

Resource

JUNE 2025 VOLUME 19

The journalism platform for all at Wageningen University & Research

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FOREWORD

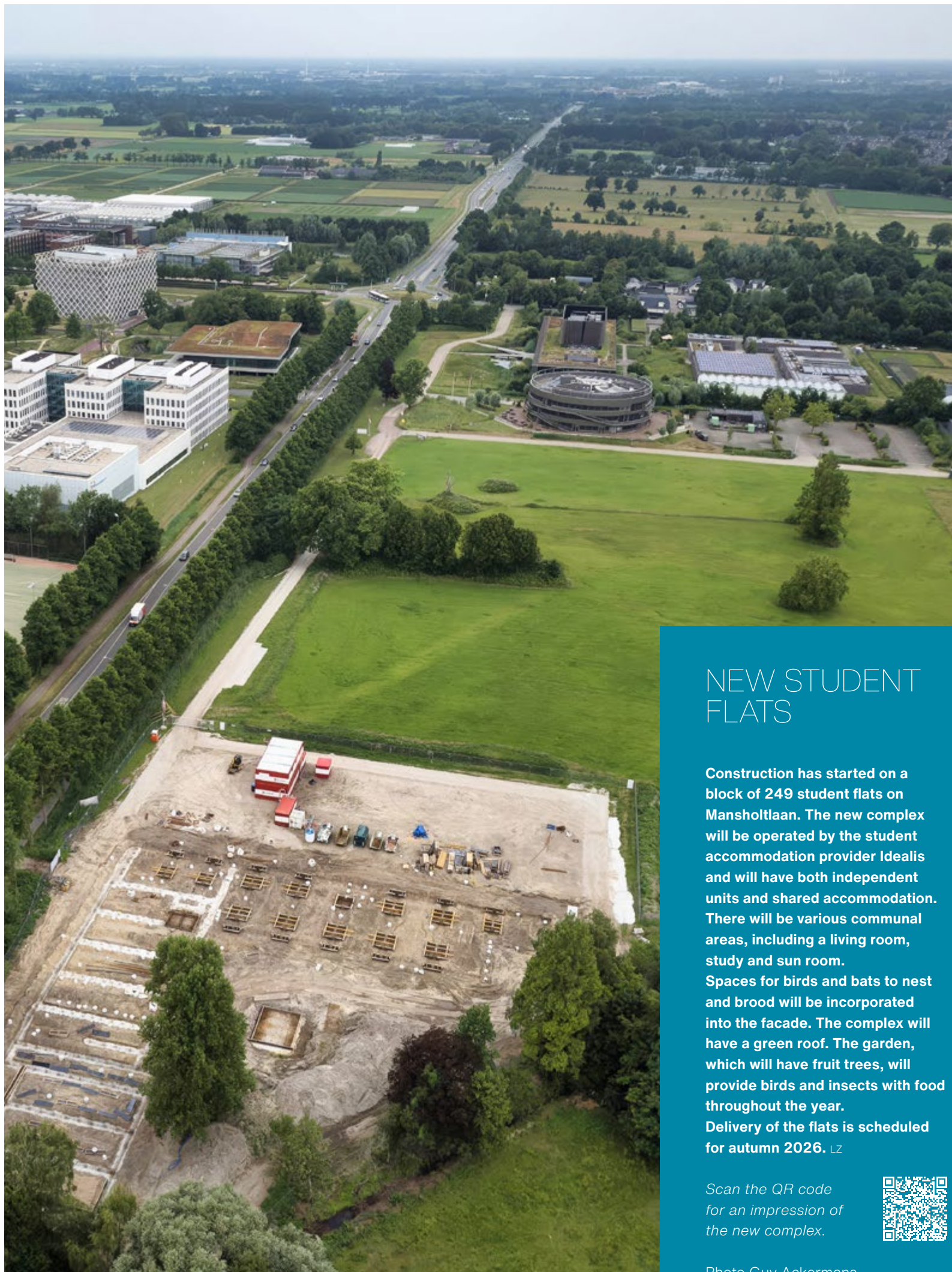
Empty chair

The current financial problems are not only due to the government cuts, they are also the result of how universities are organized, argue Professor Han Wiskerke and five of his WUR colleagues. They sent an opinion piece to *Resource* that we published in full on our website; an abridged version is printed in this issue (page 4). The authors call for universities to return to what they ought to be doing. The online article got a lot of comments in support of their viewpoint.

There's no good lead-in for the next article discussed here. The picture on the magazine cover will have given an idea, though. It is tender and compassionate, but the story behind it is intense. Our editor Luuk Zegers attended a symposium about suicide, organized by student society Ceres. He wrote a powerful report (page 14), with quotes like this: 'All of a sudden there's an empty chair at the table. How can someone who seemed so cheerful make that choice?' Hopefully the message of this article will be clear: 'Talking to someone about suicide isn't easy, but opening up helps.'

Willem Andréé
Editor-in-chief





NEW STUDENT FLATS

Construction has started on a block of 249 student flats on Mansholtlaan. The new complex will be operated by the student accommodation provider Idealis and will have both independent units and shared accommodation. There will be various communal areas, including a living room, study and sun room.

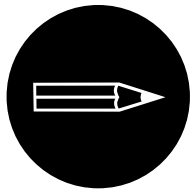
Spaces for birds and bats to nest and brood will be incorporated into the facade. The complex will have a green roof. The garden, which will have fruit trees, will provide birds and insects with food throughout the year.

Delivery of the flats is scheduled for autumn 2026. ^{LZ}

Scan the QR code for an impression of the new complex.



Photo Guy Ackermans



LETTER TO THE EDITOR

'Don't cut back on academic freedom'

Higher education in the Netherlands and beyond is in turmoil. Many universities are taking drastic austerity measures due to government budget cuts. WUR too has recently announced its austerity measures, which will likely result in the loss of 130 to 180 jobs. We want to stress that resorting to job losses is awful and we stand in solidarity with those whose jobs are on the line.

However, the financial problems are not only due to cuts, they are also the result of how universities are organized. Over the

'Let's go back to what universities should be doing'

last few decades, universities have embraced the New Public Management approach. This comes down to adopting private-sector principles with the idea that this will improve the efficiency and effectiveness of university governance. This has resulted in a 'corporate university', characterized by an increase in performance measurement, internal competition, invoicing, outsourcing and business jargon.

The current budget cuts enacted by the corporate university vastly exacerbate the challenges to what universities should stand for and even academic freedom itself. There is a real danger that if universities maintain their present organization, corporate mindset and language and add cuts on top of this, we will see a dramatic increase in work pressure and a further

erosion of academic freedom.

At WUR, this curtailing of academic freedom is the result of treating academic chair groups as 'business units'. It basically turns academics into consultants who have to continuously focus on bringing in more money.

This tends to narrow the scope of research and means that increasingly only those questions get asked that established government, private-sector or other institutions are willing to pay for. More fundamental research questions, especially those that challenge current systems of power and privilege, rarely get funded. These central contradictions and issues are not explicitly addressed in the austerity measures announced by WUR.

Hence, our plea is to have a fundamental discussion on how we can structurally rethink and repair the university. Our deepest worry is that the system will stay in place as it is, while myriad cuts are made that will put even more undue pressure on academic and support staff and on



academic freedom. So let us address and alleviate long-standing core contradictions and issues eroding academia so that WUR can refocus on being a public institution, centred on its core functions of education, research and societal engagement, based on cooperative principles of trust, collaboration and public service.

Han Wiskerke, professor of Rural Sociology

Bram Büscher, professor of Sociology of Development and Change

Edward Huijbens, professor of Cultural Geography

Rutgerd Boelens, personal professor of Water Resources Management

Bas Zwaan, professor at the Laboratory of Genetics

Marc Naguib, professor of Behavioural Ecology

29

Dutch students who live in student houses and are members of a student society drink 29 glasses of alcohol a week on average. This figure comes from the 'Under Influence' survey, which compared the consumption of alcohol and drugs by students in general with the consumption by students in student houses and student societies. Society members in their first years at university drink 1.5 times as much as older members.

LZ/ME

New Dean of Education announced

Dick de Ridder (professor of Bioinformatics) will succeed Arnold Bregt as Dean of Education on 1 September. In his new role, De Ridder plans to make it easier to revamp the degree programmes. 'The current teaching system is quite conservative. It is difficult to modernize things, for example because departments depend financially on certain courses being taught as part of a degree.' Wageningen's education mission also needs to be formulated more clearly and reflected in the actual programmes on offer.

A third priority for De Ridder is implementing lifelong learning. Now that De Ridder is taking over as Dean of Education, he will give up his job as professor. 'It was not an easy choice, but I am excited about the new role. You have to go with your gut feeling for such big decisions.' LZ

Read more at resource-online.nl

Government falls: implication for universities

Now the Dutch coalition has collapsed, there will be elections in the autumn. The universities hope politicians will find more money for research and education.

The fall of the government does not necessarily mean an end to the cuts in education and research as they had already been approved by the Upper House of Parliament. That could in theory change in September when the new budget is presented, but caretaker governments rarely if ever change course

Caretaker governments rarely if ever change course

like that. Even if extra funding is made available, that won't be until 2027 at the earliest — under the responsibility of a new minister. According to the association of Dutch universities UNL, the consequences of the cuts are already being felt. 'Redun-



Photo ANP

dancies, degree programmes being abolished and research stopping. Politicians must reverse this destructive government policy before it is too late,' says UNL.

The student union LSVb hopes that the fall of the government 'will mean an end to the appalling cuts and that the next government will invest in education, increase the basic grant and make sure there is enough affordable student housing.'

Caretaker

The government will continue in a caretaker role, with Eppo Bruins (of the NSC party) remaining Education minister until his successor takes over. That could easily take a year. The previous government (with Robbert Dijkgraaf as Education minister) continued for 361 days in a caretaker role until Prime Minister Dick Schoof and his cabinet took over. The government before that (Rutte III, with Ingrid van Engelshoven as Education minister) spent 360 days in a caretaker role.

The campaigns for the coming elections have already started, but what are parties promising? D66, GroenLinks-PvdA and Volt want to spend more money on research and education, which is a priority for them. Other parties are less convinced of the need to increase expenditure. HOP

In brief

Crowdfunding for 'nature awareness path' on campus

A group of WUR employees want to create a 'nature awareness path', a route around campus with an app containing exercises that let you experience your surroundings more intensely and 'build a deeper connection' with nature. 'It will enhance users' wellbeing and foster a connection with nature,' say the initiators. 'After walking the route, people will feel calmer and more relaxed and at the same time more energetic.' They hope to raise 28,000 euros to finance the

plan through a crowdfunding campaign via University Fund Wageningen. [DV](#)

Minister to scrap language test

Education Minister Eppo Bruins is prepared to scrap the 'language test' from his bill but only if the universities switch from English to Dutch of their own accord. The test to see whether a degree can be taught in another language is currently included in the bill aimed at reducing the number of international students. The ministry says

the language test won't be necessary if the universities fulfil their responsibility to make internationalization more balanced and if they implement their plans. [HOP](#)

Greenhouse construction halted

WUR built six large tunnel greenhouses on the edge of the town without planning permission. The greenhouses are on farmland behind WUR's barns. The six tunnel greenhouses measure 6 x 40 metres with a height of 3 metres. Construction started before the permit procedure

had finished, which means WUR broke the rules. Mooi Wageningen, among others, filed a complaint, after which the municipality put a stop to the construction. Mooi Wageningen says the greenhouses are on land that is supposed to remain open. The municipal zoning plans don't allow greenhouses in that area in order to protect the landscape and the species found there. The greenhouse frames can stay for now as WUR waits for planning permission, but no further work is allowed.

