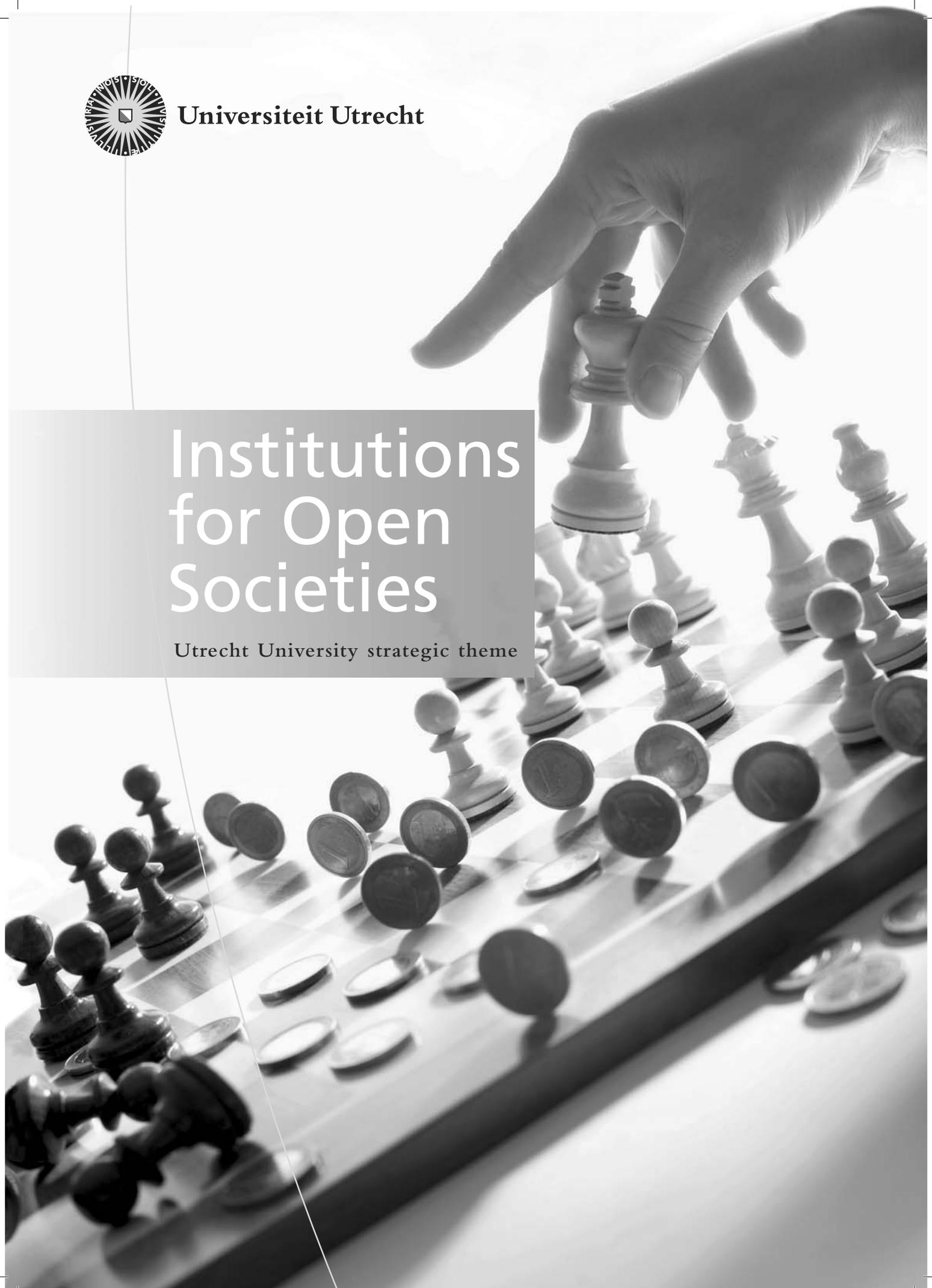




Universiteit Utrecht

Institutions for Open Societies

Utrecht University strategic theme



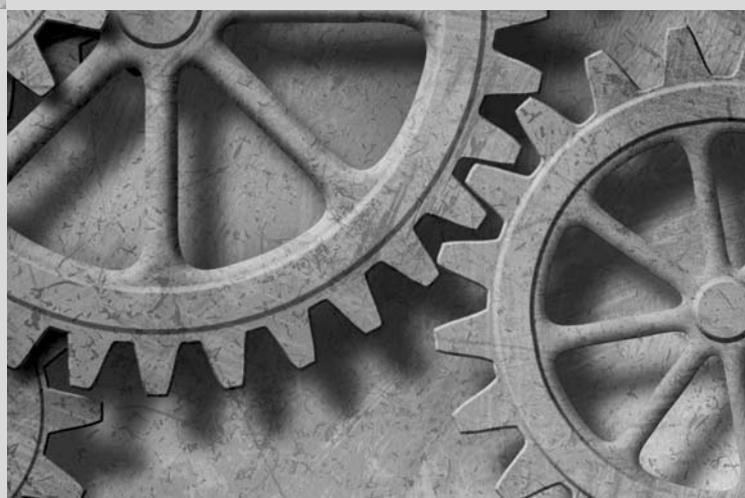
How can we achieve open and sustainable societies?

