

“Too expensive”

Choco Croissant 2,15

“Why is the chocolate croissant in the mensa more expensive than at Albert Heijn?”

Students in the university council are dissatisfied with the prices in the mensa

P.3 Photo: Observant

## Putin

British historian Orlando Figes about Russia's invasion of Ukraine: anyone who wants to understand it will have to delve into Russian history.

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## Pension

“Do you know who your pension provider is and do you know where your pension contributions go?” Prof. Rob Bauer about pension funds and more sustainable investing.

P.4

## Is the university intimidating ScienceGuide?



Please adapt

Yes,

says the editor-in-chief of the higher education medium ScienceGuide

No,

says Maastricht University

P. 5





Riki Janssen

editorial

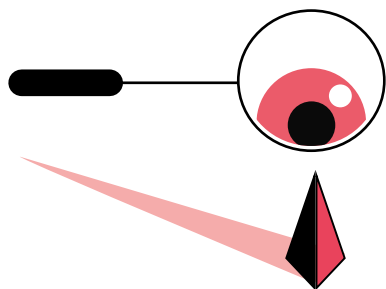
## “Terrible journalism”

UM professor fired for sexual misconduct. News platform *ScienceGuide* feels intimidated by Maastricht University, accusing the university of legal intimidation and silencing the press. UM denies these accusations. General election debate on College Tour: Pieter Omtzigt, leader of the newly formed party NSC, is very critical about internationalisation and the increased use of English in higher education. “Why teach psychology in English?” Wall vandalism near University College Maastricht and the Faculty of Law, clearly related to the Israel–Hammas conflict. We were on autumn break for a week, but the news never stops. Our inboxes overflowed and we talked about work on WhatsApp. Did we end up interviewing Orlando Figes, the Russian history expert set to deliver the annual Tans Lecture? After all, the interview had been postponed several

times. Yes, colleague PD replied, it took place in the middle of autumn break. A fellow journalist elsewhere in the country wanted to know if we had deliberately left the recently fired professor’s name out of our earlier articles. It was a public legal case, so why bother? Our response: “Naming the individual doesn’t serve the public interest. He is not a widely known public figure. Moreover, he has a family we don’t want to cause any more suffering.” The articles had already sparked discussions in the team. Could we use the term victim in our reporting (which we had done) if the court had not yet determined whether the accused had committed a criminal offence? Or was the fact that the accusers feel like victims reason enough to refer to them as such? And weren’t we being overly cautious in our

first articles by not mentioning the fact that the professor in question also held a position on the Board of the Faculty of Health, Medicine and Life Sciences? It’s always a balancing act when it comes to reporting on individuals who have been accused of a crime. You don’t want to publicly judge people; you want to practice accuracy, fairness and balance in reporting. In other words, you strive to practice responsible journalism. Even if it’s impossible to please everyone, as exemplified by a UM professor who accused *Observant* of “terrible journalism” in this case and therefore declined to speak with us. So be it.

*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. Contributions: Dennis Vaendel

### WhatsApp's over babbling

Why would you talk directly to a fellow student or tutor when you can also just send a text message? Only about one in three UM students prefers to communicate in person; the others prefer to send a message via WhatsApp (in the case of fellow students) or an e-mail (to teachers). This was one of the outcomes of a survey on ‘digital literacy’ among students, carried out in spring by research agency Flycatcher among over 150 UM students. The survey was commissioned by the university, which would like to gear its digital supply to the needs of students. The results were recently presented during a University Council committee meeting. Other remarkable results: half of the students estimates that they spend three to four hours daily on their phones, one third even longer. But whether that is study-related? While studying, the majority mainly uses their mobile phones to quickly look something up. When it comes down to making notes or reading longer texts they have a preference for their laptops. At the same time, half still uses ‘old-fashioned’ pen and paper or actually picks up a ‘real’ book. Which digital obstacles do people come across while studying? The majority (63 per cent) is hindered by paywalls, making information inaccessible. Almost half is hampered by



‘information overload’. Forty per cent is dissatisfied or very dissatisfied about the online/offline balance in their lives. They would like more guidance from the university in this field; one respondent even suggests “a sensibilisation campaign about the healthy use of digital technology (physical exercise, human contact, ethical values, et cetera)”. In addition, a lot of students would welcome more help with the use of software needed for assignments, coding or scripting, and keeping data secure. Lastly: Artificial Intelligence (AI). Forty-two per cent states being (very) excited about the developments around AI tools such as ChatGPT, while 28 per cent are (very) concerned about it. Three quarters of the respondents is (very) confident when it comes to using such tools.

