Research Report 2015
Radboud University
Cover photo:
The architecture of plant stems is often astonishing. The picture shows a cross-section of the stem of a bittersweet plant (Solanum dulcamara, one of the species in the Radboud University Plant Collection), which happily survives a long period of flooding, thanks to the formation of new adventitious roots. Bittersweet is a wild plant species that is very common in northern Europe and it is closely related to many important food crops such as potato, tomato and aubergine. Research on bittersweet includes a study of water stress i.e. the response of the plant during periods of flooding.

Photo provided by Dr Elisabeth Pierson (General Instrumentation, Science Faculty).
Academic issues and complex societal problems increasingly require expertise from various backgrounds as well as approaches from several points of view. It is therefore no surprise that the advancement of science and breakthroughs in knowledge appear on the borderlines between disciplines. For that reason, most of our research institutes are organized thematically. Within each of the themes, researchers – often representing different disciplines – work together to provide answers and to solve problems. In addition, they cooperate with other experts, both inside and outside academia.

With the intention of further enhancing multi- and interdisciplinary research on our campus, a new and broad inter-faculty theme has been identified. This theme is of major importance to society and it also provides an opportunity to focus our best researchers and our excellent facilities on one of the greatest challenges of our time. It covers much of our academic profile (see page 6) and relates to many of our societal themes (see page 17). This new theme – The Healthy Brain – also fits very well into the National Science Agenda which the Dutch government formulated in 2015 after consultation with stakeholders across the nation.

The Healthy Brain
The human brain is the most complex biological system known to man. It allows us to have thoughts, speak languages, feel emotions, initiate actions, store and retrieve memories, and navigate our world each and every day. It enables us to be the conscious and social human beings that we are, both creating and interacting with increasingly complex environments. To understand the workings of this crucial human organ is a daunting task. Fortunately, due to developments in several scientific fields, the endeavour to understand the organization of the brain and how it interacts with its environment has progressed further in the past few decades than in the two millennia before. Nevertheless, we are still only at the beginning of unravelling the mysteries of this complex system. Hence, it is widely recognized that understanding the brain will be the major scientific challenge of the 21st century. This challenge can only be met successfully if researchers from a wide range of disciplines join forces. Moreover, it can only be done at a place where excellence in the relevant research fields is available. The Radboud campus – where Radboud University, the Radboud University Medical Center and the Max Planck Institute for Psycholinguistics are located – is such a place. Moreover, our researchers have taken the initiative to cooperate to meet this major scientific challenge. The motivation to do this is driven by a common curiosity about what makes us human. Therefore in 2015, a campus-wide research programme focusing on The Healthy Brain was set up to accelerate our understanding of how the human brain works in health and disease. The Healthy Brain will make science better, improve education, and foster further interactions with society.

The most significant results achieved by our researchers in 2015 are presented in this Research Report. It is not only a transparent way to account for the resources that society has allocated to us; it also shows why we have confidence in our future.

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Within the Nijmegen Institute for Social and Cultural Research, academic research focuses on developments in society with a multidisciplinary and comparative perspective. Descriptive and explanatory research is carried out on inequality, cohesion and modernization in both Western and non-Western societies. Innovative theoretical approaches, analytical methodologies and strategies for data collection are implemented using comparative research designs.

NISCO – a research institute of the Faculty of Social Sciences – has two research groups: Cultural Anthropology and Development Studies (CAOS) and Sociology. To advance knowledge on the dynamics of societal phenomena, NISCO researchers mostly examine topics from a comparative perspective across different societies, but historical research within single communities or societies is also done, as well as trend studies on developments in different societies. A highly reputed Research Master’s programme in Social and Cultural Sciences offers high-quality training in theory building and analytical methods for conducting empirical comparative research on individuals in societies. Scientists at NISCO focus on three topical research themes: inequality, cohesion, and modernization.

Inequality
The main focus within this theme is on differences in access to – and control over – resources that affect peoples’ opportunities, e.g. in education, success in the labour market, identity, as well as family formation and health. Social inequality is studied from both an intra-generational and an inter-generational perspective.

1 NISCO: Nijmeegs Instituut voor Sociaal en Cultureel Onderzoek
Researchers examine the effects of social, cultural and economic resources on socio-economic achievement and consider how differences between and within countries are affected by structural conditions (such as wealth and unemployment), the cultural climate and national policies. Various aspects of individual, family, social groups and country contexts are thought to affect outcomes. Diversity in terms of gender and ethnicity is studied from both an anthropological and a sociological perspective.

