Preliminary Country Report: The Netherlands
Some facts, figures, issues and personal observations

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A Bit of History
Anthropology in the Netherlands developed in the late 19th century in close connection with the colonial civil servant training programs (Universities of Leyden and Utrecht) and with geography (University of Amsterdam). Under the name of volkenkunde (ethnology) chairs were founded in Leyden (1877), Amsterdam (1907) and Utrecht (1913). Although preparing civil servants for their career in the Dutch East Indies was important, the three most influential professors of the time were successful in transforming ethnology before the 1940’s into an independent academic discipline that combined ethnography, predominantly of the East Indies, with a strong theoretical basis. In Leyden it was J.P.B. de Josselin de Jong who developed a specific Dutch branch of structuralism, in Amsterdam S.N. Steinmetz worked within an evolutionary paradigm, and in Utrecht H.Th. Fischer propagated diffusionism.

After World War II the situation changed drastically. With decolonization Anthropology lost its function in the training programs for colonial civil servants. Instead staff members within the departments started to focus on what was called at the time ‘Sociology of Non-Western Peoples/Societies’ or ‘Non Western Sociology’. Under this somewhat cumbersome flag they offered programs that dealt with problems of underdevelopment in the ‘Third World’. Although non-western sociologist and anthropologists usually were part of the same department and students in their first years had to take courses in both fields, there were actually two different final degrees: one in Cultural Anthropology and one in Non-Western Sociology. Under the pressure of University reforms and budget cuts, but also as a result of the fact that sometimes members of staff moved from one ‘discipline’ to the other, the distinction between the two fields became blurred. Recently it has been decided at national level that as of September 2008 the official title of the discipline and the degree at the universities is ‘Cultural Anthropology and Sociology of Development’.

In the late 40’s 50’s chairs and departments of anthropology were founded at other universities: Agricultural University of Wageningen in 1946 (Sociology of Agrarian Development); Catholic University of Nijmegen in 1948; State University of Groningen in 1955; Free University of

1 This university recently changed its name into Radboud University Nijmegen.
Amsterdam in 1956. Initially there were significant differences in the content of the programs of the different universities. These differences were partly based on distinct theoretical approaches and partly on the different regions of the world in which the departments specialized. So, for instance in the 1970’s anthropology at the University of Leiden was strongly associated with its own specific branch of Structuralism, the University of Amsterdam was considered to be ‘Marxist’, and the University of Nijmegen was a stronghold for Symbolic Anthropology. However, we must realize that these theoretical distinctions were far from absolute. Leiden was not only ‘structuralist’, but also had a strong group of ‘materialists’ within its department. The University of Amsterdam might have had strong Marxist inclinations – especially within the Non-Western Sociology moiety – but it was also the home of transactionalism and critical/reflexive anthropology. The same point could be made for the other departments: they all were actually quite heterogeneous.

A different distinction between the departments, and one that is still discernable today in the curricula, is the regional specialization. Under pressure of budget cuts and an increasing emphasis on efficiency in the 1980’s – and after lengthy negotiations – the departments agreed to divide the world among themselves. Nijmegen got the Pacific and the Mediterranean area, Utrecht the Caribbean and Latin America, Leiden specialized in Sub-Saharan Africa and Indonesia, whereas Amsterdam concentrated on South- and Southeast Asia and Europe. The protestant Free University of Amsterdam did not claim any part of the world, but demanded recognition of the fact that they would have a special status in the field of religion. Groningen got the Arctic, but disappeared from the scene shortly after. Of course this division built upon already existing specializations. Its purpose was not to organize research along these geographical lines, but teaching and the development of library collections. Students from Nijmegen for instance, who want to do courses on Africa can go to Leiden, students from Utrecht who want to specialize in Europe can go to Amsterdam and so on.

The Present

Although the regional divisions nowadays are not as clear cut as 20 years ago, the different anthropology programs still reflect the regional traditions. This is very different with regard to theoretical traditions. Nowadays it is impossible to define the five departments in terms of theoretical identity. To a large extend of course this has to do with the development of theory within the discipline. Another factor contributing to this lack of ‘theoretical identity’ is the fact that over the last 10-15 years staff mobility has been high. It became normal that assistant-, associate- and full

2 This department was dissolved in 1989
professors (basically the three ranks in the system) move from one department to the other. It also became normal that students that were trained at one university (MA, PhD) got appointed at another university. This mobility in combination with the practice of hiring staff from outside the Netherlands resulted in heterogeneous departments and teaching programs in terms of theoretical orientation as well as topics.

**Teaching**

Enrolment has been consistently high for a long time. At the moment between 350 and 450 new students start with anthropology, outnumbering for instance the number of sociology students.