### Bar soap: Part 2

At the beginning of this year, we wrote about the soap concerning The Faculty Bar, a corner with a bar table and refrigerator on the ground floor of UNS40. It was received with great enthusiasm last year – places to go for a drink in Randwyck are few and far between – but soon there were grumblings in the council meeting of the Faculty of Psychology and Neuroscience (FPN). FPN, together with the Faculty of Health, Medicine and Life Sciences (FHML), had invested money in this project, with the agreement that the bar would be run by students from both faculties. However, the bar was opened a year ago without informing the FPN board or student association Placebo. Even worse, it was described on a poster as the ‘FHML Faculty Bar’. Contacting the bar board proved extremely difficult. During a recent FPN council meeting, the soap happily continued. Chairperson Michael Capalbo stated last September that the bar board, consisting exclusively of FHML students, had apparently disbanded. Somewhat mysteriously, however, it was said that “fortunately now we know how to gain access to the bar.” Apparently, that makes no difference to FPN students, because “we never see anything happening there; to be honest, we thought we were not allowed to use the bar,” they said. Two weeks ago, during the latest meeting, it had become clear that a new bar board had been formed. FPN director Pascal Stevens and council member on behalf of support staff Caroline van Loo had even planned a meeting with them. At the supreme moment, however, not a single board member appeared to have turned up. This means that the limit has (almost) been reached. “We will give them one more chance to talk,” said Van Loo, “otherwise we will appoint a new board. This time including FPN students.” To be continued, again.

Judge's decision: "Serious lack of self-reflection"

## Professor's dismissal due to unacceptable behaviour

*A professor from the Faculty of Health, Medicine and Life Sciences, who recently appeared before the judge because of sexually unacceptable behaviour, can be legitimately dismissed by Maastricht University. The court finds his behaviour "seriously culpable"; hence he will not be receiving financial compensation.*

One year ago, the Faculty of Health, Medicine and Life Sciences (FHML) asked an external integrity agency to initiate an investigation into the professor, after reports of sexually unacceptable behaviour. Interviews were held with 17 people involved in the case, including the professor himself. He was a so-called profiling professor from 2018 until 2023. That is a position for an associate professor who – within the framework of career policies – is allowed to climb the ladder. He was also a member of the FHML faculty board for two years.

On the basis of the results of the investigation, Maastricht University decided to start dismissal procedures. At the end of September, this led to a court case and the court's decision was published last week. The decision referred to a number of examples of misconduct, such as him bringing a drunken master's student to his home (who subsequently spent the night there), kissing another student, kissing two subordinate colleagues, touching the breasts of one of them. Also, he started a long-term sexual relationship with one of his PhD students. The image drawn in the court's decision is largely similar to what four of the people involved had already told *Observant* before the summer: unsolicited kissing, pushy behaviour, intimidation, and abuse of power. There is no question of a one-off incident, the judge believes, but of "a pattern of seriously undesirable behavior". She also holds it against him that he had a "serious lack of self-reflection". He should have been able to see what the consequences of his behaviour could be for those involved. The judge also makes short work of 'the statement' made by the professor that it was not him but 'the other' who initiated the kissing or a relationship. That he "maintains this dry-eyed", the judge calls "a denial of his own responsibility, the power structure, the exemplary role that he had". The fact that he also reckons that relationships between professors and subordinates occur more often, cannot serve as an excuse, according to the judge.

Wendy Degens

Check out for the latest news



Student members of the University Council dissatisfied about university restaurant prices

## "Chocolate croissant is too expensive"



Photo: Observant

*"A chocolate croissant costs more than two euro at the university restaurant, whereas it costs less than one euro at the Albert Heijn. How is that possible?" The prices at the Maastricht University restaurants – especially those of hot meals – which are too high in the eyes of the students, were subject of discussion during the latest University Council committee meeting.*

Although a recent survey by Groningen university newspaper *UKrant* (with the cooperation of *Observant* and other parties) shows that the Maastricht University restaurants (in Randwyck and on the Tongersestraat) are some of the cheapest, students in the operational management committee were particularly critical. It's not just the croissants that students find much too expensive – "students in Randwyck can't just slip into town to buy something," student member Cora Kenter argued – but also the prices of hot meals are a thorn in their sides. A similar sound was heard earlier in the council of the faculty of Psychology and Neuroscience: too expensive and also not sustainable enough. How can the university restaurant claim to be cheaper than other canteens in the country if the price of a hot meal is above average, student member Andrew Scrivener wanted to know. He was referring to a chart in the Groningen survey that had just been presented by Facility Services. Upon closer investigation, however, the chart showed that this did not concern a hot meal, but a so-called "full meal", consisting of a luxury roll, a cola, an apple and a bowl of soup. This deal costs 9.68 euro at UM, whereas the average price in the country is 9.28. The editors from *UKrant* replied that Groningen had not carried out an investigation into hot meals because the selection from the differ-

ent universities is so varied, making it tough to compare.

