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Are we really making progress towards the sustainable transition? One thing is clear: if we're not, it's not the fault of sustainability science. The Maastricht Sustainability Institute (MSI) is a frontrunner in the field, according to former director Ron Cörvers and his successor Professor Frank Boons.

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The campus currently employs approximately 3,000 people and is home to more than 100 companies. The diverse study programmes and research attract talent from the Netherlands and abroad. Research lines enjoy support and recognition with grants from the National Growth Fund and other bodies. Tellingly, DSM's virtual disappearance from the site has had little effect on employment. DSM's activities have been taken over by other parties and a great deal of new activity has emerged, partly thanks to innovation on the Brightlands Chemelot Campus. This is not a time for complacency: the challenges remain enormous. But we can look back with satisfaction on what has been achieved over the past decade in public–private partnerships on the campus.

**In early May 2009, representatives of Maastricht University, the Province of Limburg and DSM gathered in the conservatory of the then university president, Jo Ritzen. Their goal: to make another attempt to revitalise the nearby Chemelot industrial site. DSM was on a quest for innovation, the provincial authorities worried that DSM might leave the region, taking jobs with them, and UM wanted to enhance the impact it could make through science and technology. Working in a public–private partnership proved to be a matter of trial and error: it was not until 2012 that the Chemelot Campus was officially launched. This year, the campus celebrates its 10th anniversary: a good moment to look back on its development.**

The Chemelot Campus is today part of a cluster of four Brightlands campuses. The innovative ecosystem in Sittard-Geleen has come to be recognised as a campus of national importance. Various research institutes have put down roots there, students of relevant study programmes are educated in close proximity to practice, and startups generate new activity and entrepreneurship. The activities have developed hand in hand with societal issues, the focus in recent years increasingly turning to the energy transition and circularity. In symbiosis, UNI has taken a major leap forward in innovative research and education with the new Faculty of Science and Engineering—one of the growth centres of the university.
Circular Engineering: at the intersection of sustainability and technology

This academic year, Maastricht University launched the bachelor’s in Circular Engineering. New programme director Gavin Phillips and first-year students Maria el Kadi and Lea Dratwa discuss the how and why of this degree, which will help students to address existing as well as future sustainability challenges.
“As an engineer, you’re a technical problem solver. As a circular engineer you take sustainability and circularity into account, you think one step further,” Gavin Phillips explains. “How do you solve the problem in a technical sense, while also keeping our society and raw materials in mind? For example, students are investigating how Chemelot can use less carbon in its production process. They also work on a range of other topics, like reducing fertiliser use in agriculture.”

Sheepdog
Not only is the programme new, so too is Phillips. He moved from the UK to Maastricht, on the one hand to be closer to his partner in Germany, on the other because he was drawn to the position of programme director, the study programme and the Problem-Based Learning approach. “As the programme director I’m kind of a sheepdog. I keep an eye on all the moving parts and ensure that everything runs smoothly and well. But my main goal is to ensure that we train students to become good circular engineers, with strong technical skills and critical-thinking skills, so that they can make the best possible contribution in the future.”

First in the world
Phillips is not surprised that the world’s first Circular Engineering programme was initiated in Maastricht. “South Limburg and the surrounding areas have a lot of industry and therefore face major issues surrounding sustainability and energy transition. In a region like this—and of course beyond it too—new circular technologies and methods are desperately needed. It’s great that Maastricht University wants to lead the way in this field and invest in education and research.”

Tension
In the first year, students receive a solid foundation in engineering and sustainability, in the following two years they specialise. Phillips is particularly enthusiastic about the second-year course Circular Business Development. “Students will learn about the tension between sustainability, the economy and the interests of consumers and organisations. After all, developing a new circular solution is one thing, actually implementing it in society is another. The most sustainable solution isn’t always the most financially attractive, so we have to learn to find a good middle ground. Otherwise people won’t switch to your alternative.”

Warm welcome
He looks back with satisfaction on his first academic year. “Despite online education, the atmosphere between students and staff is good. It’s also going well on a personal level; I’ve been meeting more and more people and starting to learn some Dutch. My colleagues have given me a warm welcome; everyone is friendly and motivated. And Maastricht is a nice, safe, quiet city, with Germany and Belgium just around the corner. The work culture here is different than in the UK. In Maastricht there’s more room for discussing issues and contributing ideas—as befits a university.”

Strong female representation
This first-year students are also doing well. Currently there are 20, but next year Phillips expects 40 or 50. How would he describe the first cohort? “It’s a very international group, with students from all over the world—the Netherlands, but also Chile, Lebanon, South Africa. The current crop has quite a lot of women; I think that’s because of our emphasis on sustainability. But what strikes me most about this group is how enthusiastic, motivated and clever they are.”

Sold
Two of the current first-year students are Maria el Kadi from Lebanon and Lea Dratwa from Brussels. Both are happy with their choice of study programme. “I really wanted to study in Europe and chose UM for its Problem-Based Learning, international environment and young, open reputation,” El Kadi says. “I was also looking for a broad study programme involving sustainability, so Circular Engineering was perfect for me.” Dratwa, too, praises the versatility of the curriculum. “The programme combines sustainability and biology with a lot of STEM [science, technology, engineering and mathematics]. I was sold straight away.”

Future dreams
Like Phillips, they look back on a successful first year. “I’ve already learnt so much! My favourite subjects were Engineering in a Circular Economy and Thermodynamics,” El Kadi says. Dratwa particularly enjoyed Linear Algebra and Biotechnology. But the highlight, she says, was visiting companies like Brightlands, Chemelot and Niaga. “We got to see the things we’re studying applied in practice.” Together with their fellow students, they form a close-knit group and have good contact with the lecturers and professors. “The small scale of the programme makes it easy to approach them,” El Kadi says. “They help where they can and really want you to succeed.”

What do they want to do after their studies? “I feel like this programme will let me go in many directions,” El Kadi says. “Later I might want to do something related to biotechnology, or become a circular engineering consultant.” Dratwa sees herself contributing to a more sustainable agricultural sector. “In any case, Circular Engineering is a good start. When I tell people what I’m studying, they often say: wow, that’s the future!”

\[\text{UMagazine} \quad \text{June 2022} \]
Nearly a third of general practitioners in the Netherlands are set to retire within six years. This will exacerbate the existing shortage of GPs, at a time when more than ever are being trained. Where are we going wrong? Matthijs Limpens, head of the GP training programme in Maastricht, and trainee GP Moniek Wouda share their experiences, concerns and—spoiler alert—confidence that the tide will turn.

“Let me be clear: the shortage of GPs is not a GP problem,” says Matthijs Limpens at the start of the interview. “The problem is much bigger than that.” Consider first the numbers. Around the Netherlands, GPs are being trained in increasing numbers: 620 in 2010, 850 this year. “In Maastricht and Eindhoven together, 96 trainees now enrol annually in a three-year programme ‘for and by’ the region. By using our regional network we’re able to contribute to the continuity of GP care in Limburg and Southeast Brabant.” One of those future GPs is Moniek Wouda, now in her third year of training. She has first-hand experience of the shortages. “When my trainers are on holiday it’s hard to arrange replacements, even in a region where the shortage of GPs isn’t that bad.”

Research commissioned in 2018 by the National Association of General Practitioners and the Ministry of Health, Welfare and Sport shows that next year 22 regions around the country will face a shortage of GP care, despite the growth in the number of trainees. According to Limpens, one reason is that the new generation of GPs want to work 40 hours a week instead of the usual 60 to 80 hours of their predecessors. And these young doctors are less likely to opt for their own practice; particularly at the start of their careers, they prefer to work as observers on a freelance basis. But this, Limpens says, is not the heart of the problem.

