

# UMagazine



February 2022

on education and research at Maastricht University

## Poland's erosion of EU standards

PhD candidate Akudo McGee  
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and Neuropsychiatry

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Maastricht University



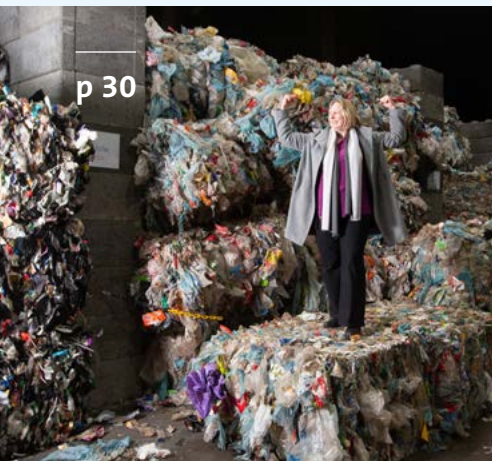


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Facebook knew about the negative impact of its service Instagram on the mental health of teenage users, and about its own role in stoking violence in developing countries. Moral philosopher **Katleen Gabriels** and data protection lawyer **Paolo Balboni** discuss the problems and possible solutions.

## A second chance for plastic



If we were to replace plastic with paper or glass, would the environment benefit? Surprisingly, no, says professor of Circular Plastics **Kim Ragaert**. She is calling for an alternative approach aimed at increasing awareness of and knowledge about recycling.

From a small room in a quarantine hotel in New Zealand, UM alum **Moniek Mestrom** discusses the importance of emergency medicine and her experiences as a ship physician. Never has she felt so free as during expeditions to the Antarctic and Greenland.

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## Cover

For the cover image, photographer **Arjen Schmitz** was inspired by the interview with Akudo McGee on the contestation of EU norms.

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## Foreword

Maastricht University  
Executive Board  
**Rianne Letschert, Pamela Habibović and Nick Bos**

# Challenges, challenges, challenges

With the appointment of Pamela Habibović as the new Rector Magnificus, our Executive Board is once again running at full capacity. Until 1 February the UM president doubled as the rector, which is not to say our work suffered in recent months—though the various challenges facing our university certainly kept us busy! Naturally, there's a certain pandemic and its impact not only on education and research, but also on our support staff. Add to that the climate crisis, plus the need for a safe working environment. Many of us are still largely working from home, online, which throws up challenges of its own—challenges that we on the board can handle just a tad better with three people rather than two.

And yes, we prefer to think in terms of challenges as opposed to problems. One challenge we like to set ourselves is to seek continuous dialogue with the academic community. After all, it has become more apparent than ever that we are stronger together than we are alone. We may be the ones making the decisions, but we feel inextricably linked to the academic community of which we are part. A community filled with talented people, with all the attendant dreams, ambitions and, of course, struggles and frustrations.

Our society has been put to the test in recent years, and it's not always easy to keep believing everything will work out fine. That's when it's nice to have colleagues around who complement your own outlook on life. One may be a calming influence, another an incurable optimist, yet another somebody who thinks outside the box. As they say: we may travel faster alone, but together we can go further.

And we would like to go far indeed: to the borders of Europe and beyond. This issue of UMagazine presents inspiring stories that showcase UM as the 'European university of the Netherlands', from our students' views on the future of Europe, to research on European guidelines for data and privacy or the erosion of European norms in Poland. There's no shortage of work to be done—but we're looking forward to it! <



## Alum Moniek Mestrom



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# TrainTool: *lifelike role-playing* video games

Lecturer faculty of Psychology  
and Neuroscience  
Reinier Kreutzkamp

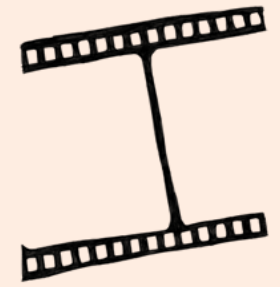


## Education

Text  
Ludo Diels

Illustrations  
Ted Struwer

Sometimes a hobby comes in handy. Take Reinier Kreutzkamp, lecturer at the Faculty of Psychology and Neuroscience, who trains students in clinical skills. A cinephile since childhood, he also develops audiovisual material for training courses, including an innovative program called Dealing with Extreme Emotions. The video role plays using TrainTool software teach students to deal with real-life situations in a professional manner.



The program revolves around managing stress and extreme emotions in situations borrowed from clinical reality. What started out as pioneering work won the International E-Learning Award 2021. “Back in the early 1990s, when I left the clinic to focus on education, I started making pedagogical films,” says Reinier Kreutzkamp, who works at the Department of Clinical Psychological Science. “In the last few years my faith in the educational value of film has really borne out.”

### Flight simulator

“Yes, it’s a bit like a flight simulator using films,” he says from his office, where the comparison is put to him. “It’s an interactive program that puts students in stressful situations. They learn to stay in control and respond professionally, even when the patient reacts emotionally and the situation turns threatening. To stay with the flight simulator comparison, try putting a plane safely on the ground when an engine has failed, the fuel is about to run out and the weather’s not cooperating. Training in these situations ensures that you as a professional are prepared for emergencies. The special thing about TrainTool is that the students record themselves with their phone, computer or tablet and can practise until they’re satisfied. And they receive feedback from fellow students and a teacher, so they also learn from one another.”

Anyone watching the films—including those in which Kreutzkamp himself plays the psychologist—immediately grasps the difficulty and delicacy of the situation. In one, a ‘client’ with a history of domestic violence refuses to cooperate with a psychological test. All at once the actor ramps up the tension, making ugly accusations and gesticulating wildly. Kreutzkamp remains calm and in conversation with the person. “In terms of emotions, we want to depict standard situations. As a professional, you have no choice but to continue with your test. At some point you’ll inevitably come across situations like this.”

### Christmas with patients

Kreutzkamp’s clinical experience stretches all the way back to his childhood. Although his accent suggests otherwise, he was born and raised in Heerlen, near the Welterhof psychiatric centre (now Mondriaan), where his father was a psychiatrist. >







"I've been going there all my life. We often celebrated Christmas there, together with the patients. I worked there during the holidays. I basically grew up surrounded by psychiatric patients and professional caregivers. So it wasn't a great leap, deciding to study psychology in Utrecht. After I graduated I moved to Maastricht University and have had the same employer for 40 years now. Never regretted a day."

"In 2015," he continues, "we started working with this innovative program, TrainTool, figuring we could use it to give students exactly what we thought they needed: practical experience in a setting indistinguishable from reality. Besides its pedagogical advantages, TrainTool enables us to reach more students and to save time. It's an efficient and imaginative approach, very much in line with the current zeitgeist."

*Telling stories in pictures never gets boring.*



**Reinier Kreutzkamp** is a lecturer in the Department of Clinical Psychological Science at the Faculty of Psychology and Neuroscience at Maastricht University. He studied Personality Theory and Clinical Psychology at Utrecht University. Between 1981 and 1992 he also worked as a behavioural therapist at the Academic Anxiety Centre in Maastricht.

#### Teamwork

Kreutzkamp emphasises that it is a team effort, together with faculty colleagues and the specialists from TrainTool. The conversation is shot through with his enthusiasm for the cinematic method. For someone who has always sought out academic challenges, it comes as no surprise that after his impending retirement he has no intention of sitting around twiddling his thumbs. "I plan to take a screenwriting course in Hasselt; I'm looking forward to that. I've enjoyed filming since I was a kid. Telling stories in pictures never gets boring. I'm fascinated by semiotics: the meaning of images."

Which movies most appeal to him? "Obviously I'm fascinated by psychological themes. The often surrealistic images in old films—the French New Wave from the 50s and 60s by directors like Truffaut, Godard and Buñuel—really capture my imagination. Those films have many layers of meaning; they captivate me to this day. When it comes to films featuring a pathological state of mind, I find psychosis, with its perceptual disturbances and private realities, the most interesting. A Beautiful Mind, which explores the line between genius and madness, is just fantastic. Good films, including in their pedagogical application, have the power to touch people, move them, shed light on the other. Insight, understanding and empathy are important qualities, both in life and in my work." <



# Dementia is like grey hair or wear and tear of the hip



*Professor of Geriatric Psychiatry and Neuropsychiatry*  
**Frans Verhey**



## Portrait

Text

Annelotte Huiskes

Photography

Sem Shayne

These are festive times for Frans Verhey, professor of Geriatric Psychiatry and Neuro-psychiatry. Last year was the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Limburg Alzheimer's Centre (ACL), which he founded; this year he will not only retire but also celebrate 40 years with his wife. He is proud of what the ACL has achieved and of its team, which works tirelessly to improve the quality of life of people with Alzheimer's. "Alzheimer's tends to be seen as a horrible, deadly brain disease that makes life unbearable. But with the right support and care, you can often still have a meaningful and enjoyable life."



*I'm now the  
last of the old breed in  
the Netherlands.*

Verhey has devoted his entire career to dementia. Much has changed over the course of four decades. "During my neurology training, people with dementia and their caregivers were practically outcasts. Not much was known about dementia and things were poorly organised. The 'treatment' consisted of muddling along at home until that was no longer possible and then moving to a nursing home, assuming there was room. In the event of a crisis you were brought to the hospital—usually with some excuse, because dementia alone wasn't enough to get you admitted—and you waited there for a place in the nursing home. The medical staff were almost hostile because the patients were often stuck in the hospital for over six months. I felt sorry for them; it really struck a chord with me. You can't treat people like that. Not much was known about what was happening in the brains of people with dementia, and they didn't receive the care and understanding they needed. Nursing homes weren't overly concerned about wellbeing or quality of life either. Thankfully, all that has improved enormously: the genuine care, the understanding, the context. Much more attention is now paid to a person's needs."

