



Utrecht
University

Utrecht
University Fund

Illuster

May 2024

Alex Brenninkmeijer Chair

Double interview
Hanneke van Eijken
and Sacha Prechal

Is AI a threat to our democracy?

Albert Meijer on fake news
and polarisation

DEMOCRACY

A voice for future generations

Eva Rovers calls for genuine democracy

Sharing Days &
University Dinner

5 - 8 June 2024

FOREWORD

The university is an institution, not a tool

Columnist Sjoerd de Jong, writing in newspaper NRC on 22 February 2024, found it uncomfortable: four academics (two of whom are prominent figures from Utrecht University) sitting round the table with ‘informateur’ Kim Putters, giving him advice on the formation of a new government. “A depressing sight”, says De Jong, “a populist government, cobbled together with academic approval?”

Uncomfortable as it may be to him, this discomfort is totally unjust. Clearly, the four academics did not play a political role. They advised Putters on possible forms of government, based on their expertise in the field of parliamentary democracy.

We are seeing it more and more these days: academia, the universities, being almost casually manoeuvred into a political role. For example, when they are accused from outside, once again, of being a bastion of the Left. Or when they are required, from within, to take a stand in a political conflict.

Universities are crucial for democracy. Here at Utrecht University, under the strategic theme ‘Institutions for open Societies’, for example, we constantly contribute to the richness of the debate and, as a result, to the quality of democratic decision-making. We readily share our expertise with society, in advisory roles, in conversations with stakeholders, or in the media. But we do this as an independent institution, not as a tool.



Thomas Vaessens

Dean of the Faculty of Humanities,
Utrecht University



16

Same degree ... different career

Publication details

Illuster is a publication by Utrecht University and the Utrecht University Fund. It is published twice a year and is sent to alumni of Utrecht University. **Final editing** Nancy Anraad **Editing** Esther Alberts and Ulrike Schmidt. **With the assistance of** Xander Bronkhorst, Joost Dankers, Lotte van Dijk, Tim Kroezen, Madeleijn van den Nieuwenhuizen, Hanneke Olivier, Eva Rovers, Vera Serieese, Yvanne van Tiggelen and Thomas Vaessens.

Concept and design FELT creative agency **Translation** Metamorfose Vertalingen **Printwork** Canon **ISSN 1338-4703**
Year 27 #94 © Utrecht University. Re-use of articles is permitted with citation.

Changed your address? Let us know by emailing alumni@uu.nl. You can also tell us your email address in this way.

Follow us on Facebook: Utrecht University Alumni, LinkedIn: Utrecht University and Instagram and X: @AlumniUU.



Contents



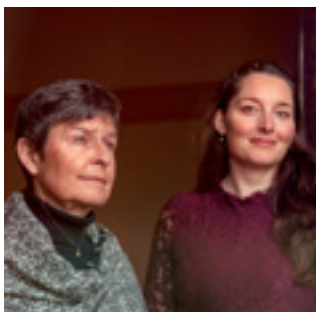
24
***“I think it’s
important that
people don’t
feel distanced.”***



Elaine Mak
Dean of Law, Economics
and Governance



8
**Is AI a
threat to our
democracy?**



12
**Listen to the
minority too**

- 4** The big picture
- 6** Short
- 11** Hall of Fame
- 15** Read & listen
- 23** A message from ... New York
- 26** Making it work
- 28** 5 questions for ...
- 29** Lifelong learning
- 30** Past and present
- 32** Life after graduation ...
- 34** Tips
- 36** Tim’s perspective

COLLABORATION

Bee society

Social honeybees choose their own queen. From a contingent of potential and reserve queens, they pick the one that smells the strongest and the healthiest.

The entire population works together to survive. If foraging bees find a source of nectar and pollen, they fetch their sisters to forage. When they get back to the hive, they all make honey by transferring the booty from mouth to mouth. The queen also gets involved and always adds a little queen's nectar. The unique taste of this nectar tells every bee that 'our queen is with us'.

In winter everyone stays inside, huddled closely together. The bees take it in turns to sit outside, and when they get cold others take their place. Inside the hive, where it is always 13°C, the queen waits until spring arrives and it is time to produce a new generation of bees.

text **Yvanne van Tiggelen**
image **iStock**



Short



Images: Bas van Hartum | From left to right: Anton Bijlbers, Henk Kummeling, Marga van der Starre, and Tim Schuring

ALUMNI

Alumnus of the Year 2023

Utrecht University has awarded the title Alumnus of the Year 2023 to lecturer Tim Schuring. He was bestowed with this honour on Tuesday, 26 March in the Dom Church during the celebrations to mark the 388th anniversary of the University, the Dies Natalis. By awarding the honorary title of *Alumnus of the Year*, Utrecht University makes it clear that alumni form an important and integral part of the academic community.

Tim Schuring obtained a Bachelor's in Earth Sciences, a Master's in Earth Surface and Water and a Master's in Preparatory Higher Education in Geography at our university. Since 2020, he has been a teacher of Geography in secondary education (at St. Bonifatius College in Utrecht). There he developed into an excellent, innovative, creative and popular teacher who is committed to enhancing the discipline and who is capable of engaging students with his discipline in a wide variety of ways. He also works at the University of Applied Sciences Utrecht, as a teacher trainer in Physical Geography and Geography teaching methodology.



ALUMNI FESTIVAL

Sharing Days

The Sharing Days take place annually in June in Utrecht. This festival-style event, which is specifically for alumni, provides a packed programme of activities in the field of science, research, sport and culture. Spread across locations on the Science Park and in Utrecht's vibrant city centre, the Alumni Office facilitates workshops, tours, masterclasses and other festivities. The event will take place from 5 to 8 June 2024. Will you join us?

uu.nl/sharingdays



HEALTHY DOGS

Tinder for healthy pups

Many dogs suffer from welfare problems caused by hereditary conditions. These conditions can be prevented through a responsible, sustainable breeding policy. This prompted the Faculty of Veterinary Medicine to launch Fit2Breed. A kind of 'Tinder for healthily bred dogs' which helps breeders prevent hereditary diseases. Based on DNA and health data, the programme advises on whether two animals are a healthy match. Currently, the programme only works for the Kooikerhondje dog breed. The aim, in the future, is to develop modules for all breeds of dog.



Donate now to help create a healthier future for companion animals.

COMBATING POLARISATION

Learning to discuss in a safe environment

Under the project 'Grip op polarisatie' (Combating polarisation), Civinc, together with Utrecht University, developed the chat app *Waaromkiesij.nl*. This allowed 300,000 voters to engage in conversation with each other before the 2021 elections. Because research indicates that even brief conversations can lead to greater mutual affinity and understanding.

Civinc is now researching a new educational tool for higher education. This is intended to help students practise sharing their views on controversial or sensitive social issues in a safe environment, through anonymous one-to-one chats. Because although, generally speaking, lecturers are very keen to discuss difficult topics, facilitating dialogue appears to be a complex task.

hello@civinc.co

ILLUSTRATION

Lotte van Dijk



THERE ARE EXITPOLLS IN THE AIR AGAIN...



BENEFIT EVENING

University Dinner

On 7 June, the Utrecht University Fund is organising the University Dinner. This is a festive gala dinner, the aim of which is to raise as much money as possible for student bursaries.

For more information, see the flyer at the centre of this edition of *Illuster*.



STREET POETRY TOURS

“A fanfare sounded in the distance”

Did you know that there are more than 200 street poets in Utrecht? Just another string in our beautiful city's bow. Street poetry is the product of a conversation between poets, the city poets guild, the municipality and local residents. Four enthusiastic students of Dutch know everything there is to know about the poems. Not only where they can be found but also the stories behind the poets, why a particular poem is in a particular place and what street poetry is actually all about. Walk or cycle with one of the guides. The tours take about 2.5 hours and cost €15 per person (free of charge with a U-pass).

straatpoezie.nl/wandelingen



Is AI a threat to our democracy?

