Monthly column from your AMIDSt director, Ton Dietz

Fading away
The AMIDSt research day on October 15 was very well attended and informative for many colleagues who participated. It was also a nice way to get acquainted with Anita Hardon and her style. During the last few months I sometimes had the idea that some colleagues look at me as a ‘mayor during war time’ (I am not sure if the Dutch expression ‘burgemeester in oorlogstijd’) has the same strength in English, or even if it means anything for non-Dutch people…). Indeed in my discussions during the research day with Wim Ostendorf (member of the Faculty Council) you may have felt some of these tensions. Soon we will know what the advice will be of the Faculty Council, but I think that by January 1st AMIDSt will be history and I will no longer be your research director. It is also quite obvious that the four research groups in AMIDSt will continue, and with more autonomy, and that many AMIDSt practices and ways of doing things have been copied in the new structure of the Amsterdam Institute for Social Science Research: AISR. For me October 15 feels as the start of slowly fading away… Also for that reason I have asked Jochem de Vries to give us his opinion about what happened during October 15. Jochem chairs the AMIDSt ‘sounding board’ and also chaired the October 15 meetings.

Jochem’s subcolumn…
Ton offered me some room in his monthly column to put my impressions of the AMIDSt-research on paper. The AMIDSt sounding board had several ambitions with the meeting. First, we wanted to inform colleagues about developments that will affect their work as researchers in the coming years. This clearly had to include the merger of AMIDSt into a Social Science Research Institute and the AMIDSt assessment of research output, but should not be restricted to that. Second, there should be the opportunity for everyone to voice opinions on and pose questions about these developments. Third, we wanted to mobilise ideas on the improvement of the research climate.

My conclusion is that these ambitions were met. With regard to the merger – as with probably all management issues - there are clearly insiders and outsiders within the institute. I was strengthened in the idea that these kinds of meetings are useful to inform the outsiders. They are also a necessary complement to the written information - in formal letters by the dean and columns like these - that is provided to those outsiders. The personal touch and the dynamics of questions and answers, do contribute to a greater understanding for the positions people take in these kind of messy processes. (This is not necessarily the same as agreeing with these positions.)

A different source of dynamics to which the ordinary researcher simply has to adapt is the ever-changing conditions for research funding. Pieter Hooimeijer’s impression clearly is that the EU is becoming an ever more important source for funding and that the buzz-word is climate change. NWO might skip funding of PhD research all together, which is possibly the greatest challenge to our current business model.

From the panel discussion with program leaders I sensed that the need to have a constant stream of ISI-publications is beyond discussion. At the same time there is a shared and growing concern that current institutional changes and incentives have perverse effects, even to the extent that it leads to so-called Stachanov-workers, see http://nl.wikipedia.org/wiki/Aleksej_Stachanov. Acting together as a department and in the future research institute might offer possibilities to counter these effects.

The workshops that I attended brought several issues to the fore. One issue on which particularly strong agreement seemed to exist was the desire to work in a socially attractive environment, in which interaction and mutual interest goes beyond the strictly functional. This is closely related to a matter that emerged several times during the day. With AMIDSt and the GPIO teaching institute being integrated in larger structures, the department should become a more prominent unit for disciplinary cooperation and social identification. Anita Hardon’s commitment to leaving the departments alone the coming years was therefore warmly welcomed.

Other issues
Back to the director again.
• You have all been asked to submit your publications for 2009 immediately upon publication. This will feed an information system that can be used in February 2010, when (ex-)AMIDSt will present a three-year ‘mid term review’ of its activities. We have decided to do that instead of making an annual report for 2007-2008 (which is long overdue) and another one for 2009.
• ASSR asked a specialist in citation analysis (Ad Prins) to do a study of ASSR’s five-year performance in terms of ‘reputation’ (which is different from ‘performance’, the way we did it at AMIDSt: comparing input and output). Anita Hardon would like to have a performance analysis for ASSR and IMES, comparable to what we did at AMIDSt, and to have a reputation analysis for AMIDSt and IMES, comparable to what is available now for ASSR. I think it is wise to integrate that in the forthcoming mid-term review (which will be the ‘end of AMIDSt review’). When the ASSR report was discussed (last week) it became clear to me that ‘citation analysis’ for social scientists puts a premium on being old, and also that reputation as measured by citations is generally restricted to just a few of people’s total publications, although the Google Scholar method is far more inclusive compared to the Web of Science (ISI) method.

• Those of you, who still did not find the time and the energy to make your personal website and put it online, of course will do that before my next month’s column, as you are all fearing that your AMIDSt research funding will rapidly fade away if you fail to do so (by the way: my current ASSR colleague shared his irritation with me, that he also failed to get a 100% coverage!).

• Because of the importance to maintain (or even strengthen) our research coherence in the Department of GPIO, it was suggested to maintain the practice of having a research sounding board, but now as a sounding board to the Departmental Chair. I think that it would also be wise to maintain the practice of an Annual Research Day for the four research groups together, to be organised by the ‘sounding board’. I think October 15\textsuperscript{th} showed the importance and I would like to end this column by thanking Jochem and ‘his’ group for the quality with which they organised it. That includes the buffet and the fireworks in the evening!

Ton Dietz, October, 2009