



Maastricht University

FASoS Research Institute Scientific Report 2020

FASoS



Content

Introduction	4
Programmes and Centres	6
Science and the oil industry: an intimate relationship / Interview Cyrus Mody	10
Information control: social media and beyond / Interview Mariëlle Wijermars	14
Facts and Figures	18
“The term ‘foreigner’ does not necessarily have a negative connotation” / Interview Pomme van de Weerd	20
Well-being, women and work in Ethiopia / Interview Bilisuma Dito, Elsje Fourie and Konjit Gudeta	24
Outreach	28

Introduction



The Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences (FASoS), Maastricht University is dedicated to analysing the development of societies and cultures as they have unfolded during the modern and contemporary era. We do so in an explicitly interdisciplinary way.

We also often work together with other societal partners from the region, country and from around the world. Researchers at FASoS study interrelationships between Europeanisation and globalisation, scientific and technological development, and cultural and political transformation and innovation. There is a strong focus on the historical dimensions of these processes, though we also pay attention to the ways in which imaginaries of the future may affect the present.

FASoS researchers investigate how the societies of today and of the past respond to these political, cultural and technoscientific developments. Some of the phenomena studied by FASoS researchers include:

- artistic practices, forms of remembrance, and cultural ideologies;
- governance, co-operation, and integration at EU and global levels;

- collaborative practices, knowledge networks and embodied expertise in research and innovation;
- emerging and changing linkages between people, goods, capital and ideas across the globe.

Our research creates deep understanding of pressing societal issues from an interdisciplinary perspective. The breadth of expertise from different fields in the humanities and the social sciences, united in one faculty, makes us distinctive in the ways we do research.

The year 2020 was challenging for everyone around the world. The pandemic meant that those of us working in universities have worked largely from home. Conferences were postponed or cancelled. Access to libraries and archives has sometimes been impossible. Colleagues have missed the intellectual stimulation that comes from talking face-to-face with colleagues, students, and support staff. Digitally mediated forms of communication have helped us to continue our teaching and research but they have not always been adequate for capturing nuance of meaning.

Despite these difficulties, FASoS researchers have had a very productive year, and we are happy to share some of the highlights here. The pandemic also created opportunities, both methodologically and substantively.

In this booklet, we present an overview of our research programmes and centres. We are also pleased to present short interviews with a few of our talented researchers to provide more insight into some ongoing projects.

Our full 2020 annual research report is also available on [our website](#).

A vibrant, interdisciplinary, and collegial research culture makes FASoS an attractive place for students and colleagues to study and to work. We look forward to meeting each other and the wider communities interested in our work in 2021.

Prof. dr. Sally Wyatt
Associate Dean for Research

Research Programmes



Arts, Media and Culture

Arts, Media and Culture (AMC) analyses the dynamics of cultural change by studying how developments in the arts and the media respond to socio-cultural and political changes and also how cultural artifacts and practices shape social and political cultures. Research focuses on the practices in which cultural artifacts are produced, distributed, and received. Approaching these topics from an interdisciplinary angle, the group's research draws on insights from art and philosophy, literary and media studies, cultural history, and gender studies, as well as the social sciences.

Globalisation, Transnationalism and Development

Globalisation, Transnationalism and Development (GTD) studies globalisation through the flows of people, goods, capital and ideas that connect localities in the Global South and between Global South and North. Its two foci are transnational migration bridging migrant sending and receiving contexts and transnational exchanges for development focusing on the way political elites and global capital influence how development is thought about and conducted. It draws on expertise in development studies, anthropology, sociology, human geography, and political science. Projects are multi-sited, mixed-method, and grounded in fieldwork.

Maastricht University Science, Technology and Society Studies

Maastricht University Science, Technology and Society Studies (MUSTS) studies how modern societies are shaped by science and technology; and vice versa, how social and cultural conditions shape technological innovations and scientific discoveries. It draws on a combination of philosophical, historical, sociological, and anthropological approaches, focusing on cultures of research and innovation. The analysis typically moves between micro-level studies of local practices and macro-level questions of governance, policy, and morality, making it relevant for policy makers, academic debates, and society at large.

