Inaugural speech for the chair Interdisciplinary Study of Societal Challenges

by

Prof.dr. Judi Mesman

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Mijnheer de Rector Magnificus, zeer gewaardeerde toehoorders, dear colleagues and guests,

Prelude
When I was first asked whether I was planning a second inaugural lecture – oratie – for my new professor chair I said: Hell no! Not that I had bad memories of the first one. My first oratie was in 2010, one year after my appointment, and I actually really enjoyed the experience. But what would be the point of doing it all over again, at the same University in the same room, in the same robe? Nevertheless, I gave the idea some more consideration and I realized that there were actually some good reasons to do this again. Because a lot has happened in the past eight years, and especially the past two years have been incredibly instructive and inspiring. I see my new chair called 'The interdisciplinary study of societal challenges' as the starting point of an exciting adventure combining the old and the new.

I am particularly pleased to embark on this new journey at this institution, the 443-year-old bastion of liberty we call Leiden University. For those who are less familiar with our university, it consists of six faculties in the city of Leiden, including the faculties of Science, Law, Humanities, Social and Behavioural Sciences, Archaeology, and Medicine, and a very new seventh faculty in The Hague, the Faculty of Governance and Global Affairs. And I have the good fortune to occupy a chair shared between the well-established Faculty of Social and Behavioural Sciences and this new seventh faculty. Within that seventh faculty, my work is embedded in Leiden University College (LUC), housed in a tall, light building at the Anna van Bueren-plein in The Hague. LUC offers an interdisciplinary bachelor's program in Liberal Arts and Sciences, focused on the study of global challenges. In the past two years LUC has proven to be a particularly inspiring academic environment that has funda-mentally changed my views on teaching, research, and academia as an institute. I would like to use this opportunity to share my experiences and reflect on how collaboration in academia can uniquely contribute to the study of societal challenges. And I would like to start my reflections on these academic issues using a non-academic format that represents another of my passions. Fairy tales!

But before I do, I would like to announce a disclaimer. *The events and characters represented in the upcoming story are ficti-tious. Any similarity to actual institutions or people is merely coincidental.*

A Fairy Tale
Once upon a time… far away, there was a wise old Tree that was held in high esteem by all. This magnificent Tree was a Baobab Tree, a type of Tree known to live for centuries, and grow incredibly tall and wide so that its interior could even contain several chambers, like a house. Now this one Baobab Tree was particularly wise and impressive. It was nearing its 450th birthday, which made it one of the oldest Baobabs in the realm. It was also a very big specimen with a circumference of more than 40 meters, and contained as many as six chambers that were populated by several animal species. And the Tree did not just house animals, but was also home to the legendary seven Dwarfs: Sleepy, Grumpy, Sneezy, Bashful, Doc, Happy, and Dopey. They each lived in a Tree chamber with one particular animal species with a specialized diet fitting the chamber's specific habitat. They also had many less well-known dwarfs around to help out with feeding and raising the animals. And it was easy to know which helper dwarfs belonged to which chamber by the color of their hats.

Sleepy and his helpers wore orange hats and lived in a chamber with a roof shaped like a dome that was populated mostly by bats whose waking hours coincided with nighttime hours, making them sleepy during the day. They specialized in star gazing and trying to understand the universe and transform what they learned into numbers.

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Grumpy and his helpers wore light green hats and lived in the chamber with a series of dark hollows that housed various types of owls who spent much of their time quietly and deeply pondering the origins and meaning of thought and knowledge, and how to express this in different languages. Grumpy's concentration and solitary lifestyle was sometimes mistaken for grumpiness, which gave him this rather undeserved name.

Sneezy wore a violet hat, just like her helpers, and lived in a chamber that housed large populations of bees who were mostly concerned with the rules and regulations regarding every individual's rights and responsibilities in this large colony, and of course the punishments if a bee broke those rules. Sneezy loved her bee companions so much that she even accepted the bouts of allergy caused by all the pollen they brought in from the nearby park.

The Dwarf named *Bashful* and her helpers could be recognized by their dark green hats and they occupied a very nice, recently remodeled chamber that housed burrowing animals such as moles and wombats, who wanted to know about what was hidden in the deeper layers of the earth, digging up old objects that could then be examined closely. Bashful wasn't nearly as shy as her name suggested but only seemed shy because her digging work kept her from being above ground much.