Approximate number of students and staff per university:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>University</th>
<th>#students (BA and MA)</th>
<th>#tenured staff (fte)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Amsterdam</td>
<td>550</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Free University of Amsterdam</td>
<td>250</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nijmegen</td>
<td>500</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leiden</td>
<td>300</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Utrecht</td>
<td>500</td>
<td>20</td>
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Since 2002-2003 all programs are organized in two cycles in accordance with the Bologna Declaration. The BA’s are without exception three year programs (180 ECTS) and the regular anthropology MA programs are 1 year (60 ECTS)⁴. Some departments offer one-year master programs on specific topics. Utrecht offers for instance a Master in Latin American and Caribbean Studies and Amsterdam offers a master in Contemporary Asian Studies and a master in Medical Anthropology and Sociology. In addition to these one year master programs, the departments take part in so-called Research Masters: two year (120 ECTS) interdisciplinary programs. These are often a combination of different social sciences, but there are also combinations with humanities and/or

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³ These figures are indications. Especially in the case of tenured staff fluctuations can be considerable.
⁴ MA programs are to a large extend taught in English, but offer students the opportunity to do their written work in Dutch.
linguistics. Although Research Masters generally aim to train students for a career in research within and without the academic world, they are especially important for students who are interested to enter a PhD. Track.

Although the departments and corresponding teaching programs no longer have the kind of strong identities they possessed twenty or thirty years ago, they still have their own characteristics. The afore mentioned difference in regional orientation is one of them, but programs also differ for instance in didactical approach, theoretical/empirical emphasis and in the place of methodology and ethnographic fieldwork. Some departments organize fieldwork in the bachelor. This can be a three week fieldtrip within the Netherlands that is organized by the department (Leiden) but also five weeks of (collective)research in Guatemala (Utrecht). Other universities organize small research projects that do not require students to actually live in the field.

All departments have organized their one year MA programs around fieldwork. Again there are differences in time spend in the field and in whether students can do fieldwork individually or have to take part in ‘collective’ fieldwork that the department organizes. However, this emphasis on fieldwork – depending on the department between 40 ECTS and 60 ECTS are spend on the process of preparing, executing and reporting of fieldwork – makes it very difficult to meet on of the objectives of the Bologna Declaration, the enhancement of mobility of students between universities, countries and disciplines. The one-year program offers too little time to ‘socialize’ students from other a specific department offers. There is no(t enough) room within the programs for courses in which ‘outsiders’ can familiarize themselves with the approaches and topics the departments have to offer. Because departments are being financed on the basis of number of students and number of graduate, they face a dilemma: either they do not accept students that are not actually well prepared for the MA and lose money, or they accept these students and eventually will have to lower their standards in order to have an acceptable graduation rate.

Research

Tenured staff at university departments are required, with a few exceptions, to be active in teaching as well as in research. The teaching-research ratio varies depending on university and type of appointment from 20% research time and 80% teaching to 50:50. Traditionally individual members of staff could decide to a large extend the content/topics of their research. Since approximately 15 years research is increasingly organized and monitored in Research Schools, including PhD research
and supervision. This means for instance that an associate professor with a 40-60 research-teaching appointment works for 40% of his or her time for a Research School.

Research Schools usually are interdisciplinary and some are cooperations between different universities. Members of staff from one university can join a Research School from another university. The Schools are organized around research programs that usually run for several years. For the RS it is very important that their members are successful in the competition for outside funding of research projects. It will help to pay for the research time of their members but, probably more importantly, it will enable them to appoint PhD students and post-doctoral researchers that are important for the scientific output of the schools. The most important institution in the Netherlands in this respect is NWO (The Netherlands Organization for Scientific Research).

In addition to the university departments and the research schools, there are four research and documentation institutes in the Netherlands that are important for the development of anthropology.

1) **Africa Study Centre in Leiden (ASC).** In this institute anthropologists, historians and linguists (some with tenure, but many more as visiting researchers) study and document divers aspects of African societies.

2) **The Royal Institute for Linguistics and Ethnology in Leiden (KITLV).** This is an interdisciplinary institute for the study and documentation of Indonesia, Surinam and the Dutch Antilles.

3) **The Centre for Education and Documentation of Latin America in Amsterdam (CEDLA).**

4) **The Meertens Institute in Amsterdam.** This institute is responsible for research and documentation of Dutch language and culture. Its research areas at the moment are: material culture, oral culture, festive culture and ritual (historical as well as contemporary) and religious culture.

Although research and documentation are the core business of these institutes, some are also offering specific MA programs and are involved in supervising PhD’s.