UNIVERSITY OF TWENTE.

In-depth Sustainability Dialogue Series #2: Research, partnerships & divestment

Tuesday April 25th, DesignLab IDEATE
Moderated by Philippe and Kimberley (UIF)
Notes by Wiro and Alex (text marked <mark>yellow</mark>: unsure if correctly noted)
Participants: approx 30

Topic 1: Research

Presentation on Planetary Boundaries & Global Justice from Michel Bourban (assistant professor in environmental ethics)

- The destruction of overarching planetary systems takes us out of a stable, safe and habitable operating space for humanity.
- The planetary boundary framework: 6 out of 10 dimensions have already exceeded beyond limits.
- Earth will be pushed into a new state if we keep up along this pathway. Possible future state of the globe: 'Hothouse Earth', inflicting several tipping points (more or less connected to each other).

References: Steffen et al. (2018) & Lenton et al. (2019)

- "Widespread, rapid, and fundamental transformations will likely be required to reduce the risk of crossing the threshold and locking in the Hothouse Earth pathway." (Steffen et al., 2018)
- We need to move away from the Hothouse Earth scenario.
- How to connect this empirical framework to an ethical framework?
- 36 possible solutions mitigating greenhouse gas emissions. But: attention to global justice, as US and EU contribute to more than half of global CO_2 emissions. The ones most vulnerable to climate change are the ones who contributed to the causes of it the least.
- Top 10% of income earners contribute to 48% of emissions.
- There is a duty and responsibility held by the biggest emitters to tackle radical inequality; at national and international levels and per capita emissions
- Radical social, political and economic reforms are required.
- Apart from global measurements: personal choices to reduce your contribution to climate change. More and more scientific philosophers are pointing to this duty to contribute, globally as well as personally.
- There is still a safe operating space for humanity, but: we need radical social, political and economic reforms and substantial changes in our lifestyles if we want to follow a more safe, just and habitable operating space.

Fishbowl 1

1. *How can university research be <u>better aligned with the SDGs</u>, and <u>what types</u> of research are most needed to address sustainability challenges?*
   - Try not to do research that funds the 'Top 1%' that further drives inequality.
   - We shouldn't allow our research / partnerships to contribute to the unjust situation that Michel Bourban depicted.
   - Have SDG's as selection criterium for future researchers: what would you like to contribute to?
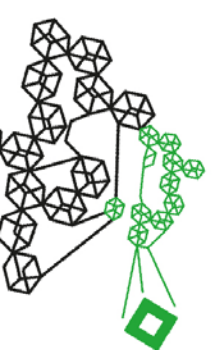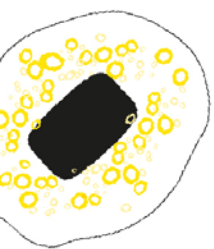
- Criteria for selection in hiring: awareness to consider climate justice and sustainability is to be interviewed for.
- Hiring: include different perspectives and create opportunities to learn about climate, SDG-, and sustainability-related questions. Make it inclusive.
- Put less emphasis on where someone studied, and more on what he or she has really done.
- Ergo: the hiring procedure should also be more 'just'.

- Impact metrics can be biased – implement a probe on specific segments. E.g. involve farmers in research on the circularity of nitrogen in agriculture.
- "I agree on mapping research with the SDGS. Let's take that approach with companies we partner with too and scan them with the SDGs"
- And: the partners we allow in our research projects – do they also align with the SDG's?
- Majority of our research is focused on relevant future-proof topics. With regard to the type of research: "We cannot do research in a bubble". We need neutrality, academic freedom. It's a luxury. "We are not funded by private organisations as we are a public university that receives state money" [?!] We need more disciplines to be involved and have an open dialogue.
- For some researchers (specific research topics) 'sustainability' feels far away, or not per se related to their field of expertise. We could emphasize their contribution to that topic more.
- "As academics we are really good in crafting our story; whether that matches the reality is another matter." Step further: truly validating our assumptions. What metrics can we use.
- The discourse of exponential growth seems to feed into this dialogue too.

