

VOX

Auf wiedersehen? Why the Germans are leaving



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P.6 WHY THE GERMANS ARE LEAVING

Germans still represent the largest group of international students at Radboud University, but they no longer come to Nijmegen in such large numbers. At the Psychology department in particular, you are once again more likely to hear Dutch being spoken.



'I don't like that bland Dutch bread from the supermarket'

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FOREWORD

WIEDERSEHEN

When I started at Vox in 2017, I was the only German on the team. Fast forward six years and the number of Germans at our editorial office has doubled to my colleague Johannes and I. That makes us the largest international minority amongst mostly Dutch journalists. Pretty representative: Germans have long been the largest international demographic at Radboud too. Well, at least for now. Between this and last year, the number of German first-year enrolments at Radboud has dropped by more than 36 per cent. And who is to blame? Germany (again): because of a change in the German psychotherapy law, the Dutch psychology bachelor has become less attractive to German students (p.6). And now? No sourdough bread anymore? No Birkenstocks? Or were those things even German in the first place? What really is German? And how are the Germans different from the Dutch? In this Vox, we have tried to get to know our neighbours to the right of the Netherlands - and written not a goodbye letter, but an invitation to return. Well, as long as we don't take the bikes away again (my Dutch colleagues have told me that this is what they call a 'joke', p.30).

Antonia Leise, Editor Vox

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-WIR WOLLEN UNSERE
FAHRRÄDER ZURÜCK
-RAUS, GEGEN DIE
WAND
-DON'T MENTION
THE WAR
-WIEDERGÜTMACHUNGS-
SCHNITZEL
-AUFMACHEN!
-ZU BEFEHL

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Dutch people, also those living in the border region, tend to be very oriented towards the Netherlands. And that while there are many advantages to becoming a border-hopper.

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USERS / Fewer and fewer school pupils and students choose German as a subject. Any chance that this will change?

P.44 / **DAY OUT** / Six tips for a day out in Germany



Million dollar shortfall for HFML-FELIX superlab

The prestigious magnetics and laser lab HFML-FELIX is facing serious financial problems. Two of their long-term funding contracts have recently expired, and negotiations on a follow-up have so far been unsuccessful. The shortfall is in the millions, although the university is not disclosing the exact figures. Since the establishment of magnet lab HFML in 2003, which was merged with laser lab FELIX in 2019, Radboud University and the Dutch Research Council (NWO) have each contributed approximately half of the funding for many years. Faculty of Science Dean Sijbrand de Jong hopes a solution will be found before the end of this calendar year. And indeed, the Nijmegen magnet and laser lab really is indispensable for fundamental research, as Nobel laureate Konstantin Novoselov and former HFML Director Jan Kees Maan agree. The latter calls for structural, annual funding for HFML-FELIX. In March, MP Lisa Westerveld submitted some written parliamentary questions on the issue to Minister of Education Robbert Dijkgraaf.



Scabies is going around

Scabies is currently going around in student circles. Since the disease resembles other skin conditions, it is often hard for GPs to diagnose. 'My GP thought the rash on my buttocks and legs was due to my pants, but it turned out to be scabies,' says a student. There are also many ambiguities about the best treatment.

Dermatologist Rinke Borgonjen of the Mauritskliniek in Nijmegen has seen the number of scabies cases rise sharply in recent months. Student Eefje Janssen suffered from the skin condition for 10 months. In an effort to help others, she has recorded her experiences in a 'scabies plan' that is now eagerly shared in Nijmegen.



ONE YEAR AFTER THE INVASION

24 February marks the anniversary of **Russia's invasion of Ukraine**.

A series of Vox articles features students and staff members for whom the war has become part of daily life. Read all the stories in this series via the QR code:

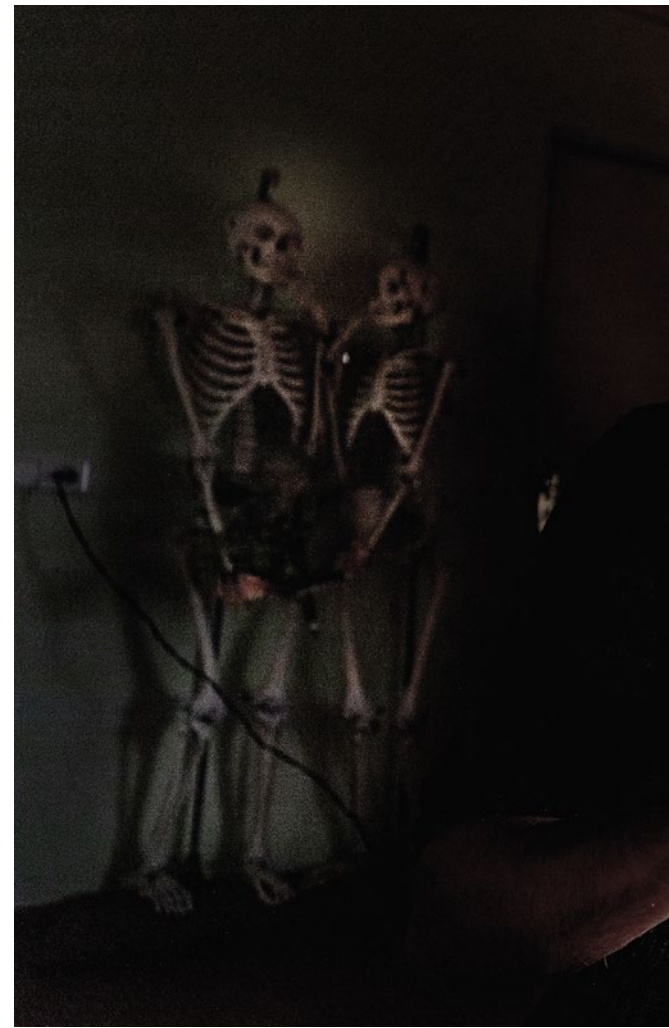


THE FIGURE

25 MILLION LITRES OF WATER



That is the amount of water dumped over **the dyke near Wijchen** during an experiment in February, initiated by ecologists to investigate the dyke's strength. Why precisely there? Because the dyke near Wijchen is covered in flowers. Researchers expect that this makes the dyke sturdier. And it's also good for biodiversity.



DULY NOTED

'It's high time students started taking **fire safety** seriously. We're certainly not trying to bully students, but this is about the safety of the residents themselves.'

Kees Stunnenberg, Director of student housing association SSH&, is really fed up with the random objects lying around in the corridors of student complex Hoogeveltdt. The residents recently received a final warning that failure to remove the objects would lead to them ending up in the dustbin. The fire service has long warned that escape routes must be kept clear for safety reasons.



ON CAMERA

WITH SKELETONS TO THE EUROPEAN CHAMPIONSHIP

Lucas Boer, Lucas Boer, Curator of the Anatomy Museum at the Radboud university medical center, makes the best animal skeletons in the Netherlands. He has already won several prizes for his work. In February, he competed in the European Taxidermy Championship in Salzburg, Austria. Vox followed him during the competition, where he and his two skeletons of ravens battling each other came a hair's breadth from being nominated Europe's best.

IN THE NEWS

SHORT

The basic study grant is back

As of next academic year, it's finally back: the basic study grant. The 'unlucky students' who came under the study loan system will be given a small compensation for the grant money they missed out on. So all's well that ends well? Well, no, not really. The opposition parties in the House of Representatives are uneasy about the level of compensation. Students who missed out on four years of basic study grant will receive approximately €1,400. Far too little, many politicians say, even though they did approve the bill.

No fixed workspace

Radboud University employees would prefer a permanent workspace on campus, possibly shared with colleagues. This is the conclusion of a survey by the Works Council. In contrast, the Campus Plan, in which the Executive Board

presents its vision for the 2030 campus, states that employees won't have their own personal offices in the future. The Works Council has announced its intention to discuss the matter with the Board.

A single Orientation festival

Next summer, the Orientation week will conclude with a one-day festival among the trees of Park Brakkenstein. Unlike previous years, all four thousand first-year students will be welcome on the same day for the party. In previous



years, this wasn't possible due to the fear of COVID-19.



Athena under fire

AthenaStudies is under fire. Several universities have filed complaints against the commercial company that deals in summaries and exam preparations. At Radboud University, Athena has been seen as controversial for some time. This went so far that study association SPiN (Psychology) was offered money by the University to stop working with the company. To no avail: SPiN ignored the offer. The University is considering suing Athena.

Studystore ceases operations

Webshop Studystore is ceasing operations in late February, as reported by their parent company, The Learning Network (TLN). The book supplier has long struggled with order delivery problems: books didn't arrive on time, or weren't delivered at all. Ten to 15 Radboud University study associations must immediately start looking for another book supplier.





WHY GERMAN STUDENTS STAY AWAY

No one at Radboud University is surprised to hear students speak German to each other: Germans have long been the largest international group on campus. But their numbers are drastically decreasing. What's going on?

Text: Antonia Leise / **Illustrations:** JeRoen Murré



'WE'RE ALL-IN THE WAITING ROOM'



GREEKS AND ITALIANS

Germans still represent the largest group of international newcomers to Radboud University. In 2022, 157 German students enrolled in a study programme in Nijmegen, ahead of Greeks (64 first-year students), Romanians (60 first-year students), and Italians (45 first-year students).

Students Ann-Kathrin Claßen, Natascha Köcher, and Carina Meyer all came to Nijmegen with a clear goal in mind: to return to Germany, where they originally came from, with a Bachelor's diploma in their pockets, and become psychotherapists.

To their horror, that plan is now in jeopardy. Indeed, since 1 September 2020, students wishing to become psychotherapists in Germany are expected to have completed a specific Bachelor's degree in Psychotherapy or a Bachelor's degree in Psychology with an extended clinical focus. It seems that the Bachelor's study programme they are taking in Nijmegen does not meet this requirement. It is highly uncertain that they will be able to go on to a German Master's programme in Psychotherapy.

This is particularly a problem for German psychology students in their second or third year of study. They had already begun their studies when they found out that their Bachelor's degree would probably not meet the requirements to start on the track to become a psychotherapist in Germany.

'There's so much uncertainty about our future,' says Meyer, who hopes to complete her Bachelor's degree this academic year. 'We're all in the waiting room and have no idea of what will happen.' She has already tried to transfer to study in Cologne, but as yet to no avail. So she is starting to consider other options. 'Becoming a psychotherapist was my dream, but I'm now orienting myself towards other fields of work.'

And she isn't the only one. A tour of the Maria Montessori building reveals that some of the students are trying to apply for a Bachelor's programme in Psychology in Germany that does guarantee admission to further education in

their home country. Others are considering studying in another country or opting for a different study programme altogether.

And then there are those who hope against hope that a Nijmegen Bachelor's diploma will still be enough for admission to a German Master's programme.

Housing

The uncertainty surrounding the implications of the new German law has immediate implications for the Nijmegen campus. The inflow of first-year students from Germany has dropped by 36% this year. The number of first-year students on the Psychology programme has decreased by 43%. In other words: German students who want to become psychotherapists apparently think two times before choosing the 'Nijmegen route'.

