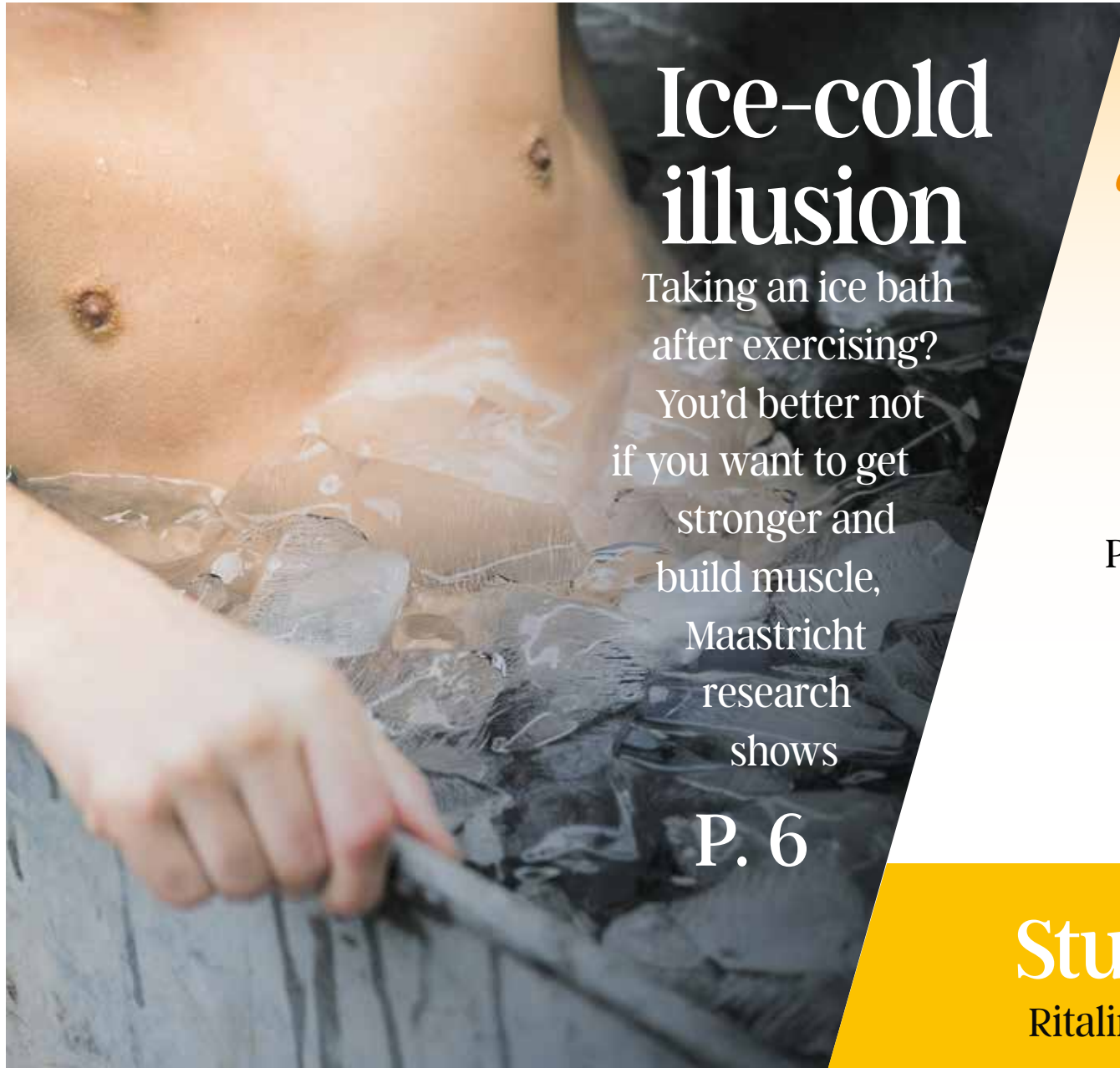


observant

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Ice-cold illusion

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Illustration: Shutterstock



editorial

Cycling
to
work

“Typical – just as I move to Maastricht, they introduce a cycling allowance! There goes my pocket money”, jokes colleague Riki Janssen on learning that UM’s new mobility policy includes a mileage allowance for employees who cycle to work, provided they live a certain distance away (reportedly five kilometres). Until recently, she was commuting thirty kilometres per day, three times per week. At an estimated rate of 20 cents per kilometre (the rate has not yet been set), that would have added up nicely. But she’s about to swap her home in a Walloon village for a place in Maastricht itself – far too close to benefit. In fact, none of us on the editorial team will: we’re all based just outside the city centre. Peter Doorakkers, who lives across the border in Belgium, sighs, “I’m 4.9 kilometres away.” His hopes now rest on a planned road diversion that might just push him over the minimum distance.