Politics and Culture in Europe

Politics and Culture in Europe (PCE) brings together political scientists, historians, and philosophers with an interest in Europe. The process of European integration since 1945 and questions of European democracy, governance, and foreign policy are central to the research agenda. Researchers study the European Union and Europeanisation, contribute to debates on multilateralism and the global order, and take an interest in transnational history. Methodologically rigorous, the emphasis of PCE is on fundamental research with societal relevance.

Research Centres

The faculty is home to five dedicated research centres. These centres act as hubs to bring together researchers from FASoS and other UM faculties. They also facilitate interaction with external academic and societal partners.

[Centre for European Research in Maastricht](#)

The Centre for European Research in Maastricht (CERiM) provides substantial input to the UM's focal point of *Europe and a Globalising World*. CERiM is an interdisciplinary research venue creating synergies and stimulating joint projects between political scientists, historians, lawyers, and economists analysing the past and future of European and international cooperation in a changing global order.

[Maastricht Centre for Citizenship, Migration and Development](#)

The Maastricht Centre for Citizenship, Migration and Development (MACIMIDE) brings together scholars working on migration from legal, citizenship, development, and family life perspectives. Researchers study the dynamics of transnational migration and mobility in a European and global context.

[Centre for Gender and Diversity](#)

The Centre for Gender and Diversity (CGD) studies the intersections between gender/age, and gender/religion, with a focus on the arts. Its researchers study art forms from high and popular culture, including fiction, poetry, film, photography, life-writing, performing arts, and children's media.

[Maastricht Centre for Arts, Culture, Conservation and Heritage](#)

The Maastricht Centre for Arts, Culture, Conservation and Heritage (MACCH) brings together (art) historical, philosophical, sociological, economic, legal, and practical expertise in response to the increasingly complex challenges facing the fields of arts and heritage today.

[Centre for the Social History of Limburg](#)

The Centre for the Social History of Limburg (SHCL) is a documentation and research centre associated with FASoS. It provides expertise and a research infrastructure for comparative regional history by providing access to historical sources, maintaining a library collection, and through its research and publications.

Graduate School

FASoS has its own Graduate School that provides training for PhD candidates associated with all of the research programmes. In 2020, we had 41 internal candidates. We also welcome external PhDs, and currently have 54.



In the Aula of Maastricht University, our PhD candidates defend their dissertations. In 2020, 10 PhD candidates received their doctoral titles here.



Science and the oil industry: an intimate relationship

Cyrus Mody



This interview was adapted to fit the layout of this report. For the full interview, please see [here](#).

"If we want a transition to a more sustainable world, and develop new technologies and alternative energy sources to become less dependent on oil, we have to realise that the oil industry itself is deeply intertwined with scientific research and innovation," says Cyrus Mody, professor of History of Science and Technology. "And that sector is not exactly raring to embrace a sustainable economy." This, in a nutshell, is the dilemma of the entanglement between science and the oil industry. It is also one of the pillars of Cyrus's research on how to deal with sustainability in times of scarcity, for which he received a Vici grant from the Dutch Research Council (NWO).

To date, Cyrus has mainly focused on the history of nanotechnology and related areas. "The oil industry kept popping up in my research, either in the form of funding or in the training of researchers. For example, I studied the early biotech companies that used nanotechnology and genetic engineering. The histories of major biotechnology companies always seemed to have a section buried somewhere in the middle stating that the starting capital mainly came from the oil industry. Just like that, no further comment. This was the case for three of the four major companies in that sector: Amgen, Hybritech and Cetus. So the oil industry had a major influence in biotechnology right from the outset." >>

Why did the oil industry invest so much money in biotechnology?

"That's one of my research questions. My hypothesis is that after the 1973 oil crisis – from which the oil industry greatly profited – they had a lot of money lying around that they were keen to spend. Biotechnology was just emerging at that time, so it seemed like a good investment. It also had the potential to contribute to technologies of interest to the oil industry. For example, genetically engineered organisms were proposed as a way to break up oil shale to make it easier to extract oil from rock. There were also proposals to genetically engineer trees, algae, and other organisms that could be used as biofuels. Those plans complemented oil firms' other investments in alternative energy at the time, particularly in solar, nuclear, and geothermal energy. In the 1970s, when oil was scarce, the oil industry was naturally very interested in alternative energy sources, but in the 1980s this interest waned. In the 1990s, many oil companies claimed to be interested in alternatives again, but it's unclear how sincere this interest was. If you look carefully at their plans, you can see that they were – and still are – planning to extract oil for decades to come."