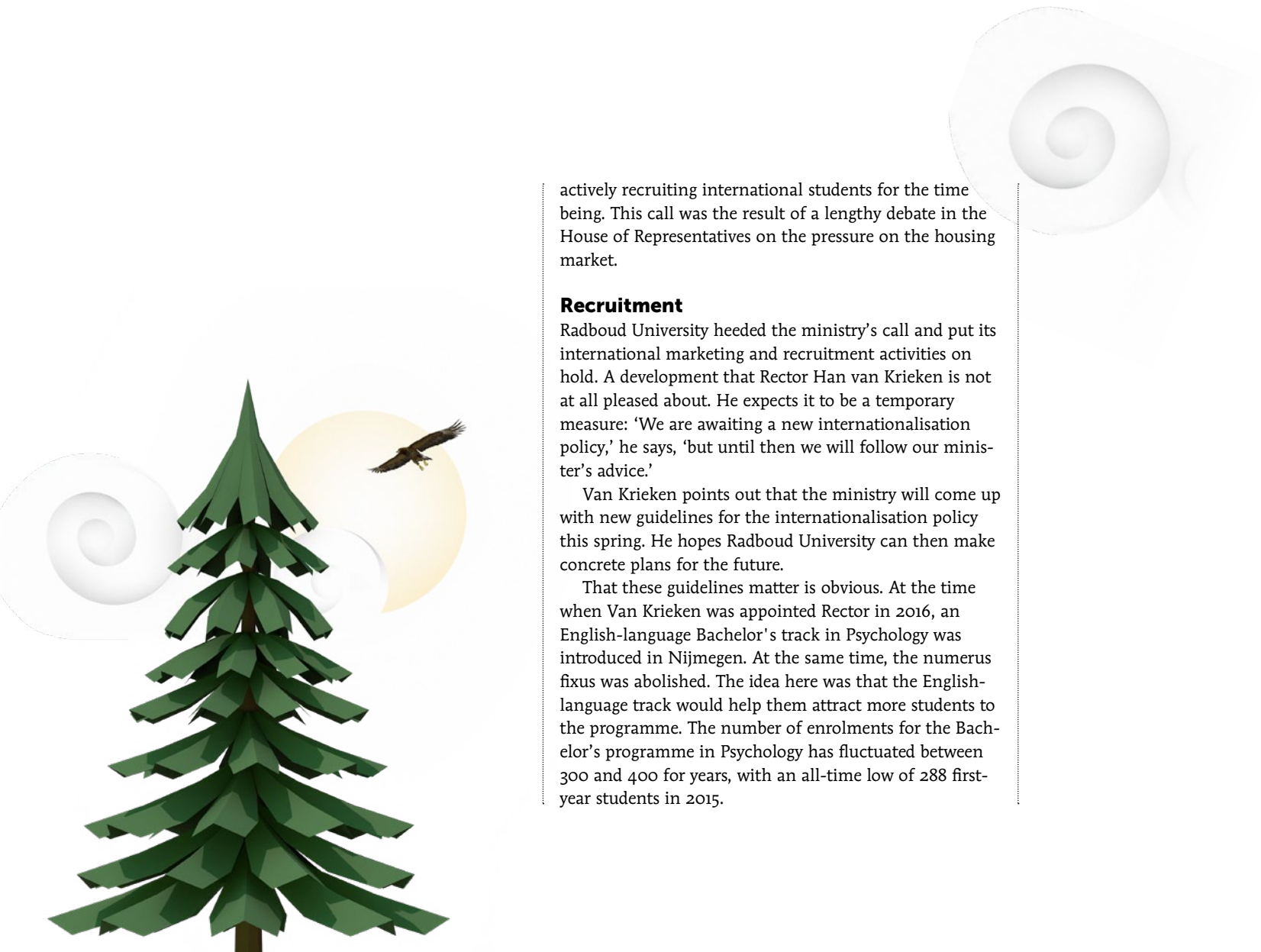
Although many Germans no longer choose Nijmegen, Rob Holland, Programme Director for Psychology, stresses that it is not yet clear exactly what the consequences of the recent legislative changes will be for both German and Dutch universities. The new German law doesn't yet give an unequivocal answer to this.

According to Holland, other factors are also responsible for the decrease in intake of international – and therefore also German – students. One major factor, he says, is the dire housing market. For international students without a social network in the city, it is especially difficult to find an affordable room in Nijmegen. This detracts from Nijmegen's attractiveness as a place to study, Holland said.

Meanwhile, in The Hague, many politicians don't seem to mind if fewer students from abroad settle in the Netherlands. Earlier this year, Minister of Education Robbert Dijkgraaf and the House of Representatives called on Dutch universities to stop



'BECOMING A PSYCHOTHERAPIST WAS MY DREAM'



actively recruiting international students for the time being. This call was the result of a lengthy debate in the House of Representatives on the pressure on the housing market.

Recruitment

Radboud University heeded the ministry's call and put its international marketing and recruitment activities on hold. A development that Rector Han van Krieken is not at all pleased about. He expects it to be a temporary measure: 'We are awaiting a new internationalisation policy,' he says, 'but until then we will follow our minister's advice.'

Van Krieken points out that the ministry will come up with new guidelines for the internationalisation policy this spring. He hopes Radboud University can then make concrete plans for the future.

That these guidelines matter is obvious. At the time when Van Krieken was appointed Rector in 2016, an English-language Bachelor's track in Psychology was introduced in Nijmegen. At the same time, the numerus fixus was abolished. The idea here was that the English-language track would help them attract more students to the programme. The number of enrolments for the Bachelor's programme in Psychology has fluctuated between 300 and 400 for years, with an all-time low of 288 first-year students in 2015.

CHRISTIAN BANONA KIANGALA (21, PSYCHOLOGY STUDENT FROM NORTH RHINE-WESTPHALIA)

'I RESPONDED TO HUNDREDS OF ROOMS'

'I originally wanted to study Psychology in Germany, but I narrowly missed the GPA requirements. Someone told me that they knew someone who had studied Psychology in the Netherlands without the GPA being considered, so I looked into it. I think the Maria Montessori building was probably what sold me on Radboud; the university has a very attractive campus – very different to some universities in Germany. And so far, I'm enjoying studying here.'

'One of the things I've still not got used to is the cycling.

That's probably also because I live in Kleve and only commute to Nijmegen. I must have applied for a hundred student rooms in Nijmegen from April onwards, but I didn't have any luck. People either didn't respond at all or I was rejected. For now, living in Kleve isn't too bad, but it can be a bit difficult to go out with your Nijmegen friends in the evening. I did take a social Dutch course, though. I think it's important to speak the language when you study in a different country, even if you don't live here.'



'GERMAN STUDENTS ARE MORE INTERNATIONALLY ORIENTED THESE DAYS'

The combination of launching an English-language track and abolishing the *numerus fixus* had major consequences for the study programme, leading to an explosion of applications in 2016: 1,800 psychology students knocked on the door. These were preliminary applications, but people were in shock. 'All hell broke loose,' lecturer Dennis Schutter told *Vox*, looking back on that time. In the end, it wasn't so bad: 'only' 616 students enrolled in the Dutch and English-language programme, but that number did mean that the first weeks of lectures had to be held at the then CineMec (now Pathé) in Lent.

Career opportunities

The launching of the English-language Psychology track brought a small tsunami of German students to Nijmegen. In 2016, they numbered 375, compared to 202 students from the Netherlands. A year later, when the *numerus fixus* was reintroduced, 368 students enrolled in the study programme, slightly less than half of them from Germany. Another year later, Dutch students once again outnumbered Germans. This trend continued in recent years. In 2021, there were 533 first-year Psychology students: 325 Dutch and only 152 German.

According to Van Krieken, the German community has also changed over the years. 'Whereas German students used to mostly focus on each other and form a small enclave, they are now much more internationally oriented.' According to the Rector, the reason for this is

that the student population as a whole has become much more international and diverse. The Bachelor's programme in Psychology increasingly also attracted students from other countries.

Even if there are fewer of them, German students still represent the largest group of international students at Radboud University. The situation is no different at the Psychology department. After all, German towns such as Kranenburg and Kleve, where the housing market is under less pressure, are only a stone's throw away from Nijmegen (25 or 40 minutes by public transport, respectively, to be precise). Moreover, according to Rob Holland, a degree in Psychology offers plenty of other career opportunities besides a job as a psychotherapist. 'We still value German students very much in Nijmegen.' *



THOMAS SCHLIENZ (22, COMPARATIVE EUROPEAN HISTORY STUDENT FROM BAVARIA)

'I TELL PEOPLE STRAIGHT AWAY THAT I COME FROM GERMANY'

'I had only been to the Netherlands once before I moved here for my degree in 2020. That was in 2016 and I definitely didn't know back then that I would one day end up studying and living here. Studying abroad had always been a dream of mine, but I knew that tuition fees in England wouldn't be feasible. I looked for other English-language history degrees and that's how I eventually found the *Comparative European History bachelor* at Radboud. Studying abroad definitely had an impact on my

national identity. If I'd started a study in Berlin, I don't think that I would have been as aware of being German as I am now. But here, being German is the first thing I say when I introduce myself to someone. And being German also gives you a connection with other Germans living abroad. At the moment, I plan to move back to Germany after finishing my degree. It's easier for me to find a job in Germany and it's also a more familiar place. Sometimes, I think, you have to move somewhere else to really appreciate your home.'



'Dutch people
lick their knives'





RELAX.



Love without borders



Text: Simone Vlug / Photography: Duncan de Fey

JOKE REUVERS (25, POLITICAL SCIENCE STUDENT) AND CHRISTIAAN ROEST (32, OWNER OF BHALU)

Joke is German, Christiaan Dutch. They have been in a relationship for a year and a half now and have taught each other to speak their respective languages fluently.

Christiaan and Joke met on the terrace of restaurant Bhalu in Nijmegen city centre. Joke: 'I ordered a cappuccino in broken Dutch.

Christiaan replied in very bad German that we could also speak German.' There was a spark, and the two got involved in a relationship. 'From then on, we practised each other's language. We alternated between a day in German and a day in Dutch.'

A year and a half later, they both speak German and Dutch fluently. Their different nationalities aren't an issue. At most, it creates 'just that extra bit of challenge', says Christiaan. 'But that suits me.' He mainly sees advantages. 'I really like the nature in Germany. Also, Christmas with Joke's family is very cosy.' Joke: 'I'm just really happy to be dating a Dutchman. That's what I always say when I talk to other people about our relationship.' So are there no cultural differences at all? Oh, yes, there are. 'What I find really crazy is people congratulating me on Christiaan's birthday,' says Joke. Even more absurd: 'Dutch people lick their knives. If you see someone doing that, you can bet it's a Dutchman.'

But the reputation Dutch people have for directness isn't so bad in practice, says Joke. 'Actually, I'm the one who's more direct in our relationship. Christiaan recently bought a new pair of trousers and I said: "Urgh, those are ugly!" It took him ten minutes to recover.' Christiaan: 'I don't think either of us fits the stereotype of a Dutch or German person. I don't actually think of Joke as German at all.' *



BACK TO THE HEIMAT

with a Dutch diploma in your pocket

Where do all those German students go to once they graduate in Nijmegen? Vox spoke to three Germans who went home. 'Dutch academia is much more open to new solutions and ideas.'

Text: Isabelle Geoffroy and Mirell Leskov

After completing a study programme at Radboud University, Ben Breuer (28) returned to Germany. He took home with him not only a Bachelor's and Master's degree in Psychology, but also new memories, new friendships, and a new language. It was not an easy decision for Breuer to leave Nijmegen behind when he graduated five years ago. 'My plan had always been to return to Germany after my studies, but I had a great time in Nijmegen. I sometimes still think about going back.'

