

UvA-wide dialogue on collaboration with third parties

Notes Table discussion “Role of the UvA”, 15 May 2023, Science Park

Question discussed:

How should the UvA participate in the sustainable energy transition with third parties?

Key insights, table 1:

- We all want a change. The UvA is aiming to make the world a better place for generations to come. The UvA must stir to reach this future. That is our role.
- We have to collaborate with companies to ensure we make the biggest impact possible. Thereby collaborate with companies who are trustworthy.
- Nevertheless, the UvA must stay in dialogue with companies that don't share our values.
- Financial restraints with companies as Shell are dubious. All contract and agreements need to be transparent. And agreements on what is done with the results of the research are important, thus, to make sure we stir towards a better world.
- Ethically we have to ban collaboration with Shell. They are not trustworthy if you look at the past decennia. And it is very doubtful if they change enough in the upcoming years. The research done at the moment is good promotion for Shell, and a bad image for the UvA.
- There are 2 ways to review if we want to collaborate:
 - o 1: Case oriented. We have to review the goals and intentions of companies. Are they trustworthy? Do they take the problem serious enough? Do they take science serious enough (what is done with results of the research?)?
 - o 2: Content oriented. In every research application review of the content is right (stirring towards a better world). Be transparent in contracts and state clear consequences what is done with the results. And we have to do more research on sustainable energy.
- Flip of coins: ethics versus reality.
- Do we want a change from collaboration or change without collaboration. There are risks on both sides. You either slow down innovations or scale it up.
 - o Ban collaboration: take a clear statement. It feels like 1 step, and then what? Change from external power.
 - o Don't ban collaboration: continue to press and push for change. What steps are needed? Common statement from all Universities together? Maybe with a set of constraints it is possible to work again. How do we monitor change then?
- In the case of Shell: are we collaborating or are we taken hostage? The power of Shell is much bigger than the UvA.
- The University has different roles with different power. There is sensitivity to the context (historically, political, cultural)
- What are the perspectives of students that want to work at Shell and other fossil fuel companies? What is to impact on our researchers and PhD students?
- Some last remarks: Is Shell too big to fail? Is conscious possible?

Key insights, table 2:

- 1) Academic integrity and freedom, independence, transparency are no-brainers. The research question should also always have added value regarding scientific impact. It can also have added value regarding societal impact. Money should not be the reason for collaborating.
- 2) We want to use our broad and deep and interdisciplinary expertise to contribute to the energy transition. The question is: how do we do so in the best and fastest manner? In contributing to that energy transition, should we collaborate with third parties including the fossil fuel energy sector? And if so, how do we take up our role? If not, then how can we contribute?
- 3) Arguments for why we *shouldn't* work together with the fossil fuel energy sector mentioned:
 - The goals of the fossil fuel energy sector are contrary to the UvA's goals and thus it is difficult – even on a project level – to align goals.
 - We cannot be sure that a project with that sector will speed up the energy transition.
 - We cannot know to what end new knowledge will be used by the fossil fuel industry.
 - The industry's money is blood money. And even if it were to speed up the energy transition to use that money, it is morally unacceptable.
 - If we set an example to the rest of the world that working together with the fossil fuel industry is wrong, the rest will follow, and the transition will be fastest.
 - The fossil fuel industry has fooled the world (including universities) with their active undermining of knowledge about environment etc. Governments, by the way, have done so too.
 - Related to this: the fossil fuel industry is much more powerful than universities are, so there cannot be a balanced relationship.
 - Every boundary that we set is better than having no boundaries for collaboration (even if all such boundaries would be arbitrary). Thus, we should at least stop collaboration with fossil fuel extractors. But the problem is that the Dutch state half owns all of the companies that extract fossil fuels on Dutch soil.
 - The energy transition is part of a larger transition, also because the energy crisis is also a global societal crisis. The capitalist ideology behind the fossil fuel industry is prolonged with the current trajectories within the energy transition.
- 4) Arguments for why we *should* work together with the fossil fuel energy sector mentioned:
 - Research interests of third parties including fossil fuel industry can align very well with our own research interests and agendas.
 - There can be a clear added value in that the fossil fuel industry has knowledge of how to upscale new technologies, which academics do not. The combined efforts bring a solution to the energy transition closer faster.
 - For researchers, having the ability to test hypotheses in real-life settings is very valuable.
 - Data, expertise, and facilities of fossil fuel sector allow for performing research towards the energy transition that academics otherwise would not be able to do.
- 5) Framework conditions for when collaborating with fossil energy sector
 - A variety of stakeholders (including NGOs) should be part of research collaborations so that dependency is smaller.
 - Criteria for collaborating should be clear to UvA scholars and students.
 - With some effort, we can evaluate projects on the criteria mentioned above, but evaluating an organization or even a whole sector is virtually impossible. Thus, collaboration should be evaluated on a project basis.

- We need a very strong role of the government. They should hold fossil fuel sector accountable. They should make sure that fossil fuel companies act within the law.
- Governments should ensure that the externalities are included in what we pay for fossil fuel energy – this will speed up the energy transition exponentially.
- If we do collaborate with fossil fuel sector, patent-shelving should not be allowed, only openly licensable.
- Perhaps a special fund that fossil fuel sector companies can set up for funding research on topics they feel are valuable will help diminish dependence on a single company within that sector.
- Perhaps fossil fuel sector companies can be obliged (by the government) to give data that researchers request, such as on wind turbines (for research on bird migration etc.).

Key Insights table 3

- Don't be a hypocrite, we all make use of fossil fuels one way or the other, is quitting to work together really helpful?
- UvA should not work with fossil industry at all to make a statement, just like ABP did for example.
- Try to create a chain reaction, which also inspires other universities to do the same.
- UvA needs to stay in touch with parties like Shell to make sure that if they want to change, we can make a contribution to that change. Instead of excluding ourselves.
- UvA can become the facilitator or at least contribute to the discussion on this topic, both inside and outside the university. The university has a big role in education future generations, take this education role more seriously as part of this discussion.
- Knowledge is power, use it to make a change as UvA.
- Be transparent about when you work together, and when you don't. Make clear statements when you do work together.
- If we don't collaborate ,we harm science and research more.