### The last zenuwarts in the Netherlands

Verhey studied medicine in Amsterdam and became intrigued by neurology and psychiatry. He decided to train as a zenuwarts, or 'nerve doctor', in Utrecht. "Actually a very old-fashioned programme. People used to think psychological problems were invariably related to brain disorders. I was especially interested in the intersection between neurology and psychiatry: diseases of the brain that also affect the personality and psychological functioning. I was one of the last students to start the programme in 1982. I'm now the last of the old breed in the Netherlands."



Verhey was, in effect, following in his father's footsteps. In the mid-1960s his father co-founded the hospital psychiatric ward, and he too became a professor. "That said, it wasn't an obvious path for me; I had to find my feet. My father was more of a general psychiatrist. I was particularly interested in the neurological side."

Verhey and his twin sister were the third and fourth in a family of six children that lived in the centre of Maastricht. "A lovely family, we're all close. It was expected that we'd go to university." His mother died of adrenal cancer at the age of 43. "At the time, I'd been studying in Amsterdam for just a few weeks. She'd been ill on and off for six years, but still her death came as a shock. We didn't know she was terminal, and my father, who did, found it hard to talk about. After her death, he was quite lost. At some point he got back on the rails by doing a PhD. When he married his former secretary a few years later, we children were very happy for him."

### Dementia is the flip side of getting old

In 1993, Verhey defended his PhD in Maastricht on dementia, memory and depression. His supervisor, Jelle Jolles, had been made a professor in 1986 and was tasked with establishing a centre for ageing. He asked Verhey to lead the dementia research. "Straight away we launched the country's first memory clinic, which grew into what is now the ACL. From an academic perspective, it was a huge opportunity."

"Dementia is the flip side of growing old; it's not something to be afraid of. It's more like grey hair or wear and tear of the hip. Dementia cases are rising because there's a solution for many other conditions: better treatments for cancer, better cardiovascular crisis management, healthier lifestyles. That means people are getting dementia at an increasingly older age. Over 90% of people have the potential to get dementia if they live long enough. Medically speaking, early-onset dementia is a different story. Parts of the brain look different and there are more genetic factors at play. It's also much less responsive to lifestyle factors, though we don't know why."

### Alzheimer's drug

In December, the European Medicines Agency decided not to approve aducanumab, a drug used in the United States. Verhey was relieved. "The whole idea of Alzheimer's proteins that you have to remove in order to be cured doesn't seem to work. That's what aducanumab does, but we now see that the patients aren't really improving and the side effects are significant. Without wanting to play the grumpy Smurf, the pros really don't outweigh cons like swelling and bleeding in the brain. Twenty years ago, >



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**Frans Verhey**, professor of Geriatric Psychiatry and Neuropsychiatry, is the co-director and founder of the Limburg Alzheimer's Centre. He was a long-serving board member of the International Psychogeriatric Association, INTERDEM and the European Alzheimer's Disease Consortium, and (joint) project leader of major national and international studies, including INDUCT (a Horizon 2020 Marie Curie Innovative Training Network), JPND Actifcare and COGNISANCE. Verhey has supervised more than 70 PhDs and has over 650 publications to his name.



I was much more hopeful about a cure. That's not to say there'll never be one, but Alzheimer's is so tied up with ageing that it's not at all obvious there is a solution. We just don't know. You'll never hear me use the slogan 'eradicate Alzheimer's.' It's the sum of many damaging and protective factors earlier in life. The way I see it, research should focus more on biological ageing and how to improve quality of life. What support can you offer by means of technology? The new National Dementia Strategy by the Ministry of Health, Welfare and Sport focuses on the quality of life of people with dementia and their loved ones, which is a step in the right direction."

#### Cinderella paradox

When it comes to dementia, euthanasia is a hot topic. What are Verhey's thoughts on the subject? "I'm by no means opposed to it; it can bring peace of mind. I often meet people in the clinic who receive their diagnosis and then discuss euthanasia with their GP. I understand that. But many people are so afraid of missing the boat they think they have to make arrangements immediately, before it's too late. We call this the Cinderella paradox. All evening Cinderella is the beauty of the ball, but at the stroke of midnight she turns back into a girl in rags. I'm against drawing too automatic a link between dementia and euthanasia; that would imply that living with dementia is by definition undignified. Many people live a decent life with dementia. We know we've achieved the mission of our Memory Clinic when people say 'We used to fear it, but now we can put it into perspective. Even with Alzheimer's my life is still pretty good.' Life doesn't end the moment you're diagnosed with Alzheimer's."

#### Milestones

For Verhey, this year is full of milestones. It has been 40 years since he met his wife, and that's something to celebrate. "She's from Tilburg, but I met her in Amsterdam through a mutual friend in my student house. It was love at first sight. She's a nurse and together we have three children, two of whom also work in nursing. Apparently you pass that on. My father always thought I should study economics, but I wasn't interested. I wanted contact with people, which is also why I chose neuropsychiatry over surgery."

In May he will reach retirement age—is that cause for celebration? "For sure, I hope the corona rules allow it. I'm proud of what I'm leaving behind: a great team of talented people who view Alzheimer's in a nuanced way. Good work has been and is being done on early diagnosis and biomarkers, prevention and psychosocial research. I'm glad to have made my contribution, but I'll also be happy not to have such a full schedule any more. For the time being, I'll stay on one day a week to help complete a few PhD projects and an international project. And I'll see what the future holds—maybe a painting course. Definitely a hike to Santiago de Compostela." <

*Life doesn't  
end the  
moment  
you're  
diagnosed  
with  
Alzheimer's.*

#### International

Text

Hans van Vinkeveen

Photography

Philip Driessen

# The next generation of European thinkers





### ***What does Europe mean to you?***

Lotte: "To me, Europe is the proof that we can truly collaborate across borders and in doing so bring about many benefits for people. We young people almost take those benefits for granted; we can cross borders without even realising it. It's become so easy we sometimes forget there are countries that don't have those benefits."

Olsi: "The freedom of movement within Europe is a huge privilege. But let's not forget that there are different cultures and languages in Europe, and that some of those might like to have more power than others. Europe ensures we are not fighting each other, but working together."

### ***Why did you apply for the G30?***

Olsi: "I'm doing European Studies and very interested in public policy, how democracy works and how we can connect politics with citizens. The G30 gives me the opportunity to have direct contact with relevant figures and learn how democratic possibilities can be realised. It will help me see things from a different perspective, from the side of influential policymakers themselves."

Lotte: "As a student of Human Decision Science, I'm interested in how we can make better decisions on complex issues when we interact with one another. At the European level, it's especially interesting to see

Studio Europa Maastricht, a centre of expertise for academic research, European heritage and public debate, will be at the heart of the conversation on the future of Europe. The centre is organising Re-Generation Maastricht, a series of events that reflect on and engage with the Conference on the Future of Europe and the 30th anniversary of the Maastricht Treaty. One of the driving forces of Re-Generation Maastricht is the G30, a group of 30 Maastricht University students who will meet with politicians, policymakers and thought leaders and participate in workshops on storytelling, imagining alternative futures and creative expression. Lotte de Lint and Olsi Sokolli are enthusiastic members of the G30.



*We need  
to bring  
new life  
to Europe.*



**Lotte de Lint** (21) is a first-year master's student in Human Decision Science at the School of Business and Economics.



**Olsi Sokolli** (21) is a third-year bachelor's student in European Studies at the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences.



how we can improve institutional decision making; to get a sense of the structures in Europe and the struggles within their decision-making processes. What also appealed to me was the creative aspect of the G30. Before I started my master's in Human Decision Science, I completed a bachelor's in Industrial Design. One of the G30's aims is to find out how we can showcase what Europe is all about through creative media. That spoke to me from my design perspective. I think storytelling is a powerful way of conveying the importance and image of Europe, which is absolutely necessary."

### ***What role do young people play in Europe?***

Olsi: "We need to bring new life to Europe. Strive for better integration, build on what our predecessors have already achieved. I expect a sustainable and welcoming Europe and am really hopeful that we youngsters can make sure we realise that."

Lotte: "What's interesting about including young people in the debate is that currently policy is often focused on the short term. We offer a long-term perspective, which is also in our own self-interest. We want to have a liveable world 30 years from now, in terms of climate change, pollution, social issues ... We look further ahead and don't have the closed-minded worldview of policymakers yet, maybe because we haven't experienced many setbacks and limitations."

### ***What G30 activities have you been involved in so far?***

Olsi: "Unfortunately, some events had to be postponed due to the corona measures. But I was present at the kick-off and was positively surprised by the G30. There were lots of people from different countries and backgrounds with different perspectives. I really enjoyed having discussions with them, particularly because many are studying something unrelated to my programme. That immediately leads to interesting viewpoints."