The strength of societies is to a large extent determined by the quality of their institutions, which are the formal and informal frameworks for human interaction. These institutions – laws, customs, networks, organisations, etc. – enable or constrain the realisation of an open, democratic and equitable society. They also determine a society's ability to absorb shocks and its sustainability.



At Utrecht University, scholars from the fields of economics, history, public administration, culture, law, sociology, social psychology, ethics, innovation studies, and geography join forces to find answers to the following key questions: Why do societies develop so divergently? And how do institutions contribute to the formation of open and sustainable societies?

The 'Institutions for Open Societies' research programme is built around five interrelated research themes, which represent cornerstones of open societies. Relevant expertise from the various disciplines is thus clustered around these themes, which at the same time link up with major societal issues.

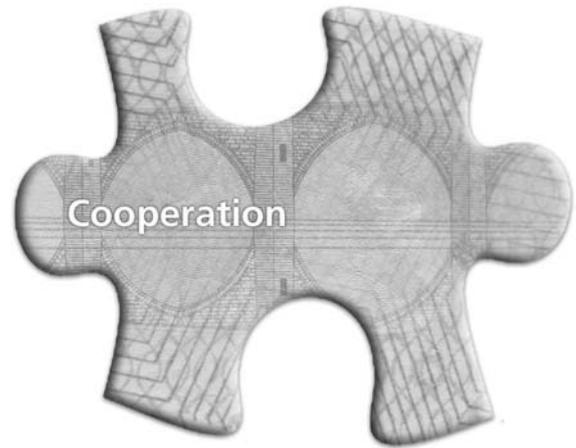


Institutions for successful cooperation: How does cooperation between citizens evolve in fields where governments and markets fail? What is needed to create successful and sustainable voluntary cooperation?

example

TRUST AND CONFIDENCE

With funding from research organisations and external partners, sociologists and economists have set up a research project to study how institutions and social networks can contribute to building confidence in social and economic transactions. This project is led by sociologists Werner Raub and Vincent Buskens, in cooperation with economist Stephanie Rosenkranz.



Vincent Buskens

More generally, Raub and Buskens are investigating the mechanisms that facilitate trust, cooperation and coordination, using tools such as game-theoretic models, agent-based simulations and social network analysis. Historical research on institutions for cooperation such as that performed by Tine De Moor on the commons, can tell us what is needed to build institutions that can survive many generations.

Combining knowledge about historical trends with experimental results improves our understanding about which combination of formal and informal institutions facilitates cooperation best. Researchers are in continuous dialogue with present-day citizens' collectives and policymakers in order to translate their knowledge on historical and present-day cooperation for today's institutions.



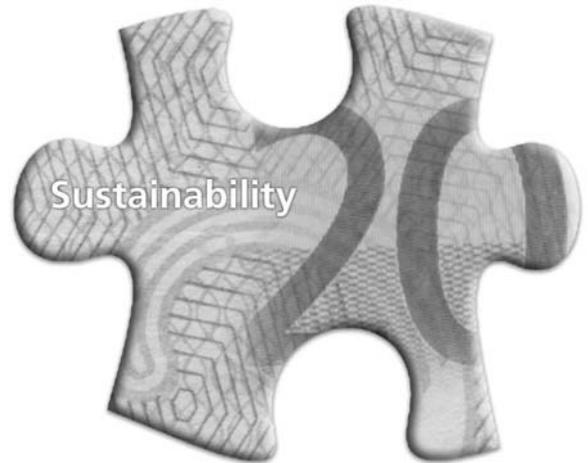
Tine De Moor

Institutions for sustainability and resilience: How do societies react to economic, ecological and socio-political crises? Which institutions are needed for a sustainable society?

example

ANTECEDENTS TO THE FINANCIAL CRISIS

At the request of the Dutch parliament, a multidisciplinary group of economists and legal scholars from Utrecht University prepared a report on the causes of the financial crisis. Their research was led by economist Hans Schenk. Joining him in this research team were economists Arjen van Witteloostuijn and Jaap Bos and legal scholars Wilco Oostwouder and Annetje Ottow.



Hans Schenk

The researchers paid special attention to gaps in legislation and supervision and the effect that these gaps had on the emergence and course of the financial crisis. The team is currently studying sustainability aspects of the financial system, including what to do with the banks that were bailed out during the crisis.

'Rights to a Green Future' is a large European network, directed by Marcus Düwell, of scholars from the fields of ethics, law, climate sciences and social sciences who are investigating the social, ethical and legal dimensions of climate change and sustainable politics. Ingrid Robeyns and Rutger Claassen are studying the ethical facets of the use of market mechanisms, including values such as justice and sustainability.



