

The global challenge for Maastricht University: Globalizing universities in a globalizing world

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The global challenge for Maastricht University

Globalizing universities in a globalizing world

Speech by Dr. Jo Ritzen, President Maastricht University, on the occasion of the Opening Ceremony of the Academic Year 2005-2006

Dear Mr. Governor of the Province of Limburg Frissen, Mr. Mayor Leers,
Honored Speaker Ms. Hertz, Ladies and Gentlemen

“Energy: Yes, Quality: No”. These are the words used by the Swiss artist Thomas Hirschhorn to express his concern about globalization at an exhibition at the Bonnefanten Museum. His work of art “Hotel Democracy” is also an expression of this concern. Globalization may lead to uniformity, to a loss of differentiation and diversity, and to a less colorful world.

Yet globalization can also be a reason to charter new territories and can also release human talent and energy. Globalization should be organized in such a way that the maximum deployment of talent and human energy is achieved. Globalization should make differentiation and variety available to many more people, rather than submerging them all in the same grey indistinguishable mass.

Maastricht University is, by Dutch and European standards, a young university that will celebrate its 30th anniversary in January 2006. We constantly seek to distinguish ourselves from other institutions of higher education by carefully observing the changes in the external environment and making choices on how to respond to them. Hence we have chosen the theme of “Universities in a Globalizing World” for the opening ceremony of this academic year.

Ladies and gentlemen,

With a new generation of students entering the university, the start of the academic year is a moment to reflect on what we – as a university – have achieved and what we are striving for. We very much welcome the new and the returning students. We feel privileged that you have rewarded our commitment to the best possible education by choosing Maastricht University as your fostering mother, your ALMA mater, which, we are sure, you will remember very fondly for the rest of your lives.

As will become clear in the next twenty minutes, we speak with pride of a university which has reached for the near unreachable. Thanks to the commitment of our former and present faculty and staff as well as that of our students, we have been able to achieve this. With this in mind we respectfully remember the contribution of those who died in the past academic year.

- Tommy Glazenborg, student at the Faculty of Economics
- Bernard van Swaaij, retired employee of General and Technical Services
- Peter Janssen from the Capacity Group Management of Health Organization, Policy and Economics, of the Faculty of Health Sciences
- Rikie Magdelijns, employee at Student Services
- Jan Meinders from the Capacity Group Biophysics and CARIM of the Faculty of Medicine
- Jos Lemmens, emeritus Professor of General Surgery
- Bèr Budy, retired employee of Unicatering
- Hilda Duizings, part time student of the Faculty of Health Sciences
- Leo Coolen, Professor of Telematics at the Institute for Knowledge and Agent Technology of the Faculty of General Sciences
- Vic Dubois, former head of the Vocational Training for General Practitioners of the Faculty of Health Sciences

- Raden Bambang Oetomo, retired researcher of the Capacity Group of Policy Analysis of the Faculty of Health Sciences
- Ber Nypels, retired employee of the General and Technical Services

This university would not be what it is without its constant adaptation to the needs of our time. It is a time that offers great opportunities, but also poses serious risks. We are appalled by terrorist suicide bombings on our doorsteps. We are appalled at murderous fanaticism in our own country. All of a sudden, the events in Israel or Afghanistan are no longer something that happens on the other side of the world, even though we realize that what we experience is no more than a tiny fraction of the insecurity felt in other countries.

This is a time in which the majority of Dutch and French citizens decided to retract from a stronger role of Europe in the world. Apparently they believed that their cocoon of identity and culture could safely withstand the gale of globalization on its own.

It is also a time in which in Gleneagles the G8 gave in to the popular call of Bob Geldof, Bono and many other pop stars and decided to change its attitude towards poor countries substantially, giving them a better chance for social and economic growth. It is, moreover, a time of peaceful transitions towards democracy in countries like Georgia and the Ukraine.

We tend to capture the changes in our time under the catch-all phrase of globalization, which means that many people all over the world are influenced or affected by the reduced time and cost of bridging distances and of acquiring information, which leads to tremendous new opportunities as well as risks in the movement of ideas and goods.

