



# Universiteit Leiden

## Proposal Title

**Leiden Wall Poems: a Mixed Methods Study of their History, Reception and Impact**

## Applicants

| Supervisor Name                    | Discipline   |
|------------------------------------|--|
| Dr. Jan Sleutels (Philosophy)      | Media philosophy, Leiden Teachers Academy project Learning 2.0 |
| Prof. Dr. Marina Terkourafi (LUCL) | Sociolinguistics, Multilingualism, Citizen Science             |

## Project description

The wall poems in Leiden are a high-profile public art project (<https://muurgedichten.nl/nl>, van der Weij 1996 and 2005). The impact of public art projects such as this is often taken for granted, and discussion stops once the project is up. With this mixed methods study, we want to place the Leiden wall poems in context: the original context of their creators, the wider context of their “consumers”, and the global context of similar projects around the world. In three connected sub-projects, our goal is to gain a deeper understanding of the impact of public art phenomena. We may also want to include the wall formulas from the sciences. The sub-projects in broad outline:

1. The **ethnographic** component documents the history of the poems through interviews with stakeholders, including the initiators of the project, owners of buildings featuring poems, and artists involved in their realization. Which choices were made, and how (choice of language, poem, script, type, colour, location, etc.)?
2. The **citizen science** component explores the reception of the poems by residents and visitors. Citizen scientists will be recruited through a public campaign and invited to send in their comments as well as act as fieldworkers collecting views about the poems from neighbours and visitors and entering them on a dedicated database. The goal here is to better understand how the poems fit into the cultural ecology of the city, and to what extent they meet their creators’ expectations.
3. The **archival** component compares the Leiden wall poems to similar initiatives in other cities around the world. Are they part of a global trend linking contemporary city dwellers? Which needs do wall poems serve in different locations?

A substantial part of the research will be carried out online using social media and other services, which will be sufficient to warrant its feasibility under Covid-19 measures.

## Research Trainee Profile

**Research Trainee 1** will be responsible for the ethnographic and archival parts of the project (components I and III). S/he will carry out ethnographic interviews with various stakeholders (members of the Tegen Beeld foundation, owners of buildings featuring poems, the artists/designers who put them in place) in an effort to document each step of the process from conception to a poem eventually appearing on a wall.

**Research Trainee 2** will be responsible for the citizen science component of the project (component II). S/he will lead efforts to recruit and train citizen scientists, set up the database to be used by them to collect results and work closely with the citizen scientists for the duration of the project, including sharing the final results.

Trainees will receive training in how to design the questions and tasks (data elicitation), record, transcribe and organize the data (data collection and analysis), as well as how to integrate data from various sources in a single mixed methods study (data synthesis). They may be advanced undergraduates or, preferably, MA students.

### **Collaboration**

From the point of view of sociolinguistics, we are interested in manifestations of public multilingualism, personal identification through language, and attitudes toward different languages as (also) represented by their scripts. Such phenomena are well-known to be bi-directional and dynamic, involving both the producers and the consumers of language use.

From the point of view of media philosophy, we are interested in how media affect human experience and behaviour in different ways, over and above the message conveyed ('The medium is the message'). The Leiden wall poems and formulas engage with this phenomenon in a number of fascinating ways, including poetry vs. prose, original text vs. translation, the use of different scripts, non-standard formats and unusual locations etc.

Finally, we are committed to exploring ways for using online digital tools that make it possible for scholars as well as students to conduct research in novel ways (as in Science 2.0 and Digital Humanities), among others by engaging citizens in research activities (citizen science) and in research outcomes (valorisation).

Combining conceptual and empirical methods from these three viewpoints will allow us to achieve the scope needed to gain a deeper understanding of the impact of public art phenomena.

### **Deliverables**

At the end of the project, the trainees will compile results from the three subcomponents in a narrative report (no more than 50 pages) which can also be supported by audio visual material (photos and short videos). We have timed this project to be carried out during the first half of 2021 with the goal that the results could be further used to produce an exhibition about the wall poems to be made available in virtual as well as in physical form during the Leiden City of Science 2022 events. We plan to apply separately for a small grant to be used for this purpose.

### **Planning**

Month 1: preliminary research about the poems; identifying stakeholders for interviews; designing data collection instrument  
Months 2-3: conducting interviews in Leiden; citizen scientist recruitment + training and design database  
Months 4-5: conducting interviews further afield; citizen science component data collection  
Month 6: data transcription and analysis  
Month 7: data synthesis; compilation of final report

### **Student Application**

Interested students should send an academic resume, highlighting their reasons for choosing this project as well as previous experience with hands on research to: [m.terkourafi@hum.leidenuniv.nl](mailto:m.terkourafi@hum.leidenuniv.nl)

### **References**

van der Weij, Marleen (1996) *Dicht op de muur. Gedichten in Leiden*. Leiden: Gemeente Leiden, Dienst Bouwen en Wonen.  
van der Weij, Marleen (2005) *Dicht op de muur 2. Gedichten in Leiden*. Leiden: Burgersdijk & Niermans.