Lotte: "The kick-off of the 30th anniversary of the Maastricht Treaty and the opening of the permanent exhibition on the Maastricht Treaty were a real eye-opener for me. They gave a nice introduction to the history of Europe, which I only know a bit about. The main takeaway was the fact that I've never experienced a world without the euro, so I never truly understood its benefits until that moment. It also made me realise that often there's a lack of European identity, which is necessary to have a stronger Europe. I also participated in the storytelling workshop, which confirmed my idea that if you want facts and ideas to stick, wrap them in a story. That's how society has always conveyed ideas—through stories." <

The European Institute of Public Administration (EIPA) and Studio Europa have been selected by the EU institutions to host a pan-European citizens' summit in Maastricht as part of the Conference on the Future of Europe. Citizens' panels will also be held in Dublin, Florence and Warsaw.



The Facebook Papers, a series of documents leaked by whistleblower Frances Haugen, brim with revelations. The company appears to have been fully aware of its role in the dissemination of false information and anger-inducing content. Facebook knew about the negative impact of its service Instagram on the mental health of teenage users, and about its own role in stoking violence in developing countries. Moral philosopher [Katleen Gabriels](#) and data protection lawyer [Paolo Balboni](#) discuss the problems and possible solutions.

# Terms and conditions of our future

## Science and society

Text  
Florian Raith

Photography  
Rafaël Philippen

Data protection, privacy and cybersecurity are crucial to upholding the fundamental rights of individuals and preventing everything from fraud and blackmail to disasters like the Colonial Pipeline attack, which created chaos in the US earlier last year. And that's not all, Balboni says. "A small number of digital service providers have tremendous power and influence over our lives and those of our children, who are growing up with social media. It's vital that we think beyond convenience and look at the ethics of this system."

Gabriels agrees that digital service providers (DSPs) have a profound influence. "In one of their emotion studies, Facebook tested 600,000 users—without their consent—to see how positive or negative biases in our newsfeed affect us. It turns out that we're emotionally highly susceptible to these biases." As she points out, it is hardly surprising that many tech CEOs and developers strictly limit their children's use of digital technology.

### Lawful—but (potentially) harmful

"DSPs need to adopt a clearly defined, sustainable role in global society, or we'll have an immense problem on our hands," says Balboni. At present, companies are beholden only to the law and their shareholders. "We need a fundamental shift in the approach to regulating DSPs, one that goes beyond legislative regulation." As part of his research project Data Protection as a Corporate Social Responsibility, Balboni aims to create a Maastricht Digital Pact. This framework will call on organisations to improve their implementation of data protection and security and to fund awareness campaigns to educate citizens about privacy, data protection and cybersecurity.

Why not just have better laws? "Do we really believe in global, effective enforcement based on current regulations?" asks Balboni. He points out how companies approach the substantial fines for violations of the EU's General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR). "Organisations can set 4% of their annual turnover aside as part of their business model, balancing potential fines against profits."

### No stick among the carrots

While Gabriels supports the notion of a Maastricht Digital Pact, she worries about ethical whitewashing. "Prior to the 'Diesel-gate' scandal, Volkswagen's corporate social responsibility communication strategy centred on their ambition to become the world's most sustainable company. Those vague pledges are often window dressing, so I think an ethical code is too light, >





especially when there are no painful consequences.” In her view, the pact has to be part of a concerted effort. “You could significantly raise the 4% cap for fines under the GDPR and enforce it more rigidly. You need more lawmakers and politicians well-versed in those topics, and much, much better education.”

Balboni’s proposed framework does not rely on motivating tech giants purely through the chance to do good. The premise is that increased transparency and oversight would lead to a competitive disadvantage for organisations failing to adopt these best practices. “This approach relies on virtuous competition between companies on issues such as social responsibility and respecting users’ data.”

### Quasi monopoly

“It’s true that people care about their reputations,” counters Gabriels, “but at the same time, if you effectively have a monopoly, there’s no real incentive to play by the rules. If people think they’ll get away with it, they’ll try to. It’s amazing how many scandals Facebook has had in the last decade, without suffering serious consequences.”

Facebook has, in effect, morally disengaged, stressing that it is a social platform and not a news agency, and thus not responsible for its content. Yet, supposedly neutral algorithms designed to maximise engagement will always promote the most incendiary messages. “Paolo is right to point out its tremendous societal responsibility, since many adults and teenagers now get their news from Facebook,” Gabriels continues. Conveniently renamed Meta Platforms Inc since the

latest round of revelations, Facebook now also incorporates WhatsApp and Instagram, among other platforms. “Because they answer our social needs, users are effectively locked in, so there’s very little leverage to make them change.”

### Public awareness and moral actors

Nonetheless, Gabriels points out how the tech giants buy up every potential competitor at a very early stage. While the myth of two university dropouts in a garage challenging Alphabet’s or Meta’s monopoly might be naïve, Balboni thinks that a good enough concept with the backing of a major investment fund could indeed drive competition around selling points like ethics, privacy and a socially responsible approach to digital business.

Gabriels also warns against becoming cynical or defeatist. “Some of these companies have tried to take on more responsibility after being pushed from both the outside and the inside. Most of these shifts were triggered by whistleblowers: insiders putting morals ahead of their careers—although admittedly those are the kind of people who can find new jobs easily.” As society figures out how best to integrate the technologies that will decisively shape it, awareness, vigilance and forward-thinking initiatives like Balboni’s are sorely needed. <



**Paolo Balboni** is professor of Privacy, Cybersecurity and IT Contract Law at the European Centre on Privacy and Cybersecurity (ECPC) at the Faculty of Law. He is involved in several EU-funded research projects on cybersecurity and privacy, and regularly advises governments, EU institutions and multinationals on these topics. He is a founding partner of the international law firm ICT Legal Consulting and author of *Trustmarks in e-commerce: The value of web seals and the liability of their providers*.



**Katleen Gabriels** is a moral philosopher, specialised in computer and machine ethics. She is an assistant professor at the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences and programme director of the interdisciplinary BA in Digital Society. Her research focuses on the co-shaping of morality and computer technologies. Gabriels is the author of *Conscientious AI: Machines learning morals and How digitalisation shapes your life*.



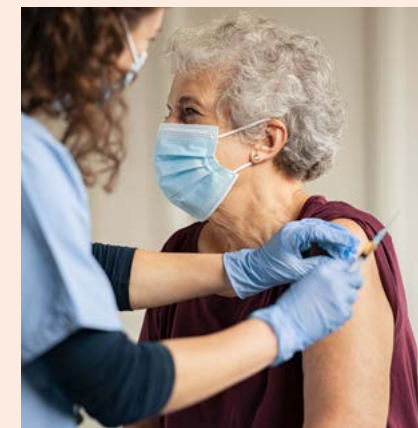
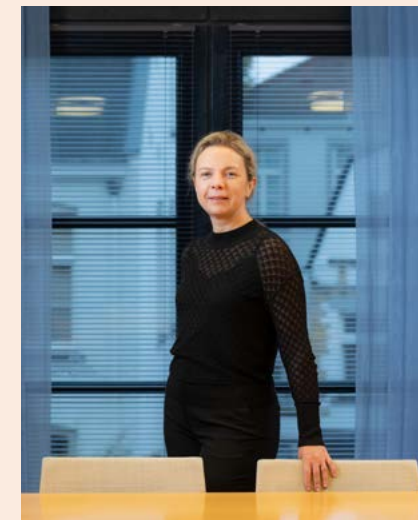
## Pamela Habibović appointed Rector Magnificus of Maastricht University

The Maastricht University Supervisory Board has appointed Professor Pamela Habibović as Rector Magnificus and member of the UM Executive Board. Habibović, professor of Inorganic Biomaterials at UM, officially took up the role on 1 February 2022.

Pamela Habibović (1977) has been a professor at UM since 2014. She was one of the founders of the UM Institute for Technology-Inspired Regenerative Medicine, MERLN, which focuses on technologies that contribute to the repair and regeneration of tissues and organs. Habibović has been scientific director at MERLN since 2019. She previously worked at the University of Twente, where she obtained her PhD, and at McGill University in Montreal, Harvard Medical School in Boston and other institutions. Until recently, she was president of the European Society for Biomaterials, one of the world’s largest associations in this field.

“The appointment of Pamela Habibović means UM will have a top scientist as its rector,” says Annelies van der Pauw, chair of the Supervisory Board. UM president Rianne Letschert and vice president Nick Bos look forward to welcoming their new colleague on the Executive Board. Habibović too is keen to embrace this new challenge. “UM is a dynamic university with all sorts of opportunities. That was clear to me as soon as I signed on as co-founder of MERLN. I want UM staff to have that same experience in the coming years; to feel they have the space to improve research and education and are not afraid to step outside their comfort zones. I also want to help strengthen UM’s many partnerships: internationally and regionally, with governments, healthcare institutions and companies. This will increase the impact of our research and education even further.”

The official handover will take place on 12 May 2022 during the university’s Dies celebration. <



## Nursing homes: “The pressure is high, but we’re in control”

COVID-19 is placing nursing homes under strain, mainly due to absenteeism and perceived work pressure. At the same time, the majority of nursing homes say they are ‘in control’. Most have managed to avoid banning visitors, but often impose other restrictions (such as limiting the number of visitors or adjusting the visiting hours) to protect residents and staff. These are the conclusions of a study carried out by Maastricht University and the Radboud University Medical Center (Nijmegen) in December among Dutch nursing homes. A total of 78 nursing homes were asked about the status of infections and (booster) vaccinations, measures taken in the event of infection, the impact of COVID-19 on everyday life in nursing homes, perceived pressure and support. <

## News

## New plasma lab ushers in sustainable future for chemical industry

The Brightsite Plasma Lab on the Brightlands Chemelot Campus was officially opened last November. Here, researchers from Maastricht University and its Brightsite partners will work together to optimise existing plasma technology and develop new plasma processes. This will make it possible to electrify chemical processes using (green) electricity and to produce hydrogen and raw materials for the chemical industry without releasing CO2.

