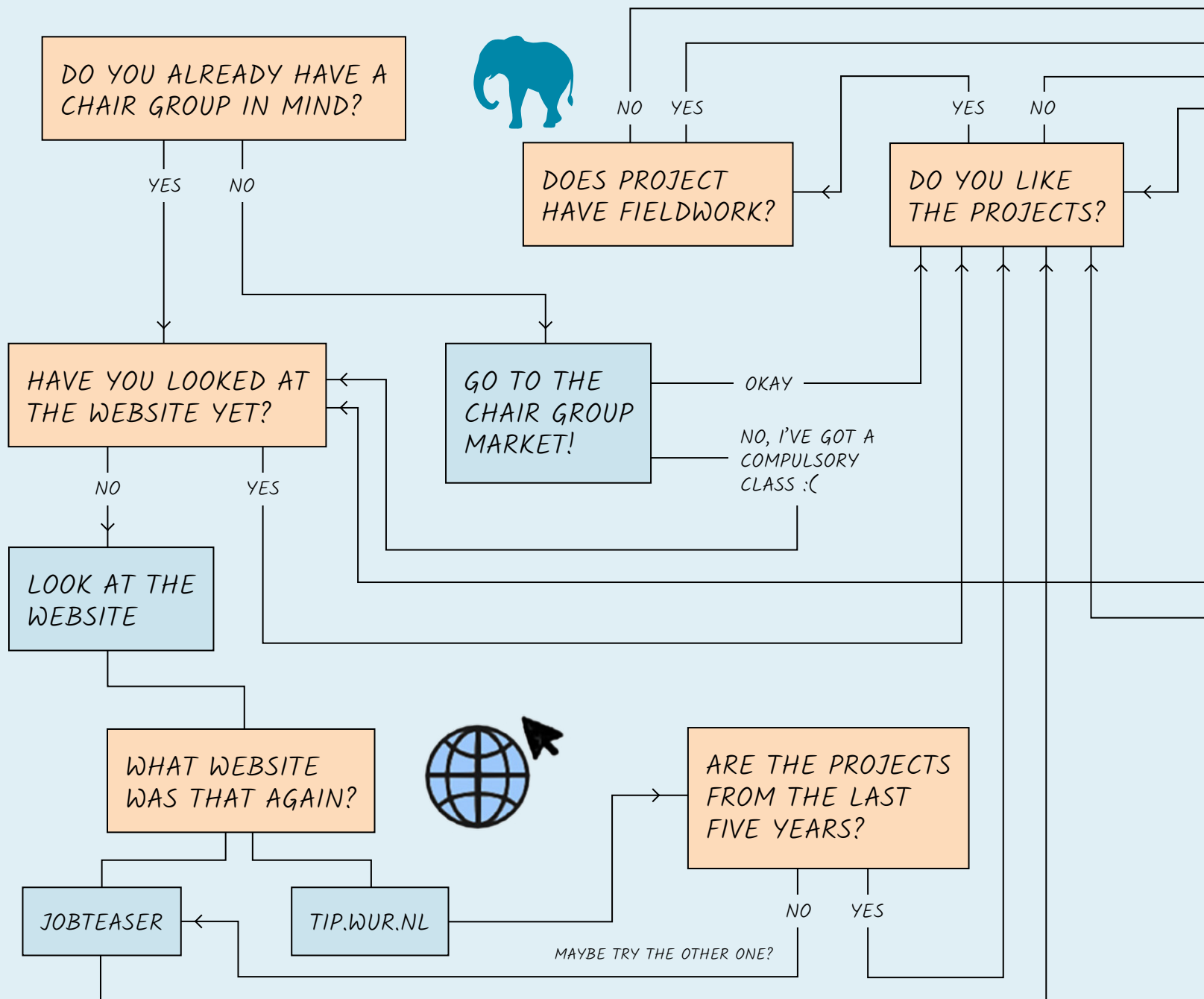
Incidentally, when big changes are made to research and education, the Board is required to submit the proposed decisions to the WUR Council first. The WUR Council tells *Resource* that it is unable to comment on the Executive Board's plans at this early stage. Chair Blair van Pelt: 'But we will fulfil our role as a consultative body and engage in a dialogue with the Board.' ■