Falling through the cracks

The issue is that GPs are footing the bill for the cutbacks in mental healthcare, youth care and social services. “Patients who are on a waiting list and have nowhere else to go turn to their GP, who ends up just papering over the cracks,” Wouda says. Limpens: “There are differences between municipalities, but on the whole the entire social domain—social work, social services and the government itself—has become more complicated and difficult to approach for patients.” The GP, on the other hand, is approachable—and so the duties pile up.

The lack of beds in healthcare inevitably leads to distressing situations that GPs can do nothing to prevent. “One elderly lady at our practice should have been in a psychiatric institution, but there was no place for her,” Wouda says. “We found her at home in her own faeces. You have to wait for things to get that bad and then it becomes a crisis admission.” While caring for patients—the aspect of the job that every doctor finds fulfilling, Limpens says—is becoming more difficult, there is also a significant increase in administrative work. “The regulatory pressure from the government and health insurers leads to frustration. When you’re already run off your feet doing your core duties, you can’t deal with that as well.” The capacity might be sufficient, he says, without the extra burden imposed by policy decisions. “The training programme has grown in recent years, but without policy changes, you’re fighting a losing battle.”

Solutions

Clearly the shortage of GPs is a thorny problem. “And there’s no quick fix,” Limpens says. “Many parties will need to be involved in the solution.” The provision of care online—eHealth—could contribute to efficiency gains. But it’s not a holy grail. Limpens and Wouda warn. “Having patients make a heart film at home or take their own blood pressure has its advantages,” says Wouda. “But let’s hope video calling is not the future. How can you provide good care without physically seeing the patient?”

Something similar is happening with initiatives such as Co-Med, a commercial party that buys up and staffs practices with self-employed workers or salaried doctors who are available only part time or temporaril y. “Much of the simple care can be delivered this way, even via video connection,” Limpens explains. “But it makes it harder to build a relationship with the patient. And that’s exactly what you need when it comes right down to it, when you’re guiding a patient in the last phase of life, or someone who’s reaching breaking point with their illness. That’s the core of our profession.”

Wouda, one of the GPs who will soon jump into the gaping hole left by her retired predecessors, admits that she occasionally worries about the future. “Also because you sometimes hear from GPs about the high workload. That can be difficult, because they’re the ones who are supposed to spark our enthusiasm. Not that I have any doubts. I’d like to guide people in their lives, to get to know the families and problems within a community. A proper village doctor, so to speak, eventually with a joint practice.” Limpens: “The people we train have consciously chosen this profession and are fully committed to it. There’s a large group of young professionals who are keen to work on solutions.”

Moniek Wouda studied medicine in Maastricht. She spent a year working at the emergency room in Weert and almost two years as a Skills Lab teacher before starting the GP training programme in Maastricht, where she is currently in her third year. She has also been working in a general practice in Margraten since June 2021.

Matthijs Limpens studied medicine in Nijmegen and trained as a GP in Utrecht. He ran a GP practice in Hoensbroek for 25 years. He also worked as a GP trainer and lecturer in the GP training programme in Maastricht. He is the co-founder of the regional GP organisation in eastern South Limburg. He has been head of UM’s GP training programme since 2019.
**46th Dies Natalis**

Maastricht University celebrated its 46th Dies Natalis on Thursday 12 May 2022, in the Sint Jans Church in Maastricht. The programme included a special ceremony in which the outgoing rector magnificus, Professor Rianne Letschert, transferred the position to her successor, Professor Pamela Habibović. The Wynand Wijnen Prize, the Dissertation Award and the Student Prizes were also presented.

Initially set to take place on 28 January 2022, the event was rescheduled due to COVID. Professor Habibović took up her new position as of 1 February.

Keynote speaker Nice Nailantei Leng’ete is the embodiment of this year’s theme, Empowerment and Leadership. In her speech, she discussed her human rights work and inspired us to become the “person we all dream to be.” “True leadership starts with the perspective of others,” she said. “Good leaders are servants.”

**Wynand Wijnen Education Prize 2021**

The Wynand Wijnen Education Prize is awarded annually in commemoration of professor of Education Science Wynand Wijnen, who passed away in 2012. Wijnen was the founder of Problem-Based Learning at UM and is remembered for his contributions to national education reform.

This year’s prize was awarded to Ben Janssen for breathing life into pharmacology education.

**Dissertation Prize 2021**

Each year UM awards a prize for the best thesis defended in that calendar year. The faculty deans nominated five theses, with this year’s prize going to Estelle Nijsten for her thesis on preventive hydration for contrast nephropathy, a form of kidney damage.

**Student Prizes 2021**

The 2021 Student Award was presented to nine master’s students who received top marks for their final theses: Lisa Kuin, Bart van de Steeg, Konstanze Kottmann, Sara Fomasiero, Danai Petropoulou Ionescu, Frederik Calius, Tim Näher, Julian Sandbrink and Amaia Ochandorena Saa.


**Russia: from (quasi-)democracy to dictatorship**

Annelotte Huiskes

Photography Arjen Schmitz
Mariëlle Wijermars, assistant professor of Cybersecurity and Politics, knows better than anyone how the Russian propaganda machine works and makes selective use of history. It is a topic she has been researching for years. Russia was shocked by the invasion of Ukraine and the brutal crackdown on freedom of expression in Russia. “The government is no longer even trying to keep up the appearance of democracy. Russia is fast moving towards a dictatorship. I saw the signs long ago, but hoped it wouldn’t come to that.” Here she discusses the importance of free press, her first acquaintance with Russia, and the career she never had as a back-up dancer for Britney Spears.

The real story of Russia

Now that the situation is developing so rapidly, academia is moving too slowly for Wijermars. She is focusing on shedding light on current events through opinion pieces, articles and media appearances. With success—the recently appeared on the talk show Jinek, the news programme Journal and Radio 1.

“The most important contribution I can make right now is to show how Russia is trying to steer our perceptions. I try to tell the real story based on research and provide context for Russia’s sometimes insane claims. One problem is that over the past eight years we haven’t looked closely enough at what’s been going on in Ukraine. Research and news articles show that what happened in the Donbas in 2014 to 2015 was at least as appalling as what we’re seeing now. But it received less attention because we allowed ourselves to be misled by Russia into believing it was a civil war between ‘pro-Western’ Ukrainians and supposedly ‘pro-Russian’ Russian-speaking Ukrainians.

“That’s a misconception. I work on a daily basis with Russian-speaking Ukrainians from the east and west assured, they see themselves as Ukrainians. There is political discord in the Donbas, but that doesn’t mean you want to be annexed by your neighbour. Russia has played an active role in fomenting this so-called civil war. By portraying it as an internal rebellion, we didn’t see it for what it really was: a war between Russia and Ukraine, just as it is now.”

From music to academia

Her passion for Russia and her research suggests that this is what she always aspired to. Nothing could be farther from the truth. Growing up in Den Bosch as the youngest of three girls, she wasn’t sure what path to pursue. At first it was music: she played the violin from age 6, the piano at 8. And she studied classical ballet. “But I just didn’t have the passion to dedicate my life to the violin. I played classical music, Debussy and the rest, but I also liked R&B. It was the 90s, so I watched a lot of TV too, especially ‘MTV. When I was 16 I wanted to be a professional dancer, like Britney Spears’ music videos, and so I auditioned for one of those Saturday training programmes, but nothing came of it.”