Like Breuer, Leonie Barth (36), came to Nijmegen in 2014 to study Psychology. As is the case for many German students crossing the border, her average final grade was not high enough to be accepted for the same study



BEN BREUER, KEULEN

'IN THE BEGINNING, I'D SOMETIMES MIX UP GERMAN AND DUTCH'

programme in Germany. Unlike Breuer, Barth did not consider staying in the Netherlands after she graduated in 2020. She returned to *die Heimat*. 'I always saw Nijmegen as something temporary. But when the weather is sunny, I do miss being able to go out cycling.'

Former student Jens Jensen (32) did not initially plan to return. Having grown up largely in the United States and pursuing a Master's degree in English at Radboud University, he saw an international future ahead of him. But then he completed an internship in Germany in 2017 – following his dual Master's programme in Transnational Ecosystem-Based Water Management at Radboud University and the University of Duisburg-Essen – and he stuck around in his native country. He still lives in Germany, and Nijmegen has now become a memory.

Job hunt

Breuer, Barth and Jensen all found jobs relatively easily after their studies. The internship Barth had to complete for her Master's programme at Radboud University led to her current job at an addiction clinic in Wuppertal, in western Germany. 'Before I started my studies, I sometimes worried whether I'd be able to find work in Germany with a Dutch degree. I read pessimistic reports online about not being able to work as a therapist in Germany with a clinical diploma from the Netherlands, but it turned out not to be a problem.' Finding a job was



LEONIE BARTH, WUPPERTAL

'WHEN THE WEATHER IS SUNNY, I DO MISS BEING ABLE TO GO OUT CYCLING'



easier than she expected. 'Where I live, it's quite common to have a Dutch diploma, and clinics and companies also recognise it.'

Breuer did not start working immediately when he returned. He chose to complete additional training in Germany first. He now owns a psychotherapy practice in Cologne. He also works for the academy where he did his additional training. What was it like for him to return and suddenly have to switch back from Dutch to German? 'In the beginning, I'd sometimes mix up German and Dutch, but I quickly got used to it and I found that working in German was much easier for me.'

Finding a job after graduation was also a smooth process for Jensen. He recently celebrated his five-year work anniversary at Deutsche Bahn, where he works on infrastructure and planning, and the maintenance of DB Real Estate. Jensen lives in Karlsruhe, in southwest Germany, but travels a lot for his work as team manager – he is responsible for a team of 25 employees. 'Having a double degree wasn't necessarily an advantage,' he says. 'People don't really know what to do with you when you apply for a job. That's because a double degree doesn't

ALUMNI



JENS JENSEN, KARLSRUHE

'NIJMEGEN IS JUST A MEMORY NOW'

always fit well with the description employers give in their job ads. Fortunately, it worked out well for me.'

Memories

For the three returning alumni, one thing is certain: their student days in Nijmegen were an enriching experience. Jensen reflects fondly on his international friends, the green environment, and the intensive teaching. Barth remembers both the ups and the downs of her student days. She remembers how she sometimes missed German *currywurst* and *doner*, but also how much fun she had with her new friends.

Breuer faced some challenges, especially at the beginning of his studies: he found it difficult to learn the language and to study in Dutch. Once he got better at it, he discovered that he enjoyed being able to speak Dutch to his Dutch friends. Barth had a similar experience. 'Looking back on it now, I'm glad I didn't have the option to study in English, because I probably would have chosen the English variant.' She no longer practices her Dutch very often, but she still speaks it fluently. 'Dutch isn't that complicated for us Germans, it's a pretty lazy way of learning a new language,' she says, laughing.

Friendships

The German alumni agree that it has not been easy to maintain their study contacts. Jens Jensen has kept one good friend from Nijmegen. 'He's even invited to my upcoming wedding.' But there are others he doesn't see any more.

Leonie Barth lived just across the border during her studies, as many German Radboud University students still do today. She had a room in the village of Zyfflich. Her roommates were Dutch, German, and of other origins. But she too has seen these friendships fade away with time. 'People had come to Radboud University from different places, and when everyone began working, it became difficult to find time for each other and to stay in touch.' Since Barth still lives relatively close to Nijmegen, she visits the city often, although not necessarily to look up fellow students. 'It feels like a little road trip on the weekend,' he says

Unlike Jensen and Barth, Ben Breuer consciously made friends with Dutch students during his time in Nijmegen. Many of his friends live and work in Nijmegen, which is partly why he enjoys visiting the city. Breuer and his group of friends have remained close since their student days, thanks to a tradition they came up with. 'Since our first year of study, we've been going on holidays together every summer. Last year, for example, we went to Portugal for a week.'

The three alumni want to urge current students from Germany to make the most of their study time. 'Compared to Germany, Dutch academia is much more open to new solutions and ideas,' Jensen explains. 'And make sure you enjoy the food,' Barth adds enthusiastically. 'Don't forget to try the fries. The fries are better than anywhere else. And always ask for double-fried fries. Those are the tastiest.' ★





Housing survey

We did an initial analysis of the Works Council housing survey on campus. On average, respondents expressed a preference for an office shared with colleagues, or a private office. Many also point out the importance of having one's own room for concentration, meetings, and confidentiality. The Executive Board's suggested policy on 'activity-based work' elicited an overwhelmingly negative response. The idea of **flexible workplaces in an open-plan office was firmly rejected by a substantial majority**. More details to follow.

Identity – Catholic, but how?

The Latin prayer traditionally uttered at PhD ceremonies is no longer called a prayer, but is referred to as 'words'. A small adjustment has also been made

to the text read by the PhD supervisor as they hand out the diploma to the PhD candidate.

Radboud University seems to be letting go of its Catholicism in the literal sense, and is looking for a new identity that will ensure that everyone feels at home.

At the same time, there should still be room for the University's special history and its 'Catholic roots'. In recent months, a dialogue process has been instigated, in which group discussions brought into focus what Radboud University really stands for. Characteristic features of our University are its emancipatory origins and strong social commitment. It goes without saying that the participational bodies are closely following the progress of this dialogue process, and that they also have their say concerning the University's identity.

Sustainability

A Rafter with soft-drink deals and a limited selection of local and vegetarian and vegan products. Bulging bins filled with disposable cups and other rubbish. A campus with limited green space and even more limited biodiversity. Lots of asphalt, including busy 50-km roads, criss-crossed with streams of pedestrians and cyclists. Radboud University wants a sustainable residence campus, but isn't quite giving off the right vibe yet. So far, we are only doing well in terms of energy and educational offerings. **How can we turn our minds more towards sustainability and integrate it in campus practices?** That is something we plan to devote more attention to in the coming months. Get in touch if you would like to join in!

WOULD YOU LIKE TO JOIN THE DISCUSSION?

Contact us via www.radboudnet.nl/personeel/diversen/medezeggenschap/leden/ or www.ru.nl/usr/over_de/de_raad_stelt_zich_1/



GERMANY HAS MORE MONEY, THE NETHERLANDS BETTER EDUCATION

In Germany, billions go to fundamental research and science is held in high regard by politicians and society. The Netherlands, on the other hand, can boast more collegiality and better education. Both countries at times feel jealous of each other. Researchers Gerard Meijer and Heino Falcke talk about the similarities and differences between Dutch and German universities.

Text: Alex van der Hulst / **Illustrations:** Getty Images



Collegial and familial, that is how astronomer Heino Falcke describes his first encounter with the Netherlands. In 2003, Falcke transferred from a position at the Max Planck Institute for Radio

Astronomy in Bonn to a job at Astron in Dwingeloo and a position as professor by special appointment in Nijmegen. 'I didn't even know that Nijmegen had a university,' says Falcke, who still lives in Cologne. 'They were just launching an astronomy department.'

The department was small, but the atmosphere was really good, says Falcke. In Germany, especially a few decades ago, the atmosphere could actually be quite chilly. He gives the example of his graduation ceremony. 'When I completed my PhD in 1994, I had to collect my diploma from a desk presided over by a very grumpy secretary. When I got my *habilitation* in 2000 [a post-doctoral degree, required to become a professor in Germany, Eds.] the same secretary was still there. She was grumpy once again, and thought I should hurry up: "You aren't the only professor here!" Well, at least that way you learn that you're not the centre of the universe. You have to root for yourself, because no one else will do it for you.'

Astronomical

Gerard Meijer moved from Nijmegen to Berlin in 2002 to set up the Molecular Physics Department as Director of the Fritz-Haber-Institut, one of the institutes of the Max-Planck-Gesellschaft. He returned to serve as President of the Executive Board of Radboud University for four and a half years, before going back to his job in Berlin in 2017. 'The research opportunities in Germany are more substantial and more diverse; there's just a lot more money available,' says Meijer. 'On the other

hand, the Netherlands is more efficient. If you look at the number of publications per euro invested, the Netherlands tops the list. I do believe that Dutch researchers are under greater pressure and that they have to work harder to secure sufficient research funding. Here in Germany, at the Max-Planck-Gesellschaft, we have ample basic funding, which makes working here that much more pleasant.'

Research funding seems astronomical in Germany compared to the Netherlands. In addition to more than 100 universities, Germany also has four major research organisations. Together, the Helmholtz-Gemeinschaft, the Fraunhofer-Gesellschaft, the Leibniz-Gemeinschaft, and the Max-Planck-Gesellschaft have some €12 billion to spend each year. By comparison, the total revenue of all Dutch universities combined was less than €8 billion in 2020. Approximately one quarter of all academic articles in Germany come from these organisations, with the rest coming from universities. This significant funding for independent research organisations does create a divide in Germany, argues Heino Falcke. At the universities, researchers aren't so well off.

Strategic financing

Falcke finds Germany's structured and strategic approach to financing attractive. He says he sometimes still finds himself too German in this respect, in that he doesn't really understand the Dutch way of granting subsidies. Falcke was awarded three major European grants (ERC Grants). He was less successful in securing Dutch grants.

'ERCs are highly competitive European grants, and I got three of those from three applications. In the Netherlands, I only got one grant out of six applications. Of course, it could just be bad luck or coincidence, but I don't understand this difference.'

Gerard Meijer stresses that the Nether-



HEINO FALCKE

'IN THE NETHERLANDS, THERE'S ALWAYS A CHANCE THAT A NEW GOVERNMENT WILL TAKE IT INTO ITS HEAD TO REINVENT NWO'





Culture and Science, while in Germany this happens bottom-up, with researchers choosing leaders from among their own ranks.' Because grant reviewers are so knowledgeable about existing research, they know who has what in terms of funding and often recommend collaborating or using each other's expertise, says Meijer.

Falcke says that it feels like there is less political influence at DFG, something he says is true of German research as a whole. 'In Germany, research funding isn't party politics. It is stable every year, and continues to expand. In the Netherlands, there's always a chance that a new government will take it into its head to reinvent NWO.'

Angela Merkel's influence in this respect shouldn't be underestimated, says Meijer. 'Of the 20 years I worked in Germany, Merkel was Chancellor for 16 of them.

She was passionate about science and research. Even during the financial crisis of 2008, she refused to cut funding, but instead invested more in science. She saw the importance of science for Germany's future. But I think the Netherlands also made a good move by appointing Robbert

Dijkgraaf.'

lands is highly successful in applying for European grants. He feels that Radboud University could do more to publicise how well it scores on ERC Grants. Meijer thinks that this success may be explained by the greater need to apply for European grants in the Netherlands. In addition, Dutch researchers have long been accustomed to submitting English-language applications to the Dutch Research Council (NWO) that are then also assessed internationally. When asked about national research applications, he says: 'The success rate for getting a grant from the Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft (DFG) never falls below 25%. At NWO, the success rate is often below 15%. This means that in the Netherlands, the 3% best proposals always get funding, the 30% worst proposals definitely don't, and for all the proposals in between, it is more a question of luck than of quality.'