SOURCE: DE GELDERLANDER

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WAGENINGEN
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‘Patients’ experiences are important in gastric surgery as well as weight loss’

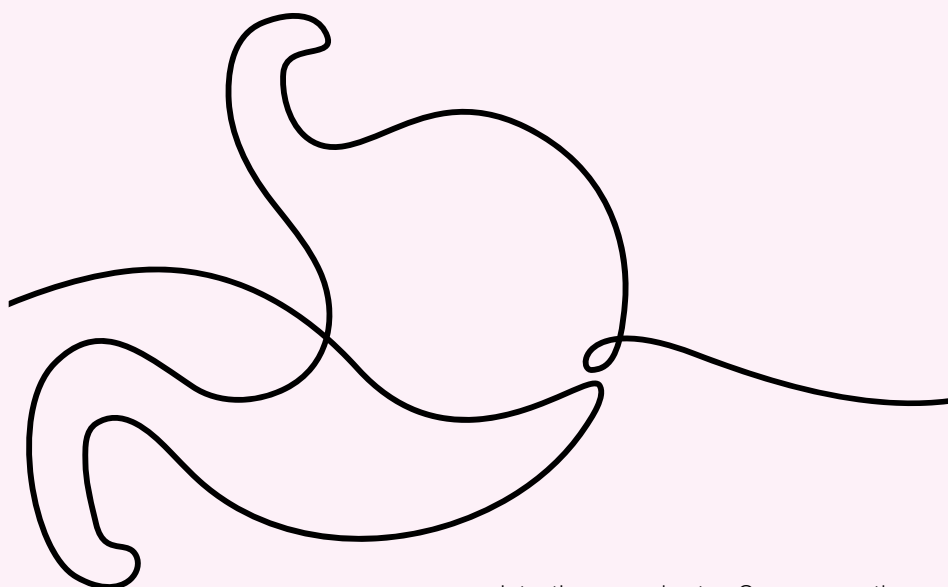
External PhD candidate Mitchell Harker (Human Nutrition & Health) studied the medium-term effects of the SADI-S operation. The operation, performed on severely overweight patients, consists of a gastric bypass combined with stomach size reduction. ‘We don’t yet know much about the treatment outcomes after five years.’ Text Dominique Vrouwenvelder

Harker is a doctor and researcher at the Vitalys obesity clinic. His PhD research at WUR concerns improvements to the surgical treatment of obesity. In his latest publication, he compared secondary and primary SADI-S: either a stomach reduction first followed by a bypass, or both interventions in a single operation. He followed the patients for five years.

The intervention, which is aimed at patients with obesity, consists of two steps. Harker: ‘We reduce the size of the empty stomach by about 80 per cent – from the size of a pear to the size of an elongated grape – and move the point where the stomach connects to the small intestine. That makes patients feel full sooner, so they consume fewer nutrients and less energy.’

One operation or two

The advantage of two separate operations is that patients already lose a lot of weight after the stomach reduction. ‘They lose some of the abdominal and liver fat that was blocking access to the stomach and intestines,’ says Harker. And that makes it easier for the surgeon to perform the bypass. ‘Which prevents complications.’ But these patients lose less weight over the five-year period as a whole. ‘They lose 16 per cent of their original weight on average, compared with 35 per cent in the case of patients who had a single operation.’ However, the latter group were more likely to experience complications,



which sometimes necessitated an extra operation. ‘Is that additional weight loss worth the risk?’ wonders Harker.

Harker also studied the effect of the site of the bypass and the influence of the length of the remaining intestine. ‘The remaining length needs to be short enough to ensure less uptake of nutrients, but not too short or the patient will suffer vitamin deficiencies and malnutrition. In the worst case, they can end up with a lifelong dependency on feeding tubes or infusions.’

Life after the operation

The intervention also affects patients’ bowel movements. ‘Patients don’t digest their food as completely because the

intestines are shorter. On average, they go to the toilet four times a day with runny stool. One in five people find that a problem.’

Harker asked patients about their quality of life three years after the last operation. ‘Not much research has been done on that among patients who have had gastric surgery. We tend to focus on weight loss, but patients’ perceptions matter too.’ Both groups felt they had an acceptable quality of life, but the score was slightly higher in the group who had had a single operation. Harker: ‘That is probably because the other group, with the secondary SADI-S, had started their treatment earlier. So some of their weight loss took place longer ago.’

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, it's Landscape Architecture PhD candidate **Floor van Gils.**

Text Nicole van 't Wout Hofland • Illustration Stijn Schreven

'Last year, I got an opportunity to present my research on the development of historical rural cultural landscapes in the Netherlands in the 20th century at a conference in Poland. However, there was one problem: the organization wanted me to send an abstract six months in advance, when I was still in the middle of my research. I wrote a summary of an ongoing sub-study, as I still had half a year in which to finish it.

'I was nervous, my mouth was dry and my work was unfinished'

'This would be my first conference. I was nervous because I'd only given talks to my department so far, in Dutch. I saw it all in my mind. There I would stand, bursting with confidence, in a room full of experts, giving a clear and concise account supported by the data I'd analysed. I did map analyses and archive research, while working on another publication at the same time.

But as the conference date got closer, I still didn't have a proper story, just loose ends. What a failure.

'The first couple of days of the conference, I went round with a sinking feeling. When I finally walked onto the stage, it was all very different to how I had originally imagined it. I was nervous, my mouth was dry and the work I was presenting was unfinished. I felt very vulnerable because I didn't have clear conclusions. I'd even considered cancelling, but my supervisor said, "Just tell them what you have found so far." That turned out to be good advice. I'm quite a perfectionist and I'd rather only share my work once it is complete. But the talk generated an interesting discussion precisely because I was presenting a work in progress. Someone asked what my historical research meant for the landscape today. I hadn't thought about that before, but now I'm going to cover it in my thesis. So sometimes it isn't a bad idea to share something that's not yet perfect.'



Tackling algae in Lumen pond

Blue-green algae expert Miquel Lüring has been combatting these cyanobacteria for decades. But never this close to home, in the Lumen pond a stone's throw from his lab. Various products based on lanthanum (a rare earth metal) are being tried out to see if they inhibit the algal bloom. The aim is to have cleaner water and a wide variety of water plants.

About 20 circular containers can be seen sticking out above the water's surface. They are actually open cylinders that have been pushed 10 to 15 centimetres into the pond bed. 'That allows interactions with the soil at the bottom but the water column above is closed off from the rest of the pond,' explains Lüring. 'So there are no fish in the cylinders.' That is important for the test because fish are a disruptive presence. Especially the carp in the pond. 'Underwater pigs' is what Lüring calls the carp. 'They are always rooting around in the pond bed, which is why the water is so cloudy. It's an underwater desert.

'Underwater "pigs" constantly root in the pond bed, which is why the water is so cloudy'

In this nature-friendly garden, we really want a pond with water plants, but so far we haven't been successful. Plants don't get a chance.' Blue-green algae, however, thrive in the nutrient-rich water.

The anti-algae products Lüring is trying out are based on lanthanum. This element binds phosphate and doesn't release it, even if the acidity of the water changes. Over the past 20 years, Lüring has acquired a lot of experience with lanthanum products. 'We know how they work. Now we want to know whether these new products are as effective as the lab tests say.'

The cylinders were installed in the winter and will stay in place for the whole summer. Lüring: 'Hopefully the trial will produce something that genuinely helps the pond.' ^{RK}



Luuk Scholten in his solar park ♦ Photo Resource

HOW MUCH SHADE CAN A SOLAR FARM TAKE?

Solar panels trap light, which means less light gets through to the ground below the panels. Plants don't grow so well, or not at all, which has a negative effect on biodiversity and the quality of the soil. But the size of that effect depends a lot on how the panels are arranged. That is the subject of Soil Biology PhD candidate Luuk Scholten's research. Text Roelof Kleis

To perform his research, Scholten has his own solar farm less than a kilometre from the campus. Behind De Born Farm, nearly 1000 solar panels in various 'pitched roof' setups are generating electricity. The solar farm was created in October 2023 specifically for his study, which is part of the Eco Certified Solar Parks project. The project's name says it all. 'The aim is to draw up guidelines and requirements for solar farms to make sure they blend in with the landscape and offer a boost to biodiversity,' explains Scholten. He is focusing on soil quality while two fellow PhD candidates are looking at biodiversity above ground.

'The problem with solar farms is that it's dark under the panels and the transition from dark to light is very abrupt,' he says, explaining his research. 'I'm looking for the minimum value for the incident light you need to maintain proper vegetation

and retain soil quality.' To investigate this, he has arranged 'solar roofs' of varying sizes running from east to west, that let through different amounts of light.

Biomass

The vegetation growing beneath and between the rows of panels ranges from grass to mixtures of plants that vary in how well they grow in the shade. At first sight, there seems to be an abundance of plants growing and flowering in the park. 'Everything grows well under a row of single panels,' says Scholten, 'but there is a clear deterioration in the rows with two or four panels. The shade-loving species appear to be doing well.'

To quantify the growth, Scholten measures the biomass: he simply cut, dries and weighs the plants. He also measures differences in the exchange of CO₂ between the soil and the atmosphere, both

under and next to the panels, and monitors things such as the soil temperature and moisture content. In addition to the trial in this park, research is also being carried out on existing solar farms elsewhere in the country.

'The problem with solar farms is that it's dark under the panels and the transition from dark to light is very abrupt'

Scholten's solar farm has a pitched-roof setup, but numerous other setups are possible. Even so, he believes the results from this specific setup will be more broadly applicable. 'The idea behind this project is to look at how much sunlight is needed. If you know that, you can design other setups that deliver the same amount of light under the panels.'

PhD theses **in a nutshell**

Fasting

The body adapts if no food is available or you are fasting. That is an evolutionary development because food was not always available in abundance. Mingjuan Deng, from China, tried to figure out how the liver and fatty tissues respond to variability in the amount eaten. The protein PPAR plays a key role as a transcription factor, regulating the expression of hundreds of genes that play roles in the lipid metabolism during fasting. During her research, she also found a new genetic target of PPAR. But it all still remains an enigma. ^{RK}

Decoding the Enigma of Fasting in Liver and Adipose Lipid Metabolism.