What are you hoping to find in your research?

"I'm hoping to discover all sorts of unexpected things, but what I'm quite certain we'll be able to demonstrate is that the oil industry is much more involved in the development of new technologies than we think. Not only the oil industry's money is important for scientific research; so too is the training it provides. Many key researchers have spent part of their careers in the oil industry, which influences what is studied and how it is studied. Usually this influence is seen in a negative light: they undermine the climate debate, they promote climate change denial.

They've done that too, and we'll certainly look at that in this project – for example, how the oil industry retreated from and even undermined solar energy in the 1980s. But they've also done a great deal of good for science, and contributed to many fantastic discoveries. One of the Nobel Prize winners for chemistry for 2019 has spent much of his life working in the oil industry. He worked on the lithium ion battery, a rechargeable battery often used in mobile phones, laptops and electric vehicles. We have to give them credit for that. But if we want a more sustainable society, with a sound innovation system and research infrastructure, we'll need to find alternatives to make up for the contributions the oil industry has made." <<





Information control: social media and beyond



This interview was adapted to fit the layout of this report. For the full interview, please see [here](#).

Mariëlle Wijermars

Internet surveillance and censorship in Russia, that's what Mariëlle Wijermars focuses on in her research endeavours. "I'm especially interested in the control of information. How do you, as a state, control what information circulates in society? Russia is a perfect case study."

Social media as the battleground of information provision

"To understand who controls information, it is important to look at where the battle for information takes place. About a decade ago, this battle still predominantly took place in the television and newspaper sphere," Mariëlle explains. "State control over information in modern-day Russia started in the early 2000s after Vladimir Putin came to

power. During the Soviet period, the media was state-owned. With the Glasnost and Perestroika politics of Mikhail Gorbachev, slowly more room emerged for freedom of the press. After the Soviet Union dissolved, in the 1990s, the Russian state stepped away from the media and a small elite group of oligarchs took hold of newspapers and TV channels. When Putin came to power, he started a campaign to take power back from the oligarchs, including in the media sphere. Slowly but steadily he nationalised TV channels and established control over most newspapers. Since then, the news has become one-sided again, even though there still are a few exceptions, and Russian state media do not shy away from using propaganda and conspiracy theories." >>

But what might even be more interesting is that a shift in battleground has taken place. “Social media has become an important source of information for Russians and the government now tries to influence what information is shared in popular apps. The Kremlin for example paid influencers on TikTok to dissuade people from joining the protests in support of arrested opposition figure Aleksei Navalny in January 2021.