It is mainly authoritarian states and hi-tech companies that stand to benefit from the AI revolution, says public administration expert from Utrecht University, Albert Meijer. And that is a very undesirable development. Meijer researches how digital innovations can, however, be used to the benefit of individual citizens.

text Xander Bronkhorst
image iStock
photo Albert Meijer

Information that is freely available, and nobody who can be silenced. What could be better? The introduction of the internet promised a blossoming of key democratic values: ‘a digital Athens’ was in prospect. But this naive optimism has since been tarnished. Albert Meijer had his wake-up call in 2006. American campaigners in Massachusetts told him at that time how, prior to the governor elections, voters were approached on the basis of data on the make of their car, the newspaper that they read and their postcode. “There was no question at that time of Russian troll factories with fake news, but that encounter set me thinking.”

Polarisation as a business model

According to Meijer, the microtargeting on social media, as well, for example, as the more recent introduction of ‘deepfakes’ has led to “an eroded public arena”. Authoritarian states are increasing their position of power and tech companies are targeting online polarisation as part of their business model. As a result, it is no longer



Albert Meijer

is Professor of Public Innovation at Utrecht University. He is an expert in the field of governance in the information society. He participates, for example, in a number of national and international partnerships in the field of datafication of local government, sustainable cities and open data. In addition, among other things, he is editor-in-chief of the academic journal Information Polity and chair of the permanent study group on e-government of the European Group for Public Administration.

“Authoritarian states are increasing their position of power”

clear what is fact and what are ‘reliable’ news sources. Meijer: “We will have to claim back that public space.” His hopes are pinned on the EU’s efforts to create a digital society based on values such as free access to healthcare and education, independent media and the protection of privacy. He therefore welcomes Europe’s plans to protect citizens’ data more effectively with its own cloud infrastructure.

He also believes that more stringent regulation is crucial. He sees the new European AI Act, which imposes strict requirements on the systems that are used within Europe, as a first step in finding a solution. “Companies like Facebook, X, Google and TikTok will have to take responsibility for their actions.” But Meijer is well aware that it is no easy task. Huge quantities of data are involved and technology evolves quickly. In addition, there is often a lack of capacity and expertise, so monitoring and enforcement is not easy. “Clearly, there will need for follow-up measures at both the European and national level.”

The value of meeting each other face to face

Whilst everyone now realises that strengthening the public debate online will not be easy, some tech optimists are still hoping that AI will have a positive

impact on the democratic decision-making process. In the US, scientists are using AI and virtual games to conduct research into the preferences of citizens around the sharing of scarce resources, says Meijer. Information on this may lead to more transparent decision-making than elections or political debates.

The professor from Utrecht University is highly sceptical. He believes that this kind of technocratic approach makes citizens passive and, in addition, can easily lead to unwanted results. “People’s preferences are not set in stone. They can change if circumstances change or if citizens hear other arguments. And it’s also important not to lose sight of the value of meeting and talking to each other face to face.”

Sometimes things go wrong

In his own research, Meijer mainly researches whether democratic decisions are being made properly. He analyses, for example, how the National Police uses AI and the impact of this on individual citizens. After all the media attention around the childcare benefit scandal, he no longer needs to explain to people that things sometimes go wrong. According to the public administration expert, problems can occur on multiple levels. First of all, engineers sometimes use algorithms without considering the potential political sensitivities. For example, there were concerns when the police used data on ethnic origin in a system that was designed to assess whether people could be prone to violence. “Politicians and engineers need to better understand what each other do”, he concludes. In addition, the administrative processes of government bodies are not always what ▶▶

» they should be. For example, sometimes they don't focus sufficiently on informing and involving citizens, or on the privacy of those citizens. Meijer and his colleagues have developed a Code for Good Digital Public Governance (CODIO, see box, ed.), which is designed to ensure that the introduction of technical innovations runs smoothly. "If a municipality wants to use smart cameras, citizens need to know how this could affect them."

But, in Meijer's opinion, the most important thing is that government bodies check carefully that the use of algorithms leads to the intended result, and that no unwanted side effects occur. "Because these are, after all, self-learning systems, unforeseen new patterns can easily arise."

Aware of risks

Meijer says that if the three conditions that he specifies above are met, he is definitely not opposed to AI. He realises that implementing government bodies such as the police are now acutely aware of the potential risks of discrimination or violation of privacy. Many municipalities now also have advisory boards to help them. He himself is chair of the advisory board of the Municipality of Rotterdam.

However, he increasingly hears people around him complaining that authorities mainly use AI to exclude risk factors or to track down malicious citizens, and far less to encourage citizens to 'behave responsibly'. "You may indeed wonder if AI couldn't be used more often to help vulnerable groups of people. For example, many citizens don't use grants that they are entitled to. We also know that failure to pay healthcare insurance is an early sign of debt problems. AI could potentially provide more insights into these kinds of problems, and into the people who are struggling with them."

For Meijer, that is one of the questions for the immediate future: "Can AI also contribute to more social justice?" «

"Companies like Facebook, X, Google and TikTok will have to take responsibility"



GOVERNMENT AND AI

Code for Good Digital Public Governance

At the request of the Ministry of the Interior, Professor of Public Innovation, Albert Meijer, and his Utrecht University colleague, Erna Ruijter, developed the Code for Good Digital Public Governance (CODIO). The Code defines thirty key public values that can be affected when a government body applies a digital innovation. Examples include non-discrimination, privacy and monitoring.

Meijer says that the Code can help not only municipalities, provinces, the police and other implementing authorities but, for example, also municipal councillors, determine which values may be jeopardised when making concrete proposals, and what needs to be done to protect them. The Code can also act as a tool for citizens. It clarifies what they can expect from a government that uses AI.

Hall of Fame

Utrecht University is proud of its graduates, and alumni are an important part of Utrecht University's academic community. But where do they all end up? In this section, Illuster presents some major appointments from the last six months.



Mijke Zachariasse
PhD in Climate Physics
(1997) was appointed Vice

President, Head of Antibody Research Materials at Genmab at the end of 2023.



Cindy Menzen
Master's in Psychology
(2000) has headed up

Sanquin – Bloedvoorziening (blood supplies) since 1 January 2024.



Marc van den Homberg
Master's in Physics (1993)
was appointed professor

under the Prinses Margriet chair "Data for disaster resilience" at the Faculty of Geo-information Science and Earth Observation of the University of Twente in January 2024.



Kila van der Starre
PhD in Modern Dutch
Literature (2021) has been

appointed chair of the jury van de P.C. Hooft Award 2024.



José van Dijck
Master's in Literary
Studies and Dutch (1985)

has been appointed chair of the jury of the Boekenbon Literature Award 2024.



Margot Hoogerwerf
Bachelor's in Liberal Arts
& Sciences (2021) won the

Villamedia Graduation Award for her film 'Dream On. Studenten zonder documenten' [Dream On. Students without documents] in February 2024.



Peter Werkhoven
PhD in Physics (1990)

joined the AWTI, the independent advisory council of the government and parliament in the field of science, technology and innovation in February 2024.



Michiel van den Hout
Master's in Physics (2001)

was appointed director of the Dutch Climate Research Initiative (KIN) in February 2024.



Caspar van den Berg
Bachelor's in Social Science
& Humanities (2002) has

been appointed the new chair of the Universities of the Netherlands (UNL) as of 1 June 2024.



Araya Sumter
Master's in Public
Administration and
Organisational Science (2023)

has been director-general of Social Security and Integration at the Ministry of Social Affairs and Employment since April 2024.



Senna El Messaoudi
Master's in Organisation,
Culture and Management

(2019) has been director of the National Rapporteur on Human Trafficking and Sexual Violence against Children since September 2023 and a member of the Supervisory Board of Stichting Klasse since 1 March.