Mingjuan Deng ◀ Supervisor Sander Kersten

Drug informer

Remnants of medicines get poured down the sink and end up in ditches and lakes. That can affect aquatic life. How can you show that? Changed swimming behaviour is one possible indicator. Elien Versteegen put this to the test by studying the effects of the pharmaceutical products carbamazepine and citalopram on the swimming behaviour of freshwater prawns. The prawns did indeed exhibit abnormal behaviour, but only with unrealistically high concentrations of the drugs in the water. So that's no good as an indicator. ^{RK}

Behavioural effects of psychopharmaceuticals and their ecological relevance in aquatic environments. Elien Versteegen ◀ Supervisor Paul van den Brink

Shedding light on pigs

People and animals react to changes in the light. Alice Scaillierez, from France, investigated what differences in the intensity and spectral composition of light do to the well-being and health of pigs in commercial barns. She used video analyses of aspects such as their posture and movements. The results are not that clear and quite limited, at least in commercial housing with little flexibility. It seems that pigs quickly adapt to their circumstances. However, extra UV light does increase the production of vitamin D. Scaillierez still recommends more pig-centred lighting in barns. ^{RK}

Enlightened Pigs. Alice Scaillierez ◀ Supervisor Eddy Bokkers

THE PROPOSITION

PhD candidates explain their most thought-provoking proposition. This time, it's **Jorge Armero Gimenez**. He received his PhD on 21 February for research on utilizing a novel production system to develop a vaccine-based pandemic preparedness platform.

Text Ning Fan



'Research will become completely dependent on generative artificial intelligence'

'During my PhD in molecular science, I noticed that more and more companies are integrating AI into their work, for example to design proteins and antibodies, improve DNA sequences and optimize production systems.

'It reminded me of the early days of PCR (a method for amplifying a piece of DNA, ed.). Back then, researchers had to manually move tubes between water baths. The invention of the PCR machine freed up researchers and allowing them to focus on other tasks. I believe AI is having a similar impact today. Those who use it are moving faster, while those who don't risk falling behind.

'Research is a highly competitive field. AI is no longer just a helpful addition but

a necessity. I've seen colleagues start with a rough idea for a proposal and use generative AI to refine and edit it. This saves time and increases their chances of getting funding.

'Will AI replace humans in research? I don't think so. It's a powerful tool, but it can't replace human creativity. Some of the most important discoveries come from accidents or unconventional ideas. AI can boost research, but it's still people who bring the spark that leads to real breakthroughs.'

Easy does it

Imagine you had a personal assistant who could compile reports of your online meetings in a nice layout, with a summary, a list of the most important topics, decisions and action points. A report, moreover, in which everyone involved is named in full, with the correct spelling. You don't even need to attend the meeting yourself.

That assistant already exists: it's called *Read.AI*. It is an AI bot, a piece of software

'All of a sudden, a meeting report had already been distributed with sensitive details of an ongoing study'

including Dutch. You can configure it so that the report it compiles is sent immediately not just to you but to everyone who attended the meeting. Convenient, right? Convenient it may be, but still not necessarily a great idea. Because the report hasn't been checked for errors. Or because it might contain sensitive information that shouldn't have been included in so many words. Because once the report has been replicated and distributed among all the participants, you can never undo that. And because you can be sure the report is not

you can install in your Teams account. You can let the bot attend Teams meetings that are scheduled in your diary. It can process written and spoken language,

only in everyone's inbox but also stored on the server that runs this AI bot.

Of course, this is a fairly dramatic interpretation of the situation, but what if it happened to you? I spoke to a colleague (from another university) who did have this experience. All of a sudden, there was a report with sensitive details of an ongoing study, and the report had already been distributed. A human taking the minutes would have taken much greater care in formulating the information. It turned out the free version of *Read.AI* had been installed by a postdoc who had moved on a while ago but was still on the distribution list for this meeting. When asked about it, he was shocked because he had no idea what he had done.

Read.AI presents itself as 'transparent': after all, it doesn't do anything you didn't configure yourself, right? Of course. But when installing an app, so many people click blindly to get through the installation quickly. Sure, you still have to give the bot permission to attend the meeting. In this case, the human host had without thinking clicked 'admit' at the start of the meeting when the bot asked for admission along with all the other participants — and hey presto, it had permission.

That is how easy it was.



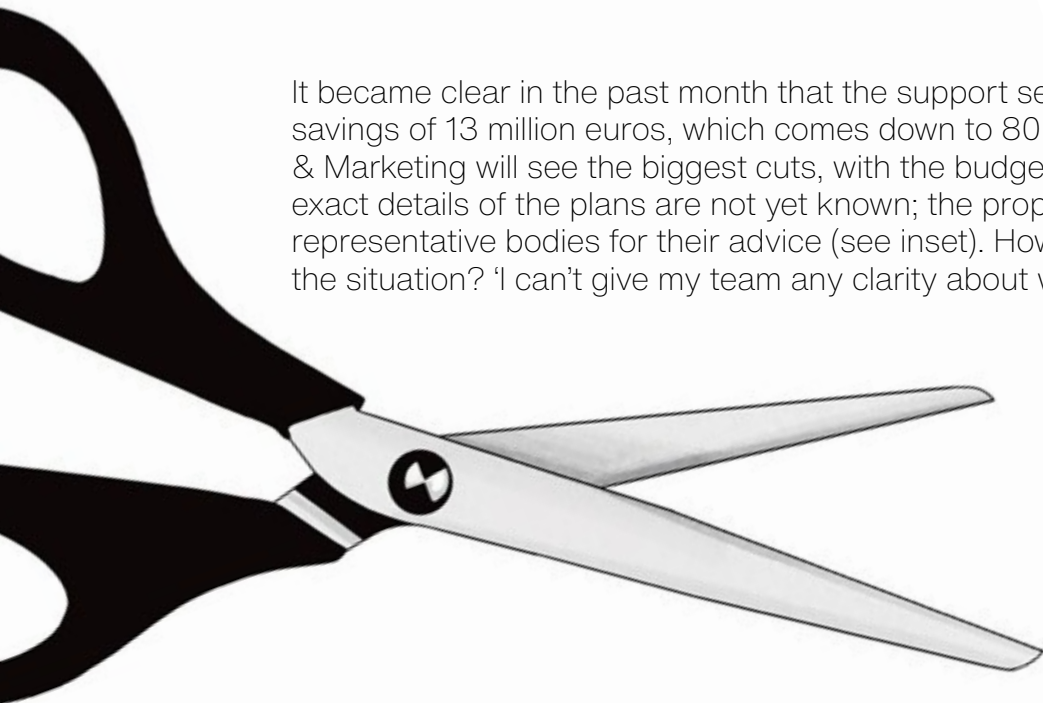
Sjoukje Osinga

Sjoukje Osinga (57) is an assistant professor of Information Technology. She sings alto in the Wageningen chamber choir Musica Vocale, has three sons who are students and enjoys birdwatching with her husband in the Binnenveldse Hooilanden.

WUR support staff on the impending cutbacks

‘WE HAVE SURVIVED SO MANY STORMS ALREADY’

It became clear in the past month that the support services will have to find combined savings of 13 million euros, which comes down to 80 to 115 jobs. Corporate Communications & Marketing will see the biggest cuts, with the budget shrinking by a quarter. The exact details of the plans are not yet known; the proposals have been submitted to the representative bodies for their advice (see inset). How do the employees involved feel about the situation? ‘I can’t give my team any clarity about what will happen next.’ *Text Resource*



‘What part of our work will continue?’

Maarten van Schaik, Alumni Relations team

‘No one enjoys having to draw up plans like these as you’ll always have to make tough choices. Even so, I found it quite confrontational as the Alumni Relations team leader to see my team mentioned so explicitly. Even though the plans contain practical points, there is still a lot of uncertainty. What part of our work will be able to continue? Who will be implementing this? And what resources will we have? The suggested idea of deploying a flexible outer layer is also quite costly, after all. These things will remain uncertain in the months to come. Personally, I sincerely hope WUR continues to focus on a long-term relationship with alumni to keep them involved and committed, rather than alumni relations turning into something purely transactional.’

‘It will basically be a step backwards’

Olaf van Miltenburg, Corporate Marketing & Communications Storytelling team

‘A lot of what is posted on the WUR website is made or prepared by my team of seven people. According to the savings plan, we need to reduce the number of content makers. We recently changed our way of working. Until last summer, departments were able to hire in our content makers. That meant the content on the WUR site was determined by the communications budget for the individual chair groups and departments. Now we are no longer hired by the science groups; we collaborate with them. We have a smaller team of content makers who produce

stories we select jointly with the science groups because they help project WUR’s image – based on the strategic plan. This lets us create cohesion and uniformity in our corporate communications, which improves the quality and efficiency. In the past, you might see three articles about the same topic, for example on the WUR website, in *Wageningen World* and in *Kennis Online*, written by three different people. Merging the creative process will let us use the same input in a variety of forms for multiple platforms, including social media. If we switch to a system with a flexible outer layer – as proposed in the savings plan – and essentially reintroduce fragmentation in the creative process, that will be a step backwards.’

‘One colleague resigned because of the uncertainty’

Steef van Gorkum, Corporate Marketing & Communications web editor

‘My team – 11 employees including me – are responsible for nearly everything that gets posted on the WUR website. Some of us advise business units on their online visibility via the WUR platforms. The exact consequences of these cuts will only become clear for the web editors mid-2026, after the launch of the new website and intranet.

We don’t have enough details at present to get a picture of the impact. I see a lot of potential cuts in the plan for things we are already working on or that have been implemented. Anyway, WUR will always have a website, so my team’s expertise will always be necessary. We have already been shrinking anyway the last while. When staff left, their posi-

tions weren’t filled and one colleague resigned recently because of the uncertainty surrounding the cuts. I can’t give my team any clarity about what will happen next. I don’t blame anyone for the uncertainty, but it’s annoying it is lasting so long.’

Councils get a say, and then?

Before CC&M and Facilities & Services can implement their savings plan — and individual employees hear whether they will lose their jobs — the representative bodies will examine the proposals. They will get input from staff members, as WUR Council put out a call on the intranet for comments. ‘We have never had so much input,’ says chair Blair van Pelt. ‘From the entire organization!’ She can’t say anything yet about the substance of the comments but adds ‘they are valuable for us when drawing up our advice.’

The Central Works Council (COR) and Student Staff Council (GV), both WUR central representative bodies, are now considering the plan. They have the right to be consulted on the savings plan: ‘COR and GV have joint meetings as WUR Council, but the advice is issued separately by COR and GV.’

The Executive Board must issue a response to the advice. And if it doesn’t follow the advice, it must come up with good reasons. Van Pelt: ‘We will present a draft version first, so the Board won’t be surprised by the recommendations.’ The aim is for COR and GV to issue their advice in early July.