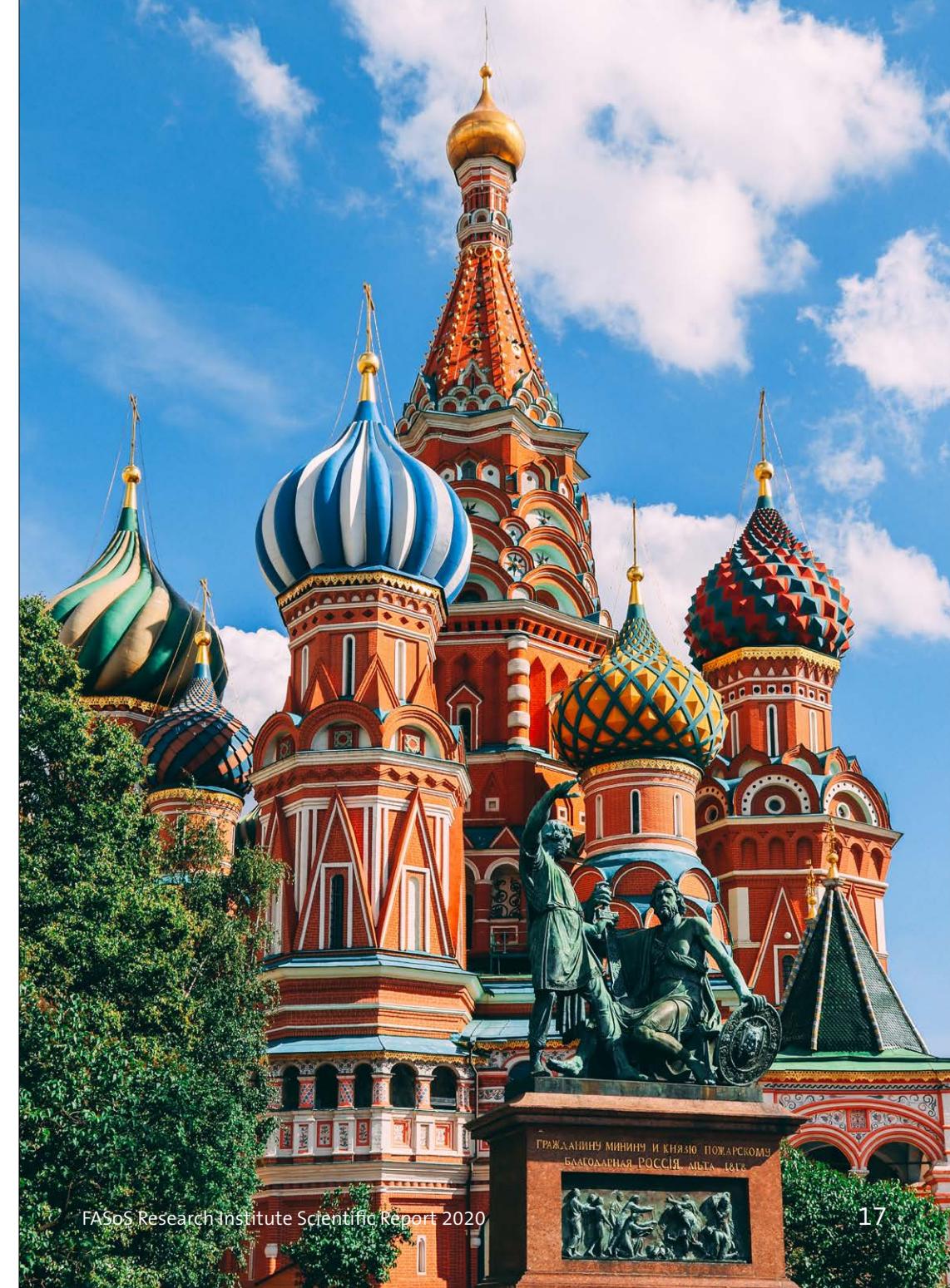
Users of the platform, however, do not know that these influencers are being paid by the Russian government. They think people they identify with really feel this way about the Navalny case and may be influenced by this messaging.” This modern-day propaganda is not limited to paying users of social media apps and actively using the internet in governmental PR, but also includes requiring platforms to take down harmful content, Mariëlle explains.

“It is illegal in Russia to post on social media about suicide or drugs, and negative information about the Kremlin is of course not welcome either. Russian social media platforms such as VKontakte are therefore obliged by law to identify and delete such content, but it’s much more difficult for Russia to force foreign social media apps such as Facebook and Instagram to abide by these rules. That’s why non-Russian social media platforms are so popular among the opposition.”

Importance of social media in protests

The protests in Belarus in 2020 were coined the ‘Telegram Revolution’, wrongly according to Mariëlle. “Dictatorships try to control the stream of information by issuing internet shutdowns, especially around elections. In this way, it becomes much more difficult to organise and coordinate where and when to protest against unfair elections. The protests in Belarus, however, show that an internet shutdown is not enough to keep people off the streets when the situation is urgent. These protests took place on such a large scale that people could simply look out the window and see what was going on – they did not need to see videos on social media from faraway places to know what was happening as their backyard was the battleground.”