Rogier van de Wetering
Master's in Business Informatics
(2005) and PhD in

Information Science (2011) was appointed Professor of Digital-Driven Transformation at the Open University in February.



Anna van Nunen
Master's in Social and
Health Psychology (2012)

has been appointed General Manager of ESNS (Eurosonic Noorderslag).

Would you like to be included in this Hall of Fame?

If so, please email details of your appointment to alumni@uu.nl. Who knows? You could see yourself in the next edition of Illuster.



NEW CHAIR

Listen to the minority too

Hanneke van Eijken, lawyer and poet, is the first holder of the new Alex Brenninkmeijer chair. **Sacha Prechal**, Professor of European Law and, since 2010, judge at the Court of Justice of the European Union, helped write the profile for the chair. How do these experts see the state of democracy and the rule of law in the year 2024?

text **Ulrike Schmidt**
image **Loek Hennipman**

Double interview



Hanneke van Eijken

is the first Professor of Rule of Law and Democracy under Utrecht University's Alex Brenninkmeijer Chair. Hanneke obtained her PhD in European citizenship and the constitutionalisation of the EU. She also teaches law students outside of the university and is deputy judge at Gelderland District Court. She is also a poet (hannekevaneijken.nl).

As a child, Hanneke saved her favourite words, which she now records in a notebook.



Sacha Prechal

was born in Prague and came to the Netherlands when she was nine. She studied Law in Groningen, obtained her PhD in 1995 at the UvA and has taught European law at a number of different universities. Since 2010, she has been a judge at the Court of Justice of the EU in Luxembourg. She is also Professor of European Law at Utrecht University. She enjoys reading detective novels. Sacha was married to Alex Brenninkmeijer.

S

Sacha Prechal is astounded that the rule of law is a topic of discussion during the current formation of a government. “The fundamental rights are

the ultimate check on the power of the government.” If we start negotiating these, what will be next? Coincidentally or otherwise, we are having this conversation at the end of February on the day that the report by the parliamentary enquiry committee on Fraud Policy and Services, ‘Blind voor mens en recht’ [Blind to humanity and justice], was published. The committee investigated the government’s policy on fraud over the past thirty years and how it could happen that the services provided to citizens have failed to such an extent. How can the government win back citizens’ trust? **Sacha:** “Among other things, by acting on the rulings of the courts and the recommendations of the Ombudsman. And not letting things get bogged down in bureaucracy.” We get onto the importance of legal certainty: laws and rules must be clear, predictable and easy to apply. “This is important not only for citizens but for civil servants too. If legislation is unclear, you risk it being applied randomly”, says Sacha.

Let ‘ordinary people’ help make decisions

“The authority of the government is legitimised by the inhabitants of a country”, says Hanneke. “But democracy is about more than just being able to vote. More too than trying to find your beliefs in an election manifesto and then voting for the party that best represents them. Democracy is about citizens’ ability to help define the policy of the government. Citizens’ assemblies are a good example

of this.” Hanneke mentions a well-known Irish example from 2018 on the relaxation of the law on abortion. “Citizens were randomly chosen to have their say and came from all layers of the population. There were major differences of opinion, so a lot was at stake. These citizens were also provided with relevant information over a long period of time. Based on this citizens’ assembly, following a referendum, the ban on abortion was subsequently removed from the Irish Constitution. This probably wouldn’t have happened otherwise.”

Or take the ‘Conference on the future of Europe’, for example. Between 2021 and 2022, eight hundred people from all over the European Union talked to each other over the course of a year about the sort of Europe they wanted to live in. The result was 49 concrete proposals, which were presented to the presidents of the European Parliament, the Council and the European Commission. **Hanneke:** “As a result of this, among other things, there will now be EU legislation on plastic packaging and the exclusion of PFAS. The government entering into a dialogue with citizens is crucial for mutual trust. That requires political guts.”

Citizen participation that’s “just for show” doesn’t work

They both say that the government must involve citizens in policy. But how? **Sacha:** “Citizens have had input for a long time now. But all too often, monitoring and follow-up are lacking. If citizens are given the opportunity to have their say and the government doesn’t act on it, it damages the trust that they have in the government.” **Hanneke:** “Indeed — allowing citizens to have their say over a slice of cake to keep them happy is not how it works! In the context of my chair, I’m keen to research the effectiveness of citizens’ assemblies. It may be that training is needed for civil servants around how these new forms of citizen involvement should be organised. It’s not easy though.” ▶

Double interview

» What can we citizens do to exercise our democratic rights? “Citizens are already doing a lot”, responds Hanneke, “take the climate marches, for example. Young people who don’t yet have the right to vote are letting their voices be heard!” Sacha thinks it is wrong for too much responsibility to be placed on citizens. “The question must be ‘How can the government be more open?’. Take your citizens seriously. Engage with people, talk to them.”

Hanneke adds an important point. “I see a discrepancy in how unaware we are of our EU citizenship and, at the same time, how naturally we exercise the rights associated with it. We don’t even think twice about going for a weekend away in Paris or ordering headphones from Italy, for example. There are European directives for water quality, food safety, safe toys ... There are so many rights that we exercise without even realising it. It’s a real shame! Politicians often say that ‘Brussels’ is imposing a particular regulation, but I know from experience that all the member states draw up legislation together in Brussels in a constant dialogue. Suggesting that something has to be done because ‘Brussels’ says so, while, in actual fact, our civil servants, ministers and MPs are drawing these

laws up together, is ridiculous.”

What plans does Hanneke have for this chair?

Hanneke: “To stimulate the dialogue around democracy and the rule of law in as many different places as possible — among academics and judges, in ministries, in communities, in schools and among trainee lawyers, etc. Everyone must be able to understand what democracy means.

I also think it’s important that the lawyers of the future have the courage to take a broader perspective on things. That they are critical and reflective about the law and their own role within it. In the Master’s module ‘Europe for the people’, my students have to interview at least two citizens about what the EU policy on asylum means for them, for example. They interview staff at a reception centre for asylum seekers, for example. I think it’s crucial that our students, who will soon be judges or policy advisers, have actually talked to citizens outside of their usual circle about the impact of legislation and policy on citizens.”

Festival Europa, which Hanneke and her team are organising on 31 May, is a good example of the sort of project that she wants to set up more often

Alex Brenninkmeijer Chair

To keep the ideas of Alex Brenninkmeijer alive and to develop further academically, the Faculty of Law, Economics and Governance decided to set up a chair in his name.



as part of the chair. The festival will include a leaders debate, journalists, academics, poetry and music. It’s free of charge and will take place in Utrecht Public Library on the Neude (see also page 34). “I hope that a lot of citizens will vote in the European elections in an informed way. That way, they can help define the future of Europe, of their everyday lives and of future generations. There are also some young people who never go to the big city. That’s why we’re keen to take this into communities, too”, says Hanneke. “Actually, I’d like to take Festival Europa to the whole country. I come from a small village in Zeeland where hospitals and schools are being closed. That really affects the residents. When the problems that you face on a daily basis demand all your attention, you won’t be thinking about the European Green Deal, for example. In the context of the chair, I want to establish a genuine dialogue between science, education and practice. Sacha agrees with her: “As a government, you have to ask yourself, how do I do right by all citizens. If you only do what 50 per cent of the electorate + 1 want, you are excluding a lot of people. An effective democracy goes hand in hand with respect and tolerance towards minorities.” **Hanneke:** “It’s the government’s responsibility to ensure that everyone can participate. Not just the citizen’s.” ◀



Read & listen

New column

In this new column we keep you up to date with books and podcasts by alumni of Utrecht University.



BOOK

De inventieve middeleeuwen (The inventive middle ages)

Practical knowledge and expertise from

before the year 1000

The middle ages are not really known as a time of great knowledge and expertise. But they should be. Everyday problems from a thousand years ago are often not that different from our own but that doesn't always apply to the solutions.