After finishing high school she still had no clear-cut plan, so she opted for the broad-based International Relations. It was only when she took Russian as a minor that the ball started rolling. What began as a minor soon turned into a second degree. “Having to decipher Latin in high school later helped me in learning Russian. I’ve always been interested in Slavic language, culture and history.” As a student of Slavic languages, she spent three months in Saint Petersburg in 2011, her first encounter with Russia.

“The first impression was very impressive, it’s a large and beautiful city. The Hermitage was fantastic. And we were there in winter; occasionally it got down to minus 30 degrees. I’d never experienced cold like that. One student from The Hague would wear his grandmother’s fur coat. They found that very strange—men don’t wear fur.”

She was last there in 2018 to conduct interview research. “You try to do it as securely as possible, because there’s a good chance you’ll be tapped. A number of academics I had contact with at the time are currently in a precarious position. Proper research is not viewed favourably right now. Back then my visa was supported by the Higher School of Economics in Moscow, but my host had to submit a report to the representative of the security services at the university. I was a foreigner, after all. So that double layer has been around for many years.”

Erosion of democracy

Her current research topics are of some urgency: how are platforms forced to impose censorship? How do you pressure journalists? How can we guarantee internet freedom? “What happens to the internet in Russia also has an impact abroad, other countries can learn from it. For example, Russia is successfully exerting pressure on foreign social-media platforms. You now see the same tactics being used in Turkey and India, all those countries that have the same goal: curtailing press freedom and freedom of expression.

“It’s ultimately about the erosion of democracy, which is relevant for us too. That’s why I find it so disturbing to see populism emerging here. Because I’ve been involved with Russia for so long, I look differently at public debates here. Press freedom is an essential pillar of democracy, and in recent years distrust of journalists has been growing. People see news as ‘fake’, which concerns me deeply. You also see our politicians struggling to connect with voters, prioritising their own PR and agendas. That doesn’t help, it endorses democracy. Let them be warned.”
Are we really making progress towards the sustainable transition? One thing is clear: if we’re not, it’s not the fault of sustainability science. The Maastricht Sustainability Institute (MSI) is a frontrunner in the field, according to former director Ron Cörvers and his successor Professor Frank Boons. “As the time pressure increases, so do the ambition and the will to change.”

Frontrunner in sustainability

We know more about the global ecosystem than ever before. Human activity has been proven to be a source of climate change. At least one urgent problem—the hole in the ozone layer—has been successfully tackled. The transition to renewable energy sources (wind and solar energy) and the electrification of land transport are well underway. Last but not least, the younger generations are becoming increasingly activist.

The above summary is the sustainability scientists’ response to the question of whether we are making progress in the sustainable transition. And the MSI is making an important contribution to this end.

The institute is a frontrunner in transition thinking, research on climate and society, and active learning in the management of large-scale change processes. “The European Environment Agency is steeped in these insights,” says Boons. The MSI was founded 25 years ago as a research institute focused on global processes. “We’ve since shifted to addressing regional and local issues, but in an international context,” Cörvers says. A successful study programme was later initiated. “Hundreds of our alumni now work in governments, companies, NGOs and academia.”

Stuck

But are they being too optimistic? Fifty years ago, the Club of Rome predicted that the growing global economy would reach its limits by 2030. The UN climate panel IPCC subsequently began counting down: thirty, twenty, eight years left. Shouldn’t politicians, citizens and companies be doing more?

Boons and Cörvers alike say no one party is to blame—indeed, they are all stuck in their own way.

“Politicians focus on the short term, while transitions require difficult and expensive decisions that are electorally unpopular. That’s the dilemma of our democracy,” Cörvers says. Citizens, too, don’t always think about the following generations. They are used to cheap, mass-produced products and not easily inclined to consume less. “We need to make our production processes cleaner and bring them closer to home, but people don’t want this if it makes things more expensive.” As for companies, Boons says: “Try being the CEO of a company with thousands of employees and customers. You don’t just decide to do things differently tomorrow.” That being said, unwillingness and even sabotage are not unheard of. Boon gives the example of the car industry, where built-in electronics have been used to trick emissions tests.

Sustainability

Text
Hans van Vinkeveen
Illustration
Veronique de Jong
Governments will only intervene if companies exceed environmental limits. Instead, the rule should be that you can only produce something if you’ve demonstrated you can stay below those limits. Without legislation and regulations, this is impossible.

So is a circular economy, where materials and products are constantly reused, compatible with capitalism, which is based on growth? “We ought to start thinking differently about growth,” Boons says. “Producing more efficiently, but in larger volumes, won’t solve anything. That’s why we have to think about wanting fewer but better things, or staying at a certain consumption level.”

The challenge for the MSI is to address complex issues such as climate disruption under increasing time pressure and urgency. “We have to pursue all options: net zero greenhouse-gas emissions, just transitions,” Boons says. “Regionally and nationally, we need an integrated approach to these ambitions. By building on our existing research directions, the institute can certainly contribute.”

Threat
Doomsday thinkers, they are not. Boons: “The COVID crisis showed that when faced with a threat, people are willing and flexible enough to do things differently. It’s not a happy message, but perhaps what we need is even more urgency. That should trigger more political will and ambition.” Cörvers mentions the Delta Plan. “In a crisis situation, governments are willing to act. But why wait for a crisis? Good governance also means looking ahead. There are many things we already know, and if we don’t change, it’s coming.”

TheInterplay
Society as a whole is responsible for tackling sustainability issues, they say Boons studies this from a systems perspective. Consider the food supply or the transport system. “For me it’s about the interplay between government, companies and social parties. How do companies incorporate sustainability into their strategies, and what role does the government play? What are the consequences at the system level, and are we thinking nationally or internationally? You can easily make the Netherlands sustainable by moving all polluting industry to other countries.”

Cörvers approaches sustainability with an eye for policy processes and the role of knowledge. This involves issues such as how inequality plays out in the international food supply. “How can you improve international food supply? Can you strengthen the position of farmers in global production chains? How can you improve the position of small farmers in the Global South?”

The growth
For both, the recent decades have made clear that a sustainable transition cannot be left to the market economy. There are calls for more government regulation—a taboo, Boons says. “As a government, you don’t intervene in the market process.” Cörvers:

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The challenge for the MSI is to address complex issues such as climate disruption under increasing time pressure and urgency. “We have to pursue all options: net zero greenhouse-gas emissions, just transitions,” Boons says. “Regionally and nationally, we need an integrated approach to these ambitions. By building on our existing research directions, the institute can certainly contribute.”

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One misconception that Milene Bonte and Giada Guerra want to dispel at the very start of this interview is the idea that people with dyslexia are less intelligent than others. The learning disorder is a serious problem, affecting an estimated 5 to 10 percent of primary school children.
Dyslexia has nothing to do with laziness or a lack of intelligence, say Professor Milene Bonte and her PhD candidate Giada Guerra. “People who have problems with reading take as it were a different road, neurologically speaking, than people without reading problems. Reading is a complex affair for the brain — it’s a small miracle that it usually goes as smoothly as it does. People with dyslexia have a developmental disability that affects how areas of the brain involved in language processing develop. Reading processes are automated in their brains in a different way than in people without dyslexia.” Given that up to 10 percent of children worldwide suffer from dyslexia, a deeper understanding of the causes and the development of new teaching methods is essential. Through early diagnosis, preventive training and, above all, more research, progress is within reach.

**Rocky road**

Guerra recently defended her dissertation on the contribution of auditory attention to the reading processes of school-age children with and without dyslexia. During the project, she and Bonte also became friends. Together they look back on an intriguing few years in terms of the science, as well as a learning process from a human point of view.