‘We were actually scaling up the team’

Johan Kanis, Recruitment manager

‘The task of the team of eight recruiters is to fill the job vacancies. In the past year we had over 1,000 vacancies and more than 40,000 applicants. The proposed plans will presumably lead to a fall in the number of job vacancies, so it seems logical to look at reducing the team to a realistic size. But we still expect 600 vacancies this year and the job market is tight. It is hard to recruit people for the more senior positions in research, teaching and support. You need to go all out to get the right people. Recruitment is our main task, but we were actually working on scaling up the team this year so we could do more on selection. After all, if you get applicants you want to make the right selection. We offer training courses, appropriate selection questions and guides for conducting the interview and scoring candidates. The cuts mean we will need to make choices. What can we still do with less capacity and without compromising on quality? The focus will remain on recruitment because WUR has ambitions and needs the best people to achieve those ambitions.’ ■

‘All that will be left is a front desk job’

Marcel Vijn, Science Shop project manager

‘The Science Shop is a direct link between science, the general public and society at large. So cutting this institute’s budget is the wrong kind of cutback. Really you should be doubling the budget rather than eliminating it. Universities and research have drifted away out of sight in right-wing public opinion. People are no longer involved in what is going on at universities. These cuts mean that you are turning your back on society. The Science Shop lets you show a friendly face: you help community groups who are facing problems or have questions. We do about a dozen projects a year, and get funding of 35,000 euros per project. I’ve been doing these projects for 15 years now alongside my work as a researcher at Plant Sciences. The Science Shop also has two coordinators, who make up one FTE in total. After the cuts, all that will be left is a front-desk job. What can we do without a budget? WUR’s Science Shop is the only one of its kind still going. Science shops elsewhere have degenerated into student help desks. We are the only place to let researchers do paid work on citizen projects. The Science Shop has survived many storms already, so I hope it will this time too. I hope the Executive Board looks at what image we want to project, who we want to be. A Science Shop is part of that.’

Ceres symposium is aimed at breaking taboo on mental problems

DARE TO ASK DARE TO SHARE

Many students find it hard to talk about mental issues, whereas talking can often help. It can even be life-saving. That is why student society Ceres organized the 'Dare to Share' symposium in the Grote Kerk in Wageningen. Text Luuk Zegers

Students would normally be drifting in up to a quarter of an hour after the start, but this time the church was already packed long before the symposium was due to begin. The audience included 350 students as well as confidential counsellors, social workers and representatives of the university and the municipality – including the mayor, Floor Vermeulen. 'When we started preparations for this symposium, we hoped the circumstances would be different,' says Ceres president Quirine Kerpen as she addresses the audience. Earlier this week, a first-year took their own life. The symposium went ahead anyway at the request of their friends and family. 'Not to turn a blind eye to the pain but instead to start a conversation about this issue.'

The evening began with a plea from clinical psychologist Maryke Geerdink of the 113 Foundation, known for its helplines for people with suicidal thoughts. 'Don't go around keeping all your worries to yourself. It's not easy to talk to someone about suicide, but opening up does help.' There is something else she wants to

impress on the audience. 'Family and friends often have feelings of guilt: if only they'd said this or done that. But by the time someone takes that decision to try and end their life, an awful lot has already happened. All kinds of factors play a role. So there is never just one reason or cause. That is important because it means that you as an individual are never responsible for someone else's decision to take that step. Feeling guilty won't help you. What can help is sharing those guilty feelings with others.'

Look after yourself

If someone opens up about their suicidal thoughts to you, they might want you to keep it a secret, says Geerdink. 'But you can only look after someone else properly if you look after yourself first. Don't try and shoulder that burden entirely on your own. Confide in someone, preferably an adult. Together, you will be better able to work out how to help.'

'TALKING TO SOMEONE ABOUT SUICIDE ISN'T EASY, BUT OPENING UP HELPS'

A question from the audience: what words of support can you say to someone struggling with depressive thoughts? Geerdink: 'Say something like: it's good that you're sharing this with me. Then the other person knows they can come to you. You don't have to have a solution for their problems. Just listening and not passing judgement is worth a lot.' Geerdink admits it can be tough. 'But being there for someone can also feel good.'

It helps to ask for help

If you have suicidal thoughts or are worried about someone else, talk about it. The 113 suicide prevention helpline is staffed 24/7. You can phone 0800-0113 or chat via 113.nl. It's free of charge and completely anonymous. The site has other options for help, such as coaching and therapy. You can find more options for getting assistance in the online version of this article at resource-online.nl





At the symposium, WUR student Benjamin and Quirijn (both 22) talked about their triplet brother Jan, a Veterinary Science student at Utrecht who unexpectedly took his own life in 2022 • Photo Guy Ackermans

Frederieke Vriends is the director of MIND Us, a charity that wants to improve the mental health of young people. 'Growing up isn't easy,' she says. 'Your brain goes through a development process with all kinds of choices. What do I want to do as a job? Who am I? Why am I here?' While that search for your identity (and the associated mental struggle) is nothing new, in surveys more and more young people say they experience a lot of stress. Vriends

thinks smartphones are a factor here. On average, young people spend 6.5 hours a day on screens, she says. 'That is at the expense of sleep, social life and exercise. If you're feeling miserable and you share this with a friend, they'll do everything they can to make you feel better. But if you search for something about your miserable feelings on social media, their algorithms will make sure you get more of the same. That is not healthy.'

She closes with a call to look after yourself and the people around you. 'Take time for your mind and your heart. Look after your body: get enough sleep, eat healthily and do some exercise. And seek out other people. We are social creatures, so support one another. And make sure you have something to look forward to.'

Jan's story

WUR student Benjamin and Quirijn (both 22) talk about their brother Jan, the third triplet, who studied Veterinary Science at Utrecht. 'Anyone who knew Jan will remember his huge grin. He was a very dedicated and caring person. He was a typical student who wanted to have a good time with his friends and was always the first person to stop at a bar.' In 2022, he unexpectedly took his own life. 'All of a sudden there's an empty chair at the table. How can someone who seemed to be so cheerful make that choice?'

The brothers urge everyone in the audience to ask how someone is really doing more often. 'Not just when they're mourning a loss but also in everyday conversations with friends and family. Someone might seem so upbeat on the outside but still be struggling with all kinds of problems inside.' Whereas you can always talk to someone, they say. 'That could be a friend or a relative, or even a psychologist, student counsellor, study adviser or other professional. Anonymously if you want.'

'We're telling our story in the hope we can give you some pointers. Don't be afraid to ask someone how they are really feeling. Because sometimes you need that question to be able to share your problems.' ■

Measuring CO₂ with O₂

Ingrid Luijkx performs highly accurate measurements of oxygen levels in the air. That signal reveals how much of the emitted CO₂ remains in the atmosphere.

The amount of CO₂ in the atmosphere is continually rising. The increase last year was abnormally large. Scientists think that might be because forests are absorbing less CO₂ from the air. Ingrid Luijkx, an associate professor of Meteorology and Air Quality, is conducting research to get more certainty about this. She is using the oxygen concentration in the air to obtain a clearer picture of emissions and uptake of CO₂.

Emissions due to fossil fuels are continually increasing the amount of CO₂ in the atmosphere. About half of what is currently being emitted remains in the air. The other half is absorbed by the oceans and the forests in roughly equal proportions. 'But that uptake can fluctuate depending on the conditions,' says Luijkx. 'Forests absorb less CO₂ in very dry years, and oceans also absorb less as they become warmer. If you want to know how climate change is going to alter the amount of CO₂ in the atmosphere and make predictions, you need to figure out what effect all the underlying processes have.'

Fingerprint

The extra information that is needed for this is provided by oxygen. Luijkx: 'Oxygen measurements let you distinguish between fossil fuel combustion and the uptake by the biosphere.' Oxygen plays a key role because it is involved in both combustion (the formation of CO₂) and photosynthesis (the sequestration of CO₂). According to Luijkx, oxygen provides a kind of fingerprint of the CO₂ level in the atmosphere. But that requires you to be able to make very precise



Text Roelof Kleis

measurements of small changes in the oxygen level, which is far from easy. Oxygen is present in abundance in the atmosphere, making up 21 per cent of the air. Try measuring a few extra molecules in that enormous amount of oxygen. But that is precisely what Luijkx does, using a device she developed herself during her PhD in Groningen, 15 years ago. She was the first person in the Netherlands to do this kind of measurement.

Lead

Luijkx studied physics in Groningen. 'I combined technical physics with environmental physics, with a focus on environmental issues. That was how I ended up doing atmospheric research.' For her PhD, she studied the exchange of carbon dioxide and oxygen above the North Sea. The oxygen meter she built to do this is essentially quite simple, she explains. 'It's a fuel cell in which a current is generated if you let air flow through it. That is because the oxygen reacts with lead. It's basically the same process as in a battery that provides electricity. The more oxygen in the air, the stronger the current.'

You can buy these oxygen meters off the shelf, but you need a lot of peripheral equipment to get the accuracy needed to measure atmospheric signals. Luijkx developed the concept and put together a prototype. The 'flight case', as the device is called, is the same size as a large freezer. The name refers to the aluminium casing, which is similar to the freight containers used on planes. There are now two newer versions

'The pandemic was a kind of real-life experiment'

in operation: one carries out measurements on the Royal Netherlands Meteorological Institute (KNMI) mast at the Cabauw station in Utrecht; the other is in Groningen.

Pandemic

After her doctorate, Luijkx moved to Switzerland for two years as a postdoc. She carried out oxygen measurements at an altitude of 3500 metres on the Jungfrauoch glacier near Interlaken. Then she switched to Wageningen. Here, she got the opportunity to master the art of modelling atmospheric processes. 'Performing measurements in one specific place is interesting, but it doesn't tell you much about the climate problem or give you the bigger picture of CO₂ on the global scale.' She has been working on that bigger picture ever since. And making a name for herself too. She has already secured a Veni grant, a Vidi grant and EU funding for her research.

That her method gets results became clear in 2022.