Cohesion
Within this research theme researchers describe and explain differences in social participation and connection to formal organisations (companies, communities and political parties), as well as in informal social networks, such as in families, in ethnic groups and among friends. Developments in the relationships between an individual’s social and cultural resources and pro-social attitudes (support, giving intentions) and anti-social behaviours (criminality) are explored, focusing on variations in and among societies at different stages of development and with different welfare-state regimes. Furthermore, comparisons are made to show which social groups have intolerant attitudes towards (ethnic) out-groups, taking differences in economic, cultural and demographic contexts into account. Attitudes and behaviours of migrant groups are also studied in relation to their social integration.

Modernization
Researchers at NISCO study economic, cultural and technological developments, and particularly those that are associated with secularization and modernisation of opinions in Dutch and other societies. A great deal of attention is paid to belief systems, constructing identities and meanings derived from religion, to conceptions of citizenship, justice and altruism, and to the implications of these concepts for participation in society. NISCO researchers also focus on modernization processes in developing countries and their effects on inequality and poverty, as well as on developments in social and political cohesion. Furthermore, various reactions to modernization processes are the subject of research on the role of governments, civil society organisations and individual citizens.

Research facilities
Within NISCO the collection of high-quality data is greatly valued, as it provides excellent opportunities for multidisciplinary comparative research and cooperation. Researchers at NISCO therefore contribute to the academic community by involvement in large-scale data collections. Data facilities include both longitudinal collections – on Dutch individuals and their life courses and networks (Family Survey Dutch Population (FSDP), Netherlands Longitudinal Life-course Survey (NELLS), Social and Cultural Developments in the Netherlands (SOCON)) – as well as cross-national collections that contain information related to a wide range of topics (e.g., the European Social Survey (ESS) and the New Immigrant Survey Netherlands (NIS2NL)). Within the Anthropology Department small-scale data is collected in the Netherlands and in developing countries using ethnographic field research. Large-scale data often are collected with additional funding from the Netherlands Organisation for Scientific Research (NWO). These are transparently documented and deposited at the Royal Netherlands Academy of Arts and Sciences’ Data Archiving and Networked Service (DANS). NISCO-generated Dutch data have been widely used by colleagues both nationally and internationally.

Academic integrity
Within NISCO high standards of academic integrity are communicated to all researchers. Since 2014, the Institute has established a system of annual archiving of information related to all academic publications by its researchers. This makes it possible to carry out security checks with respect to fraud, plagiarism and data construction. A long-standing tradition has been built up by NISCO researchers to provide the academic community with well-documented open-source data with the goal of improving academic transparency and integrity. Such data makes it possible to control and repeat academic research results, thus promoting integrity. This tradition has been widely recognized as best practice and both data and publications are carefully archived together with source information at the University and at DANS-KNAW.
Collaboration

Members of NISCO collaborate with colleagues in Dutch research schools in order to advance national and international alliances and provide education to PhD candidates, including the Research School for Resource Studies for Development (CERES) and the Interuniversity Centre for Social Science Theory and Methodology (ICS). Scholars at NISCO work together with top international institutes, such as the Social Science Research Center (WZB), Berlin; Pacific Studies Research Group University of Bergen, Norway; Ohio State University, Columbus, USA; London School of Economics, London, UK, Centre de Recherche et de Documentation sur l’Océanie, Aix-Marseille Université, France; Collaborative Research Centre on Human-Environment Interaction, as well as with several departments of the German universities of Bamberg, Cologne, Göttingen, Heidelberg, Konstanz and Munich, the Danish University of Aalborg and the British universities of Cambridge, Essex, London, Oxford and St. Andrews. Within the Netherlands collaboration is established with the Institute for Migration and Ethnic Studies (IMES), the Nederlands Studiecentrum Criminaliteit en Rechtsfunctionering (NSCR), the Mulier Institute, the Netherlands Institute for Social Research (SCP) and Statistics Netherlands (CBS). Researchers have additionally visited or received guests from the University of California, the University of Applied Sciences Upper Austria, the Berlin Social Science Centre, the Siberian Federal University and the University of Trento.

NISCO staff also participates in a variety of academic networks, such as the European Association of Social Anthropologists (EASA); the European Association of Development Research and Training Institutes (EADI); the European Network for Research Expertise on Economic change, Quality of Life and Social Cohesion (EQUALSOC); European Research Centre on Migration and Ethnic Relations (ERCOMER); Network of Migrant Mothers Caring for Children (ICS); the European Consortium for Pacific Studies (ECOPAS), the European Society for Oceanists (ESFO), the network on Digital Literacy and Multimodal Practices of Young Children (DigiLitEY), EU Kids Online, the European Research Network on Transitions in Youth (TIY), the Network of Excellence ‘Enhancing the Interest in Science in a Developing Europe’ (EISDE); the Development Policy Review Network, and the International Civil Society Forum on Conflicts (INFOCON). NISCO has also established international partnerships through the South Africa-Netherlands Research Programme on Alternatives in Development (SANPAD).