"I interpreted the chart incorrectly," says Mike van Gerwen, contract manager at Facility Services, afterwards. He doesn't know how the prices are elsewhere in the country, but the cost of a hot meal at UM – from beef rendang and chips, Turkish pizza with kebab, eastern chicken salad to lasagne – is between 5.50 and 8.50 euro. "We have about sixty different options; what is on the menu depends on the season."

There wasn't an immediate answer to the question posed during the committee meeting, whether a hot meal could cost less. But on Wednesday, October 25, Van Gerwen sat down with caterer Eurest and one of the students from the university council to see what options there are.

In answer to the question whether UM makes a profit on the university restaurants, there was a resounding "no" from vice president Nick Bos. The annual contribution that the caterer pays to UM, is used for the buildings and the improvement of services. Previously, the branch manager for Eurest at UM, René Kersten, had already stated to *Observant* that the business in Maastricht does not make a profit at the moment.

Riki Janssen



## The five stages of exams

“

Every exam week, you promise yourself and everyone around you that next semester will be different. You'll start early, stay on top of your readings, and establish a healthy sleep schedule. But your semester seems to follow its own unchangeable pattern.

### Denial

Life is good. You're meeting friends and drinking overpriced coffee. Of course, exams are pretty close, and you could be studying, but going out seems far more rewarding. Still, every time you're sipping a beer outside, you have to suppress a nagging feeling.

### Anger

Denial doesn't work anymore. You have to face it; you messed up again. And you're pissed, mostly at yourself for not following through on your good intentions, but also at the stupid university. What idiot came up with exams every six weeks? It's not fair! All your friends can enjoy their college years, but you had to choose Maastricht out of all the places, right? You develop a deep hatred towards anyone who has the audacity to post on Instagram. Hello? Not everyone can just sit in cafes all day.

### Bargaining

Perhaps not all is lost just yet. Maybe you can ask for an extension? Maybe you don't really need seven hours of sleep; maybe four is enough? You start to feel a bit better. Perhaps you can make it a bit more fun, like watching TV while studying or meeting with a friend?

### Depression

Okay, seriously, what the heck? How did you end up in the same place again? It's one week until the deadline, and you're completely screwed. Sleep deprivation is catching up; you don't even know what day it is anymore. Why did you choose this degree again? Why are you even stressing about exams when the world is ending anyway? Everything feels meaningless, and not in a fun Camus kind of way.

### Acceptance

Well, there's no way around it. If you want to graduate you have to submit something. So you drag yourself back to your desk and start writing that stupid paper. The adrenaline of the approaching deadline is doing its job, and perfectionism takes a back seat. Something is better than nothing, right? "This too will pass" becomes your guiding motto. And then it's over. You survived, at least more or less. And next time, you'll do things differently.

”

Line-Marie Eichhorst,  
student at University College  
Maastricht

series: societal impact of research

# UM study leads to more sustainable pension investments



Rob Bauer Photo: Ellen Oosterhof

In today's world, the societal impact of research findings seems more important than getting published in an academic journal like *Nature* or *The Lancet*. What impact has research conducted at UM had in recent years? This week: how UM economists nudged a pension fund into making more sustainable investment decisions.

"Do you know who your pension provider is?" asks Rob Bauer, smiling when the reporter can't answer the question right away. "And do you know where your pension contributions go?" He smiles again. His point is clear. Anyone who works in the Netherlands automatically contributes to a pension fund. But how many people are aware that they pay roughly a fifth of their gross salary into their pension? And how many know where and how that money is invested, or if it's invested sustainably?

Bauer, professor of Institutional Investors at the School of Business and Economics, is interested in sustainable investing. This may sound like common sense today, "but years ago, especially in the field of finance,

people would chuckle when I brought up the topic." A lot has changed since then. "Institutional investors like pension funds started taking sustainable investing more seriously after the 2009 Climate Change Conference in Copenhagen. They began making more ethical decisions, like avoiding investments in the tobacco industry." But until recently, he explains, pension fund participants had little to no say in these decisions. And while there have been studies on participants' preferences, they tended not to look at sustainable investing or were methodologically unsound. "In 2018, Dutch pension funds agreed to start asking for participants' views on responsible investing", says Bauer. "My then colleagues Tobias Ruof and Paul Smeets and

I put our heads together to come up with a way to go about this. Measuring people's true preferences is not an easy task."

