



# Connect



Dr. Sepideh Yousefzadeh

## Global health affects everyone

BY GERARD DE JONG

**The one truly personal touch in her new office at the Beurs building is a quote by famed Persian poet Rumi. She loosely translates the framed quote, written in Farsi: 'Cherish the one who gambles and loses everything, who doesn't lose hope and gambles again.' It says a lot, if not all, about Dr Sepideh Yousefzadeh (50), assistant professor in Global Health at Campus Fryslân. 'I fell in love with Rumi at a very early age, I keep his poetry close to my heart.'**

Born and raised in Tehran, Iran, Yousefzadeh's road that led to her teaching Global Health at University College Fryslân in Leeuwarden has been impressive. 'I worked as a midwife in Iran, but became interested in development work. I worked for NGOs with refugees in Afghanistan and Pakistan,' she says. 'That sparked my desire for higher education. I landed a spot at Harvard Kennedy School, a beautiful chance to work with

people from all over the world.'

Though she cherishes her time at Harvard, it also made her realize that people can have very different perspectives on things. 'I realized I was an Iranian in a post-9/11 USA. The political reflections were so one-sided and stereotypical, it left me feeling frustrated and angry. It was intimidating.'

### Original and challenging education

After her time at Harvard, she worked for UNICEF, did a PhD at the University of Maastricht with a focus on child poverty, went to Groningen for her post-doctoral research and finally wound up in Leeuwarden. She'd be the last to admit it, but she's made quite a name for herself at Campus Fryslân. Her teaching methods are unconventional and challenging. 'My aim is to create an environment in which students can share ideas, but also come across difficult situations. To be confronted with people with different opinions. The problem with the education system is that it tends to give

too much structure to students. Everything becomes predictable: you have a lecture, and you finish it off with an exam. But the real world can't be predicted: you don't have any certainties. I want my students to find things out for themselves, to be curious. I want them to question everything. Even the things I tell them, because what I tell them comes from my own perspective, which differs greatly from theirs.'

### Health issues affect us all

Her students may be taken off guard at first, but they duly come through and get on board with Yousefzadeh's method of thinking outside the box. 'Just the other day, we had sixty primary school children in here. It was very loud, but very joyful! My first-year students talked to them about health. They showed them, for example, how many sugar cubes there are in the soft drinks that they drink. They showed such teamwork and responsibility! I was impressed with their leadership skills. Another thing that they came up with is the laughing gas problem. Something

**'Health issues affect us all. They're right around the corner'**

I wasn't even aware of myself, happening right here in Leeuwarden! That's Global Health: it's not a problem "far away in Africa", like we were taught thirty years ago. Health issues affect us all. They're right around the corner.'

### Growing up in a bubble

Growing up, Yousefzadeh had to deal with things unfathomable to people in the West. 'I experienced war throughout all of my childhood. I ran to school when it was literally raining rockets. Staying at home just wasn't an option. I have a beautiful daughter now, and I realize she is growing up in a bubble. It's a bubble of prosperity, safety and

security: it's a great bubble, don't get me wrong! But growing up the way I did made me resilient. It made me the woman I am today.' 'And this goes for my students as well. Some of them were born after 9/11. And they take some things for granted, unconsciously. My aim as a teacher is to lure them out of their comfort zone. To create awareness, to make them realize other people have different views on things. But mostly to empower them, to give them the belief that they can make a change in this world.'

### Lovely Leeuwarden

Leeuwarden seems like a far cry from the places where Yousefzadeh grew up and lived previously, but she unreservedly embraces it. 'Oh, Leeuwarden is so lovely! The city and its people are so friendly and welcoming. I feel secure here. Interacting with people here is so easy, it's beautiful. Even though my Frisian is not very good. I'm lucky people in Leeuwarden speak really good English!'

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# Hopon: reducing CO<sub>2</sub> emissions, traffic and costs

Sebastian Karges (28) from Trier, Germany, is an alumnus of the Master's degree programme in Sustainable Entrepreneurship at Campus Fryslân. Together with fellow alumnus Germán Ramos (26, from Spain), he created the carpooling startup Hopon.

BY GERARD DE JONG



Sebastian Karges (on the right) en Germán Ramos (on the left)

"I was a bit sceptical about coming to Leeuwarden. I'd studied in Amsterdam before and lived in Shanghai, so Leeuwarden seemed rather small. But the University's Open Day convinced me. The course units were very well thought-out. It was an intense one year Master's programme, but it was very much worth it. And I got to experience the upside of Leeuwarden: a smaller city means easier networking!"

