

New Year's spoken column by Paul Wouters, dean of the Faculty of Social and Behavioural Sciences

Dear students and staff members,

I would like to start with applause for all of you for:

- your improvisational talents (abundantly shown both in teaching, research and operations in which we had to jump to a largely online and partly blended work and learning environment)
- your willingness to support each other and work together across boundaries of departments and institutions
- your capacity to retain your focus on your long- and medium-term priorities in your research projects, learning goals and innovative teaching ambitions, even in the midst of a raging pandemic.

In the improvisational and admittedly difficult jumpy dance we have collectively performed since March 2020, we have sown the seeds for a happier and more inclusive Faculty of Social and Behavioural Sciences, with a new rhythm and groove. In the coming year, we will try to harvest the fruits. Perhaps we can capture this in the motto "*open collaboration for inclusive knowledge*". This touches upon both process - open collaboration - (how do we work together and what kind of work culture do we foster?) and outcome - inclusive knowledge - (how fundamentally novel can we become in our insights and methods?).

The idea that society is not the result of a God-given order but a human creation took hold about 250 years ago, in the last quarter of the 18th century. This created the philosophical possibility of systematic empirical social science, and since then the social sciences have proliferated in a complex relation to the existing power structure in society. On the one hand, university-based social science tends to reflect and support the powers that be, by creating governance tools and concepts, by monitoring social developments, and by training future civil servants and leaders for contemporary industry and services. On the other hand, social science is a continuously renewed resource of social critique by creating alternatives, producing disruptive new methodologies and social technologies, developing penetrating and sometimes harsh analysis of commonly held assumptions, and last but not least by enabling social mobility and forming new cadres and kinds of leadership in society. The way these two roles of social science - both valuable - interact with each other shapes the social and intellectual dynamics of the various disciplines, in this way acting as an important source of renewal in society.

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This also holds for our Faculty. This year we will formulate our mission and strategy for the coming years (based on our work over the past two years). One of our goals is to develop a truly inclusive social science which builds on the knowledge and experience of all people and cultures. Not because it is fashionable, but because it is necessary and urgent to address and illuminate the current crisis in society. Such a social science can only be created by an inclusive community with a safe and sustainable learning and work culture.

Hence, *open collaboration for inclusive knowledge* I see as our motto for this year. The Faculty Board will take a host of initiatives ranging from improving our communication infrastructure and prioritizing social interaction in the use of our buildings, to building new labs and state-of-the-art infrastructures for research, to connecting the methodological research and teaching in the different institutes for interdisciplinary synergy, to enabling new career trajectories, to reducing the administrative work load and continuing to invest in teacher support. I can't mention all initiatives now, but I can assure you that they will be realized in a very close collaboration of students and staff members in the Institutes with staff of the Faculty Board, and with the help of the monthly exchanges in the Faculty Council. I emphasize this collaboration because we have also learned the limits of organizational columns in the university, and the value of project-oriented management based on trust in the professional judgement of our staff members, we aim to anchor this permanently in the faculty organization so that we can better serve the needs of the Institutes and their researchers and teachers.

Last year, we partially reinvented ourselves as a Faculty. This year, society as a whole will have to redesign itself, and we have a responsibility there. The more we can develop our creative collaborative and inclusive academic culture, the more we will be able to contribute to an open and free society with more equal chances for all, irrespective of class and ethnicity.