Bad coffee, draughty offices, parking woes – it’s often the little things that get people most worked up. The news that campus parking will no longer be free from 2027 onwards has sparked grumbles across the university, as we found out when asking staff for their opinions. Critics say UM is “punishing” people who drive to work. But that is not the intention, the project leader recently stressed in an interview in *Observant*. The goal is to reward cycling and discourage car commuting, all to cut carbon emissions.

After reading the interview before publication, he confessed he thought the tone was “a bit negative”. That was just his interpretation, from his perspective, I countered; after all, he knows exactly where the sore points are and where objections are likely to arise. But the policy is what it is: a carrot for cyclists, a stick for motorists. Our job as journalists is to present the facts as objectively as possible. What we personally think is beside the point. Readers will form their own opinions, shaped by their own circumstances, their own values and, in this case, their own daily commute. As the saying goes, beauty is in the eye of the beholder. A climate-conscious reader may see the new policy as progress. But a staff member with dodgy knees, who can’t cycle and is soon to face parking fees, may feel left out in the cold.

Wendy Degens

The editor-in-chief gives a look behind the scenes at the editorial office.



series the times they are (not) a changin’

“Killed by multiple stab wounds”



Photo: Nelis Tutkey

50 Years of UM:
The Times They Are
(Not) A Changin’

1996

On Monday morning 26 January 1996, at around 11.55 am, a murder took place in a faculty building on Kapoenstraat, in the city centre. “A female staff member of the university [was] killed by multiple stab wounds”, according to a statement issued by Maastricht police later that day.

The victim was 35-year-old José de Groot, secretary and, by all accounts, the linchpin of the faculty office of what is now the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences. She was involved in just about everything, and everyone liked her – she was not only great at her job but also, above all, a lovely person. She was always accommodating towards *Observant* journalists, too, which was not something to be taken for granted.

The tragedy was unrelated to her work. She was in the middle of a divorce; her husband struggled to accept it, but had shown no signs of violence until then. He was no stranger to those working in the building, either. It was not unusual for him to drop by, even during the time of the divorce. But that morning, something must have snapped. He took a large knife, went to Kapoenstraat, entered the small office near the back entrance and stabbed his wife “in vital organs”, as the police put it after the autopsy the next day. She died almost instantly. According to witnesses who had rushed towards the commotion, he then sat down on a chair, head bowed, and waited.

I can’t recall how, but word quickly reached us at the *Observant* office that something terrible had happened on Kapoenstraat – someone had been stabbed. As the university newspaper, we had to be there. I arrived to find

a muted kind of chaos: red-and-white police tape, staff members in shock and grief, the dean doing everything he could to support his people and protect them from intruding eyes. And as a journalist, that’s what I was, an unwelcome intruder, even more so when I started asking people questions. Dean Wiel Kusters – also a poet, who wrote a beautiful obituary the same evening – was exactly the leader the faculty needed at that moment. He kept me at arm’s length. Years later, he told me he had been “quite angry” with me at the time, though he added that he understood *Observant* had to do its job.

But I did it with a heavy heart. It felt cruel to interview people still reeling with shock. I soon decided to stop asking questions and instead wrote an account based on what I could see and hear.

“That morning, something must have snapped. He took a large knife and went to Kapoenstraat”

Even so, *Observant* was later accused of sensationalism, unworthy of a university newspaper. It stung, as I had taken great care to avoid writing a lurid story. The accusation came, indirectly, from none other than senior lecturer José van Dijck, a former assistant professor of journalism at the University of Groningen and later president of the Royal Netherlands Academy of Arts and Sciences (KNAW). But with all due respect, the criticism was unfair – and, thankfully, not shared by others. To *not* report on what had happened, however painful, was not an option. But we covered it as soberly as possible, hoping that it would be the first and the last time.

