

## Deep Democracy meeting March 20, 2023

This document contains a description of sentiments shared during this meeting, and does not reflect the ideas or policies of Utrecht University for now.

### Introductions

At the start of the session, eight members of End Fossil Occupy Utrecht protested at the entrance. They carried banners and signs calling on UU to sever ties with the fossil industry. At our invitation, two of these people ended up participating in the Deep Democracy conversation.

The session starts with a brief introduction by Henk Kummeling, rector magnificus of UU. This topic touches the portfolios of the entire Executive Board; therefore I am present now together with Anton Pijpers. Margot van der Starre will join the session on Monday, May 15. The goal of this exercise is to set up conditions for collaborations. But we also want to articulate what our own ambitions are, and what we want to get done. Armed with all the insights and knowledge, we want to take the next steps. After this introduction colleague Anton Pijpers and I simply join the conversation as participants.

Introduction of the Deep Democracy method by moderator Yonathan Keren. He does a brief check-in by asking all attendees about their state of mind. They can give a score from 1 (very bad) to 5 (amazing) by raising their hands in the air when that number is mentioned. Then attendees address what affects the state of mind in the room:

- Results of the Dutch provincial elections "simmer" beneath the surface of this meeting.
- The impact of what we are going to do here together, will have an effect in the lives of my (grand)children, but not so much on my own life.
- I feel a tension because of the disbalance between staff and students here today. That makes me tense to speak out here. Moreover, the topic is emotional, which also makes the conversation tense.
- I feel an imbalance between our session today and the great enthusiasm I see all around me for Formula 1, the fossil industry's showcase.

Yonathan then asks what the attendees hope to get out of this conversation:

- A clear position of where UU stands. If it remains very vague or subtle, that's not enough.
- The urgency needs to be clear: the urgency for action and urgency to understand the existing ties between UU and the fossil industry.
- I find it surprising that I was not asked to do homework. I have many factual questions, and a need for information and knowledge. It is important to rely on existing knowledge, and it is important that this knowledge is broad.
- I hope that the discussion will lead to a practical solution: people who need to work with it should be able to do so. That should be part of the discussion.
- I hope that this discussion will not damage my work position. Relationships should not be harmed; this conversation should have no consequences.
- I have a desire for exploration in gray area: what exactly do we mean by fossil industry? We all want a more sustainable world. What is the definition we are talking about?
- I hope for a discussion aimed at finding solutions together. Not to convince others of their own point(s) of view.

- We are a very white group and need to be aware of our privilege, our position in society and how that impacts our views. We don't want to exclude the outside world.

### Goal of the meeting and introduction to Deep Democracy

Yonathan again describes the goal of the meeting: to gain insight into the different viewpoints within the UU community, and to broaden one's own understanding. We will not end today with a decision. There will be another conversation on May 15, and we want together insights there as well.

Up next is a brief history of the Deep Democracy movement: it originated in South Africa in the 1990s, when organizations were transformed from racist and apartheid-based to non-racial. The method gives attention to the undercurrent in groups, which is full of emotions, values and beliefs. It is a tool for decision-making and conflict resolution. Yonathan came into contact with Deep Democracy in 2007, through teaching. He wanted - partly because of his personal past - to learn more about dynamics in groups in times of conflict.

A question arises from the audience on what the decision making process looks like. Henk Kummeling explains a bit more about the process: after collecting all the insights on 20 March and 15 May, it is up to the board to go back to the community with a proposal to ask for feedback. The idea is that we can arrive at sensible draft decisions with these attendees.

Up next is an introduction to Deep Democracy and how a conversation following this method works. Yonathan draws a picture of an iceberg on a flipchart. The top of the iceberg visualizes the conscious, and at the bottom, everything below the so-called "waterline" visualizes the unconscious. That's where our primary drives are: what influences our actions. In Deep Democracy, we use this model for the collective, not for the individual. What everyone knows is the conscious, what not everyone knows is the unconscious.

Question from Yonathan to the group: what do you do when you are told to do something without being able to participate or give feedback; or when you are simply not heard. How do you behave then? Answers from the audience:

- Resistance in the form of sabotage. Or at least a loss of motivation.
- You either go along with the decision, or you leave.
- I am quite conformist and law-abiding. Even during corona, when I wondered if the measures made sense. But during corona, there was a collective lack of knowledge. This allows you to be conformist. Or you can use your lack of knowledge as a reason to go against the policy.

Yonathan explains that at the very bottom of the drawing, well below the waterline, there is the terrorist line - also called the sabotage line or resistance line. There are several steps in the process towards sabotage:

1. Through humor (a joke) you quickly escalate to sarcasm. You see this a lot in minority cultures.
2. Next come excuses. When these excuses keep repeating themselves, they point to something happening below the waterline: "the fish". This symbolizes what is left unsaid: topics of emotional nature. Those are usually expressed in excuses. Something that is repeated three times or more refers to something that is unsaid and therefore has to do with feelings and emotions.
3. After the apology, you escalate to gossiping/lobbying: a way of venting and finding like-minded people. This is a phase where people avoid contact.