## Binding referendum

The three researchers developed a questionnaire and found a pension fund willing to participate: Pensioenfond Detailhandel, one of the ten largest pension funds in the Netherlands. Bauer has been an independent advisor on its investment committee since 2009, and the fund is affiliated with his department. "We were able to conduct this study because they already knew and trusted me", he says. "That said, it was an independent study that can stand the test of scientific scrutiny. It was published in *The Review*

of *Financial Studies*, a reputable academic journal."

The fund already made investment decisions with three of the seventeen UN sustainable development goals in mind: 'Decent Work and Economic Growth', 'Climate Action' and 'Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions'. The study asked whether the fund should add a fourth goal, 'Responsible Consumption and Production'. It also asked whether the fund should increase its engagement to improve the sustainability policies of the companies it invests in. "The board committed in advance to integrating the outcome of the study into their investment decision-making. As far as I'm aware, Pensioenfond Detailhandel was the first pension fund in the world to hold a binding referendum on part of its sustainable investment policy among its participants."

The outcome of the referendum was clear: 68 per cent of participants voted for a more sustainable investment policy, with only 10 per cent opposing it. Moreover, 58 per cent was still in favour of more sustainable investing even if this would result in lower financial returns. "We found a close relationship between participants' support for more sustainable investments and their social and political preferences", says Bauer. "And people turned out to be quite willing to put their money where their mouth is."

## More weight

As a result of the study, the fund engaged more companies in dialogue about sustainability. In 2019, they had 568 sustainability discussions – a 44 per cent increase compared to 2018, the year when the referendum was held. "And the number has remained the same since", says Bauer. What about the effect of the effect, though? In other words, did all these talks actually yield results? "We didn't specifically examine that", says Bauer, "but other research has shown that this kind of engagement brings about change at one in five companies. The fund is currently exploring whether it would be more effective overall to engage a smaller number of companies in more in-depth discussions." Pensioenfond Detailhandel also actively implemented another non-binding outcome of the study. Three-quarters of participants were in favour of investing more in companies that perform well on the four sustainable development goals mentioned above. These companies were subsequently given more weight in the fund's investment index, although Bauer notes that "the board needs to ask itself whether this was enough". Finally, the UM economists noticed that their study had a side effect. "Ten other pension funds asked us to conduct similar studies for them. We didn't have time for that, but we did evaluate the participant surveys of three of these funds based on our experiences. That's also real-world impact, as funds all too often still use a standard survey of subpar quality. Our feedback has genuinely made a difference."

Peter Doorackers

# News platform ScienceGuide at loggerheads with Maastricht University

Is Maastricht University intimidating higher education medium *ScienceGuide*? Yes, says editor-in-chief Frans van Heest. “It looks as if like they are trying to ruin us.” No, says UM: the fact that university challenged *ScienceGuide* about inaccuracies in an article, is not intimidation and is not related to the reclaiming of 50 thousand euro ‘collaboration money’.



Illustration: Simone Golob

What is going on between the university and *ScienceGuide* (SG), the online medium that publishes news articles and background stories about higher education in the Netherlands? In July, SG editor-in-chief Frans van Heest wrote about a labour dispute between UM and a professor from the Faculty of Health, Medicine and Life Sciences. The latter was suspended and took the matter to court. Van Heest based himself on the published court decision which is open to the public, and led with the heading: “*Sueing Maastricht*

*University professor does not want a ‘position elsewhere’*.” The day after the publication, SG received an e-mail from one of the Maastricht University press officers, saying that some things were incorrect. “If we didn’t adapt it, we were threatened that legal steps would be taken.” And that did not go down well with Van Heest. “They could also have picked up the telephone; then we could have solved this amicably. Why use harsh legal threats?” About this, Koen Augustijn, spokesperson on behalf of the Maastricht Executive Board says: “We

felt that we had to react firmly. Something had to be put right here quickly. The incorrect position taken in the article was unnecessarily damaging to one of our employees. Anyway, in answer to the question whether threatening with legal steps was necessary, one could say: ‘Perhaps that could also have been done differently.’”

## Stupidities

Eventually, SG made a few adaptations, “we mainly made the intro more explicit. The

suspended professor had actually *unjustly* accused another professor of unacceptable sexual behaviour, and that had to be made clearer.”