Together with British colleagues, Luijkx demonstrated that UK CO₂ emissions fell by almost a quarter during the pandemic. 'You couldn't see that decrease just by looking at the CO₂ signal, because the signal depends on the amount of CO₂ absorbed by the biosphere. The decrease that was calculated based on energy consumption was 17 per cent. We got a decrease of 23 per cent based on our oxygen measurements, so that is pretty close. The

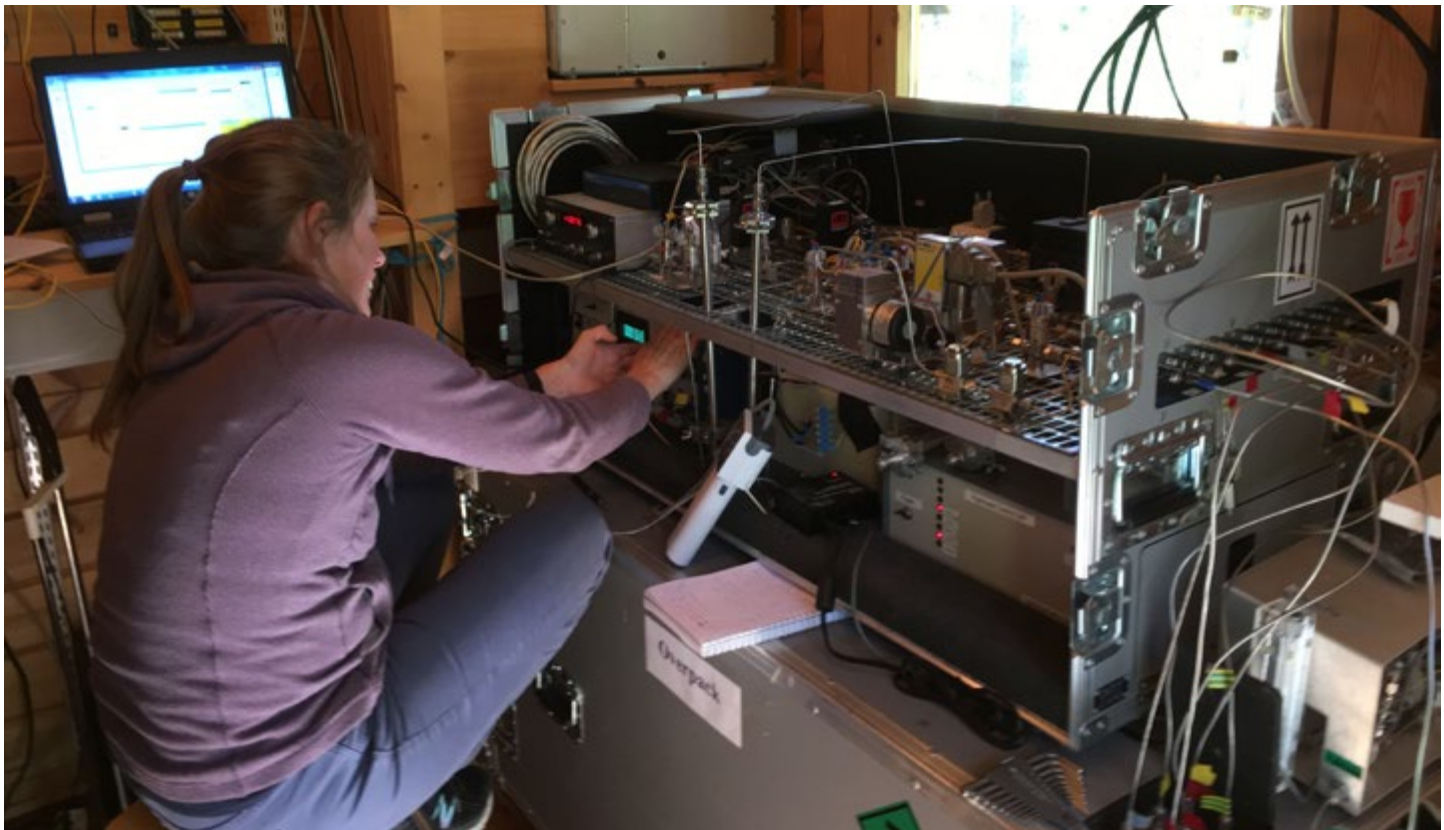
pandemic was a kind of real-life experiment.'

For her Veni project, Luijkx set up her equipment in the forests of Hyytiälä in Finland. Measurements were performed at various heights above the forest to learn more about the net outcome from CO₂ uptake by forests. 'The net value depends on photosynthesis (uptake of CO₂ by plants) and respiration (emissions by the vegetation and from the soil). But atmospheric processes also influence the concentrations. You need to be able to distinguish those processes to interpret the measurements correctly. On 8 July, Kim Faassen will get her PhD for the development of a fundamental framework, based on those measurements.'

Since September, oxygen measurements have been made from the transmission mast at Cabauw with funding from the EU CORS project and the Vidi grant. 'This year, I hope to set up a similar measurement system at De Zweth station near Rotterdam. That will let us build up a time series for the Netherlands.' ■

Multipurpose

Oxygen measurements using Ingrid Luijkx's method have recently started for individual leaves. This is a study she is doing with researchers at Plant Sciences. The exchange of carbon dioxide and oxygen under varying conditions tells us more about how photosynthesis and respiration depend on factors such as temperature and the amount of light. 'It's funny to see how you can use the same measuring equipment for completely different purposes,' says Luijkx. 'We want to know more about the atmosphere while they want to improve photosynthesis models. It's great you can start up collaborations like this so easily in Wageningen.'



A lot of peripheral equipment is needed to measure oxygen accurately. Ingrid Luijkx designed this device herself and used it to perform measurements in a Finnish forest. ♦ Own photo





NERVE-RACKING

The students in the Horse Group who did the annual horse-and-carriage course are counting down. They know exactly where each rein goes, which shrubs their Hiske should definitely not nibble (because they're poisonous!) and what the traffic rules are for a horse and carriage. That all got tested in the theory exam. Next week is the final test of their skills, the practical exam. They will have to show they can manoeuvre a flight animal weighing roughly 600 kilos through traffic using only their voice, a whip and a set of leather reins a few metres in length. The club chair Judith Gijsbertsen (on the right in the photo) is confident they are ready. ME

Photo Resource

Arnold Bregt to stop as Dean of Education

‘Education’s an oil tanker: changing course takes time’

After years at the helm of teaching at Wageningen, Arnold Bregt will be stepping down from his role as Dean of Education. He saw student numbers rise substantially and then fall again, he steered education through the Covid crisis and he helped shape the new resit policy.



Text Luuk Zegers

students, policy officers and support staff. I enjoy playing a role in such complex group processes.’

What was the education situation when you started eight years ago?

‘Student numbers were shooting up. We went from 9,000 students to 13,000 in just a few years. That put a lot of pressure on the system because the growth in staff hadn’t kept pace. Teachers had huge workloads and there physically wasn’t enough space. Our challenge was to teach all those extra students and still maintain Wageningen’s high quality. We invested in new accommodation, such as the Aurora building, and hired a lot of teachers and researchers. The ratio of students to staff

when I started was 18:1, compared to 14:1 now. That makes a real difference to teachers.’

Now it looks as if fewer students are coming to Wageningen.

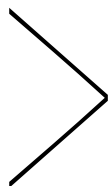
‘That’s true, we’re seeing the reverse. The influx of Dutch school leavers is falling, Dutch politicians are voicing concerns about the number of international students and there is increasing competition from other universities. In the past, you had to go to Wageningen to study certain subjects. That has changed. Other universities now also recognize the importance of our domain and are offering similar degrees. That recognition is nice, but we need to make sure we don’t become invisible. Our forecasts assumed a slight downward trend in the intake. Perhaps we didn’t take action fast enough because there are worries that numbers might be falling too quickly. As WUR, we

Just a few more weeks and he will be done, but he doesn’t feel the job is finished. Arnold Bregt sees plenty of challenges in education for his successor to deal with. He would secretly be quite happy to continue a little longer, giving ‘strategic advice’ to the Executive Board and making sure the Wageningen teaching machine functions smoothly. ‘The nice thing about this job is you never do it alone: you need everyone else. If you want to introduce a change, you do it with the teachers,

‘What I remember above all from the pandemic is the dedication of our teaching staff’



'I like the way we can all work together to keep perfecting the education machine and adapting it to developments in the market, in politics, technological advances such as generative AI, pandemics and so forth. We're doing that well.' ♦ Photos Duncan de Fey



need to be far more active in promoting ourselves among prospective students. We have been voted the best university in the Netherlands by students for 20 years now – we need to publicize that more often and more vociferously.’

To what extent has the education on offer at Wageningen been revamped?

‘Five new degree programmes have been added. We now have a Bachelor’s in Marine Sciences and will soon have Data Science for Global Challenges. The new Masters’ are Biobased Sciences, Data Science for Food and Health, and MADE – Metropolitan Analysis, Design and Engineering – in partnership with Delft University of Technology. ‘We have also started teaching seven Bachelor’s programmes in English. We were quite late in taking that step in Wageningen. Looking back, that’s not a bad thing as we will probably not be hit so hard by the proposed Balanced Internationalization law (in which the Dutch government is aiming to steer the internationalization of higher education in the desired direction, in part by taking a critical look at which degrees should be offered in English, ed.). That’s what I hope, at any rate.

‘We offer an ever-wider range of educational approaches, both extracurricular and in the curriculum. The student challenges are an example of extracurricular education that lots of students get involved in. There have also been educational improvements “behind the scenes”. Six years ago, the accreditation organization NVAO was critical of our examining boards. While

that’s not something students and teachers notice, these boards are crucial to the recognized value of our degree certificates. All the degree programmes were reviewed again last year and this time the examining boards got a lot of praise.

‘Now, we carry out a portfolio analysis every three years to make sure we are continually critically assessing the education we offer. We’ve become more professional in this respect too.’

What has changed most in the past few years?

‘We have become much more of a Master’s university: Master’s students currently make up two thirds of our student population. In the wider world, the tone of the political debate has changed. People are more distrustful of higher education institutions, which are sometimes portrayed as elitist. That’s a dangerous development. We need to maintain and strengthen our connection with society. We are already doing that but we need to stay alert.’

How do you feel about the pandemic period?

‘Covid had a huge impact on education. What I remember above all is the dedication of our teaching staff: in a single weekend, they made a huge transition to an online environment so that they could continue teaching. At the same time, Covid showed how important in-person education is — the interaction and the spontaneity you get from being together in a classroom. Another positive aspect is the greater awareness during that period of students’ mental wellbeing.’

‘As WUR, we need to promote ourselves more among school leavers’

After the pandemic, the resit policy was a tricky issue. In the end, the number of times a student can sit an exam in a given year was reduced from three to two. ‘Students were critical and not keen on losing one resit possibility. I don’t mind people being critical — that helps refine the decision-making and improves the quality of the decisions. After a lengthy process and lots of discussions with students and teaching staff, we ended up with a balanced policy that left both groups better off. Teachers have a reduced workload and students are taking their exams more seriously, with the pass rate for the first time they take an exam rising from 81 per cent to 89 per cent. It’s great when you have a tricky issue like that and eventually come up with a win-win solution.’

What would you say has not been a great success?

‘I think we could do more in terms of boundary crossing. We aim to educate students to be able to resolve complex problems in society. That requires an ability to collaborate across domains, disciplines and cultures. We are doing that already, but I think it could be much more. I sometimes say: education is evolution. And sometimes evolution is slower than you’d want.’

What has been a great success?

‘In addition to being Dean of Education, I also chaired the Recognition & Rewards working group. That was another difficult process that took over four years, but the end result was good. In contrast to the past, when academic staff were judged mostly on the number of publications and PhD candidates they supervised, now there is more recognition of teaching and impact on society.