Ria Paroubek-Groenewoud & Carine van Rhijn (ed.), Uitgeverij Verloren, €25.00



BOOK

Liberator Down

The incredible story of the US pilot John Keffe who, on 8 March 1944, had to jump out of his crashed bomber and

survived.

Now translated by alumna Caroline Brevet, Adri Brevet and Wim de Leur, €29.95



BOOK

Het groene poetsboekje (The little green cleaning book)

Poet, literary scholar and cleaning guru Diet Groothuis tells you everything you need to know about mopping, polishing, hoovering and cleaning materials.

Uitgeverij Atlas Contact, €17.50



BOOK

De man in de Amstel (The man in the Amstel)

1948. The body of a man is found in the Amstel. Lawyer De Winter is asked to find out what happened.

Duco Hellema, Uitgeverij Prometheus, €22.50



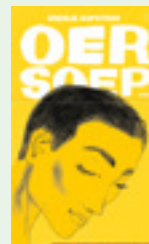
BOOK

Hogere machten (Higher powers)

It's the 1930s. James Welmoed meets Elizabeth van Elzenburg. They have nothing in

common with each other. What follows is an affair that lasts for decades, while the world is changing around them.

Joost de Vries, Uitgeverij Prometheus, €24.99



BOOK

Oersoep (Primordial soup)

A lyrical reading experience that at times feels more like a trip than a novel. Bregje

Hofstede investigates the yearning for self-loss in a disenchanted age.

Das Mag Uitgevers, €22.99



PODCAST

First citizens' assembly in Utrecht

In the podcast series Focused on the Future, Utrecht councillor Eva

Oosters talks to three scientists from Utrecht University about the first citizens' assembly in Utrecht. 27 May online.

You can find this and many other UU podcast series at uu.nl/organisatie/podcasts



BOOK

Doe zelf normaal

Under the influence of climate change and intelligent technologies, the democratic rule of law is changing. Too

much knowledge about the future threatens to remain with experts and universities. It is time to gather this knowledge and engage in a public debate.

Maxim Februari, Uitgeverij Prometheus, €22.50

Share your publication

Let us know if you have had a book published or want to draw attention to a podcast.

Send a signed copy to: Utrecht University, fao Alumni Office, Postbus 80125, 3508 TC Utrecht. Or email: alumni@uu.nl, quoting 'Illuster Lees en Luister'.



Same degree ...

Jurriaan Parie (29)

Degree programme: Mathematics

Job: Co-founder of Algorithm Audit

As a toddler all I wanted to do was sums, I already knew then that I wanted to be a mathematician. At the same time, I've always had very broad interests. So, during my studies I followed the interdisciplinary honours programme offered by the Descartes College. After lectures there was pizza and cola — it was a really good way of getting to know students from other degree programmes. After my second Master's in Data Science in London I started studying for a PhD in Statistics in Zürich. This proved to be too theoretical. While looking for a new focus, I was inspired by a newspaper article on a discredited machine learning-driven algorithm that had been used by the Municipality of Rotterdam. I set up Algorithm Audit with one of my Descartes classmates to raise public awareness around the responsible use of algorithms and to drive the debate around the issue. We bring committees together to provide advice on urgent ethical issues. For several years I combined this with jobs at IBM and Deloitte, but since September, I have been working full time on ethics, politics and the social relevance of algorithms and, well, just hard statistics.

Lucas Smits (25)

Degree programme: Mathematics

Job: Scientific officer at CPB Netherlands Bureau for Economic Policy Analysis in The Hague

Cstatistics give me peace of mind, it's great when everything checks out. Maths was my favourite subject at school and I thought I was going to be a string theorist.

While studying for my degree in Maths and Physics, I became increasingly aware of the important and equally as interesting issues that play out outside of the university. The fight against climate change is the key theme for the years ahead and I want to contribute to this through facts, knowledge and research. After I graduated I found a job at TNO. But politics is closest to my heart and, since last year, I've been working for the CPB on their Climate programme. It's my ideal job. I'm currently building a big model with three colleagues to predict the impact of a CO₂ levy for large polluters outside the EU, including all the data on the international energy industry. The model did well in the first major test, that was a real milestone! Building a model like this is a kind of complex puzzle. The great thing is that my model has a direct impact. When the CPB publishes the results of a study it always attracts a lot of attention, from the media and politicians.

... different career






Democracy

A voice for unborn gene- rations

The Netherlands is one of the strongest democracies in the world, and yet there is a huge flaw in our democracy: the vast majority of the Dutch population is not represented and has no voice at all. Who are these people?
Future generations.

text Eva Rovers *image* Hans Reitzema



**“The well-being of
the current generation
must not be at
the expense of
future generations”**



“Democracies can appoint guardians of the future”

T

he majority of democratic decisions that we take today have the greatest impact on people who cannot have any say on them. Decisions on the location of new homes, for example. Do we build in low-lying parts of the country, or in places where, even in a hundred years' time, people can keep their feet (and houses) dry? Or decisions about the health sector: do we make major investments now that prevent 'double ageing' (the situation that we face, where not only are there more older people, but they are also living longer) disrupting our society over several decades or do we postpone this?

Clearly, this democratic failing doesn't just apply to the Netherlands. That's why the United Nations is drawing up a 'Declaration on Future Generations', which will (hopefully) be signed by all members in the autumn during the UN 'Summit of the Future'. This declaration is based on the idea of intergenerational justice. The well-being of the current generation must not be at the expense of future generations (and vice versa). Despite all the fine promises, unborn generations are still barely protected, says the UN.

Short-sighted democracy

Why do even the strongest democracies pay so little attention to the rights of future generations? Two of the main reasons lie at the heart of contemporary democracies: elections and a strong belief in market forces.

Elections force politicians into a race in which short-term political interests (obtaining as many votes as possible) take priority over shared long-term interests. Or in the words of Barack Obama: 'One of the hardest things in politics is getting a democracy to deal with something now where the payoff is long term or the price of inaction is decades away.'

There are countless examples of this. It has been known since the 1970s that fossil fuels lead to dangerous global warming, but adequate legislation to counter this was not drawn up. So climate change became a climate crisis. In spite of years of warnings from the World Health Organisation, countries made virtually no preparations for a pandemic, so COVID-19 became a global health crisis.

This tendency to postpone problems is reinforced by the belief in market forces that has been dominant in Western democracies for the last forty years. As a result, private parties, through intensive lobbying (and in the Netherlands through the 'polder' (consensus) model), have significant influence over democratic decision-making. They succeed, for example, in delaying or preventing disagreeable policies with the argument that measures would be detrimental to their operations and therefore to the economy — in the short term, of course.

Guardians of the future

This short-sightedness, however, is not a law of nature. Democracies can take the



long term into account, by appointing ‘guardians of the future’, for example. As far back as 1993, for example, the Finnish parliament set up a ‘Committee for the Future’, which evaluates policy proposals and technological developments for their long-term impact. And, in 2016, the Welsh government created a ‘Commissioner for Future Generations’, who advises government bodies and checks that new policy is consistent with the interests of future generations of Welsh people.

An important feature of these kinds of roles is that they function in an integrated way, across what are often segregated ministries. The main weakness is that, as things stand,

they have little authority. Moreover, if democracies want to take more account of the future, not only must they make democratic institutions more future aware, but they must also trust their citizens. Because, in spite of the popular belief that citizens mainly consider their own interests and people are ‘naturally’ focused on the short term, in practice that does not seem to be the case.

The forward-looking perspective of a citizens’ assembly

The practice can be seen in ever more countries and municipalities: politicians enlisting the help of citizens to tackle complex long-term issues. For example, among others, France, Scotland, Denmark, Spain and

Luxembourg organised a national citizens’ assembly on climate policy. These citizens’ assemblies comprise of around a hundred and fifty citizens who constitute a reflection of society. People cannot put themselves forward for a citizens’ assembly, they are

invited through a weighted lottery. This lottery produces a group of people from all over the country, with all possible ages, levels of education and opinion.