“Social media is a great source of information but its importance should not be exaggerated. You can spread information quickly via social media, but more is needed for building a solid group of protesters who do not give up easily. It’s not like you open your Facebook app and start a revolution.” [«](#)



Facts and Figures 2020



Amount of funding received

€ 5,010,039



Academic publications

195



Number of researchers, including PhDs

167



PhDs awarded

10



“The term ‘foreigner’ does not necessarily have a negative connotation”



This interview was adapted to fit the layout of this report. For the full interview, please see [here](#).

Pomme van de Weerd

For her PhD dissertation research, Pomme van de Weerd joined one of the preparatory secondary vocational education classrooms of a high school in Venlo for 9 months. Her intention was to research language diversity at middle schools but along the way, she developed a fascination for ethnic categorisation.

Nederlanders and buitenlanders

The title of Pomme’s PhD dissertation is *‘Nederlanders and buitenlanders: A sociolinguistic-ethnographic study of ethnic categorization among secondary school pupils’*. The choice to leave the words ‘Nederlanders’ (Dutch people) and ‘buitenlanders’ (foreigners) in Dutch while the rest of the title is in English was not an arbitrary

one. “Leaving these words in Dutch and formatting them in italics shows that these words are concepts that are used throughout my dissertation and that I do not aim to provide explanations of what these words mean,” Pomme says. “I did not want to create the idea that I explain what the terms ‘Nederlander’ and ‘buitenlander’ mean in my PhD dissertation because there is not a single definition for these concepts; they have a different meaning to everyone. That is also exactly what I wanted to find out in my dissertation: how pupils in this pre-secondary vocational education classroom use these concepts to describe themselves and others, and what meaning they give to these terms.” >>

The usage of labels

Pomme explains that the terms 'Dutch people' and 'foreigner' mean much more than we often think or than we are told by the media. "When someone calls him/herself 'Moroccan', most people think that this person has not integrated into Dutch society. But my dissertation shows that this is not the case." In her dissertation, Pomme demonstrates that when students with a migration background used labels such as 'Turkish', 'Moroccan' or 'Dutch', they gave a social function to this, for example to create groups within the classroom. "This resembles when I went to school and we differentiated among 'emos', 'nerds' and 'populists'. The youth will always make a distinction between people and contemplate which group they want to belong to, but they use different terms for this."

In her research, Pomme found that labels mean much more than we usually think they do and that these meanings are forged and negotiated in a local context. This negotiation reflects the fact that everyone gives a different meaning to a label. "One student for example thought it was rather logical that when you call yourself Turkish, you are automatically also a Muslim, but this was not the case for another student. They thus all agreed that labels and categories existed, but they all gave different interpretations to these."

Moreover, Pomme uncovered that labels have different functions in different interactions. "Labels were often used as a joke. Students for example said 'that's such a Turkish thing to do!' while what that pupil did at that time of course had nothing to do with Turkey or with being Turkish. But at that moment it was simply viewed as being more funny when it was labelled."

The meaning of labels

Although Pomme sat in the back of the classroom to observe most of the time, she also at times started the conversation with students. "I asked a student who identified herself as Moroccan, for example, if she would like to live in Morocco someday. She firmly said she would not want to because 'those people there are different, they have a different culture'. That verified that labels have a positive meaning for these students and that they can feel very integrated and at home in The Netherlands, even though they call each other and themselves 'Turkish' or 'Moroccan'." <<



“Challenges in the workplace impact the women physically and psychologically.”

Konjit Gudeta



“Some women show agency in using these jobs in a strategic way.”

Elsje Fourie



Well-being, women and work in Ethiopia

Bilisuma Dito, Elsje Fourie and Konjit Gudeta

Bilisuma Dito, Elsje Fourie and Konjit Gudeta are three of the researchers involved in the ‘Well-being, Women and Work in Ethiopia’ project. This interdisciplinary project, which combines insights from three collaborating UM faculties, studies how employment generated by foreign direct investment (FDI) is affecting the well-being of female workers in Ethiopia. The well-being of workers in horticulture and the textile sector are compared and the study aims to uncover whether the origin country of the investor makes a difference in the well-being of women.