With respect to the difference between DFG and NWO, Meijer and Falcke agree that Germany is better off. Meijer: 'In the Netherlands, the NWO Board of Directors is appointed by the Minister of Education,

Taboo

Meijer sees how German universities are struggling with education. 'In the Netherlands, teaching is better organised and more structured. Buildings and IT facilities are better. This is something that we look upon with envy in Germany. You can say Dutch universities are more school-like, but it works better. The number of students per professor is a lot lower in the Netherlands than in Germany. This means you get more attention as a student in the Netherlands. In my view, this has to do with tuition fees, among other things. There are no tuition fees in Germany, as a result of which, many students are enrolled who don't study at all, but only want to use the public transport discount or the university restaurant. But it's taboo to talk about tuition fees in Germany, because it touches on academic freedom.'

Students in the Netherlands have a privileged position, says Meijer. 'There's a lot to criticise about university rankings because there are things you can call into



GERARD MEIJER

'IN GERMANY, IT'S TABOO TO TALK ABOUT TUITION FEES, BECAUSE IT TOUCHES ON ACADEMIC FREEDOM'



question around every ranking. But it's true that all Dutch universities are in the top 200 in most rankings. At the top, of course, are the great American and English universities, but they're not accessible to everyone. Germany also has two top universities: Munich and Heidelberg. There are some 20,000 universities in the world, so if you do your VWO final exams in the Netherlands, you have access to the top 1 per cent of the best universities in the world. It's not for nothing that Germans come to the Netherlands to study, rather than the other way around.'

Cooperation opportunities

Heino Falcke advocates for more cooperation between the Netherlands and individual German states. Joining up with the state bordering the Netherlands, North Rhine-Westphalia, could benefit both. 'We're now working on the Einstein telescope. If we partner with Jülich, Aachen and Maastricht, we may be able to achieve more. North Rhine-Westphalia is keen to compete with other states. Only recently, the Deutsches Zentrum für Astrophysik went to the state of Saxony, representing €100 million a year. That's the entire budget for Dutch astronomy combined.'

Meijer also sees collaboration opportunities for smaller study programmes. 'If some study programmes, like language programmes, become too small to continue, cooperation with Germany may be a good idea. The numbers of students for these kinds of study programmes in Germany are also limited, but still substantially higher. Just look at how many theology students we still have in Germany, a great deal more than in the Netherlands.'

Etiquette

The days of *Herr* or *Frau Professor* are also disappearing in Germany, Falcke and Meijer say about the alleged formal German etiquette. Falcke: 'These days, etiquette is similar in the Netherlands and Germany. Students in the Netherlands are perhaps slightly more informal. I like that; I really enjoy it.' Meijer has also agreed in his department to address people informally, to *dutzen*, but it doesn't come easy, he says. 'You have to adjust to the culture and ultimately, I can't say du to everyone. We're talking a

lot about the differences now, but there are also important similarities. The Netherlands and Germany aren't nearly as different from one another as we are from France.'

The interaction with students and the location are reasons for Falcke to remain in Nijmegen. 'The fact that we also have lots of good students who often come from a non-academic family is also really refreshing. We have a fantastic position here, on the edge of the country. It's not so elitist, even though we have some top institutions. We are facing different problems than in the West. Complaints about the influx of international students are much less of an issue here. But there are also disadvantages to the fact that Nijmegen is less well connected to the Randstad. If the HFML-FELIX magnet lab had been in Amsterdam, structural funding would have been in place long ago, I'm sure of it.'

Chaotic

During meetings, Gerard Meijer sometimes longs to be back in the Netherlands. He is a member of the Wissenschaftsrat, an advisory board to the German government. 'There we are sitting at a big table with 30 researchers. Whenever a topic comes up, people who want to say something raise their hands. The chairman goes through them one by one. Then the fourth person goes on to repeat what has already been said three times, while the fifth one calmly waits for their turn. It's all very structured, but the slightly more chaotic situation in the Netherlands, where everyone speaks up and jumps in unasked, works better for me and is more efficient. Germans do have a different approach in that respect.' *

Love without borders



Text: Myrte Nowee / Photography: Duncan de Fey

SARAH WÖSSNER (28, BIOLOGY STUDENT)
& SUSANNE KÖNINGS (32, ARTIFICIAL
INTELLIGENCE ALUMNUS)

Sarah is from Germany, and Susanne from the Netherlands. The two met online and have been together for about three months.

Sarah (on the right) has lived in the Netherlands for nine years, and she has dated Dutch people before. Smilingly, she admits that she already had some experience of the people across the border. She finds their use of clothes pegs to be particularly impressive. 'The Dutch use them for all sorts of things other than laundry - I don't understand that at all.'

According to Susanne, Sarah is in all other ways quite Dutchified. Sarah: 'Then again, Susanne isn't a stereotypical Dutch person. She's not as direct as some Dutch people, and, like Germans, she thinks a bit longer about how something might come across before she speaks.'

This is Susan's first relationship with a person from Germany, so she finds it hard to say what makes Sarah typically German. To get some 'fingerspitzengefühl' for it, she is currently learning the language. This should also make it easier to chat with her in-laws. Susanne: 'Then hopefully I'll finally be able to understand all the Instagram jokes Sarah keeps showing me.'

The two don't experience any irreconcilable cultural differences, but Susanne's cycling behaviour is remarkable, in Sarah's opinion. 'It doesn't matter if it's still dark in the morning, or if something is very far away: she always wants to cycle everywhere.' Susanne manages to compensate for this typically Dutch trait with something quite German. 'I don't like those limp Dutch sandwiches from the supermarket. Give me some strong and hearty bread any day.' Sarah nods approvingly: 'See, when I hear that, it makes my heart beat faster.' *



'Give me **hearty bread** any day'





POLITICAL SCIENTIST IN THE VOLUNTEER FIRE BRIGADE

An entire world opened up for political scientist **Maurits Meijers** when he applied to join the volunteer fire brigade in his hometown of Wyler, just across the border from Nijmegen. 'How do you roll up a fire hose? I had to learn everything.'

Text: Mathijs Noij / Photography: Johannes Fiebig



After various detours through world cities like London, Berlin, and Antwerp, Maurits Meijers settled just across the German border near Nijmegen with his wife and children in 2017. A very different world, but one they liked so much that not long after, the family bought a house in the border village of Wyler.

A perfect place to live, says the political scientist – nice and rural, with lots of space, but still within cycling distance of Nijmegen. Nor is the language an obstacle for Meijers: thanks to a German father, he is fluent in both German and Dutch. His Belgian wife also speaks the language well.

In Wyler, the family encountered a close-knit community, where people had lived together for decades, developing their own customs in the process. Although a growing number of Dutch border workers are buying homes in the area, there is still an us-versus-them mentality. 'It's incredible what a strong sense of community there is here. Coming from the city, it wasn't something I was familiar with. I have neighbours who work as sexton in the village church, others join neighbourhood committees, or become members of the shooting or carnival clubs. People really devote a lot of time to it.'

Meijers expected some tension in the border region between Dutch 'imports' and German locals. But it



turned out to be not half so bad as he thought. 'People do consider it important to maintain social cohesion. In other words, they expect some participation. For example, our children go to the *Kindergarten* in Zyfflich, rather than to the Dutch nursery. That helps.'

Solidarity

So when Meijers was asked by a fellow villager to join the volunteer fire brigade last year, the political scientist felt obliged to at least think about it. 'I'm someone who is open to new things. So I thought: why not?'

I was also aware that many rural areas in Germany depend almost entirely on the volunteer fire brigade. 'If nobody signs up, there's no fire brigade. It's a form of solidarity. I felt responsible.'

Since then, he takes part in a training exercise once every fortnight. 'These exercises are really serious stuff. They simulate a car accident, for example, or a fire in a house.' Meijers and his colleagues shut off the road, connect the water, and do everything they would do in the event of a real fire. The only thing they don't do is spraying water.

'I've only really been part of it since November,' says Meijers, 'so I'm still in the learning process. I first

have to complete a six-month trial period. And I have to take two more modules.' And then if he wants to continue learning, he can also get a licence to drive the fire engine. Or learn to work with an oxygen mask. 'But that also brings new responsibilities.'

So far, he has been paged once. He was home, and felt the adrenaline coursing through his body. 'Quick, to the barracks, put my suit on. We were

'HERE I WORK WITH PEOPLE FROM OUTSIDE MY OWN BUBBLE'

just driving out of the village with sirens blaring when we heard that the problem had already been solved. Apparently, something went wrong with a stove.' The team turned back as they were no longer required.

But what if he's paged while standing in front of a full lecture hall? 'Then I won't go,' says Meijers. 'Nor am I expected to. It's a volunteer fire

brigade after all. But if I'm writing a paper at home, it's a different story.'

Gap

The beauty of his new volunteer job on the side is that it's so practical, says Meijers. Very different from the university, which is what makes it so refreshing. Moreover, it takes him into an entirely new world. 'As a researcher, I work among other things on voting behaviour and polarisation.' There's so much talk of a gap in society between the highly and the practically educated. The fire service is a place where Meijers gets a chance to cross over this divide himself. 'Here I work with people from outside my own bubble.'

It's also a humbling experience, he says. 'At the university, people listen to me. At the fire brigade, I'm nothing yet. How do you roll up a fire hose? How do you open one of those water outlets? These things aren't difficult, but I do have to learn it all.'

During nights out – at the Kranenburg bowling alley, for example – Meijers has the opportunity to get to know his fellow firefighters better. Some are farmers. 'It's interesting to talk to them about nitrogen issues and climate change. Not that it suddenly makes me change my opinion, but it makes my perspective less black and white. It's very instructive.' *

THE REAL GERMAN DOESN'T EXIST

What exactly is a German? Well, the obvious answer would be that a German is a person from Germany. The real answer to quintessential Germanness, however, is a bit more complicated.

Text: Antonia Leise / Photography: Johannes Fiebig

I would definitely call myself a German. After all, I was born in 1998 right in the middle of the more-or-less freshly reunited country next to the Netherlands. I also spent the first eighteen years of my life in the same tiny German village, I hold a German passport and my last name is a literal German adjective. But despite this level of immersion in German culture, the essence of Germanness continues to evade me.

What is it that the more than eighty million people currently residing in the Federal Republic of Germany (Germany's official name) truly have in common? How can you find a single unifying characteristic between East and West? The South and the North? Berlin and the rest of the country? To answer this question, you have to dig deep into the culture of wearing Birkenstocks with socks, sourdough bread, and grammar that no one understands.

Not German

German. But sometimes, even that turns out to be more complicated than you might think. Take for example Birkenstocks, sourdough bread, and Grammar that no one understands: all of those things seem very German at first, but once you look a bit closer, they turn out to be not German at all.

Birkenstock has been owned by an American equity firm since 2021, sourdough bread was invented more than six thousand years ago in Egypt, and Germans share their language's impossible grammar with the Swiss, the Austrians, and some people in Belgium and Luxembourg. So what remains if even the most German things turn out to be not German at all?

Federal republic

Let's start from the beginning. As the name suggests, the Federal Republic of Germany consists of sixteen federal states. Only thirteen of those are actually states; three are city-states, including Berlin, Hamburg, and, for reasons unknown to many, Bremen.

