



Connect



Oskar Gstrein on human rights and digitalization

Fundamental rights more important than ever

Oskar Gstrein is a university lecturer in International and European law. He studies the impact of digitalization on human rights. A subject as grateful as it is complex, in these times of corona. Gstrein is concerned about the curtailment of our freedoms and privacy, but also sees rays of hope. "Our fundamental rights are more important than ever before."

BY GERARD DE JONG

Gstrein looks around and counts: "Just here on my desk, there are five cameras and as many microphones," he sighs, when we talk to him via video link in mid-April. "So many sensors and stimuli. For my work, I look at digital developments from the perspective of human rights. And that may sound very academic, but it might be more practical now than ever."

The impact of crime

The Austrian scholar studied law and philosophy in his native country. During his work as a research

er for the special rapporteur for privacy at the United Nations, he ended up in Groningen. Now he teaches students here and does research at Campus Fryslân's Data Research Centre. "We explore how to reduce the impact of petty crime," says Gstrein. "Crime figures have been going down for years, but people are feeling increasingly unsafe. Why is that happening, and what can we do about it?"

The corona app is complex

The Austrian's professional field has been in the eye of the storm in recent months. Shortly after the outbreak of the coronavirus, the Netherlands also started designing several apps to stop the pandemic. Gstrein follows the developments with some suspicion. "The 'app-athon' that the government organized was a disaster. But maybe that is a good thing, at the end of the day. It shows how difficult it is to create an app that both works and protects the user from abuse by the government or criminals."

The app is, at the same time, a new surveillance system, Gstrein

argues. "The app doesn't identify if someone has corona. The use of these technological resources is potentially very dangerous. In addition, it leads to social pressure. Do we want to know whether our neighbours or colleagues have corona? And how do we respond to people who don't want to install the app? Refusal causes suspicion."

Code is law

On the other hand, there is too much attention for the technical side of such an app, and not enough for its legal and ethical side. "That is what we call 'Code is law'. First, the product is built, and then research will have to determine whether it is in line with our legislation and rights. You see that happen time and time again. Our fundamental rights seem to be an abstract fact, but we have centuries of experience. The trick is how to properly implement such an app. After 9/11, we were faced with the data retention of our telecom data. We have been struggling with this for two decades now, we know how this data has been

"We must continue to insist on the importance of our human rights."

abused, among others by Edward Snowden. You would have thought we had learned our lessons from that. It is frustrating that this repeats itself time and again: we must continue to insist on the importance of our human rights."

Young people need space

"We are not used to a crisis like this. Our grandparents, both farmers in Tyrol, had to deal with world wars. My parents are baby boomers. My brother and I are the first generation with the luxury to do what we wanted. We were

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raised to conquer the world. That is different for the current generation of students. They are much more aware of big data issues, but they are also constantly feeling more pressure. Today's adolescents also need space to discover things and grow as a person. They do that, knowing that companies are watching, while no young person can go without social media. That causes pressure. The data trail they leave is much bigger than ours. And they don't know if and how it will come back to bite them later." According to Gstrein, "It is a prejudice that young people do not care about privacy." He also notices this in his students. "The beauty of our fundamental rights is that they are more important than ever in a crisis like this. We can do two things: either we throw them out, or we apply them to this particular situation. And we must continue to ask questions: what do privacy and freedom of expression mean in the digital age?"

Sustainability on the frontline

Where do our SE alumni end up? For this edition of Connect we talk to Leander van der Wal, who graduated last year and has worked for the Ministry of Defence since November. His goal? To contribute to society by increasing sustainability within the Department, and, by doing so, gaining enough inspiration and experience to start his own sustainable enterprise. After all, an entrepreneurial mindset is not easy to lose.

BY FARDAU BAMBERGER

Within the department Defence Materiel Organisation (DMO), Leander has the task of advising in the field of sustainability in the broadest sense. He advises on acquiring clothing and weaponry, but also heavier materiel, such as trucks. "Like most organizations we are constantly aiming for a balance between sustainability and affordability, but as the Ministry is expected to respond to conflict situations as well, we are dealing with a certain time pressure on top of that. Moreover, the sustainable way is not yet the most logical way for everyone. The Ministry of Defence is a large department, which means that many old, ingrained processes are at work. I see it as a positive challenge and despite having worked here for just a few months, I can already see results. Such changes in company culture take a lot of change management to succeed."