Research results

In the field of inequality, NISCO researchers explored cross-temporal gender differences in the effects of family resources on educational attainment in the Netherlands. Results showed that especially in earlier cohorts – the effects of parental educational resources were gender-specific: the mother’s education affected women’s educational attainment most, whereas the father’s education mainly influenced men’s education. This pattern is less prominent in more recent cohorts. Results further indicated that for girls only, growing up with a working mother becomes increasingly beneficial over time. Anthropological research showed how economic empowerment helps women to reduce their reproductive health vulnerability in Northern Tanzania. Women’s employment has a positive impact on ‘health-seeking’ behaviours during pregnancy and at child birth. This indicates that any policy that increases women’s economic empowerment may be influential in improving women’s position in developing countries.

Cohesion in societies is a common focus of study, looking at the effects of ethnic diversity on bonding and bridging social capital. NISCO sociology researchers investigated whether ethnic diversity effects depend on the geographic scale at which they are measured. Indeed it was found that in small localities ethnic diversity was positively associated with bridging social capital, but that at larger scales the findings are more mixed. A major problem with research on ethnic diversity lies in the use of cross-sectional information. NISCO research therefore employs German longitudinal data to deal with this issue. Fixed effects panel regressions were used to analyse the consequences of changes in ethnic diversity between 2003 and 2008. Findings indicated that more ethnic diversity has a negative effect on political participation only. No evidence is found that ethnic diversity is related to other expressions of social capital.

CAOS researchers investigated the impact of urban policies on creating fruitful, practical distributions of people, authorities and spaces in neighbourhoods. Ethnographic research on Amsterdam’s Diamantbuurt was employed to reach these conclusions. Another anthropological study investigated recent conceptualizations of citizenship (beyond the nation state) with new perspectives on ‘governance assemblages’ comprising both state and non-state actors. This study showed that assemblage processes impose a citizenship agenda on these neighbourhoods, distinguishing between ‘good’ and ‘bad’ citizens.

Modernization processes are mostly examined within CAOS research studies. A state-of-the-art article investigated the relationship between decentralization processes and mineral resource conflicts in the Philippines. It showed that institutional negotiation processes lead to a range of conflicts. Emerging in addition to all sorts of institutional struggles, locally elected politicians raised important concerns about the elite’s role in decentralization processes. Another study raised the question whether the relevance and effectiveness of donor strategies by NGOs are linked to the ability to adjust to local contexts. It drew on institutional theory and found out that, besides the more commonly identified unequal power relationships between donor and recipient, processes of homogenization stem from NGOs themselves and from their organizational characteristics (mission,
staff, strategy and structure). Research done in the Sociology group tested hypotheses explaining variations in church attendance, comparing between-country designs with within-country designs. The latter provide a more convincing test, because fewer assumptions about unobserved country-specific variables seem to be required. It was shown that results from between-country analyses may lead to inaccurate conclusions. The authors therefore advise researchers to be cautious in applying between-country designs.

Awards and acknowledgments

From NISCO, Peer Scheepers was appointed as a member of the highly reputed Academia Europaea. Both Anouk de Koning and Martijn Koster received an ERC Starting Grant. Anouk de Koning for the project Reproducing Europe: Migrant Parents and Contested Citizenship, and Martijn Koster for a project on Participatory Urban Governance between Democracy and Clientelism. Niels Spierings acquired a Veni grant for the project ‘Understanding the Influence of Islamic Religiosity on Democratic Attitudes in the Arab Middle East’. Gerbert Kraaykamp and Roza Meuleman were appointed National Coordinators of the 8th round of the European Social Survey (by NWO-ESSNeth), and Maarten Wolbers received grant support for the project ‘Vocational education and youth labour market integration’ carried out with the Gak institute.

Societal impact

NISCO encourages scholars to engage in a variety of activities (sitting on advisory boards, contacts with policy makers, cooperation stakeholders, professional publications, and exposure in the media) to ensure that academic knowledge is made available to stakeholders to improve policy making. To do this, researchers participate in public debates – and appear in the media – on topics such as migration, cultural diversity, radicalism, (educational) inequality, poverty, gender and diversity, effectiveness of aid, and opinions among European citizens. Moreover, they advise public and private institutions and act as consultants. For instance, advice was given to the Dutch AIDS Fund, the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, NGOs in Indonesia, Stichting Lezen, and SNV Netherlands Development Organisation. Scholars also give advice on international data collection (such as the European Social Survey/Swiss longitudinal youth survey) and national data collections (DANS-KNAW and Statistics Netherlands). Conferences were organised by NISCO staff on the conflict in Yemen, policy making in relation to climate change, the relationship between Europe and the Pacific, and NISCO researchers organized a workshop on the European Social Survey. Moreover, NISCO played a leading role in organizing a Radboud summer school course on gender as a core concept in society and science.