'THE SOUTH IS THE RICHEST AREA, MOSTLY BECAUSE OF THE AUTOMOBILE INDUSTRY'



Birkenstocks

NUMBER OF INHABITANTS
IN GERMANY:

84 MILLION

OF WHICH LIVING IN
NORTH RHINE-WESTPHALIA:

21 %

GERMANY CONSISTS OF

**16 FEDERAL
STATES**

GERMANY IS THE **FOURTH WORLD
ECONOMY**, AFTER THE US, CHINA,
AND JAPAN

ON AVERAGE, GERMANY HAS
**237 INHABITANTS PER SQUARE
KILOMETRE** (AS COMPARED TO
511 IN THE NETHERLANDS)

GERMANY IS NOTORIOUS FOR
ITS **BUREAUCRACY**

BIRKENSTOCK HAS BEEN IN THE
HANDS OF A U.S. INVESTMENT
COMPANY AND THEREFORE NOT
GERMAN SINCE 2021



'42% DO NOT FEEL AFFILIATED WITH CHRISTIANITY'



The west German states are generally wealthier than the east German states – unless you live in the Saarland, which just got unlucky. The South is the wealthiest, mainly thanks to the German car industry – and especially Bavaria can be a bit smug about that. So much so that they have their own Bavaria-exclusive party and sometimes threaten to become a country in their own right.

The South, especially Bavaria, is also what most foreigners associate with the typical German: *Lederhosen*, *Dirndl*, and *Oktoberfest* included. Except for the famous Prussian attitude – that’s mostly from present-day Brandenburg, the region around Berlin, at the other end of the country.

Statistically, however, most Germans are from North Rhine Westphalia (which is also where a lot of German students at Radboud University come from). And, historically, some of the most important Germans, including Nietzsche, Bach, Luther, Schiller, and Goethe all worked in Thuringia. *Where on earth is Thuringia?* You might ask yourself. Don’t worry, most Germans regularly forget about its existence too. I should know, it’s my home region.

Bürgerliches Gesetzbuch



Religious enigma

areligious than in the East, mainly thanks to four decades of Socialism that have left the East mostly atheistic. On the Christian spectrum itself, the West is more Catholic, the East more Protestant and overall, 42 per cent of Germans are not affiliated with Christianity whatsoever. And despite almost half of Germany being non-Christian, Angela Merkel’s Christian party ruled the country for sixteen years.

If you are now confused about German religious identity, we are on the right track. Having a lot of questions about German Christian identity is exactly why Martin Luther wrote a very long letter, refused to apologise to

the authorities, and then hid in a castle while translating the Bible for eleven months, laying the foundations for Protestantism.

Part of German religious identity is not being able to agree on it, which is why the West and the East celebrate different religious holidays. What does remain the same, however, is that most Germans only see the inside of a church for (a) weddings, (b) funerals, and (c) Christmas mass, where the long tradition of sitting through a poorly acted primary school production of the birth of Jesus takes place once a year.

Lost in dialect

But wait! I hear some of you say. *Go back to what you said about the translation of the Bible. Isn’t that the origin of a written standard of the German language?* And yes, indeed, you would be right. Most Germans do speak German and we do agree on how to spell it (well, at least until the standard German dictionary Duden decides to change their mind about that again).

Of course, not everyone who speaks *German* is necessarily German, but let’s disregard this for the moment. The German language is definitely something Germans do have in common. At least if we can understand each other. Understand each other? Yes, exactly, welcome to the world of German dialects.

In the North, German sounds suspiciously close to Dutch, the more you get to the South, the less you will be able to understand anyone at all, and when I get emotional, my friends have pointed out with great delight and fascination that I start to *Sächsel*, which is the Saxonian dialect that everyone confuses with my Thuringian one because, as we have already established, no one ever remembers Thuringia.

The Nazis

So far, most German things have turned out to not be German, we have established that there is barely religious, political, or linguistic unity – and not even German clichés are something we can really agree on. What remains, then, in terms of Germanness? Well, it’s time to address the elephant in the room: modern German history.

Their shared history, one might say, is what truly unites the people of a country. And in the case of Germany, the most prominent part of that history includes some of the most atrocious acts in human memory. And let me be perfectly clear, most Germans take this part of their history very seriously.

At the same time, a shared Nazi past and the historical responsibility that comes with it can't be the core of Germanness, either. It might be a defining moment in German history, but ancestral participation in the Holocaust is not the definition of what a German is. If it were, we would have to disregard all the people that the Nazis precisely didn't want you to associate with being German.

It would disregard the histories of German Jews, Black Germans, and Germans of Colour. It would also do injustice to Germans with mental and physical disabilities, to gay, lesbian, bisexual, nonbinary, and transgender Germans, socialist and communist Germans. Put differently: a lot of past and present Germans that some fascists eighty years ago decided to erase from the definition of what a German is supposed to be.

Not to mention that there are quite a number of Germans whose families moved to Germany decades after the end of the Second World War. Would they be less German because their grandparents and great-grandparents were not part of those decades of German history? I don't think so.

True Germanness

Does the real German not exist, then? After all, Germanness, with all its contradictions, continues to evade a definition. At the same time, there is something about Germany that does make me feel like I am returning home every time I cross the border.

Maybe there is some quintessential Germanness, some part of universal German culture, a way of being German that cannot be defined through

the usual suspects that you would usually quantify a culture with. But what is it, then, the universal feeling of being German?

To find out, you have to venture into the depths of German public service buildings that have not been renovated since the early 2000s, but look like they are from the 90s. You have to try making an appointment at a German municipal office that is only open during a two-hour window every third Wednesday following a full moon.

You have to interact with the German driving licence office or the office for student finance or, in fact, any administrative body in this vast country. You have to have someone look you straight in the eyes and tell you the way to communicate with an official German office in 2023 is by fax.

Only when you have come up against the monster that is German bureaucracy and asked yourself halfway

German wine



'THE GERMAN BUREAUCRACY IS TRULY UNIQUE'

through if you, too, would be capable of voluntary manslaughter, have you experienced the essence of Germanness. No matter the religion, dialect, political or sexual orientation, colour of your skin, or federal state of your origin, the sheer insanity of German bureaucracy is something so inherently German that I have yet to see it replicated. And it may just be what unites all of us - Germans of the past, the present, and, probably, the future. ✱



Thermomix
(food processor)

A NAZI JOKE:



WHAT A LAUGH!

How come Dutch people still enjoy Nazi jokes in the year 2023, but Germans fail to find them funny? And is it OK to make fun of Hitler?

Text: Annemarie Haverkamp / Illustrations: Roel Venderbosch

Put a German in a group of jolly Dutch people and chances are that before long someone will ask him: when will I get my bike back? Hilarity all around. The war

may have been over for almost 80 years, but Nazi jokes are still commonplace.

A small sample among the Vox editors – two young German colleagues – reveals that Germans do not consider the cycling joke as a thigh-slapper.

German-born cultural expert Yvonne Delhey can't really laugh about it either. She was once in a wellness centre with a friend, they were speaking German, when a complete stranger from the Netherlands shouted that joke at them across the room. She couldn't see the speaker through the steam in the room.

Delhey has lived and worked in the Netherlands for 30 years. This experience has taught her that Nazi humour is part of the deal here. In Germany, you would never hear jokes like this.

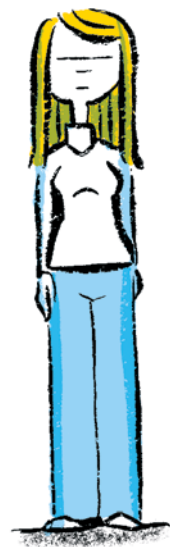
'The first time I heard someone tell a Nazi joke, I was

shocked,' says one of our German colleagues on the Vox editorial board. 'It was only after living in the Netherlands for a while that I understood that this is normal.'

Why is it shocking? 'Because in Germany, we are taken to visit a concentration camp three times in secondary school alone,' says our Vox colleague. 'It's instilled in us from childhood what the Germans did in the war, and the fact that we are responsible for making sure that this kind of thing never happens again.'

Joking about the suffering of victims has no place in this context. Germans, including the younger generations, simply live with a great sense of guilt. Delhey: 'How far you can go with humour is directly related to society's collective memory. It has to do with how a society sees itself.'

Where the Second World War is concerned, the German people still see themselves as the bad guy. Delhey also learned this in school. 'If you go through life as a German, you carry that past with you. And it's reinforced by the way other people respond to you. Being German is not something other people initially associate with something positive.'



'THE FIRST TIME I HEARD SOMEONE TELL **A NAZI JOKE**, I WAS SHOCKED'

'PUTIN AND TRUMP ARE ALSO CALLED NAZIS'



Gas bottle

So making jokes about the war when you're on the 'perpetrator side' of a fraught history can quickly be experienced as going too far. The other *Vox* colleague of German origin shares how Dutch friends still sometimes joke with him when a gas bottle is produced at a campsite or festival site ('As a German, you know how to deal with that!'). He would never dare to make a joke like this himself.

Humour researcher Ivo Nieuwenhuis who, like Delhey, works at the Radboud University Faculty of Arts, calls this the 'hypercorrectness of Germans'. They will generally avoid saying things that could be misconstrued, whereas the Dutch like to shock. Take comedian Theo Maassen, who made jokes about the Holocaust in one of his shows and got the audience on his side when he shared that he'd actually wanted to wear a T-shirt that said 'My grandparents went to Auschwitz and all I got was this lousy T-shirt'.



Nieuwenhuis focuses on Dutch humour in particular. 'There's a strong tradition in the Netherlands of blunt jokes that are on the edge of what's acceptable,' he says. Jokes that make the audience think, 'oh oh, ha ha, is it even OK to say what you're saying there?' Provocative humour became the norm starting in the 1960s, led by comedians like Freek de Jonge and broadcasters like the VPRO. Whereas until then, the Dutch had been very proper and church-oriented, suddenly all sacred cows had to be overthrown. Criticising royalty and religion was something new and fun.

Every country has its own brand of humour, so it could also be that our eastern neighbours simply don't find the blunt Dutch jokes funny, whether they are about the war or not. Or don't Germans have any humour at all? Of course, this prejudice is very much alive on our side of the border. Opel recently capitalised on this in a TV ad, in which a woman is saying that the car dealer must be joking when he mentions the price of the new Vauxhall Karl. The dealer answers in a strong German accent: 'Germans don't joke.'

Adolf Hitler

Yvonne Delhey is convinced that Germans do have a sense of humour. 'But I haven't done any research on it.' What she did investigate was how humour can help make difficult topics approachable in public discourse. In particular, she charted Hitler parodies. 'In the 1990s, German cartoonist Walter Moers published the book *Adolf, die Nazisau*,' she says. 'In this book, Hitler is the size of a gnome and is portrayed as a completely idiotic figure, who, among other things, has sex with a transgender prostitute called Hermine Göring.' In a 2013 US comic series entitled *Hipster Hitler*, Hitler wears skinny jeans, and both the Third Reich and hipsters are made fun of.

But of course, the most famous example of jokes at Hitler's expense is the film *Er ist wieder da*, which was a huge blockbuster in 2015. It was preceded by a book about the Führer waking up on a Berlin lawn in 2011, not being taken seriously by anyone and eventually



becoming a TV star. Delhey: 'That book was on the bestseller lists in Germany for weeks, but reviewers did virtually nothing with it. Very silly, I thought.' In the meantime, the *Volkskrant* had already published a full-page article even before the book was translated into Dutch.