Too often, globalization is viewed as an inevitable process, with an inevitable outcome, ignoring that the outcome is very much determined by the agreements we have made on globalization. In a recent book I focus on three aspects of globalization that require urgent change.

Firstly: trade in agricultural products. The present rules are highly in favour of rich countries and virtually bar poor countries from developing their main economic sector, which is agriculture.

Secondly: development cooperation, where the lack of harmonization still leads to disproportionate overhead costs for poor countries. For example, Tanzania still has to write, every 3 months, 2,400 reports to all of its donors.

Thirdly: there are too few rules to fight the corruption in poor countries that is caused by outside parties. A substantial part of the corruption in poor countries finds its origin in the dealings between internationally operating firms and the local bureaucracy. There are no international sanctions against such dealings.

At Maastricht University, these topics are studied and taught widely, but in particular in the newly founded Maastricht School of Governance and in the new merger of the United Nations University INTECH with the MERIT Group of our Economics Department.

I am tremendously pleased to have Noreena Hertz with us today. She will deliver a keynote speech on globalization and universities. She believes that we ourselves choose the course globalization should take. Noreena is not only an accomplished academic. She is also the author of the bestsellers “The Silent Takeover” and “I.O.U.” on the debt threat.

I am looking forward to hearing her views on the potential role of universities in this world characterized by globalization.

There are groups of committed young people who have turned their back on globalization – calling themselves anti-globalists. Artists, like Hirschhorn, but also –here in our city- Maries van Osch, feel that a countervailing force is needed against the present form of globalization. Maries van Osch has been so kind to present some of his art here today to accompany the keynote speech of Noreena Hertz. We very much appreciate the support of the Bonnefanten Museum that allows us to have his work exhibited here.

Not only will Noreena Hertz speak about new directions in globalization (and how our alumni might contribute to them). She will also address the implications of globalization for the future world of academia.

We had hoped for the presence of Mr. Saakashvili, President of the Republic of Georgia. He is a fine example of a leader who has been shaped by globalization, with an early experience of studying abroad. Unfortunately, he had urgent last minute obligations which prevented him from being here today. Instead he has sent us a message which will be read by one of our students from Georgia.

Maastricht University is very much part of a globalizing world. Our university listens to demands from the outside world and translates these in its strategic approach. Hence the key words that summarize the choice we make are *innovative and international*.

It has been our decisive course to provide Dutch as well as foreign students with a climate of joint participation. Maastricht University was the first European University on the continent to seriously open itself to foreign students and faculty by offering full bachelors and masters degree programs in the English language. Now 30% of its student intake comes from abroad, with a mix of nationalities that are increasingly more diverse and less concentrated in the border region. Substantial emphasis is placed on the internationalization of the curriculum, and a period of study abroad has become a regular part of the university's courses.

“Innovative” means to us a commitment to problem based learning as a major improvement in university education. In the Netherlands, this drive has yielded Maastricht University a top ranking. This is associated with much appreciation by employers for our alumni’s team spirit, problem solving capacity, as well as competence in their specific discipline. There are few international comparisons of the teaching quality at universities. Yet, we feel, from the scant evidence available, like the rating of our economics faculty by major employers in Germany, that Maastricht University not only has a prominent place in the Netherlands, but that its teaching quality may well be second to none in Europe.

This academic year will mark the redefinition of our strategy for the period 2006-2010, which succeeds the existing strategy for the period 2001-2005.

Innovative and *international* will remain the key words for our university, perhaps with an even deeper meaning than in the past. Yet, more than ever, we will have to choose where we want to fit within the huge diversity of Dutch and European universities.

The development of universities was given a substantial stimulus by the book by Cardinal John Henry Newman: “The Idea of a University”, published in 1854. Unfortunately, his writings have led many people to believe that universities should all be alike, despite the fact that his texts suggest the opposite.

To quote: “If then a practical end must be assigned to a university course, I say it is that of training good members of society. Its art is the art of social life, and its end is fitness for the world.”¹ It is clear from this quote that no one size can fit all university education.

