

observant

THIS IS THE LAST PAPER
VERSION OF OBSERVANT
OF THIS ACADEMIC YEAR.
WE WISH YOU ALL
A LOVELY SUMMER!

INDEPENDENT WEEKLY MAASTRICHT UNIVERSITY

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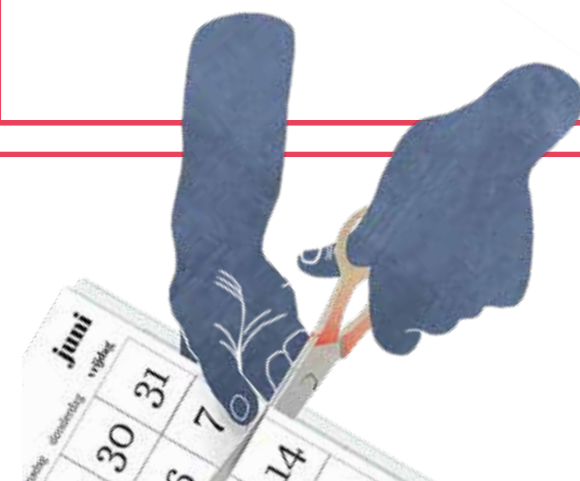


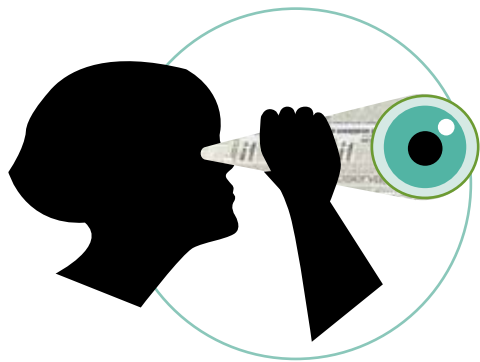
Under construction

P6-7 Students complain about their 'container livings' in Randwyck: too expensive and construction nuisance

Cut

P5 In the future, the academic year could probably be shortened with four weeks; is that feasible for the entire university?





Riki Janssen

editorial Walking? Boring!

My office at Lenculenstraat 14 faces north. It doesn't get too hot in this weather until around two p.m. My colleagues on the south side, the street side of the building, are less fortunate. At 8.30 a.m. last Monday, it was already heating up. By the time everyone left my office after our morning meeting, around noon, it was sweltering, even with the fans running at full speed and the blinds drawn. There's no air conditioning in the building. The coming days, my colleagues on the south side will have to work mainly from home.

Summer break is almost upon us. The last print newspaper of this academic year will come out this week, but we'll continue to publish articles on the website for a few more weeks. Next week is our annual team outing. We're going to go walking near Epen, where our colleague DV was raised. Walking? Again? How boring, one team member

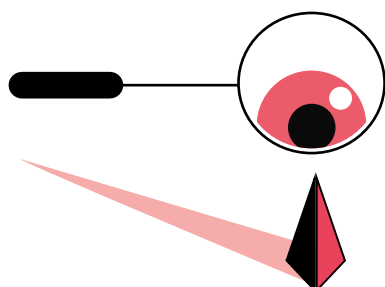
sighed when we democratically decided on our summer outing. She's not entirely wrong; ever since the pandemic, we haven't got beyond going for a walk followed by a lunch somewhere in South Limburg. She reminisced wistfully about our excursion to Liège, Belgium, where we went on a nice off-the-beaten-track tour of the Walloon city. I personally wasn't very invested in our visit to the arms museum, though. Boring!

I actually like walking as a team activity. It's nice to get some fresh air and you can talk to your colleagues about anything and everything as you walk, which is a good bonding activity. It'll be even more fun this time, as our new hires are joining – not just our new editor Peter Doorakkers, but also our two junior journalists Simon Wirtz and Lotte van de Loo. All three will start work at *Observant* in mid-August.

Last Monday, the junior journalists came in to meet the team. They introduced themselves, after which everyone else had 90 seconds to share something about themselves. Not a lot of time, no, but our weekly deadline was fast approaching and there will be plenty of opportunity to talk more during the walk next week.

For our next annual outing, we'll do something different, I promise. Junior journalist Lotte already dropped a hint without realising it. She grew up in Kaatsheuvel, near theme park Efteling. Who knows... But first, summer. Enjoy your break!

Every week, the editor-in-chief writes about what has been happening at the Observant office



splinters

A funny incident, a striking piece of news, something interesting that happened elsewhere in the country: it is in this column.

