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No More Professors. The Peaceful Revolution in the Department of Psychology at the University of Groningen, the Netherlands, 1968

Hilda T.A. Amsing and Marieke Stuurwold

The 'Action for Democracy' campaign held in the Department of Psychology at the Dutch University of Groningen in 1968 and 1969 was a peaceful and, in the Dutch context, early student revolt which succeeded in changing structures drastically, at least for a short period. The means used by the students were primarily bureaucratic in nature, except for the noisy protests used at the very beginning, which were immediately rejected by less reform-minded students. The demands of the students found fertile soil as some key figures in the department and at the university held positive views regarding the students' demands, in line with a general attitude that could also be found in Dutch politics. However, in this specific case there was also another factor that influenced the course of events, the scholarly interest of the academic staff in organizational structures. The Action for Democracy, started by students to remove the traditional hierarchical rule of professors and to introduce a critical perspective on the role of science in society, was soon turned into an action research experiment in the field of organizational psychology.

Introduction

A three-minute silent amateur film gives us a good impression of the climax of the 'Action for Democracy', a campaign meant to completely change the governance and educational structure of the Department of Psychology at the Dutch University of Groningen. This climax was a mass meeting held on 28-29 March 1969 in which many decisions were made that completely changed the structure of the department. The intention of this meeting was to remove the old hierarchy, bringing down the 'ivory tower' ruled by the professors, and to replace this with democratic structures in which both students and staff members other than professors would gain a voice. The scene is the neo-classical Korenbeurs building, currently a Dutch UNESCO Monument, built in the 1860s as a centre for corn exchange. This large, well-lit hall, with its glass and cast-iron construction, was the ideal place for the meeting, which was attended by 275 people. The amateur film shows younger and older people, students and staff, seated on chairs and using one of the microphones to make statements in a polite manner. A flip chart is being used to sketch the new structures, while many pamphlets and voting forms are being distributed. We can also see a reel-to-reel player recording the sounds of the whole event. At the end of the film we see the signing of agreements and, suggesting that it was warm inside the hall on these two very cold days in March, the cheerful chairman and his associates enjoying ice creams. When we compare this example of students speaking up with what happened in Paris or Berlin the year before, the differences are striking. We do not see any violence, fires, shouting or banners. How do we understand the peaceful nature of this student revolution which would – at least for some time – lead to far-

reaching changes, in which students used rather traditional and bureaucratic means, such as paper forms, flip charts and microphones to make their point?

Practices of student revolt in the Netherlands

The Netherlands did not have a history of violent student revolt. This can at least to a certain extent be related to what is known as the pillarization (*Verzuiling*) of Dutch society. In this compartmentalization of society along socio-political lines, the main ideologically distinct groups (Catholics, orthodox Protestants, socialists and liberals), comprised of members of all strata of society, each formed a pillar, consisting of political parties, youth organizations, trade unions, newspapers, television stations and schools. This pillarization led to the acceptance of ideological differences of opinion and as such formed a shield against expressions of radicalism. However, the dominance of the pillars faded in the 1960s, which led to new political interests and rebellion, especially among the youth.

Student protest was one outgrowth of the rebellious 1960s, especially from the mid-1960s, when the first public protests occurred, until 1976, when the most left-wing government ever seen in the Netherlands fell. Student revolt was part of an atmosphere which included calls for the emancipation of women, freer sexual attitudes and informal codes of conduct. Young rebels who fought the system were called provos in the Netherlands because they used *provocation* as a method to make a stand against issues such as air pollution, traffic in the inner cities, the establishment of an oil refinery, war, nuclear defence or the failure of the political system.

Students aligned themselves with rebel groups and joined their protests, including the monthly anti-Vietnam demonstrations in Amsterdam, causing anxiety amongst politicians. An important role in the Dutch student movement was taken up by the Dutch student union, the SVB. The Union was established in 1963 by Ton Regtien, a student from Nijmegen, who became acquainted with French ideals concerning university democracy through his travels and who would also become the president of the Critical University, a national movement that aimed at rethinking the aims of academia. Until then, the students' voice was restricted to that of elite student members of fraternities and sororities, chosen by their boards. Regtien considered this to be completely undemocratic, since only a small and unrepresentative part of the student population – whose social status had become far more diverse – joined these clubs. Furthermore, due to the rapidly growing student numbers, the government proposed measures to cut the higher education budget by limiting study to a maximum of five years and raising tuition fees, issues which the traditional student representation was not sufficiently equipped to address.