Wammes Bos

Maastricht University was founded fifty years ago. In this anniversary series, we delve into our own archives to rediscover memorable, funny, relevant and curious news stories from the past

In the pipeline: an interfaculty bachelor's degree in governance, law and society

“A perfect fit for what municipalities need”

Maastricht University is working on plans to develop a new interfaculty bachelor's degree in governance, law and society (Bestuur, Recht en Samenleving). The reasoning behind it is that Dutch municipalities urgently need broadly educated professionals who are able to tackle complex issues such as the energy transition and the nitrogen crisis. Some concerns were raised by the university's representative bodies last week. “How many teenagers dream of becoming a civil servant?”

The starting date of the programme, to be taught in Dutch, is pencilled in for September 2028. Recently, Sjoerd Claessens, vice-dean for education at the Faculty of Law, briefly outlined the plan at both the most recent Faculty Council meeting and a University Council committee meeting. Although the Executive Board as well as the deans of all faculties have given the green light to move forward, there are still many obstacles ahead. For example, the national Macro-Efficiency Committee will need to determine whether there is sufficient demand for the programme – are too many similar ones already on offer in the Netherlands? – and its graduates. Claessens is

convinced of the latter. According to him, current law graduates are not a perfect fit for what municipalities need: people trained to think across disciplines, capable of engaging with “wicked problems” that call for more than just a legal perspective. While the Faculty of Law is taking the lead, the School of Business and Economics (SBE) and the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences (FASoS) will also be involved. Both councils suggested offering the degree as a master's instead. But, as Claessens explained, the whole point is to provide students with a broad foundation. A graduate of the regular Dutch Law bachelor's degree will start a master's with a ‘monodisciplinary’ perspective. By contrast, this new programme aims to immerse students in multidisciplinary thinking from day one.

There were also concerns about ‘ownership’: how will you make sure that all faculties take ownership, so one doesn't end up doing all the work while the others sit back? Rector Pamela Habibović responded that firm agreements will be made: “If you decide to set up an interfaculty programme, it has to function as one. Global Studies shows it can be done, even if there's always room for improvement.”

University Council member and law professor Raymond Luja (academic staff representative) wondered whether the new programme might draw prospective students away from the existing Dutch Law bachelor's degree. Currently, this isn't seen as a concern. Donna Yates, an academic staff representative, also from the Faculty of Law, inquired about staffing at SBE and FaSoS: as both faculties are largely international, do they have enough Dutch-speaking staff to teach in the new programme? Claessens replied that new hires might well be needed.

Maarten van Wesel, a non-academic staff representative on the University Council, questioned whether 17-year-olds are interested in becoming municipal public servants. Claessens's hope is that UM, with help from its marketing department, will be able to highlight the programme's career prospects and relevance.

Finally, there is the matter of location. The Executive Board wants a say in where the new programme will be based, with Venlo and Heerlen being considered as serious options.

Wendy Degens



Unsettling protests

“

Recently, I visited the *Protest* exhibition in Maastricht. As *Observant* wrote the other day, it's absolutely fantastic: visually striking, intellectually rich, and emotionally resonant. It reminds us that protest is not just political, it's deeply human, and demonstrates that polite requests rarely lead to structural change in history. From civil rights marches to feminist sit-ins, the most impactful movements in the modern era have unsettled the status quo.

This reflection felt especially timely after the recent *Vuelta a España* cycling race, where activists disrupted the event to draw attention to the horrible events currently taking place in Gaza. The action sparked debate: Was it a legitimate act of protest, or an unfair intrusion into a public sporting competition? Similar questions arose following the September 14th march in London, where over 100,000 protesters called, among other things, for the expulsion of migrants. Was that a valid protest, or an incitement to hatred? And what about the violent anti migration protest, last Saturday in The Hague?

The exhibition equips visitors with critical tools to recognize and reflect on the risks of ‘bothsidesism’ or false balance. While protest remains an unalienable right in democratic societies, the messages it conveys may not always be legitimate (or even legal). It is both just and necessary to publicly denounce war crimes and flagrant violations of basic human rights. Conversely, spreading hatred against migrants seeking refuge in Europe is unjust and illegitimate.