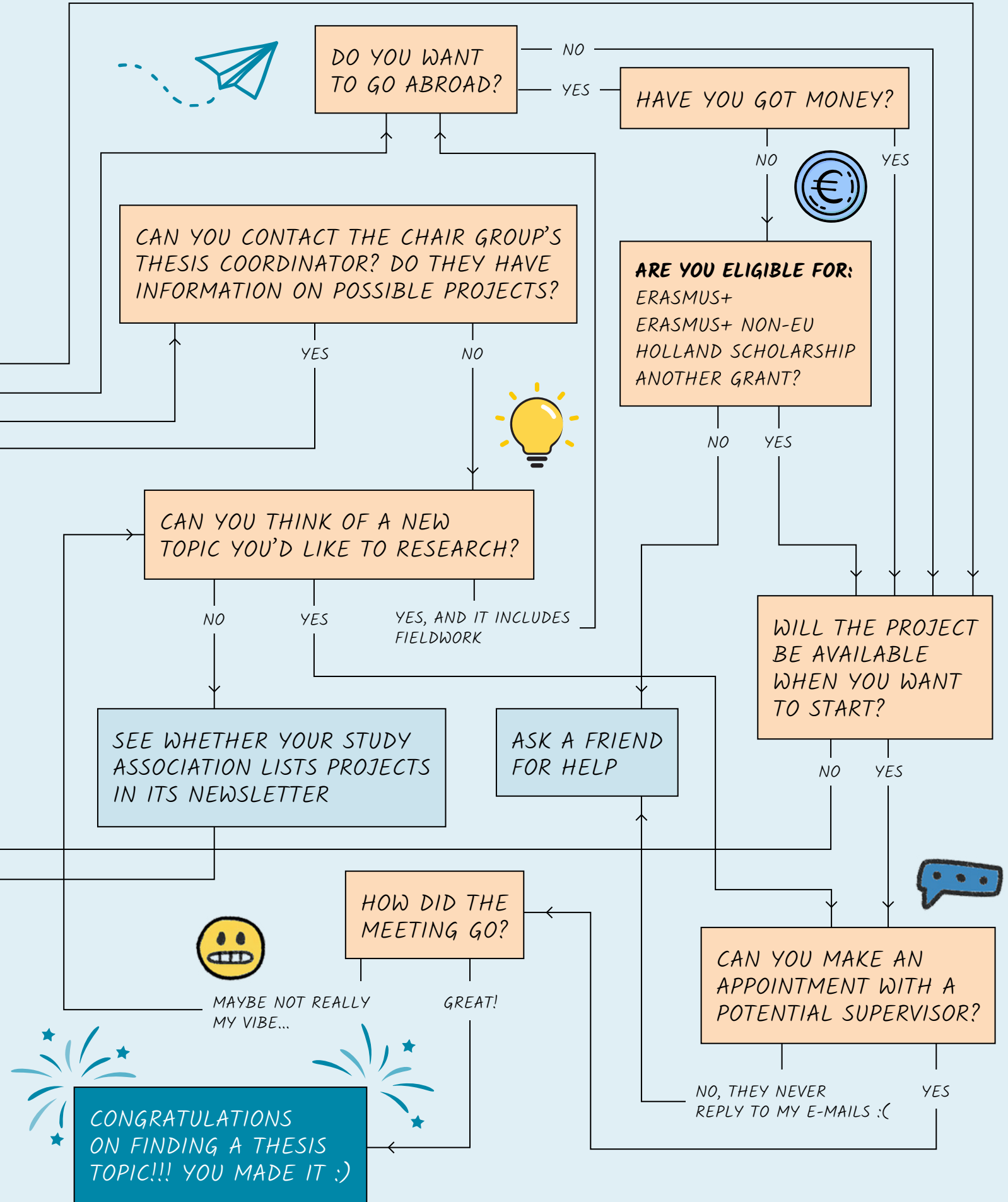


Wageningen solidarity during the strike on Monday to protest against the higher education cuts. ♦ Photo Resource

HELP, I NEED A THESIS TOPIC!

You've nearly reached the end of your Master's (or Bachelor's) but you can't seem to find an inspiring topic for your thesis. Student editors Mario Martens and Ana Clara Mattiuzzi Martins have been there, done that and are happy to help you. Take these steps to find the perfect thesis topic!





‘Animals shouldn’t always come off worse’

Even though animal ethics expert Bernice Bovenkerk still has to publish her book – aimed at the general public – on her Vidi project, she has already secured a follow-up Vici grant from the Dutch Research Council. She will again be delving into a complex but appealing topic: how technology can help make human-animal relations more equal.



Text Marieke Enter

For centuries, humans ruling over animals was the dominant picture in the relationship between humans and animals. But as scientists revealed more and more about the intelligence and feelings of animals, that approach became harder to justify. This has led to lots of new questions and dilemmas about what is permissible and what is not in the way we treat animals. All of which is the field of study of animal ethics specialist Bernice Bovenkerk, associate professor in the Philosophy chair group.

Her previous major research project, for which she got a Vidi grant, was about the agency of animals — their ability to act on their own behalf. In practice, Bovenkerk explains, agency is often defined as the extent to which an animal has choices and control over its own life, although animal ethicists have a somewhat stricter definition. ‘The crucial thing for us is that it’s a relational concept: your environment can increase your agency or restrict it.’

It’s not just humans who need to be able

to exercise agency; that is equally important for animals. Bovenkerk: ‘Animal scientists are now agreed that animals are not driven by instinct nearly as much as we assumed in the past. It turns out animals have their own views on their life, and individual preferences about what to do with their life.’

In the Vidi project, Bovenkerk and her team studied the agency of various categories of animals, such as wild animals. ‘Wild predators in particular have quite a lot of scope for exercising their agency. But then you immediately get into what is called the predator problem: what about the agency of their prey?’ she says. That dilemma is relevant not just to African savannahs but also to Dutch gardens. Think of the agency of pet cats versus that of the birds they catch in excessively large numbers. ‘You see the same dilemma in the polarization around the wolf. Not everyone is willing to accept wolves killing sheep. Some would rather

the wolf’s agency was restricted, for example by giving them a more sharply defined area in which to roam. But these same people don’t see a problem in the fact that humans kill sheep, tens of thousands of them per month.’

Stray dogs versus pet dogs

Another part of the Vidi project is the research that PhD candidate Yulia Kisora did in Georgia on the agency of stray dogs. Her study gives you a different perspective on the comparison between stray dogs and pet dogs. What is worth more in a dog’s life: the comfort of a ‘home’ or the greater freedom of choice in a life on the streets? She will soon be releasing a film about this.

Closer to home, postdoc Koen Kramer looked at whether farm technology restricts the agency of dairy cows or facilitates it. He found both effects. Manure and milking robots, cow toilets and electric cow brushes give dairy cows more scope for exercising their agency than they would otherwise have. For example, the milking robot lets the cow

‘At present, technology mainly benefits humans’



Bernice Bovenkerk • Photo Duncan de Fey

decide for itself when it wants to be milked. At the same time, the technological barn gadgets can be quite controlling: the cows are expected to keep to certain 'scripts'. Things such as freedom of choice in their partners or submerging themselves in ditch water when it is hot are not options.