These individuals meet for a minimum of five days to discuss the topic among themselves and with experts. This discussion is not a debate but rather a dialogue, in which people try to understand rather than persuade each other. Although dialogues can get quite heated, with this form of communication, people seem to be very good at looking beyond cultural or political differences, beyond personal interests and ... beyond their own generation. Within a few months, these citizens come up with feasible, constructive recommendations that take the future into account.

For the time being, in the Netherlands, citizens’ assemblies only take place at local level. A recent example is the municipality of Borsele, where residents have defined the conditions for the construction of a new nuclear power station through a citizens’ assembly. A remarkable recommendation: don’t build temporary accommodation for the people who will be working on building the power station for the next fifteen years, build a sustainable neighbourhood and, in the future, give young residents of Borsele priority to the homes in it. That way, the residents immediately also found a solution to the future housing shortage. The municipality will use these recommendations as a point of departure in the negotiations with Central Government.

Globally, citizens’ assemblies are demonstrating that citizens are the key to a less short-sighted democracy. Citizens don’t need to win any elections and appear to value ►►

“The Seven Generations principle of the Iroquois people: what is the right thing to do, according to the seven generations that came before them and the seven generations that will come after them.”

Main article



About Eva Rovers

Alumna Eva Rovers studied art history in Utrecht and obtained a PhD from the University of Groningen. She is director of the citizens' assemblies organisation Bureau Burgerberaad and an author of non-fiction books. As an expert in the field of democratic renewal, she regularly appears in the media, and at conferences and festivals such as Lowlands and Brainwash.

► shared interests more than market forces. This regularly leads to choices that go against their own interests or wishes — such as paying more tax (Scotland) or a lower maximum speed (France) — but which benefit future generations.

The wisdom of seven generations

And this impact of citizens' assemblies can be strengthened further. Japanese economist Tatsuyoshi Saijo (University of Osaka) has developed Future Design, a method of decision-making that increases people's 'futarability'. He was inspired by the Seven Generations principle of the Iroquois people. When making important decisions, these native North Americans consider what is the right thing to do, according to the seven generations that came before them and the seven generations that will come after them.

Future Design allows people not only to consider future interests, it also allows them to speak on behalf of others from the future. An example is the town of Yahaba, which wanted to produce an urban development plan up to the year 2060. Saijo organised five meetings with

residents from all over the town. They were divided into a 'present group' and a 'future group', which were not different from each other in any way, other than the fact that those in the second group wore a yellow kimono. This symbolised that they were representing the residents of 2060.

During the first meetings the groups only talked to each other about the development of the town and drew up a list of policy measures. The 'present group' developed measures that mainly took into account the needs and limitations that they knew from the present-day. These were mainly measures that would improve existing systems, and they gave the highest priority to measures that would have an immediate impact.

The future group, on the other hand, formulated a more creative and innovation vision, which specifically took into account the quality of life in 2060. These residents took socio-economic and democratic changes into account in their measures, whereas the present group hardly considered this. The future group also prioritised measures that set to work on long-term problems at an early stage but without forgetting the interests of current generations.

The future-focused society

A democracy that cares about future generations calls for a future-focused society. We can all exercise this 'futarability', it's not difficult to do. Put a pair of children's shoes on your desk as a symbol of unborn generations. Not only will they remind you to step into their shoes from time to time, they will also be sure to spark a conversation about the well-being of those future children with anyone who comes over to your desk. ◀

“The position of women fascinates me”

text **Madeleijn van den Nieuwenhuijzen**
image **Tatjana Almulj**

The day after Trump won the election in 2016 things were remarkably quiet in progressive New York. Taxis barely hooted, in the bagel shop below my apartment there was none of the usual daily banter — the city was in shock. In the years that followed, I saw the US become more conservative.

The most impactful change actually took place within the judiciary. Trump managed to put forward three conservative judges in the nine-member Supreme Court. The same Supreme Court that recently abolished the universal right to abortion. Trump’s legacy goes far beyond his political career, whether he wins or loses in 2024.

There are many things wrong with Dutch politics — from the scandalous practices at the tax and customs administration to the hate that female politicians in particular can face. But if you live in the US, you realise that things can always be worse! Together with thousands of other New Yorkers, I protested in Union Square against the overturning of the right to abortion. To no avail.

The position of women in society fascinates me — not only because it affects me personally but also because it illustrates just how

“I try to establish how inequalities have arisen”

persistent the echoes of cultural and legal inequality are. From subtle stereotyping in the media, which I draw attention to in Zeikschrift, to derogatory remarks about ‘part-time princesses’. What is generally lacking is a historical awareness. Of the fact that, up to 1956, the Dutch government female employees on the day they got married. That, for centuries, legislation has prevented women from accumulating financial assets, which means that the distribution of assets and start-up capital for entrepreneurship is still divided entirely along gender lines. I try, in everything I do, to establish how such inequalities have arisen and how they continue to have an impact today. Interspersed with cream cheese bagels for motivation. «



Madeleijn van den Nieuwenhuijzen

is a legal historian and is mainly known as the founder of the media-critical Insta account @Zeikschrift. She graduated with Distinction from University College Utrecht and is currently working on her PhD at the City University of New York, where she is conducting research around emancipation, employment and women’s rights. In 2022, she published ‘Leven en laten leven: een gedachte-wisseling over abortus en zelfbeschikking’ (*Live and let live: an exchange of ideas around abortion and self-determination*).

madeleijn.nl

1980s



2001

graduation
from Erasmus
University
Rotterdam.

Make choices out of curiosity

After a management role, can I ever go back to education and research? This is one of the questions that Elaine Mak considered before applying for the role of dean. She took the plunge and, since September, she has been at the helm of the Faculty of Law, Economics and Governance (REBO).

“Maybe after I’ve been a dean I’ll want to do something completely different but, luckily, the University is committed to giving people the opportunity to switch between different activities and career paths.

Who knows, maybe I’ll soon be an example of someone who’s successfully managed to switch between management, research and education.”

Three professors of law

If it was a book or film it would be a bit far-fetched but for Elaine it’s a reality: she is one of identical triplets and all three sisters are professors of law. All in different cities. “It’s brilliant fun having two sisters the same age as me. But it’s also good, and in some ways liberating, that we’ve all gone our own separate ways. When I was young I wanted to be a housewife, probably because I saw how my mother ran a busy household with five children.” But when her father took up studying at the age of forty and started his own law firm, it sparked in Elaine an interest in law.

text Hanneke Olivier
image Bas van Hattum

2003

Master's from Panthéon-Sorbonne University in Paris



2008

PhD from Erasmus University Rotterdam



2016

appointment as professor at Utrecht University



2023

appointment as dean of the Faculty of Law, Economics and Governance at Utrecht University



A PhD, what's that?

At secondary school a chemistry teacher tried to encourage the sisters to study materials science but Elaine knew what she wanted to do. "I wanted to do something that involved people. And law was ideal for that. During my studies it became clear that I had a fairly academic bent — the Bar was not really for me. As a student assistant I was asked if I'd ever thought about doing a PhD. A PhD? What's that? I had no idea. But I found research increasingly interesting."

Contact really motivates me

"Partly because PhD candidates often came to me with their stories, once I had obtained my PhD I was asked to be a PhD dean, a kind of confidential adviser. Sometimes you can only help people further by listening to what they have to say and letting them work out for themselves what they are aiming for. Contact really motivates me and it's a common thread that run through everything I do."

