Gwenda van der Vaart
Gwenda van der Vaart is a PhD researcher at the Department of Cultural Geography, Faculty of Spatial Sciences, University of Groningen (http://www.rug.nl/staff/g.van.der.vaart/). She was born in Groningen and raised in Grootegast, a village near Groningen. After high school, she started studying at the University of Groningen, where she obtained her Bachelor degree in Human Geography and Planning in 2011 and her Research Master degree in Regional Studies (cum laude) in 2013. During her studies she went abroad twice: one semester to Lisbon, Portugal during her Bachelors and one semester to Gainesville, USA during her Masters. After graduation, she was granted an Ubbo Emmius PhD-spot at the Faculty of Spatial Sciences, which meant that she could develop her own PhD research and work on this for a period of 3 years. Dr. Bettina van Hoven and Prof. dr. Paulus P.P. Huigen are her promoters.

What are you up to? In short: wat do you research?
In my PhD research I explore the role of the arts (especially participatory community arts) in building resilient communities. Communities in today’s world are facing several challenges, such as population decline, ageing, unemployment and climate change. In order to deal with these challenges and flourish, communities need to find ways to become or remain resilient. Communities can develop their resilience in various ways. In my PhD I explore the potential value of (participatory community) arts – which refers to a collective method of art-making in which community members are engaged – in this light. In the literature, it is argued that participatory community arts can be of value because of their high community participation potential and their ability to generate social capital, the ‘social glue’ of communities that helps communities to function well.

As part of my PhD, I am doing a research project in a coastal village in the Northern Netherlands. For this project, I adopt a participatory approach and use creative methodologies, involving the local inhabitants in the co-creation of data. The project involves three stages: for the first stage, I conducted walking interviews with 28 inhabitants of the village, talking with them about the community, what they see as threats for / tensions in the community, and their opinion and experiences of the position and impacts of the different arts and artists in their village. As the interviews were done partly outside, the participants could actually show places that are meaningful to them, that they think are contested in the community, or are under pressure because of changes. A camera was brought along during the interviews, so participants could also take photographs of the places they showed. These photographs were used during the second stage of the project, which comprised a group discussion. The participants were brought together to reflect on and discuss each other’s photographs and further discuss interesting topics that emerged during the interviews. The third stage of the project will comprise a creative workshop, in which the participants will convert the results of the first two stages into some kind of artistic output. This will subsequently be presented to the broader community during a
community event. With this event, it is aimed to engage the community, to raise the inhabitants’ awareness of issues at play in their community, and to generate a discussion.

*Does your research have an interdisciplinary character? If yes, how would you describe it?*

In my PhD research I combine the fields of (participatory community) arts, cultural geography and planning with each other. The ideas for my research arose out the research network ‘Between the Tides. Comparative arts and humanities approaches to living with(in) intertidal landscapes in UK & the Netherlands’ (see [https://tidalcultures.wordpress.com/](https://tidalcultures.wordpress.com/)). This network is illustrative of the interdisciplinary (and transdisciplinary) character of my PhD research, as it brings together academics from several backgrounds, artists and public parties from the Netherlands, the UK and beyond.

*In what way has your research societal impact?*

By adopting a participatory approach, my research already has a societal impact during the data collection period. The community members are actively involved in the research, and are brought together and encouraged to discuss and think about their community. Seen more broadly, knowledge on the role of the arts with regards to developing resilient communities will be generated through my PhD research. In this way, more knowledge on how to counteract or how to deal with future challenges and how to develop, resilient, viable and sustainable communities is generated.

*Do you aspire a career in science?*

The Ubbo Emmius PhD-spot allows me to devote a significant period of time to exploring a topic in greater depth in terms of empirical data collection as well as theoretical engagement than has been possible during my studies. Right now I am enjoying having this opportunity to continue my learning and development, both academically and personally. For my future career, I have an open mind and would also be interested to work on bridging the gap between science and the public, work in a more educational context, or explore ‘the world’ outside of academia.
Melanie Bakema
Melanie Bakema is a PhD researcher at the Faculty of Spatial Sciences, University of Groningen. She grew up on the island of Ameland in the North of The Netherlands and her family still lives there. After three years of high school on the island she went to high school on the mainland, in Leeuwarden. After living in Leeuwarden from her fifteenth till her eighteenth, she moved to Groningen for her bachelor studies Human Geography and Planning. As part of her bachelor program, Melanie studied abroad in Geneseo, USA, and she was engaged in various extra-curricular activities, including the Faculty Council and the Faculty Board. After graduating from her bachelor program in 2010, she started with her research master in Regional Studies. During her master program, she became more and more interested in disaster studies. Therefore, for her master thesis she went to New Zealand to do research on the planning of the recovery process after the earthquakes that hit the city of Christchurch. Melanie was living in New Zealand when she had her job interview through Skype for her current Ubbo Emmius PhD position. In her PhD research she continues with her passion for disaster studies, supervised by prof. dr. Philip McCann and dr. Constanza Parra. Besides her work she enjoys traveling, playing volleyball, playing the guitar and reading.