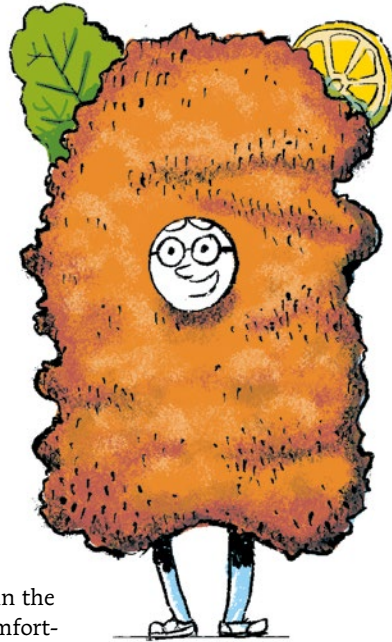
German critics were afraid, among other things, that the real Nazi propaganda used by the author could stir up still dormant sentiments.

Delhey uses the book in a course she teaches to students. She had them read it out loud. Because *Er ist wieder da* is written in the first-person form, it immediately feels uncomfortable to speak aloud the thoughts of a violent dictator who killed millions. And it is precisely there that a conversation emerges, in Delhey's experience.

As time passes, the collective memory of a people changes. Recently, Delhey came across a rubber duck of Napoleon in a shop. Few would take offence at this amusing portrayal of a killer with over three million deaths on his conscience. He's been dead for two hundred years, and there is no one left with a personal memory of him and the terror he caused. While there are still Holocaust survivors telling their stories and SS men serving sentences for their war crimes, which is why Hitler is a much more sensitive topic.

Hardworking people

Over the past 80 years, the term Nazi has already changed its meaning worldwide. 'Putin and Trump are also called Nazis,' Delhey said. 'It has become a common swear word.' Or take New Zealand's outgoing prime minister, Jacinda Ardern. She made COVID-19 vaccination mandatory and was subsequently depicted by anti-vaxers on posters with a Hitler moustache. Former Chancellor Angela Merkel was once given the same honour in the Turkish media, after President Recep Erdoğan accused her of 'Nazi practices'. The term 'language Nazi' is also fairly well established in the Netherlands in the year 2023, to mean a person who obsessively

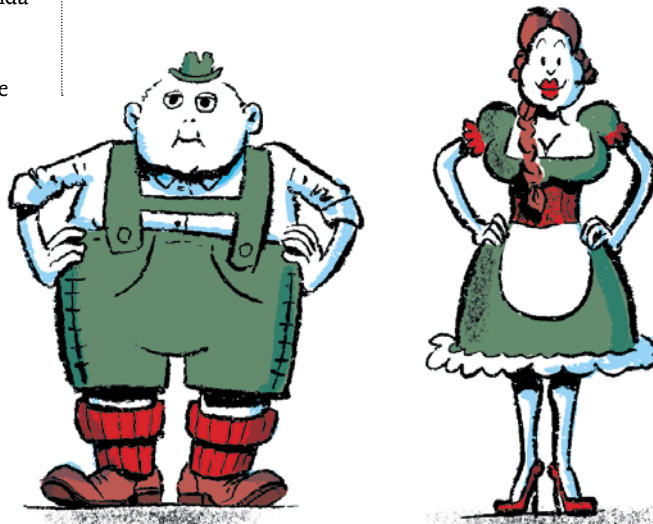


'THE DUTCH ENJOY TEACHING OTHERS A LESSON'

highlights language errors in other people's texts.

By now, the two sample Germans on the *Vox* editorial board are used to laughing along when subjected to a bicycle joke. 'I understand now that it's not meant personally,' one of them says.

The question remains why the Dutch find it so funny to keep referring to the war, even 80 years after the fact. According to Delhey, this has to do with the image the Dutch have of themselves as a hardworking people who are sober and strict in their doctrine. 'The Dutch enjoy teaching others a lesson. With these jokes, they still want to show that they aren't to blame, but that the Germans are.' *



DON'T FORGET TO LOOK ON THE OTHER SIDE OF THE BORDER TOO

Germany is less than 10 kilometres from the University campus. Yet most Nijmegen residents rarely cross the border – their gaze is limited to the Dutch side. Which is a shame, says professor of German Language and Culture Paul Sars. Four reasons to become a border hopper.

Text: Annemarie Haverkamp / Photography: Erik van 't Hullenaar

His mother used to read to him at night, poems by Goethe, Hölderlin, Rilke. Not that little Paul understood what they were about, but he loved the rhythm and sound of the sentences. 'That's where my love for the German language began,' he says.

Paul Sars is a true ambassador of German language and culture, also outside Radboud University: he is quite literally the ambassador of the Rijn-Waal Euregio, which is intended to promote cooperation between Germany and the Netherlands. The Netherlands only has two professors of German Language and Culture, Sars being one of them (the other one works in Utrecht). He often sits down to discuss things with the German ambassador.

'I grew up on the border in Roermond. We had a neighbour who sometimes went to Mönchengladbach to buy sandwiches, and I was allowed to go along. It was a huge adventure, like going on a trip around the world.' And when Germans came to Roermond in their big cars, he would run towards them, hoping they

would ask for directions. Just so he could speak German to them.

These days, he still does the same. As a young academic, he even ventured into writing poetry in his favourite language, having studied German in Nijmegen and Philosophy in Munich. Nowadays he sticks to academic publications and information leaflets for schools, companies, students, and politicians. And he has as many Germans as Dutch in his team.

He is genuinely surprised that so many Dutch people, especially residents of the border region, live with their backs to their eastern neighbours.

'WE HAD A NEIGHBOUR WHO SOMETIMES WENT TO **MÖNCHENGLADBACH** TO BUY SANDWICHES, AND I WAS ALLOWED TO COME ALONG'

Nijmegen 8 km
Zyfflich 2 km

Kleve 15 km
Kranenburg 4 km

ZIMMER ZU VERMIETEN
KAMER TE HUUR

+49 157 538 668 32
+31 614 288 694

Four areas in which we are missing out on opportunities, according to Paul Sars.

One. THE LANGUAGE.

The language! German has thousands more words than Dutch. 'It's an incredibly beautiful language. So rich! German has so many speakers and, as a Germanic language, it is also influenced by Slavic, Romance, and Nordic culture. Germany has nine neighbouring countries, making German a hodgepodge, the language of central Europe. The Swiss and Austrians have enriched the language, and because of the many immigrants – Germany is a *Zuwanderungsland* (country of immigration) – new words are being added all the time.' If you master the language, an entire world opens up. Just think of the great thinkers and poets that Sars' mother read aloud to him. 'The Netherlands only boasts one great philosopher, Spinoza, and he was a Portuguese-Spanish Jew. Germany has a philosophical tradition. German culture has been shaped by great thinkers. The poets inspired the philosophers, and vice versa. Heidegger once said that his death analysis was based on the work of the poet Rilke.'

Sars calls German a unifying language. The country was divided for a long time – in 1600 it still consisted of 400 different city-states – but the language created unity. It was only after the Berlin Wall fell in 1989 that a safe political unity emerged for the first time.

Two. THE ECONOMY.

Germany is the Netherlands' largest trading partner, but it could play a much bigger role. 'Look at places like Duisburg, Düsseldorf, or Essen. These cities are home to millions of people, and they are closer than Amsterdam. They are major economic centres, with a huge potential, not only in terms of labour force, but also in terms of jobs.'

You would think any self-respecting company would open a branch across the border to take advantage of that market. But they don't. 'Yes, there are regulatory differences, but this isn't the real reason. The issue lies with the cooperation itself, and the communication. Germans are incredibly good



'WHEREAS WE DUTCH SAY: WE'LL SEE WHERE THE SHIP RUNS AGROUND, A GERMAN SAYS: THERE'S NO WAY I'M GOING TO BOARD A SHIP THAT MIGHT RUN AGROUND'

at analysing problems; they want to have everything figured out in advance. Whereas we Dutch say: We'll see where the ship runs aground, a German says: There's no way I'm going to board a ship that might run aground.'

According to Sars, this means that we need better education, a helpdesk where you can get advice on how Germans think and what makes Dutch people tick. In 2019, he was asked by the Province of Gelderland to draw up a plan for a Netherlands-Germany Border Institute. It had to be a physical building, with people in it who understand both cultures and could therefore break down barriers. Cooperation in lower and higher education, technology, and trade was to be encouraged. 'But the plan foundered due to the expense. In the Netherlands, we are quick to ask: how much profit will this yield? Well, it

takes 10 to 20 years for this kind of cooperation to bear fruit. The payoff lies in learning from each other's best practices. If a German and a Dutch school in the border region manage to merge, you can show other schools: Look, it works; this is how you can do it too.'

Three. EDUCATION.

The Netherlands has four universities on the German border: Groningen, Enschede, Maastricht, and Nijmegen. Why don't they pull together? Why don't they make it easier for German students to study in the Netherlands and vice versa? Why are German and Dutch students seen as 'different'? You should throw things open, thinks Paul Sars. Set the same entry requirements and create the same schol-



arship opportunities for both nationalities. And create joint degrees, study programmes in which universities from two different countries jointly present a programme, like the Master's programme in Dutch-German Studies that Nijmegen has with Münster. 'We have a similar cooperation at Bachelor's level with the University of Duisburg-Essen; our students go there by shuttle bus.'

Sars has raised the issue many times with the Ministry of Education, but he has not succeeded in eliminating the obstacles across the border region. Diplomas are also not mutually recognised. Here is an example: Germany has a severe shortage of Dutch teachers. Suppose that as a Dutch teacher, you would like to work across the border; in principle it should be possible. But in Germany, teachers are civil servants in the service of the state, which is what allows them to make a career or move on to other schools. A Dutch person can't simply get civil servant status. 'Which means that you always remain a kind of second-class citizen; even if you have similar documents, they don't grant you the same privileges.' And so the Dutch teachers obedi-

ently remain on the Dutch side of the border, and nothing ever changes.

We're also missing opportunities where primary and secondary education is concerned, says Sars. From 2017 to 2021, Radboud University led the Nachbarsprache project, which involved some six thousand Dutch and German schoolchildren taking biology or geography classes together, and getting to know each other. 'For them, this is a first introduction to children from another country, which is the best way to learn about each other's culture. And that's incredibly important in the European context. You try to put yourself in the other person's shoes without giving up your identity as a Dutch person. That's how true empathy is created.' The project has now ended, and new funding rules stand in the way of a follow-up.

Four. RECREATION.

Many border residents only visit Germany to fill up their fuel tank or stock up on cheap beer at the Aldi. That's a shame, says Sars. The Reichswald is, of course, wonderful for hiking, but go a little further south, and enjoy the beauty of the landscape on the German side of the Meuse, near Nettetal. Or attend a German theatre performance. 'We think a 40-metre stage is pretty big, there they have stages of up to 140 metres! And German actors have a very different status, they're highly respected.'

We would probably cross the border more often if the infrastructure was better organised, he argues. Both the Dutch and the German government only look at their own country when considering accessibility. By way of example, he shows the route planner on his phone. Tomorrow he has a breakfast appointment in Xanten, preferably going by public transport. 'Travel time: 2 hours and 19 minutes,' he exclaims. 'By car, it takes 50 minutes. That's crazy, isn't it?' And there's still no train connection between Nijmegen and Kleve, despite repeated lobbying.