When I'm sitting in the tram in Rotterdam in the morning and I see a series of meetings in my diary, I think: this is going to be a long day. But I always come out happy and with more energy. Clearly, there are also more difficult conversations to be had. Everyone needs to get things off their chest sometimes and I think the dean is the right person to turn to. But eventually you have to get down to it and I move things forward in a constructive way. In my current role I'm no longer as approachable as I'd like to be. But I think it's important that people can access the faculty board easily and don't feel distanced from it. I do my best to ensure that that's the case."

A bit more chilled

Dean, ongoing teaching and research tasks and deputy councillor in criminal cases at the court in The Hague: with such a full schedule, how do you ensure that you get enough relaxation? "I like going out with friends and family for a meal or a walk or going to the cinema. And I also think it's fine sometimes just to be at home and not do a lot. During the pandemic I also took up knitting again. During Teams meetings, when I was off camera, I sometimes sat there knitting, very relaxing. I already have a whole pile of jumpers, and last year I hosted a workshop in the REBO faculty."

"I think it's important that people don't feel distanced"

Apart from knitting, do you have any advice to give students? "I've noticed that students are often extremely socially aware and want to contribute something to society, but also that they take their studies very seriously and like to study as quickly as possible. I think this is great and is characteristic of our times. But perhaps they just need to be a bit more chilled sometimes. So my advice is this: enjoy life and make choices out of curiosity, not based on what you think a future employer is looking for." «

“Focus on consumption is untenable”

text Esther Alberts
image private collection
Nick Dessens

Illustrator talked to Nick Dessens and Ernst Worrell about the Global South Impact Fund, which they set up together. The fund is part of the Utrecht University Fund.

Nick Dessens, entrepreneur and alumnus of Utrecht University, saw with his own eyes, while studying abroad as a student, how unfairly the climate burdens in the world are shared. People who contribute the least to this climate change are the biggest victims of it. Local communities are faced with flooding and heat stress, lose their homes and see harvests fail. People lose their source of income, sink ever deeper into poverty and go hungry. Although Nick is the first to admit that his own carbon footprint is too high because of the flying that he does, he is determined to make a difference globally. “The West has achieved a standard of living that, with today’s technologies, is already not sustainable, and which certainly won’t be as larger groups of people reach that standard.”

Time at university?

We asked Nick what influence his time at university has had on him. He says that it was mainly the international experiences that he had during that

time that opened his eyes: “Going somewhere on holiday is totally different to living somewhere and working with local people. My time in developing countries made it clear to me just how complex many issues are. For example, I worked on the Methane Capture Project at a waste disposal site in India. Methane is one of the most important greenhouse gases that contribute to climate change. Capturing it and using it reduces the impact on climate. On paper it was a fantastic project with nothing but advantages, but when you go to a location like this yourself, you see all around you people who indirectly live off this huge mountain of waste. Capturing methane means that these people, who already have so little, have to leave where they are and build a new life for themselves. Clearly, there are good solutions here, but at the time it made clear to me the impact of projects in practice; the difference between theory and practice.”

Why the fund?

Through his company NIDO Nick builds bio-based houses: homes that are built using a fast, clean building process in which they store CO₂ rather than emitting it. “I want to make a difference on a larger scale, not only in the Netherlands but globally. That’s why I set up this fund, together with Ernst Worrell (Professor of Energy and Raw Materials at Utrecht University — ed.). To work with students towards a better future.” The fund



Source: flightradar24.com

focuses on the energy transition because the efficient use of raw materials and the move from conventional fuels to more environmentally friendly energy sources is crucial if you want to make a difference in terms of climate change and economic development. “Take the concept of ‘technological leapfrogging’, for example.” ‘Leapfrogging’? “Yes, this means that you jump ahead with innovation and miss out unnecessary interim steps. Does a particular region need more energy? Opt for solar or wind power straight away. That way you miss out the conventional, polluting construction of coal and/or gas power stations. That is just one example, there are many other applications where you miss out the polluting phase. We have these technologies available to us, it’s just that they’re taking far too long to reach the Global South. It’s such a shame.” According to Nick, students are the key to a better future. They are the ones who can take their knowledge and the practical solutions to the areas of the world that so badly need our help.

When is it a success?

“For me it’s a success if we can implement projects that actually make a difference to the people in the Global South, that have an impact. And for the climate too. I hope more people will join us and contribute to the fund so we can support lots of projects.” Ernst Worrell: Here at Utrecht University, we want to work with students from all over the world, with different knowledge, input and backgrounds. It’s brilliant that we can do such important work through this.” Nick: “I recently spoke to a fellow

entrepreneur in Overijssel. He has an agricultural business and is currently improving the drainage of his fields with expensive equipment. Five years ago he thought it was something that would never happen, this year he regards it as a major item of expenditure in the budget. It is clear that global warming is more than just high temperatures. The whole of the climate is changing: it’s more extreme, more turbulent, more unpredictable. Over the next few years it’s going to affect everyone, and we won’t get anywhere if we just focus on the West.”

Individualism

Greta Thunberg says: ‘We are all in the same storm, but we are not all in the same boat. There are three billion people on the earth who consume less energy per year than an average American refrigerator.’ What does he think about this quote? “I can’t argue with that. I believe that in fact everyone has an equal right to pollute. Imagine if you could redistribute prosperity in this way? Imagine if you could build a global system of CO₂ credits? Give everyone the same number of credits. If you eat a lot of meat or you fly a lot, you can buy more credits from someone who’s within their budget. Someone from India, for example. This, in essence, is a fair and equitable solution. My only fear is that it is not practically feasible for this generation.” ◀



Nick Dessens

Nick Dessens began studying for his Bachelor’s in Innovation management at Utrecht University in 2003. He took a minor in Materials Science at the University of Florida and did a Master’s in Energy Science at Tshwane University of Technology in South Africa. Through his company NIDO he builds bio-based homes and his company Accu’t focuses on the reuse of old batteries from electric cars.



Ernst Worrell

Ernst Worrell is Professor of Energy and Raw Materials at the Copernicus Institute of Sustainable Development at Utrecht University. After graduating with a degree in Chemistry, he worked on sustainable use of energy and materials in various locations worldwide. Ernst has been a professor at Utrecht University since 2008.

Want to help?

The Utrecht University Fund is proud of this unique fund set up by Nick Dessens and Ernst Worrell. It helps students make a difference by contributing in a practical way to the energy transition in the countries of the Global South. Inspired by the story of the Global South Impact Fund and want to contribute? Learn more at:



RESEARCHER IN IRAQ

5 questions for Jeffrey Quarsie

Jeffrey Quarsie, UMCU PhD candidate, researches how the environmental effects of a war affect children's health. He is one of the researchers who, thanks to financial support from the RechtOpLeren Funds, can pursue his academic research.

text **Esther Alberts**
image **private collection**
Jeffrey Quarsie

What exactly do you research? Since 2003, far more babies with congenital abnormalities are being born in Iraq. Doctors there think the war has something to do with it. Many hazardous substances, such as metals from bombardments, end up in rivers, soil and the air. My research focuses on children in Iraq but

may also be of interest for children in other war zones.

What was your first reaction when you heard that you had been awarded a grant from the RechtOpLeren (Right to learn) Fund? When I opened the email, I fell off my chair and started cheering! This grant will enable me to continue my research for the benefit of vulnerable women and children in war zones.

What difficulties do you encounter and how do you deal with them? I sometimes find it hard that it takes so long to get

results. Sometimes you wonder if you'll ever see a result. At times like that I try to focus on the fact that every small step ultimately leads to a bigger result.

Did you ever get wise advice that you still think back to now? When I was doing a placement in India there was a doctor, a very passionate man, who gave me wise advice. He told me I shouldn't choose a life that focused on external success. The most important thing was to live a life that made a difference to others. That is still the main driver in the decisions that I make.