Hot fish

When people want to cool down in this heat, they hop into the shower or dive into a swimming pool. Fish are always in the water, but they can also get too hot. For example, if their home in the water is not very deep and quickly warms up, such as the pond between Debyeplein and MUMC. A university employee was worried about the upcoming heatwave and alerted (whose pond is it anyway) both the hospital's and Maastricht University's service desk.

MUMC, which appeared to be the owner, sent someone out there on Friday to size up the situation. They were able to reassure the animal friends: there is a deeper part in the pond where the fish can still swim quite well. At the end of June, the pond will be cleaned and the fish will leave for cooler waters where they will spend the summer.

A room thanks to ChatGPT

A student from Groningen found a room thanks to ChatGPT, sister newspaper *Ukrant* writes. The first-year student had been looking for some time, but rarely received an answer to his e-mails to landlords and estate agents. "Most likely because I am an international student and so I wrote to them in English," he says.

So, he decided to use artificial intelligence. He asked ChatGPT to write a proposal e-mail to future landlords in Dutch. "In doing so, the programme had to take the landlord's perspective and motives into account." He was promptly offered accommodation.

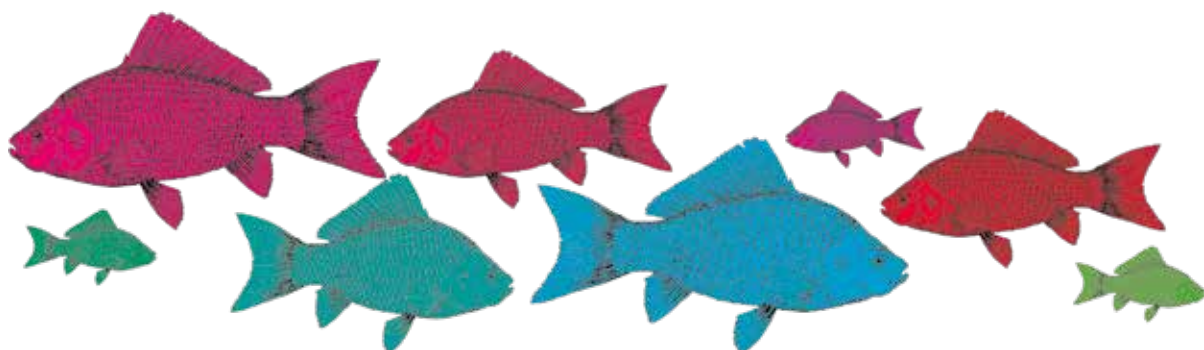
The most important thing is that you give AI the correct orders, says the student, who uses the chatbot a lot. "When I wanted to have my Dutch tenancy lease checked, for example, I asked AI to pretend he was an expert in the field of Dutch housing law. You do that with the 'act as' function, which is really useful."



Free lessons

Mathematics lecturer Gert Regterschot has been coming to TU Eindhoven campus every day for the past 27 years to teach. Nothing strange about that, you might say, were it not for the fact that he was fired by the university back in 1995. Regterschot appealed against the dismissal, lost the case, but clearly did not accept that. So, he just continued to teach. The students adore him, they even started a collection now that the unemployed lecturer – who has lived off his savings, gift vouchers and the deposit of returnable bottles that he finds, for the past decades – is really starting to come to the end of his money.

TU Eindhoven is less enthusiastic. Although Regterschot is allowed to come to the campus, his access to the classrooms has been denied. He supposedly told students and employees that he is still employed by the university, but doesn't get paid. That gave them "an unsafe feeling", said a statement on the TU/e website. (HOP)



‘How do we treat one another, what is respectful behaviour’ Compulsory lesson on sexual safety for first-year students during faculty introduction

All first-year students will receive a lesson on sexual safety during the faculty introduction at the end of August. In addition, they will have to take an (also compulsory) online course on the prevention of sexual violence. It is part of a Sexual Safety programme that will be introduced in autumn.

Maastricht University previously decided to do more about combatting undesirable sexual behaviour. President Rianne Letschert, for example, signed Amnesty International's Let's talk about Yes manifest at the end of 2021. Amnesty's study in Dutch higher education showed that almost one in ten female students is the victim of rape. UM's own investigation (also in 2021) was no more optimistic: 47 per cent of the students was a victim of sexual violence and/or sexual intimidation.

Training

At the moment, a plan is being finalised that includes training for students and employees (how do we treat one another, what is respectful behaviour, how can we help victims, what should you do if you see something happen that is unacceptable?), rules and procedures, and a communication plan. During the latest University Council's strategy committee meeting last Tuesday, Letschert said: "The formal proposal is not ready yet, we will include your remarks in our discussion."