Sars shakes his head and pours another cup of Fencheltee – the tea bags are from the German supermarket. As long as he is a professor, he will do his best to show both Dutch and Germans a 360-degree world, instead of a limited 180-degree perspective, with their backs against the national border. ★

'GERMAN HAS THOUSANDS MORE WORDS THAN DUTCH'

Love without borders



Text: Myrte Nowee / Photography: Duncan de Fey

HENNING MEREDIG (LECTURER IN
MODERN LANGUAGES AND CULTURES)
AND LIANNE LA FAILLE (ADMINISTRATIVE
ASSISTANT)

'When Dutch
people see **the
word 'free'**,
they're happy'

German Henning and Dutch Lianne have really found each other despite a number of cultural differences.

Dutch Lianne likes her friend's German structure, and for his part, Henning has no issue with the Dutch directness. In fact, he thinks the Dutch could be a bit more direct at times. For example, when they have a work appointment. In Henning's experience, they first have to talk about the weather or the traffic. 'They want to get to know each other, before starting a business conversation. That's not efficient at

all, is it? You've only got one hour!'

This German pragmatism sometimes also shows up at home. 'At dinner, Lianne used to keep repeating how good the food was, as do a lot of Dutch people.' Lianne looks at him in surprise at first, then bursts into laughter as Henning gives a demonstration: "Hmm... what a yummy soup. So yummy. What a delicious soup." We just say it once and that's it.'

So it is Germans who can come across as a bit blunter, Henning concludes. 'Remarkably, abroad, it's the other way around. We Germans

are a bit more wait-and-see, and we ask politely if we don't know something. The Dutch can be a bit rude.' Lianne guiltily agrees. 'You can hear Dutch people coming from far away!'

They're also a bit more naive, she thinks. 'Whenever I see a discount promotion in the shop, I immediately get excited.' Henning: 'So then I have to explain that the supermarket still makes a profit. But that doesn't matter to her – as long as it's a bargain. To put it bluntly: as soon as Dutch people see the word "free", they're happy.' *



GERMAN IS BECOMING

German is becoming less and less popular, both as an exam subject and as a study programme. The language is struggling amid all the excessive focus on science, according to teachers and researchers. More attention to cultural differences should help turn the tide.

Text: Stan van Pelt / Photography: Getty Images

Mit, nach, bei, seit, von, zu, aus, außer, entgegen, gegenüber.

Who can't recite this list off by heart? Yet German is heard less and less in secondary schools, and it is increasingly being replaced by Spanish or even Chinese. Whereas back in 2017, 70,000 pupils took German for their final exams, last year only 56,000 did so.

At universities, enthusiasm for the study programme in German language and culture is also waning. Nijmegen only has 6 first-year students this year (compared to 24 in 2017), and 49 nationwide. How can we explain the decline in popularity of the language of Goethe and Günter Grass in schools and universities? And is this decline a bad thing?

To begin with the last question: it certainly is a bad thing – at least, as far as Sabine Jentges and Chrissy Laurentzen from the German Language and Culture Department are concerned. Jentges has no shortage of arguments: 'German broadens the world you live in, especially here in the border region. In Kleve, for example, there are great museums and cultural events.' In addition, economic cooperation with our eastern neighbours is massive, she says. Plus, German is the most spoken language in the European Union. 'Of course, you can also get by fine with English these days, but speaking to someone in their mother tongue allows you to understand them at a deeper level. It also helps avoid cultural misunderstandings.'

'NIJMEGEN ONLY HAS SIX FIRST-YEAR STUDENTS THIS YEAR'



Sprechen Sie Deutsch?

Associate Professor Jentges studied German Studies, has worked in Nijmegen since 2008, and is German herself. Laurentzen is researching new teaching methods for German as a secondary school subject, thanks to a PhD grant for teachers from the Dutch Research Council (NWO). She works three days a week at Radboud University, and two days as a German teacher at the Commanderie College in Gemert.

German has an image problem, according to the two experts. 'Incidentally, all language programmes are struggling,' Jentges stresses, 'not just German.' And the reason? First of all, as a school subject, German puts pupils on the wrong track. Laurentzen: 'For example, in secondary school there's a lot of focus on text interpretation because that's what the central final exam is all about.' But the study programme is about so much more, says Jentges, such as linguistics – or how German works 'technically'. 'In other words, its semantics, phonetics, etc. Students also learn about German literature and culture. But we also have less traditional courses, such as intercultural communication and 21st-century issues seen from a Dutch, German, and European perspective. Think of sustainability, environment, and gender issues, for example.'

NG LESS POPULAR

Another factor here is that languages are fighting an unequal battle against the excessive focus on science, says Jentges. 'Science and engineering are given an enormous boost in higher education. The government has also invested a lot of money in these fields.'

Something similar is happening in secondary schools. Laurentzen: 'Many secondary school pupils choose – also at their parents' insistence – for the broad NT and NG profiles: Nature & Engineering and Nature & Health. This allows them to keep nearly all study programme options open, including medicine and science programmes.' However, these profiles leave less room for languages than the other two: Culture & Society (CM) and Economics & Society (EM).

Wave

According to secondary school dean and French teacher Inge Holthuizen (Stedelijk Gymnasium Nijmegen), the profiles aren't the whole story. 'In VWO, you are required to choose one foreign language in addition to English, even with a science profile. Usually, pupils choose French or German or, in schools that offer it, Spanish. In gymnasium schools (grammar schools), this second language is automatically Greek or Latin, since they are compulsory.'

'IN GYMNASIUMS (GRAMMAR SCHOOLS), THE SECOND LANGUAGE IS AUTOMATICALLY GREEK OR LATIN, SINCE THEY ARE COMPULSORY'



MEMORY GAME: GERMANY VERSUS THE NETHERLANDS

One way for a class to discuss cultural differences in a fun and approachable way is the Nachbarsprache & Neighbour Culture memory game. It was developed by Jentges, Laurentzen, and their colleagues through the European Interreg border grant programme. Memory pairs in the game are not exactly the same, but show instead the Dutch and German version of an element from the street scene. Think of a yellow (Netherlands) or red (Germany) ambulance, or blue and yellow place name signs. By discussing the game in German, pupils learn about both the language and culture of our eastern neighbours. So what is typically German, and what is just preconceived ideas?





COLUMN

Lucy's law

Lucienne van der Geld is a lecturer of notarial law and director of Network Notarissen.

Berliner

Germany is not only geographically close in Nijmegen's 'notarial law lecture halls'. Part of our inheritance law is also inspired by German law. In addition, all kinds of terms in other fields of notarial law have a German name, such as *Belehrung*, *Vormerkung*, and *Selbsteintritt*. For their Master's thesis in Notarial Law, students often make a legal comparison with Germany. Why? German inheritance law and relationship property law are better regulated on a number of points than in the Netherlands.

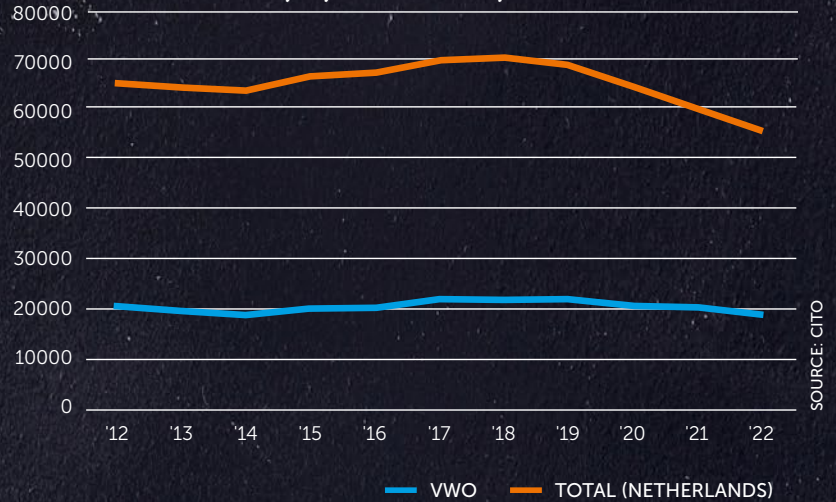
Thus, notarial lawyers dream of the possibility of making Berliner wills in the Netherlands. In such wills, spouses declare each other sole heirs, and stipulate that the inheritance should go to a third party upon the death of the surviving spouse. But there is more. Take, for example, the German option of agreeing, even before you get married, in the prenuptial agreement that neither of you will have to pay any alimony after the divorce. Incidentally, in case of divorce, the German judge does look into this agreement to check how it works out for both partners. In the Netherlands, the Supreme Court reaffirmed last November that a prenuptial agreement on non-payment of spousal alimony is invalid.

After a two-and-a-half-year marriage, Sylvie Meis is divorcing her husband, German artist Niclas Castello. Their lifestyles, they say, are too different. The German tabloids can't stop writing about it: Sylvie is supposedly too extravagant for East German Niclas, who is more frugal in nature. Is that why a partner alimony agreement was included in their prenuptial agreement? I'll keep an eye on Bild.de!

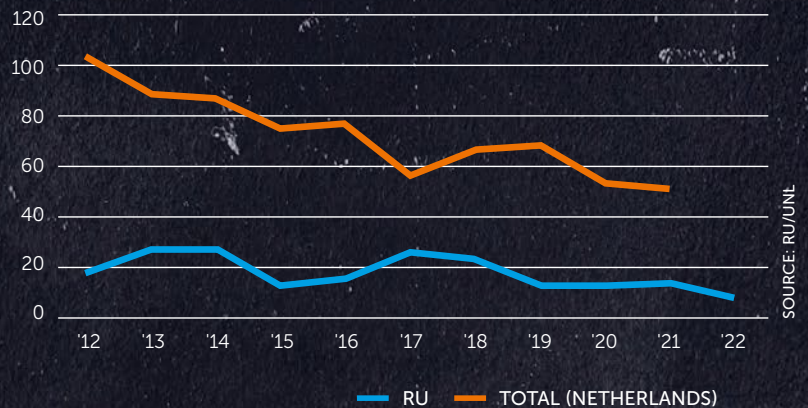
Knowledge of German law and the German language is not only useful in the lecture hall, but also out there, especially now that groceries are a lot cheaper 10 kilometres away. But perhaps the best reason to learn some German are the words that have no Dutch equivalent. My top three: *Ferienwohnungwechselltag* (abbreviated: *Fewowetag*), *Muckibude* and *Freudentaumel*. I'm curious about yours.

Tschau!

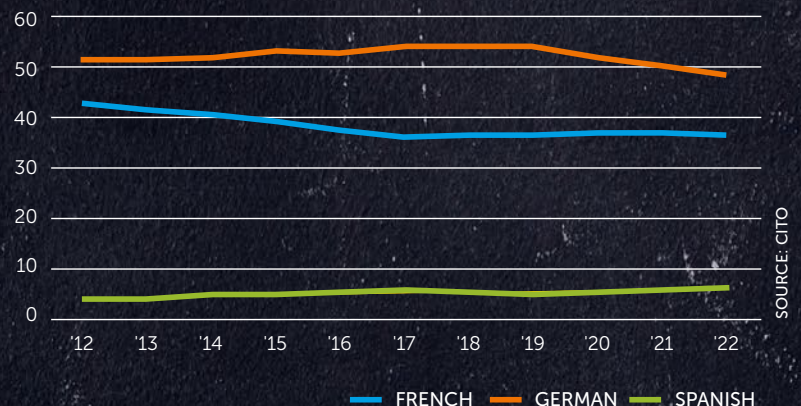
Final exam pupils who opt for German



Number of first-year students in German Language and Culture



Percentage of VWO exam pupils who opt for a language (French, German, Spanish)



'IF YOU STUDY GERMAN, YOU'RE GUARANTEED A JOB'

As a result, our students are less likely to choose yet another additional language in their package.' What about being pushed aside by Spanish? This is more of a problem for French than for German, she says, since the two languages are related.