Initially, in discussing material matters such as the price of coffee and housing, the SVB took a more pragmatic stand, rather than a political one, and in this it lagged behind with its fellow student movements abroad. However, at the end of the 1960s, starting with the adoption of the Sindikaal Manifest which explicitly aimed at political action, the SVB not only aspired to stand up for student rights, but also aimed to reform society in its entirety,

starting with the universities. This approach was inspired by student revolts in Berkeley, California (1964-1968), Paris (1968) and Berlin (1968). Like their fellow students abroad, in 1969 Dutch students began using sit-ins as a method of protest. In the spring of 1969, students occupied the School of Economics at Tilburg (and re-christened it Karl Marx University), while the main academic building at Leiden was claimed as a permanent centre for discussion, and the administrative centre of the Municipal University of Amsterdam, the Maagdenhuis, was occupied for nine days. These protests were, however, relatively non-violent. While in other places, both in the US and in Europe, violence was occurring in an escalating spiral, the level of violence in the Netherlands decreased quite rapidly. In August 1965, there had been a violent engagement between the rebels and the police on Spui Square in Amsterdam, but the eviction of students after their occupation of the Maagdenhuis a few years later was characterized as laconic by Kees Schuyt and Ed Taverne, who wrote about the Dutch after war period in the prestigious series "Dutch Culture in a European Perspective".

Ideas on the Dutch student revolt

Before we turn to the 'Action for Democracy' in the Department of Psychology in Groningen, we will first attempt to present possible explanations for the peaceful nature of this student revolution using the ideas of Hans Righart, James Kennedy and Schuyt and Taverne, historians who have provided general analyses of the Dutch student revolts of the 1960s. Righart provides three explanations for the restrained character of the revolts. Firstly, as mentioned above, the Dutch had no tradition of student revolt, which was very different from the situation in Germany and France. Secondly, he points out that the Dutch did not have a powerful political factor, such as the Vietnam War in the US, the linguistic conflict in Belgium or the authoritarian regime in France. Thirdly, in 1969, Dutch politicians were already convinced of the need for democratization at universities and thus had sympathy for the demands of the students. A few years earlier, in June 1966, the police had violently suppressed a protest by construction workers, towards which students declared their solidarity. The violence led politicians to reflect on what was seen as broad social dissatisfaction with social structures and an inter-generational conflict. The pre-war generation, primarily preoccupied with norms, values and economic prosperity, was confronted by the post-war generation, which had been brought up in an era of economic wellbeing, offering opportunities for self-realization, and striving for new causes. According to Righart, after 1967, the conflict between the generations subsided because of the self-criticism of the pre-war generation after the events of 1966, leading to a willingness to seek compromises.

Kennedy also emphasizes the willingness to seek compromise. He claims that authorities at the time demonstrated a "lack of opposition" to social change as well as sympathy for the demands of the students in order to prevent their radicalization. To prove his case, Kennedy uses the example of the University Management Reform Act of 1970 (*Wet Universitaire Bestuurshervorming*, WUB). This law was unprecedented with regard to student

participation, even from an international perspective, and was a response to the student revolt, designed to meet student needs. Another example used is the famous occupation of the Maagdenhuis, with respect to which formal policy was directed at de-escalation and avoiding violence. Schuyt and Taverne, however, emphasize that while the official reaction of politicians was indeed favourable to the students, the police and the judicial authorities, representatives of the state, were not so tolerant. The occupiers of the Maagdenhuis were accused of 'terror' and 637 young people were charged, leading to one of the largest mass trials in the Netherlands, which is not exactly evidence of a lack of opposition from the ruling class. Nevertheless, at the level of politics, the threat of radicalization prompted a willingness to change, and this might also have been behind the friendly revolution in Groningen. From the point of view of students, however, the willingness of the politicians was often seen as a form of repressive tolerance that would hinder real change.