Furthermore, as a visitor I was compelled to think about the illusion of neutrality. When conflict is a daily presence, when violence is not an exception but the norm, remaining neutral becomes not just difficult, but often untenable. Neutrality can be a form of detachment that ignores the urgency and moral weight of what is actually happening. I have the impression that, in its response to recent pro-Palestinian protests, Maastricht University has partly walked straight into both these traps, trying to balance opposing views without realising that this cause demands moral clarity now more than ever. By attempting to remain neutral, our institution risks appearing inoperant in front of the unprecedented humanitarian crisis currently unfolding in Gaza.

”

Pablo del Hierro,
associate professor of history

INKOM ban didn't affect interest in traditional associations

Over 25 percent rise in new Tragos members despite suspended ties

Interest in the traditional student associations Tragos and Circumflex has shown no signs of waning, despite Maastricht University suspending ties with both. In fact, Tragos saw its number of new members rise by more than 25 percent this summer.

Where Tragos typically welcomed around 85 new members in recent years, this year's total reached 109. The student association has stepped up its recruitment efforts, says newly appointed chair Veerle Kiefer. “We organised more activities, including smaller ones like shared meals, and focused more on one-to-one contact. It's been effective.”

At Circumflex, the number of new members remained stable at 98 – just two fewer than last year. Chair Jasper Gielen is pleased: “We were a bit anxious about whether we'd be visible enough to new students.” Both associations were absent from this year's INKOM fairs and parties, which are usually the main opportunity to catch new students' attention.

Their absence was due to the university suspending all ties with both associations earlier this year after several incidents during activities for new members, including “cases of fainting, exhaustion and a panic attack”. Both Tragos and Circumflex claimed they were unaware of these incidents.

As an alternative, they organised their own introduction week together, mostly consisting of parties at their own clubhouses. Both chairs say the turnout felt comparable to previous years, when they ran a similar programme alongside INKOM.

Gielen is under the impression that the university's announcement earlier this year had little impact on students approaching Circumflex. “We received hardly any questions about it.”



Tragos at the INKOM fair in 2024. This year, they were not permitted to take part, just like Circumflex. Photo: Observant

Kiefer was asked to “clear up the situation” a few times, “but we were able to reassure everyone. I don't feel like it discouraged students from signing up.”

Neither Tragos nor Circumflex is Maastricht's most popular student association. That distinction belongs to student rowing club Saurus, which has consistently attracted the most new members for years. This year,

Saurus welcomed 120 new members – down from 135 last year, but still the largest increase among the city's four biggest associations. Student association KoKo comes in last with 86 new members so far (the sign up period here lasts a few more days), up from 77 last year.

Dennis Vaendel

series sing, fight, cry, pray, laugh, work and admire



Martin Unfried (1966,
Ellwangen an der Jägst,
Germany)

\ Senior researcher at the
Institute for Transnational
and Euregional cross-
border cooperation and
Mobility (ITEM)

\ Relationship status:
married, two children

\ Lives in:
Maastricht

Photo: Joey Roberts

“
In ten years I'll be retired,
but there's still plenty of
work to be done
”

How often do you cross the border? About three to four times per week. I live in the Jekerdal valley and often go for evening bike rides taking me through Kanne and Barchon. Sometimes I travel to Luxembourg for work, or I'll nip over to Germany to buy bread – I'm German, after all, and we prefer our own bread. It doesn't really feel like going abroad, though. The EU feels like home to me, although less so since the German police reintroduced border checks.

What's on your bedside table? Cycling route guides. We recently spent four weeks cycling from Venice to Trieste – in stages, of course, and sometimes taking the train. I enjoy reading up afterwards on the villages we passed through.

What news makes you angry? Oh, where to begin? The other day I was angered by some thoughtless comments the German Chancellor made about the conflict between Israel and Iran. He claimed that, under international law, Israel had the right to attack Iran in self-defence. That's simply not true. I've just read three articles by professors arguing the opposite.

Favourite film? *Before the Rain* by Macedonian director Milčo Mančevski. It's set in Macedonia during the armed conflict between the Albanian and Slavic populations. The timeline is nonlinear, with the ending circling back to the beginning – it's very cleverly done. And the landscapes are stunning, beautifully filmed.