¹ Newman, J.H., The Idea of a University, Part 1 “University teaching”, Discourse 7. Knowledge viewed in relation to professional skill (1852) 177

Also, one should take into account that the context has changed. In Cardinal Newman's time, maybe 1% of the 18-25 year olds studied at a university in Europe. Today this percentage is closer to 20%. In his day, the globe was perceived as vast, with huge costs attached to the acquisition of information or the movement of people or goods over large distances, while we speak now of the world as flat and a village.

Universities nowadays have to cater for a wide variety of talents of potential students and an even larger variety in the demand for human capital. No single university can satisfy all these demands at the same time. Universities do well to differentiate and to specialize for particular talents of students and particular demands for human capital. In doing so, they should take their specific location, including its 'feel' and academic potential, into account. For example, Maastricht University is housed with its city campus in one of the most historic and picturesque academic environments in Europe, close to the administrative capital of Europe, Brussels. The city of Maastricht provides an attractive environment for an active student life.

As part of its differentiation from other universities, Maastricht University has chosen first of all to maintain its exceptional position as regards teaching. It is not without reason that Maastricht University puts teaching and learning first on its website, where most Dutch universities mention research first. This choice for a top position in education, which was first expressed by the founder of the university, Sjeng Tans, in 1970, will be maintained in the future. We have made this choice even against the grain of the government's recent move to make the provision of good education financially less attractive. The government does so by its new funding system in which student presence plays a larger role and student achievement receives a lesser reward, all of which takes place under the appealing, but highly misleading name of "learning rights".

The new strategy paper takes the bachelors/masters degree system as its point of departure. Europe may be proud of the harmonization of its higher education systems, thus making the European higher education area more accessible to students. Meanwhile, this new bachelors/masters degree system does provide universities in general, and Maastricht University in particular, with a new challenge, namely to attract students from all over Europe as well as from outside Europe on a substantial scale. Thus the introduction of the bachelors/masters degree system has brought some of the challenges of globalization right to our doorstep.

In recruiting international students, we have the advantage of our reputation for teaching. However, masters students select their master's degree course on the basis of the reputation for research of the university as well. Maastricht University has been increasingly able to develop a good reputation in a number of fields and topics.

The new strategy will be built upon a broad, university-wide discussion of the challenges implied in the changes of our context, of our external environment, so that the strategy can be implemented because it is shared, because we own it. In the process, external regional stakeholders will be widely consulted, making it a strategy that is also owned by the region (which is the South East of the Netherlands and the Euregion).

The Management Team of Deans and the Executive Board defines its approach as follows:

By 2010, the university will have a student intake of approximately 3,000 bachelors students and approximately 3,500 masters students each year. 35% of the bachelors students will come from abroad (80% from the EU, 20% from outside the EU); 50% of the masters students will be coming from other countries (35% coming from other EU countries and 15% from countries outside the EU). Each year, some 200 PhD students will graduate from Maastricht University.

These are substantial challenges, which imply a growth of bachelor students by 20% and of master students of even 60% as well as a doubling of PhD graduates.

In research, so we have stated for 2010, Maastricht University will have succeeded in substantially adding (national and international) project funds to national funds. The increase in research funding will not only be due to successful fundraising, but, more importantly, to contract research in partnership with the industry and social parties. The university concentrates on two clusters: the bio-medical and life sciences field, and the study of society and its governance from a humanities and social science perspective.

In a university-wide strategy debate on April 29, 2005, 71% of the participants thought that the use of the English language as a means of communication in the university should be promoted. 79% was convinced that the university should be selective for the top echelon of talented students. 85% supported the notion that research funds should be allocated on the base of merit and achievement. These are rough indicators of the attitudes of the university population towards the strategic ambition for the year 2010, based on innovation and internationalization.

The present developments in research are encouraging for the strategy set out in the statement of the Management Team of Deans. Maastricht University has, as a young university – with Tilburg University and Erasmus University in Rotterdam-, a substantial deficit in its basic research funding by the Government. If Maastricht University would be financed on an equal footing compared to the older Dutch universities, it would find its research funding increased by about € 30 million a year. Parliament has corrected this deficit for some 10% by a series of amendments to the government budget, initiated by the Members of Parliament Van der Laan and Bakker, for which we are most grateful.