On the eve of the friendly revolution in Groningen

In his report of the events of the 1967-68 academic year, the Rector Magnificus, Prof. Johannes Th. (Jan) Snijders wrote about the storm that went through the University, "although Groningen was not at the centre of the hurricane". Students were calling for increased participation in university matters, but according to Snijders the turmoil was not a crisis brought about by the students but a crisis concerning the university as a social institution: "But it is the youth who registers this crisis more sensitively than we, older people, and who react to it more intensely." Snijders denounced the way students were treated. They "cannot and will not be the child that needs to be nurtured, the auditor of his professor and the outsider in society." They needed to be treated as adults, like their peers in offices and factories, which, according to Snijders, demanded a revision of student-staff relationships. Furthermore, according to the rector, scientific reasoning is by definition critical and thus anti-authoritarian. He understood that students and staff work in the same academic community, and the difference between their work was far from absolute because professors also undertake study and students are hired to work as their assistants. Snijders praised the social awareness of students who raised their critical voices and he considered the breakthrough of the model of an isolated and privileged student-life, full of parties and a mediocre approach to study, a "tremendous profit". According to the rector, although these critical students might sometimes be a bit noisy, this should not make us deaf to what they have to say.¹

Figure 1: Rector Magnificus Jan Snijders at the elections for the university counsel in 1970. Collection Museum University of Groningen.

The tone of his report resembled the speeches of Dutch politicians who had shown sympathy for the demands of the students. His progressive point of view was therefore not extraordinary, on the contrary, in the case of Snijders it fitted very well with his progressive worldview. Snijders was a professor of psychology whose interests included youth issues,

especially career counselling. Furthermore, he was known as a progressive Catholic who openly agitated against the papal encyclical regarding contraception. The Rector Magnificus did not stand alone in the University of Groningen Senate in his call for changes to the position of students. In a meeting of the senate (a management body consisting of all of the professors) on 25 June 1968, several professors spoke out in favour of student representation: "students need to be encouraged to engage in proper organization and representation."ⁱⁱⁱ

As a professor of psychology, Snijders was closely involved in the peaceful revolution 'Action for Democracy' that took place around one year later in the Department of Psychology (starting in September 1968), six months before the protests in Tilburg, Leiden and Amsterdam. This department was part of the brand new faculty of social sciences, established in 1964. The faculty was loosely organized and governed by the professors of the departments of psychology, sociology and education. The faculty had expanded very quickly as a result of the baby boom and because of the external process of the democratization of university education, meaning that the university had become popular amongst socio-economic groups that had previously rarely entered the 'ivory tower'. Many of these students were interested in a wide range of socially-oriented topics, making the faculty of social sciences especially appealing. In 1963, the Department of Psychology had 216 students; five years later, in September 1968, when the protest started, the number of students had grown to 693, resulting in staff dissatisfaction about the housing conditions of the faculty, the workload and the emerging impersonal student-staff relation because of the massification of education.

Decisions regarding management were made by two bodies in the Department of Psychology: the 'kleine lunch [small lunch]', which consisted of professors and associate professors, seven people in total, and the 'grote lunch [big lunch]', consisting of professors and all other scholarly staff members, in total about thirty people. The meetings of each were held every alternate week. Students and non-scholarly staff did not participate in decision-making, could not attend the meetings, and the minutes were only distributed among the participants. Nevertheless, in recently held interviews, both Professor P.J. (Pieter) van Strien, who chaired the 'lunches' from August 1968, and Professor W.K.B. (Wim) Hofstee, who was appointed in 1969, declared that the climate in the department was open and students could approach staff members very easily. Moreover, from May 1965 students of the department were engaged in a study advisory board, where they could discuss their education. Although this board was meant as an organ for discussion, not decision-making, it can be regarded as the first formal body for consultation between students and staff.

Starting the campaign

In September 1968, five students and a secretary wrote an open letter to the newly appointed chairman of the department, addressed to "Mr van Strien", rather than the usual "Prof. van Strien", in which they invited themselves to one of the 'big lunches'. In this particular meeting, the democratization of decision-making was to be discussed and the students, having got hold of an internal memorandum to this effect, expressed their interest in participating. In response,

Van Strien arranged a meeting with them, later seen as the first conference in the campaign for democratization.