Bovenkerk's next big research project is also about technology in the context of human-animal relations — but this

time high-tech and on a bigger scale. The Dutch Research Council (NWO) recently gave her a Vici grant worth 1.5 million euros. 'I don't see agency as meaning an animal should always be able to do exactly what it wants,' says Bovenkerk. 'But it shouldn't be the case either that animals always come off worse when they live alongside humans. It's a question of give and take, of negotiating almost. Then you are taking agency seriously. At present, technology mainly benefits humans, for example in the optimization of livestock farming. I want to investigate the other side: how can digital technology mainly benefit animals

Book for the general public

Bovenkerk will conclude her Vidi project with a book presenting the topic of animal agency (see text) to a wide readership, with contributions from guest authors. For example, the animal language researchers Leonie Cornips and Marjo van Koppen, both from the Meertens Institute, will discuss how cows and cats point. The Utrecht animal ethics expert Monique Janssens will look at whether animals can give informed consent to animal tests. The landscape architect Thijs de Zeeuw will discuss how the design of zoo enclosures can boost agency, and the philosopher Eva Meijer — who recently published a book on her adopted lab mice — will consider toads' migration. The plan is for the book to be published in the autumn.

and under what conditions, and how can technology make a positive contribution to human-animal relations?'

Language of whales

Whether technology truly improves the relationship between humans and animals remains to be seen, notes Bovenkerk. 'It depends on how humans deal with the technology in practice. But technology has a lot of potential in principle. Artificial intelligence, for example, could be used for developing inter-species translation systems. An understanding of what animals are saying — if they even want to talk to us — could have a big impact on the picture people have of animals.' The intention is to have a research project on the language of whales as part of Bovenkerk's Vici programme. 'If we can figure that out, hopefully people are more likely to see the whales for what they are: individuals with their own personalities and desires, that live in groups with their own cultures and languages. Modern technology will make it clear to people that there is much more to animals than they thought'. ■

Four students on their experiences in the military

A SIDE JOB IN THE ARMED FORCES

Thijs, Floor, Verena and Martijn aren't standing behind the bar, tutoring kids or working in a call centre. Their side job involves donning a uniform, with the risk of being sent to the front in a war. What drives these Wageningen students?

Text Luuk Zegers • Photos Shutterstock

Thijs Neggers (23)

has paused his Master's in Biology to serve in the navy for a year

'A year of service is a nice way of getting to know the armed forces. After basic military training, you spend a year in the military police, the navy, the army or the air force. I chose the navy, and since mid-March I've been sailing on the *Tromp*, an air defence and command frigate. Our ship currently leads a NATO fleet. That feels quite special. We patrol the North Sea and are now near Iceland.

'During the basic training, you have to do all sorts of tests. Obstacles through the water, target practice, or crawling across the grass at four in the morning. It can be gruelling, but it's also a really cool experience. In week four of the training, 18 of us shared a tent at minus eight degrees. We were in each other's pockets, everyone was extremely tired... so you really get to know each other well. **I find that solidarity something special; you don't get that at uni.**

'Life at sea mainly consists of training. We do a lot of radar and identification training. Officially I'm in the



logistics service, which means that I help with food, for example. But I'm allowed to see what others are doing. 'I started doing this because I can see that the world is changing. If something happens, I want to be knowledgeable and not helpless. In the military, you learn to be disciplined, deal with hierarchy, develop as a person and push your boundaries. I don't know yet whether I want to stay with the military. If the answer is "yes" after this year in service, I'll probably do the officer training programme. But I also like biology. If I choose to do that, I will remain a reservist.'

Floor Huigen (25)

is doing a Master's in Sustainable Business and has been working at Defensity College, in the navy, since summer 2023

'A housemate of mine worked at Defensity College, a programme for students who want to use the expertise from their studies in the military. You receive military training and become a reservist in the army, air force, navy or military police. Additionally, you work on an assignment at least one day a week. That housemate did such cool things that I also got excited. At the same time, I doubted whether I could handle it. On my housemate's recommendation, I applied. There's a strict selection process, so I reckoned I would find out automatically if it was too much for me. With each round I advanced, I found myself getting more and more excited. Yet even after I was hired, I continued to feel a kind of impostor syndrome, as if I didn't actually belong among those tough people in the military. 'I'm now a year and a half in, and I'm more grounded and confident. **The basic training has given me military skills. I've taken part in exercises in Scotland and a mountain training programme in Germany, learning military skiing and practising avalanche rescue operations.** You learn to collaborate in all sorts of circumstances and how to lead others in a way that suits you. There are so many things you can do within the Defensity College programme. Last week, for example, I went to Ypres for a tour of the site of a battle from the First World War. Super interesting, and you get paid well for it. It's also a fun group of students. We celebrate our



own Foundation Day each year with a symposium and gala, and we hold sports days and get-togethers with military work students from the same city.

'After two promotions, I'm now a sublieutenant. At the moment, I'm helping organize the forces-wide swearing-in for reservists, an event in The Hague where reservists swear allegiance to the King.

'My work in the military takes up about 20 hours a week. During the holidays I'm sometimes on exercises, and then it's 24/7. To be able to combine it with my studies, I have to plan well. I often work on the train, in the evenings and in the weekends. It requires flexibility, from my fellow students and my teachers too at times. Sometimes it works, sometimes it doesn't.'

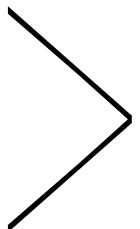


Verena van den Dikkenberg (25)

is doing a Master's in Landscape Architecture. She is involved in the air force through Defensity College.

'A former flatmate was at Defensity College. I thought the military was only for strong, tough types and I didn't see myself in that category. I also had my doubts about the military because the aim may be peace but they achieve it by waging war. Even so, it sounded like an awesome side job. So I went ahead and applied, but I was up front about my doubts. I was taken on anyway and I've been doing it for about a year now.