Now, the Dwarf named *Doc* lived in a huge chamber with snakes who studied the healing powers of various animal and plant substances. His chamber was a little different from the others as it had lots of guests walking in and out looking for cures for their ailments. Doc, as a tribute to his adventures with Snow White, had decided that he and his helpers would only wear white, which made them easy to recognize for people in need of their healing skills, but he kept his hat the light blue it had always been.

Happy and her helpers wore red hats and lived in the chamber with many thin branches that were woven into square structures that were perfect for its monkey population to climb. These monkeys knew everything about intricate social structures, hierarchies, and behavioral patterns. They loved predicting each other's behaviors and visiting other monkey communities to find out how *they* lived. Happy was of course not always happy, but the funny monkey faces did make her laugh a lot.

The seventh Dwarf, *Dopey*, shared this monkey chamber with Happy because there were only six chambers.

This distribution of Dwarfs and animals and their specific foods and habits were very successful. The Dwarfs generally got along just fine, give or take a few small tiffs about chamber borders, and each year they would take their most important dwarf helpers on a nice two-day trip to get to know each other and bond, sitting in circles, doing fun activities together, and making long lists of resolutions, and forgetting them the next day because they stayed up so late.

But one day, the Tree decided to try something new, and donated one of its green shoots to a neighboring realm to be planted there. This rather uncharacteristic show of adventurous spirit effectively created a seventh chamber, although this one was not attached to the main Tree. First, the seventh chamber needed some leadership. And because the monkey chamber was inhabited by two Dwarfs, Dopey quickly volunteered to move into the seventh chamber so he would finally have a room of his own. Unknown to most, Dopey was not his real name, but an unfortunate nickname that was given to him by the other Dwarfs who were secretly jealous of his adventurous spirit. His sense of adventure sometimes got Dopey into trouble, but also made him special. But Dopey's real name was Dreamy, fitting his fanciful ambitions and high hopes and dreams for his new chamber.

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Now it wasn't easy to take leadership in this new place. Almost all the other Dwarfs understandably wanted a piece of the action, and wanted to develop their own activities in this new region. And when Dreamy wanted dwarf helpers and animals of his own, they made it very clear that he could not have any of theirs, but that he should find his own. And he shouldn't use up too much of the new chamber's resources, because they would all be needing some of those too. And actually, everyone said, we shouldn't be calling it a chamber, we should just call it an outpost, because being so new it obviously cannot have the standing of a chamber. Dreamy only half paid attention to what everyone was saying and soon found a quiet corner in the tallest part of the seventh chamber where the other Dwarfs would not bother him. This tall corner had a light and unique quality that Dreamy liked a lot, and here he sat down to think about what to do next.

As he was pondering his options, Dreamy suddenly noticed a small group of caterpillars approaching, crawling straight towards his Unique Light Corner of the outpost. Dreamy saw it as a sign and let them in. The caterpillars were clearly hungry, and Dreamy decided to feed them an apple, which they quickly ate. The next day, the caterpillars were hungry again, and because Dreamy was used to all the animals in the old Tree having very specialized diets, he brought the caterpillars another apple. But instead of taking the apple that Dreamy had provided, the caterpillars now found their way towards two pears lying around, and ate those. And the next day, the cater-pillars found three plums that they ate with relish. Dreamy was amazed at these caterpillars. All caterpillars are hungry, but these ones were clearly *very* hungry, and not easily satisfied or full. They also seemed far less picky about what foods they would eat compared to other animals he knew that lived in the old Tree, and Dreamy decided to provide a large range of foods to see what would happen. And to his great surprise and delight, on the fourth day the caterpillars ate four strawberries, the next day they ate five oranges, and on the sixth day they ate

a chocolate cake, a pickle, an ice cream, some cheese, salami, a lollipop, a cherry pie, a sausage, a cupcake, and a water melon! And finally, on the seventh day they ate a big green leaf.