Compulsory lesson

During the Inkom 2023, an awareness campaign for students will be launched, even though it is not known yet what exactly this will look like. It is clear that during the faculty introductions all first-year students must attend a compulsory lesson on sexual safety. In

addition, a compulsory online course on the prevention of sexual violence has been scheduled. "This is not a module in the curriculum, we never said that," the President emphasises. "The curriculum is the responsibility of the deans, not of the Executive Board." There will also be a Social Safety Point for students where they can go with questions and complaints.

Point for employees.

How will they check to see if all students have participated in the compulsory lesson at the end of August, University Council members wondered. Will there be attendance lists, for example? The answer was that this is still being deliberated.

Riki Janssen



May our shared humanity always shine

This is my last column for *Observant*. For three years, I had the privilege to share my musings on things such as poetry, solar panels and what it means to be a scholar. This last pondering falls in the week that UCM celebrates its 20th anniversary, making it a time of reflection for the college and my own contribution to this community of learning. This November, I too celebrate 20 years at UCM. It has been a fulfilling 20 years.

Graduations are also a time for contemplation and UCM will have its summer graduation soon. I happened to see Tom Hanks' recent commencement speech at Harvard University and felt it resonated with the times. He said that "the maelstrom of history swirl so wildly that no matter the year, the era, or the generation, there is always an atmospheric river of events that makes right now the hinge upon which our fate is turning." Dear UCM class of 2023, as you cross the André Rieu stage to receive your diplomas, I will echo Hanks' sentiment, and say "at last, help is on the way!"

I hope that my students will say that their journey has been one of growth, understanding, and navigating diverse viewpoints. I aim to instill the value of being good citizens, engaging in meaningful dialogue, and embracing empathy. While we may encounter individuals with differing political beliefs, it is crucial to approach each interaction with an open mind and a willingness to listen. By seeking common ground and respectfully discussing our differences, we contribute to a society that fosters unity and understanding. Dear UM community, stay informed, critically analyze information, and let's together challenge our own biases. By doing so, we can actively contribute to a society that thrives on respectful discourse and cooperation. And, may our shared humanity always shine. For in our journeys, both far and near, let's strive for a world that's kind and clear.

Roberta Haar, professor of Foreign Policy Analysis and Transatlantic Relations at UCM

MUMC installs sunscreen dispensers at the hospital exits

How do people react to free sunscreen?



Photo: Joey Roberts

You see them more and more: posts with bottles of free sunscreen attached. Great – after all, applying well can prevent skin cancer and other damage to the skin – but how do people react to those dispensers? Do they use the cream? Why (not)? A team of researchers from the department of Health Promotion at research school CAPHRI are going to investigate this.

The location: in Maastricht, at the exits of MUMC. That is where the hospital set up the sunscreen posts, filled with SPF 30, last week. "The initiative came from MUMC's Zorgin-

novatielab (Health Care Innovation Lab)," says assistant professor Francine Schneider. "One of their members – dermatologist Herm Mertens – has been an advocate of free sunscreen in public spaces for years. Because large-scale research into how such a post is used had never been done, they ended up with us."

The researchers will observe how people react to the post. Is it noticed? Do they approach it to read the text? Do they then use the cream? Also, does it make a difference at what time of the day they walk past the post? Or how warm it is outside? "We are also going to interview

people. Why did they decide to use or not to use the sunscreen," says Schneider, who adds that the posts will be decorated more this week. "A banner so that they are more noticeable and a mirror, so that you can see if you have spread everything out properly."

Schneider hopes to expand the research to other locations. "For example, in the park or near bars with outdoor seating. It appears that people are more prone to use the cream at some locations than at others. But whether that is actually the case and why, we don't know."

CF

series a room of one's own

“It's difficult to meet new people if you don't like to party”



Photo: Ellen Oosterhof

Céline Camelot (18, Dutch/French), a bachelor's student of European Studies, lives on Dorpstraat in a 70 m² apartment with a kitchen, bathroom, two bedrooms and a living room. She lives with a roommate. Their total rent is 1300 euros per month, of which she pays half (650 euros).

When Céline Camelot opens the door, she is dressed formally in black. Does she always dress this neatly? No, she laughs. “After this interview, I have a negotiation simulation for class. I have to act like a member of the EU council and talk about Russia's invasion of Crimea.” And yes, she's a bit nervous. (A few days after this interview, she reported that everything went well and she had a lot of fun.)

Ancient Greek and Latin

She enjoys studying European Studies, as she

is interested in politics and history. “Especially how people treat each other, how they behave.” This began in secondary school, where she spent a lot of time learning ancient Greek and Latin and becoming familiar with the history of classical antiquity.