At this first meeting it was decided that the discussion about restructuring the decision-making process would be held informally and not in the context of the department's official bodies of decision-making. Furthermore, the participants in the discussion would be addressed *à titre personnel*, an indication that the participants were willing to abandon existing power relations. The idea was to turn the discussion into a "shared exploration process" rather than a negotiation, as was the character of these kinds of discussions at other universities.ⁱⁱⁱ Furthermore, it was decided that the discussions had to start from a fundamental level, relating the demands for democratization to the goals of the university and its relationship to society, and it should involve as many people as possible. The result of this meeting was a clearly formulated programme of action, put together by both the representatives of the department and the five students. It was considered that the process should start with a critical investigation of the current structures, leading to a classification of them, which would be distributed to all students in the Department of Psychology. A mass meeting would then be organized to begin the process, followed by the encouragement of discussion on democratization during lectures and within discussion groups. This process would lead to a second mass meeting, in which decisions would be made within boundaries laid down by the board. The process was set up very systematically and was well thought out, as though it was a research proposal for 'action research', a methodological approach that was very popular at the time. In this approach identifying the problem, developing a plan, acting and collecting data and reflecting on it are all important phases. Action research is aimed at establishing collaboration, it is intentionally political, and aims to contribute to social and cultural transformation. All these aspects can be seen in the way the process was organized.

The report on the classification of the existing structures (identifying the problem), formulated by the critical students, had an alarming tone. It concluded that when it came to democracy, the faculty was in chaos. The discussions that took place in lectures were inflammatory. Activist students distributed pamphlets and interrupted lectures (nevertheless mostly after a polite preliminary call to the lecturer), initiating a discussion on the need for more democratization. However, within a few weeks it appeared that not all students were enthusiastic about these interruptions, in which students angrily made a stand against the existing structures. Students who objected to the disruptions wrote and distributed their own statements: "In our opinion incorrect conclusions about the existing way of functioning are being drawn in an unacceptable way, based on general social criticism and a desire for change. Furthermore, we object to the scouting based, superficial and propagandistic approach of this group."^{iv} Despite resistance from within the student population, it soon became clear that most of the professors and other staff members were very willing to cooperate in discussing new decision-making structures, allowing pamphlets to be printed at the cost of the university and arranging for a room to be at the disposal of the activist students for use as a headquarters. This led the activist students to rethink and reform their strategy into a consensus-seeking model.

This new approach drew criticism from the SVB, which warned of repressive tolerance that would hinder real change. However, the Groningen students would not be swayed, claiming that they were using a "non-dramatizing ideology of change", a strategy which, while seeming to go along with "the nice leaders", "like a duck takes to water", actually allowed them to infiltrate the power structures without losing sight of their ultimate goal.^v This new strategy transformed the inflamed atmosphere into a more peaceful environment, which also characterized the first mass meeting. According to the local newspaper, the discussion at this meeting, which took place on 14 November 1968, was rather timid, despite the fact that 400 people participated – both from within and outside the department – and Regtien, the president of the SVB, was one of the speakers. With broad assent, a draft constitution was accepted, consisting of six statements that would guide further action. It was decided that the new university had to be rebuilt from scratch and that, in doing so, the principle of direct democracy (one man – one vote) would be applied. In addition, it was also stated that social scientists had a duty to start from the basic assumption that people need to be given a say in all matters that affect them, that fundamental critique should always be applauded, and that the will to reform the university had to be related to the will to change society at large.

Formulating new ideas

At the end of the meeting, ten working groups in which staff members also participated were established. These groups had to prepare proposals on issues such as new decision-making structures, the organization of education and forms of assessment. According to Van Strien, who published a book on the event in 1970, three positions could be recognized. Firstly, the most radical group was striving for a completely new governing structure organized around "projects", in which a radical form of power levelling would be achieved and issues such as selection, grading and the overall view of science were fundamentally questioned. Secondly, there were other more moderate working groups who did not want to set aside the governing structure completely, but called for amendments which would grant students more influence in decision-making. Thirdly, there were more conservative voices, especially among staff members, who were concerned about a lowering of the quality of both research and education. The many and often very emotionally charged discussions led to the development of ideas about a new model for the governing structure, which came to be known as the "sector model".^{vi}

In this model, research, education and management were integrated into "sectors", consisting of students of different persuasions along with staff members. These sectors needed to have a high degree of autonomy, with no authoritarian relationships, and were to be organized as a form of direct democracy. Through this direct democracy principle a system was worked out in which representatives of the sectors formed the governing bodies of the department. Within a sector, various small-sized project groups were formed that also had a lot of individual autonomy. Along with undertaking research and educating students (in direct

relationship to each other), these groups, each comprising about thirty people, had to take a critical approach towards social phenomena, with the aim of reforming society at large.