By that time the caterpillars had grown very fat; they spun cocoons, and curled up inside. Dreamy couldn't wait to see what would come out of the cocoons. For days he waited patiently, and after more than 14 days, on a sunny afternoon, the cocoons – one after another – began to crack slowly, their outer shells opening up. Dreamy looked on in anticipation, as slowly but steadily small creatures came pushing through the gaps. The creatures seemed small once their entire bodies had come out of the cocoons, but to Dreamy's great surprise, they then unfolded a set of majestic and brilliantly colorful wings, each with their own unique patterns and color combinations that were unrivaled by any other creature Dreamy had ever seen. He had heard of them but never knew they really existed. These were magical butterflies! As the butterflies flew out of the room into the warm afternoon air, Dreamy was now sure what he wanted to do: attract more of these caterpillars, work with others interested in raising these wonderful creatures and together make the world a more beautiful and happy place. But who could help him? He was reluctant to ask the Tree or the other Dwarfs as their interests did not seem to match his own. And after some careful consideration he suddenly had a good idea. He would ask the three Fairies Flora, Fauna, and Merry-weather to take the lead. Who better than Fairies with wings to manage a place dedicated to raising winged creatures?

Now the three Fairies loved the idea of working with Dreamy on this enterprise, because they were sure that this place was magical and deserved their full attention to make it the best it could be. The Fairies decided to do what they did best: bestow magical gifts, as they did when Princess Aurora – better known as Sleeping Beauty – was born. Now what gifts would best serve Dreamy's plan of perfecting the art of creating new dishes, and raising many of these caterpillars to become

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wonderful butterflies in this outpost? After a lengthy discussion, the Fairies decided that, for Dreamy to achieve his goals, it wasn't he who needed magical gifts. What was needed was a fresh breeze, a daring vision, and an adventurous spirit for the entire ancient Tree community, planted in the Tree's roots, bark, and branches. Flora was up first, and looking very solemn she waved her wand and said: "I wish upon the Tree the courage to dream." Then it was Fauna's turn who also waved her wand, twirling it expertly in her hand and said: "I wish upon the Tree the courage to trust." Then third, it was Merryweather's turn to bestow her magical gift, and holding her wand up high she said: "I wish upon the Tree the courage to make it happen."

Within moments after the Fairies had all bestowed their gifts, Dreamy looked around his tall and light chamber and was amazed by what he saw. The room was full of dwarf helpers with hats in every color, and sometimes even multiple colors, or rainbows! And these dwarfs were intermingling and sharing food with remarkable ease. Not just that, they were working together to make wonderful new foods! Mixing, merging, and combining the foods everybody knew to create extraordinary new dishes that were soon spreading enticing aromas throughout the region. These smells soon attracted the cater-pillars that Dreamy had hoped to see, the very hungry and adventurous ones, and they fed them a wide variety of dishes until they cocooned and eventually developed into magical butterflies, each with unique patterns and colors. And these butterflies flew out into all corners of the realm and brought beauty and happiness wherever they went, spreading their knowledge of all the rich foods they had experienced in the tall light space of the outpost.

The story of the new foods, the adventurous caterpillars, and the wonderful butterflies also quickly reached the old Baobab Tree and the other six Dwarfs. And once they had tasted some of the dishes and seen the butterflies, they agreed that the

dwarf helpers with their multicolored hats had to be something really special to create these foods and nourish caterpillars into such wonderful creatures. And from that moment onwards, the other Dwarfs stopped using the nickname Dopey, and the old Tree bestowed upon its outpost the official title of seventh chamber. The other Dwarfs even offered to contribute to this new adventure, and invited the dwarf helpers from the seventh chamber to come and visit the old Tree chambers to share ideas and maybe come up with even better new ones! They also sent their own best and brightest dwarf helpers over to the seventh chamber to help create more wondrous dishes and help feed the caterpillars.

Word of this exciting source of new foods and new creatures also came to the ears of the many inhabitants of the Tree's realm, and even well beyond its borders, attracting many people seeking to learn from what was happening in this seventh tree chamber. And everyone who encountered the amazing, colorful butterflies agreed that they were a valuable addition to the lands, bringing light and color to dark places, and rich dishes to regions in need of nourishment. Soon, even Kings and Queens from afar visited the seventh chamber, seeking counsel about this or that problem in their lands, and after consultation went back home with new and inspiring ideas that would help them turn things around for the better.

