Monthly column from your AMIDSt director, Ton Dietz

Dear colleagues,

This week some of you may have received the (Dutch-language) Advice made by a committee, installed by our Faculty Dean, about a possible merger between AMIDSt and the two other current research institutes in the social sciences, ASSR and IMES. I would like to share with all of you what the main points are in that Advice.

The committee consisted of six members. It was chaired by Prof. Claes de Vreese, director of one of the other research institutes in our Faculty, ASCOR (Communication Studies) and assisted by the head of Human Resources of our Faculty, Pieter van Leeuwen. The other four members came from the three current research institutes: Prof. Meindert Fennema, member of IMES and head of the Department of Political Science; Prof. Jelle Visser, member of ASSR and representing the sociologists; Prof. Willem van Schendel, member of ASSR and representing the anthropologists, and finally Prof. Clara Mulder, from AMIDSt. Clara had a difficult position as it became clear to her after discussions with the AMIDSt programme leaders and the AMIDSt klankbordgroep that nobody in AMIDSt was really eager to push for a merger. The very successful and informative AMIDSt discussion day about our ‘forthcoming five-year plan’, on March 20, had made it quite obvious that AMIDSt members and the international advisory board are in fact happy with the contents, form and scale of the current AMIDSt and its four programme groups. For Clara the choice was either to say njet and come with a minority report (as it soon became clear that the committee members from ASSR and IMES, and the Chair, saw many advantages in a merger) or to strive for a consensus, but as much as possible maintaining the strengths of AMIDSt. And her position to push for a position: “IF it has to happen, it should be done in a prudent way” could be based on a general feeling in the committee that AMIDSt indeed is in good shape. She chose for that latter position and indeed I think that IF it has to happen the Advice is a wise one. I am sure that those of you who read Dutch will get a chance to read the document, as it is an ‘open’ document, that will soon be discussed in the Faculty Council, and also within AMIDSt. But for those of you who do not read Dutch (and for those who want to know the position of your AMIDSt director (for as long as it lasts…)) I will give a brief summary of the major points.

There was a general fear that after the College, the Graduate School and the Research Institute there would also be a merger of the departments (our GPIO, with Sociology/Anthropology and Political Science). The Advice takes
a position that the disciplinary foundation (and the Human Resource management) of the three groups of scholars (or four if Sociology and Anthropology will be split again) is an important asset. As much as possible the ‘architecture’ of the new research institute should be close to the ‘ground level’ of activities, that is: close to the current department in which people are positioned and close to the lowest-level teaching organisation. As it is quite clear that the system of external research evaluations will remain a disciplinary one, and interdisciplinary research groups will always be in a disadvantageous position in that system, it would be unwise to go for a merger that mixes everything according to thematic lines of organisation (even if some of us think that the disciplinary organisation of the current [social] sciences is a relict from the past, and that we should even strive for transdisciplinary, problem-based research-and-practice groups).

The Advice talks about a ‘lean’ institute and ‘strong’ (and quite autonomous) programme groups, with programme leaders in key roles. It says that there should be 8-10 of those programme groups and that existing ones that function well, or that were recently formed (e.g., our Geographies of Globalisations group) should be able to remain. Programme groups should consist of 2-3 leading professors and 20-30 members, including all PhD candidates. That is what we have at AMIDSt, and what we regard as an optimal level of scale. Within programmes there can be one or more research lines (under a professor, generally), but these should be informal and flexible constructions. The Programme Group is the basic financial and organisational unit, and - for existing programme groups that continue - the existing financial reserves will still be there after the start of the new Institute.

The Advice suggests that initiatives for a new architecture of programme groups should come from the key professors (kernhoogleraren), who should indicate the intended composition of the proposed groups, guided by the overall director of the merged Institute. I assume that in our case three groups will more or less remain what they are now: Urban Geographies, Planning, Institutions and Transforming spaces, and Geographies of Globalisations. Maybe there are one or two researchers from among the current IMES and ASSR groups who would like to join; I don’t think there will be exit movements. For the group Governance of Inclusive Development (the old LEG group) I assume that discussions might be useful with development-oriented sociologists and anthropologists to mix and then split into two new programme groups (GID already is quite big, so I do not think it will be wise to add a considerable number of researchers/PhD candidates and remain one big group).