'Defensity College has jobs for students on all kinds of degree programmes. For my first assignment, I looked at the effects of the Natura2000 laws on the redevelopment of the naval port. That meant spend-



ing one day a week in Den Helder. I'm now on my second assignment. I'm looking at the redesign of that port along with two landscape architects in the Government Real Estate Agency — both former WUR students. It's a challenge because a lot of different activities have to take place in a limited space. Afterwards, I will look at how to streamline the training of medical staff at Defence Ministry locations. At the moment, the different locations often use different approaches, which is not handy.

'My Defensivity College activities take up at least one day a week, but it can be two or three days. That's doable if you don't mind studying or working in the evenings and weekends sometimes to catch up.

Martijn Smakman (24)

is doing a Master's in Spatial Planning. He has just been accepted by Defensivity College

'After a long application process, I was accepted by Defensivity College on 1 April. I still have to do my basic military training. After the introduction, I'll look for a position within the military. I come from Breezand, just south of Den Helder, and we always used to go to the navy's open days. Despite that, I applied to the army because I think it's a better fit with my degree subject, spatial planning. The expansion of the armed forces also means the training areas will need to expand, for instance. How do you do that while taking account of nature, local residents and other stakeholders? I think it would be really interesting to help with issues like that.

'After the Cold War, the military no longer seemed necessary and it was scaled back a lot to save money. However, recent developments have shown that a strong military really is important. **I thought: in these turbulent times you can stand on the sidelines feeling scared, or you can do your bit**, push yourself, learn things and know what to do if all hell breaks loose.

'I'm hoping the military will be a challenge – physically, mentally and intellectually. I hope to be joining training exercises in the Netherlands and abroad, doing the Four Days March with a backpack, as well as working on an assignment where I can put the things I've learned in my degree to good use.

'During military training, you find out new things about yourself, for example how you respond to stress. Next summer, I want to go to Lofer in Austria to do mountain training — take on a physical challenge and learn to collaborate and take charge.

'As a reservist, you can be called up if a NATO territory is attacked. I'm not exactly desperate to be sent to the front, but on the other hand I don't want to be sitting at home doing nothing either. I'd rather play my part.'



'You have to spend at least one day a week on an assignment, so that could make combining it with my studies difficult. Teachers vary in their attitudes to this. Some think it's great, whereas others immediately start protesting and saying that's going to be a problem for the schedule. But the bottom line is that the country needs more reservists. So I would ask teachers to be a bit flexible.'

STUDENTS ADD GREENERY AROUND THE CHURCH

‘Last weekend I was sitting outside at a cafe here. Then it’s really nice to be able to see your own work,’ says Fleur Bastings. ‘It’s great when the first design of yours that actually gets implemented is for your own town.’ That work is the greenery around the church in Markt square. Text Roelof Kleis

Bastings and fellow student Joerie Gerritsjans have been keeping a close watch on developments around the church in the past few months. Both are still studying for their degrees. The other members of the Landscape Architecture & Spatial Planning ACT group (Elzemieke Brouwer, Leon Herrenauw, Eline Ranshuysen and Fuyuki Wakayama) who designed the Markt greenery have since graduated. They completed their assignment back in July 2023, but implementation only started this February.

The assignment from retail and hospitality businesses was to make the town centre greener. ‘To transform the town centre from a place to shop into a place to be,’ as centre manager Robert Frijlink puts it. Gerritsjans: ‘The centre has a fair amount of greenery, but that’s mainly in the parks beyond the canal. There’s not much greenery otherwise.’ ‘Wageningen is the City of Life Sciences and has a very green university, but that isn’t reflected in the town centre,’ adds Bastings. ‘The centre is all brickwork, which produces a lot of heat stress. On a summer’s day, the temperature in the Markt can feel ten degrees warmer. That’s only going to get worse in future.’

Despairing

But the options for increasing the amount of greenery are limited. Bastings: ‘Businesses find accessibility and space for parking and deliveries very important. There are also lots of listed buildings that you can’t do anything with. ‘We got

to the point where we were despairing because there was so much that was out of the question.’ ‘We had to find a balance between easily implementable measures and out-of-the-box ideas,’ says Gerritsjans. As regards Markt square, the decision was made to turn the oval around the church into a green space with plants and paving that lets water through. The new section of the town hall was given a green facade. The implementation of the design immediately showed the shortcomings of urban greenery efforts: it has only been half

‘The centre is all brickwork, which produces a lot of heat stress’

implemented. There is no green to be seen on the east side of the building, which has a lot of shadow. ‘That’s because of the market,’ explains Frijlink. ‘The space is too narrow for a plant bed. The oval area has to stay paved so that the market stall holders can park their vehicles there.’

The new greenery in the Markt is one of three plans that were worked out in detail. The other two are Hoogstraat (the main shopping street) and Salverdaplein. ‘The next step is to make Hoogstraat greener,’ says Frijlink. While taking account of the numerous restrictions. ‘We will be adjusting the students’ ideas on doing something with facade gardens, green arches and plant beds to come up with something feasible.’ ■

Read more about the three plans on resource-online.nl



Fleur Bastings and Joerie Gerritsjans next to the church on Markt square in Wageningen • Photo Resource

In-house knowledge used to boost healthy habits

Stairs or lift in Lebo?

Only a few people take the stairs in Leeuwenborch. Too few, in the eyes of the researchers in the Consumption & Healthy Lifestyles group, which is based in 'Lebo'. Drawing on their own expertise, they asked Facilities & Services to make changes to the working environment. The project resulted in a Master's thesis and a plan grounded in science. Photo Guy Ackermans



Text Dominique Vrouwenvelder

It is a typical example of building designs from the 1950s, with three large lifts right next to the entrance but stairs that are hidden away. Students and staff even end up queueing to use the lift at the start of the working day and at lunchtime. That needs to change, decided staff in the Consumption & Healthy Lifestyles group.