The thing about Sustainable Entrepreneurship is that you want to put into practice what you've learned. So Germán and I came up with Hopon. CO<sub>2</sub> emission is a big problem for the environment. Research shows that CO<sub>2</sub> emissions often derive from the daily commute. Carpooling has been around probably since cars have existed, but it never really took off. We want to change that.

We believe you need three key factors for this to work. Firstly, you need to have enough cars. And there are enough in Friesland. Without a car, a lot of people here are restricted in their mobility. Secondly, you need the technology. Unlike five years ago, everyone now uses smartphone apps daily. Thirdly, you need awareness. People need to be aware of the CO<sub>2</sub> problem and be willing to do something about it. We found that

**'We're not about occasionally sharing a ride with someone, but about implementing a carpooling structure in an organization.'**

awareness in abundance here.

Within a week of having conceived the idea, we pitched our idea at Enterprijs, a student startup competition. We had to learn that one week of prep is not enough, so we got kicked out in the first round, but we were even more motivated after that! The University gave us a lot of leeway. We were allowed to combine assignments with our work on Hopon. The lecturers could not have been more supportive. When research showed that our business model was feasible, it was clear: let's go all in. And that's what we've been doing ever since.

Hopon is aimed at large companies and organizations. We've created an app for colleagues to easily arrange carpooling appointments. It takes away the hassle of messaging back and forth to make a date. We're now looking for organizations to test-drive the app. If it works for one, it will work for others.

What makes us unique is that we're not about occasionally sharing a ride with someone, but about implementing a carpooling structure in an organization. Our whole business model is based on reduction: reduction of congestion, CO<sub>2</sub> and costs. Sharing a ride saves money for everyone involved.

Right now, Germán and I both have side-gigs to pay the rent, but every available hour is spent on Hopon. We're lucky to have found a nice office space at the Kanselarij in Leeuwarden. I hope that in a year from now, several companies will be using Hopon. And we're optimistic about it! People want to do good, even if they are dependent on a car. With our startup, we're giving them the chance to do that.



## Column

Drs. Piet Bouma – Managing Director University of Groningen/Campus Fryslân

# From 'a fly on the wall' to 'a fly in the ointment'

Some time ago, I took part in a so-called active bystander training session. The session posed the question of how you should conduct yourself when faced with a colleague behaving inappropriately, or how you should conduct yourself towards the victims of such behaviour. How do you become an 'active bystander'? That is, someone who intervenes, confronts the culprit and supports the victim – instead of someone who looks away, rolls their eyes or laughs uncomfortably. In a short performance, actors succeeded in having us as an audience empathize with the pain and discomfort that comes about as a result of inappropriate behaviour. Nobody wanted to be a passive bystander any longer after experiencing this, even though it was the most convenient choice. A company of actors from the outside world had compelled us. The choice for active commitment in such a situation – to signal, confront and help – had been forcefully handed to us.

Days afterwards, as I sat in the Maassilo event hall in Rotterdam, I still found myself thinking about the training session a few times. It had made a lasting impression. The VSNU conference that I was attending, meanwhile, was about 'Room for everyone's talent – towards a new balance in the recognition and appreciation of scientists.' A mouthful for an interesting theme within academia in the Netherlands: how do we reward appropriate behaviour among our staff? The conference was specifically about how academic staff should go about creating a good balance between doing research, making an effort to teach and connecting with society – through, for example, open science. This good balance also includes a balance between one's own career and the good of the team. And it requires quality over quantity when it comes to publications, citations and acquired grants.

Here, too, outsiders force change. Society demands socially involved universities that do not look to each other, but instead look outward – universities comprised of researchers who stay motivated about teaching, research and the exchange of knowledge with society. These researchers do not have to do everything all at once, but instead throughout the entirety of their career. To this end, we as universities will have to make some changes ourselves, such as to our personnel policy. At Campus Fryslân, we have already begun drawing up a new HR policy. Key words in this include intrinsic motivation, fewer measurements and peer review. This concept fits seamlessly into the ambitions of the new coalition of universities, the Dutch Research Council (NWO) and the Royal Netherlands Academy of Arts and Sciences (KNAW). If the companies who manage the international rankings of universities were to join us now too, then the perverse incentive for inappropriate behaviour within institutions would be gone from this perspective as well.

We must fly in the face of inappropriate behaviour from colleagues, by no longer being a 'fly on the wall' but becoming a 'fly in the ointment'. In this way, we as universities will have to reinvent ourselves to keep academic careers vital and relevant. Campus Fryslân will gladly serve as a testing ground for this.

'I want to put the recovery of IC patients on the map'

# Life after the intensive care unit

Lise Beumeler (27), originally from the southern province of Limburg, is a PhD student at the UG/Campus Fryslân. She researches the health progression of patients after being admitted to intensive care. Some patients recover better than others but the reason behind this is as yet unknown.