Painted canvases

Canvases painted by Camelot and her roommate decorate the living room wall. Opposite the colourful wall, a green dinosaur teddy is sitting on the air conditioning switch. The

two roommates are the only students in the apartment building; the other apartments are inhabited by working people. They are good friends and previously lived together in a student house in Maastricht with three other friends. They moved because they were having problems with the landlord; he would come into their home drunk and yell at them, trying to intimidate them. It was neither a safe nor a healthy environment. Fortunately, all of them were able to find alternative accommodation.

Although the two sometimes cook together, they have different tastes in food. She doesn't like to cook and prefers to eat premade meals, while he loves cooking spicy food which she doesn't enjoy.

Rows of books sit on her desk, in the sunshine. She used to read a lot and wants to get back into it. She doesn't like serious books, but prefers reading something with a bit of humour in it. Her favourite is a Dutch novel entitled *Ik geef je de zon*. It's about the lives of two twins, Noah and Jude, as they fall in love, go through the ups and downs of life and grow apart. One of the reasons why she likes to read is that she is a real introvert who needs time alone “after meeting people, to recharge”.

Introvert

“I like being around certain people I know well, and I enjoy hanging out in places I'm familiar and comfortable with.” She's a bit shy and quiet, and often finds it difficult to talk to people in her class. “Everyone already has friends and they like to party together”, she says. “I don't – it's too noisy and crowded for me. It's difficult to meet new people if you don't like to party, as that's what students mostly do.”

But things have changed since she joined a social group that her roommate has begun to refer to as “Mob Mentality”. The idea behind the group is simple: members come to events like game nights and cooking evenings, sometimes even inviting strangers to join them.

She goes home to Zaltbommel every week, which she thinks is “quite often for a student”. She mainly goes home to take driving lessons and to visit her family. “I usually spend most of my time relaxing in my room.”

Phone addiction

She can't live without her mobile phone. “My phone is an addiction and a distraction. I use it to escape and to procrastinate on studying.” She spends most of her time on TikTok, engaging with funny content that is sometimes political.

Kathryn van den Berg

A series about students and their student room

UM going all out with ideas for a 'smarter academic year'

"The university as a whole has taken an irreversible path, the urgency is great"

Maastricht University wants to have a shorter academic year. But is an idealized image, a single model for all study programmes to stop teaching at the beginning of June, actually feasible? This is being investigated at the moment. In addition, three faculties are experimenting, with funding from the government. "The most important thing is to reduce the workload," says rector Pamela Habibović.

"In comparison to Belgium or the United States, we have a very long academic year," stated Thomas Cleij, dean of the Faculty of Science and Engineering. His faculty is participating (just like the Faculties of Arts and Social Sciences and Health, Medicine and Life Sciences) in a national pilot, funded by the Ministry of Education. A total of fourteen universities and one university of applied sciences are taking part. How they will shorten the academic year, so where they will make adaptations, is up to them. Condition: it may not be at the expense of the content of the programme. The projects will run until 2026.

A number of continuous weeks

At the time when the ministry introduced the funds for the pilots, UM had already been zooming in on the theme for a while, says rector Habibović. Two internal working groups presented their ideas at the end of 2022, after which the deans and the Executive Board gave the go-ahead for further elaboration. At the moment, a feasibility study is taking place to find out what the consequences of such an operation would be for academic staff, for students, and for administrative and support staff. Habibović is not saying much about the 'model' that they are aiming for, but does say that "research has shown that lecturers benefit most from a number of continuous weeks 'off', for example four weeks at the end of the year," so in June. She also says that the ideal situation would be for the whole of UM to have the same set-up of their year. It is important for the interdisciplinary aspect, she outlines, for (even more) co-operation in the field of research and education. That won't work if a lecturer or researcher from faculty A has a different academic agenda to a colleague at Faculty B. Cleij is convinced that change is unavoidable: "The university as a whole has taken an irreversible path, the urgency is great." The pilot projects in the three faculties constitute a separate track, and no, "it is not certain whether this can be (fully) integrated in the overall plan for UM," the rector said. They may, however, be part of the solution.

Internships

There are certainly advocates of a shorter academic year; who wouldn't want a more relaxed



Illustratie: Simone Golob

pace and room to do things? Finally time to attend congresses, for education innovation, research or time off. Students may also benefit, says Cleij, because they will have more time for internships. But here was criticism too, because the number of credits must remain the same. Will more lessons be given in fewer weeks? Will members of staff be busier at

a different time? Cleij: "We have become convinced that a smarter academic year is certainly not worse. It is possible that the absolute workload will not (immediately) be reduced, but hopefully the stress that is felt will be, that there will be more moments to rest."