Links to practice

To achieve these results, Leander applies many skills he refined during his master's at Campus Fryslân. After gaining a bachelor's degree in Business Administration, a master's degree in Strategic Innovation Management and

subsequently working for the UG's Green Office, Leander decided to start the Sustainable Entrepreneurship master's in Leeuwarden, in search of a study programme that links to practice. "In Leeuwarden I found what I was looking for: practical training, a lot of guest speakers, tutorials and more focus on personal development."

"Organizations now realize that circularity is also an opportunity to save and make money."

Entrepreneurial mindset

"To be honest, in my current job I use everything that I learned during the master's," he laughs. "What really stands out is the necessity of an integrated approach: involv-

ing all stakeholders and making it clear that you can only reach sustainability when it's a collective effort. I quote papers and make use of the theoretical knowledge I have, which effectively activates people." His master's thesis on circular business models turns out to be of good use as well. "It's an emerging topic, as many organizations are starting to realize that circularity is not only better for the environment, it's also an opportunity to save and make money." So even though Leander is now employed by the government, his mind-set will always be that of an entrepreneur. "In the end I would love to start my own sustainable enterprise, but what shape that will take is still unclear. I have so many ideas, but for now my focus is on gaining more experience." He is not in a hurry; for the time being he is happy to work at the Ministry. "This position just happened to come my way. When you start to take action, things get set in motion. Recently a political party in Amsterdam invited me to brainstorm with them about waste processing – so who knows what that will lead to!"



Column

Prof. dr. Andrej Zwitter - Dean University of Groningen/
Campus Fryslân

Post-COVID-19 World

The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic is yet to be seen. The effect of the virus that has affected all countries is still uncertain. But one thing is already clear: the crisis will have a lasting impact on global politics. In political science we usually define different eras of global affairs in time periods marked by major events:

- 1918-1938 – interwar period
- 1947 – Cold War period
- 1991 – Post-Cold War period
- 2001 – Post 9/11 period

After 2020 we will be living in a Post-COVID-19 world, whose effects will accompany us for many years to come and will determine world politics. This also means that the global challenges we are facing might be accelerated or modified. The concrete effects that are already visible can be categorized into three domains: (1) Geopolitics, (2) Economics, and (3) Society.

Geopolitically, we will be facing major shifts. China, having first faced the consequences of the virus outbreak, and having tackled it quite successfully, is taking the lead economically. At the same time Europe and the United States have to look inwards and decide how to best mitigate the consequences of the pandemic. This will give China a head-start, and shift the geopolitical power balance in its favor. We have yet to see the impact of the pandemic on Africa, but if predictions hold true, we can expect the continent to face massive problems when it comes to maintaining political stability and functioning economies.

Economically, COVID-19 will lead to greater problems for countries with a large informal sector. According to a UN study, "In Africa, 85.8 per cent of employment is informal. The proportion is 68.2 per cent in Asia and the Pacific, 68.6 per cent in the Arab States, 40 per cent in the Americas, and just over 25 per cent in Europe and Central Asia." These regions will be hit the hardest by the crisis. On the other hand, we are currently seeing positive effects on CO₂ emissions induced by reduced mobility. Experts argue that these benefits might be short lived. In order to regain financial stability, countries might try to increase their CO₂ output. In summary, the next global financial crisis and accompanying effects on the climate and world peace might be severe.

In addition, societally, we are currently witnessing how technology companies can offer data-driven solutions to combat the spread of the virus. These technological advancements might, however, engender long-term consequences for data protection. Finally, if social distancing norms remain in place, there will be permanent cultural effects on how we interact. We have seen how globalisation and digital anonymity has already in part led to a reduction in empathy for others. What will be the empathic consequences of social distancing?

Living in a Post-COVID-19 world will be very different to what we are used to. Global challenges will change. For us, this is a call to reevaluate our priorities and approaches with regards to the global challenges we aim to tackle. Everyone will be required to help solve these future problems.



Leander van der Wal

Rowan-Niels links organizations and students

Students and organizations reinforce each other



Rowan-Niels Spinder

Campus Fryslân has appointed a relationship officer. On 1 December, Rowan-Niels Spinder started his new job, in which he connects the university to the outside world.