Nevertheless, this didn’t clear the air, the editor-in-chief states. A number of weeks later, in August, there was a discussion between SG and UM about an ‘unduly claimed payment’ of 50 thousand euro. UM, as a ‘partner’ of the news medium (along with three other universities, eight universities of applied sciences and three other organisations), paid an annual amount for the ‘collaboration’ with SG, but the collaboration agreement appeared to have ended in 2021. According to Van Heest, however, that was “not formally” arranged. The UM had just paid the invoices after 2021. Due to “stupidities”, Augustijn now says.

## Business dispute

It came to light last spring due to an alert UM employee. After receiving a new invoice from SG, the editorial board was contacted about the ending of the collaboration in 2021. “We were no longer a partner, so we were not going to pay the invoice,” says Augustijn. “The e-mail exchange about this was *before* the publication of the article about the court case, so before we asked for textual adaptations.” UM is therefore of the opinion that “the journalistic dispute” is not related to the “financial dispute”. Van Heest sees that differently. According to him, one plus one is two. “Moreover, UM has always behaved like a partner the past few years,” he says. “We have had plenty of contact about various topics, we visited the UM for talks, to discuss subjects. We spent a lot of attention on Maastricht.” Augustijn contradicts the fact that the university behaved as a partner: “We treated *ScienceGuide* just like other media, such as *de Limburger* and *Observant*, we send press releases and highlight all kinds of activities.”

SG has now submitted a counterclaim to the university for the past year. Van Heest: “If Rianne Letschert sticks to her guns and wants the 50 thousand euro returned, that will be the end of SG.”

Wendy Degens

## What is the court case about in the challenged article in ScienceGuide?

In spring of 2023, Maastricht University suspended a professor from the Faculty of Health, Medicine and Life Sciences and started a ‘personal investigation’ into his behaviour. He did not agree with this and took the university to court just before the summer. The court’s decision was published on 30 June, after which *ScienceGuide* (SG) wrote about it on the basis of public documents on [rechtspraak.nl](https://rechtspraak.nl). The fact that the judge needed to be involved, had to do with all kinds of issues. One of

the most important ones is the ‘animosity’ between the two departments of Human Biology (HB) and Nutrition and Movement Sciences (NMS), which has existed for years. The suspended professor was from the latter. The whole case escalated because of plans by the faculty board to introduce a new chair in the department of Human Biology. The other group, NMS, didn’t agree with this, because they already had a chair with the same name. Furthermore, there was criticism of the decision-making surrounding the chair and

there were complaints about social unsafety at work (with regard to both departments). On top of that, the ‘main character’ in this whole process – the professor who had instituted the court case – had unjustly accused a fellow professor of improper behaviour. For its article, SG used a number of e-mails (published on [rechtspraak.nl](https://rechtspraak.nl)) between UM president Rianne Letschert and the suspended professor. In one of those e-mails, Letschert writes about the “great concerns” that she has about his well-being. She sug-

gests that he should undergo an intensive round of treatment. In the process, he could also focus on finding employment at another university. Letschert could take up her “role” in this, she writes in one of these e-mails, for example where it concerns the transfer of materials, data, or ongoing funding. For SG, this was reason enough to use the term ‘position elsewhere’ as a heading for the article.

The alternative that Letschert suggested to the professor, was a personal investigation. This was eventually started (and still not completed).

The judge, by the way, did not rule in the professor’s favour; UM is allowed to suspend him while the investigation is ongoing.

WD

*The professor in this case is another one than in the dismissal case*

## Orlando Figes on Russia and Ukraine:

# “Calling your enemies

What does Russian President Vladimir Putin hope to achieve with his war on Ukraine? The answer to this question can be found in Russian history, says Orlando Figes. The British professor will unpack the issue in Maastricht next Tuesday, delivering Studium Generale’s annual Tans Lecture. “You must also understand Russia, because after the war, you’ll still have to deal with it.”

“Who controls the past controls the future”, and “who controls the present controls the past”. Early in *The Story of Russia*, Orlando Figes quotes George Orwell’s dystopian novel *1984*. In Figes’s view, the quote holds true for Russia more than any other country. His book, published last year, serves as an assertion of this claim. It provides a concise overview of a thousand years of Russian history, as well as Russian historiography – the way the Russian people view their own history, and how this has shaped their nation. According to Figes, generations of Russian rulers have distorted this history into myths to bolster their own power and justify their decisions.