Wendy Degens

The pilots: from a longer summer holiday to a week off every now and again

Within the bachelor's of **European Public Health**, FHML wants to shorten the eight-week blocks to seven weeks, stated Mirjam Oude Egbrink, scientific director of the Education Institute. Lecturers and students are yearning for breathers. Reason enough to experiment with one week of no classes resulting in lecturers being 'free from teaching'. Students can prepare, for example, for the following block. Oude Egbrink: "The academic year would in fact be four weeks shorter, but summer holidays would not be longer."

The Faculties of **Science and Engineering (FSE)** and **Arts and Social Sciences (FASoS)** are striving for the latter in their pilots. "We want a cut at the end," says Cleij. This would be possible by removing a short block of four weeks, after Christmas for example (that prefers Cleij). This would shift everything. "In principle, the year should end for everybody at the beginning of June. Of course, some extension can't be prevented, a diploma ceremony for example, or some other minor duties, but no lectures, thesis supervision or exams." According to Cleij, it is a great opportunity "to modernise and improve" the study programmes. At the same time, it is a complex process: "You can't remove four weeks 'just like that'. You have a considerable number of themes to deal with, for example how the ECTS are divided up in

the programmes." The task at hand is now to go and identify the bottlenecks, he says. FSE and FHML actually want to change the academic year (implementation phase) in academic year 2024-2025.

At FASoS, there are no regular blocks in the last period of the academic year, Patrick Bijsmans, vice dean of education e-mailed, but there are deadlines for theses and resits. "Ideally the whole period will become free of any teaching-related work. So our pilot would be concerned with how to best organize this." For example, this will require that period 5 is at least partly teaching free to enable students in their final year to focus on their thesis. They ask themselves how they can make this work, without increasing work pressure elsewhere and without losing education quality.



Years of growth and challenges

I thought for a long time about which topic this column should have. After all, it will be my thirtieth, and last student column that I write for *Observant*. But I couldn't decide on one topic. Instead, I want to use this last column to reflect upon my student journey here in Maastricht, that started eight years ago, and will come to an end in just a few weeks with my first 'real', or 'adult' job.

Eight years – that's a very long time indeed. And I never would have thought to study that long when I started, in the summer of 2015, when I was 20 years old. Back then, Obama was still US President and the Russians did already fight wars, but foremostly in Syria.

I, for my part, was beyond excited to dive into the social life of Maastricht. Of course, I made friends quickly, got around a lot. I still remember the one awkward time I went – all on my own, because the friend who invited me didn't show up – to a cantus of student organisation Lux ad Mosam, and was asked to stand up on the bench and sing *Ein Prosit der Gemütlichkeit* in a room full of strangers, all on my own (without really knowing the melody, the people around me rolled their eyes). I was never invited back (no blame, would do the same).

But with other groups I was far more successful, like the debating club Rhetorica, thanks to which I could go to Oxford and Stockholm, but also got to know our country better with debating tournaments in Middelburg and Leiden. Or the great year podcasting with UNSA, which not only let me acquire new skills, but also rediscover my love for Sangria.

I had fun. But of course, I also struggled. My studies weren't going how they should, and I always had the pressure to earn money on my neck, being made an orphan in year one when my mum died from cancer. And the guilt. I know that she did everything, often putting herself last, to ensure that I would be able to study and have the freedom of choice that she couldn't have back in the 80s.

Now I'm here. Nearly done with my bachelor's, and starting a very exciting new chapter – at *Observant*, where I will work as junior journalist from August. I often worried about my future, about everything, and I still do. But in the end, everything will be okay.

Simon Wirtz,
master's student at FASoS

In one fell swoop, 600 new student homes in Randwyck: **how did that go?**

“We have been living on a building site for almost a year now”

In only a few months' time, they appeared on the Sorbonnelaan in Randwyck last autumn: six buildings, each with a hundred prefab student studios – the so-called ‘container homes’. It prevented a rooms shortage in Maastricht, the owner says. Students still complain, however, and “just had it” with living in a place that is not ‘ready’.

Text: Dennis Vaendel Photo: Joey Roberts

The building site

“The noise of the machines often starts at seven o'clock in the morning, sometimes they are right beside your window,” a Polish student sighed back in November. Two months before she moved into a ‘container home’, right after it had been completed; sleeping with earplugs was still a necessity. “But fortunately it will all be over soon,” she said hopefully at the time. The last of the six buildings would after all be completed in two weeks, ready to be rented out.