Assistant professor Sanne Raghoobar set to work on the issue. 'If you want to change people's behaviour, you need to know what factors are causing that behaviour. That is exactly what we look at in our field of research. Now, we could use our social science knowledge for the benefit of other social scientists,' she says. Her thesis student Julia Joosten (Management, Economics & Consumer Studies) tackled the topic.

Boring and echoes

Joosten used focus groups to find out what was stopping Lebo people from taking the stairs. Joosten: 'The access door is heavy, the stairwell echoes a lot so it feels like everyone can hear you, and it has a hospital smell. In addition, the stairwell is boring and people who take the stairs get disoriented because there aren't enough signs showing what floor you're on. People also don't like being out of breath when they get to their destination floor. One reason *for* taking the stairs that was sometimes mentioned is to avoid someone else.' Joosten carried out a second study to determine which

of these factors were most important for Lebo users. Those factors could then be the starting point in deciding how to nudge people to change their behaviour. 'Suppose you put up a poster saying taking the stairs is good for your health but people find sustainability more important, then you won't have the effect you wanted. It turns out Lebo users find various factors important. So if you address individual motives such as health and sustainability, plus social factors such as lack of time and crowded lifts, plus the ambience of the building, you can persuade more people to use the stairs.'

Joosten presented her research results to Facilities & Services. 'They were really enthusiastic. An architect will now be using the findings from my thesis to come up with a design that makes the stairs more appealing.'

In-house knowledge

Supervisor Sanne Raghoobar thinks it is good to see the knowledge WUR has being applied in its own environment. 'Julia's research considers the stairs issue by looking at the root causes. That knowledge makes any intervention more targeted and therefore more effective. It's all very well designing a great new staircase but if the design doesn't key into the requirements of Lebo users, they'll still take the lift.' ■



WUR student helps set agricultural policy in Brussels

‘Negotiations can be chaotic’

Imagine sitting down at a table with the European Commission President, Ursula von der Leyen, to formulate the EU’s future agricultural policy when you have yet to finish your Master’s thesis. There are not many students who can say that, but Peter Meedendorp is one of them. He talked about his experiences recently during a guest lecture for the Agriculture, Food & Policy course. Text Marieke Enter

Half of Europe’s farmers are due to retire in the next 15 years. That makes younger farmers particularly important to the EU. The reverse is true too: the EU’s Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) and its subsidies are hugely important to young farmers. So there is a lot at stake for both sides. Meedendorp knows all about this. He is not only a WUR Master’s student but also an arable farmer and the chair of CEJA, the European Council of Young Farmers. In that capacity, he was one of a select group of 29 key players invited to join the discussions in the ‘strategic dialogue on the future of agriculture in the EU’, initiated by the EU President, Ursula von der Leyen. This was last year, against a backdrop of farmers’ protests flaring up all over Europe. The President of WUR’s Executive Board, Sjoukje Heimovaara, was another of the 29 key figures. Her role ended when the final report was delivered last September, but Meeden-

dorp, as CEJA chair, is still closely monitoring agricultural policy-making in Brussels. At the end of February, building on the strategic dialogue, the European Commission presented its vision on food and agriculture looking ahead to 2040. The fact that this vision document explicitly mentions young farmers as a priority is a nice win for Meedendorp and CEJA. Now that needs to be reflected in the specifics of the new CAP, the details of which will be announced later this year.

Sofa farmers

Meedendorp’s dual role as both a WUR student and someone operating at the heart of Brussels’ agricultural policy-making led to the invitation from the Agricultural Economics and Rural Policy chair group for him to give a guest lecture for the Agriculture, Food & Policy course. Because if anyone can give students an understanding of the dynamics of decision-making and lobbying in Brussels, it’s Meedendorp. He gave the students —

who were not just from EU countries but also from Norway, India, Canada and the United States, for example — a fascinating insight into European agricultural policy. He started by outlining the issues at stake for young farmers. They include the availability of agricultural land — although that is more of a national issue than an EU one — which is a major bottleneck given the ageing farmer population profile. Older farmers hold onto their land until they are in their seventies or eighties because that is basically their pension. What little land does come on the market is increasingly being bought up by institutional investors who see it as an inflation-proof investment. That means it is getting harder and more expensive for young farmers to acquire the hectares they need. Access to capital is also a notorious problem for young farmers. That has become even harder due to the strict rules for banks (Basel IV), which now have to apply higher liquidity require-



Student Peter Meedendorp was one of 29 key players invited last year to join the discussions in the 'strategic dialogue on the future of agriculture in the EU', initiated by the EU President, Ursula von der Leyen. This was against a backdrop of farmers' protests flaring up all over Europe.
Photo Shutterstock

ments to grant loans. 'But farmers have limited liquidity by definition because their money is tied up in the land,' says Meedendorp. What is more, lots of young farmers miss out on EU agricultural grants. 'A lot of grants are based on the number of hectares. Some of that money goes to what we call "sofa farmers": ones who just lease out their land.'