In a Zoom interview, he points out a number of recurring themes. “The principle that power derives from the personal authority of the ruler, who is seen as divine or holy. The fundamental problem of the sheer size of the country and its lack of natural borders. And the idea that Russia isn’t just a country but a sacred country, perceiving itself as a saviour of sorts. This is difficult for Westerners to wrap our heads around. Our understanding of nations is based on the way they developed here, with a separation of church and state and checks and balances in the power structure. Russia didn’t develop that way. Throughout much of its history, it had no checks and balances and was heavily influenced by the legacy of the Byzantine Empire, where church and state were two sides of the same coin.”

### Painfully relevant

The book would’ve been a fascinating read in and of itself. Figes is not just a prominent historian specialised in the history of Russia, but also a skilled writer. But since last year, the topic is also painfully relevant. *The Story of Russia* ends with the build-up to the Russian invasion of Ukraine. It’s what prompted Figes to write the book, he explains. In 2016, the Russian president unveiled a monument in Moscow to Vladimir the Great, Grand Prince of

Kyiv, who converted the state of Kievan Rus’ to Christianity around the year 1000. Putin’s speech increased Figes’s apprehensions about Ukraine being in danger. “Putin claimed that the grand prince was the founder of the modern Russian state.” Historically, this direct connection does not exist, as Figes makes clear in his book. But it didn’t stop Putin from asserting that Ukraine has always been part of a “Greater Russia” and should remain so.

### Declaration of war

In 2021, the Russian president reiterated this in an essay “on the historical unity of Russians and Ukrainians”. Many Westerners saw it as a curious document with dubious claims. In hindsight, Figes argues, we can view it as “a declaration of war, as Putin’s historical justification of the invasion. He contends that Ukraine is not a real nation. That whenever it tries to break free from the rule of Greater Russia, it falls into the hands of Western powers that will use it against Russia. That NATO’s increased military presence in Ukraine confirms that the West is a threat to Russia. And that Russia needs a strong leader and a strong state to defend itself. These claims are myths, of course, but they are crucial to understanding what’s happening in Ukraine.”

**And they’re not new either, according to your book.**

“Most of Putin’s myths from 2021 can be found in any nineteenth-century Russian history book. They have been a fundamental part of Russian historiography for at least two hundred years. It was only in the 1990s that alternative views were briefly allowed. The West never took these ideas as seriously as it should’ve. Not because we should accept them as historically accurate, but to better understand where the Russians are coming from and to deal with them more effectively. To do so, we must not only study Russian history, but also Russian *historiography*.”

**How could that have helped us in dealing with Putin’s Russia?**

“Churchill once said that Russia needs to feel like a great power and needs to feel that it is treated as such. If we’d understood this better, perhaps certain mistakes could have been prevented. Because the West has made mistakes in its dealings with Russia ever since the fall of the Soviet Union. It treated the Russians as perpetrators of the Soviet system, not as victims like the other Soviet nationalities. Between 1991 and 2014, USAID gave over five billion dollars to civil society groups in Ukraine. Similar groups in Russia received about 120 million dollars during the same period.”

**And what about sensitive issues like NATO expansion in Eastern Europe?**

“Perhaps it could’ve been done with more dialogue and transparency. NATO could’ve expanded into Eastern Europe without provoking Russia. It was always clear that Ukraine would become a problem; Gorbachev had already said so. And yet Western countries got involved in the 2014 Maidan revolution in Ukraine, as if Russia had no say and no influence in the matter. That was a mistake. The West should’ve been more aware of the need to reassure the Russians. Putin’s myths have the intended effect on the Russian people because they feel humiliated by everything that has happened since the fall of the Soviet Union. So many lost so much – their economic security, their jobs, their savings. In their view, this lends credibility to Putin’s claim that the West has been playing with Russia and treating it as a defeated power. His rhetoric since 2012 has revolved around the idea of restoring ‘Greater Russia’. And for twenty years, Russian schools, TV and films have told the Russian people that they should be proud of their history, including the period under Stalin, and that they are a great people maligned by the West.”

**Aren’t we getting dangerously close to justifying the war by attempting to understand these Russian myths?**

“No, I reject that notion. I understand people who say that these myths are just a way to disguise a raw lust for power. There is clearly an aggressor in this conflict. But it doesn’t help to call your enemies savages, Asians, and all the other terms Ukrainian nationalists have been using to refer to the Russians. I understand, to some extent, the need for countries to mobilise hatred and demonise the enemy in order to fight a war. But you must also understand your enemy. Even if Ukraine wins this war, you’ll still have to deal with Russia. The country won’t just disappear.