Eight months later, at the beginning of June, it is still a construction site with machines working around the buildings. With every gust of wind, dust and sand blows everywhere, “if you

forget to close your window, your whole room will be covered in dust,” a German student complains. The paving on the site only started a couple of days ago; before that, it was bare soil. Okay, they put down gravel during the winter, so that the students didn't reach their front doors with mud-covered shoes. “But if you are a disabled student, you have a problem,” says a student from Kazakhstan. A ‘building site’ is how practically all the students who spoke to *Observant* – about a dozen spread out over the academic year (names are known to the editors) – described the place where they live. The noise has not become any less since November. “I know a lot of people who ‘flee’ during the day, for example to the library, because the noise is driving them mad,” one student says. “It is very difficult to

concentrate here.”

“We also would have liked things to have been different,” Joep Gubbels, contact person on behalf of Studenten Huisvesting Maastricht (SHM; owner of the buildings), said when asked. “Because of the situation in construction work, where the supply of materials has been delayed, it just wasn't possible. Fortunately, we are now getting a lot of work done. We plan to have the site largely completed in August, so before the start of the new academic year.”

The teething problems

Four washing machines for more than 800 homes – the 600 homes plus the already

existing 250 studios. That was the situation for weeks last autumn. “Huge chaos,” is how a German student describes it. “Through sheer desperation, I did my washing at my grandparents' home in Düsseldorf.” The reason? Again, delays due to suppliers, says property manager Janou Sangers from Plaza Resident Services, which manages the buildings on behalf of SHM. “In the end, it was already December before we were able to set up a laundry area in each building.

So, they were suffering from multiple ‘teething problems’. Especially in the first few months, tenants regularly had to do without electricity or running water, a situation that could last from hours to sometimes even half a day. “This was announced beforehand, but often the exact time changed at the last minute,” multiple students said. “Then you suddenly have a discharged laptop.” Sangers agrees that things were often cancelled or changed. “But it filled us with apprehension to communicate that, because we knew how awkward it was. Often it was circumstances beyond our control: work couldn't go ahead due to, for example, the weather or having to wait longer on a delivery.”

But the “mother of all problems,” says a German student, was the air-conditioning that supplies the studios with both warm and cold air. “It made a loud, ticking noise, even when it was switched off. I wore ear plugs in bed at night, otherwise it was unbearable. At one point, I bought an electric heater; if you switched the air-conditioning off it was less loud.” Despite frequent contact with the manager, no solution came for months, another tenant adds. “Enough to drive you crazy. At one point, we no longer heard anything from Plaza anymore. Until one day, after six months, the noise had suddenly disappeared.” It was a complicated problem, Sangers explains. “The factory even sent experts from abroad. They had to manually change the settings in every studio. Obviously not without the consent of the tenants; it took a while before we got that from everyone. We didn't communicate this because we had e-mailed so often before about repairs. You have to find a balance, otherwise tenants won't read them anymore.”

The atmosphere

“We want to create a community here,” says Sergio Aspers, on behalf of Plaza, who was first a caretaker and now a property manager, as he walks across the grounds. He greets students passing by enthusiastically and starts up conversations with them. “Many students live far from their families. They should feel at home here.” He points to the places where they will soon be able to have a picnic and also where a square will be realised. “Maybe we will be able to hold a ‘Sorbonne Festival’ sometime soon.” They are also working on turning the laundry spaces into communal spaces. “We want to have televisions, magazines and a dartboard in each of them.” That is great, but should have been done sooner, the students reckon. For a whole year, they have been complaining about the lack of places where they could meet. “I am surrounded by 800 students, but I hardly know anyone here,” many said. “Several fellow students live in one of the other buildings, and still I never bump into them here. Only at the university.” Yes, one block of studios on



the premises has a common room, but they rarely go there. “I don’t feel very welcome, you always see the same faces there,” says a German student. Otherwise, mainly bare corridors. And sitting outside together has not been possible yet. “It is even dangerous, in between all those machines,” another one says.

Moreover, in the beginning, when a lot of people just moved in, the atmosphere was unpleasant. Employees from Plaza regularly walked around to keep an eye on things, for example, to point out if bicycles or bin bags were in the wrong place. “One of them was known to act in an aggressive and threatening way,” a tenant says. “This caused quite a few conflicts. I did not feel welcome at all, as if the managers are against students and think that all we are good for is demolishing the place. Fortunately, things have been better lately.” Aspers confirms that. “For the past nine months, the relationship with the students has been very good. The person who was involved in some incidents in the beginning, no longer works here.” But, he says, it is important that personnel set limits. “This concerns things like fire safety and noise hindrance. Some young

tenants who find themselves living by themselves for the first time, can’t deal with the freedom very well.” He does understand the dissatisfaction among students in that initial period. “But now that everything is starting to take shape, you see that they are becoming more enthusiastic.”