At her own school, Holthuizen generally sees a wave motion when it comes to the popularity of certain languages. Sometimes German is popular for a while, then it's French again. This matches what we see happening nationwide. At VWO level, the number of exam candidates with German in their package has hovered around 21,000 for over a decade, compared to approximately 16,000 for French. The recent downward trend for German can mostly be observed at HAVO and VMBO level.

Holthuizen takes a look at her school's grades. 'For this examination year, German and French are almost perfectly in balance: 28 out of 169 sixth-graders have opted for German, and 32 for French. In addition, 12 exam students have chosen Spanish.' But among the current fourth-graders, French is actually twice as popular as German: 69 against 34. Even Spanish (37 pupils) is more popular than the language of our eastern neighbours. Holthuizen is unsure why this is the case. 'Sometimes it depends on how much of a connection students have with a teacher. If their teaching style isn't appealing, pupils tend to drop out.'

This can lead to a downward spiral. Fewer German exam pupils also means fewer students, and ultimately fewer first degree teachers. This in turn only makes it harder for schools to find good, experienced teachers. 'If you study German, you're guaranteed a job, I always say,' laughs Jentges of the Radboud University German department. 'And not only as a teacher, by the way. You also have great opportunities at international institutions, like the European Union, and international companies or organisations in the border region.'

Understanding someone's world

How can the tide be turned? The University is investing a lot in school visits, information and continuing education, according to Jentges and Laurentzen. This should improve the connection between VWO and the University. In addition, the content of German as a school subject needs to be revamped, they believe. There should be less emphasis on text interpretation and cramming grammar rules, especially in the lower grades. Jentges: 'Most school pupils only have one or two years of German anyway. Above all, you want them to be able - and to dare - to manage in practice afterwards.'

So communication skills should come first in secondary school, as well as reflection on cultural differences, Jentges stresses. 'For example, in the Netherlands,



it's perfectly normal to say to someone: just jump on the back of my bike. But to a German, that's shocking, because it's forbidden in Germany.' What she means is that you can speak perfect German, but ultimately, society is also about understanding each other's world.

Whether these plans are enough to make the German language more popular once again remains to be seen in the coming years. But there's hope on the horizon. Curriculum developer SLO (Stichting Leerplan Ontwikkeling) is currently revising the examination programmes for modern foreign languages, including German, on behalf of the Dutch government. This revision is in line with the ideas of Jentges, who is involved in the process as a consultant. 'SLO's plan places less emphasis on traditional skills - reading, writing, listening and talking, and literature.'

The focus lies more on language and cultural awareness and communication - in other words on being able to use a language in everyday situations. Jentges: 'You could for example - I'm just making something up here - be presented with an assignment in the final exam where you have to explain a Dutch restaurant menu to a German exchange student. You may know the literal translation of "patatje oorlog" or "kapsalon" in German, but that doesn't tell you what you are actually ordering. Or take the example of sitting on the back of someone's bike: explain why a German might be startled by this suggestion.'

The introduction of the new plans may take a few more years, but soon it could actually be a good thing that we hear fewer German preposition lists being recited in the school corridors. ★



Swimming in a coal mine

When you think of the Ruhr region, you probably think of industry, and you would be more than right. But the great thing is that within all that industry, you can soak up culture to your heart's content. The Zeche und Kokerei Zollverein industrial complex in Essen houses a museum, an open-air cinema, a concert stage, and an exhibition space.

Zeche Zollverein was once the largest coal mine in the world and was declared a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 2001. Every year, two million visitors come to see the gigantic machines that have now come to a standstill. At the museum, you can learn all about the history of the complex and the people who worked there, then perhaps take a dip in the swimming pool, made from two sea containers welded together. To finish off, you might enjoy a spin on the Ferris wheel or a drink on one of the terraces.

A mere half-hour drive away, there is also the Landschaftspark Duisburg-Nord, the ruin of a blast furnace complex that was shut down in 1985. Here you can hike, dive, and climb (there is a climbing wall). In the evening, the old buildings and machinery are beautifully lit up.



A city trip to Cologne

Are you tired of Nijmegen's cosy city vibe? Then why not trade it for a day in one of Germany's largest cities? In just two hours by car or three by train, you can visit the industrial-centre-turned-media hotspot Cologne – and meet some of Germany's friendliest people. Whether you want to scroll through pop-up stores in the artsy district Ehrenfeld, take a cruise across the Rhine, or visit Germany's most famous church, Cologne Cathedral, this city truly has it all. Including a chocolate museum. And if you've had enough of Cologne, some other German cities are only a short ride away by public transport: visit, for example, Düsseldorf, with its luxury shopping miles, the former West German capital of Bonn, or the grave of Charlemagne in Aachen. All within 28, 22, or 35 minutes respectively.



Phantasialand

Disneyland Paris who? Phantasialand in Germany has everything you could dream of that its French counterpart has as well – but

minus the exorbitant prices. And it's less than two hours by car away from Nijmegen (or three to four hours by public transport). While the Efteling is undoubtedly the favourite theme park of the Dutch, a trip across the border is definitely worthwhile: Phantasialand is regularly rated among the best theme parks in Europe. Whether you come for its immersive theme worlds, such as the Berlin of the early 20th century, a medieval village, or an African savanna, some of Europe's best roller-coasters, or its show programme: one of Europe's oldest theme parks will guarantee a good time for both young and old visitors. And if one day at Phantasialand isn't enough, you can also stay at one of the park's luxury hotels, including the four-star hotel Ling Bao, considered to be the largest Chinese building outside of China.



Catching a breath at Merlin's after a day in the woods

Not to mention a more impressive beer and food menu.

Few pubs are as close to a border as Merlin. Before you even know you're there, you're already driving out of the village of Grafwegen, right on the edge of the

Reichswald forest, between Breedeweg and Milsbeek. Grafwegen is also located right next to the northernmost tip of Limburg. At one time, the café was appropriately called *Zum Deutsche Ecke*. For cyclists who have just climbed the Sint Jansberg or pedalled themselves ragged on the Kartenspielerweg, Merlin is a great place to rest in summer. And hikers who have spent the day roaming the woods will also find it an ideal place to catch their breath. Owned by Dutch landlords for decades, Merlin is a Dutch enclave in Germany where the beer and wine list is fully coloured by Schwarz-Rot-Gold.



Like a Roman in Xanten

What was the life of a Roman like? You'll find the answer to that question in Xanten, where a Roman port city has been reconstructed in the *Archäologischer Park*. Colonia Ulpia Trajana was founded in the first century AD. For a long time, it was one of the largest Roman cities north of the Alps, until it was destroyed by the Franks in the late third century.

The open-air museum includes a Roman bakery, a winery, and a bathhouse. The buildings were reconstructed based on archaeological research that is still going

Fancy a day out? The editors of Vox selected five trips that can be done within a day (and yes we did try them out ourselves, albeit not all at once).

Text: all Vox editors

TAKE A DAY TRIP

on in the park. Highlights include the port temple, a defensive wall and, of course, the amphitheatre, in which real parades and fights between gladiators are still being staged.

One original feature is the inn, where Roman dishes appear on the menu. Finally, antiquity aficionados can indulge their passion in an extensive collection of Roman statues, jewellery, and tools.

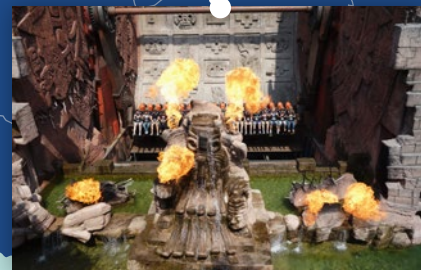
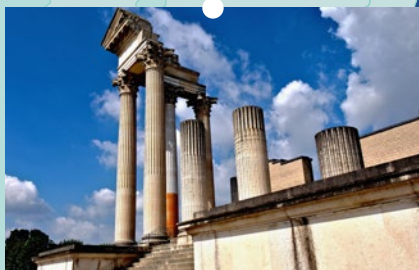


Snow an hour and a half away

Winter sports enthusiasts have a hard time in the flat Netherlands. So what do you do then, if you want to go skiing for a day? Check out the world's largest indoor skiing facility, of course! Which is located, as it happens, in Bottrop,

just under an hour and a half's drive from the city on the Waal. On the 640-metre-long track, you can imagine (if only for a moment) that you are on an Austrian slope. You can also book ski or snowboard lessons.

Not a fan of artificial snow? You can always seek refuge in the all-you-can-eat restaurant, where trays of chips, schnitzels, and Kartoffelsalat await you. But if you want to ski afterwards, we advise you to go easy on the large glasses of German beer. You wouldn't be the first to be plucked off the slope with a broken bone by the rescue service.



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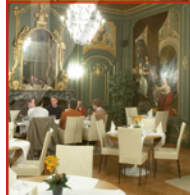
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WICKED THINGS

Last February, Holly Hartley from the University of Exeter started the second half of her Erasmus-exchange at Radboud University. She writes about books.

The beginning of this term has certainly felt strange for me. First and foremost, my best friend and flatmate moved out, returning to Spain to finish her studies. In fact, a lot of my nearest and dearest have left – and I've been trying to come to terms with the fact that I will have to face the new semester without the support network I have come to rely on since I moved to Nijmegen.

And even though I'm usually a quite social creature, something about forging new friendships and connections feels scarier this time around. It seems easy to shrink away from social situations when you've been thrown in at the deep end. Especially when you're being hit by the kind of lethargy that comes after a busy exam period, when, after all this stress and studying, you just want to stay in bed and drink tea now that it's over.

So, I curled up in bed, drank some tea and, as always, I've been finding solace in books. And I couldn't help but notice the similarities between my situation and the character of Annie from Francesca May's book *Wild and Wicked Things* – a supernatural *The Great Gatsby* retelling. Much like Annie,

I've arrived in a new place without any prior connections (or at least with all the old ones gone). And although the dark magic element of my life is limited solely to the demonology course that I'm taking at the moment, I can relate to how isolated Annie was at the beginning of the novel.

Luckily, I've found that the people I've encountered in my new classes have been really friendly. Slowly but surely, I'm being coaxed out of my post-exam nest and into the real world again – much like Annie left her boring hometown for a life of glittering magic. Funnily enough, my demonology course is filled with some of the most welcoming people I've met so far (although I

haven't met any actual ghosts or spirits – yet) and so I can't think of a better way to break my habit of hiding in my room.

A particular quote from *Wild and Wicked Things* stuck with me: 'A tiny thought at the back of my mind whispered that when I looked at this place I could almost taste magic on my tongue, could feel its promise of transformation humming in my veins. There was just enough of it in the air to make me feel brave.' And, just like Annie, I'm hoping that I'll have my transformation moment as well.

'Something about forging new friendships feels scarier this time around'



For the upcoming semester, English Literature student **Holly Hartley** is going to compile a reading list about her remaining time in Nijmegen. And especially after all her friends have left following their own exchange semesters, books can be a source of solace (and a cure for isolation).

FOLLOW HOLLY ON VOXWEB.NL!

COLOPHON

Vox is the independent magazine of Radboud University.

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