“The road was sometimes rocky,” Bonte smiles. “Giada commuted between Maastricht, her hometown of Treviso, the Dyslexia Institute in Amsterdam, and London, the joint ‘home base’ of all five PhD candidates in the European Interlearn project. And then there was the pandemic. There were times when she struggled.” Guerra laughs. “But thanks to Milene’s support and maternal feelings, I found my way out of those dips.”

**Genes**

The day after defending her PhD, Guerra appears well-rested and relaxed. “That’s how I feel too. I always feel good in Maastricht. The city was like an anchor for me. It doesn’t surprise me that UM has a good reputation worldwide; I felt like a fish in academic water here.”

In Italy, Guerra stumbled across dyslexia almost by chance. “No one in my family has it, but I gradually became interested in the subject. It touches on various interesting fields, such as psychology and pedagogy.

I also found the genetic aspects fascinating: you have a 40 to 50 percent chance of developing dyslexia if one of your parents or siblings has it. There were still a lot of mysteries surrounding dyslexia, and that was exactly what I found so exciting. It’s a complex topic.”

**Prejudice**

Bonte is an authority on cognitive-neuroscientific research into language development and literacy in children. “I’ve been interested in brain research on language development since the 1990s. I’m fascinated by the plasticity of the brain and how it differs from one person to the next. This kind of research is not only socially relevant, it’s also vital if we’re to do away with the prejudices people with dyslexia face. It doesn’t mean they’re less intelligent than others, nor is it an insurmountable condition. People with dyslexia just process words differently.”

Certain risk factors influence the development of dyslexia, both scientists agree. “Genes play a role, but so does whether a teacher notices the reading problem in time and refers the child to a to dyslexia expert. The sooner dyslexia is detected, the easier it is to address,” says Guerra. “It’s also important whether a child is often read to. That helps them to develop expression and vocabulary skills. Attention and sound play an important role in the neurological processing of words. There’s also a cooccurrence between dyslexia and ADHD, which is currently being investigated.”

**Extra mile**

Bonte praises Guerra for the path she has travelled. “She definitely went the extra mile. Her research involved a lot of logistics. She collected empirical data from children between the ages of 7 and 12 in partnership between various universities and the Dyslexia Institute in Amsterdam. She worked very hard over the past three and a half years.” Both agree on the need for further research. Dyslexia can have a major impact on a personal level and even lead to social isolation. At the same time, both look back on a fascinating journey. “I’m grateful Milene was always there for me,” Guerra says. “Particularly during those moments when I couldn’t take it anymore, when the panic hit, she managed to keep me on track emotionally. She calmed me down, took my stress away and always stayed positive. We’d go out, cook together and take bike rides.”

**Close friendship**

“It was an interesting and instructive process for me, too,” says Bonte. “You’re so closely connected that a friendship develops that transcends academic collaboration. We’ll definitely keep in touch. It’s not only the academic side of things that we have in common.”

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**Milene Bonte is professor Cognitive Neuroscience of Language and Literacy Development at the Faculty of Psychology and Neuroscience at Maastricht University. Together with her Brain & Language lab at the Maastricht Brain Imaging Center she investigates cognitive and brain mechanisms underlying speech perception, reading and dyslexia. Milene studied Psychology at Maastricht University (1995-1999).**

**Giada Guerra recently defended her dissertation at Maastricht University on the role of auditory attention in children’s reading skills. She conducted her research at Birkbeck University of London, Maastricht University and the Regional Institute for Dyslexia (RID) as part of the European Marie Curie programme INTERLEARN. She previously studied Clinical Psychology at the University of Padua (Italy).**
During the celebration of the 46th Dies Natalis Professor Rianne Letschert, the Maastricht University president, stepped down from the position of rector magnificus. She is succeeded by Professor Pamela Habibović.

In her speech, Letschert articulated the university’s ambitions: “A European degree with YUFE, less work pressure more work pleasure, the launch of the Einstein telescope in Limburg … I love dreams, especially when they become reality.” The new rector, Pamela Habibović, has already spent a hundred days on the job. She too spoke about the future of Maastricht University—and about staying connected. “Maastricht has always been a place for people to come together and work together across disciplinary boundaries. I want us to build on that mentality and make an effort to speak each other’s languages, on a personal and a university level … Our ambitions for the future should not be too modest. We won’t become the oldest or the largest Dutch university, but we can become the most impactful.”

A new rector magnificus
In March, after 35 years at Maastricht University, Aalt Willem Heringa delivered his farewell lecture. The departing professor of Constitutional Law reflects on a successful career and on the role of courts in the Netherlands and Europe.

“We have constitutional rules to run society effectively, to protect citizens against majorities and to safeguard democracy by holding those in power accountable.” The tension inherent in this triangle fascinates Heringa: “Obviously, you can’t optimise for all of those at the same time. It’s always a trade-off and the circumstances dictate which equilibrium is best.”

Power corrupts

He cites the corona pandemic as an example. “In a pandemic, you limit citizens’ individual freedom for the sake of public health.” A temporary carte blanche helps the government solve the problem—but leaves Heringa uneasy. “As a constitutional scholar, I don’t really trust politicians. They want more power.”

In his farewell lecture, Heringa called for a bigger role for courts in the Netherlands. “The courts don’t have the authority they need to be a third power that can effectively control parliament and protect citizens.” While increased governmental powers can benefit the populace—consider the welfare state—“we need checks and balances.”

Citizens, he says, aren’t interested in the nitty gritty of politics. Nor should they have to be. “They elect a government to take care of their concerns, be it rising gas prices or crime.” But somebody needs to keep that process in check. For Heringa, impartial courts fit the bill. “Unlike politicians, who have to seek re-election, courts don’t stand to win or lose anything.”
Defending the interests of future generations

The crux of the matter is that politicians shape the laws that restrict their own powers. “In the Netherlands, we lack courts powerful enough to veto the government. In the UK and Germany, the courts can step in to resolve big issues.” For example, when Dutch citizens sued the government over its woeful performance in reducing CO2 emissions, they won a moral but ineffectual victory. “In the end, the government did reach the target, but only because of COVID.”

The looming climate catastrophe is an example of courts acting in the interest of future generations where governments favour their own short-term interests. “It’s morally wrong to treat the world like an all-you-can-eat buffet now and leave the tab to future generations.” When the courts intervened in Germany, the government conceded and brought forward its emission targets. “This put more pressure on the current generation, but I think citizens appreciate that. Across the board, EU citizens trust courts.”

Disproportionate punishment

Heringa cites the recent childcare benefits scandal in the Netherlands, which saw the previous government resign. It had imposed draconian sanctions on parents suspected of fraudulent benefit claims. “Some were fined twice the amount they had received. The courts could only interpret the law, not disapply it on the grounds that the punishment was disproportionate.”

Proportionality is a legal principle under which punishment should be proportional to the crime. “If a law violates such a principle, the court should be able to indicate this in its ruling and return it to parliament to fix it. Then you can have a dialogue on the law. Had it been a VAT issue, the courts would have had the power to intervene because this is governed by EU law, under which courts can test laws for principles such as proportionality. Under Dutch law, they can’t.” EU law prevails over national law in areas such as privacy and competition law. “But it doesn’t apply to social security and other national matters—which is an absurd anomaly.”
How does art reflect our community? How does our community express itself through art? Barbara Strating is the new curator of the Arts and Heritage Commission at Maastricht University. She succeeds Mieke Derickx, who is retiring after more than two decades in the role. Here they discuss curiosity and wonder, Patient Zero and art as a meditation on our collective memory.

→ Mieke Derickx served as Maastricht University curator from 1996 to 2022. She is a visual artist and educator and also worked as a research assistant at the Faculty of Health, Medicine and Life Sciences.