- What is the historical precedent for systemic change? Directed to Michel Bourban. Examples of where it occurred. Moral imperative. He cites slavery. Only abolished when it became economically feasible and it became a law. There has to also be political will and momentum. The longer we wait the more costly it will be at global and intergenerational scales.

- Statement on ethics / how UT wants to work from Climate Crisis Coalition:

"Research Ethics
Code of Ethics UT:

- *The University of Twente does not want to be involved in activities that affect the dignity of people*. (Page 2)
- *In light of its pursuit of a sustainable development of prosperity and well-being, the University of Twente values the careful interaction with nature and the living environment*. (...) (Page 2)
  - It also mandates that UT "**only works with suppliers and parties that act in accordance with this Code of Ethics**." (p.2)

- The fossil fuel industry's practices are incompatible with human dignity

For as long as we partner with this industry, UT is complicit in these practices, as it enables the fossil fuel industry to keep operating longer

- Hence: collaboration with the fossil fuel industry is against UT's own code of ethics.

 – doesn't align with our current partnerships and collaborations with these companies.

- Do not take the SDGs for granted. SDG Framework also has a lot of controversies.
- The development paradigm in sustainable development goals (as presented in e.g. *Planet Dialectics,* Sachs (1999)) might not be aligned with planetary boundaries and global climate justice frameworks. The research is very clear – "radical reforms" are needed (Lenton et al., 2019; Steffen et al., 2018). We need radical reform (politically, economically, socially, ethically): and that are the kind of research questions UT researcher needs to address! Think of alternatives, bring those ideas here, and reform our research.

- Jean-Paul Lange in response to Rosalie:
- By Defossilizing the Big Consumer *and* technology transfer we can have double the impact. SDG's have helped *and* are helping society, and also industries to transform. Don't look at companies [?] in the past; Look at what they are doing in their current transformation

2. How can universities measure the impact of their sustainability research on society and the environment, and what metrics can be used to evaluate success?
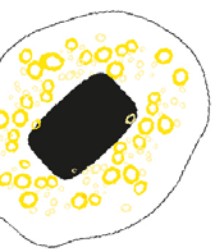   - Our current metrics to measure research are biased. To measure impact on society you need to be clear on the segment you're impacting (agro for example), and then the people in that segment decide on your impact (farmers in this example). Ask our partners.
    - Are there examples of other systemic transitions that can guide us, like slavery? Taking a moral turn is one thing that is needed, and willingness as well. And: we need answers towards what to do now, balancing different kind of stakes – instead of what to quit doing. Actions, budgets, willingness, solidarity.

Topic 2: Partnerships
Presentation on Partnerships from SBD: Sebastian Husein and Caroline van Bers.
- Some perspectives on sustainability in UT research (snapshot of Energy and Resilience landscape). UT's research profile: Climate, Health, Safety & Security.
- 'Energy' crucial from a Climate perspective: Energy sector contributes to emissions 73%. Within that: energy use in industry as biggest chunk.
- What UT focuses on with regard to Energy and Resilience: see PPT for a broad overview, cross faculty.
- What drives embedding of sustainability? Governance / Culture, social, environmental / economic drivers. The second: mainly bottom-up, more and more asked for sustainability.
- Hydrogen as case. 'Hope, Hype, or Saboteur?'

- Are we thinking holistically, in how this might impact society in general? Or are we focusing on the specific topic?
- Sustainable thinking: using SDG's is at least a shared framework, what more institutes are looking towards to commit to.
- No's: "how do I tag as many SDGs as possible". Don't cherry-pick.
- Resilience World -programme 2021. Cross-faculty initiative for healthy communities, safe societies and drought resilience in the region of Twente/Overrijsel.
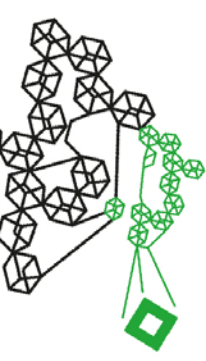- UT-UW collaboration on planetary health.

NB: No fishbowl for topic 2.