In the meantime, Maastricht University is doing better, year after year, in competitive research, both within the Dutch and the European research area. The number of the winners of grants from NWO, the Netherlands Organization for Scientific Research, the share of Maastricht University in these grants, the share of Maastricht University in professorates awarded through the Royal Netherlands Academy of Arts and Sciences (KNAW), they all exceed the share that Maastricht University is given in Dutch basic research funding, and equals or exceeds the share in Dutch university students. Only two years ago, at the opening ceremony of the academic year, we formulated this as a long term goal. It has been very quickly achieved, which demonstrates the research strength of Maastricht University.

Research cooperation with industry is on the rise. We appreciate the recent (July 2005) decision by DSM to focus on innovation next door, in Geleen, partly in conjunction with Maastricht University. We appreciate the decision by Philips to create the Center for Molecular Medicine together with the Technical University Eindhoven and us. In both instances the cooperation with the Maastricht Academic Hospital has been strengthened, and the cooperation was substantiated in a new University Medical Centre. This cooperation will enter a new phase this academic year, when, by January 1, 2006, we aim to finalize a contract for the joint administration of both the Faculties of Health Sciences and Medicine, and the Academic Hospital. During the years 2006 and 2007, the two faculties will gradually merge. In that way we facilitate the emergence of graduate schools across both faculties and the Academic Hospital.

Our research cooperation with industry is further enhanced through the new cooperation in the Leading Technological Institute for Pharmacy and in the extended cooperation in the Wageningen Center for Food Sciences, the name of which we hope will be changed into the Dutch or International Center for Food Sciences, to express the substantial involvement of partners like Maastricht University.

The university is also engaged in other disciplines than health and medicine, by focusing its research in institutes, which can be national and international points of concentration for research on major societal issues. This is very much spurred on by the Government's drive to found and fund leading technological institutes and social top institutes with a formula in which social parties – either industry or other commercial parties – participate on an equal footing with the respective universities, with the Government matching the joint contribution of social parties and universities.

In this Academic Year we hope to see the participation of Maastricht University in a number of leading technological institutes and social top institutes.

Our research effort is strongly supported by the Province of Limburg. The University takes centre stage in the prospects for the future economic structure of the Province in the context of the Government Memorandum "Peaks in the Delta", including the so called "Acceleration Agenda" of the Province. We feel that it is part of our "raison d'être" to contribute to regional development. At the same time, we hope that the drive towards a regional knowledge economy can strengthen the absorption capacity of this region for our graduates.

Ladies and Gentlemen, let me conclude.

We feel privileged that so many students have chosen for a bachelors degree in Maastricht, making us the university with the largest growth in numbers of new students. We have more than met the targets set out in the strategic document in terms of the intake of first-year bachelor students, and are currently ranking no. 6 among the 14 Dutch universities in market share.

The present numbers of new master students are not yet in line with our strategic prospects. This was hardly to be expected, as many EU countries are not yet fully engaged in the bachelors/masters degree structure. The number of European masters students therefore is still in a state of flux. At the same time, in this academic year we will reflect on new initiatives for masters degree courses tuned to the tastes and preferences of students and the needs of society as well as our strong points in teaching and research. In this process we will keep in close contact with “like minded” partner universities in Europe, organized in and around a consortium in development, in which, provisionally, University College Dublin, the University of Copenhagen, the University of Mannheim, the University of Toulouse and Warwick University participate. Also, the regional links with the University of Hasselt, with Liège and with Aachen will be important as a source of inspiration and potentially for the purpose of organizing joint degrees.

In other words: we have changed to accommodate the demands of globalization. So, do we then still need critical reflection on our existence, on our role in globalization, on our role in society? Yes, very much indeed. As Noreena Hertz will argue, there is much to be desired from our institution. We firmly believe that Maastricht University is reflecting on those desires and challenges. With another quote from Hirschhorn: “I will grapple with reality in all its complexity, massiveness and incomprehensibility ... I will be brave, I will not be lulled to sleep, I will work on and be happy.”

I firmly believe that this quote from Hirschhorn will guide us, the management, faculty, staff and students of Maastricht University alike, in shaping our ‘unique’ future in the globalized world of tomorrow.

Thank you for your attention.