This model favoured group responsibility above individual responsibility, with the group also being responsible for assessment, or at least setting the standards for assessment procedures. The radical students rejected any division of labour, so technical and administrative staff members were also able to join study activities, while students and academic staff members had to take part in administrative, technical and domestic duties. The radical members, inspired by Marxism, also rejected differentiation in payment, and both the radical and moderate students showed sympathy for the French idea of a student's wage.

The concept of the sector model was borrowed from ideas on socio-technical systems, known from organizational psychology. So, students did not figure out this concept all by themselves. Van Strien and Prof. H.A. (Herman) Hutte, both experts in the field of organizational psychology, had published articles on these new insights. Hutte, who lectured in social psychology, had also developed the theory of smaller units, in which development was instigated on the level of the work floor, with each department having its representative at a higher level, an idea that was embraced by the British Tavistock Institute of Human Relations and the student union. This model seemed a good solution, not only for meeting the students' desire for democratization, but also for handling the large numbers of students who entered the study.

Most of the professors and associate professors joined the discussions from the beginning and expressed moderately progressive points of view regarding the principles described above, although there was resistance in relation to the methods used at the beginning of the 'Action for Democracy'. The department board only felt a need to guide the process and to set limits, rather than to suppress the protest. Students were even given credits for participating in the working groups. The professors explicitly sympathized with the students' demands in a memorandum of 6 February 1969, in which they declared that they had a positive opinion of the ongoing democratization of university structures and that they embraced the desire to take a critical position regarding social issues. In this memorandum, they expressed a willingness to allow alternative forms of assessment (in addition to individual assessment, in which grades were given by staff members) and they expected staff members to take part in projects, but only with their own consent. Furthermore, the professors, who until then had determined the courses, declared that they wanted to share responsibilities with both staff and students and promised to press the minister to change the laws regarding university education in such a way that it would meet the demands of democracy. The professors seemed even more enthusiastic than other staff members and made their own proposals to put the governance of all education and research in the hands of the sectors. This led to unrest among some staff members who, until then, had been involved in the decision-making process at the 'big lunch'. They feared a loss of autonomy regarding their own research projects and felt they were about to lose their say in the running of the department because the professors had begun to see students as important discussion partners.

As mentioned above, not all of the students were enthusiastic about the 'Action for Democracy'. Only a small group of students were actively involved and this group had a

rather closed character. Although the draft constitution maintained that fundamental criticism should always be welcomed, there was little room for critical remarks directed at this group. The students in this rather closed group could generally be recognized by their hairstyle (men with longer hair) and their clothing (knitted sweaters), although this was not strictly observed, as young men with short hair and wearing shirts, ties and jackets were also part of the group. Their written work could be recognized very easily, however, because of their phonetic spelling. For example, they did not write about 'Actie Democratisering', in the official Dutch spelling, but wrote of 'Aktie Demokratisering' or even 'Aksie Demokratisering.'

Monitoring the attitudes of students and staff was part of the research-based approach. The results of a survey on this were published in the handbook that was used to guide the upcoming congress (*Kongresboek '69*). As can be seen in table 1, only a rather small percentage of the students were actively involved. From the numbers, staff members seem far more involved. It should be noted that this might be related to the aforementioned dissatisfaction of staff members about the recent and growing massification of education at this faculty. But in the presentation of the results in the handbook, there were some reservations about the figures on staff involvement, which were considered not to be representative. Nonetheless, because of the substantial differences, it is safe to say that students were not more actively involved than staff members.

	Students N= 324	Staff N=20
Agrees with goals and principles of the action	152 (47%)	14 (71%)
Actively engages in the action	36 (11%)	13 (67%)
Interested, but not actively involved	169 (52%)	1 (5%)
Action is too theoretical	133 (41%)	6 (30%)
Irritation about political aspect of the action	122 (38%)	11 (55%)

Table 1: Differences between the attitudes of students and staff, results of a survey. Source: Archives ADNG (no. 375 1969 1): *Kongresboek '69. Aktie democratisering Psychologie R.U. Groningen* (1969): DD1-DD6.