“By combining the possibilities of plasma with innovative state-of-the-art technologies in our new lab, and by carrying out fundamental research, we expect to achieve significant breakthroughs in sustainability,” says Gerard van Rooij, UM professor of Plasma Chemistry and head of the new lab.

This academic year also saw the launch of the bachelor’s degree in Circular Engineering. Students will be able to apply what they learn in the lecture hall directly to the experiments carried out in the Brightsite Plasma Lab. Both fundamental and applied research will be carried out in the lab, and interested companies will be able to join various academic and industrial programmes. The lab is expected to attract new parties to the campus. <





## Research and society

Text

Theo Tamis

Photography

Arjen Schmitz

# Poland's erosion

# of

# EU

# standards

→

Born in Philadelphia to Nigerian parents, **Akudo McGee** was the first in her family to attend university. She studied German language and culture at the University of Pittsburgh before moving to Amsterdam for her master's degree in European Studies. She is now a PhD candidate at UM's Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences. Her research has received funding from the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme under the Marie Skłodowska-Curie grant agreement No 847596. She also heads the Dutch chapter of the 89 Initiative, Europe's first 'think-and-do tank', created to revitalise the European project. The chapter focuses on research related to climate and democracy, collaborating closely with Studio Europa Maastricht.

→



What has set a pro-EU country like Poland on a collision course with Brussels? How damaging will the row over the rule of law and other fundamental values be to the Union? PhD candidate Akudo McGee is studying the contestation of EU norms, particularly in Poland. An American citizen of Nigerian descent, she views the European project from an outsider's perspective — with fascination and, increasingly, concern.

"The EU is probably the most successful project of its kind ever, and easy to take for granted if you grew up in it," McGee says of the organisation's wow-factor among non-Europeans. "For me, looking from the outside at how former rival nations now work together has been truly amazing."

#### Out is out

Brexit, the EU's handling of the migrant crisis, its recent inaction against Poland — nothing has diminished her fascination. "The fact that the EU has undergone and overcome multiple crises contributes to that sense of wonder. Unfortunately, the EU also has a way of making sure that when you're on the outside, you stay outside. If I leave the country for more than three months a year, I lose my right to stay, even though I live here."

Fortress Europe. The standoff over Poland's border with Belarus in a form of 'hybrid warfare' against Western liberal democracies has revealed another side to the EU. "The advantages that come with living in the EU make it attractive for migrants. Of course, the system wasn't designed to incorporate ever more people and countries; that's understandable, but the argument is undermined when you see migrants losing their lives in horrific ways, and this whole tragedy becoming politicised. The image of the EU as a shining example of integration has become irrevocably tarnished after 2015."

#### External and internal challenges

That was a pivotal year, McGee says, because of the migrant crisis but also the electoral victory of

Poland's right-wing Law and Justice (PiS) party. The bitter irony behind its name is that the party immediately began chipping away at national structures guaranteeing democracy and the rule of law. For starters, it took over the Constitutional Tribunal, and has since brought the entire judicial system under tighter political control. "Post-2015 Poland has been marred by egregious acts of norm contestation. I'm exploring how political representatives in both the past and present frame and legitimise norm contestation and compliance."

#### Political smokescreen

Although it's too early for definitive findings, McGee suggests that some forms of contestation are natural and not necessarily damaging to norms. "Member states are always contesting EU standards to some extent, but outright violation as we're seeing now is rare." As for what is happening in Poland and other countries: "It's clearly a political tactic. The treaties are clear on the issues of democracy and the rule of law currently being debated, including the primacy of EU law over Polish law. By questioning it,

they're putting up a smokescreen to obscure the real issue: that PiS wants to be able to dismantle democracy and the rule of law unchecked."

#### Existential threat

With the exception of the European Parliament, she says, "the EU response to the behaviour of Poland and Hungary has been inadequate, effectively giving them the green light to further push the envelope. This sets a dangerous precedent: member states can embrace illiberalism without real repercussions."

McGee emphasises that PiS has no wish for a 'Polexit'. For its part, the EU barely has the power to restrict the benefits accruing to Poland for being in the EU, let alone to expel the country. The new rule-of-law mechanism was watered down, and the inaction of most EU institutions represents a grave threat. "The worst-case scenario is a country operating so far outside the legal and normative orbit of EU that it no longer resembles a member state, while still enjoying the benefits. I don't want to sound dramatic, but this is a bit of an existential threat to the European project."

#### Standing up for fundamental norms

How to counter this threat? McGee believes that at some point even the most inactive of EU institutions—including the European Commission, which always favours dialogue—will be forced to act. "If the Parliament suing the Commission and outrage among EU citizens and politicians at the Commission's inaction isn't enough, you can bet that PiS will force its hand. If not, other institutions, MEPs, member states, pressure groups or even individual citizens may stand up to stop this blatant violation of fundamental EU norms and standards. Europe has been through so many crises; I'd be greatly disappointed if this is the one that tears it apart, but I don't think it will be. The EU still has the chance to reclaim its dignity and its legitimacy by showing that it's willing to clean up its own house before preaching liberal values abroad. I'm optimistic about the future." <



*The EU still  
has the  
chance to  
reclaim its  
dignity.*





*International gravitational-wave  
laboratory opens in Maastricht*

On 8 November, Ingrid van Engelshoven—the demissionary minister of Education, Culture and Science—officially opened ETPathfinder during a festive ceremony in Maastricht.

ETPathfinder is a state-of-the-art physics laboratory that will serve as a testing ground for the development of technologies for future gravitational-wave detectors. The lab strengthens the border region’s position as a candidate location for the new European gravitational-wave detector, the Einstein Telescope.

ETPathfinder is currently under construction at Maastricht University, one of the driving forces of the new lab alongside the Dutch physics institute Nikhef. The project also involves several other knowledge institutions from the Netherlands, Belgium and Germany. <



# The herd behaviour of pension funds



Professor of Finance  
Rob Bauer



PhD candidate  
Matteo Bonetti



Professor of Finance  
Dirk Broeders

## Professor - student

Text

Jos Cortenraad

Photography

Paul van der Veer

There are some 200 pension funds in the Netherlands, all involved in investing the future pensions of millions of employees. The pension sector is supervised by De Nederlandsche Bank (DNB), which sponsors PhD projects at Maastricht University to gain insight into both the performance and the investment strategies of these funds. Late last year Matteo Bonetti, born and raised in Italy, successfully defended his PhD dissertation on factors that influence investment strategy. Here he reflects on the project with his supervisors Rob Bauer and Dirk Broeders.

Pension funds are in the spotlight like never before. Increasingly, they find themselves under fire for investing in the arms industry or other ethically dubious sectors, such as the mining and textile industries, where employers often play fast and loose with working conditions. Some have changed course under pressure from stakeholders and public opinion; take ABP, the largest fund in the Netherlands, which recently withdrew from the fossil energy industry. Add to this the ongoing debates on minimum funding requirements, lagging indexation, premium increases and concerns about the ever-rising average age of participants, and it is clear why the question of how to manage the hundreds of billions of euros in the pension coffers keeps certain people awake at night.

## **Complete picture**

Matteo Bonetti is one of them. In early 2016, he spotted an ad for a PhD project at UM focused on the Dutch pension system. After just two interviews, he jumped at the chance to trade Italy for Maastricht.





**Rob Bauer** studied economics at UM and financial management at TIAS Business School before obtaining his PhD in Maastricht in 1997. The UM professor is also director of the International Centre for Pension Management in Toronto and has his own consultancy firm. Along with Mieke Olaerts, he holds the Peter Elverding Chair at UM, focused on sustainability.

"It was exactly what I wanted," he says from the new UM building in the former Tapijn barracks. "I became interested in pension systems during my bachelor's and master's degrees, partly because they have such a major social impact. Pensions determine the purchasing power of a growing part of the population, especially in an ageing Europe. To safeguard that income and avoid having a negative impact on the economy, they need to be invested well. That's why it's important to analyse how these funds are performing and how they arrive at their decisions. The Netherlands is a particularly interesting case because all pension funds are subject to mandatory supervision by DNB. They have to provide all sorts of detailed data, which gives you a complete picture. It's a gold mine for researchers."

### New insights

It's a unique situation, Dirk Broeders confirms. The UM professor also works as a senior risk manager at DNB. "Monitoring and optimising investment policies means sifting through mountains of data. The data are anonymised and protected, and to analyse it we colla-

borate with the UM School of Business and Economics. Although we finance the PhD projects, the assignment is not set in stone. It's up to the PhD candidates to contribute ideas and look for new angles."

### Educational journey

That was a breeze for Bonetti, says Rob Bauer, the second UM professor and supervisor. "Matteo came up with the ideas and plans, especially in the first year—more than we could handle, actually. Ultimately, the three of us decided the research should focus on the complex governance structure of pension funds and how this influences investment decisions. After that it was three-plus years of hard work. Matteo waded through masses of data. Rarely have I supervised a PhD student with so much patience and perseverance. He analysed all pension funds and drew some surprising conclusions. Of course there were discussions along the way, but it was all part of an enjoyable, educational journey."