→ Barbara Strating is the new curator at the Arts and Heritage Commission. She holds a Bachelor in Philosophy and a Master in Art, Policy and Patrimonage from Radboud University. She also works as a programme maker for Studium Generale University. She also works as a programme maker for Studium Generale University.

If you ask Mieke Dericks, the division between the arts and sciences is a mere historical quirk: an understandable yet haphazard response to an ever-growing body of knowledge and skill. In the acknowledgements of her son’s recent PhD dissertation on astrophysics, she wrote: “We look at the world with the same curiosity and sense of wonder.” As Derickx sees it, this natural, unified approach has become obscured over the years. Obvious examples include Da Vinci and Goethe.

Strating for a recent example, her successor Barbara Strating mentions the Dutch education minister Robbert Dijkgraaf, a professor of theoretical physics who also studied fine arts.

**Patient Zero**

Strating and Derickx share a predilection for artworks that imbue locations with meaning and contribute to community building. A case in point is Derickx’s final commission, Patient Zero, a response to the cyberattack on UM in late 2019.

“It’s part of our collective memory and experience, so I wanted to commission something from a conceptual artist working with data visualisation. UM’s network faces around 3000 attacks per second. Patient Zero visualises both the time and geographic providence of the attacks.” Data from live monitoring is translated into an aesthetic experience, an invitation to think about something pervasive yet typically imperceptible.

“It raises awareness of the ongoing cybersecurity issue and promotes a sense of wonder at the same time.”

Derickx is serene about handing over control to the commissioned artist. That being said, the creation of Patient Zero involved a number of practical considerations, from liability issues to the exact location and maintenance of the work. “The artist wanted [anonymised] live data from the ICTS department of the attacks on our system, which is obviously delicate, so I had to mediate between them.”

**What makes these walls ours**

Strating is particularly taken with this aspect of her new role. “It’s not just about owning galleries and buying art as an investment or decoration, but about commissioning something rooted in our community and identity.” A university is more than bricks and mortar—but it is also that. Curators have to find ways to elevate UM’s buildings beyond the strictly functional, which goes beyond merely breaking up the monotony with the odd painting.

“The buildings weren’t ours until about 18 years ago, until then the State decided which artworks were bought.” The underlying philosophy was of art-as-ornament: a painting was seen as a financial investment that could beautify any office and be moved around as needed. “I wanted something that responds to and becomes part of our identity, something specific to a certain building, like murals or light installations.”

Derickx’s legacy can be seen in the mark she leaves on UM’s physical space, from the Aula’s stained-glass windows to the iconic entrance of the Inner City Library. She is most proud of the artworks created at the intersection between art and research, usually exploring the artist’s view of a research environment.

One such artist is Derya Zenginoglu, whose multidisciplinary works examine interactions between synthetic material and living tissue in the lab of the new rector Pamela Habibovic.

**Art is more than artefacts**

Her personal favourite leaves no physical legacy at all. Derickx has created an elective module for medical students focused on whether experiencing art enhances their perceptive and diagnostic skills, thus making them better doctors. In general, she has always sought to involve UM staff, from researchers to facility managers, “I see myself as part of this community, facilitating and involving people in the process is my little contribution.”

Strating likewise believes in foregrounding the process in defining art not primarily by the artefact but by the creative activity. “Some of our scientists spend their evenings painting, for example. It’s interesting to explore the abilities and passions already present in our community.” She would like to give students an even bigger role. “They come and go—but in doing so, they play a huge part in shaping the identity of our community, so I’m looking for ways to enable them to contribute more.”

**Tastes change—as do contexts**

If the results will necessarily be transient in nature, Strating remains unfazed. “I find the idea of artworks as eternal very limiting, almost claustrophobic. Tastes change, contexts change. That’s what makes this role interesting.” She embraces the tension between her role as curator and as conservator: “It’s a great responsibility to be in charge of UM’s art collection. We have an amazing collection—but we’re not a museum.”

Strating wants the seemingly unfashionable items in UM’s collection to do what Derickx’s commissions have done by design: start a dialogue with and among community members. “All artists, even the canonical ones we now consider geniuses, always reflect their times. It can be very interesting to put older artworks into a dialogue with our times, our sensibilities.”

How to achieve this? “It’s too early to say,” laughs Strating, who has spent most of her term thus far recovering from COVID. But she is determined to continue where Derickx left off. Mobilising staff and students to wander UM’s grounds with a sense of wonder and curiosity. <
In 2015, scientists measured a gravitational wave for the first time. It was a breakthrough that not only confirmed Albert Einstein’s theory of relativity, but also marked the start of an exciting voyage of discovery into the origin and future of the universe. Jessica Steinlechner and her research group at Maastricht University are making their contribution in the form of mirror coatings that will improve our ability to make such measurements.

Searching for signals in the new science of gravitational waves

Last year, the Steinlechners popped the champagne at their home in Aachen on two separate occasions. The first was in summer, when Jessica Steinlechner heard she had been awarded a Vidi grant from the NWO’s Talent Programme to the tune of €800,000. Not long after, a letter arrived in the post awarding her a Starting Grant of €2.5 million from the European Research Council. The funding allows her to turn the dream held by many scientists into reality: forming her own research group.

More than six months later, is she still on a high? “Definitely,” she says via video call. “As a researcher, it’s exciting enough to be able to join a team. Creating your own team is even better. To be honest, I’m still a little dazed. There are perhaps 40 universities and institutes worldwide working on coatings for detectors. It’s fantastic that we here in Maastricht now have the opportunity to make our contribution.”

Ripples in the universe

The German physicist uses the word opportunity with good reason. “It was only seven years ago that scientists managed to detect a gravitational wave. We’re talking about a ‘ripple’ in spacetime that occurs when, say, two stars collide. A ripple like that can teach us a lot about spacetime, gravity, black holes—and about the origin of the universe. For astronomers and astrophysicists, it’s extremely exciting. We’ve long been able to measure the light from stars that has been on its way to Earth for millions of years, but when it comes to measuring signals from dark objects like black holes, we’ve just taken the first step.”
Eureka moment

Measuring the first gravitational wave may have been a Eureka moment, but a great deal of work remains to be done to unravel the secrets of the universe. “A huge amount,” Steinlechner confirms. “My research group and I want to contribute one small step out of the countless complications and challenges: how to optimise the coating of the mirrors on the detectors that register the ripples? Using laser beams, we measure the distances between mirrors that are built into the detector. Minuscule differences that should arise due to gravitational radiation. The problem is that the current coatings on the mirrors interfere with thermal vibrations. Here in Maastricht, we intend to develop a coating that will eliminate or at least reduce this interference.”

Fundamental and applied research

The research and experiments will be carried out at the latest offshoot of the Faculty of Knowledge Engineering: the site where the ETpathfinder is currently being built. The ETpathfinder is a scale prototype of the Einstein Telescope, the largest laser detector in the world that, thanks to tunnel installations over ten kilometres long, will enable scientists to “see” deep into the universe. This was also the testbed that drew Steinlechner to Maastricht in 2019. “It was a great opportunity: I was given the space here to write research proposals and apply for grants. It wasn’t easy. I’d already been rejected for a Vidi and you can only try twice. Receiving the Vidi was a good start that no doubt had a positive influence on the European application. The fact is that we now have enough funding to do real fundamental and applied research.”

ETpathfinder as test case

Steinlechner, born in southern Germany and raised in the north, is still “overjoyed” to be able to fully focus on her passion: astronomy. “It’s fantastic, yes. I’ve always been intrigued by the stars and the mysteries of the universe. More men than women venture into this field, but it’s been a while since I was the only woman in the room. I also notice this when hiring researchers for the team here in Maastricht. There are more and more female applicants.”