Topic 3: Divestment
Presentation on Cutting the Ties from Guus Dix.
- Why a committed UT community should end its liaisons with fossil industry:
  o Our shared commitment to the idea of unbiased research: fossil fuel financing of research leads to outcome bias, research direction bias and transition bias.
  o Our shared commitment to the pursuit of truth: fossil fuel companies fostered – and still foster – science denialism and divisiveness in science.
  o Our shared commitment to a just and habitable world for all: fossil fuel companies are not committed in word or in deed to a just transition.
  o As a committed academic community we need to wield pressure differently after thirty years of failure. (Not a single major event managed to reduce global temperature rise.)
- First movers: Naturalis, UvA, UU, and last week VU decided to 'cut the ties'.

Fishbowl 2
3. <u>What ethical considerations</u> should universities consider when partnering with external stakeholders?
4. <u>Should universities divest from fossil fuels</u> and other unsustainable industries
   a. <u>What are the potential benefits and challenges of doing so?</u>
   b. <u>How does partnering with the fossil fuel industry impact our ability to meet the climate crisis?</u>
   c. <u>What can we learn from their historical behaviour?</u>
5. <u>What role</u> can partnerships with external stakeholders, such as industry, civil society, and government, play in advancing the sustainability transformation inside and outside the UT?
6. How can universities invest in <u>sustainable and socially responsible industries and technologies</u> to promote positive change?

- No clear figures about how much fossil industry contributes, as majority of research money is public money.
- By collaborating with Shell (e.g.) we give them credibility, while they're not committing to the Paris agreement. Greenwashing.
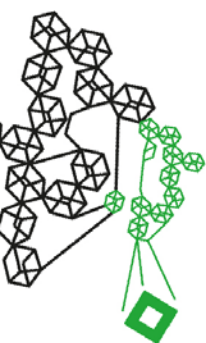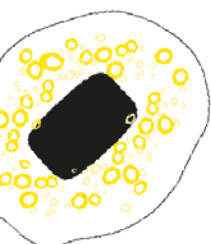
- There's a (drive for) demand to products fossil fuel industry offers and they built up this system, globally. We might need them to transform. And where we might have more impact: show where our investments and contributions are going to. Not necessarily cut research ties.
- With regard to hydrogen: indeed we approach that as holistically as possible, in existing value chains – as well as creating new ones. Due to there being a big need for it.
- We do need collaboration for co-funding, not just here – but also on a global scale. We would need to dramatically change the landscape of research funding to get to an unbiased state without major stakes influencing.
- Would you now promote Tesla as a new research partner? Would that be better? Is that our new 'frame' for a sustainable society? Would that give relevant leverage to our research.
- As academics we need to signal what kind of change we would want! Beyond the status quo we are in now.
- Facts in a broader perspective:
    o Is it bias or education? Using the experience and scope of a global company: are scientists influenced by their money? Or about the larger opportunities to learn?
    o Greenwashing. Shell is committed to Paris, but together with society. So clients have to be willing to buy it. "We want to deliver, but our customers should be willing to pay the price." Citizens don't want to suffer.
- Still: if you take into account the injustice Michel depicted – then it's 1% influencing a huge part of emissions, whereas fossil fuel industries consumers are not just that 1% - so couldn't they do more, and not just follow pace of society? Define pace instead?
- This is not about fossil fuel industry, but it is about our choice – if they show commitment and positive action we might be willing to collaborate again.
- Scope 3: –25%, 2050: net-zero.
- "Where is the evidence?" "With what we (think we) know we cannot conclude otherwise …"