### Herd behaviour

Bonetti found that the age of the directors, external advisers and the policies of other pension funds influence their investment strategy. "Pension funds exhibit a kind of herd behaviour," he says. "Because the smaller funds tend to make the same decisions as the larger ones, these 'followers' perform less well. Funds that use the same advisers and administrators seem to have comparable investments, even if the pension funds are different. And the boards are typically staffed with relatively old directors with little diversity and few women. When you have an old board combined with young participants, it can result in an overly conservative investment strategy."

### Risky

Herd behaviour can be risky, Broeders acknowledges. "If something goes wrong, it's more likely to affect many funds at once, which can have a destabilising effect." As for what the trio will do with Bonetti's conclusions: "We want to translate academic research into social relevance. The lack of diversity, for example, is an issue we often raise with pension funds." <



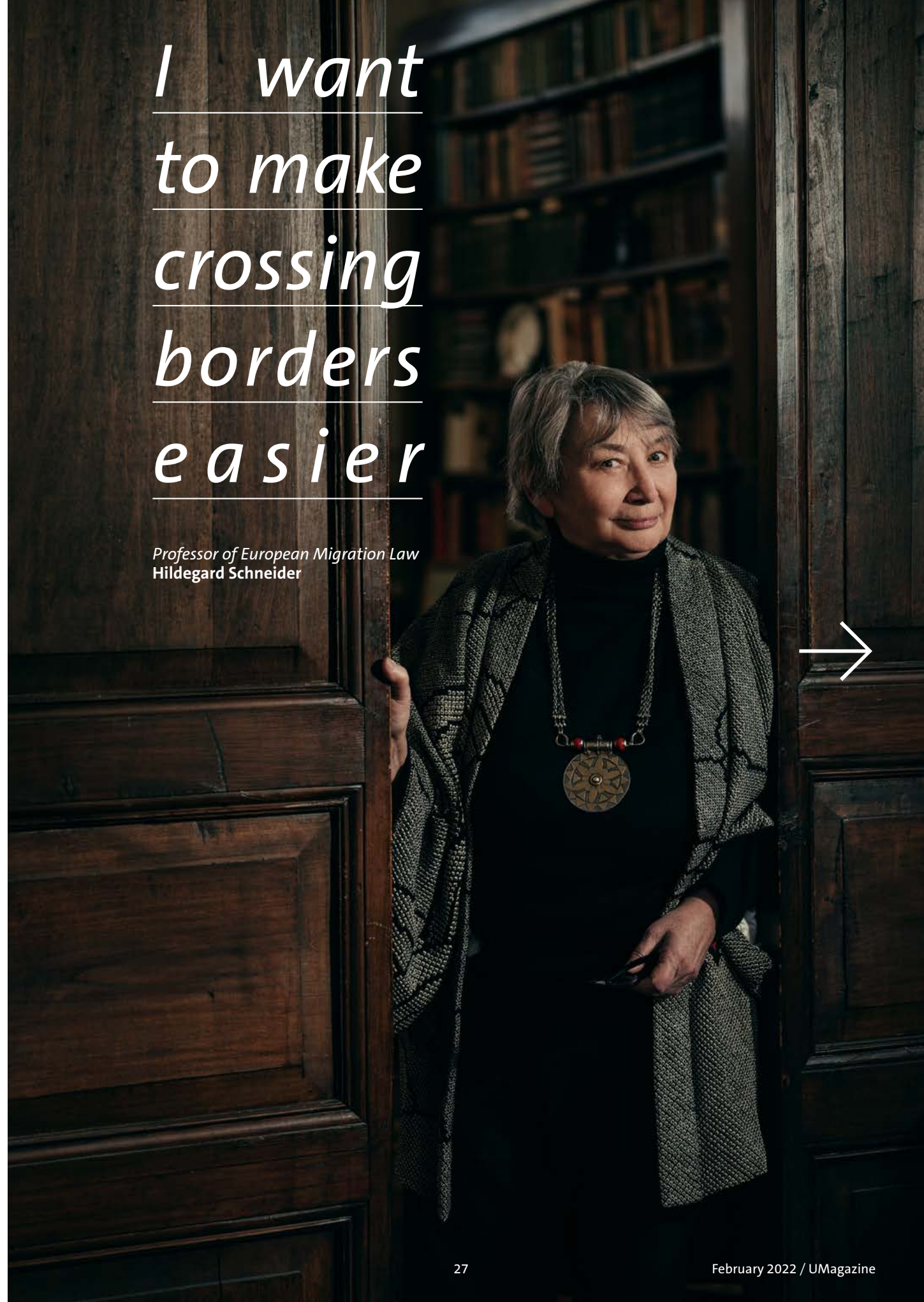
**Matteo Bonetti** obtained his bachelor's and master's degrees at the University of Turin. After an Erasmus exchange year at Umeå University in Sweden, he worked in Italy and Belgium before starting his PhD in Maastricht in 2016. He now works as a risk manager at DNB in Amsterdam.



**Dirk Broeders** studied at Tilburg University and worked for two commercial banks before joining DNB in 2002, where he is now a senior risk manager. He previously served as head of the International Organisation of Pension Supervisors. He obtained his PhD at Tilburg in 2009 and is, alongside his work at DNB, professor of Finance at UM.

# I want to make crossing borders easier

Professor of European Migration Law  
Hildegard Schneider





Hildegard Schneider is set to say goodbye. As professor of European Migration Law and former dean of the Faculty of Law, her career coincided with the foundation and pioneering years of the law faculty. She herself made an important contribution to the profiling of Maastricht University as a European university. “Now the university has to get ready for global challenges.”



There is much to discuss, but first: her farewell. “I’m not really feeling it yet,” she admits. We are in her home, which is filled with carvings, African masks with large peepholes, even an Indian feather headdress; a veritable museum of non-European art. “So far it hasn’t felt like a big transition. I’m still supervising PhD candidates, attending conferences and preparing a research initiative called *Borders in times of crisis*.” She will miss the daily contact with colleagues and students, though corona has already nudged this process along. “As my daughter said, ‘this way you can get used to being retired.’”

It comes as no surprise that her farewell lecture—if it goes ahead—will focus on the theme of crossing borders. Schneider became a lecturer in European law in 1986, specialising in the free movement of people. Later her focus shifted to migration and asylum law, but also the free movement of artworks in the EU—all fields that transcend a monodisciplinary approach. “I think this interest comes from my background. I grew up in a border region and later studied European law, political science and art history.”

#### Fairer art trade

In the 1990s, Schneider came up with the idea for the course Law and Art: The Free Movement of Cultural Property, which has since grown into a respected legal field. Art law is involved in many aspects of the art trade, but also money laundering and the return of colonial possessions or valuable works stolen by the Nazis. “My motivation is to make the art trade fairer and more transparent. A lot used to go on under the table. The claim in the art trade was: we trust our clients, they trust us and that revolves around confidentiality. But it also paved the way for all kinds of dubious practices. Now people are more critical of the art trade, and the trade itself has become more cautious. There’s a protocol for how to deal with stolen artworks.”

#### Collaborating disciplines

Crossing national borders, too, requires collaboration between disciplines. “What struck me early on was that borders always give rise to problems in border regions. The coronavirus is no different. Member states have kept their healthcare systems to themselves, which in a crisis leads to absurd situations. National borders have been closed, when it might have been better to close the borders between provinces. Patient exchange abroad is fairly normal, but has been done on the sly during COVID-19. I want to make crossing borders easy for citizens.”

With this in mind, Schneider initiated three multidisciplinary research groups. The Institute for Transnational and Euregional cross-border cooperation and Mobility (ITEM) is a spinoff of the Maastricht Centre for Citizenship, Migration and Development (MACIMIDE). Then there’s the Maastricht Centre for Arts and Culture, Conservation and Heritage (MACCH), which focuses on

art and heritage from a multidisciplinary perspective. Which one is she most proud of? “That’s like asking which is your favourite child. I think all three are equally great.”

#### Highest scholarly award

Just as impossible to answer is the question as to which of her 33 PhD candidates she remembers best. She is willing to name the first two. For starters, Yoei Michielsen won the Best Speaker Award at the European Law Moot Court Competition. “Yoei’s dissertation was on the nazification and denazification of the Dutch, Belgian and Luxembourg judiciary, and he found that the Supreme Court was in the wrong. He obtained his PhD cum laude and received the Research Prize of the Praemium Erasmianum Foundation, the highest scholarly award in the humanities and social sciences.

“My second was an older lady who I figured was around 70. She was studying the recognition of diplomas and the legal status of interpreters and translators. The manuscript was approved, but I suggested holding off a little because European legislation was in the works. But she was keen to have the defence as soon as possible, and when I received her CV with her date of birth, I thought it must be a typo. It turned out that she was turning 85 the following month! No wonder she didn’t want to wait.”

#### Eating well

Schneider switches seamlessly between the present and the earliest days of the university, then still known as the Rijksuniversiteit Limburg. She talks about the founding of the law faculty in 1981 in the home of the dean, Job Cohen. About the inaugural lecture *Compare everything and keep the good* by her husband René de Groot, a retired comparative law professor, which paved the way for the establishment of the European Law School. Then there was the Maastricht Treaty: “That was a huge stroke of luck for the city and the university. Maastricht was easiest to organise in terms of security, and the French president Mitterrand wanted to be able to eat well. It put Maastricht on the map, which triggered the university’s name change.”