And even if Putin disappeared, Putinism would survive. It’s become a kind of national ideology. To strip these myths of their power, you must understand them. In Russia’s thousand-year history, there have been revolutions, protests and popular uprisings. There have been well-intentioned but doomed-to-fail initiatives to guide Russia onto a democratic and constitutional path. There have been moments when Russia was open to listening to the West. The current situation was not inevitable. These alternative stories need to be told to give the Russian people a different perspective on their own history, enabling them to be more content with themselves and foster peaceful relations with their neighbours. Understanding is necessary to find a lasting solution to this conflict.”

Peter Doorackers

*The Tans Lecture 2023 is fully booked. A recording of the lecture will be available at [maastrichtuniversity.nl/SG](https://maastrichtuniversity.nl/SG) from November 7.*

Orlando Figes (1959) studied history at the University of Cambridge. He specialised in Russian history and currently teaches at Birkbeck College, University of London. Figes is the author of several prize-winning books, including *A People's Tragedy: The Russian Revolution, 1891–1924*.

# “savages doesn't help”



Orlando Figes: “You must also understand your enemy. Even if Ukraine wins this war, you still have to deal with Russia.”  
Photo: Phil Fisk

## background



The Maastricht Lacrosse Club Photo: Joey Roberts

## “Try it once and you’re sold”

It's Wednesday evening, and it's already dark. Floodlights shine down on twenty people with netted sticks in their hands and helmets on their heads. The Maastricht Lacrosse Club is preparing for the new season. “Let's go!” echoes across the field. The visors go down. It's showtime.

The ball flies through the air. The players keep their eyes on it as they run across the field. One of them catches the ball in her net and heads for the goal. “There's a defender next to you, watch out!” a teammate calls out. She dodges, once, twice, almost goes down, and she scores! “Great job, Madison!” yells the coach. Fifteen minutes in, it's time for a cooling break. Madison Soubelet (18) from France, a first-

year student at University College Maastricht, is one of the newcomers to the team. “I was introduced to the sport on a school exchange to the US. I enjoyed it so much that I wanted to continue playing. After arriving here, I immediately started looking for a lacrosse team, and here I am”, she laughs. She's happy with her decision. “The team spirit is incredible. At first, I was embarrassed to make mistakes; this is my

first time playing a team sport. But I quickly realised that no one gets angry or aggressive. It was different in the US.”

### Two versions

The break is over. Most of the players are back on the field, but Noa Kaesler (25), one of the coaches, remains on the sidelines. She's coaching today's ‘no-contact group’ training session. Why is it called that? “Well, there are two ways to play lacrosse. They're technically known as women's lacrosse and men's lacrosse, but Maastricht stopped calling them that a long time ago. The sport is for everyone”, she explains. So, how does it work? “Well, there's a version where you use your body to defend or attack, which we call the ‘full-contact group.’” They play by the rules of men's lacrosse, with helmets and protective gear. The no-contact group plays by the rules of women's lacrosse, in regular sports clothing. “This is a very tactical version, as you have to position yourself between the ball and the player. There are people who play both versions because they enjoy the variety.” Kaesler got into the sport by chance. “I lived in a lacrosse house. My housemates played it, and their teammates came over a lot. I went along with them one time and I just loved it. Try it once and you're sold.” Kaesler also made friends on the team, “real friends”. The members do a lot together, from cycling dinners to drinks, member weekends and tournaments. “We often sit around chatting after training sessions. It's important to have fun, after all. You should talk to Mattia; he has years of experience on the team.”

### “It never gets boring”

The training session is over. Mattia Cristofolletto (24), an Italian master's student of Globalisation and Law, is sweaty and tired. “I was never really interested in playing sports, but lacrosse is different. I discovered it when I was eighteen and immediately liked the combination of rugby, football and field hockey. It's like playing all of them at once, so it never gets boring.” Even after six years on

## Some lacrosse facts

- 1 Lacrosse is played 10 vs 10. Each player carries a stick with a net on the end to hold the ball.
- 2 The team that scores the most goals wins the game.
- 3 Maastricht is the oldest lacrosse club in the Netherlands. It was founded in 2000 by two German brothers who discovered the sport on exchange in the US and brought it back with them.
- 4 Lacrosse has its origins in a Native American game used to prepare young men for war and settle disputes between tribes.
- 5 Lacrosse is especially popular in the US and Canada. It's known as Canada's national summer sport.
- 6 Lacrosse was played at the Olympics in 1904 and 1908, and will be back again in 2028.

the lacrosse field, he's still learning. “I'm still working on shooting at goal and getting better at tackling.” Not least because the Maastricht team competes not only against other universities, but also against regular teams. “We've been playing in the Belgian league for the past few years, and there's some real competition there. We have to keep improving. But in the end, the most important thing is that we are here together and having fun. Playing sports makes you happy.”