What are you up to? In short: what do you research?
In my PhD research on disaster governance I explore how governance systems can be created for resilient and sustainable longer-term recovery processes after disasters. When a disaster occurs in a society, we often hear a lot about it in the media. Many international organizations go to places that are hit by a disaster to provide emergency relief efforts. Also, there are many international protocols on how to deal with the emergency phases after a disaster. Nevertheless, we do not have that much knowledge about the social, longer-term recovery after disasters. Who has to be responsible for what? Should the government always take a leading role? Or do we as citizens, together with the private sector, have to play a role as well? In my research I look at this division of governance roles and responsibilities between various public, private and civil society institutions in different phases after a disaster.

My research contributes to disaster studies and to governance debates in a broader sense. I look at disaster governance from a social-ecological perspective, acknowledging that societies and their natural environments are interrelated. Disasters occur through the negative intersections between nature and societies and we can best understand social systems when we see them in their interrelation with their natural environments. Moreover, constructing recovery processes based on the ideas of multi-level governance, including both spatial and temporal levels, will allow for and encourage tailored space- and time-specific governance responses that is best for all areas and people.

The insights in disaster governance for my PhD research are based on three in-depth case-studies. The first is the city of Christchurch that was hit by a series of earthquakes in 2010 and 2011. I lived twice approximately three months in this city in New Zealand to conduct in-
depth interviews with people with a wide variety of roles in the recovery process. An interesting thing about the case of Christchurch are the many grassroots initiatives that are set up to make the city culturally attractive in the transition period towards the future. I explored the value of these initiatives and their links with the role of the governments. The second case is the island of Chiloé in Chile. The salmon sector of Chile, its second biggest industry, is for the largest share located on this island and has been impacted by a virus in 2008. The virus had a huge impact, led to many social, economic and environmental problems and can be regarded as a social-ecological disaster. In 2014 and 2015 I lived twice a couple of months in Chile where I – after learning Spanish – conducted in-depth interviews with respondents from different levels of government, employees of companies working in the salmon industry, and many local community groups. More than five years after the crisis, the industry and society are recovered and learned from the outbreak of the virus. However, an interesting aspect is that they perhaps learned too well how to control for diseases which is manifested by the current very high use of chemicals and antibiotics. In my last case-study I explore the vulnerability and governance dynamics in the North of the Netherlands. The area is vulnerable for many kinds of disasters, either nature- or human-induced or mixes between the two. I explore how we can apply the lessons and insights on disaster governance from the first two post-disaster cases, to the “pre-disaster” case of the North of the Netherlands, an area that is vulnerable to among others sea level rise, earthquakes and harmful consequences of the busy shipping routes on the North Sea.

**Does your research have an interdisciplinary character? If yes, how would you describe it?**

My research combines approaches from planning, economic and cultural geography and contributes to the research program of the Faculty of Spatial Sciences “tWIST”: towards Wellbeing, Innovation and Spatial Transformation. Besides that, the interdisciplinary character of my research is highlighted by the use of insights from environmental governance, political ecology and anthropology. Moreover, it connects to the research theme of “Sustainable Society” of the University of Groningen, through its focus on innovate governance systems to stimulate transitions towards more sustainable and resilient places in the face of disasters.

**In what way has your research societal impact?**

In my research I get a lot from society: people in New Zealand, Chile and the Netherlands talk with me and share their stories about their roles in and views on disaster recovery processes. I translate these insights in academic articles for a scientific audience, but next to that, I aim to give something back to society as well. During my research stays in New Zealand and Chile, I participated in several community activities to talk with the public and government officials. I would very much like to share my findings with practitioners working in the field of disaster governance and also learn about their experiences. Furthermore, besides my work as a PhD researcher, I am volunteer for the Foundation for Global Housing Assistance after disasters (Stichting Mondiale Woonhulp) and provide this foundation with reflections based on my research.