Is there anything you've done that you wouldn't let your children do? [Winks] My children had it *very* tough – we never flew anywhere for holidays. That's what happens when your dad's a climate fanatic. Even now, in their twenties, they still don't travel by plane. It's not easy, though, when everyone around you does. Even here at UM, work trips are often made by plane. We once proposed that any trip under 8 hours should be made by train. But then came the excuses: it's too expensive, does it really make an impact, is it safe? There's a deeply ingrained belief that you have to be able to get to a conference quickly.

If you could change one rule for cross-border workers, what would it be? I'd simplify the rules around social security and taxation for cross-border workers who work from home. This has been a focus for us at ITEM as well. The current rules are incredibly complex due to double tax conventions and differences in national regulations.

What were you like as a child? Quite ordinary and average. I grew up in a small village of around 2,500 people in the German state of Baden-Württemberg, where the Black Forest is located. I had a happy childhood. I didn't necessarily want to leave, but there were no job opportunities for EU experts. Now I live in another country, but I'm not sure it makes much of a difference. I think the real divide is between village and city life. My brother and sister both live in Berlin,

which feels like a completely different world from our hometown – possibly even more so than Maastricht does. It takes 45 minutes to get from my brother's to my sister's house in Berlin. From Maastricht, that would take you all the way to Liège or Aachen.

What would you like to do again? A cycling holiday like the one we did in May. It was our first time doing something like that – it must be the Dutch influence – and I wish we'd started earlier. It was fantastic, not just the trip itself but also the spontaneous aspect of it. If we liked a place, we'd just decide to get a hotel there.

Do you ever pray? No. I was an altar boy as a child, and I'm culturally Catholic, but I don't believe anymore. I do think it's important to know what a religion involves; it helps you decide whether it's for you. Some people become more religious as they age, but my mother became more critical, partly because of what she saw in the village – the role of the local priest and the power he claimed for himself. It wasn't right.

My partner can't stand it when I... load the dishwasher the wrong way.

I feel most German when... I do everyday things like eating German bread or watching *Tagesschau* instead of the Dutch eight o'clock news. That's how it is for many immigrants – you continue living in two worlds.

In ten years... I'll be retired, I'm afraid, but I doubt I'll be sitting around doing nothing. There's still a lot for us to do as citizens when it comes to things like the EU, the climate, democracy. How do you engage the silent majority in politics? How do you communicate what the EU stands for, or that having open borders is a good thing? Cross-border regions seem to have very little lobbying power. These German border checks are terrible for the region, but we couldn't prevent them from being reintroduced. There's still plenty of work to be done. Will I still be living in Maastricht? Most likely, though perhaps with a holiday home in Baden-Württemberg.

Cleo Freriks

Weekly personal interview with a student or employee

Research on ADHD drugs as study aids

Ritalin won't help you get better grades

Some 10 to 20 per cent of students occasionally take Ritalin before sitting a difficult exam. The drug, intended for people with ADHD, is thought to boost study performance. But recent research from the Faculty of Psychology and Neuroscience (FPN) suggests it's not that easy.



Illustration: Simone Golob

Drugs like Ritalin are popular among students as study aids. They boost concentration, but while they help people with ADHD feel calmer, people without ADHD report feeling more alert and energetic. In a survey conducted a few years ago, 10 per cent of UM students admitted to having taken “study drugs”, says Anke Sambeth, professor of Educational Neuroscience.

Sambeth and her colleagues have previously investigated Ritalin's effects on memory. “Participants were asked to memorise a list of thirty simple words. They turned out to perform better after taking the drug. But that's very different from sitting a real exam at MECC, so we wanted to see what would happen if we made the task more complex. This is relevant from an educational perspective as well – if Ritalin truly does help students get better grades, it could have policy implications.”

The researchers tried to simulate an exam as realistically as possible. “Obviously, you can't just give half of your Psychology students Ritalin and the other half a placebo – that would be unethical. So we wrote four texts on topics the participants knew nothing about. They were given limited time to study them and were tested on the material the following day.” Some participants took Ritalin before studying, others before sitting the test, and a third received a placebo. “We wanted to see if it mainly affected memorising new information while studying or recalling it during the test.” But the drug turned out to have no effect whatsoever. “All three groups scored the same.”