The costs

“They try to make as much as possible from you,” an Italian student complains. He is referring to the high cost: 8 euro to wash and dry a load of washing, 75 euro for cleaning costs if your room is not clean enough when you leave (“the checks are strict, and yet I was given a dirty room when I moved in”). But it is actually the rent that is a thorn in the side of students, sometimes even a reason to move. Including service costs, furnishings (in most buildings) and an advance for gas, water and electricity, the rent comes to almost 600 to 700 euro per month, depending on the floor. “The basic rent is determined using the government points system,” says Gubbels, the contact person for owner SHM. “The students

have a lot of their own facilities, including their own bathroom, kitchen and air-conditioning. Also, it is under the limit for rent subsidy. So we are definitely taking affordability into account.”

“But then you live in a place that is not ‘finished,’” a student remarks. “If you put a complex like this together so quickly, I understand that things can go wrong. But we do pay a considerable amount. If the rent had been lowered, I would have had less of a problem with it.” Has the owner ever considered compensating students for the problems? No, says Gubbels. “The studios themselves were simply finished. Also, we always offer an inspection beforehand: the students knew where they were going to live. Moreover, we tried to limit the nuisance caused as much as possible.” And don’t forget, Gubbels adds, “construction work was carried out fast for a reason: to prevent a shortage of rooms in Maastricht.”

The occupancy

“The situation has improved somewhat, but so much has happened that I have completely

had it,” a German master’s student sighed. She is even willing to pay the ‘fine’ of 250 euro: the cost of getting out of the minimum lease period of one year (a type of contract that is no longer being offered since last September, a spokesperson for Plaza states: from that time onwards, only temporary contracts with an opportunity to terminate per month have been issued). “I would rather pay than stay longer. You can earn that fine back with a lower rent elsewhere.”

Another three students who spoke to *Observant* in spring of this year, have by now moved or are planning to do so. Is it correct that there are a lot of unoccupied homes? “The buildings have not been completely full yet,” says Gubbels. “Partly because some buildings were completed in October and November when there are fewer new students.” At the beginning of February, the next influx moment, eighty homes were unoccupied. “That number has since then risen to about a hundred. But that compares to what we see at our other locations in and outside Maastricht. Students simply change homes rather easily. Moreover, practically all studios have been reserved for the next academic year.”

The beginning

“A tremendous operation”, is what Maurice Evers (head of Maastricht Housing) called throwing up the 600 prefab homes in Randwyck last autumn. It wasn’t until the end of 2021 – having just left the terrible rooms shortage crisis of that year behind – that the idea was cautiously presented. The predicted influx of students (which ultimately would turn out to be lower than feared) pointed towards a possible shortage of a thousand rooms. Six hundred extra homes on wasteland owned by UM on the Sorbonnelaan, next to a place where developer SHM had already

built more than 250 ‘container homes’ in 2020, could be a solution.

Plans were made in great haste. The first permits were applied for in February of last year, construction work began only in June. Despite delays and personnel shortages in the construction industry, the first buildings – each with one hundred studios – were completed and ready before the start of the new academic year, on 1 September. Until halfway through November, a new block followed every couple of weeks.

news

This is the winning column of our writing contest about 'horror holidays'

La cucaracha



Photo: Pexels

My heart belongs to Italy, but I have a kind of love-hate relationship with Spain, the Spanish islands in particular. Great food and drink, good places to shop, and the people are friendly and don't mind when I accidentally wish them a buon giorno instead of a buenas dias. But my worst fear are those big brown creepy-crawlies: cockroaches. They're the main reason why I only want to visit Spain in the winter, as I am under the illusion that they show up on the streets more frequently in the summer. But this isn't guaranteed Stefanie-proof, either.

You should know that I never plan and book my own holidays; I have a personal travel agent for that, and I love it. No comparing prices, no stress – everything is taken care of. But this one time, I booked a holiday to Gran Canaria myself. When friends invited us to come along, I blindly copied their booking. What that holiday taught me is that I will never again book a holiday without first consulting my travel agent.

After another wonderful day of sun, sea, sand and sangria, we got back to our hotel room. The balcony door was still open, which I found a bit odd. We had a room on the first floor with a view of the pool, surrounded by palm trees. After putting my son to bed, I settled down with a book. Suddenly, I saw something crawling from the corner of my eye. I naively thought it was a spider at first. But when I looked closely, it turned out to be my worst nightmare come true. There was a cockroach in our room. No, not one, but two! I made a hysterical call to the front desk. A housekeeper came up, armed with bug spray ("You keep, you relax"), and left again. It was later brought to my attention that cockroaches can fly, apparently, and like to hide in palm trees. Needless to say, I didn't get a wink of sleep for the rest of that holiday, and I will never pose for a picture under a palm tree ever again.