The Advice suggests that the ‘target’ would be to become one of the top-level institutes of social science research in Europe, by putting more emphasis on research programming and more focus on getting (inter)national subsidies for research. But for the current AMIDSt groups that is nothing new. It is also suggested to have an annual round of quality monitoring, based on a systematic review of output, compared with input of research time, and to use a three-year period of input/output comparisons for these internal assessments. The minimum norm is two peer-reviewed publications for every 0.4 fte research time. Again: for AMIDSt this is nothing new (although we take a five-year moving period). In fact during May 2009 all senior members of staff in AMIDSt will receive such an individual assessment. And finally the Advice suggests that PhD candidates should fit in the overall research programming of Programme Groups. Again - it becomes boring - this is standard AMIDSt practice.

I expect that the period until this summer will be used to discuss the Advice, and I expect some ‘courting’ to take place (but again: for the current AMIDSt groups I do not expect major changes, maybe with the exception of GID). I assume that further steps will be taken before January 2010, and possibly a formalisation of the merger. For AMIDSt it is nice that we already put so much emphasis on our new research programme. For the time being we will finalise that process, knowing that it might be a Five-Year Plan for just this year.

Please share your thoughts and suggestions with me in the coming period!

Ton Dietz

Link for submitting publications
Please submit your publications via the following link as soon as your publication has been published. This way the publication will appear in DARE as soon as possible, and the publication will be available online.
http://www2.fmg.uva.nl/amidst/jaarverslag/publicaties.html

Remitting strategies of Zimbabweans living in Yorkshire, UK
AMIDSt Lecture Series by Prof. dr. Adrian Bailey, Friday, 15 May 2009, 12:00 - 13:00 hrs., room GS08

Adrian Bailey is professor of Migration Studies and Head of School at the School of Geography, University of Leeds. Trained as a population geographer at Indiana University, USA, his research interests focus on geographies of the lifecourse and the challenges and opportunities associated with transnational societies. This lecture reports on research into the remittance strategies of Zimbabweans living in Northern England in 2008. On the basis of new primary data collected through a community survey and long interviews I shed light on in 2007, with remitters more likely to be married, in an older age group, making one or more visits to Zimbabwe.
intending to return, employed, and possessing higher levels of education in Zimbabwe. However, remitting piles pressure on Zimbabwean families in the UK and Zimbabwe, and can represent a form of dependency and deepening inequality with negative consequences for recovery in Zimbabwe. In summary, policy must remain equally attentive to social and economic processes.

Commuter Partnerships. Balancing home, family, and distant work
PhD defense Marjolijn van der Klis, 15 May, 14.00 hrs Agnietenkapel

This study is about commuter partnerships. The commuter partnership is a particular non standard household arrangement in which, for part of the time, one partner lives near his or her work and away from the communal family home, because the commuting distance is too great to travel on a daily basis. This study seeks to explain the function of a commuter partnership in the life courses of couples who opt for this household arrangement and to look into the day-to-day experiences of these couples with regard to their working and family lives. The research is of an exploratory nature and it is based on in depth interviews with commuter couples in the Netherlands. Results show that most couples view their commuter partnership as a temporary solution. The choice of a commuter partnership can be understood as a practical solution for couples and families to balance the commitments to work, partnership family, and residence.