BY GERARD DE JONG



Lise Beumeler

Beumeler studied Biomedical Sciences in Groningen, where she also obtained her Research Master's degree. This was a practice-oriented degree programme that involved a lot of laboratory work, which she found really interesting – but she was looking for something more. Something even more practical and clinically applicable, that would enable her to help people in a concrete way and in a relatively short time span. Two research projects guided her in the direction of her current PhD research topic.

"I have participated in two research projects, one in Assen looking at lifestyle intervention for people who have experienced cancer, and one at GGZ Drenthe (the province's mental healthcare organization) looking at sleep medication for and sleep disorders in patients who were involuntarily admitted to a mental healthcare institution. There was very direct patient contact and the healthcare workers assessed each patient as a whole. To me, that gave it an extra dimension, something you don't see in the lab. It was a real challenge to find my way from the pillars of scientific research to daily practice. When four PhD positions opened up at Campus Fryslân, I thought: yes,

**'Until recently, we only focused on surviving – but not on how someone survives in IC.'**

this is it! I immediately applied and was offered a position," says Lise Beumeler, sitting on a sofa in the faculty building.

### Recovery after leaving intensive care

"My research is aimed at preventing deterioration in health after having been admitted to the IC. No less than 48% of IC patients suffer from deteriorating health, which is not surprising considering that they almost died. But it is unclear why one patient recovers better than another. Until recently, we only focused on surviving – but not on how someone survives in IC.

Together with internist-intensivist Christiaan Boerma of the Medical Centre Leeuwarden (MCL) and Professor Gerjan Navis

of the University Medical Center Groningen (UMCG), Beumeler has set up a research study that will map the recovery of patients and look at ways to improve quality of life after admission into an IC. "For this study, we will conduct a few measurements, including an ultrasound of the thigh muscle and asking the patient to squeeze a small device. This will tell us something about the patient's muscle strength. After that, we will visit the patients again, first at the intensive care unit and then at three, six and twelve months after being released. We will also ask them to fill in a set of questionnaires. This way, we can see what problems the patients run into and how we can offer support with a personalized after-care programme."

### Distress, attention and care

"The IC is an impressive place," ponders Lise Beumeler. "People are unconscious and are surrounded by all kinds of machines. Some patients don't make it and they pass away. This is a very distressful process. At the same time, I have seen that the IC is a warm and safe environment. That may sound contradictory but so much attention and care is given to both the patient and those involved. People allow me to get

in contact with them at such a vulnerable time in their lives. I find it quite special that I get to be a part of that."

Albeit of a completely different nature, Beumeler also feels like she receives attention and care from the people in her PhD programme and on campus. "At Campus Fryslân, I can speak my mind. I can exchange experiences about the practical side of conducting research with other PhD students and that is also important to me. People sometimes say that doing a PhD can be quite lonely – and that prospect scared me a little – but, in my experience, it's not lonely at all. The people that I work with are friendly and we have a small-scale campus, which is great."

### Recovery of IC patients on the map

At what stage is her research currently? "I will be monitoring patients and collecting data for one more year. After that, the goal is to set up an 'intervention', an after-care programme for people who have just been released from IC, aimed at improving their quality of life. Putting the recovery of IC patients on the map, that's what I hope to have achieved in two-and-a-half-years' time."

## Top Degree Programme

The Bachelor's degree programme in Global Responsibility & Leadership (GRL) offered by the University College Fryslân (UCF) has been awarded the 'Top Degree Programme' quality label by the Dutch Higher Education Guide (Keuzegids) 2020. With no less than 84 points, the programme in Global Responsibility & Leadership comes in at second place in the category of programmes offered by university colleges in the Netherlands. Out of all 440 Bachelor's degree programmes (including joint degree programmes) offered at universities in the Netherlands, GRL/UCF holds fifth place. The assessments provided in the guide are based on student evaluations (National Student Survey 2018), data from the national degree programme database Studiekeuze123 and visitation reports by the Accreditation Organisation of the Netherlands and Flanders (NVAO).

## Lecture series

'Succesvol ondernemen in een circulaire economie' (successful entrepreneurship in a circular economy) is the name of the four-part lecture series about sustainable entrepreneurship for professionals, managers and employees. Topics such as strategy, leadership, business models, technology, government policy and transition will feature in the lectures. As well as gaining scientific insights, plenty of space will also be given to group discussions about the topics that your organizations face. The lectures will be held by professors Gjalte de Jong, Jo van Engelen and Caspar van den Berg, Dr Anne Beaulieu and Dr Niels Faber on 10, 17, 24 and 31 March from 3.30 to 7 p.m. For more information and to register, please visit [www.rug.nl/cf](http://www.rug.nl/cf).