Marcus Düwell

Institutions for innovation and economic growth:

How do societies enable productive innovation and entrepreneurship and technological progress?

example

ENTREPRENEURSHIP

Erik Stam combines geographical and economic research to study the role of entrepreneurship in the long-term development of regions. Insights into, for instance, collective learning via spin-offs, inter-organisational learning and labour mobility have informed innovation policy in multiple regions and countries and at a number of think tanks both in the Netherlands and



Erik Stam

elsewhere. Stam's research, which helps clarify why economic regions succeed or fail, has also close links with the research carried out at the Innovation Studies group (Marko Hekkert and Frank van Rijnsoever) on innovation policy. Annetje Ottow conducts research into institutional innovation, examining, for example, the design of competition agencies and how competition law affects and is affected by technological innovation.



Annetje Ottow



Marko Hekkert

Institutions for equity: How can inequitable societies be prevented and how is equality and social mobility stimulated?

example

DIVERGENCIES BETWEEN RICH AND POOR

One of today's major challenges is to better understand divergences between rich and poor in the world. One approach used in economic and social history is to look at long-term patterns of inequality and their interaction with economic growth and the institutional organisation of markets at the macro-level, as is being done by Bas van Bavel and Jan Luiten van Zanden.



In the ERC Advanced Grant project 'Investments in a sustainable workforce in Europe', Tanja van der Lippe is studying what makes a sustainable workforce, especially at a time when people are insecure about their jobs and governments are reining in social welfare spending. What kinds of organisations invest in their employees, in human and social capital, work-life policies, in creating a more flexible workforce and in the long-term

employability of older workers?
And how do these investments impact the productivity and satisfaction of employees and organizations as a whole? Does this lead to a flourishing and inclusive European workforce?

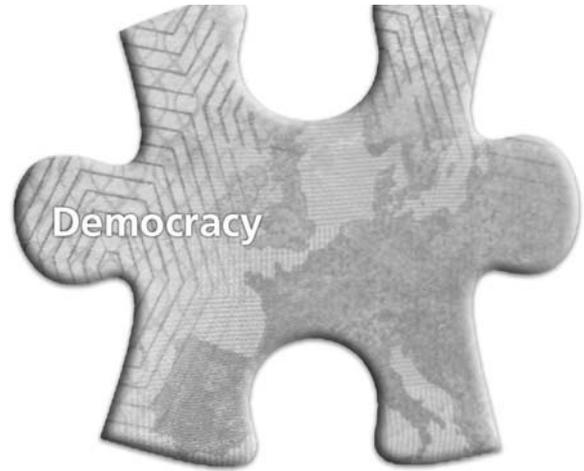


Institutions for democracy: How to guarantee a democratic system that is sufficiently transparent and based on trust?

example

PUBLIC ACCOUNTABILITY

Has the transfer of considerable political power from the national level to the EU been accompanied by an adequate transfer of public accountability and democratic control? This issue is the central theme in the externally funded research conducted by a team of Utrecht University's public administration scholars, political scientists and legal scholars



under the leadership of professors Mark Bovens, Deirdre Curtin and Paul 't Hart. They show how a web of political, legal and administrative accountability mechanisms has been spun around the institutions of the EU and how the EU is gradually turning into a 'normal' political entity. 'All Rights Reserved? Barriers towards European CITIZENSHIP' is the title of a European research endeavour by a consortium of 26 universities coordinated by

Utrecht University. This research programme, bringing together lawyers such as Sybe de Vries, social scientists such as Trudie Knijn, and humanities specialists such as Maarten Prak, focuses on the obstacles that EU citizens encounter in the exercise of their rights and obligations. What are the reasons for these impediments, and what are the possibilities for the European Union to further develop the notion of European citizenship in the future?



Strategic theme 'Institutions for Open Societies' at Utrecht University

Founded in 1636, Utrecht University has evolved into a modern and leading institution with a growing international reputation. With respect to the strategic theme of 'Institutions for Open Societies', our university aims to deepen understanding of the development and consequences of institutions in society. Societal challenges – economic, social and ecological – are coming to light ever more sharply and we wish to use our academic expertise to help address these issues.

Utrecht University has clustered its research efforts in a fully interdisciplinary way around its thematic programme. It is also forging new partnerships with social organisations, companies and public bodies at the national, European and global level. Researchers at Utrecht University maintain a strong collaborative network with academic partners.

This network includes the world's elite (Oxford, Cambridge, UCLA/Berkeley), has broad coverage in Europe and has bases around the globe (e.g., Stellenbosch, Chinese University of Hong Kong, TsingHua University in Peking, ANU in Canberra).

Contact

If you are interested in our research programmes or would like to call on our expertise, we would be happy to discuss the options with you.

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