

# **UvA-wide dialogue on collaboration with third parties/fossil fuel industry**

## **Notes of the Round Table discussion on**

### ***Value tensions and “sensitive” & “controversial” partners***

Roeterseiland Campus 06-06-2023

#### Background Info

On May 15<sup>th</sup> at the in-person dialogue at the Science Park, we talked about the UvA values such as academic freedom and its possible constraints as well as serving the world and creating sustainable opportunities. In our policy it is noted that a tension can exist between our values and a third party, which can be an organization, an industry, a theme, technology, or a country. These are referred to as “sensitive” or “controversial” partners. In our discussion, we will reflect on the fossil fuel industry and on its potential sensitive nature in light of other possible sensitive partners.

#### Question

What are clear criteria to decide whether an organization\* is considered “sensitive”?

And how to validate those?

(\*Note: this could also refer to an industry, theme, technology, or a country)

#### Agreement in values

When working with third parties, we should compare the partner organization values with the UvA values - not only the written statements but rather their actual actions.

If we do collaborate with any partner, we validate their actions.

Not only state today but also: Does a partner/company change over time; taking responsibility for past actions (for past violations) and can show a path that is aligned with UvA values.

For fossil industry the proven history of (and possibly still ongoing) disinformation is opposed to the university values of quest for truth and facts.

We do not need new criteria, we have a lot in place, but need to elevate it:

Research Integrity, Scientific code of conduct... → how can they apply to third parties?

Sensitive and controversial are not synonymous (as used in policy document):

SENSITIVE	Applies at smaller scale, e.g., project, theme, technology in contrast with a particular value politically sensitive Organizations cannot be “sensitive” only topics/methods etc.
CONTROVERSIAL:	Applies at higher level, e.g., a company) has different core values compared to ours spark polarization is against the law look beyond company but whole supply chain of (e.g., fast fashion)

Some feel even if the partner is clearly controversial or even illegal (terrorists) and we would exclude working with them, we could use their data.

Applying to the energy transition: ANY data from any source is welcome and needed to speed up the energy transition (most data on earthquakes etc. in Groningen comes from Shell and NAM)

Additional values that need to be respected:

- honesty
- non-violence

- is non-exploitative
- maintains the status quo although change is needed
- contributing to a sustainable Future

Transparency is a key value at any level for UvA as well as third parties

It is important to balance academic freedom – democracy  
(Our foremost aim is not academic freedom for the sake of it, but for the good of society and creating a better world)

Many suggest public interest should be the principal value (justify spending of public money).  
We should not endorse activities that we disapprove of.  
In case of doubt: Do not engage in grey areas!

### International Agreements

We need to take International Agreement as starting point for assessment:

- Paris Agreement / IPCC
- Human Rights Declaration
- SDG's

How to judge?

An independent committee can define criteria and do assessment or can commission an assessment.  
Alternatively, there are credible, authoritative international organizations whose publish reports.

- IPCC report (for fossil a clear scientific analysis is made by our colleagues – we should propagate these results as co-scientists)

### Criteria in a changing context

Academic freedom has a very high value and should only be constraint if necessary.  
→ Make transparent list of criteria that constrain academic freedom where necessary.

The criteria for judging of what is “sensitive”/“controversial” are dependent on time, place, and people. It is necessary to discuss and review the values and revise policy regularly.

How to do this:

- Criteria /partnerships can be discussed in dialogues between students and staff
- Criteria /partnerships can be voted on in democratic settings
- There should be room for a system of “appeal”: if criticism about partnerships reaches a certain threshold, more thorough investigation should be performed
- citizen panels (lottery of participants) can be used to judge “sensitive cases” → we have that instrument with UvA panels.

Any review process should include a diverse set of people (e.g., include critical people like activists) as different perspectives are needed.

### Before we even start thinking of working with third parties...

Do we have the right questions in place to ask ourselves?

How can we raise awareness of what is considered a sensitive partner?

Awareness not only at the start, but during the full life cycle of any collaboration a project: can we have more systematic review of post-project reflection

- the intention (e.g., serving public good?)
- the outcome (did it serve public good?)
- the right questions (which questions had we better asked ourselves?)

Life cycle review to

→ learn from experience as we go

→ educate young researchers to reviews a project in terms of societal value (not only scientific value)

→ share insight across faculties/disciplines

An independent advisory committee can help researchers:

They should not only look at the individual project in isolation but should consider public good as an important criterion.

It is important that the core responsibility does end up one the individual researcher, but with the group/department/faculty/UvA

#### Law, regulations, and politics

All agree that law plays a decisive role in judging what is acceptable.

What is banned internationally is of course also banned in NL and at the UvA (list is in the policy document).

Some feel “anything that is not illegal, should be allowed”; others feel that the UvA as a public institution should be stricter than the law, defining our own rules.

In addition:

- Lag time: getting new/actual topics into law & regulations often takes a long time
- Lobby: some laws & regulations that safeguard public interest are prohibited by lobby and are lacking in the law

Even if there are extensive lawsuits or convictions, is that not a “partner as a whole” is violating the law but only certain activities

→ that does not justify a full ban according

→ but if UvA continues to work with a party that is convicted, this is supporting their illegal actions knowingly.

Politics can use scientific findings in a biased way.

Scientists have a unique role in society and the task to interpret available evidence, inform, educate, and actively influence politician and law makers.

#### Public Benefit

If UvA accepts funding from third partners

Can we strive for:

- investment is made to serve (global) society (clean up rivers in Nigeria)
- research output serves the community (local and global) ,e.g., freely accessible etc.