## Circular agriculture

Together with Wageningen University & Research, and in a consortium with other partners, Professor Gjalte de Jong will conduct research into circular agriculture in the Northern Netherlands. The Dutch Research Council (NWO) recently approved and financed this large-scale research project into the challenging future scenarios and related opportunities for action within the field of circular agriculture. Circular agriculture is universally seen as an attractive prospect for a sustainable food system. Despite consensus on the principles of circular agriculture, the route to achieving it is still unclear. The goal of this research project is to develop transition pathways in which challenging circular scenarios are linked to concrete opportunities for action. In the Northern Netherlands region, a living lab will be created in which an interdisciplinary research team will work with engaged public and private stakeholders. The research will combine integrated analyses of biomass and nutrient flows and quantitative scenarios with innovative production systems, new revenue models and interventions for scaling up, broadening and deepening small, radical changes (the so-called small wins approach).

# Favourite spot(s) 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! This time, we asked four students.



Café De Markies

#### Marc Flessa - BSc Global Responsibility & Leadership

"The Harmonie is one of my favourite places to go to with my friends. They have a whole range of classical concerts, opera and many more events. The reception area is very pleasant with some beautiful designs. Sometimes there is breakdancing prior to a concert which was very nice because it was different and you wouldn't expect it. Good view from all areas which is unusual from classical concerts. Every now and again you may get a free drink at the break."

#### Balder Weening - BSc Law

"The Markies is an alternative place where you can get many unusual types of beer. It's in the centre of the city, close to the bus station which is very useful. Sometimes they have a live band playing and the place is always packed full of people but one can usually manage to get a spot. Only disadvantage, it can be a little expensive. However, they do have loads of different board games you can play too! Perfect for bonding with some classmates."

#### Zoe Wang - MSc Multilingualism

"My favourite place to go in the city is to Stek Cafe. This is a cafe situated nicely at the bend of a canal not too far from the city centre. It was actually the first place that my classmates and I ever hung out together. The best thing about it is the nice atmosphere at Stek Cafe. I believe this comes from the cool interior design and it's picturesque location in the city. My absolute favourite thing to get is a coffee accompanied by a frisian biscuit, of course!"

#### Pieter Polhuis - LL.M in Law and Governance in Digital Society

"I love to go to Cafe de Toeter. If you finish your beer, look left, look right and suddenly it's full again, meaning they have very fast service. There is a cosy and *gezellig* atmosphere in Cafe de Toeter and they often have good music playing too. My favourite thing about the place is that it is local and you can just drink at the bar for a borrel in the evenings."

## You don't have to save the whole world to save the whole world.

I am growing up in a world that is the current epitome of human prosperity yet simultaneously a world of crisis on a scale that has never before been felt. Humanity as we know it is under a severe existential threat that has landed us in a climate crisis as a result of our own actions. Actualizing change on a global scale has never been as important as it is now: but how can you contribute to any solution when you are still trying to figure out who you are?

I think many of us fear our actions will play no role in the bigger picture. I know I do. Being merely 20 years old in such a vast world, rich in people and culture, it is so easy to feel small. To me, this is present all the time, like when I'm walking to university every morning, with strangers passing by me in cars, buses, on bikes and foot. They have no idea who I am, much like I have no idea who they are. Many of them I will never knowingly meet and talk to, yet all of us are puzzle pieces essential to solve the challenges we face on a global scale. Sadly, many of us do not ever come to this realization. But, why?

Maybe we feel it is useless to even make an attempt. There are billions of other people out there, why can't just one of them take the leadership seat? With privilege comes laziness. Unless problems affects us directly, we feel comfortable leaning back in our shiny chair, drinking a mojito waiting for someone else to take responsibility. This way of thinking is exactly what is stopping progress, this is

the thinking we have to unlearn people. If not you, then who? If not now, then when?

Being an uncertain student in an uncertain world is terrifying, but uncertainty, fear and vulnerability is and should be our biggest strengths in this fight, not our weaknesses. What I have learnt over the past year of protesting, speaking, reading and studying for what I believe is right, is that you can never progress if you do not forgive yourself and others on the way. You have to accept the idea that you will never be able to please the whole world, solve every problem and be happy, because that is simply impossible. But that's also okay.

Believe me when I say, as long as you fight with optimism and with the hope of a better and improved world, you will positively impact many more people both close and far, without ever really being aware. Yes, you have to try, but you do not have to save the whole world, to save the whole world.

This text is a part of Frida's speech. The full speech can be found on the 'Campus Fryslân' channel within the University of Groningen's Youtube account.



## Column

Frida Nilsson is a second year student Global Responsibility & Leadership at University College Fryslân and one of the speakers at the opening of the Beurs last October.

## Colophon

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