**Do you aspire a career in science?**

Growing up on the island of Ameland, I became interested in the relationships and interdependencies between societies and nature. Despite our trust in technological innovations, I believe that we need new (social) approaches to decrease the vulnerability of
societies to disasters and that we have to explore good governance practices to create more resilient places. I very much enjoy my current position as a PhD researcher. It allows me to develop myself as an academic researcher and to explore the topic of disaster governance in greater depth. I obtained a lot of interesting and valuable insights in governance and specifically in disasters through my research on the three cases, and I would very much like to further develop them in collaboration with both scientists and practitioners. I would be very happy to continue with researching this fascinating topic and create bridges between science and society as a scientist, but am also open for broadening my experience and work beyond academia.
Angela Ruepert
Angela Ruepert is a PhD researcher in Environmental Psychology at the Faculty of Behavioural and Social Sciences, University of Groningen. She grew up in Soest, a town in the centre of the Netherlands and after finishing high school at the age of 18 she moved to the city of Groningen to start her bachelor in Business Administration and her life as a student. As part of her bachelor program and as if studying in Groningen is not exciting enough she wanted to experience studying in another country with another culture. She was a student for one semester at UGM in Yogyakarta, Indonesia. Besides, Angela was involved in various extra curriculum activities, including being the research coordinator of ESR Dublin (European Study Research). After receiving her BA degree in 2009, she started the master of Business Administration, specialization Change Management. During this master program her interest in social psychology grew and she decided to take courses in psychology as a nice addition to the business courses. After finishing from her master program in Business Administration in 2011, she started her master Social Psychology with a focus on environmental psychology. Her thesis focused on how situational cues can make people morally hypocrite and to her delight she was given the opportunity to continue doing research in the PhD program at the environmental psychology group in the beginning of 2012. In her PhD research under the supervision of prof. dr. Linda Steg and dr. Kees Keizer she continued to study factors promoting moral behaviour and more specifically pro-environmental behaviour in the organizational context. During her PhD Angela tried to experience as many different aspects of doing research as possible, such as being a visiting scholar at the CUSM, USA to do research together with prof. dr. Wesley Schultz, and by organizing a large international conference on Environmental Psychology in Groningen in 2015. Besides her work she enjoys running, skiing and surfing, traveling the world, and having drinks with friends.

What are you up to? In short: what do you research?
I study which factors influence (pro-) environmental behaviour at work. Environmental problems are to a large extent caused by human behaviour. Therefore, it is important to understand how to encourage people to engage in a range of pro-environmental behaviours, for example using less energy or wasting fewer materials. Until now, most studies focused on factors influencing private or household pro-environmental behaviour. Yet, within a lifetime people spend a major part of their time at work, and encouraging pro-environmental behaviour at the workplace can result in a significant reduction in environmental problems. Although behaving pro-environmentally generally implies a conflict between immediate gratification for the self and doing what is good for the environment in the long-term, many people act pro-environmentally at home because they care about the environment, and feel good when they act pro-environmentally. The question remains whether they are also willing to do so at work, and what would motivate people to incur
some personal costs to benefit the environment? Another important question is how characteristics of the organizational context influence pro-environmental behaviour at work. In my research I look at to what extent and how general moral considerations (i.e., people’s values) and contextual factors motivate people to do “the right thing” and as such engage in pro-environmental behaviour. My first study was conducted among employees of 4 large organizations in Spain, Romania and Italy. We tested whether moral considerations are important for understanding pro-environmental behaviour at work. The results showed that the more people care about nature and the environment (i.e., have strong biospheric values), the more they see themselves as a person who acts pro-environmentally, and the more they felt morally obliged to engage in pro-environmental behaviour at work. Interestingly, people did not always act upon these feelings of moral obligation and we propose that this is due to contextual factors. In our next studies we examined how biospheric values and contextual factors that are relevant in the work context on pro-environmental behaviour at work. We found that people act more pro-environmentally at work when they think their company aims to reduce its environmental impact, while they acted less pro-environmentally when they thought their company was merely interested in making a profit. Also, we found that people were less likely to act pro-environmentally when they have been working on a demanding task for a prolonged time. However, this was only the case among those with weak biospheric values, and when people were not focused on making decisions between right or wrong.