The old Tree was overwhelmed by the amazing success of what was once an almost impulsive, adventurous decision to plant a little green shoot in an unknown place. The Tree realized that bold enthusiasm and adventurous spirit as displayed by Dreamy, the Fairies, the caterpillars of the seventh chamber, and everyone working with them, could best be trusted and nurtured in the future to ensure a fruitful existence for hundreds of years to come. And with this guiding principle now firmly embedded in the Tree's roots, bark, branches, and leaves, everyone lived happily ever after.

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The Interdisciplinary Study of Societal Challenges
The past two years at Leiden University College have been pretty close to a fairy tale for me, give or take a few magical gifts. When I first heard about LUC and its curriculum and read some of the academic staff's profiles, I wished I could be a student there. But not being a Fairy, this wish did not come true, so I did the next best thing, I became the Dean. And in hindsight I think I may have had more magical powers than I thought, because in many ways, I did end up being a student. And although actual students may not fully appreciate this yet, feeling like a student more than 20 years after actually being one is probably one of the best things about an inspiring academic environment.

I am in awe of our academic staff for whom thinking and collaboration across disciplines in both teaching and research seems to be second nature. Visiting their classrooms, reading their scholarly work, reviewing their grant proposals, and discussing their views on academia in our staff seminars have had a big impact on my research program about societal challenges that aims to combine and integrate my disciplinary expertise and interests with a host of new perspectives.

My own background is in the behavioral sciences, and specifi-cally in research on childhood socialization processes. And like any self-respecting scientist, I secretly believe that my field should be included in pretty much any scholarly inquiry, especially those addressing societal challenges. Because no matter what you study – ethnic conflict, climate change, health, international relations, or justice – they all in one way or another have their origins and sometimes also their potential solutions in childhood. All adults were once children who were raised and educated by various individuals and institutions to follow certain rules, and to have certain values, ambitions, and expectations. These socialization processes are crucial to understanding why adults do the things they do, including raising the next generation to know and value certain things

but not others, and either perpetuating or breaking established patterns. So, in my view, an intergenerational and lifespan perspective is a key element in the study of societal challenges. And the projects I am pursuing with my colleagues at the Institute of Education and Child Studies are certainly testimony to that view, adding significantly to our under-standing of childhood processes in relation to children's future functioning in society.

But just like any self-respecting scientist, I do realize that my discipline is necessarily limited by its own history, culture, focus, and methodological conventions. This is why I have regularly worked with researchers from outside the behavioral sciences, venturing into health sciences, anthropology, law, and linguistics, to add other perspectives to my own. These collabo-rations were instrumental in understanding the limitations of a single discipline in addressing things as complicated as societal challenges. Because for example an emic rather than an etic approach to parenting in non-Western cultures clearly produces very different results. And looking at legal and insti-tutional aspects of raising and educating children opens up a wide range of relevant contextual factors to study that normally do not make it any further than one sentence in a discussion paragraph of publications in my field.

Obstacles to cross-discipline collaboration
Now all major players in academia have in one document or another expressed their support for collaboration across disci-plines. It is now widely acknowledged that complex problems in society can only be understood and potentially solved when multiple perspectives are integrated using expertise from a variety of academic disciplines. But in practice cross-disci-plinary work is often looked upon with skepticism. If a researcher or a research proposal does not follow clearly defined patterns that are recognizable as reflecting a distinct academic discipline, they are often mistrusted. An academic with a heterogeneous background, instead of being deemed

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interesting and unique, is assumed to be insufficiently trained in the methods and theories of any of the disciplines that they studied. When a research proposal that includes perspectives and methods from – say – three disciplines is sent to reviewers from those three disciplines, each appreciates and values only a third of the proposal, often dismissing the rest, or even worse, evaluating the other two-thirds as impossible or incorrect, even though they have no expertise in these areas. And publication outlets are rarely geared towards cross-disciplinary contributions.