Sambeth, also in her capacity as vice-dean for education at FPN, hopes students will take this as yet another reason to steer clear of study drugs. “This is just one study, and we're the first to test it this way. But the idea of ‘It won't hurt, so why not?’ doesn't hold for Ritalin. It raises your heart rate and blood pressure, which can be risky in the long term. Chronic use can cause depressive feelings and even make you feel suicidal. If you want to feel more alert for an exam, drinking a strong cup of coffee beforehand will do the trick.”

Cleo Freriks

Members attend a workshop to take the role

Confidential advisers at all student sports clubs

Irreconcilable conflicts with the board, an unsafe social environment or inappropriate behaviour by fellow members: UM SPORTS requires all student sports associations to have at least one confidential adviser members can turn to with concerns or complaints. But how does this work out in practice?

To find out, *Observant* spoke with board members of eighteen student sports clubs during the INKOM introduction week, when university associations present themselves to new students. From large clubs such as Fyrfad (vol-

leyball) and MSHC (field hockey) to smaller ones like Kinran (karate), the response was consistent: all either already have a confidential adviser or are actively seeking one. Advisers are members, sometimes former members, who are not part of the board or any committees. The only exception is Cactus (spikeball/roundnet). “We've only got eight members”, they explained apologetically, “and three are already on the board.” Cactus members who would like to talk to someone can instead turn to the UM confidential adviser.

MUSST, the umbrella organisation for UM stu-

dent sports associations, meets with the clubs twice a year. During these meetings, the presence of confidential advisers is also discussed. In theory, clubs without an adviser could face a small fine, though “this hasn't happened in recent years”. To emphasise the importance of the role, workshops for new confidential advisers were introduced in 2022 and even became mandatory as of this year, covering topics such as how to handle a conversation with a member who has approached you with a concern and where to refer them for support.

What about the confidential advisers them-

selves? According to two of the three *Observant* spoke with, reports are rare. Cedric Pots of the student athletics association UROS said he often chats with fellow members but has never had to step in formally. Similarly, alum Teun Wich of the frisbee association Ultimaas has not yet needed to act in his role as confidential adviser. Ise van Gool of the tennis association Stennis hinted at having dealt with a confidential matter but declined to elaborate. “Let's just say there's a reason we're here.”

Peter Doorackers

science

Cold is bad for circulation and recovery, Maastricht research shows

Not so cool: popular ice baths are not that great for your muscles

It's popular among top athletes, but lower level athletes and fitness addicts also swear by it: the ice bath. The extreme cold is said to lessen muscle ache and aid recovery after exercise. But research at Maastricht may have shattered this vaunted cold therapy. "If you want to be strong, don't take one."

Text: Deborah Blekkenhorst

Illustration: Simone Golob

Researcher and PhD candidate Milan Betz says he was not entirely surprised by the results, as he shows a picture of himself with his leg in an enormous bucket. He was not exempt from his own research, which was a continuation of a study done at Maastricht University in 2019. At the time, there was already cause to question the healing properties of ice baths much lauded by athletes. "It has been shown numerous times over the last ten or fifteen years, that the cold may not be that great for muscle adaptation," says Betz. That is the process by which muscles are stimulated to grow through stressors, such as exercise. But why would it be worse when they are cooled? That was the question Betz was eager to answer in his own research. "Do certain enzymes in the muscles work less well in the cold? Are signal molecules [which transmit information between cells] not triggered? Or is it related to circulation? And many more questions. That was the starting point for my PhD track."

Smallest veins
In the Human Biology department of the Faculty of Health Medicine and Life sciences (FHML), Betz managed to map out the circulation of even the smallest veins. He used an advanced ultrasound device to scan the legs of twelve male subjects. Because there are two such machines available – "thank you, Internal Medicine" – the circulation in both legs could be measured at the exact same time.