BY GERARD DE JONG

Rowan-Niels, born in the Frisian town of Drachten, studied Applied Psychology at the Hanze University of Applied Sciences. "Next, I worked for the municipality of Smallerland and later at Brunel. My job there included finding the right candidate for a job, which is basically what I am doing here. Because it is a new position, I have a lot of freedom to shape it at my own discretion."

This is just one aspect of the work of Campus Fryslân's relationship officer. Spinder: "I maintain contacts with organizations. I determine what they can do for our students, and vice versa. We try to provide our bachelor's and master's students with the best place for their research. That is the biggest

challenge: to find a research position where the student can test the knowledge gained in practice. Not staying within their university's walls, but trying it out for real, is what I call it."

Networking in times of corona

To ensure that this is successful, Spinder is networking a lot. The coronavirus pandemic caused significant changes to his work method. "I like to visit organizations to check them out. I prefer to meet people for coffee. Video chat just isn't the same. That was also what I liked about this job: working both inside and outside the faculty. So, the new situation caused a bit of a change. At the same time, it soon became clear that you

can achieve a lot while working remotely."

Holding up a mirror

In a short time, it has produced a diverse range of research positions. "Our students carry out research at local authorities, water boards and research institutes, but also for self-employed professionals. A casual introduction to the Frisian Design Factory, part of NHL Stenden, also led to a research project. We are looking for the best match between organization, research topic and student."

Spinder believes that all kinds of organizations can benefit from this. "Our students do not follow a traditional placement, where they learn the tricks of the profession. They perform research at a scientific level and hold up a mirror to the organization. This can lead to entertaining and surprising insights. After the research project, these organisations will continue to be part of our network."

Liaison

Although he is relatively new in his job, Spinder already feels at home. Is he the face of the Campus? "Well, 'the face' is a bit much.

"We are looking for the best match between organization, research topic and student."

That is not how I see myself. I want to be there for both the students and the organizations and businesses. I see myself more as the liaison between the University and the outside world. Organizations interested in working with students are welcome to approach me!"

Spinder feels deep satisfaction when a student is placed in the right position. "Accepting this job truly was a leap of faith. It was a big challenge, and I thought about it long and hard. However, in the end I knew I wanted to make that leap, and I haven't regretted it for a moment."

Changing for good

On 18 March the first in-house PhD researcher of Campus Fryslân, Angela Greco, was supposed to defend her dissertation 'Changing for good'. Unfortunately, the event was postponed due to the corona pandemic. Nevertheless, we would like to highlight her research here in Connect.

BY FARDAU BAMBERGER

Angela Greco focused on the present-day topic of transforming organizations into sustainable enterprises, from a local housing association perspective. She found that a user-centric approach is best at preventing unintended consequences and conflicting demands.

Finding a balance

Nowadays transforming businesses into sustainable enterprises seems like the logical thing to do. After all, anything that helps the environment appears, by definition, good. However, in practice the transformation is not always that easy and can result in unintended consequences. Especially for social businesses like housing associations that provide affordable housing for low-income tenants, finding a balance between

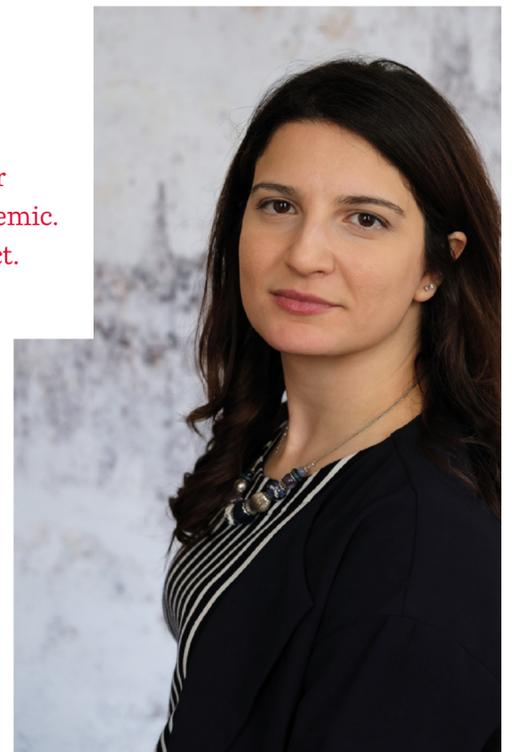
doing good for the environment and the social mission of doing good for the people can lead to clashes. Greco studied best practices and found out that in a situation where a housing association wanted to be a frontrunner in sustainability, tenants struggled. "Imagine having your house under construction for weeks, without really knowing how the end result benefits you or the environment while in your daily life you are dealing with much more urgent problems."