The congress handbook also contained a "free comment" by one of the respondents. This was a severe critique of the 'Action for Democracy': "The activists are a clique with a distinctly red political tone, who talk in a very theoretical manner about issues that many people do not understand. They are not open to other opinions, in fact do not want democratization at all. They are the new bosses, who want to be in charge."^{vii}

The climax of the action: the mass meeting of 28-29 March 1969

In line with the schedule worked out at the beginning, a mass meeting was organized to complete the decision-making process, the congress of 28-29 March 1969. The head of the department, Van Strien, attached great value to this congress. In his introduction to the

handbook he stated: "The form the study programme will take and the manner of decision-making regarding the interests of students, academic staff and other personnel, will depend highly on the resolutions of this congress." About 275 people attended the congress, according to Van Strien a "disappointing" and "low turnout"; 88 percent of the academic staff showed up, 44 percent of the senior students and 27 percent of the junior students.^{viii} The 200 plus pages of the handbook contain the results of the different working groups and individual contributions. This document, designed to stimulate and guide discussion, was sent to all those involved. Within the six main themes – "Basic Information", "Grading and Selection", "Project Education", "Goals", "Direct Democracy / Governance Structure" and "Position of Staff" – 148 propositions were formulated. At the congress these were translated into resolutions, with new resolutions formulated as well. In total, 22 resolutions were put to the vote. One of the resolutions stated that sectors should be established in which education, research and management were concentrated in the form of projects. In this approach, "research" was referred to as a "learning situation".^{ix}

Figure 2a: Polite debates using stencilled resolutions.

Figure 2b: Reel-to-reel player to record all that was said.

Figure 2c: Van Strien, contributing to the debate.

Figure 2d: Relaxed faces, tulips and ice creams at the end of the meeting.

Stills from the film *Action for democracy* (28-29 March 1969)

During the congress there were three main points of discussion: the autonomy of the academic staff, the status of the students' first academic year, and grading and selection. The academic staff successfully called for independent scholarly research and their freedom not to join didactical forms they considered inappropriate. With regard to the first academic year, the radical group aimed to include all students in the sector model, but the majority of the attendees argued that students had first to gain basic knowledge before they could engage in the projects. Regarding awarding grades, the congress claimed that evaluation of work needed to be seen as a matter of intensive discussion within the group. When participants in a sector agreed that some kind of objective judgment was necessary, they had to agree on the criteria, and when these criteria were met, individually or as the result of group work, credits were given.

In formulating the resolutions, a consensus-seeking strategy was used. A lot of effort was made to formulate proposals in such a way that they were acceptable to as many people as possible. Resolutions with large majorities of 80-90 percent and the voting behaviour of the academic staff not differing from that of students were accepted. As a result, an atmosphere of communality arose. It was in this mood of reconciliation that, at the end of the congress, Hutte suggested abolishing the title of 'professor' as being "relatively unfair" and "status loaded".^x It was considered that addressing professors with their academic title would hinder communication and proper cooperation between different members of the academic community. Amid jokes and hilarity the suggestion was accepted with acclamation.

The aftermath

A few days after the congress, the official board of the department accepted the resolutions that had been agreed upon, as none of them conflicted with the conditions set beforehand. They sent a letter to everyone involved with a list of the resolutions and a declaration of acceptance. They also accepted the possibility of the establishment of a new board made up of representatives of the sectors, who could be students, academic staff or non-academic staff (a possible composition that was not permitted by law). The old board would hand over all responsibilities to the new one, although the old board – consisting of professors only – would remain legally responsible. In the letter, dated 17 April 1969, the board's attitude was described as: "They trust that when the tone of the discussion characteristic to the current process of restructuring is upheld, they will not come into conflict with their legal responsibility and a full and joint responsibility will in fact be realized, where the design and further improvement of education, research and governance is seen as a joint task."^{xi} A special committee, consisting of academic staff, including two professors, non-academic staff and students, was chosen to translate the resolutions into a new study programme and new governance regulations. This committee used the form of open assembly, which allowed anyone interested to join the meetings, and applied the principle of basing decisions on strong consensus. The new forms chosen and laid down in the guide for the 1969-70 programme mirrored the intentions of the congress. The sectors and project groups could be established and led by anyone interested, including students, since staff members were seen as post-doctoral researchers and as such were not fundamentally different from students. The concrete design of the groups, including the rules concerning passing or failing, was open and up to those who joined the group. Courses given by a lecturer were to be first proposed as suggestions. In this way, everyone could construct an individualized study programme.

