

A portrait of a woman with shoulder-length brown hair, smiling slightly. She is wearing a patterned jacket with teal and maroon floral designs over a maroon top. The background is a blurred indoor setting.

INTERVIEW

ELINE KOOI

A well-oiled machine

When Eline Kooi herself received her PhD in 1999, the supervision of PhD candidates was not quite what you can expect nowadays.

“Still, I can look back on a wonderful time, as during your PhD project you can focus entirely on your research”, she says. Just over a year ago, she succeeded Marc van Bilsen as CARIM’s PhD coordinator.

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For years, Eline had been a member of the CARIM Educational Programme Committee, which advises the Board on PhD-related matters. In January 2023, she became its chair: “A great honour”. In addition to advising on policies and programmes for PhD candidates, she has a number of other tasks. For one thing, she organises a welcome meeting for new PhD candidates every three months, together with I'MCARIM. She is the approachable contact person and source of information, and she consults colleagues of similar committees elsewhere in the university. From an annual science day to a one-week course, CARIM's more than three hundred PhD candidates are offered numerous tools to help them develop into independent researchers, ready for their next career step.

FOND MEMORIES

She still remembers how as a physics PhD candidate – at the time she was only the second female PhD candidate for her supervisor – she was more or less thrown in at the deep end when it came to her first major presentation. “I think the present generation have better presentation skills than my generation during their PhD”, she laughs. “But mostly I have fond memories of that time, even though in those days we didn't have a PhD coordinator, nor a coach or welcome meetings.” Nowadays, CARIM assigns to each PhD candidate a staff member as a coach for four years. “A wonderful initiative of my predecessor. I really inherited a well-oiled machine.”

Of course, she can add some personal touches to that well-oiled machine. For instance, she gets to choose a theme for a workshop each year. This year, the focus is on diversity and inclusivity, “such as to enable the new generation of leaders that we are training to recognise talents without bias. As the PhD coordinator, I enjoy the opportunity to contribute to that. CARIM has a long-standing tradition of taking the PhD programme very seriously. Fortunately, the vast majority of our PhD candidates are very satisfied with the supervision they are offered.”

FUTURE

In the final stages of their project, the PhD candidates also focus on the future, whether within or outside the academic community. “The industry is also in need of independent researchers to contribute to innovation, so our supervision also considers that aspect. Another thing is that PhD candidates must learn to deal with setbacks. I can well remember that from my own PhD project, 25 years ago. The word 'perseverance' frequently came up in a training course on qualities. Not surprising, of course, as without that attitude you can't succeed in science. If you wish to be innovative, there is never a clear-cut path and things always develop differently from what you expect. You can then mope for an evening, but then you have to pull yourself together and just get on with it. We like to assist our PhD candidates in all these matters as best we can.”