Stefanie Hollanders – van Oostrum
YUFE Office manager

Agenda academic ceremonies Aula Minderbroedersberg 4-6

15-06, 10.00 h	Marta Poyo Solanas	28-06, 10.00 h	Sanghamitra Pati
15-06, 13.00 h	Charlotte Mueller	28-06, 16.00 h	Yawen Wang
15-06, 16.00 h	Esther Adriana Boudewijns	29-06, 13.00 h	Carlos Murillo Ezcurra
16-06, 10.00 h	Sara Souto-Miranda Double Doctoral Degree Maastricht University – Universidade de Aveiro, Portugal		Double Doctoral Degree Ghent University-Maastricht University
16-06, 13.00 h	Lucas J.M. Heijns	29-06, 16.00 h	Tuğçe Varol
19-06, 13.00 h	Mathew Francis	30-06, 10.00 h	Giuseppe Zaccaria
19-06, 16.00 h	Delia Irene Fernández de la Fuente Double Doctoral Degree Maastricht University - Universidade of Santiago de Compostela	30-06, 13.00 h	Anne Marjan Daniels
20-06, 10.00 h	Henrique Jerônimo Bezerra Marcos Double Doctoral Degree Maastricht University - Universidade de São Paulo	30-06, 16.00 h	Maarten van Heinsbergen
20-06, 13.00 h	Onallia E. Osei	03-07, 10.00 h	Junhua Chen
20-06, 16.00 h	Jules Stouten	03-07, 13.00 h	Evelien Jozef Vandercappellen
21-06, 10.00 h	Frauke Anna Stehr	04-07, 10.00 h	Denise Petzold
21-06, 13.00 h	Rodolfo de la Vega Amador	04-07, 13.00 h	Zhen Zhang
21-06, 16.00 h	Lucia Leontiev Double Doctoral Degree Maastricht University and the Scuola Superiore Sant'Anna	04-07, 16.00 h	Erman Onur Akpınar
22-06, 10.00 h	Lena Pieper	05-07, 10.00 h	Cai Zhang
22-06, 13.00 h	Sheetal Chaudhuri	05-07, 13.00 h	Stijn H. J. Ketelaers
22-06, 16.00 h	Michiel A.G.E. Bannier	05-07, 16.00 h	Kirthana Kunikullaya U
23-06, 13.00 h	Karin Catharina van den Berg	06-07, 10.00 h	Charlotte Andriessen
23-06, 16.30 h	Dr. Marjolein L. Smidt inauguratie	06-07, 13.00 h	Nienke Verstegen
26-06, 13.00 h	Alessandro Concari	06-07, 16.00 h	Michael W.M. Gerrickens
26-06, 16.00 h	Jackson Tyler Boonstra	07-07, 10.00 h	Mathilde I.J. Kennis
27-06, 10.00 h	Maurice Sopacua	07-07, 13.00 h	Mark Matthijs Bakker
27-06, 13.00 h	Milena Agata Ślęczkowska	07-07, 16.30 h	Dr. Lee H. Bouwman inauguratie
27-06, 16.00 h	Prof. dr. Saskia Klosse afscheidscollege	10-07, 10.00 h	Martha Ali Abdulai
		10-07, 13.00 h	Ellen Abrafi Boamah Kaali
		10-07, 16.00 h	Amal Fakha Double Doctoral Degree Maastricht University and KU Leuven
		11-07, 10.00 h	Zhixiang Wang
		11-07, 13.00 h	Yadessa Tegene Woldie
		11-07, 16.00 h	Sarah Jane McGibbon
		12-07, 13.00 h	Haiyan Zeng
		12-07, 16.00 h	Faisal Mohammed Alosaimi
		13-07, 10.00 h	Nordine Es-Sadki
		13-07, 13.00 h	Lynn L.J. van Vugt
		13-07, 16.00 h	Georgios Agorastos
		14-07, 13.00 h	Rick H.W. de Vries
		14-07, 16.30 h	Dr. Tjark Vredeveld inauguratie

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Maastricht University

Interne vacatures

Voor uitgebreide informatie, raadpleeg de website www.maastrichtuniversity.nl.
Klik op de link "Werken bij de UM" en vervolgens op "Vacatures".
Schriftelijke sollicitaties o.v.v. vacaturenummer op brief en envelop (of elektronisch solliciteren via de vacaturewebsite) richten aan de afdeling HRM van de betreffende faculteit of beheerseenheid (Postbus 616, 6200 MD Maastricht).

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