‘I’m also proud of how everyone involved in teaching has continued to offer high-quality, relevant education. Students, teachers, examining boards, the Executive Board, Education & Student Affairs,



chair groups, programme directors and so on — they are people with their own roles and objectives, but they depend on one another. Together, we can keep the education machine progressing step by step, perfecting it and adapting to developments in the market, in politics, technological advances such as generative AI, pandemics and so forth. We're doing a good job there.'

What problems will your successor need to tackle?

'We need to make cuts and I suspect funding will stay tight in future too, in part because the world is changing. The information explosion — with everyone being able to look up anything on YouTube or ChatGPT — means students will be less interested in a classical format where the teacher stands in front of the class and tells them things. That requires a rethink. How do we keep education inspiring? 'We shouldn't underestimate the extent to which AI is undermining the traditional

cornerstones of education. Students are currently assessed for writing an essay or thesis. But what do you do if students can outsource some or all of that assessment work to ChatGPT? I like technology and don't necessarily see this development as a threat, but what does it mean for the next generation of students and the education we want to give them?'

What advice would you give your successor?

'You can set a lot of things in motion in this job, but you have to accept it will happen slowly. Education is like

'Given the information explosion, a rethink is required: how do we keep education inspiring?'

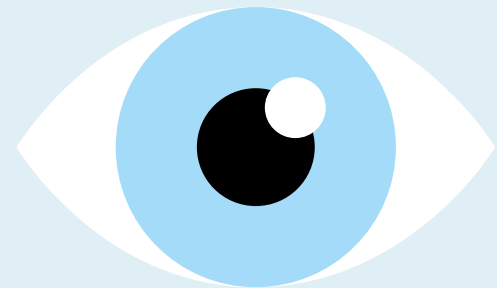
an oil tanker: it takes patience and perseverance to change course.' Finally, what are your plans for after you've handed over to the next person? 'I work one day a week in the Geo-information Science chair group, but I haven't given that task so much attention over the past few years, so I will be spending more time there. Apart from that, I don't know exactly. At any rate, I plan to have more granddad days with my granddaughter Pippa in Breda.' ■



CONFIDENT OR SHOCKED

WUR's Supervisory Board has two new members. That means this body, which monitors the Executive Board and gives it frank feedback, now has a full complement of six people. But who chooses the members, who approves the appointments and is the mix of members still appropriate for these times? Opinions on that last aspect in particular differ. Text Willem Andrée

Supervisory boards usually have a dual role: they are supposed to monitor the executive board's activities and also act as a partner it can bounce ideas off. WUR governance expert Katrien Termeer, who is a supervisory director of various NGOs herself, says membership is a serious responsibility, not some trivial side job. 'You approve the financial statements, evaluate the performance of the executive board and are personally liable if something goes wrong.' She hasn't analysed WUR's Supervisory Board but she stresses the importance of a wide range of expertise among the supervisory directors: 'You need people who know about finance, IT and organizational change as well as people with a feeling for trends in society at large.' That feeling is what is missing at present in the WUR Supervisory Board, thinks former Teacher of the Year



Ignas Heitkönig. 'I'm shocked at the current composition. Why does it include the financial director of an industrial meat processing company, for example? We're in the middle of a climate and biodiversity crisis, so you need people who can think about future-proof agriculture, not people who are part of the problem.'

Lobby

The Supervisory Board chooses its own members (see inset). The appointments are approved by the ministries of Education and Agriculture – currently the responsibility of caretaker ministers such as Eppo Bruins (of the NSC party) and Femke Wiersma (of the BBB). 'That is not a formality,' says Heitkönig. 'There is a definite political aspect to this, which has consequences for the direction the university takes. If you appoint people who have links to the agri-industry or major lobbying groups, such as the agricultural company Avebe, you know what you are getting.' PhD candidate Anne-Juul Welsink, who is involved in Scientists4Future (S4F), also has questions about the

Becoming a member

An examination of the rules shows that the procedure — such as the role of representative bodies and the publication of the profile — is laid down in law. The first step is when the Supervisory Board draws up a profile of who they are looking for, after consulting the Executive Board. This draft profile is sent to the representative bodies for their advice. They also have an opportunity to discuss the appointment profile with the Supervisory Board.

Once everything is agreed, the profile — the 'vacancy' — is published. Anyone can apply, except for WUR employees, politicians and other specific categories. The new members are ultimately appointed by the Ministry of Education in consultation with the Ministry of Agriculture. The underlying idea is that it keeps the supervisory body independent of the executive body. Each member serves a maximum of two four-year terms on the Supervisory Board. The Supervisory Board regularly talks to the representative bodies and to ordinary WUR employees, for example during working visits prior to board meetings. The discussions the Supervisory Board has with the Executive Board are private.

'We have no insight into the links between politicians, the private sector and the university'

procedure. S4F and Solid Sustainability have analysed the supervisory boards of all Dutch universities, she says. They looked at the backgrounds and connections of all the supervisory board members. 'The composition turns out to be skewed. The members mainly come from the private sector, often with a governance background. Of course supervisory bodies need such people, but research, education and small-scale sustainable initiatives are underrepresented. The WUR Supervisory Board does currently have someone from a "green" foundation – WWF – but they are still all establishment figures.' That is why Welsink and S4F want a debate about the selection procedure.

Heitkönig: 'I looked at a Supervisory Board annual report but couldn't find anything about their decisions or what their considerations were. What goes on there is out of sight of society at large. We have no insight into the links between politicians, the private sector and the university. They no longer merely lobby for a policy: they have become part of the policy-making body. Some of the people in this supervisory body represent companies that refused to talk to Johan Remkes during the nitrogen dialogue. That is not a neutral position.'

A workshop organized recently by S4F produced a very different picture of the future for WUR, says the former Teacher of the Year. 'We talked about a campus without companies such as Unilever or FrieslandCampina and with more space for education, student housing and research into healthy soil and a healthy living environment,' says Heitkönig. 'Leeuwenborch (which is now located away from the campus, ed.) could move to those spaces. To achieve that, we would need a different make-up of the Supervisory Board, among other things, with more members who are rooted in science, sustainability and education, rather than mainly experts on financial reports.'

Confidence

One of the new members, Sigrid Hoekstra (WoonFriesland housing corporation), will be the main point of contact for WUR Council and the Student Council; she 'enjoys

From then to now

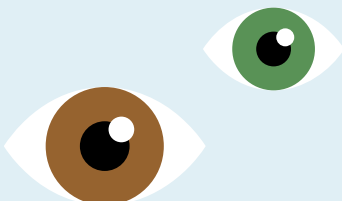
From the former chairs Job Cohen and Jeroen Dijsselbloem to the current chair Elbert Dijkgraaf, and from Berry Marttin and Robert Smith to Mariëtte Verhoef, the Supervisory Board has had a lot of members since 2018 (the first year for which the annual report is available online). The longest-sitting member is Tjarda Klomp (who is also CEO of Vion Food Group), who joined in 2018. Verhoef was another familiar face until recently, when she completed her two terms, eight years in total. The board now has its full complement again, with chair Elbert Dijkgraaf and members Frank Baaijens, David Fousert, Sigrid Hoekstra, Kirsten Schuijt and Tjarda Klomp. Hoekstra is executive director of WoonFriesland housing corporation and Fousert is CEO of Royal Avebe. Over the years, the backgrounds and experience of members have ranged from the CEO of WWF and a Rabobank banker to members of the supervisory boards of Avebe and FrieslandCampina. Both now and in the past, the WUR Supervisory Board has had professors and rectors from other universities.

our particular confidence', as it is put. Both the councils were involved in the appointments. 'We had transparent discussions and the process went smoothly,' says WUR Council chair Blair van Pelt.

The chairs of the central representative bodies say they have confidence in the collaboration. The councils have official meetings with the Supervisory Board several times a year. 'We have a good feeling about Hoekstra,' says Van Pelt. 'We are basically on the same team but with different roles. We are free to voice criticisms and put any topic on the agenda that we consider necessary. Everything we discuss with her is confidential and, as with her predecessor, we could talk things over with her if we were to get on poor terms with the Executive Board. There are good arrangements for that.' The Student Council chair Hanna Elsinga emphasizes that the student perspective is not forgotten. 'You can tell they don't see education as a sideline. We recently discussed AI in education and I could see they were taking my point of view seriously even though I'm much younger.'

However, for PhD candidate and S4F member Welsink the fact that the meetings are held privately is a reason to be critical: 'Who oversees the supervisory body? If we don't debate this issue across WUR, nothing will change.'

The Supervisory Board was not available for comment and the chair prefers to avoid the limelight. Former chair Jeroen Dijsselbloem was not available either to reflect on his experiences. He said he would be unable to do an interview due to a packed diary. ■



Studying fish in 'difficult' Wadden Sea

Cloudy picture

Wageningen researchers spent five years studying the role of the Wadden Sea in the lifecycles of fish in the hope of learning more about the ecology and finding pointers for nature management and policy. 'There are only a few levers you can pull when it comes to fish.'

'Wadden Sea cops' was the title of a 2020 *Resource* article on the start of the Swimway research project, which needed a lot of detective work. Scientists knew far less about fish in the Wadden Sea than about birds in the area and animals on the seabed. Larger species such as the sea trout, seabass, thicklip grey mullet and school shark had largely been below the radar during the regular fish monitoring exercises. The same applied to smaller fish that form shoals, such as herring and sprat, an important source of food for terns and other protected species. More was known about some fish species such as sole and plaice because they are important for the commercial fishing industry. But that information showed

they were not doing well in the Wadden Sea, which they use as a nursery to grow to maturity. 'If we know why that is, we might be able to turn things around,' said Ingrid Tulp at the time. Tulp is a researcher at Wageningen Marine Research (WMR) and the scientific coordinator of Swimway. Five years on, she sums up the results for *Resource*.

Challenging area

The key question for Swimway was to determine how fish use the Wadden Sea. 'Some fish spend their entire lifecycles in the Wadden Sea, others only part of the lifecycle. The underlying idea was that if you want to know how well a species is doing in the Wadden Sea, you need to know what function the Wadden Sea has for that species. We call that the lifecycle approach,' explains Tulp. But the Wadden Sea is a challenging area for fish research. The water is shallow, cloudy and strongly influenced by the tide, which makes the context very changeable. As a result, standard fish research methods can't always be used.



Text Marieke Enter

Indeed, an important subsidiary objective of the project was to look at possible new techniques to see what results they get and whether they could be used for additional fish monitoring.

The researchers learned a lot through Swimway about acoustic methods, says Tulp. 'On the one hand, that deals with the problem you have in the Wadden Sea of not being able to see much underwater and on the other hand the catch methods have their limitations too. In a lot of fish studies, you have to take the fish out of the water, which isn't good for any species of fish. That was why we were looking for less invasive methods where you can let the fish swim undisturbed.'