Her coatings group consists of five researchers, including three PhD candidates. The labs and test facilities should be ready to use this year. “We plan to run experiments using all kinds of different coating materials, cooling the mirrors down. Are we going to find the solution? I don’t know. But we will make significant improvements. And yes, as soon as the ETpathfinder is ready, we’ll be able to run tests here in practice.”

UM as forerunner

And maybe, just maybe, the final coating will be used in the real Einstein Telescope, a multi-billion dollar project. “It would be great if the telescope ended up here in South Limburg. That would really put Maastricht University on the map as a forerunner in the new science of gravitational waves, which is all of a sudden in the spotlight. We could do the work we do anywhere in the world, but I’m already noticing that I really like this setting at this young university. In any case, we’ll do everything we can to contribute.”

Unravelling the secrets of the universe.

Jessica Steinlechner is assistant professor of Gravitational Waves and Fundamental Physics. After obtaining her PhD in physics at Leibniz University Hannover, she worked as a postdoctoral researcher in Glasgow and Hamburg. In 2019 she relocated to Maastricht, where she leads a research group specialising in mirror coatings for gravitational-wave detectors.

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As far back as she can remember, there was always plenty of food in the house. “My mother often cooked three different meals: Lao dishes for herself, Thai for me and meat curries for my father.” Her mother hails from the Isan region in northern Thailand, close to Laos. “It’s very different from Thai cuisine, they use a lot of fermented products. I don’t like the taste or smell,” she says, making a face. “But I really like Thai cuisine, with lots of vegetables, and my father mainly wanted meat. Occasionally she also cooked Dutch food for us. She swore that she made better pea soup than many Dutch people, and Friday was frietdag: chips!”

First memories of Thailand
Her parents, now divorced, met when her father was holidaying in Thailand. Her mother was 18 when she joined him in the Netherlands. “They loved each other, but it was probably also a way for her to build a different life for herself. The irony is that my father is Dutch father, and during her studies developed a love of Italian cuisine too. Melline Somers, a postdoctoral researcher at ROA, discusses life between two—or even three—cultures.

Food is not purely functional
During her studies she spent time in Italy, where she fell in love with Italian cuisine and hospitality. “I have an ex-boyfriend from the south of Italy. He came from a fishing family and food was a big thing for them too. What I like about Italy is that a large part of the day revolves around food, and they spend a lot of time sitting around the table. When you go to a restaurant in Thailand, many delicious dishes appear on the table all at once and often you’re outside again within half an hour. Lingering at the table is rare there. I like good food and having long, personal conversations around the table. I have a Dutch boyfriend now and, unfortunately, his family is very fond of games. After dinner, they clear the table quickly to make room for the board games.”

As she sees it, life in Italy and Thailand revolves more around food, whereas in the Netherlands food is mainly functional. “Dutch people are super nice once you get to know them. It just takes a little longer here to get invited over for dinner. People are more relaxed about that in Italy and Thailand. When I was young, anyone could join us for dinner at the last minute, so your average Nederlander isn’t the only one who makes you feel comfortable.”

Not your average Nederlander
At the end of the day, Somers feels more Dutch than Thai. “Though I often say things like ‘the Dutch do this’ or ‘the Dutch do that’. After all, I was raised by my mother and that makes me feel different from the average Dutch person. I know how to behave in Thailand, but sometimes I struggle with the fact that it’s very much about the form. In Thai culture, you’re not allowed to speak loudly, touch the head of an elderly person, sit on a cushion … Sometimes I feel like you’re judged according to those rules, whereas to me it’s more important that your intentions are good. Thai people don’t really share their emotions either, so when my mother thinks something’s up, she’ll ask, ‘What do you want to eat?’ Then she’ll make pad cha, a dish with fish or prawns and lots of chilli peppers, but also fresh young peppercorns, krachai [similar to ginger but fresher] and Thai basil. Very hot but so tasty. ‘I just keep on eating while my lips are burning.’ What did she like best as a child? “Chips, of course. My father always baked them.”

I like good food and having long, personal conversations around the table.
Alumni meeting minds

Text
Hans van Vinkwegen

Photography
Alexandra Nizet

Humanitarian aid gives me a purpose in life

Alum Alexandra Nizet crossed the Atlantic from the United States specially for the University College Maastricht with a concentration in Life Sciences. Here she became acquainted with the different facets of healthcare and developed a holistic approach to global health. “I enjoyed the many activist student organisations in Maastricht.”

Growing up in the US, she heard about UCM by chance. “I wanted to follow lectures, but we only have these massive courses with up to 500 students. And the curricula are often fixed in advance. My mother, who—like my father—comes from Belgium, happened to hear about UCM. That you have small classes of 21 people at most and can put together your own curriculum, I was immediately drawn to that.”

She opted for a concentration in Life Sciences despite being unsure whether she intended to continue in the field. “I saw that as an advantage. The bachelor’s was exciting because it left doors open. I loved that flexibility and the emphasis on exploring your options. You learned to think across disciplines, solve problems, design research and draw your own conclusions. Those are the skills you need to tackle new things, and I benefit from them to this day. I love new challenges.”

Networks

That freedom of choice at UCM exposed her to the multiple angles from which healthcare can be approached. The focus can also lie on economic, sociological or political and administrative aspects. After graduating, Nizet first worked in a refugee centre in Serbia and later for an environmental organisation in Brussels. She then opted for a master’s in Global Health and Development at University College London. “I took courses in political science, anthropology and public health, which helped me develop a holistic approach to wellbeing and health.”

She is now based in Berlin, working for Doctors of the World, a humanitarian organisation that provides medical care to vulnerable people worldwide. Her appointment reveals the importance of personal networks, she says. “I’d been applying for jobs without much success. But my mother is in a WhatsApp group of French-speaking women in New York, and one of them was looking for someone to come and help Doctors of the World. It’s the kind of organisation I dreamed of joining.”

Ukrainian refugees

She is currently focused on assisting Ukrainian refugees, by writing articles, statements, and social media posts. Medical teams in Ukraine and at the borders of neighboring countries are cooperating with the Ukrainian government to facilitate humanitarian corridors. “I do the communications and help build understanding from a humanitarian perspective. It’s a modest role, but for me even the smallest contribution makes a difference. Whether you donate, work as a translator or serve on the welcome team for refugees, anything is better than doing nothing. I want to show that you can be engaged in this terrible situation on a humanitarian level.”

Alexandra Nizet studied at University College Maastricht with a concentration in Life Sciences from 2014 to 2018. She volunteered in a refugee camp and with an environmental organisation before obtaining a master’s in Global Health at University College London. She currently works for the humanitarian organisation Doctors of the World. As a communications officer, she aims to foster a better understanding of the refugee crisis from a humanitarian perspective.

Nizet intends to continue working in humanitarian aid, even if she does not yet have a clear career path in mind. “This work is more valuable than anything else, including a well-paid job. You’re helping people through the most difficult phases of their lives.” She does have professional ambitions, however. “First I want to gain knowledge of emergency response and then of the recovery of health systems that have collapsed or been disrupted by crises. Later I hope to use that knowledge to help develop and improve global and national health policies.”

Green office

Looking back on her time in Maastricht, the first word that comes to mind is grateful. “It gave me a foundation on which to build my life. The education set me on the path towards a holistic approach to health. And I made friends there—many of my friends in Berlin are from that period or an extension of that network. It was a nice environment in which to discover myself.” Maastricht’s student culture helped a lot. “I enjoyed the many activist student organisations, such as the Green Office that I volunteered with. There was an open culture, where you could discuss issues and refine your views. Surprising, incidentally, when you consider that it’s quite a conservative region.”