Negotiating

Other key issues for young farmers that he mentioned include knowledge and skills ('young farmers need to be very versatile, certainly with the increasing burden of the restrictions laid down by law') and the quality of rural life ('if increasing scale means only a few farms are left, as is the case in Romania, that won't be enough to support amenities such as shops and schools'). In CEJA's view, all those aspects should be covered in the EU's agricultural vision and policy. Meedendorp therefore did his utmost to get these issues into the final report on the strategic dialogue, and then the vision on agriculture. But no lobbying group ever gets everything they want — not even Mee-

Access to capital is also a notorious problem for young farmers

dendorp's CEJA. The students wanted to know how you deal with that. How do you decide what issues you are willing to compromise on and what is non-negotiable? Do you sometimes end up defending things you don't agree with personally ('of course, that's part of the negotiating game!')? How do you accept defeat, how do you maintain grass-roots support, and what about formal and informal power? Meedendorp also talked about the dynamics of the negotiating process: 'You'd expect the negotiations to be very structured but in practice it was quite chaotic at times. Some plenary sessions were closer to theatre or therapy sessions, especially when emotions ran high.' Meedendorp gave students some wise lessons. Keep calm, make sure you know how your grassroots members feel, don't under-

estimate the person you are negotiating with but don't overestimate them either, even if they are high-ranking. And above all, remember the message is sometimes more important than the substantive details. 'People often don't read reports from start to finish. So think about what message you want them to remember. The narrative is key.' ■

Peter Meedendorp has a Bachelor's degree in International Relations from the University of Groningen and is currently studying for a Master's in the Economics of Sustainability at Wageningen. He was appointed chair of the European Council of Young Farmers (CEJA) in June 2023. He had already been a board member of NAKJ, the Dutch young farmers' association, since 2021 with responsibility for international affairs. In addition to his degree studies and his CEJA role, he also runs an arable farm and contracting firm with his father in Onstwedde in Groningen.

Garbage or dinner?

‘Dumpster diving’ – looking in rubbish bins for food that’s still edible – is becoming a popular activity among people who want to reduce food waste. There are dumpster divers operating in and around Wageningen too. How does it feel searching for food in a bin? And what do you need to know if you want to try it? *Resource* spoke to two dumpster divers, a beginner and a veteran.

Text Luuk Zegers • Illustration Marly Hendricks

WUR student Magdalena* made her debut as a dumpster diver recently

‘My flatmate regularly “does the grocery shopping” by dumpster diving. We have a large fridge that we fill every week with food that the supermarket throws away. I thought dumpster diving sounded interesting, as if you literally dive into a stinking rubbish bin. So one evening, I went along with my flatmate to try it out. ‘We wore old trousers and rubber boots because you can easily step in an open yoghurt carton. We also had helmet lights, large shopping bags and plastic gloves. Incidentally, there are hardly any opportunities for dumpster diving in Wageningen, as most supermarkets lock their waste containers. So we had to drive about 15 minutes to find a suitable location. ‘Somebody had just dumped a whole load of advertising folders so we had to remove those first to get to the food. On a balcony above us, someone stood smoking and watching me picking things out and handing them to my partners in crime. I climbed back out of the



container a little later, with my hands covered in sauce and with a vague feeling I was doing something clandestine. Less than ten minutes later, we were on our way home with full shopping bags.

‘Back home, it took us a good hour to sort the stuff. There was a lot of potato salad and liver sausage, both of which I find really disgusting. We also had a lot of meat and fish. If the weather’s cold and it’s only just been thrown away, it’s often still OK for a while, but you need to be careful — sniff and examine it before you eat it. I’m normally a vegetarian, but it’s such a shame to throw away meat because then the animals died for nothing. So then I eat meat. We also had a bag with 200 bread rolls, regular and chocolate croissants and more stuff from the bakery section, baked fresh that day but unsold. We shared the rolls with everyone in Droef.

‘Dumpster diving is really a kind of grocery shopping, only dirtier. And you don’t know what you’ll bring home. I think it’s a nice way of combating food waste. It’s also good to use your senses to decide whether food is still edible rather than purely relying on the sell-by date. We’ve kind of forgotten how to do that in modern times.’

‘Dumpster diving is really a kind of grocery shopping, only dirtier’

WUR researcher Renaud* from France has been dumpster diving regularly for ten years

'I read about dumpster diving in the university magazine when I was studying for my Bachelor's in France. When I moved into a shared house where housemates were already doing it, I asked if I could join them. That's how it started.

'At first, I was just curious to see what you could find. That's still one of the nice things: the thrill of never knowing what you'll get. You rummage around, observing and using your senses. You need to touch, sniff and taste the food you find. Dumpster diving makes you more conscious of what you consume.

'After a while, I began exploring the city on my own in search of good places for dumpster diving. One bakery became my favourite: every time I went there, I came home with bags full of croissants, baguettes, brioches and more. Sure, they were from the day before, but they still tasted great. I shared them with my classmates, saying, "It's from the bin so eat at your own risk". One day, the bakery owner caught me. He was angry and wanted to chase me away, but I stood my ground because I wanted to talk to him. In the end, he agreed it was better for the food to be eaten rather than thrown away. That was a beautiful moment.

'I also spent some time in the south of Spain, where they produce a lot of fruit and vegetables for the rest of Europe. Everything that's too ripe to export just gets thrown away. I never had to buy fruit or vegetables when I was living there.

'There aren't many places in Wageningen where you can go dumpster diving because most supermarket containers are locked. But I managed to find one spot and I still go there every other week. It's a nice hobby and you are rewarded with free food, but it's also sad to see how much food is thrown away. Dumpster diving only lets you save a fraction of that.

'Advice for people who want to try it out? Go in the winter, because then the food stays fresh longer and it's darker so there's less risk of you being disturbed. Be careful about what you decide to eat, especially when it comes to meat products. And be respectful. Don't damage anything or throw trash around. And if people ask you to leave, then leave.' ■

** Fictitious names have been used for the interviewees as dumpster diving is illegal in the Netherlands*

'It's a nice hobby, but it's sad to see how much food is thrown away'



Limelight



SAT
03-05-25

Café Loburg Wageningen

From 22:30

Tickets 12 euros

They have appeared on TV and will be performing this year at such major festivals as Paaspop, but Red Hot Chili Peppers-tribute band Californicated feel just as at home in Wageningen's Loburg.