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Visualisation of the Fishbowl 2 debate (Alex Baker):
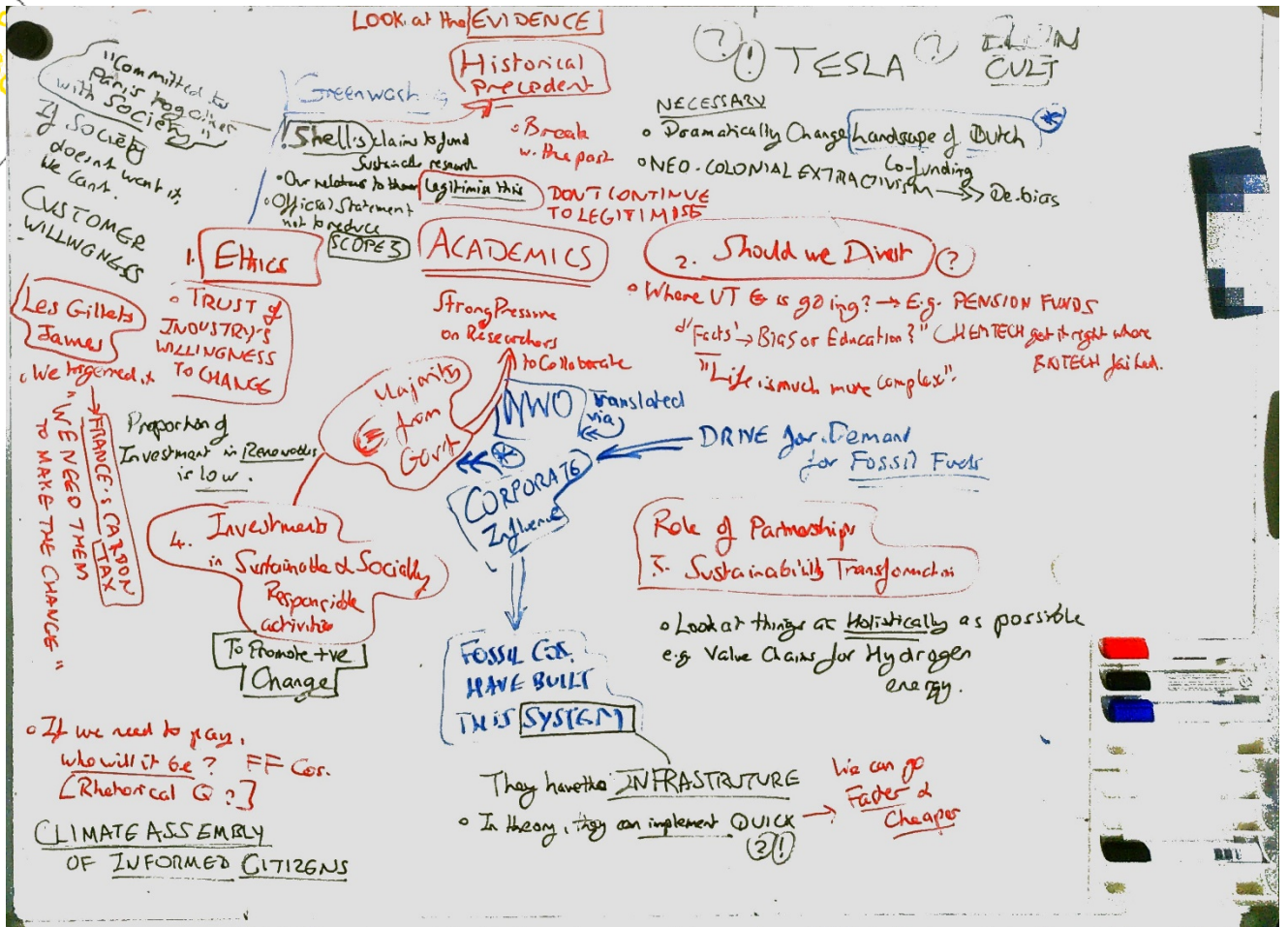
Finishing remarks by Tom Veldkamp
We're both citizens and consumers, and those roles do not always align.
We have to weigh and make a decision together. A decision that makes impact, and serves a better future.
It's a system change, and that's not easy – as we need everyone on board, also to tackle this dilemma.

Aftertalks with Jurriaan Schmitz, Sascha Kersten, Jean-Paul Lange and Gert-Jan Koster
- *"We need a broad, open, scientific and objective dialogue, now it's too activist / greenhub focused, scaring away certain people."*
- *"We are glad one colleague dared to step up, but he was 'attacked' by six others – only chasing their own facts."*
- *"We should address the topic of academic freedom. Also in finance of research: co-funding also gives a certain scope to your 'freedom' as scientist."*

Find a way to even more broadly involve people – from all walks of life.

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References:

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