Does your research have an interdisciplinary character? If yes, how would you describe it? While we mainly focus on the psychological factors, we of course do not work in a vacuum. For example, to create a societal impact the effect of behaviour on the environment is essential to take into account, and as such are the more technical aspects of people’s (pro-) environmental behaviour. This means for example, that for one study we collaborated with energy experts to assess energy use related to the behaviour of employees, and in another study we measured energy use by means of smart plugs. Besides, my research was part of an EU funded project on energy use at work, in which I collaborated with scientists from different disciplines (e.g., sociology, statistics, energy researchers, and specialists in agent-based modelling).

In what way has your research societal impact? My research focuses on understanding, predicting, and promoting pro-environmental behaviour, which can yield important insights for organisations and policy makers on how to reduce the environmental impact of organisations. I collaborate for example with the Municipality of Groningen and discuss my results with them. More generally, researchers in our group do present their results often to practitioners. To make my research really relevant for policymakers and to create a societal impact we therefore always keep in mind that the transition from science to practitioners is important.

Do you aspire a career in science? When I started my bachelor in Business Administration 10 years ago, I never imagined myself working in science at the Social Sciences faculty, but I am really glad how everything in the past years has brought me where I am now. I very much enjoy my current position as a PhD researcher. More specifically, I enjoy doing basic research that has clear practical implications at the same time, and I would love to continue to increase the understanding of
which factors can motivate people to make decisions beyond their own self-interests to benefit the environment. I would be very happy if I could continue working in the inspiring context in which you are continuously challenged mentally and are always being pushed to your very best; in this context where you can learn something every day, but are also given the opportunity to transfer you knowledge to the students and to build the transition from knowledge to society. But doing research is more than that. Until now I was able to see only a glimpse of the complex organisation behind research at the university. I am interested and open for a broader experience in academia where the process behind research also plays a role next to doing basic research.
Lonneke Vink

My name is Lonneke Vink and I am a PhD researcher in Social Psychology at the Faculty of Behavioral and Social Sciences, University of Groningen. I grew up in de Betuwe and moved to Utrecht to study a BSc in Clinical and Health Psychology. I then completed two masters, a research master and a clinical psychology master. After graduating from the university I first gained some working experience, including as an epidemiological researcher. Because I wanted to further develop myself I successfully applied for a PhD position and therefore moved to Groningen with my dog Danté in February 2015. The supervisors of my project are prof. dr. Arie Dijkstra and dr. Kai Epstude. In April 2015 I joined the Psychology PhD council and in April 2016 I joined the BSS PhD council where I represent the interests of my fellow PhDs.

What do you research?

My research topic is the decision processes regarding the purchase of a dog. In this project we try to get more insight into the way people decide that they want to buy a dog. Suboptimal decisions e.g. can lead to problems between owner and dog and have consequences like the eventual abandonment of the dog. My project focuses on mapping the psychology of the decisions about the purchase of a dog and strategies to improve the quality of the decision making process. With our findings we hope to develop effective interventions to prevent the occurrence of problems. During this research we will also try to figure out if the quality of the relationship between owner and dog plays a role in the human health and well-being. While previous research indicated that pet ownership is associated with human health and well-being, these results have not been found consistently. Last year we set up a cohort study of over 600 people who were planning to buy a dog within one year. We will follow them for approximately a year and a half after they purchased a dog to see if we can predict which factors in decision making can lead to problems between owner and dog. My research is financed by De Hondenbescherming, a Dutch organization that protects the welfare of dogs.

Does your research have an interdisciplinary character? If yes, how would you describe it?

My research focuses on applied social psychology. I do not collaborate with people from other fields but I do read literature on the broad category of human-animal interactions and people from various fields publish about this topic.

In what way has your research societal impact?

In this project strategies to improve decision-making will be designed and tested. With the results of this research we hope to be able to give recommendations about the way people can be influenced before they buy a dog. Hopefully this way we can improve the relation between owners and dogs and reduce abandonment.
*Do you aspire a career in science?*

Right now I feel very privileged to work on this research topic. I enjoy combining my passion for doing research with doing research on a topic that I find very interesting. I like the fact that my research has practical implications. The nice thing about working in Science is that I have a lot of freedom that I can use to develop my own vision. I try to keep an open mind for my future because in the past I learned that not everything can be planned. However, if it is possible to find a challenging job in academia I would definitely be open for it.