Letters from Alumni
life after the PhD thesis defense

On the interface of policy and science
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Since my early undergraduate years I have been interested in applying scientific insights to solving real-world policy problems. This interest grew during my PhD years, when I built theoretical models to explain why politicians sometimes make policy choices that are not seen as optimal by economists, and also worked on several empirical projects for Dutch ministries. After I finished the PhD, it therefore seemed to be a logical step to apply for a job at CPB Netherlands Bureau for Economic Policy Analysis, an independent thinktank for the Dutch government and the official body for economic policy analysis in the Netherlands.

For the last six years my work at CPB has involved research in the domain of regional and spatial economics. During this time I have worked on various research projects: construction of CPB scenarios for long-term regional development; project appraisal of large land development initiatives that are to be financed with public money; analysis of demand and supply in the higher segments of the urban housing market, etc. Furthermore, I was part of a team that started a new research direction aiming at empirically estimating the geographical range of the benefits of local public goods. What all of these studies (some of which provided an answer to a question posed by a ministry, others initiated by CPB) have in common is that they aim at providing information that supports the policymaking process.

Six years is actually quite a lot of time. Several fresh PhD graduates that started together with me have left in the meantime. Some went back to academia, as they longed for more freedom of research. Others became civil servants at different ministries or moved to the more dynamic world of consultancy, with short deadlines and higher pay. However, many PhDs (and I am one of these) chose for a long-term employment relationship with CPB. What makes CPB attractive for us? I think the main factor is the possibility to perform academic research that is socially relevant, has exposure in the policy world and has impact on policymakers. Other important factors include high quality requirements with regard to the output, a stimulating research environment with like-minded colleagues and access to academic journals and libraries, and at the same time the possibility to combine work on short-term policy-initiated projects with long-term academic research.

Let me assure you that my connection with Tinbergen Institute is still strong. As a TI alumna and chair of the board of the TI alumni association I appreciate and enjoy greatly the many business and personal contacts CPB has with Tinbergen Institute. TI courses are open to CPB employees, for example, and joint seminars and conferences are regularly organized. Moreover, many CPB colleagues share the same TI past— and even CPB director Coen Teulings used to be director of Tinbergen Institute not so very long ago.