What does your family think about you doing academic research? My mother wasn't very happy when I told her that I was going to Iraq for my research. Because clearly it's still a country where there's no real guarantee of safety. And although my family don't always understand why I enjoy doing research so much, they still give me their full support! «



Design Thinking:

a practical approach to innovation in the workplace

The world is evolving rapidly and, clearly, as a professional you want to keep up. Our Continuing Education offer provides you with the right knowledge, tools and network to deal with new challenges in your work. From short courses to full Master's, at Utrecht University you can learn on a lifelong basis. In the spotlight today: the Design Thinking course.

text **Esther Alberts**

Design Thinking is a method for solving difficult problems by thinking like a designer. The 'Design Thinking doorgronden en toepassen' (Understanding and applying Design Thinking) course is delivered by Anne van Ewijk, an experienced lecturer with a passion for innovation.

Through the course, Anne demonstrates that Design Thinking is not just a method but a way of thinking. Anne: "It's a complicated process but it's a flexible approach that focuses on involving stakeholders, so you really understand what people need. You then come up with a number of practical solutions that you test straight away before they are completely ready. By looking and listening carefully you discover what works and what doesn't. It's a process that encourages creativity and collaboration."

The most powerful aspect of Design Thinking is that it enables you to gather relevant information quickly, while at the same time generating support. This method doesn't produce recommendations, it produces real solutions or, if they don't exist, in any event important insights that can take you forward. If you don't think that empathy, creativity and interaction are really your thing, the Design Thinking course will give you the techniques and exercises that you need to develop these qualities and apply them directly in your day-to-day work.

Do you too want to keep learning?

Visit uu.nl/professionals for our full range of Continuing Education programmes.

Practical example: "Design Thinking gets the ball rolling"

Sarah is a professional who took Anne's course. "I used the method when informing asylum seekers and status holders about paid work in the Netherlands. I used the steps to explain the problem, come up with different solutions and produce a prototype from these solutions. The method seemed to help stakeholders feel more involved, it allowed colleagues to use their creativity and it enabled me to try out a solution in a pragmatic way. It definitely gets the ball rolling!"

6 June 2024: free sample Design Thinking lecture during the Sharing Days

Want to learn more about this method, which can help you tackle difficult issues in the workplace and use your creativity in the process? Why not attend the sample lecture during the Sharing Days on Thursday 6 June at 17:00?

uu.nl/sharingdays

RENTING FROM A LANDLADY

Back with a vengeance: the landlady

1982 It seems as though there has always been a shortage of accommodation for students. In the 1980s it was common for students to rent a room from a landlady.

It was handy for the student and it provided a modest additional income for the landlady. On this photo you can see Mrs. A. Groenewoud-de Oude celebrating 50 years (!) as landlady of the student house Ramstraat 17 in Utrecht. Behind her, from left to right, are her tenants: P.M.R. Fechner and M.C. van der Poel (Law), J.D.S. Gaastra (Veterinary Medicine), H.J. van Unen (Medicine) and N.J. Salomonsen (Law). It seems that tenants and landlady were very happy with each other.

2024 A lot has changed for students since the 1980s, but the shortage of rooms remains the same. It appears, therefore, that the number of students renting a room from a 'landlady' (or host) has been on the rise for several years now. What's more, in Utrecht, there is even a company for this. Hospi Housing was set up in 2018 as a wild and idealistic idea of three friends, two of whom were former students of Utrecht University. They now call themselves a social enterprise and are active throughout the Netherlands. They look for suitable accommodation with friendly hosts and facilitate the right match between host and student through their online system. The match between tenant Celestia (left) from Canada and host Sanna has definitely been a success. Celestia graduated with a Master's in European law last year but the two of them still chat with each other on Whatsapp.

text The Utrecht Archives/ Ulrike Schmidt
top image M. Kooren (Utrechts Nieuwsblad/
DPG Media), through The Utrecht Archives)
bottom image Martine Jansen



I have a huge need for affirmation,

that's why I'm a comedian

text Vera Seriese
image Jaap Joris Vens



Andries Tunru (33)

is a comedian and improv actor. He has won awards at three different comedy festivals and caused a storm on Lingo, Dumpert and De Slimste Mens, where he came second. He is currently touring with his third solo show 'Marmer' and as half of the improvisation duo 'Beperkt Houdbaar'. He is also a permanent member of the comedy team Spijkers met Koppen and one of the men behind the podcast 'Radio Willekeur'. Andries studied Social Psychology at Utrecht University and obtained a degree in comedy from the Koninkstheateracademie in Den Bosch. If he hadn't become a comedian he might have been a policeman. "I like telling other people what to do, haha!"

He studied Social Psychology at Utrecht University but knew from a young age that he wanted to be a comedian. "At that time I still listened to my parents, who thought that I should go to university", says comedian Andries Tunru, laughing. He expresses his fascination with human behaviour and group dynamics on the stage, that's where he belongs. "Being on stage really is the best thing in the world. You can't get much more independent in terms of a job than that, I don't think. I can do whatever I want in my career and I can take advice on board. Or otherwise. It's fantastic."

So, when asked whether he is sensitive to authority, he doesn't need long to reflect: "Absolutely, it puts my back up. If someone starts a sentence with 'You have to ...' I switch off. I don't have to do anything, I think. And people buy a ticket to my show because they like the fact that I say what I want, so that's important. At the same time, in today's society people have more

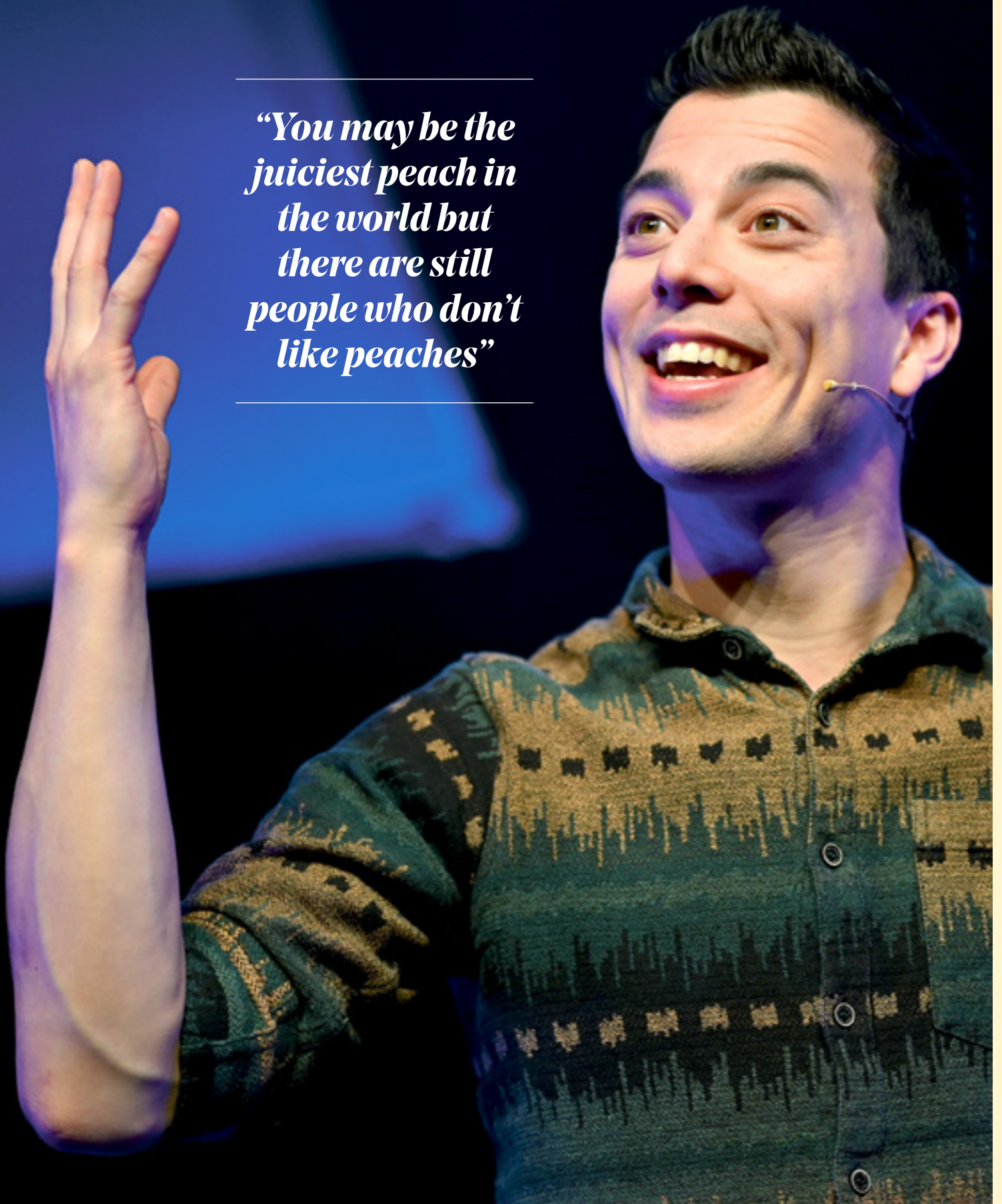
access to information and can put forward an alternative view, and let me know if I say something that's not right. I think that's good too."