User-centric approach

"Cases like this can make it seem like doing something good for the environment is not always the right thing to do," Greco explains. This is where good preparation of all of those involved is key. Taking a

user-centric approach may prevent most issues. She found that engaging the community increased the tenants willingness to participate. "When you engage the community, you will find that people are not against doing good things for the environment as many might assume. If you do not just inform, but let everyone involved 'own' their solutions - by making them an active part of the process - they'll be for sustainability, not against it."

Angela Greco adds that while housing associations are her research context, the theoretical framework and conclusions apply to any organization seeking to transform sustainably and dealing with conflicting demands.



Angela Greco

Favourite spots in Leeuwarden



The number of students that are enrolled in a bachelor degree or master degree programme in Leeuwarden is about 23,000. Find out what they like about Leeuwarden and what their favourite places are!

MSc Sustainable Entrepreneurship - Etienne Carchera

"Noorderplantage is one of my favourite places to go when the weather is good, or well, any time that I can really. It's a city-park [stadspark] in the North of Leeuwarden located right behind Tresoar, the library in Leeuwarden where students from Campus Fryslân and NHL Stenden often go to study. It's the perfect place to go chill with friends on my days off, sitting in the sun and catching some of that good vitamin D. The park is right at a bend in the canal, where I love to sit watching the ducks in the water. With COVID-19, things are a bit different now, but hopefully, I can go back to chilling in the park with my friends relatively soon!"

BSc Global Responsibility & Leadership - Kari Kuggeleijn

"There's a cute little coffee corner in a bookshop called Boekhandel Van der Velde in the city centre, and it is my favourite place to go to! But I also like to keep it a bit secret. They only have spots for a handful of people and the quiet is one of the best things about it. It feels like a garden. There is a big tree, and you can hear the leaves rustle in the wind. There are also two very sweet, cuddly cats. They have benches and lounge chairs in bright yellow. They only serve coffee and tea, but the good kind, from local shops, and sometimes they have apple pie. It is really meant as an addition to the bookshop. They have second-hand books, cookbooks, travel books, books in other languages and every other kind of book, you can think of!"



Boekhandel Van der Velde

Adaptation skills in crisis



Column

Ester Alda H. Bragadóttir
Student assessor Campus Fryslân
Second-year student Global Responsibility & Leadership

In recent months we have been faced with a certain reality check. We have been shown that the everyday life we have always taken for granted can, in fact, be completely transformed in a split-second - the everyday life we believe is normal and we believe it takes months, even years to change. Then, suddenly, we were faced with a crisis and changes occurred in a blink of an eye. The speed with which this crisis came upon us made its severity clear to us from the beginning. On the contrary, longer time can make challenges look so much smaller and less important, and currently, there are other crises one can argue deserve the same recognition and urgent action as this one. For instance, our planet is rapidly warming in front of our eyes, but the pace is slow enough for people to take it less seriously. Even though it is actually happening terrifyingly fast in terms of our Earth's timescale, on a human scale, our world does not seem to be transforming overnight. That is why it does not seem as important on a day to day basis.

One of the greatest lessons we have learned from this situation is the importance of the ability to adapt. We have all adapted by doing everything within our power to minimize the damage caused by the current pandemic. We stayed at home, and we have limited all human contact. However, adaptation is not only important when sudden situations come up, like this one, where we must act quickly, but also in cases where predictable changes come our way and adaptation is still within our power. Such adaptation might require us to conduct minor lifestyle changes, in order to allow others the same privileged oppor-

tunities we have had throughout our lives. Crises are challenges that ask us to be adaptable for the greater good. In solidarity with others. I believe that it is undesirable, or even dangerous to become stuck in self-made quicksand of habits and ways of living.

"Crises are challenges that ask us to be adaptable for the greater good. In solidarity with others."

Another important lesson we have learned from this situation is to prioritize what is important and what we care for. At the end of the day, slow crises are also threatening lives and threatening safety. They are even threatening our future. Now, we have proved to ourselves that change is possible, and we have outstanding adaptation skills. I encourage us all to continue using those skills of ours, in solidarity with the other residents of this planet.

Colophon

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Telephone: +31 58 2055000

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Editorial staff: dr. Indira van der Zande, dr. Joop Houtman,
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