Today, Schneider is genuinely worried about Europe, particularly the developments in Ukraine and Poland. But she sees European unification and European law as a foregone conclusion. “Now the university has to get ready for global challenges. Many legal fields are developing in this direction too. Take climate refugees —that’s a global problem. I’d like to see the study programme pay even more attention to the challenges of law and justice on a global scale.” <

#### Region

Text  
Hans van Vinkeveen

Photography  
Hugo Thomassen





Professor of  
Circular Plastics  
Kim Ragaert

## Sustainability

Text

Milou Schreuders

Photography

Sem Shayne

# A second chance for plastic

If we were to replace plastic with paper or glass, would the environment benefit? Surprisingly, no, says professor of Circular Plastics Kim Ragaert. She is calling for an alternative approach aimed at increasing awareness of and knowledge about recycling. “We should see plastic as a raw material rather than as waste.”

Many people think they are being environmentally conscious by choosing a glass instead of a plastic bottle, or a paper instead of a plastic bag. In her TED Talk ‘Plastic Rehab’, Kim Ragaert points out that opting for the plastic variant can be the better choice. The process of producing and recycling plastic often has a smaller ecological footprint than that of materials such as glass and paper. “Plastic is not all bad,” she says. “But we have to be conscious of how we use it.”

### Hot topic

Even as a child, Ragaert was curious about materials, how they are put together and how we can reuse them. Of particular interest was that highly versatile material: plastic. So it is perhaps of little wonder that she was recently appointed professor of Circular Plastics at Maastricht University. She describes her new employer as a young, dynamic institution that offers abundant opportunities.

Within her research field, too, opportunities abound. “When I started this research around 10 years ago, neither industry nor academia had much interest in topics like recycling and sustainable plastic. New European legislation and increased social pressure have since triggered a sea change. Recycling has become a hot topic, but the research is still in its infancy.”

### Victim of its own success

Why does plastic have such a bad image, especially when research shows that it’s not all bad? “A lot of disposable stuff is made out of plastic, so we’ve come to see it as ‘junk’. Plastic pollution is also highly visible. Not to mention the negative stories doing the rounds in the media, microplastics affecting our health and the like, though as yet there’s little scientific evidence to back that up.”

Plastic is, as it were, a victim of its own success. “It’s lightweight, strong and versatile, which makes it economically appealing. But there are many different subtypes of plastic and, in a practical sense, therein lies the rub. Good plastic recycling is much more complicated than just tossing everything together into the recycling bin.”

### Licence to litter

Naturally, we need to avoid creating a great deal of additional waste. Ragaert regrets measures such as the European Single Use Plastics Directive, which prohibits disposable products from being made of plastic instead of banning them altogether. >





**Kim Ragaert** has been professor of Circular Plastics at the Faculty of Science and Engineering since September 2021. Her background is in mechanical engineering and materials science. She obtained her PhD in Engineering Sciences at Ghent University, then worked as a researcher, assistant and associate professor and coordinator of projects such as C-PlaNeT. In 2020 she was awarded the prestigious title of European Plastics Recycling Ambassador of the Year.

“This gives people a ‘licence to litter’ by implying you can just use alternatives like bamboo straws or biodegradable soup cups once and then throw them out. That way they’re not recycled and we end up polluting the environment even more. I’d rather see a European Single Use Product Directive—let’s reuse all our products more often, taking plastic as an example. We should see it as a raw material rather than as waste.”

### Valuable material

A stronger commitment to plastic recycling would require a different, more responsible mindset. “For starters, product developers will have to design products that take the recycling process into account. The government can encourage this through legislation and subsidies. In addition, we have to raise awareness; consumers need to know that plastic is a valuable material, that we can really do something with it as long as we reuse it properly. Then demand will eventually arise again automatically, and it will become easier for product developers and retailers to use plastic again. Often they shy away from it because consumer pressure is high and plastic has a bad image.”

### Fishing nets

Recycling should result in less new waste, but what do we do with the plastic that is already polluting our oceans? “Plastic that has long been exposed to UV light and seawater can be even more difficult to process. Fortunately, there are innovative startups that have succeeded, for example, in turning discarded fishing nets—which make up a large part of marine litter—into new fishing nets. In any event, plastic waste has to be removed from the sea, of course, and we have to avoid creating more marine pollution. Globally, the Western world should take responsibility by helping to develop the collection and recycling infrastructure in countries where a great deal of litter is currently generated. That way, packaging will find its way into the circular economy there too.”

### Unselfish

Ragaert would rather contribute to a better world than help companies turn a profit. “That’s why I chose academia; I want to do my part through my research.” But she also tries to set a good example in everyday life. “I sort my waste, reuse products wherever possible, drink from the tap or from a refillable bottle, buy products made from recycled plastic, replenish soap from large bottles instead of buying small ones. Every little bit helps, and if we all contribute, we can generate a critical mass for all materials. If people stop buying those cute little 0.15L soft-drink cans or 20g of pre-packaged nuts, they’ll soon disappear from the shelves.” <



### Soul kitchen

*A peek inside the kitchens of UM employees*

Text

Annelotte Huiskes

Photography

Arjen Schmitz



→  
The  
scientist,  
the chef  
and her  
passions

*Professor of Psychology  
and Neuroscience of  
Abnormal Eating  
Anne Roefs and her  
daughters Meike en Elin*



Even as an 11-year-old, she used to jump at the chance to cook for the entire family. Anne Roefs, professor of Psychology and Neuroscience of Abnormal Eating, was tossing up between a career as a scientist or a top chef. Now she is passionate about her research on topics such as obesity. Occasionally the cook in her fantasises about using her knowledge to promote sustainable weight loss: “There’s no reason healthy food can’t be tasty too. What if I were to write a cookbook with healthy recipes, combined with a meal box with the right ingredients—the ‘Lose Weight Box’—and an app with supporting advice?” First, however, she must await the verdict on her VICI grant application.

*Many people don’t seem to realise that healthy food can be tasty too.*

Her scientific research has undoubtedly changed her view of food. “I’ve learned how hard it is to change an unhealthy lifestyle. I used to have this cavalier attitude: come on, you just have to do this, this and this. But for the people involved, it’s like elite sport. There’s so much room for improvement in how we can support people in transitioning to and maintaining a healthy lifestyle. Some are very good at it; they just flip a switch. But for most people, it’s a very bumpy road. We mainly look at behavioural and psychological elements, but environmental and biological factors also play a role. That’s what my VICI project is about: can we develop profiles of people that can predict who will be able to change their lifestyle and lose weight sustainably, and who won’t? Obesity research tends to be based on averages and neglect individual aspects that can lead to overweight. These profiles could help us decide which intervention is most appropriate.” Roefs is now among the final 20 candidates; around 10 will eventually receive a grant.

#### Missed opportunity

Listening to her explain her research with such enthusiasm, it’s hard to imagine she ever had doubts about her profession. “When I finished my PhD, I said to Anita [Jansen, her supervisor]: now I’m going to quit and become a chef. ‘Think it over,’ she said. ‘Why not do that two days a week and work four days as a postdoc?’ So I did that for a year: I worked in the kitchen at Le Salonard in Maastricht and also gave cooking lessons. I was friends with the restaurant owner and learned a lot from him, from cutting five kilos of onions to experimenting with flavours. I realised that when you work for a boss you don’t have the freedom to do your own thing. But I found starting

for myself too risky—I’m actually risk averse,” she laughs. “And the days in the restaurant all started to look the same just as my postdoc research was becoming more and more interesting, so I decided to pursue my scientific career. I’ve never regretted that choice, not least because my research is on eating behaviour. Many people don’t seem to realise that healthy food can be tasty too—such a missed opportunity!”

#### Freedom of choice

Roefs hails from a baker’s family in Brabant, and both of her grandmothers were good cooks. “A love of food is definitely part of it, just not through my parents. Food was functional for us; my mother is definitely not your typical Burgundian. When I was 11 and suggested cooking for the family, she must have thought, great, that way I don’t have to do it, whereas I thought: now I’ll be able to make food that’s actually yummy.” She experimented with cookbooks and learned from an uncle who was into French cuisine. “Chocolate mousse and the perfect chips with homemade mayonnaise. He always made a party of it and let you go your own way, intervening only when you were really headed in the wrong direction. I see him doing the same thing with my daughters now, and it works.”

During high school she waited tables at a high-end restaurant, so the Hotel School in Maastricht seemed a logical choice. “But it was awful: completely focused on management, no cooking at all. I didn’t feel at home there. I quit after two years, much to the horror of my parents. My father’s a guidance counsellor, and he hadn’t seen it coming at all,” she laughs.



**Anne Roefs**, professor of Psychology and Neuroscience of Abnormal Eating, studied Psychology at Maastricht University. She succeeded Anita Jansen as chair of the Eating Lab, a research, education and treatment laboratory at UM. Her research focuses on obesity, weight loss and dieting, eating disorders, brain processes and interventions. In 2016 she received an NWO VIDI grant for her research on reward responses to food.