FDI in Ethiopia

“In recent years, Ethiopia has been one of the fastest growing economies in Africa,” Konjit explains. “A lot of FDI goes into textiles and horticulture and mostly women are employed in these sectors.” Bilisuma adds to this that they study how the experience of working in these sectors affects female well-being. This can be positive or negative, or both. What is important is that they provide nuance and that they put things in perspective: there may be more or less harmful forms of FDI. According to Elsje, the difference in origin country of FDI or the destination of exports may also play an important role. Companies based in or exporting to many OECD countries, for example, need to comply with a patchwork >>

of international agreements and conventions. “The corporate social responsibility (CSR) infrastructure is much more visible, though it is also of course the question how much these agreements and conventions are adhered to in the workplace.”

This research seeks to not only provide academic output but also suggest practical interventions to help improve the workplace. In effect, the outcomes could help the Ethiopian government and employers to improve their employment and CSR practices.

Well-being of women

“What we know from our research so far – we are still in the exploratory phase – is that women are facing challenges in the workplace. These include demanding working conditions that impact the women physically and psychologically which also have an impact on their personal lives. On top of that, many women working in the horticulture or textile industry in Ethiopia are internal migrants. They face additional challenges such as low income and food insecurity. This can have a huge impact on the physical and mental well-being of these women,” Konjit explains.

“Besides the significant challenges some women experience, other women can benefit from their workplace: they receive social support from their colleagues and

they build up self-esteem because they are able to make an income and provide for themselves,” Konjit explains. “For some women, jobs in horticulture or the textile sector are temporary and a potential means to acquire certain skills. These jobs may be a stepping-stone for those coming from rural areas and starting a new life in the city. Some women show agency in using these jobs in a strategic way. They take on these jobs and aspire to start their own businesses or new jobs elsewhere when they have acquired sufficient resources, skills and self-esteem,” Elsje adds. Konjit continues that “what is overlooked is listening to the women in these sectors. Our interviews with women in the workforce reveal a noticeable difference in the results of female well-being when women are talked about and when women talk about themselves.”

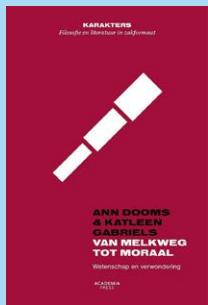
“Since there is a lot of turnover with women starting and leaving jobs along with many other nuances, it is not appropriate to only focus on the well-being of workers on a particular point in time. Instead, we need to understand their well-being as a process. That’s why we focus on the processual well-being of women, and aim to capture that using mixed methods and an interdisciplinary approach,” Bilisuma explains. <<

“We focus on the processual well-being of women, and aim to capture that using mixed methods and an interdisciplinary approach.”

Bilisuma Dito



Outreach



12 February

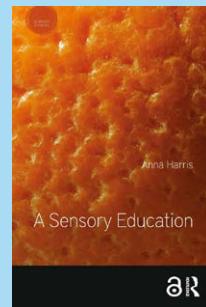
Katleen Gabriels (MUSTS) published the book *Van Melkweg tot Moraal: Wetenschap en Verwondering*.

March - October

Terra Mosana researchers (AMC) looked for inhabitants of the region to translate and record seven sentences into their own language or dialect. All received spoken messages were processed into a [sonic artwork](#).

30 June

Adam Dixon and Imogen Liu (GTD) presented research findings from recent fieldwork to Beijing and Hong Kong on Chinese state capital to more than 70 staff of the European Commission.



11 December

Anna Harris (MUSTS) published the book *A Sensory Education*.

12 March

Karlien Strijbosch (GTD) was chosen to be one of the 12 new 'faces of science', an initiative by NEMO Kennislink. As 'face of science', Karlien [blogs and vlogs about everyday life as a PhD student](#).

19 June

Hylke Dijkstra (PCE) wrote a [report about European security](#) for the 'Adviesraad Internationale Vraagstukken', which advises the Dutch government on international issues.

16 November

Klaartje Peters (PCE) reported to the Dutch parliament about the effects of decentralisation efforts in Dutch government over the past 15 years.

4 December

Aagje Swinnen (AMC) spoke in [an interview](#) with Maastricht University's independent newspaper *Observant* about her research into retiring from UM.

Colophon

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