That happened in the morning, when the test subjects were still in bed and the circulation was relatively low. "Then everyone would do strength training exercises, at maximum intensity. Very tough," says Betz, who added the leg press to the list, in which you have to push away a weight while seated. "You could see the circulation shoot up, in both legs." So far, so good, but then came the ice bath. In order to take correct measurements, on both legs simultaneously, the test subject was made to sit on an exercise bike. In place of the pedals, Betz and his team had added large, round buckets. One was filled to the brim with body-temperature water, the other with ice. After the subjects had sat on the bikes, legs in the buckets up to their groins, they would be measured again.

Barely any blood

"That's when we saw that the circulation in the cold leg was 60 to 70 per cent lower than the control leg, the volume was way less." In other words, "There was literally less blood flowing to the muscles." The cold had constricted or blocked off the veins. "The most remarkable thing was how long it lasted," Betz continues. "Even three hours after the ice bath, when the muscle had long since warmed up again, the circulation was up to 25 per cent lower." He also gave the test subjects a protein shake "with special amino acids, a building block for proteins, as it were, which we were able to track". That way, Betz was able to see exactly how many nutrients reached the muscles – an important indicator of recovery. "We noticed that a lot less of the shake reached the cold leg than the control leg. The people whose circulation had been most affected, also absorbed the fewest amino acids."

Building muscle

In the long term, this can have a negative effect on muscle growth and strength, something athletes work so hard to achieve. "This has also been shown in yet more research, where the subjects were monitored for three months as they completed strength training three times a week, followed by a dive into cold water. Betz: "It is odd that you would first stimulate your muscles to grow and then slow that process down with the cold." But what about all those professional athletes who deliberately seek out the cold once they leave the track or their bikes? "That is slightly different," emphasises Betz. "Our research is focused on muscle growth and adaptation, specifically after strength training. In addition, we made people sit in the ice bath for twenty minutes, that doesn't always happen. There are also lots of other situations with different results, such as runners or people who do endurance training. And a tournament or match is different again, with different levels of effort. The mental factor also plays a role. Cold muffles the pain, which is helpful if you need to be ready to go again the next day." That doesn't take away the other negative effects, though, "such as fewer nutrients reaching the muscles". Betz still has questions. For example, what is the effect on women, who are not currently included in this research. "Their body composition is different, as is the underlying layer of fat. That is definitely worth investigating," says Betz. "But I do think we can conclude that someone who wants to get stronger and build muscle, should just not take an ice bath."

Staff reactions to the new mobility policy proposal

“Commuting by bike? I wouldn’t know where to find the time”



Maastricht University’s new sustainable mobility policy – introducing a mileage allowance for cyclists while requiring car commuters to pay for parking on university premises – has caused quite a stir. Observant has asked seventeen employees, both academic and non-academic staff, for their thoughts. “It’s good to be idealistic, but you also have to be realistic.”

Text: Wendy Degens Photo: Observant

The majority of the seventeen interviewees either cycle or walk to work. Only one takes the train, while five drive (though some swap the car for a bike if the weather is nice). How do they feel about the new policy? A project group spent the past months developing a new transport and parking plan to reward sustainable behaviour and discourage less sustainable travel, like project leader Cyriel Heuts said in a recent *Observant* interview.

Only one interviewee is outright negative, calling the paid parking “a disgraceful proposal”, while three welcome the plan, mainly for environmental reasons – lower carbon emis-

sions – and fairness: cyclists will now receive a mileage allowance, just like car and train commuters.

Most interviewees have mixed feelings. They applaud sustainability but note that “policy affects a whole group, yet each individual case is different.” Various interviewees argue that individual circumstances should be taken into account, since not everyone can realistically cycle to work. “If you have children and live outside Maastricht, you have no choice but to take the car. It’s practically impossible to take your children to school by bike before cycling to work yourself. And what if you’re

less mobile due to illness or injury?” An interviewed receptionist points out that some employees work late shifts: “The first start at 7.30 am, the last leave after 10 pm.” She would have to cycle a considerable distance in the dark, to a village well outside Maastricht. “It’d be unsafe. It’s not an option.” She hopes the university will allow for exceptions. “In such cases, free parking would not be unreasonable.”

SPRINTS

Cycling to work also isn’t a realistic option for a PhD candidate who lives fifty kilome-

tres away in Belgium. “I might consider it if I had an electric bike, but it’s a huge time investment. I wouldn’t know where to find the hours. And it’d take me 2.5 hours to get to work by public transport.”