#### History repeats itself

At the time of the interview, Roefs, her husband and their two daughters (aged 10 and 12) are living elsewhere while renovating the ground floor of their house: a new kitchen was a must. “We thought long and hard about the layout. I need a good oven and lots of space, so we’ll have a very long countertop—almost to where the dining table is—because I like to cook with company. A good convection oven is enough for me; I don’t need fancy technology. If I want to steam something, I just do it with an aluminium steamer in a pan.”

Her favourite chef is Yotam Ottolenghi. “I use his books whenever I have time and am cooking for a group. Roasted aubergines, how special can they be? But if you use all those ingredients in his recipes, they become so exciting. My work has definitely led me to cook more healthily.” She is also keen to pass on her passion to her daughters. “The eldest, who’s just turned 12, enjoys cooking and can prepare a meal on her own. She’ll app me to say, ‘Mama, can I cook?’ So sweet.” History repeats itself. <



# Life and death and glaciers

From a small room in a quarantine hotel in New Zealand, UM alum [Moniek Mestrom](#) discusses the importance of emergency medicine and her experiences as a ship physician. Never has she felt so free as during expeditions to the Antarctic and Greenland.

Alumni  
meeting  
minds

Text  
Florian Raith

Photography  
Moniek Mestrom



"I knew I wanted to be a doctor since I was about six," she recalls. Having grown up near Roermond in Limburg, Mestrom wanted to go as far away as possible to study. "I went to open days in Groningen, Amsterdam, Leiden. But in the end, I liked the university in Maastricht the most, so I had to stay in the region," she laughs.

Since then, she has more than made up for it. As far away as physically possible from Limburg, in New Zealand, she is about to start work as a registrar in emergency medicine in a hospital in Wellington. After graduating from medicine at Maastricht University in 2013, she specialised in emergency medicine without ever abandoning her love for travelling.

## Helicopters and penguins

After almost three years of working, including six months in a rural hospital in Suriname, she applied to become a physician on polar explorations and boarded a ship to Antarctica from Argentina. "I'd never been into sailing or anything like that, but I heard about this option during a hospital internship. I just loved the idea of combining work with travel. And those are places I wouldn't be able to visit otherwise."

South Georgia Island, home to hundreds of thousands of penguins and about seven researchers, holds a special place in her heart. "It was absolutely overwhelming, the hues of white and blue, the enormity and calmness of the glaciers, the wind in my hair... I cried when I had to leave." Mestrom has served on eight trips to the polar regions since. She tries to combine three months a year as an expedition physician with her regular medical career.



[Moniek Mestrom studied medicine at Maastricht University from 2007 to 2013 and completed residencies in Weert, Suriname, Leiderdorp, the VieCuri Medical Centre in Venlo, and Radboud UMC in Nijmegen. She took part in the Sudan Tropical Exchange Project and in a 500 km charity bike ride in rural Malawi to help raise money for girls' education. She has served as a ship physician on an icebreaker in Norway and on expeditions to Antarctica, the Falkland Islands, South Georgia, Spitsbergen and Greenland.](#)

The expedition ship, a converted Dutch navy vessel, holds approximately 100 guests and 45 crew. The average age of participants is around 70, since it requires both substantial funds and free time. "I tell people at the beginning that it's really important to follow the safety guidelines, like always holding on to the ship. The waves can reach up to 15 metres in the Drake Passage [between South America and Antarctica]. A helicopter rescue is only an option in the final six hours of a journey that takes between ten days and three weeks."

## Cardiac arrest

"At some points, we're more than 1000 nautical miles away from any possible assistance. You're dealing with seasickness and falls on a daily basis, so you do wonder: what if someone breaks a hip or has a cardiac arrest?" There's only one way to find out—and indeed, a passenger suffered cardiac arrest on a similar expedition to Greenland. "It was a worst-case scenario, but I stayed calm, prioritised and got some of the expedition guides to assist with things like chest compression.

"The protocol is very different from in a hospital setting. There's no team, no hospital close by, so you have to get creative. Since intubating in the middle of the ocean is unreasonable, I decided to leave the airway for later and make sure I got output [heart pumping blood to the body] first." Her patient survived. "We were at 74 degrees north, so the nearest hospital was in Iceland. It took two days and he slept the entire time."

## Pandemic

In early 2020, the global pandemic scuppered her plans to head to the South Pole. She cancelled her trip to Argentina at the last minute and returned to the home front. "The situation during the pandemic was intense; during its peak I struggled to get through the day. At the same time, the solidarity in the hospital was amazing—everyone was helping and encouraging each other."

Mestrom is concerned that funneling all resources into the care for COVID patients is taking a heavy toll on health professionals. "Everything has become about the pandemic. Many health workers have had to abandon their specialty in favour of COVID care. At some point, people just want to return to the job they actually chose because it excites them and gives them energy."



## Calm in a crisis

As an emergency doctor, Mestrom is used to being in the thick of it. "It's quite hectic, but I've always been good with stress. It's also very stimulating: there's a lot of variety and multitasking as well as practical skills. I also enjoy the interaction with patients and the cooperation with colleagues from other specialties."

She hopes her field will continue to gain in importance at home. "The specialisation is only three years, but that's really too brief to learn all the skills involved." The emergency medicine training programme was officially approved in the Netherlands as recently as 2008, making it a much younger field than in countries such as New Zealand.

Mestrom looks forward to further growing as a physician and to the new experiences and work culture that await her. When she will be able to board a ship again is unclear, but in her quarantine hotel in Hamilton, she has plenty of time to practice patience in a confined space. <





As a fresh-faced student, Jeroen Lenaers had no idea where a degree in European Studies would take him. The UM alum who simply ‘fell’ into a career in international politics was last year elected by VoteWatch Europe as the most politically influential Dutch MEP. “MEPs have a huge influence on legislation—that’s one of the great things about the job.”

# Leading actor in the European Parliament

When Jeroen Lenaers heard the abbreviation MEP in his first year of European Studies, he didn’t know what it meant. Now, almost two decades later, he is an MEP himself: a member of the European Parliament. “I had no idea what you could do with the degree. I didn’t have strict career plans then, and I still don’t, because if things don’t work out the way you envisaged, you end up disappointed. And it blinds you to the opportunities along the way, the forks off that career path, because you’re so focused on the path ahead.”

He fell into politics almost by accident when an unexpected opportunity presented itself: an internship with the Dutch MEP Ria Oomen. In 2014, he followed in her footsteps as a member of the Christian Democratic Appeal, part of the European People’s Party Group. That things are going well is putting it mildly: he was elected by VoteWatch Europe as the most politically influential Dutch MEP of 2021.

## International cross-pollination

Lenaers has always been interested in Europe. “I grew up on the border between the Netherlands and Belgium as the son of a cross-border marriage. My father is Dutch, my mother Belgian. I never really saw the border as such, and that’s thanks to Europe.” Perhaps unsurprisingly, he opted for European Law School, which he soon realised was too heavily focused on national law for his tastes. “In my first year, I stumbled across European Studies. It had a real European character, with a varied mix of European cultural history combined with European law and macroeconomics.”

What he mainly recalls from the programme is the cooperation with foreign students. “You’d be writing a thesis with Ukrainian students about the Holodomor, a famine in Ukraine perpetrated by Stalin, but really it was about fake news, because there were many Western journalists who blindly believed Stalin’s version of events. That international cross-pollination was so enriching.” He is now reaping the benefits. “We have 26 nationalities in the Parliament. You have to know who you’re speaking to and how, and be aware of the sensitivities involved—which you also make use of during negotiations.”

## Fair labour market

The highlights of his work are situations in which he can help individual citizens with social security or tax problems, Lenaers says. He also mentions his contribution to the establishment of the European Labour Authority, which aims to create a fair labour market. And then there was his involvement in overhauling the existing European information systems and setting up new ones, leading to improved police and judicial cooperation. “I’m very proud to have played a leading role in this.”

These are examples of what he sees as the considerable power of the European Parliament. “MEPs have a huge influence on legislation—that’s one of the great things about the job. That power is much more direct and substantive compared to, say, the House of Representatives. You can really push concrete laws in a certain direction.” He disputes the claim that European decision making is always slow. “The European Corona Certificate was developed within a few months. If the political will is there, things can move quickly. What’s frustrating is that the member states only take action when their backs are to the wall.”

## Setting an example

When it comes to issues like migration and climate change, there is no doubting the severity of the situation. Will Europe be able to cope? “Yes, but not alone; the member states have to really want it. Migration needs a global solution. But if you want to play a role on the world stage, you have to be on top of things at home, which is currently not the case.” As for the climate crisis: “It’s good that Europe is taking on a leadership role and setting an example. If you don’t take responsibility yourself, you can’t hold others accountable.”

But such issues are also potentially divisive. Europe is a strong power in economic and trade terms, Lenaers says, but the divisions between member states make it vulnerable. Other countries take advantage of this. “That’s Putin’s strategy, not to mention Lukashenko, the Belarussian dictator who’s currently using migration as a form of hybrid warfare. Reaching a consensus always requires willingness on the part of national governments, but I understand that developments have to move at a pace that everyone can get on board with. If you overrule your member states, you undermine the longer term sustainability of the cooperation.”