Another complicating factor is that the academic organizational structure of faculties and disciplinary institutes is not always conducive to working across disciplines. When a professor from a certain discipline is appointed to another institute than the disciplinary one, the institute in question is generally not amused. Someone who studies a certain topic in one institute is at times seen as unwelcome competition by another institute also studying this topic. Interestingly, such responses are almost exclusively seen at the management level, which is understandable because the management is responsible for the unit's scientific profile and competitive success. But whenever I talk to individual colleagues about studying societal challenges, shared interests are almost invariably met with enthusiasm. The institutional response is to put up boundaries, whereas the scholarly response is to remove them. It would be a great step forward if we could ensure that the scholarly response prevails over the management response, so that institutional mechanisms are subservient to scientific considerations rather than the other way around.

As it stands now, a cross-discipline project is often what I sometimes call a love child – which according to the urban dictionary is a child born out of wedlock. According to institutional boundaries, we are not supposed to have them, but we have them anyway because we feel so passionately about them, so much so that we take the unpaid nightly waking hours taking care of this love child for granted. Now in the past years

I have produced quite a lot of love children and I have many more on the way. Although the projects are often incredibly rewarding, this is not a sustainable solution. At some point, someone is going to have to make an honest scientist out of me, although with cross-discipline work the marriage would probably have to be a polygamous arrangement…

The Societal Challenges Lab
The issue of identities that dictate who one wants to collaborate with, and what seems worthwhile investigating and how, is of course not unique to academia, but is also a key element of many societal challenges. Very similar to academic identities, civic identities revolve around one's sense of affiliation and belonging to a particular group or community in society with its own values and goals. Whereas citizenship refers to an objective status regarding legal membership of a nation state, civic identity refers to a subjective state that can apply to a variety of affiliations (one can have multiple civic identities) that do not necessarily comply with national borders.

In the Societal Challenges Lab, my team and various scientific and societal partners work on the investigation of socialization influences of parents, schools, media, institutions, etc. on how children as they grow into adults develop a sense of social citizenship, by which I mean their perceptions of their own and others' roles and responsibilities in society, and how these roles actually take shape. This research program aims to bring together various disciplines at LUC, other FGGA institutes, and the Faculty of Social and Behavioural Sciences, as well as colleagues from the other faculties to investigate social citizenship development as one of the key issues in studying and understanding societal challenges.

The development of social citizenship is addressed by pursuing two lines of research: one addressing the early foundations of societal functioning, and one investigating the origins of its particular expressions.

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Foundations

The first research line addresses the foundations of how individuals develop a sense of their own capabilities and a sense of what to expect from others. These foundations are laid in early childhood and form the starting point for different pathways of civic development. In the 1950s psychologist Erik Erikson described the development of basic trust as the main goal in the first stage in a child's social-emotional development. Erikson defined basic trust as "an essential trustfulness of others as well as a fundamental sense of one's own trustworthiness". John Bowlby and Mary Ainsworth further elaborated on this notion in their attachment theory in the 1960s and 70s, and described how children develop internal working models – or blueprints – of the self and of others based on their early experiences with caregivers. When caregivers are able to see things from the child's point of view, and adapt their behaviors to fit the child's needs, their children are more secure. This security means that they have more positive expectations of both themselves and others. Decades of research since then have confirmed the basic assumptions of these theoretical frameworks showing that trust and security in early relationships predict children's and even adults' positive functioning in the social world. People with secure childhood relationships have better social skills and more friends, and are more open to new experiences, and less prejudiced towards unfamiliar others.

So what makes trust and security so important in social encounters? Two main mechanisms are relevant here. First, based on their early experiences, trusting and secure individuals are used to receiving sensitive responses from others. From that point of view, they will approach unfamiliar people and new situations with confidence and optimistic curiosity, expecting a positive experience. In the absence of security, individuals will approach new people with mistrust and feelings of anxiety and stress, which are likely to lead to unproductive coping strategies, such as avoidance or aggression. Second, precisely because secure people experience fewer anxieties and less stress in encounters with the unfamiliar, they have the mental space to see things from the others' point of view, to show empathy, and endorse supportive rather than fearful responses to others. For example, adults with a higher sense of security are less likely to dehumanize illegal immigrants and less likely to suggest harsh punishments and policies.