He can't deny that he can also feel hugely vulnerable, alone on the stage, with all eyes on him. "Comedy is so hyper-personal. I stand there as myself, sometimes a bit magnified or a bit accentuated, but in principle I tell stories from my own life, in a way that I find funny or interesting. So if it doesn't resonate with the audience, it feels like a rejection of the very person that I am. After all, one of the reasons I do comedy is that I have a huge need for affirmation." But luckily you get used to it.

And now ...

Nowadays he has enough self-confidence to realise that there are plenty of people who find him really funny. "You may be the juiciest peach in the world but there are still people who don't like peaches." That should be a slogan on a coaster. ◀

*“You may be the
juiciest peach in
the world but
there are still
people who don’t
like peaches”*



Tips



FESTIVAL EUROPA

Politics, literature, music and science

Just before the European elections, Utrecht University, together with Utrecht Library, is organising 'Festival Europa'. With, among others, Sander Schimmelpenninck, Lise Witteman (Follow the Money), De Kiesmannen (leaders debate and comedy) and musician Blaudzun. The programme is being drawn up by three researchers from the Faculty of Law: Dave van Toor, Pauline Phoa and Hanneke van Eijken. The festival will start at 16:00 on 31 May. Access is free of charge but please sign up. Come and listen and have your say. What kind of Europe do you want?

uu.nl/festivaleuropa

FACULTY CLUB

The rule of law and Europe

Following Part 1 of the Trilogy of the rule of law — 'De rechter en de psychiater' (The judge and the psychiatrist) — now comes Part 2. Where are we at with the rule of law and where are things headed? Come to the Faculty Club on 28 May and have your say.



Scan the QR code to register.

SCIENCE

Utrecht Science Week

Utrecht Science Week is back, from 27 September to 6 October, with a varied programme of lectures, debates and tours on sustainability and healthy living. The programme also includes the Betweter Festival, the Weekend of Science and Sustainability Day.

utrechtscienceweek.nl

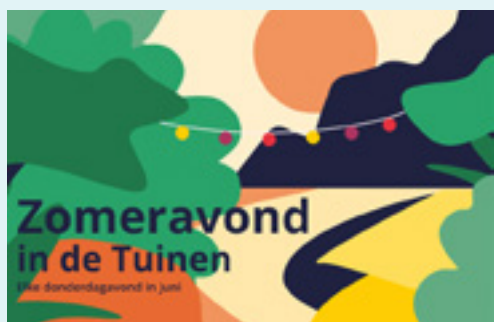
LIFELONG LEARNING

Utrecht Summer School



Utrecht Summer School is one of the largest academic summer schools in Europe and the programme for summer 2024 can be found at utrechtsummerschool.nl. Some 165 courses will be provided for students, PhD candidates, postdocs and professionals. Everything from Humanities to Social Sciences, Art & Design to Business, Law and Economics and Life Sciences.

utrechtsummerschool.nl



NATURE

Summer evening in the Gardens

The Botanic Gardens at sunset is a magical place. So, every Thursday evening in June, the Gardens will be open late. Wander through the tranquil gardens, observe the empty campus from the Rock Garden, take a seat on our terrace for a snack and a drink or settle down on the grass with a picnic hamper. Open until 22:00 every Thursday evening in June.

uu.nl/botanischetuinen

SCIENCE FOR CHILDREN

Kennis-Knetters

Can you play football with robots? Why are there no dinosaurs any more? And how do you know if something is true or not? Discover the answers to these questions together with researchers during the first edition of KennisKnetters. This initiative from TivoliVredenburg is being organised in conjunction with Utrecht University and the University Museum. Do you and your children/grandchildren, aged 8 and above, fancy a day full of discoveries, experiments and surprises? If so, put Sunday 26 May, from 12:00 to 16:00, in your diary.

uu.nl/agenda/kennisknetters



Film series Science & Fiction: 'Europe challenged'

USG and cinema Louis Hartlooper Complex are organising the thirteenth edition of the film series Science & Fiction. The theme of the films is 'Europe challenged', they will be introduced by scientists.

14 and 28 May, 11 and 25 June 2024
uu.nl/usbo/sciencefiction

Dialogue dinner: gender identity

Are we focusing too much on gender? What does science have to say? Historian Professor Geertje Mak on gender identity. **10 June from 18:30, €34.50. More information and to book: sg.uu.nl/agenda/2024**

Utrecht Chemistry Club reunion

The Reunion Association of Utrecht University Chemistry Club (UCC-R) is organising a meeting for its members on **14 October 2024 from 15:30** in the Belle van Zuylen Room in University Hall. Following a talk by Professor Bert Klein Gebbink, there will be a general meeting of members, with drinks and dinner. **For more information and to register, please email j.p.kamerling@uu.nl**

2nd anniversary of Hofvijverkring

The Hofvijverkring is a fund that was set up by alumni to provide support to researchers. It will celebrate its 2nd anniversary on **3 October 2024**. Personal invitations will follow. **More info from l.emmen@uu.nl**

uu.nl/alumni/agenda

Democracy and me

A historic victory: 37 seats for the PVV. A wiser person would have adjusted their worldview following the Brexit referendum and Trump's victory, but that scares me. In the Netherlands too there is a broadly held right-wing sentiment that I find hard to identify with. It's time to talk about democracy.

My support for democracy appears to be fluid. When I read that the majority of secondary school pupils would vote for the FVD, my enthusiasm for young people's right to vote waned somewhat. At parties, I increasingly hear conversations about who should actually have the right to vote. I take part in these conversations, in fact I'm often the one who initiates them. It is my version of the storming of the Capitol, slightly less illegal but perhaps just as harmful to democracy.

And I want to stop this. Not expressing my own political preference but totally dismissing a voice that I don't agree with. I still believe in the importance of climate action and I don't believe

that a right-wing government will do a lot to help that problem, so I vote for the Left. I worry about the future. That doesn't make me a better person, it just makes me a privileged person: in my own life I don't expect to face that many problems over the next 50 years. I'm not a farmer, I'm not a parent on benefits, I own my own home.

I trust the system that has looked after me so well over all that time. So, here are my resolutions for this year: I'll stop being so polarised in my views, I'll no longer make jokes about taking away someone's right to vote and I'll no longer doubt democracy. In 2024, I'll leave the exclusion of sections of society to the PVV.

Tim Kroezen

Tim obtained his BSc in Life Sciences from University College Utrecht in 2013, followed by an MSc in Energy Science from Utrecht University. In 2022, he won the Groningen Student Cabaret Festival. [timkroezen.nl](https://www.timkroezen.nl)