Koen Breedveld served as an expert in the field of sports in various ways: as a consultant to the Dutch Parliament, the Ministry of Health, Welfare and Sport and NOC/NSF. Paul Hoebink and Lau Schulpen advised the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Dutch Parliament and several private aid organisations and appeared widely in the media discussing international development cooperation. Maarten Wolbers is treasurer of the Dutch Sociological Association (NSV), and together with Jochem Tolma he presented an edited volume on educational differentiation to Minister Bussemaker of OCW. Toon van Meijl organised a highly valued international ESF/ECOPAS conference on Europe and the Pacific in Brussels. Gerbert Kraaykamp was appointed as National Coordinator of the European Social Survey and became a member of the advisory board of CUPESSE. In collaboration with the Netherlands Institute for Social Research (SCP), Gerbert Kraaykamp composed a report on opinions in Europe, and Marcel Lubbers wrote a report on East-European migration, both of which were offered to the Dutch Parliament. Peer Scheepers is a member of the Scientific Advisory Board on data collection at Statistics Netherlands and was invited to give a keynote speech during the visit of the Dutch Royal family to Denmark.
Key publications


Dissertations: 6

Scientific publications: 133

Professional publications: 34
Director: Prof. Gerbert Kraaykamp

Gerbert Kraaykamp has been Professor of Empirical Sociology since 2008. His research interests mainly relate to educational inequality, parental socialization and health. Prof. Kraaykamp is a board member of the Interuniversity Center for Social Science Theory and Methodology (ICS), a member of the CUPESSE advisory board and co-initiator of several large-scale data collections (NELLS, FSDP, and SOCON). He is currently Dutch National Coordinator of the European Social Survey (round 8) on behalf of the Netherlands Organisation for Scientific Research (NWO). In 2015 this resulted in a cooperative publication “Nederland in Europees perspectief” (The Netherlands in a European perspective), together with the Netherlands Institute of Social Research (SCP).

Future research
In 2015 NISCO proved especially successful in acquiring funds for doing research. For example, two ERC Starting Grants were obtained within the CAOS group. Moreover, additional (temporary) personnel (UD, postdocs and PhDs) were hired to encourage research output. It is foreseen that this recent change in staff composition, and expected new personnel from the ERC projects, will feed research initiatives, contribute to the Faculty’s educational programme, and help broaden the scope of NISCO research themes. Moreover, CAOS researchers have adapted their publication strategy by focusing more on high-ranked journal publications. It is also expected that in 2016 a new professor of developmental studies will be appointed to further stimulate research and education within CAOS.

Research within the CAOS group focuses on issues related to cultural diversity and its consequences for socio-economic inequality. In 2015 an innovative new research programme was established and several initiatives were undertaken to acquire external funding. Staff are currently finishing a SUSO project on the vulnerable position of sex workers. Cooperation with the Sociology group (Prof. Scheepers) on ethno-religious conflicts in South-East Asia (Indonesia and the Philippines), which is NWO-funded, will result in two additional PhD students finalizing their thesis. Furthermore, a research programme funded by NWO/WOTRO that involves examining value chains in order to gain better insight into the increasing role of the market in development processes will result in four dissertations by Ethiopian PhD students.

In the Sociology group the Niels Spierings’ Veni project will start in 2016 and a replacement postdoc will be hired. Various sociological research projects are related to the key NISCO themes of inequality and cohesion. Several PhD students (partially funded by NWO) are working on these themes and associated publications are expected. Topics that are investigated include the relationship between unemployment and radicalism, the integration and opinions of recent migrants, the female advantage in education, inequalities in late careers and the relationship between major life events and sports participation. Two PhD students and a postdoc will continue working on the NORFACE MIFARE project led by Marcel Lubbers on migrants’ welfare-state benefit dependency and attitudes.

Sociological research mostly employs life-course analyses and multi-level modelling, which has proved to be of international interest. Maarten Wolbers recently acquired a grant from the Gak Institute on vocational education and youth labour market integration. A PhD student and postdoc will start working on this project in 2016. Collaboration between the Department of Sociology and the SCP will result in publications on behalf of the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs in 2016. It is further expected that a new professor of gender and diversity will join NISCO, thus extending research on gender-related issues. This appointment will strengthen NISCO’s intention to achieve further cooperation between Sociology and CAOS researchers.

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