After a short period of an interim governing body, consisting of professors and the committee that had translated and implemented the resolutions, on 15 October 1969 a new board took office, with Hofstee, one of the progressive staff members, as president and consisting of representatives of all 26 sectors as well as other representatives, for example, freshmen. Students formed the majority on this huge board because staff members were hesitant to join. As promised, the old board handed over all responsibilities.

The new board continued to demand further democratization, and rather than solving problems, which would make the implementation of the experiment smoother, numerous meetings were held in which the time-consuming consensus-seeking strategy continued to be used to deal with ongoing demands. Other faculties watched the outcome of the experiment with interest, but as new student members entered the scene, the atmosphere of communality diminished, and only a few months after the enthusiastic start, problems began to arise. The projects stagnated, mainly because of vague descriptions of the content matter and a lack of expertise on the part of the students who organized them. Furthermore, problems arose concerning assessment. Many sectors did not succeed in setting concrete standards for assessment, so credit points were given for attendance and involvement rather than

performance, which led in turn to concerns about the continued accreditation of the department's doctoral degree. Soon, the sectors started to fall apart, some students focused on the project groups that were running more smoothly, while others started to opt for traditional courses. An atmosphere of apathy became dominant, with students also going to the local newspaper *Nieuwsblad van het Noorden* to express their dissatisfaction about the new organization, though it appears that these students had been dissatisfied with the new ideas from the beginning, and "because of indifference, being busy with study, good faith and a lack of knowledge about the action", had not attended the congress in March 1969, as explained in articles published in this newspaper on 14 and 22 January 1970.^{xii}

Ten years later in a television programme on student revolt, Hofstee declared that the experiment had failed because students were neither willing nor equipped to assume the real responsibility on governance issues, which was required by the principle of one man – one vote. To avoid any more damage, within the course of the first year of the experiment, Hofstee took the initiative to reform the governing structure by transforming the numerous sectors into six departments – each related to a particular discipline within the field – and establishing a smaller and more decisive board (with strong student participation) to develop a new study programme. The position of projects was to be reduced and that of traditional courses strengthened (although project education was still to be considered an important aspect in the programme), and academic staff members were again to be in charge of assessment.

Although some radical elements (such as students being responsible for assessment) were removed, the experiment did not end. In 1970, an evaluation of the 'Action' commenced, conducted by the SISWO, a national research institute for social sciences. In the same year, a new law on the governance structure of universities was adopted. This University Management Reform Act (*Wet Universitaire Bestuursstructuur*, WUB), which directed university governance for 25 years (1972-97), gave Dutch students a voice, in the form of elected representation, although the academic staff members held the majority at the various levels of the organization. Because the level of democratization within the Department of Psychology excelled what was prescribed by the new law and the department wanted to retain this balance, it requested special status as an experimental unit. Eventually it managed to achieve this status and maintain it until 1979, when after ten years the experiment finally came to an end.

Conclusion

From a Dutch perspective, the 'Action for Democracy' was an early attempt to give students a voice in university governance. While the Netherlands lagged behind student agitation for democratization internationally, with the famous occupation of the Maagdenhuis, for example, taking place in the spring of 1969, a year after the uproar in Paris, the lesser known 'Action for Democracy' in the Department of Psychology started in September 1968. Right from the beginning, students used bureaucratic means to make their case. Rather than

introduce the issue through violent action, an open letter was addressed to one of the official bodies of the management structure, and they made their position clear in the form of pamphlets, not to mention setting up a constitution. While in the beginning they attempted to force change by noisily interrupting lectures, they changed their strategy very quickly when fellow students became fed up and started to protest against the protests, while the staff appeared to be very cooperative, facilitating their efforts for change and openly and explicitly sympathizing with the demands. This reaction fits the analyses of Righart, Kennedy and Schuyt and Taverne about the sympathy of Dutch authorities for the demands of the youth. In this environment, students adopted a consensus-seeking model in which bureaucratic means of action predominated.