Her advice for current UCM students? “When thinking about your future, try to break it up into smaller questions, a bit like Problem Based Learning. A dream job is nice, but not the most important thing. You have to think about the environment you want to work in. With whom and for whom? What topics excite you? What goals would you like to pursue? It’s about the total picture. Also think about the steps to take. They don’t have to be set in stone, as long as there is a gener al direction. I didn’t know what I wanted for a long time, but I learned to think in small steps. Where would I want to find myself working and what influence do I want to have? Each little step adds up to a clear path. So start small and build your life up bit by bit.”
In 1999, Hanneke van der Tas was one of the first students to graduate from UM’s brand new European Law School. She went on to earn a postgraduate degree from Harvard Law School. She passed both the New York Bar and the Paris Bar, seemingly destined for a career as a lawyer or judge. Then her life took a very different turn.

"Studying at Maastricht University was partly a reflection of my pain at that moment. I wanted to be as close to Germany as I could. Of course, I was also motivated by this brand-new European Law School that would be taught in English, my mother tongue, from the third year onwards. The programme was also a reflection of my past, teaching comparative law between four countries: the Netherlands, Germany, Britain and France. European Law is about breaking down borders, which is important to me.

Amazing experience at UM

"What most appealed was studying in small groups. And I made the right choice: I received an amazing education at the European Law School! What I took away from it was the brilliance and genius of the inspiring and extremely helpful professors. For me there was no doubt that UM was the best university. Having high-level discussions with just ten students and the professor was an amazing, luxurious and very personal experience. After Maastricht, thanks to the various professors who thought I had it in me, I went to Harvard. And you know what? Getting into Harvard is difficult, but on an intellectual and educational level, UM was in no way less than what I experienced there."

Choosing film production

Van der Tas returned to Europe and fell into a deep hole. "I had no idea what to do with my life. Friends and family thought I was spoiled and should get my act together. It took me a couple of years to find out what I wanted. I moved to France, lived in Nice for a few years, did odd jobs. I was in such doubt that I took the bar exam in New York and Paris and was admitted to both. I started applying to film-production companies in Paris, but they said: you studied law, so apply to law firms. But this girl really didn’t want to work at a law firm.

"I finally took the leap and did a German-French one-year master class in film production. Then I set up my own production company in Berlin. It took me ten years to undo the legal formatting of my brain. I was dealing with creative writers, but I had the sharp tongue of a lawyer and would lash out at these poor creatives and burn them to the ground. It took me a while to understand that it wasn’t a courtroom and I was dealing with a totally different process."

Lighthouse experience

While at Harvard, Van der Tas realised she wanted to do something different. "At that time in Europe, when you chose a study programme at 18, you were meant to stay on that track. The United States changed my perspective, because there you find 360 degrees of opportunities available, a lighthouse experience. That was a mind-blowing experience for me: looking around and thinking about what I really wanted to do. First, I thought about television. A counsellor at Harvard got me an internship at a TV station. After that, I wanted to apply to production companies in Hollywood, but that turned out to be impossible because I had accepted a Fulbright scholarship to go to Harvard. They pay for your plane ticket, but oblige you to leave the country within one year of graduation. So I had to go."

Sea change

Van der Tas produced socially engaged arthouse films that were mostly shown on the European culture channel ARTE. In 2016, after an intensive decade of film production and hard work, she took a sabbatical. "I spent a year sailing to the Caribbean and back on the classic yacht Peter von Seestermühe, and that one year never really ended. The owner of the boat is now my partner. I’ve moved to Seestermühe, on the Elbe above Hamburg, where I help him with his yacht business, grow vegetables in our garden, help other production companies, and try to find a way to finance as much free time as I can. I no longer produce films, but I coproduce part time and help other production companies. My French-German-Belgian coproduction All the People I’ll Never Be by Davy Chou has just been selected for this year’s Cannes Film Festival.

"My advice to current law students: make sure this is what you really want to do. Go directly to where you want to go. And if law is truly for you, congratulations—because it’s an invigorating, mind-enhancing profession."

Alumni meeting minds

Text
Florian Raith

Photography
Hanneke van der Tas

As the daughter of a diplomat, Van der Tas travelled all over the world. She was born in Mexico and grew up in the Syria, Germany, France, the US, the UK and the Netherlands. She was living in Germany, where she had been from age 10 to 16, when her Dutch father returned to his home country. "I loved Germany, had a wonderful life there," she says. "Moving to The Hague was a culture shock, as it often is for diplomats’ children. The parent is going home, but the child is leaving everything it loves behind.

"My advice to current law students: make sure this is what you really want to do. Go directly to where you want to go. And if law is truly for you, congratulations—because it’s an invigorating, mind-enhancing profession."
Corporate social responsibility (CSR) is becoming ever more important, allowing companies to make a positive contribution to challenges in society. It can enhance a company’s reputation, increase employee involvement and loyalty, and—not least—help them to attract fresh young talent.

Corporate social responsibility with the University Fund

Donations that launch a movement

Maastricht University (UM) increasingly aims to help address regional challenges involving health, sustainability, equality of opportunity, talent retention and more. The University Fund Limburg/SWOL, UM’s external support foundation, cooperates with the business community and other parties to fund social projects initiated by university staff and students. By building a bridge between UM researchers and society, the Fund helps to bring these social projects to fruition.

One of those researchers is Dr Chahinda Ghossein-Doha, a trainee cardiologist and principal investigator of the Queen of Hearts study. This is a large-scale research programme exploring the physical, psychological and social aftermath of pregnancy complications.

In collaboration with the University Fund Limburg, Ghossein-Doha has initiated various activities to support her research. Five years ago she launched her first crowdfunding campaign to raise money for an out-of-the-box idea that fell outside the scope of existing grant programmes: a study on the use of the placenta to predict cardiovascular disease in women at a later age. Since then she has established a Named Fund—the Queen of Hearts Fund—to ensure a sustainable and continuous stream of research funding.

Due to complications during pregnancy, Ghossein-Doha lost her own daughter 11 days after giving birth. This tragic loss made her even more determined to develop her scientific ambitions in the early detection of cardiovascular diseases into an internationally renowned line of research.

Wide visibility

The University Fund Limburg would like to help researchers like Ghossein-Doha achieve their scientific goals. An excellent starting point is the crowdfunding platform, which not only helps researchers to raise money but also triggers additional activities that raise their profile.

The Fund launches fundraising campaigns and cooperates closely with project owners. For the Queen of Hearts Fund, for example, several creative and inspiring campaigns were organised involving business and private parties. A charity dinner was held for the regional business community, and Ghossein-Doha and her team took part in the Ironman Maastricht to raise awareness of the research. Additionally, noted artist Kiki van Eijk offered a preview of her exhibition and created an artwork to raise money for Queen of Hearts. “It’s fantastic that so much attention is being paid at UM to research not only on HELLP syndrome and preeclampsia, but also to the broad social impact of pregnancy complications,” Van Eijk said.

Activities such as these help to extend the Queen of Hearts network and engage more and more people—including celebrities like Eva Jinek. Jinek contributed to a special Queen of Hearts book on pregnancy complications, hosted Ghossein-Doha as a guest on her talk show, and included the researcher in her own book Think Big.