We are currently conducting a series of interrelated studies that look at the role of early sensitive care in the development of children's expectations and attitudes regarding interactions with others. These studies focuses on various ethnic groups in the Netherlands in which hundreds of families are visited at home – often across several years – to collect data in the form of structured video observations, computerized tests, interviews and questionnaires. I also have the good fortune to work with PhD students from across the globe who have access to communities in places rarely represented in research on childhood socialization practices, including communities in Brazil, Peru, Turkey, Yemen, Egypt, Kenya, Iran, Indonesia, and China. The PhD students and their local teams collect unique video data of family life that can teach us about the role of culture and context in the socialization processes involved in a child's developing sense of self and others. For these studies we collaborate with anthropologists within LUC and from the Anthropology institute, and with colleagues from African Linguistics.

Civic Socialization

Once the foundations for a general sense of self and others is laid, the question is what children then learn about the community they belong to, and what they are expected to do and not do in that community. But also what they learn about communities they do not belong to and what that means for their relations with individuals from those communities, if a relation is expected at all. This process is the main focus of the

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second research line: socialization efforts more specifically related to civic identity development.

Civic identities develop through a complex socialization process that involves many individuals, groups, and institutions. This process of what I call civic socialization is one of the key mechanisms that determine the willingness to collaborate with certain groups but not others, to act on behalf or in the interest of some but not others, and to contribute to certain societal developments but not others. This includes various influences, such as gender socialization, ethnic socialization, and political socialization, not just in the family context, but also in the school context, and through media, and indirectly through institutions and public policies that influence the attitudes of parents and educators, which in turn influences the messages that these adults convey to children.

8   We focus on explicit as well as implicit socialization processes. Explicit processes are those in which adults or others clearly state messages about identities and social expectations. This can be a father who forbids his son to wear a dress and tells him that those are just for girls, or a teacher who tells the children in the classroom that it is important to share and help other children, or a children's program presenter who tells children that they should not litter because it is bad for the environment. However, research shows that implicit messages are far more common and potentially even more influential than explicit ones.

Every day, from the day that they are born, children receive countless implicit messages that tell them something about what is acceptable and expected and what is not, in very subtle ways. These messages are often not at all intended to convey anything in particular, but inevitably do. A somewhat less enthusiastic or awkward response to a picture of a boy playing with dolls than to a picture of a boy playing with trains. Less eye contact and more physical distance when talking to the neighbor who wears a headscarf than when talking to the neighbor without one. A derisive comment between parents about a political leader on television, or any adult conversation in the presence of children about current events or other people. The examples are endless and when these messages form consistent patterns, children will pick up on the underlying evaluations of certain behaviors and people, and will for example conclude that it is best to behave consistently with your biological sex, that people with headscarves do not belong to our trusted inner circle, and that certain people are less respected than others because they have certain opinions.

In a similar vein, adults can implicitly model aspects of civic identity to their children through their own lifestyles. How are household tasks distributed between the parents? Do they both have jobs? Who are their close friends? Do they do volunteer work, or take care of family members who need help? Do they go to a church, a mosque, or a synagogue? Do they recycle, have a car, eat meat? And whether parents do any of these things of course has something to do with their own childhoods, but also with societal factors such as policies and opportunities regarding recycling, the economic situation, the availability of state-funded elderly care and child care, the public discourse about religion, etc. Research has repeatedly shown that children are susceptible to explicit as well as implicit civic socialization messages, and are likely to imitate what they observe, especially when it concerns people they trust. And if the explicit and implicit messages do not match, the implicit message is more likely to stick than the explicit one. It is then not surprising that we find significant associations between parents and children when it comes to things like their stereotypes and prejudices.

The team working on civic socialization in the Societal Challenges Lab includes people with backgrounds in diverse corners of the social and behavioral sciences, including education studies, psychology, sociology, anthropology, and

political sciences. In addition to standardized observations in families, we will go into schools to collect data on civic social-ization messages hidden in the curriculum, learning materials, and classroom interactions. We are now for example working with publishers of Dutch educational materials, analyzing their content for gender stereotypes and ethnic diversity. And the publishers are committed to using these analyses to reduce implicit messages reinforcing stereotypes and interethnic separations in future editions of these materials. The goal is to expand these projects to examining civic socialization messages on television, in policy documents, and other relevant sources of information, also those aimed at adults who are ultimately the ones responsible for educational, commercial, and media content for children.