UM will continue to fully reimburse travel expenses by public transport. The only train commuter *Observant* spoke to, a postdoctoral researcher from Arnhem, doesn’t mind the long journey. “I work on the train. I can’t work from my car.” Her commute takes over two hours, “including three sprints to change

Continue reading on the next page

Faculty Council of Science and Engineering discusses mobility policy proposal

“You’re docking their pay so they can park”

What’s the latest on the new mobility policy? Raymond Hodiament, council member and Occupational Health & Safety & Environment Coordinator at the Faculty of Science and Engineering (FSE), raised the issue during Tuesday afternoon’s Faculty Council meeting. He asked whether the policy is set in stone or if it still needs to pass through several bodies, such as the Local Consultative Body (consisting of Executive Board members and trade union representatives). Hodiament expressed concern about the proposal to charge staff for parking on campus. While this is not an FSE policy, he emphasised that it will directly affect FSE staff. “You’re punishing people, essentially docking their pay so they can park.” He also raised practical concerns when it comes to the ‘promotion of cycling’: “What about safety – having to cycle a long way outside the city in the dark during winter?” Dean Thomas Cleij, who also sits on UM’s Sustainability

Supervisory Board, regrets that the rationale behind the proposal hasn’t been clearly communicated. “UM is not looking to make a profit from parking spaces. The aim is to invest the money in other measures to reduce carbon emissions.” He explained to the Faculty Council that UM is serious about sustainability. Reducing car use would make a significant difference in emissions. “Because no one yet knows how much they’ll be paying for parking – it could be fifty cents per day, or it could be much more – there’s some anxiety.”

While Cleij defended the policy – “You have to make sacrifices to achieve ambitious sustainability goals” – he acknowledged that the university’s various locations present a challenge. FSE lecturers and researchers work across several campuses in Limburg. “What if you have to teach in Venlo in the morning and be back in Maastricht in the afternoon? The board has requested flexibility.”

background

I'm just glad it's been free until now

Continued from page 7

trains”, but expenses are covered and it's an environmentally conscious choice.

FRUSTRATED

Some staff have complained on the intranet that it's ridiculous to have to pay to come to work. One interviewee disagrees: “I don't see it that way. Plenty of companies charge for parking; I'm just glad it's been free until now.” Without sharing exact numbers, project leader Cyriel Heuts previously stated, “We definitely won't be charging commercial rates like Q-Park. You won't suddenly find yourself paying €12.50 per day. No, absolutely not.” Parking rates will also be linked to commuting distance: the farther you live from the university, the lower your rate.

A PhD candidate understands this approach but at the same time believes that employers should ideally provide parking for employees who have to come into work. One of her

colleagues, who walks to work, questions whether introducing parking fees will have the desired effect. “Negative discouragement will only make people feel frustrated.” Another interviewee points to MUMC+, where his wife used to work. “Employees there have been paying for parking for years. I think there's no other way, considering limited parking spaces. You can't just keep adding spaces. So I understand the decision.”

Finally, one interviewee rides his motorbike to work: “I can't cycle anymore due to a knee injury.” He lives on the edge of Maastricht, seven kilometres from the School of Business and Economics where he works. “Nothing will change for me – I'll just drive past the barrier.”

The names of the interviewees have been omitted for readability but are known to the editors.

With contributions by Deborah Blekkenhorst, Peter Doorakkers, Cleo Freriks and Dennis Vaendel

U-Council has no right of consent

During the university council meeting on Wednesday, September 24, the issue of mobility policy briefly came up again. The project leader's statement in *Observant* two weeks ago—that the plan had already passed through the participation process—raised many questions. “The U-Council has certainly not yet given its approval,” was the response. At the same time, council members are confronted with concerned colleagues.

Rector Pamela Habibović explained that the U-Council has the right to be informed on this topic, but that the Local Consulta-

tive Body (which includes the trade union representatives) holds the right of consent. There is now consensus on the policy framework—the direction in which the university wants to move. “Now we need to determine the details,” said the rector. “Those rules will again be submitted to the Local Consultative Body for approval.” She acknowledged that the project leader's statement in *Observant* caused confusion. “In matters like this, you have to be very precise. We've discussed it internally, and they realize that too.”

RJ

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