## Right to exist

He is also concerned about the support for Europe at the national level. Member states like Poland and Hungary are chipping away at the rule of law, even as Eurosceptics challenge the EU’s very right to exist. “I see that as my primary objective: the fight for Europe in the longer term. I’m convinced that the future of the Netherlands lies in a strong EU. Europe provides the pathway to solve problems that genuinely affect citizens: unemployment, security and the dark sides of the internal market. Only if we succeed in this can we speak of real successes again.” <



Jeroen Lenaers studied European Studies at Maastricht University. After his internship in 2007 with the Dutch MEP Ria Oomen, he worked as a policy officer in the European Parliament. He was elected to the CDA in 2014 and is currently spokesperson for the EPP’s Christian Democratic Appeal in the Committee on Civil Liberties, Justice and Home Affairs.



Students and researchers at Maastricht University are chasing their dreams thanks in part to generous donations, facilitated by the University Fund Limburg/SWOL. The Fund serves as a bridge between the university and its donors, including a growing group of UM alumni. Donors based in Europe and the US can take advantage of the tax benefits of giving to a good cause.

# Donations make dreams come true

Christian Wiehenkamp



**University Fund  
Limburg / SWOL**

*Text*  
Tineke Oosterloo

*Photography*  
Bouwien Janssen and  
Christian Wiehenkamp

The smiling face of scholarship student Thaïs Gautry says it all: there's nothing better than giving. Gautry hails from France and has roots in Niger. Thanks to donations received through the Annual Fund Campaign 2020, she will be the first in her family to attend university: European Law at UM.

"I'm incredibly grateful for this scholarship," she says. "I'm aware that this is a great opportunity for me. By succeeding in my studies, and eventually working in the legal profession, I hope to be able to fight for the rights of others and give a voice to the voiceless." Who wouldn't want to help make dreams like these come true?

## The importance of giving

Anyone who cares about UM can make a meaningful contribution. You can contribute to scholarships for underprivileged students or give a financial boost, big or small, to worthy research with a positive impact on society. By donating to an educational institution you know and trust, you contribute to a better future for everybody.

The University Fund Limburg/SWOL has formed the bridge between the university and the wider world since 1965. It is the vehicle through which individuals and private organisations can donate to the university—a role that should not be underestimated now that private funds are, alongside public funding, becoming increasingly important for the university.

## A bond for life

Alumni in particular are giving back to the university more than ever before, reflecting the special bond between UM and its alumni. Take Christian Wiehenkamp, who provides financial support to his alma mater. Remaining part of the university



## Thaïs Gautry receiving the Jo Ritzen scholarship

community is important to him. "UM has managed to create a sense of shared roots and pride among the alumni community that I've previously only seen with US schools, and which is foreign to friends or colleagues who studied elsewhere in Europe," he says.

Fortunately, this solidarity is also reflected in the annual fund campaign. University relations, such as alumni and employees, are asked to make a financial contribution to four special UM projects with social impact. The campaign not only raises money, but also puts the university (and therefore academic research) on the map as a good cause. The campaign motto is For Each Other, and with good reason: it is this campaign that enables students such as Gautry to study in Maastricht.

## Giving back: a good feeling

Wiehenkamp, who studied economics at UM, is now Chief Investment Officer at Perpetual Investors GmbH. He knows from experience how important scholarships can be. "I was lucky to receive financial support from SWOL during my PhD; without it, I probably wouldn't have done a PhD, which would have been a real loss for me personally. Having personal insight into the direct connection between financial means and academic achievement made me want to support others in realising their potential. Concretely, I hope that many small contributions like mine can help the recipient to finance her studies."

These types of donations allow the Fund to support a wide range of initiatives, from innovative research projects to scholarship programmes, professorial chairs and student activities. The Fund also manages the crowdfunding website [www.umcrowd.nl](http://www.umcrowd.nl), which

provides a platform for talented scientists and scholars to bring their research to the attention of a wide audience. There are also specific partnerships for the business community, including the Maastricht University Dinner, intended to foster interaction between UM and companies. When donating large amounts, you can also consider establishing a Named Fund, in which you as the donor choose—either in life or through a provision in your will—the topic on which the money is to be spent.

## Tax-friendly international donations

The university community is growing ever larger and more diverse. Donations originate not only from the Netherlands, but also from the rest of Europe, the US and elsewhere. The University Fund Limburg/SWOL is registered with the Transnational Giving Europe network and the Netherlands-America Foundation. These partnerships allow donors from all over Europe and the US to contribute to UM projects in a tax-friendly manner, taking the hassle out of international philanthropy. The first alumni have already made use of this option.

Together with our committed donors, the Fund strives to enable more academics and students to make their dreams come true. Ultimately, our goal is to bring about a better, fairer world, where people like Gautry enjoy equal opportunities to study. <

In the annual fund campaign For Each Other: Together Towards a Healthy Future, we draw attention to four projects: a new implant for diabetes patients, a scholarship programme for underprivileged students, sustainability research for a healthy Maastricht, and support for talented and ambitious academics.

More information can be found at [umcrowd.nl](http://umcrowd.nl). Your contribution is much appreciated.



# Limburg welcomes first ICAI Lab for the development of artificial intelligence for patient care

Knowledge institutions from Limburg will join forces with local parties in health-care and IT. The first ICAI Lab in the region—the ICAI Brightlands Smart Health Lab—is committed to making breakthroughs in patient care by developing and deploying artificial intelligence. The arrival of this lab marks Limburg's accession to the national network of ICAI Labs.

In the new lab, researchers from Maastricht University and Zuyd University of Applied Sciences will collaborate with healthcare providers, the Netherlands Comprehensive Cancer Organisation, medical IT service provider ilionx, and several Brightlands campuses and organisations. The research focuses on artificial intelligence that can predict the course of a patient's disease. Technology can then be used to help map out treatment plans for diseases like cancer.

The lab's academic directors are Professor Andre Dekker, Dr Rianne Fijten and Dr Alberto Traverso. Dekker and his team bring with them longstanding expertise in the responsible sharing of privacy-sensitive medical data. The ICAI Brightlands Smart Health Lab builds on their work on the Personal Health Train: a network that allows healthcare providers to learn from each other's data while keeping those data under the host institution's management, thereby preserving patient privacy. <



## News



## Jody van Melis (Work, Health & Career) wins Unilever Research Prize 2021

Jody van Melis, student of the FHML master's programme Work, Health and Career, is a joint winner of the Unilever Research Prize 2021. She received the award for her master's thesis, 'The effect of work-time control on the development of depressive complaints in 2 years in different subgroups among Dutch daytime workers: a prospective cohort study'.

Depressive complaints are all too prevalent in society and have major consequences for employee wellbeing, health and labour participation. Van Melis investigated the potential role of work-time control in the prevention of depressive complaints among workers. She used questionnaire data from 1,800 daytime workers—a subsample of the Maastricht Cohort Study—over the course of two years. The results suggest that greater control over working hours, time off and the ability to regulate work pace may protect against depressive complaints. Van Melis intends to submit the resulting scientific paper to an international journal. <

# National pilot factory for regenerative medicine: development kicks off

RegMed XB has received an initial €23 million grant from the Ministry of Economic Affairs and Climate Policy. This marks the start of the development of a national 'pilot factory' for regenerative medicine after the Dutch cabinet decided in April last year to award RegMed XB a total of €56 million from the National Growth Fund. The funds will be used for the high-quality construction, furnishing and staffing of the pilot factory in the various regions. This will not only have benefits for healthcare but also provide an important boost to the innovation power of the Netherlands.

Regenerative Medicine Crossing Borders (RegMed XB) is a patient-driven public-private partnership dedicated to bringing affordable regenerative-medicine solutions to patients with chronic diseases. Regenerative medicine focuses on repairing damage to cells, tissues and organs with a view to preventing or curing chronic diseases. Research makes use of stem cells, mini-organs, tissues and smart (bio)materials.

RegMed XB connects top clusters in the field of regenerative medicine in different regions in the Netherlands (Leiden, Brabant, Utrecht and Limburg) and Flanders (Leuven). At present, the research focuses on curing type 1 diabetes, kidney failure, osteoarthritis and cardiovascular disease. In the context of cooperation with ReGEN Biomedical, UM researchers have started designing and developing an infrastructure for the production line of small tissues. <



## 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, Transnationalism 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 (CAPHRI)
- School for Mental Health and Neuroscience (MHeNS)
- 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)

### 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
- Montesquieu Institute Maastricht

### Faculty of Psychology and Neuroscience

- Graduate School of Cognitive and Clinical Neuroscience
- Clinical Psychological Science
- Cognitive Neuroscience (CN)
- Experimental Psychopathology (EPP)
- 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 (NSCOPE)
- Marketing-Finance Research Lab
- Service Science Factory (SSF)
- Maastricht Sustainability Institute (MSI)
- Maastricht Graduate School of Governance (MGSoG)
- UMIO - executive branch
- Education Institute

### Interfaculty institutes

- The Maastricht Forensic Institute (tMFI)
- MERLN Institute for Technology-Inspired Regenerative Medicine
- The Maastricht Centre for Citizenship, Migration and Development (MACIMIDE)
- Maastricht MultiModal Molecular Imaging Institute (M4I)
- Maastricht Centre for Systems Biology (MaCSBio)
- Maastricht Centre for Arts and Culture, Conservation and Heritage (MACCH)
- Centre for European Research in Maastricht (CERIM)
- Institute for Transnational and Euregional cross border cooperation and Mobility (ITEM)
- Institute of Data Science (IDS)
- Brightlands Institute for Smart Society (BISS)

## Colophon

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