Text Dominique Vrouwenvelder

Red Hot Chili Peppers tribute in Loburg

Is such a small venue still fun to do if you also perform on major stages? 'Of course,' says Californicated bassist Arie Goossens (on the right in the photo), who lived in Wageningen until recently and worked at WUR for several years. 'In fact, we actually asked Loburg if we could perform there again. It feels for me as if I'm back home and we enjoy playing there. We can experiment more in a place like Loburg compared with the big venues. Play lesser known numbers,

for example, add an instrument or do something acoustic.'

'I've always felt the Peppers had something magical ever since I started making music. They use various techniques and they give the bass more of a prominent role,' explains Goossens. A few years ago, he played a couple of numbers in Wageningen in another

Peppers tribute band. 'I was at the Woetstock Wageningen Festival when the bass player collapsed on stage due to a medical condition. I knew the people backstage and could play all the Peppers songs. So I offered to help the rest of the band complete their set. They immediately hung a guitar around my neck and pushed me onto the stage. That whetted my appetite. When I saw a call for a bassist for this tribute band a couple of years later, I applied straight away.'

Californicated took part in the SBS6 TV show *Battle of the Bands* two years back. 'That turbo-charged our musical career,' says Goossens. 'At first we only ever played in small pubs. Thanks to that programme, we were suddenly performing in the RAI and since then we've been getting invites for bigger gigs.'

The tribute band try to give performances similar to the experience of the genuine Red Hot Chili Peppers. 'Within our capabilities as semi-pro hobby performers, of course. Our aim is that after seeing one of our gigs, people leave with the same feeling they would have if they'd seen the real Peppers perform. We create a similar atmosphere: we play their songs, wear outfits similar to what they wear on tour and play almost identical instruments.'





You can see great-looking people wearing awesome outfits on Wageningen campus. This column highlights some of them. This time, it's Ioanna Patarai (22), Animal Sciences Bachelor's student from Russia.

Text and photo Eva de Koeijer



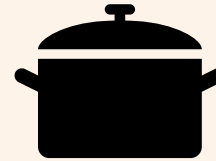
'If I had to describe my style in a few keywords, I would say "Attract, Amaze, Captivate". The key pieces in my outfits are usually my jewellery. When I wake up, I pick a basis, and then the jewellery to add contrast. Most of what I wear I find at markets. I also have a few favourite local artists back home in Russia.

'My style is a way to lift my mood and express myself. I have an active personality and I want my style to reflect that. What I want to express can vary from day to day. One day, you will catch me dressed as a metalhead, the next day in a white dress. Today, you could say that I'm dressed to pursue my goals.

'Getting dressed doesn't take me much time because I know my wardrobe inside out. I have organized it so that I can instantly find what I want. Style is a big topic in my life, but in my daily routine, I just see my clothes as a quick way to start my day in an outfit that reflects my mood.

'I believe that people should be more open about how they want to look, and not let social norms hold them back. Now, while studying at university, is the perfect time to experiment.'

You encounter all the flavours of the world in Wageningen. Berna Mutlu (25), a Master's student in Food Technology from Turkey, shares a dish for Patates Böreği.



Flavours of WUR

Potato cake

'Patates Böreği, or Potato Cake, is a savoury delight in Turkish cuisine. It is a delectable baked treat made primarily from potatoes, eggs and flour. Its simplicity and comforting taste make it a go-to dish for casual gatherings, to enjoy with a steaming cup of Turkish tea. It is an irresistible addition to any tea-time spread.'

- 1 Preheat the oven to 180°C.
- 2 Peel the potatoes, wash thoroughly and cut them into cubes.
- 3 Whisk the eggs, the yogurt and the oil in a large bowl. Fold in the flour, making sure there are no lumps.
- 4 Add the potato cubes to the batter. Stir carefully. Add salt to the mixture.
- 5 Dice the tomato. Add it to the mixture just before you put the cake in the oven. If you add the tomato too early, it will make the batter watery.
- 6 Prepare a pie tin by lining it with baking paper. Pour the batter into the tin. Cut the excess paper.
- 7 To make the dish even more tasty, top it off with cheese and black pepper before baking.
- 8 Bake for around 45-50 minutes, until the upper layer is golden brown.

Ingredients (For 4 to 5 servings) :

- 3 eggs
- 1 cup sunflower oil
- 1 cup yogurt
- 1 kg potatoes
- 1 2/3 cups flour
- 1.5 teaspoons of salt
- 1 large tomato
- optional: cheese and black pepper to top it off

Time :

~75 minutes



Berna Mutlu

Master's student in
Food Technology



Meanwhile in... America – LGBTQ+ and women's rights

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 events in their home country. This time, Animal Sciences MSc student Wayne Grindle (24) shares his thoughts about the current situation in the US under President Trump. Tekst Machteld van Kempen

'My main concern right now is for my friends back home, many of whom are women or in the LGBTQ+ community. My best friend, who is gay, worries about his right to marry, especially with a Supreme Court dominated by conservative judges rolling back rights. As a straight white man, I don't personally face these threats, but those I care about do. The revoking of Roe v. Wade is an example of this: if one of my female friends in Ohio needed an abortion, she'd have to drive at least two hours to Pennsylvania, deal with the travel costs and pay the costs of the abortion as well. Beyond politics, I've told my girlfriend that I don't want to raise kids in the US. The cost of parenting is very high, there's no strong social support system and school shootings still happen a lot. 'On social media, I see many people comparing Trump to Hit-

ler. While the situations aren't identical, they are both populists saying wrong things to rally their base and scapegoat marginalized groups. Right now, transgender people are the target. They're being mistreated just for existing. The US was founded on freedom of speech, but now we see the opposite happening: right-wing individuals were once censored for spreading misinformation and now those advocating for human rights are being silenced.

'Trump doesn't unify people. However, someone once said he was the most unifying president in history because he has united the world against the US. I think rather than focusing on global conflicts, America needs to address its internal struggles right now. If we lose our rights and the ability to share information, we can't effectively help others. We can't raise awareness of others if we can't do it for ourselves. 'My Dutch housemates are a little worried because they see their own country moving to the right as well.'