Promotor: Prof. dr. C.H. Mulder, Co-promoter Dr. Ir. C.J.M. Karsten

Afscheidscollege Hans Knippenberg + symposium
Dinsdag 26 mei, 15.00 uur, Aula van de Universiteit van Amsterdam
Ter gelegenheid van het afscheid van Prof. Dr. Hans Knippenberg, bijzonder hoogleraar in de Sociale Geografie, in het bijzonder van politieke en culturele verschijnselen, organiseert de leerstoelgroep politieke en culturele geografie van de Universiteit van Amsterdam een symposium over de potenties van de nieuwe culturele geografie, getiteld: "Van folklore tot kapitaal: De ‘cultural turn’ in de Nederlandse geografie". Het definitieve programma is vanaf eind april te raadplegen op de website van AMIDSt, of op http://users.fmg.uva.nl/vmamadouh/26mei2009.html. Het symposium vindt plaats voorafgaand aan het afscheidscollege, van 9.30-13.30 in de Doelenzaal van de Universiteitsbibliotheek.

New colleagues
- Serena Nasongo, PhD student GID
- Sabine van der Greft, PhD student UG
- Robert Marijnissen

New Towns for the 21st Century: The Planned vs. The Unplanned City
Conference Thursday June 4  & Friday June 5  2009
What happens after planners leave the brand new New Town and the complexity of society takes over? Does overruling of the planners' concepts imply the failure of planning? Or are these 'unplanned' additions and unforeseen usages of the planned city actually the key to its success? In a two-day conference in June 2009 the International New Town Institute (INTI) will explore the relationships between the planned city and the unplanned city.
On June 4th the conference will explore existing cities and analyse the ways in which New Towns have been taken over by real life after the original plans have been built, and the unplanned city and self-organised building activities have decidedly changed and shaped the resulting city. Also, lecturers will analyze how these ‘old’ New Towns have been revitalized and regenerated in recent years and how the unplanned urban culture and inhabitants are included in this reanimation. Key note speakers are Wolfgang Kil: Normalisation of planned communities and the Urban Think Tank: Rules and strategies of the informal city.
On June 5th the conference aims to acquire lessons for the future. This will be accomplished by speculating on how the planning of New Towns in the 21st Century can anticipate unplanned activities, be responsive to inhabitants’ input and to unexpected changes in political, economic or cultural context, thereby enriching both the planning profession and the city itself. Key note speakers are Margaret Crawford: Everyday urbanism and Claudio Acioly: Informal Settlements & Brasilia.
- Two day international conference in the New Town Almere, the Netherlands
- 25 presentations about informality in relation to New Towns
- Public lecture evening: Who's afraid of Planning? with Anne Lacaton, Sam Jacob and Jord den Hollander (free of charge)
- Program includes lunches, drinks, afternoon program (bike tour, city tour, movie program)
- Participants fee € 200,- (student / PhD fee € 40,-)
- Register before May 22, 2009.
Visit www.newtowninstitute.org for detailed program and digital registration form.

ENHR conference 2009 in Prague
Dear ENHR member,
This year's conference will be held 28 June and 1 July in Prague, The Czech Republic. The theme is Changing Housing Markets: Integration and Segmentation. The deadline for submission of abstracts is approaching:
- SECOND CALL FOR ABSTRACT: updated deadline for submission of abstracts - 31 March 2009.
- Deadline for submission of papers – 1 June 2009.
- The deadline for registration is 10 June 2009
For more information visit the conference website at http://www.enhr2009.com/info.php?l=cz&cid=25073

UvA draadloos
Wist je dat je met je UvAnetID gebruik kan maken van het netwerk eduroam? Met je UvAnetID kan je ook draadloos internetten bij andere instellingen die bij eduroam aangesloten zijn, zoals de HvA en de RUG.
Verwijzingen
http://www.ic.uva.nl/draadloos

Personal webpage
For all staff members there’s a possibility to make their own personal page, which you can update yourself. It’s accessible at: https://home.medewerker.uva.nl/homepage; log in with your UvAnetID. When you’re done, click on “Activate” to publish your personal page. Inform the AMIDst secretariat so they can link this to the AMIDSt website.

Out of office
In order to be more helpful towards our colleagues it’s important that the secretariat has a good overview of the room occupations. Therefore, we kindly ask you to report to the secretariat the days you are out of office (due to holidays, fieldwork, illness, etc.)

Common room
The common room and kitchen is communal space. We would appreciate it if everyone keeps this space tidy and does his/her own washing-up. It is not the task of the secretariat.