Simon Wirtz



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**Maastricht University**

### Vacatures

Voor uitgebreide informatie, raadpleeg de website [www.maastrichtuniversity.nl](http://www.maastrichtuniversity.nl). Klik op de link “Werken bij de UM” en vervolgens op “Vacatures”.

[www.maastrichtuniversity.nl](http://www.maastrichtuniversity.nl)

## Agenda academic ceremonies Aula Minderbroedersberg 4-6

26-10, 10.00 h Fatma Bashir Abulgasem Mokhtar  
 26-10, 13.00 h Luuk I.B. Heckman  
 26-10, 16.00 h Aline Mirella Elias Caldeira Dantas  
 27-10, 10.00 h Bart Johannes Hendrikus van Sloun  
 27-10, 13.00 h Jules Robin Olsthoorn  
 27-10, 16.30 h Dr. Federico De Martino, inauguratie  
 30-10, 10.00 h George-Mihai Irimescu, Double Doctoral Degree Maastricht University and Nicolae Titulescu University of Bucharest  
 30-10, 13.00 h Michelle Roanne Baggerman  
 30-10, 16.00 h Irene Moll  
 31-10, 13.00 h Adele Veronika Ruder  
 31-10, 16.00 h Ruud F.W. Franssen

01-11, 10.00h Maria-Eugenia Polipciuc  
 02-11, 10.00h Andrea Roberto Calore  
 02-11, 13.00h Jessica J.L. Berkvens

02-11, 16.00h Pongtong Puranitee  
 03-11, 13.00h Marien Rolin Krouwel  
 03-11, 16.30h Dr. Andrea Broderick inauguratie  
 06-11, 13.00h Naveen Kumar Balakrishnan  
 07-11, 10.00h Nikita Alana van de Burgt  
 08-11, 10.00h Pragati Bhaskar Hebbar  
 08-11, 13.00h Tian Lu  
 09-11, 16.00h Anna Eliza Willems  
 10-11, 10.00h Leonardo Pimpini  
 10-11, 13.00h Johannes Arnoldus Wegdam  
 10-11, 16.00h Prof. dr. Nanne de Vries afscheidscollege  
 13-11, 13.00h Amée Maret Buziau  
 13-11, 16.00h Maikel Verduin  
 14-11, 10.00h Emma N.M.M. Boersma-von Scheibler  
 14-11, 13.00h Sofia de la Puente Secades Double Doctoral degree Maastricht University – RWTH Aachen University

14-11, 16.00h Shahzad Hafeez  
 15-11, 10.00h Marten Laudi  
 15-11, 13.00h Chandni Khemai  
 15-11, 16.00h Femke Verhees  
 16-11, 10.00h Haiyang Yu  
 16-11, 13.00h Merel Rosemarie Aberle  
 16-11, 16.00h Dominique V.M. Verhaert Joint degree Universiteit Maastricht – Radboud Universiteit Nijmegen  
 17-11, 10.00h Dean Paes Double Doctoral Degree Maastricht University – Hasselt University/tUL  
 17-11, 13.00h Froukje Vanweert  
 17-11, 16.30h Dr. Tim Huijts inauguratie  
 20-11, 10.00h Kimberly Milukia Grèaux  
 21-11, 16.00h Esther A.B. Beckers  
 22-11, 10.00h Vu Uyen Chau Nguyen Double Doctoral Degree Maastricht University – University della

Svizzera Italiana  
 22-11, 13.00h Lisanne Vranken  
 22-11, 16.00h Manlio Caldara  
 23-11, 13.00h Tomasz Dolny  
 23-11, 16.00h Vincent R.A. Moermans  
 24-11, 10.00h Bram M.M. Kremers  
 24-11, 13.00h Alice Giannini Double Doctoral Degree Maastricht University – University of Florence  
 24-11, 16.30h Dr. Rory R. Koenen inauguratie  
 27-11, 10.00h Xu Liu  
 27-11, 13.00h Naomi Annie van Westen-Lagerweij  
 28-11, 16.00h Zeinab Mohamed Mamdouh Abdelkareem Gomaa  
 28-11, 10.00h Sriganesh Kamath  
 28-11, 13.00h Wendela M.H. Broers  
 30-11, 16.00h Madhura Ramchandra Rao  
 30-11, 10.00h Hidde Pieter van Steenwijk  
 30-11, 13.00h Hannah Bernhard  
 30-11, 16.00h Christine Kawa