

# The Grand Tour D'Europe; a rite de passage

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The famous Grand Tour through Europe was an important aspect in the transition to adulthood of young men in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. This rite the passage was mainly reserved for those from the higher social classes. These tours, in which main European cities were visited, had an educational component but also involved a lot of pleasure.

In the 21<sup>st</sup> century Nico thought this is important to be extended partially probably because his own pleasurable experiences in travelling through Europe being known as 'Mr. EAPS'. Gender equal as he is (either by nature or nurture via Anne), he apparently felt this tour d'Europe was important for women too. He therefore introduced me to EAPS and European demography in 2007. It marked the start of me becoming the Executive Secretary of the European Association for Population Studies and Nico remaining the tour leader.

The different components as important in the tour of young men also were found relevant for me as a women. It was the start of a European journey with a lot of new experiences and also a lot of pleasure. And as was the case for young men this experience was very relevant to be able to discuss important (demographic) issues when starting the future career. Big difference between the young guys and me was that they went with many at the same time to travel through Europe. For me it was a unique individual experience into the world of European Demography that Nico knows so well and in which he played (and continues to play) a key role in bringing together different parties and partners.



The tour started in my in the meantime beloved Barcelona. Preparing for the 2008 European Population Conference we paid visits to the city and the Centre for Demographic studies. During those first meetings it was very clear to me that Nico knew what he was talking about and had a vision on how to make things run smoothly for all involved. I learned so much from his way of dealing with different issues and people. At the same time I learned just as much from his ability of combining work and pleasure: With the EAPS council we worked very hard without forgetting it should also be enjoyable! Discussing the latest in demography and lives of demographers in Europe was often done over a beer (or two) and other bad habits that are most enjoyable (like smoking cigarettes).

I seemed to have passed the first step in the tour successfully and was allowed to continue to the next stop: Vienna. Like the men in their days were known for favouring parties and drinks this aspect of the grand tour was introduced at the EPC in Vienna with the first EPC party which putted European demography in a totally different light.

Again we passed this stop and headed for the next main place in Europe: Stockholm. The Nordic work ethic with no beer allowed over lunch remained a puzzle to Nico who so much

likes to make life pleasant. Like a real teacher he however had clear visions on how he wanted things to be organized, but at the same time was open to suggestions by others. Nico had the bigger view, the details were left to be worked out by others. In that regard he also trusted the running of the Association more and more to me even though he continued referring to me (and other women at NIDI) as 'meisje' (also when we had passed the age or innocence of 'meisje' a long time ago ☺). This however also shows his heart for individual people in addition to the heart for the cause of European population studies.

In the old days these young men who had travelled around continental Europe returned to their home country with a lot of experience and respect taking up high positions upon return. The first clearly applies to me too, about the latter one can debate but the first (experience) is anyway much more relevant for an individual rite the passage. Nico has made this journey extremely enriching and enjoyable for me. To me this journey marked an important transition in both personal and professional development for which I am very grateful that Nico invited and guided me. He was and hopefully continues to be the motor behind European collaborations for years to come. Mr. EAPS (Extremely Appreciated and Passionate Scholar) should absolutely remain Nico's middle name. And I hope he will transmit this passion further on to the next generation also after retirement!

Het ga je goed.