Advertentie

IN MEMORIAM

HANNE VAN DER KOOIJ

It is with deep sadness that we share the news of the sudden passing of our beloved colleague Hanne van der Kooij, on 1 April. From the very start of her studies in Molecular Life Sciences, Hanne stood out as a brilliant and dedicated student. We were therefore truly delighted when she chose to do both her final-year research project and her PhD within our Physical Chemistry and Soft Matter group. There, she developed a novel experimental technique to study dynamic processes in materials, enabling her to answer significant open questions in materials science. In 2020, she obtained her doctorate *cum laude*, and her thesis was awarded both the Challa Prize, by the Royal Netherlands Chemical Society, and the Dutch Polymer Institute Golden Thesis Award.

After completing her PhD, Hanne continued to enrich our group as a research fellow. With endless patience and enthusiasm, she supervised many students, taught them the fundamentals of abstract thermodynamics, and elevated every project she was part of. Hanne had an exceptional ability to grasp complex matters and explain them with clarity. Above all, Hanne was a warm and sincere colleague, always willing to help, listen or offer words of encouragement. To many, she was a shining and inspiring light.

We will miss her deeply and wish her family and loved ones strength in coping with their loss.

*Jasper van der Gucht,
professor of Physical
Chemistry and Soft Matter*

MOVIE NIGHT

WITH ENGLISH SUBTITLES

24.04.2025 • 20.00 • movie.w.nl

A Tunisian woman is caught between her maternal love and her search for the truth when her son returns home from war and unleashes a darkness throughout their village.



Column Willy Contreras-Avilés

Insured discrimination

Carmelita (fictional character) had moved to the Netherlands to begin her journey as an external PhD. Although excited and grateful for the opportunity to attend Wageningen University, she had to confront the unexpected reality of discrimination. She was experiencing the annoying and unjust face of a system, to be discriminated against because of one's nationality. Among many unexpected situations, the most recent was from an insurance company which withheld her health insurance application because she came from one of the targeted countries (Cuba, North Korea, Syria, Belarus, Iran, Ukraine and Russia) which must go through an 'additional compliance check'. The company communicated that it was nothing personal. Yet she could not help but ask: 'Why should I be treated differently based on my nationality, especially when it comes to health-related matters?' This is one of many companies that do the same with international PhD students, making the life of the foreigner even more complicated and frustrating.

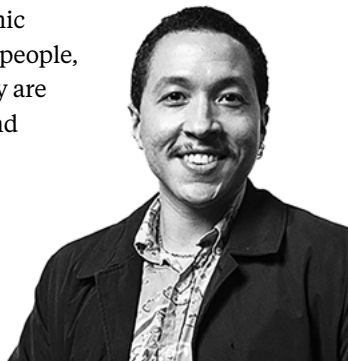
We should ask ourselves: 'How can we prevent people from being discriminated against?'

Additionally, Wageningen University does not provide health insurance for external PhD

candidates. A lack of institutional representation and support aggravates any systemic discrimination much more while putting extra mental and emotional pressure on the PhD student.

We should ask ourselves: 'How can we prevent people from being discriminated against?'

I'm certain that the answer should include an academic institution supporting its people, regardless of whether they are students or employees, and certainly regardless of their nationalities.



Willy Contreras-Avilés (34) is a second-year PhD candidate in Horticulture and Biochemistry of medicinal cannabis, from Panama. He likes to dance (*perrear*), cook Italian food and swim.

WEEKLY UPDATES ON STUDENT LIFE AND WORKING AT WUR?

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Resource

Colophon

Resource is the independent medium for students and staff at Wageningen University & Research. *Resource* reports and interprets the news and gives the context. New articles are posted daily on resource-online.nl. The magazine is published once a month on a Thursday.

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Contemplation room in Atlas • Photo Resource



EXPRESS MILK, ANGER OR LOVE OF BEER

There will be more room for self-expression in the designated uses of contemplation rooms on campus.

They are used to pray or meditate in silence. New mothers can express their milk there. But you can do so much more with the contemplation rooms, says the Executive Board. Together with the Student Council, they are looking at new options for a more multi-functional use of the quiet rooms.

Most students are unaware the contemplation rooms exist, says Hanna de Jager (Student Council). 'Students don't pray or meditate that much, let alone express milk. So they don't use those rooms. Which is a shame, because they definitely need a suitable space for relaxation. Students have experienced a big increase in stress since the new resit policy.'

'Employees also increasingly need to let off steam,' adds Executive Board member Jens Boekhout. 'The cutbacks are undoubtedly going to make a mark. I am expecting a lot of anger, frustration and aggression, which all needs to be channelled properly. That is where the contemplation rooms come in. Anyway, I don't like unused office space.' After an extensive survey of requirements, a shortlist of options has been drawn up. In pole position so far is shared use as a rage room, where people can vent

'They let go of their inhibitions under the influence of beer. Apparently that helps'

their anger by trashing the place. That could help them deal with

suppressed emotional pain. Boekhout: 'We also have a lot of old furniture lying around since we introduced hot-desking. So this could be a cost-neutral solution.' De Jager (Student Council) isn't totally opposed to the idea but she does think there has been a misunderstanding. 'We were actually advocating a rage cage, which is a drinking game and quite different to a rage room. But maybe we can combine the two. Plus lots of students love screaming and letting go of their inhibitions under the influence of beer. Apparently that has a significant beneficial effect.' Of course silence and screaming don't go together, and neither do expressing milk and trashing the place. Boekhout sees a contemplation room reservation app as the solution for this. But first, in the great Wagenin-gen tradition, there will be a dialogue, starting in May. It will include demos of possible future uses.