It is tempting to understand the non-escalation strategy used by the board – the "shared search process" rather than "negotiation" – as a form of repressive tolerance, but the first thing that caught our attention was the composition of the board. There were many young academics on this board, and they had a genuine and positive attitude towards the democratization of university government. The role of the progressive Snijders, a professor in the psychology department but also Rector Magnificus of the University of Groningen at the time, was crucial.

However, we cannot explain the peaceful course of the 'Action' by only considering the possibility of repressive tolerance or the genuine interest in democratization of staff members. It appeared to be no coincidence that the revolt took place in the Department of Psychology. In the period under consideration, the academic staff were very interested in organizational structures, including the theory of smaller units, a model that was embraced by the student union as a democratic form of university organization. We can conclude that due to this interest, and the research-based approach of the Action, the scholarly thrill of creating a huge experiment in organizational psychology is also part of the explanation.

Further reading

Hilda Amsing and Mineke van Essen (eds.), *Over professoren. Een halve eeuw psychologie, pedagogiek en sociologie aan de Rijksuniversiteit Groningen* [About professors. Half a century of psychology, pedagogy, and sociology at the University of Groningen] (Assen: Van Gorcum 2014).

Teus de Jong, *Democratisering als experiment* [Democratization as an experiment] (Amsterdam: SISWO 1972).

James C. Kennedy, *Building new Babylon: Cultural Change in the Netherlands during the 1960s* (PhD Dissertation) (Iowa: University of Iowa 1995).

Hans Righart, *De eindeloze jaren zestig. Geschiedenis van een generatieconflict* [The everlasting 1960s. A history of a conflict of generations] (Amsterdam: University Press 1995).

Kees Schuyt and Ed Taverne, *1950 Prosperity and Welfare* (Assen: Van Gorcum 2004).

Pieter J. van Strien, *Van radenuniversiteit naar open arbeidsorganisatie [From a university composed of boards to a professional organization]* (Rotterdam: Universitaire Pers 1970).

Authors

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- ⁱ "Verslag van de lotgevallen der Rijksuniversiteit te Groningen in het studiejaar 1967-1968 uitgebracht door Rector Magnificus Dr. J.Th. Snijders op 16 september 1969", *Jaarboek der Rijksuniversiteit te Groningen 1968* (Groningen: N.V. Erven B. van der Kamp 1968): 13-27.
- ⁱⁱ "Verslag van de lotgevallen der Rijksuniversiteit te Groningen in het studiejaar 1967-1968" (1968): 17.
- ⁱⁱⁱ Van Strien, *Van radenuniversiteit naar open arbeidsorganisatie* (1970): 40-42.
- ^{iv} Van Strien, *Van radenuniversiteit naar open arbeidsorganisatie* (1970): 43.
- ^v Van Strien, *Van radenuniversiteit naar open arbeidsorganisatie* (1970): 44.
- ^{vi} Van Strien, *Van radenuniversiteit naar open arbeidsorganisatie* (1970): 46-51.
- ^{vii} Archives ADNG (no. 375 1969 1): *Kongresboek '69. Actie democratisering Psychologie R.U. Groningen* (1969): DD6.
- ^{viii} Archives University of Groningen: EB 4078: *Brief met bijlagen* (17.04.1969): kenmerk S 130/pvs/sfc.
- ^{ix} Archives ADNG (no. 375 1969 1): *Kongresboek '69. Actie democratisering Psychologie R.U. Groningen* (1969); Archives University of Groningen: EB 4078: *Brief met bijlagen* (17.04.1969): kenmerk S 130/pvs/sfc.
- ^x Archives ADNG (no. 375 1969 2): *Unpublished transcription of the recording of the "Congres Actie Democratisering"* (28-29.03.1969): 40-42.
- ^{xi} Archives University of Groningen: EB 4078: *Brief met bijlagen* (17.04.1969): kenmerk S 130/pvs/sfc.
- ^{xii} "Minderheid drijft zijn zin door onder mom van democratie", *Nieuwsblad van het Noorden* (14.01.1970): 16-17; "Meerderheid laat kansen liggen in nieuwe opzet van de faculteit", *Nieuwsblad van het Noorden* (22.01.1970): 18-19.