Emergence of a social movement

By giving women a voice, Ghossein-Doha’s research is making a big impact. “It’s not just the research results and publications that inspire me. Translating those results into daily practice—people—is what keeps me going. My research gives women a better understanding of what they’ve been through; they feel less alone and often decide to join us. It’s become more than just a line of research; it’s a movement of a particular generation of women. I’m very proud of that.”

Ghossein-Doha is not the only UM academic whose work warrants social visibility. Our researchers are making strides in diverse fields from health and sustainability to equality of opportunity and culture. The University Fund Limburg brings this research to the attention of the public, enabling contributors to make a positive impact on society through their donations and networks. This often gives rise to warm relationships between academics and generous donors—sustainable partnerships for the future.

New Queen of Hearts crowdfunding campaign

The new Queen of Hearts crowdfunding campaign aims to support research that focuses on female participants rather than defaulting to male subjects. Women are encouraged to walk, run, cycle, swim or engage in any other sporting endeavour to raise money for research. Would you like to contribute to this good cause? Read more on the crowdfunding website UMcrowd.nl.
Patients with schizophrenia severely underrepresented in antipsychotic drug studies

As many as 80% of patients who are prone to psychosis are excluded from clinical studies on the effectiveness of antipsychotics. These drug studies apply strict exclusion criteria, meaning that only the least ill patients participate, such as those who are susceptible to psychosis but do not suffer from addiction, physical ailments or suicidal thoughts. Psychosis-prone patients who do suffer from such additional issues appear to respond less well to antipsychotics than do patients who are less ill. These are the striking conclusions of an international study led by Maastricht University researchers and recently published in the scientific journal *JAMA Psychiatry*. <

Profile

Education and research at Maastricht University is organised primarily on the basis of faculties, schools and institutes.

**Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences**
- Politics and Culture in Europe
- Science, Technology and Society
- Arts, Media and Culture
- Globalisation, Transnationalisation and Development

**Faculty of Health, Medicine and Life Sciences**
- School of Nutrition and Translational Research in Metabolism (NUTRIM)
- School for Cardiovascular Diseases (CARIM)
- School for Public Health and Primary Care (CAPPH)
- School of Mental Health and Neuroscience (MHNS)
- School for Oncology and Developmental Biology (GROW)
- School of Health Professions Education (SHE)
- Institute for Education

**Faculty of Science and Engineering**
- University College Maastricht (UCM)
- University College Venlo (UCV)
- Maastricht Science Programme (MSP)
- Department of Data Science and Knowledge Engineering (DKE)
- Aachen-Maastricht Institute for Biobased Materials (AMIBM)
- Brightlands Institute for Smart Society (BISS)
- Brightlands Future of Farming Institute (BFFI)
- Department of Circular Chemical Engineering (CCE)
- Department of Molecular Genetics (DMG)
- Department of Sensor Engineering (SSE)
- Gravitational Waves and Fundamental Physics (GWFP)

**Faculty of Law**
- Institute for Globalisation and International Regulation (IGIR)
- Institute for Transnational Legal Research (METRO)
- Institute for Corporate Law, Governance and Innovation Policies (ICGI)
- Maastricht Centre for European Law (MCEL)
- Maastricht Centre for Human Rights
- Maastricht Centre for Taxation (MCT)
- Maastricht European Private Law Institute (MEPLI)
- Maastricht Graduate School of Law
- Montesorque Institute Maastricht

**Faculty of Psychology and Neuroscience**
- Graduate School of Cognitive and Clinical Neuroscience
- Clinical Psychological Science
- Cognitive Neuroscience (CIN)
- Experimental Psychopathology (EP)
- Neuropsychology & Psychopharmacology
- Work & Social Psychology
- Maastricht Brain Imaging Centre (M-BIC)

**School of Business and Economics**
- Graduate School of Business and Economics (GSBE)
- Research Centre for Education and the Labour Market (ROA)
- Network Social Innovation (NSI)
- Limburg Institute of Financial Economics (LIFE)
- The Maastricht Academic Centre for Research in Services (MAXX)
- Accounting, Auditing & Information Management Research Centre (MARC)
- European Centre for Corporate Engagement (ECCE)
- United Nations University – Maastricht Economic Research Institute on Innovation and Technology (UNU-MERIT)
- Social Innovation for Competitiveness, Organisational Performance and Human Excellence (NCGOPE)
- Marketing-Finance Research Lab
- Service Science Factory (SSF)
- Maastricht Sustainability Institute (MSI)
- Maastricht Graduate School of Governance (MCGOG)
- UMIO - executive branch of SBE
- Maastricht Institute for Innovation, Entrepreneurship and Development (M4I)
- Technology Innovation Platform (TIP)
- Education Institute

**Interfaculty institutes**
- The Maastricht Forensic Institute (MFI)
- MERIN Institute for Technology-Inspired Regenerative Medicine
- The Maastricht Centre for Citizenship, Migration and Development (MACIMIDE)
- Maastricht Multimodal Molecular Imaging Institute (MM4I)
- Maastricht Centre for Systems Biology (MacCSBio)
- Maastricht Centre for Arts and Culture, Conservation and Heritage (MACCH)
- Centre for European Research in Maastricht (CERIM)
- Institute for Transnational and Euroregional cross border cooperation and Mobility (ITEM)
- Institute of Data Science (IDS)

**UM to coordinate nationwide research project on skin diseases**

The Dutch Research Council awarded a prestigious €11.7 million grant to the Next Generation Immuno-Dermatology (NGID) research project. NGID is a nationwide, large-scale project coordinated by Maastricht University to identify novel biomarkers for six different skin diseases. These biomarkers will underpin a high-tech, patient-centred approach in clinical practice. The grant was awarded through the Research along Routes by Consortia (NIVA-ORC) programme.

In the Netherlands, over 2.5 million patients suffer from chronic skin diseases. Although not life-threatening, these chronic conditions have a major personal impact and high socioeconomic costs. The available treatments are often ineffective and are not suitable for all patients.

NGID aims to develop the right care for the right patient at the right time. Over six years, six inflammatory skin diseases will be investigated in ultra-high detail. To this end, a unique international consortium has been set up comprising scientific institutes, universities, hospitals, patient associations, and technology and (bio)pharmaceutical companies. Dermatologists from all Dutch university medical centres will be connected to biologists, bioinformaticians, statisticians, behavioural scientists, communication researchers and of course patients. Using a new approach to data analysis and integration, NGID will make patient-specific fingerprints to ensure that each individual patient receives the best possible care in the future.

**Large-scale study on cuts in the number of tobacco outlets**

The sight of cigarettes encourages smoking. The Dutch government has therefore pledged to cut the number of tobacco points of sale and thus reduce the visibility of tobacco in society. From 2022, supermarkets will no longer be allowed to sell tobacco. The number of outlets will then be further scaled down, with cigarette sales ultimately only allowed at specialised tobacconists. The new legislation stems from late March a large-scale study over four years which commits the government to cutting smoking. The Dutch government has ultimately only allowed at specialised tobacco outlets.

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"We're very pleased to be carrying out this comprehensive policy evaluation with the support of the Dutch Cancer Society," says project leader Professor Ciera Nagelhout of Maastricht University. "By collaborating with health scientists, economists and investigative journalists, we'll be able to provide a complete picture of the implementation and effects of the policy."

**NGID**

- Maastricht Institute for Transnational Legal Studies (MILT)
- Maastricht Centre for Arts and Culture, Conservation and Heritage (MACCH)
- Centre for European Research in Maastricht (CERIM)
- Institute for Transnational and Euroregional cross border cooperation and Mobility (ITEM)
- Institute of Data Science (IDS)
Blow up

Want to know which part of Maastricht is zoomed in on? Visit the Facebook page of the UMagazine.

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