Sound

Various methods using sound waves turned out to be a real find. For example, reflections from the signals sent by a depth sounder could be used to detect shoals of small pelagic fish. Equipment on the bed of the Marsdiep – the choppy

5x

Five PhD projects

The Swimway PhD candidates Bas Dye, Margot Maathuis and Hannah Charan-Dixon have already obtained their doctorates for research on fish temperature preferences, the diet of herring and sprat, and the role of marshes for immature fish, respectively. Jena Edwards is due to get her PhD on 10 July for research on the function of the Wadden Sea for large fish. Maryann Watson, who studied the role of shellfish banks for fish, will get her doctorate after the summer. In Swimway, Wageningen Marine Research collaborated with the University of Groningen, NIOZ, Directorate-General for Public Works and Sportvisserij Nederland.

body of water between Texel and Den Helder – revealed swimming patterns that showed the Wadden Sea is a place where young herring and sprat grow to maturity. The researchers also used hydrophones to capture sounds the fish themselves produce. This gave a better picture of the fish communities in the various habitats. An advantage of the larger fish species is that you can fit transmitters to them. To study these species, the Swimway researchers installed a network of underwater acoustic receivers in the western Wadden Sea. ‘That tells you which receiver a fish swam past and therefore how that fish is using the Wadden Sea,’ explains Tulp. ‘The measurements showed that seabass stick to certain places: in the winter, they migrate to the English Channel, but when they return to the Wadden Sea the following year, they go to exactly the same places. Such insights are useful input for fish management. Governments could decide to no longer allow human activity or commercial fishing in those parts of the Wadden Sea, for example.’ Swimway was also about climate change.

‘The Wadden Sea is very shallow and the water temperature is a crucial factor for cold-blooded creatures like fish,’ explains the coordinator. ‘Does that mean the Wadden Sea will no longer be suitable for certain species? And can we expect newcomers?’ WMR conducted lab experiments to look at temperature preferences. The Netherlands Institute for Sea Research (NIOZ) added theoretical models that let scientists make predictions about the future.

Freshwater gradient

Climate change is also affecting the discharge of freshwater. That has irreversible consequences for a brackish body of water like the Wadden Sea with few natural transitions from freshwater to saline water. Tulp: ‘In the Swimway project, we were able to find a relationship between the length of the freshwater peak from the discharge

sluices in the Afsluitdijk – how far the peak extends into the Wadden Sea – and the numbers of smelt and stickleback that try to reach the freshwater at the Afsluitdijk. We would like to investigate the freshwater gradient in greater detail in follow-up research.’

With the Wadden Association as the lead project partner, the idea was that the project would deliver knowledge that could be used for policy and nature management. ‘There are only a few levers you can pull when it comes to fish,’ says Tulp. ‘Now that the PhD candidates have finished (see inset), the supervisory team is working on the implications of the new insights for aspects such as the spatial setup, freshwater management and use of the Wadden Sea by humans.’ In addition to those recommendations, the Swimway project will also produce advice on monitoring. ‘We have already concluded that the current monitoring system is not sufficient given all the policy objectives.’ ■



Researcher Ingrid Tulp describes fieldwork in the marshes as ‘often like a real mud bath’. Thanks to the efforts of Hannah Charan-Dixon and her team, more is now known about the importance of the edges of the mud flats for young fish • Photo Swimway Wadden Sea project organization



TOP PICNIC SPOTS ON CAMPUS

With (hopefully) many sunshine-filled days coming our way, *Resource* went on a mission to find the best picnic spots on campus.

Text & Photos Ananya Doraswamy & Marieke Enter



Under the oak tree next to Impulse

At the entrance of Impulse, walk past the stone sculpture towards the grassy patch on the left of the building. You will find yourself in a lovely picnic spot, shaded by an oak tree. You can take your pick of seating: the big boulders shaped as seats, the wooden furniture or the grass.

- + The AH to Go is easily accessible if you didn't have time to bring a picnic from home.
- The place is not that peaceful because of the many passers-by between Forum and Aurora.



The amphitheatre

A simple design with a concrete bench around the circumference, leaving it wide open to nature. A partial covering on one side offers some shade without shutting out the rest of the world.

- + If you're lucky, there will be a concert playing on the grass nearby and you get a musical afternoon.
- There are lots of cigarette butts lying around.



The Lumen nature garden

Follow the paved path on the right of the building, walk through the gate and turn right to get to the garden. There, nestled among the wild flowers, is a cosy bench for two. Enjoy your meal with a gorgeous view of the lake. Surrounded by nature, you have only the breeze listening to your conversation. You're also in the perfect place for a scenic, post-lunch stroll.

- + The garden hosts some rare and vulnerable plant species, such as dragon's teeth and the marsh helleborine.
- You can only walk on the paths so as not to disturb the nature.



The hidden garden behind Unilever

If you're looking for something offbeat, this is definitely a spot to consider. Is it a legit picnic spot? Let's put it this way, there aren't any signs that say it isn't! Tucked away behind the Unilever building is a little patch of fruit trees, wild flowers and bird boxes. There's plenty to observe, and at this time of year you can enjoy the sweet scent of roses as you picnic. Tip: rather than walk on the paved footpath, take the grassy path on the hillocks past the building; it's lined with daisies and other wild flowers.

- + Easy walking distance between Orion and Lebo, so it's a meeting place for natural and social scientists.
- When the grass is tall, there isn't much room to spread out a blanket.



By the willow tree opposite Zodiac

In front of Zodiac, there is a charming pond that hosts ducks, coots and an occasional heron. Make your way toward the *Man with Bull* statue and stop at the cheerful blue bench. Suddenly all you can hear is the gentle swish of willow branches in the wind and the water rippling in the breeze.

- + The view: a spectacular backdrop of sky. If you run out of conversation, you could always lie back and cloud-gaze.
- Watch out for duck droppings when you spread your blanket on the grass.



The NL2120 Landscape Garden, behind Atlas

A cute space designed by Landscape Architecture students. They got inspiration from the 'Netherlands in 2120' project, WUR's perspective on what the Netherlands might look like if we opt for future-proof, green solutions in spatial planning. Besides a selection of flowers that are in bloom right now, there are picnic benches!

- + With solar panels embedded in them, the tables have charging points so your devices can recharge while you take a break.
- It is not the most vibrant place on campus.



The Forum waterfront

If you'd prefer to picnic closer to water, the wooden steps by the bridge between Forum and Impulse may be more to your taste. On a clear day, it's ideal for basking in the sunshine as you munch on your meal and watch swans gliding lazily and rays of sunlight transform into glittering diamonds as they hit the water.

- + Since it's a popular lunchtime spot, even if you start your picnic alone, you are likely to run into a few familiar faces before you're done.
- At times, it can get very busy.

DICK BELGERS SEES THEM FLY BY

Biologist Dick Belgers has already spotted 2,800 species of insects over the past ten years. Just in his garden. An ordinary mortal might spot between 10 and 20 species of small flying critters in their garden, and a biologist would undoubtedly see a few more. But 2,800 different insects? In an urban garden? Let that number sink in for a bit.

Text Roelof Kleis

Dick Belgers is not even an entomologist. A botanist originally, he studied at the applied sciences university in Wageningen (STOVA and HAS Larenstein). He got fascinated by insects when he was still living in the Blauwe Kamer area, near the Opheusden ferry. 'First it was wild bees; I'm a beekeeper. In 2008, I had a burnout and I started catching insects with a net. That's when my love for entomology started. For wasps, bees, flies and beetles. For everything, really. I'm a generalist.' Ten years ago, Belgers moved to Nassauweg on the slopes of Wageningse Berg, where he has a beautiful garden of around 500 square metres. Quite big for an urban garden. Since then, he has been working on his collection. He lists and photographs everything with wings and six legs ('I'm not as interested in spiders, woodlice and snails') and that endeavour has produced the incredible figure of 2,800 species in ten years. A new one gets added every week. 'I've been working on my personal BioBlitz for ten years.' Belgers collects species, but he doesn't call himself a species hunter. 'I don't travel all over the Netherlands to get to the top of the wildlife observations

website. Absolutely not. For me, it's about the ecology in my garden. My passion is to give a face to the insects that aren't seen as cute. Literally, by photographing them. Some have never been photographed. Of those 2,800 species, there are 60 to 70 that are completely new to the Dutch fauna – they have never been recorded by anyone before. Much of that still has to be published.'

Skylights

The Dutch fauna includes 20,000 species of insects. This means about 14 per cent of them were spotted in Belgers' garden. How is that possible? And why does he see so many new species? There are several answers to that question. Belgers' most important 'weapons' are the four skylights in the roofed-in area at the back of his house. 'I catch about 85 to 90 per cent of my insects in my skylights. Alive – that's important to me. I don't use traps that kill them. I do have to check every day, otherwise they're gone again.' A second explanation is the location. 'This isn't your run-of-the-mill urban garden,' Belgers acknowledges.



'Especially not with the surroundings here, the floodplains, the old oaks along Generaal Foulkesweg, the nearby arboretum and the slope that heats up in the sun. This place is an oasis, or really several connected oases. There are large scissor-bees here, for example, that are attracted to buttercups. I don't have those flowers in my garden, but they are found in the floodplains. Those bees come here to build nests in my large bee hotel.' Another factor is that the insects are doing poorly in Dutch fields. Opportunist



Biologist Dick Belgers: 'I catch about 85 to 90 per cent of my insects in my skylights. Alive — that's important to me. I don't use traps that kill them.' • Photo Guy Ackermans

species are therefore retreating to the towns and cities. Belgers: 'There are European wool carder bees here, which barely exist outside of urban areas anymore. They have adapted to this environment. Cities are becoming greener, paving stones are being removed and this attracts insects. And don't forget that we'll be getting a lot more insects from the south in the near future due to climate change. The hotter it gets, the more insects. Slowly but surely, they're coming this way.'

Obscure critters

So Belgers will be busy for a while. 'I think I should be able to get to about 4,000 species. I reckon there are many more flying around than we assume. An ecosystem like this is full of them. You just have to see and catch them.' That's

'Cities are greener now with less paving, which attracts insects'

what you need people like Dick Belgers for, and the small army of experts he can call on. 'I don't do all of this alone. When I catch a beastie that I think is special, it goes into a jar with alcohol and I send it to the experts. There are so many obscure critters out there.' That huge diversity also puzzles him. An example: 'There are about 80 species of fungus gnats here. Very strange, spotted insects; more like flies than mosquitoes, because they don't bite. There are about 250 species of fungus gnats in the

Netherlands, and they all have a one-to-one relationship with fungi. They are very small creatures that can't fly very far. So there must be fungi somewhere nearby. But where?'

