

Tilburg, December 20, 2018

Re: Housing TiSEM Koopmans (“K”) building

Dear members of the Executive Board,  
Dear Mrs. Snijders,

We very much appreciate your willingness to hear our views, during the meeting (December 6) with TiSEM’s heads of department and faculty management team, on housing TiSEM in the Koopmans (“K”) building.

As discussed, our stance, for the most part, boils down to the following: separate office space for each full-time faculty member (lecturer, assistant, associate, and full professor). To be perfectly clear, we don’t make a plea for minimum office space per person. We repeat our arguments below.

*Why separate office space?*

Doing good research and teaching—the key contributions a university makes to society—requires quiet. To generate good ideas, manage information, prepare classes, write course material, do high-quality research, academic staff need silence and that you don’t get when sharing office space. In addition, faculty members regularly hold Skype meetings or (phone) conference calls with co-authors, which drives (a) roommate(s) crazy, if they were to share office space. Experience (e.g. the department of Tax Economics, in the Montesquieu building, TIAS Business School in the TIAS building) shows that, when switching from separate to shared office space, people start working at home, and only come to the university to teach. Thus eliminating the collaborative work environment (i.e. communicating and working together), which is an important factor in doing research, and creating a “commuter university,” will affect students by making it more difficult for them to approach staff outside lecture hours.

Supervision of (several) Ph.D. and BSc./MSc. (on average 12 each) students makes up an important part of faculty’s daily job. To quantify this, note that TiSEM has about 1,000 MSc. thesis students every year, with between 5-8 meetings, on average: i.e. between 5,000-8,000 meetings a year. Several departments schedule these meetings in groups of 5 students. Supervisors typically meet with their Ph.D. students on a weekly basis: i.e. meeting time accumulates to 10 hours a week, on average, for a full professor supervising 3-4 Ph.D. students. One-on-one meetings can be held in faculty’s office. The capacity of the meeting cells, as planned for each floor, is insufficient: they don’t accommodate 5 students + 1 faculty member.

As mentioned above, to maintain the quality of research and teaching, having a collaborative work environment is of vital importance. In the field of business and economics, there is fierce competition for talent. Only departments with a strong research reputation manage to hire talent. The main reason why TiSEM has been successful in hiring, on the one hand, and retaining, on the other, faculty is precisely the collaborative work environment. Note: not salary, which is substantially below U.S. salary standards and, for some time now, also below that for many

universities in neighboring (i.e. European) countries. If we are forced to downgrade from separate to shared office space, we are driving them (i.e. prospective new hires and incumbent faculty) into the arms of other universities. To get it through, nearly all of last year's job market candidates asked for individual office space (!), and those who accepted our offers, indicated to us that, next to our research reputation and collaborative work environment, having individual office space tipped the scales. In addition, each department has a significant number of foreign (i.e. non-Dutch) faculty members—for some the majority is foreign—and many of them have multiple exit options: not only to get a higher pay, but also better office facilities. Therefore, what we need to offer, at the bare minimum, is decent office facilities: faculty members can't do without individual office space!

*What about Ph.D. students and other faculty?*

Ph.D. students can continue to share office space: smaller (larger) offices can accommodate 2 (3) Ph.D. students. Other (i.e. not full-time) faculty can share—and are, as we speak, for most departments, already sharing—rooms. The number of other-faculty members per room depends on the size of the appointments and we can introduce a flex-desk system.

*Why should assistant professors have individual office space?*

All TiSEM departments have a so-called flat organization, where we treat full, associate, and assistant professors, as far as possible, equally. Especially, assistant professors (tenure-track), however, are under great pressure: in our “up or out” system, they are required to publish in top journals in a relatively short period of time in order to be offered a permanent position. Meaning, if anyone else, in particular assistant professors need individual office space to do research. As mentioned above, it is extremely hard to attract talent, especially considering the salary levels we can offer to assistant professors—which are 30% of the salary-levels offered at U.S. schools, and increasingly at 50% of the salary-levels offered by European competitors. Not being able to offer them individual office space will make it even harder to recruit talent—or, more honestly, just making it plainly impossible.

Many job market candidates who consider coming to Europe have a preference to work in big cities like London, Paris, Vienna, Zurich. As mentioned, these places offer salaries that we cannot match. Also in the Netherlands, people know Amsterdam better than Tilburg and view it as offering better amenities. The only advantage, then, that we have compared to these cities is the low price of office space. From this perspective, forcing colleagues to share offices seems penny wise and pound foolish. To repeat, one of the recurring questions we get at job market interviews from prospective assistant professors is whether they will get individual office space.

It is important to note that all our competitors offer their faculty individual (i.e. not shared) office space. If we no longer can offer individual office space to prospective assistant professors, they will not join our departments. Further, discriminating between different “types” of professors is not an option: we hire most of our assistant professors from top international universities, where assistant, associate, and full professors all have their own office. The international standard in our, highly competitive, field is that such form of discrimination is just not done.

*Alternative?*

All departments fully support an alternative plan in which the department of Finance stays in the Intermezzo building till 2021.

To conclude, if we can no longer offer individual office space to incumbent and prospective faculty members,

- We won't be able to hire new talent; and
- We risk losing incumbent faculty members on a research track to our competitors.

Seeing that it takes, on average, about two years—the international job market only takes place once a year and one isn't always successful every year—to hire new talent, the remaining faculty will face increasing teaching loads with, at the same time, increasing student numbers. Taken together, this will have an immediate, direct impact: it will tarnish TiSEM's research reputation which has taken us 25 years to build! Also, the resulting difficulties in hiring will increase the risk of underspending on TiSEM's budget.

We wish to emphasize, once again, that we are not disputing the number of square meters per person as used in your calculations. We are perfectly happy with smaller offices, which comply with existing norms. Our only objective is to convince you that having individual office space is of vital importance for the success of our departments, school, and the university as a whole.

Finally, we would like to draw your attention to the following: the facilities where seminars and Research Master and/or Ph.D. classes are being held, are currently included in the calculation of the number of square meters per faculty member. This, of course, is incorrect. Also because these facilities are available to other schools. We kindly ask you to leave this out from the calculations.

Yours sincerely,

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