Knowledge exchange
An additional key component of the work of the Societal Challenges Lab is knowledge co-creation and exchange with the general public and societal partners. I am currently working on several 'love-child' projects that illustrate this approach.

One is the project called 'A youthful vision of the future', in which thousands of primary school children will participate in a lesson plan in which they are challenged to express their vision of the ideal future society in writing or art. A selection of these works will then be used for exhibitions and presenta-tions in museums, libraries, and at literary festivals. And the entire body of the children's work will be analyzed for themes and content by a multidisciplinary team of scientists with expertise in child development, sociology, art, and literature. This will then result in both a scholarly publication and an illustrated book for the general public, and can hopefully inspire creative thinking about how research and policy can learn from and contribute to the ideal society described by Dutch children.

A second example of a cross-discipline project involving the general public is the Asia in The Hague project that I am conducting with LUC colleagues who have expertise in Asia studies, with backgrounds in anthropology, public health, peace & conflict studies, and international relations. The aim is to bring together young people from all the Asian communities in The Hague, to meet with each other, but also with LUC students, and Asia scholars, for a year-long series of both informative and entertaining evening events. These events will explore what it means to be Asian in the context of Europe, the Netherlands, and the Hague, the intergenerational trans-mission of Asian memories and identities, historical perspec-tives on Asia-Europe relations, and Asian representation in popular culture. The ultimate goal is to share and create knowledge and experiences to inspire research and inform policies regarding the position of Asian minority youth in The Hague.

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Working on these types of projects is a lot of fun and very rewarding, and has given me a taste for more. So anyone who is in for a polydisciplinary affair and has some love children like these ones, please contact me. And hopefully some weddings will follow so that we can have legitimate children and all the benefits of a stable family arrangement. And following scien-tific evidence regarding the effects of contact between groups, these collaborations should reduce prejudice between our disciplinary communities. An often-heard complication of cross-discipline contact is that people from different disci-plines speak different languages. But again following the available scientific evidence, when people are exposed to different languages at a young age, this is not a problem and multilingualism becomes second nature. So exposing young people like students to multiple disciplines then makes sense because they will develop an understanding of the languages of several domains that will likely foster open-mindedness and easier cross-disciplinary contact in the future. And together we can feed academia and society with a rich variety of traditional

but also new and unexpected foods that can inspire future generations and contribute to a better world.

Closing
I would like to express my gratitude to the Executive Board of Leiden University for my appointment, and the Faculty of Governance and Global Affairs and the Faculty of Social and Behavioural Sciences for facilitating my shared chair. Then a warm thank you to my colleagues at the Institute of Education and Child Studies with whom I have done so many wonderful projects, and still am, and whose support has been very important to me in the past 17 years. A very special thanks to the academic staff, the support staff, and my fellow College Board members at LUC who have been truly inspirational in the past two years, and I feel lucky to be part of your magic. Thank you also to my very first research team in The Hague who have worked very hard in the past year to lay the founda-tions of the Societal Challenges Lab. I am also grateful for the support of my FGGA colleagues who have made me feel very welcome in my new faculty. A big thank you also to my fellow Athena's Angels for the truly remarkable energy they give me every time we work on a project or simply meet for lunch. And finally, I want to thank my family, who contribute hugely to my fairy tale life on a daily basis.

In closing I would like to leave you with a brief fable that I believe applies to both our societal and our academic challenges. It is the fable of the Porcupines:

Winter had come, and it was the coldest winter ever – many animals died because of the cold. The porcupines, realizing the situation, decided to group together. This way they covered and protected themselves. But as they provided each other with warmth and protection, the pointy and sharp quills of each one inflicted small wounds on their closest companions. And after a while they decided to distance themselves to avoid these discom-forts, moving into separate corners. But that meant that they had

to suffer the bitter cold, and soon the porcupines began to die, alone and frozen.

So they had to make a choice: either accept the quills of their companions or die from the cold. Wisely, they decided to go back to being together. This way they learned to live with the little wounds that were caused by the close relationship with their companions, but that were clearly worth what was most important about being together, the warmth that they shared and that kept them alive. This way they were able to survive and enjoy the many springs and summers to come!

Ik heb gezegd.

Prof.dr. Judi Mesman