He has been sharing his passion via LinkedIn #magheteenbeestjemeerzijn for the past two years. 'I love doing that. It gives me so much energy.' He posts a photo with a brief comment almost every day. The photos are always identical in design: an insect on a sheet of white paper, lit in such a way that the insect casts a shadow on the paper. 'This way it looks like they are coming off the page.' The posts get a lot of response. 'Recently, I took a photo of two red Heteroptera, a European firebug and a cinnamon bug. My post was about the differences. It's been viewed 65,000 times. Isn't that crazy?' ■

Limelight



SAT
28-06-25

Torckpark Wageningen

13:00-24:00

Free

Woetstok, the Wageningen cover-band festival in the Torch park, celebrates its 10th anniversary. The last few years there has been more room for artists who focus on the repertoire of contemporary music, instead of just the bands your mum and dad listen to. One of those bands is Intercity, which will give their rendition of Lady Gaga as Googoo Gaga at this edition of Woetstok. Text Coretta Jongeling

Googoo Gaga at Woetstok

Intercity – the name refers to the train the band members take to rehearse together in Utrecht – usually plays at student parties and often covers rock songs. 'The last few years we've been moving more towards pop,' says guitarist Riemer. 'It's fun to play famous songs, to really put on a show. We take hits but transform them, make them heavier or we take a verse or bridge from another song. When you perform those iconic pop hits in particular, that gives you room to put your own spin on the music.'

In addition to her music, Lady Gaga is famous for her outrageous outfits. 'We

are definitely going to do something with that,' Riemer says. 'At first, the idea was to give each band member a Lady Gaga outfit from a certain period. But now Hugo in particular, the vocalist, is going all-out flamboyant, and the rest of the band will have matching outfits. That will be along the lines of a lot of black clothing with holes, and of course plenty of gel and mascara. We want to make it a big show.'

The Intercity band can trace its roots back 20 years, when band members Floris (drums), Jente (bass guitar) and Hugo (vocals) met each other at primary school in Wageningen. At secondary school, they befriended keyboardist Dylan and guitarist Riemer. And finally, when they were already students, Bas (guitarist) joined them.

This is not the first time the band has played at Woetstok. Two years ago, the band played songs by Smash Mouth, and last year they performed Katy Perry numbers (as Kitty Purry). Riemer is happy to be there again this year. 'It's very cool to be on such a large stage. And it's nice that it's free, so all our friends and family can also come and watch.'

See loburg.com/woetstok/ for the line-up and more information.



TIPS

Thursday 19 June

Call of Booty (Pride party)

– De Wilde Wereld

Sunday 29 June

Gluren bij de Buren (living-room festival) - throughout Wageningen

Sunday 6 July

LEEF Festival (street theatre)
– town centre



Intercity at Woetstok in 2024 as Kitty Purry ♦ Photo Cees Beumer



You can spot great-looking people and cool outfits on Wageningen campus. This column highlights some of them. This time, meet Robin Blersch (28), a Governance of Sustainability Transformations Master's student from Germany. Text and photo Eva de Koeijer

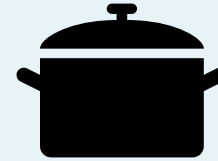


'In the morning, I consciously choose an outfit. Looking good makes me walk around with confidence. I also like to profile myself with what I am wearing. For example, my hair is black on one side and red on the other – my hair is like an accessory to me.

'In general, I really like accessories. I usually wear one silver earring and a lot of rings, and I have several tattoos. Each tattoo is symmetrical, across my arms, chest and legs, and so are my double nose piercings. 'My choice of clothes is inspired by music. I listen to rock and metal, and I love band shirts, leather jackets and chains. However, I also have another side, where I enjoy dressing in a 70s or 80s hippie style. Everything I wear is second-hand. The Netherlands has great second-hand stores: I like to go thrifting in Nijmegen and Arnhem.

'I would say I am a bit extravagant, and I love to experiment. These trousers, for example, are women's trousers, but I don't care about the gender aspect of clothing. I just buy what I think looks cool. I would tell other people to do the same, and to not be afraid to be a little different, if that's what you like!'

You encounter all the flavours of the world in Wageningen. Rin Kishimoto (23), a Food Technology Master's student from Japan, shares her favourite dish from Korea, where she lived for ten years.



Flavours of WUR

Gochujang popcorn chicken

'Korean Gochujang Popcorn Chicken is a delicious fusion of crispy, bite-sized chicken and Korea's signature spicy-sweet glaze. Featuring gochujang – a fermented chili paste packed with umami – this dish is both comforting and exciting. It is often enjoyed as a school lunch or snack in Korea, and it's perfect for sharing, entertaining or satisfying a spicy craving.'

Preparation

- 1 In a bowl, combine the soy sauce, gochujang and honey. Mix until smooth. Add the grated garlic and sesame oil and set aside.
- 2 Cut the chicken breasts as wished into either small popcorn-style pieces or slightly larger chunks.
- 3 In a separate bowl, coat the chicken evenly with corn starch, garlic powder and pepper.
- 4 Heat about 1 cm of oil in a frying pan over medium heat. Once hot, add the chicken pieces in batches. Fry until golden brown and cooked through, about 4 minutes per side.
- 5 Transfer to a paper towel on a plate to drain excess oil.
- 6 Discard excess oil from the pan. Return the fried chicken to the pan and pour over the gochujang glaze.

Ingredients (for 4 people):

For the chicken:

- 2 medium chicken breasts
- Corn starch, as needed to coat
- 1/2 tsp garlic powder
- 1/2 tsp black or white ground pepper
- Cooking oil

For the gochujang glaze:

- 4 tbsp soy sauce
- 2 tbsp gochujang (Korean chilli paste)
- 2 tbsp honey
- 2 large garlic cloves, grated
- 1/2 tsp sesame oil (optional)

- 7 Toss well to coat all the pieces evenly. If the sauce is too much or too thick, gently cook for an additional 1–2 minutes to reduce it slightly.



Rin Kishimoto (23)
Food Technology Master's
student from Japan

Tip Garnish with sesame seeds and finely chopped spring onions. Serve hot with pickled radish or steamed rice for a full meal.



Column
Philip Timmers

The plant thief

With a pounding heart, I hurry out of the supermarket. I quickly look over my shoulder to check whether I'm being followed. When I see the coast is clear, I open my coat. There it lies, sad and shrivelled against my chest. The poor little plant hasn't been watered for days. It was close to being thrown out, pot and all. When I saw this poor fellow with that neglected look, I couldn't help but rescue it. All it needed was a little tender love and care. Unfortunately, as a plant you are in the wrong hands with all those teenage shelf stackers. Every Wednesday, Death walks along the plant aisle with a trash bag in hand and mercilessly flings the whole lot in. The next day, there is a new collection and we all act as if nothing has happened. This plant was about to bite the dust, and I couldn't bring myself to abandon it. You might wonder why I didn't just pay for the plant, but contributing to this capitalist malpractice is two bridges too far for me. If I pay, I am guilty of starving plants and if I don't, I am a thief.

I must confess that I am not a fan of stealing, but when a life depends on it, I am easily persuaded. I see myself as an ethically responsible and modest thief, like Robin Hood. In this unjust houseplant economy, I'd rather be a thief than a murderer.



Philip Timmers (19) is a first-year International Development Studies Bachelor's student. He likes gardening and is always up for a laugh. He enjoys reading surrounded by nature on a hot summer's day.



Meanwhile in...

Los Angeles – Immigration protests

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, an MSc student from Los Angeles, who would prefer to remain [anonymous](#)* due to the political climate in the US and abroad, shares their thoughts about the ongoing protests in Los Angeles against Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE). Text Machteld van Kempen

'From the perspective of Angelinos, the inhabitants of LA, the Trump administration has sent a band of armed thugs to kidnap our community members. There is an immediate material threat to our neighbours, family and friends. I think to respond to that legitimately and earnestly requires a level of organized militancy. The actions that we're seeing right now are not necessarily organized; they are distributed and emergent. I imagine that if the scale of the abductions increases, so will the militant resistance tactics. If there's one thing I want emphasized above all else, it's this: fuck ICE, the federal armed goons that Trump has set upon the people of LA. I'm really proud of how my city is responding.

'I think there is kind of a consensus among people that I talk to in LA that the scale of the civil disobedience is overhyped by US media and media abroad. When I tell people I'm from LA, they look at me as though I'm from a war zone. I think this is because from the outside LA seems a bit crazy, setting autonomous vehicles on fire and pelting cop cars with Molotov cocktails. But generally speaking, I think people in LA feel that life is going on as normal. I would imagine that people who aren't watching the news in LA don't even know that there are massive demonstrations taking place if they're not directly affected by them. LA is huge, and this is happening in just a few areas.

'Looking ahead, I'm concerned that Trump frequently talks about his desire to deport US citizens to concentration camps in El Salvador. I sort of hope that Trump is more performing authoritarianism than he is unleashing it. With respect to US activists, I'm hopeful for a shift in tactics to actions that are materially disruptive to the kind of regimes and policies that we oppose, for example the direct targeting of supply chains, companies and logistics throughout the US, rather than massive symbolic demonstrations.'

*Name known to the editors



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WUR from within: straight, sharp, transparent



MOVIE NIGHT
WITH ENGLISH SUBTITLES

THE SEED OF THE SACRED FIG
MOHAMMAD RASOULOF
NEON

25.06.2025 • 20.00 • movie.wur.nl

A chilling Iranian domestic drama in which a judge clashes with his two daughters during the student demonstrations in their country.

filmhuis Movie W

Colophon

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The new location for resits: the grounds of Argo rowing club • Photo Guy Ackermans



Resits at Argo premises this year

Students retaking exams in the second and third weeks of July this year will do so at rowing club Argo's premises. This is a pilot, which will be evaluated at the start of the next academic year.

Dean of Education Barnold Echt is enthusiastic about the new exam location: 'We know from research that working in a quiet, natural setting next to water boosts concentration. We also expect more students to turn up for the resits if the exams take place close to the Rhine beaches rather than on campus.' The education committee came up with the idea after the 0317 Festival, which was held on the Argo grounds last weekend. Various members of the education committee, including Barnold Echt, went to the festival to get an idea of the site. 'The atmosphere was amazing,' says Echt. 'You could hear the water babbling, the sun was shining and everyone went wild. A world of difference compared to the stuffy gym hall in De Bongerd.'

It has been known for a while that a natural environment is good for students' wellbeing and ability to concentrate, says Forest and Nature Conservation lecturer Oen Karts. He regularly teaches classes outdoors on campus and has been sleeping in the open air for the past 27 years. 'Students currently give their exam experience 3 out of 10 on average,' he explains. 'But I would expect that score

to go up a lot if we hold exams outdoors. My assumption is also that an off-campus location would be even better than outdoors on campus, where there are so many cars.' Argo was also keen on the idea from the start. 'The more students visit our premises, the better,' says competition coordinator Spyr Pein. 'While students are struggling with their fifth attempt to pass Maths 2, we have plenty of time to assess the quality of their backs and shoulders.'

'We expect more students will actually turn up for the resits now'

We could do with some new competitive rowers.'

If the pilot goes well, WUR will look at moving other activities to Argo as well.

Echt: 'The Summervibes

Festival is an obvious choice. The patch of grass next to Atlas is soggy and it's always so windy there. The sooner we move, the better. It would also be a huge improvement if the campus run ended at the Rhine. As for the Bioblitz, think how many new species we could discover along the water's edge. And to be honest, the Albert Heijn To Go should live up to its name and go too.'