4. Next comes sabotage and delay, followed by protest.  
> Comment from the audience: delay is the reason we are here today!
5. The last phase is war or separation.

What makes conflict resolution difficult is not that the conflict itself is complex per se, but that we have an internal resistance to say what we really think. Because if you really hear what the other person thinks, the relationship might or will break down. Therefore, we don't bring out all the voices. The answer to a conflict is not necessarily complex, but what is needed is for all parties to hear each other clearly. Jonathan's core skill as a moderator is therefore neutrality and compassion.

To create a decision-making model, the following steps are required. Steps 1 through 4 are above the waterline, step 5 is below the waterline.

1. Gather all perspectives; try to give everyone an equal voice
2. Find the no
3. Spread the no
4. Vote via raising hands
5. What does the minority group need to join majority? Look for aspects of the issue that we cannot yet see clearly.

Henk Kummeling shares more info on the transparency of existing collaborations with the fossil industry. UU does not have a standard registration system for all collaborations. A colleague from the research policy department is working on this overview. This will be shared in April 2023. Besides research projects, this overview will also provide insight into other collaborations, e.g. sponsorship arrangements, large consortia where fossil is one of many partners, guest speakers, etc.

### Start of the 'conversation on our feet'

During the 'conversation on our feet', participants can briefly comment on a statement and then choose a position in the room. Those who agree with the response, stand close by the person who shared it. Those who disagree seek a position further away in the room. No questions are allowed (because there is usually an opinion behind a question). Everyone is allowed to share one opinion at a time, preferably short and sweet without long political discourses. You may move freely around the room and you may also contradict yourself today.

### Question: what should we do with collaborations fossil industry?

- Collaboration with different types of organizations is a good way to make impact faster. We should not just banish everyone who has anything to do with fossil.
- Collaboration with the fossil industry contributes to greenwashing; it is better for the university not to want to participate in that in any way.
- As long as it is legal to have fossil industry, you can't ban it completely. But simply cooperating with fossil is not integer, but naive.
- Collaboration can be a great way to be able to stay in contact with different organizations. We, as an organization, are good at that, and can make good agreements with them.
- There are parties that make so much money, and use only so little of that money to help improve the world for the better; collaborating with them gives them the image that they are doing well. We should not want that, as it sends the wrong signal.

Comment from Yonathan: there is immediately a repetition of certain views. Therefore, I to switch to another form immediately. We use the polarity of the existing views in our conversation. We are going to hold a debate, but it will not be political. It is a debate between two sides, not between

people. You may speak for both sides as an individual, and you may also switch sides. The room divides into two groups. We start with the arguments of the side with the most people, and the other side is only allowed to listen in order to pick up all the arguments.

#### Arguments in favor of collaboration

- Fossil fuel expertise can help with energy transition.
- Every collaboration should start with a plan of how they want to stick to the max 1.5 degree warming. This way, it becomes clear how the cooperation contributes to this. We should only cooperate under strict conditions.
- Do cooperate with the fossil industry, but keep conveying the signal that you disagree with basic industry principles.
- The type of collaboration is important (e.g., commissioned research versus research as a partner): it should be subject to conditions such as at least being able to publish the results freely.
- What exactly are we talking about here? In the linear economy, every company is fossil. So should we exclude all companies?
- If you keep people from the fossil industry close to you, you can (continue to) exert influence.
- Cooperation with the fossil industry is a global phenomenon: other countries and continents have diametrically different views on this. They are on the eve of economic development and are going to use a lot of oil in the near future anyway, whatever our decision will be.
- I am leading a project on the future of energy transition in the Netherlands; fossil companies are also participating in this. It would be weird if they didn't take part: you need their participation. Their future - and who works for them - is part of the energy transition. That is also an inclusivity aspect. We need to know more about how the chain works, who is contributing? A lot of people have oil on their hands.
- Oil is needed to make magnets, to make solar cells, and so to carry out the energy transition. We need big companies because of their knowledge of scale.
- Very few companies can handle the desired scale, e.g. regarding the production of wind turbines.
- I want to influence the industry from within: I want to train people who are going to make the transition a reality within companies. And to make new substances so that we are no longer dependent on fossil. I am aware of the greenwashing effect of the industry, but I accept that for now, so that in ten years I can make the transition from within.

#### Arguments against collaboration

- I hear a lot of arguments that express hope that fossil fuel companies will go along with the transition: but these companies have known about their negative effects for over 50 years and have actively spread disinformation. Why would they suddenly change now?
- I wonder how much influence employees really have on the big picture of these companies. The power is with the shareholders and the top management anyway. We want to initiate change from within, from the bottom up. But is that realistic? I wonder if it would not be better to take a decision top-down (as happened, for example, with the hole in the ozone layer).
- Some companies are very clearly delaying the transition. They are going out of their way to block it. It is dangerous to say "the fossil industry is everything, so we can't do anything". So let's look specifically at companies that are an obstacle and give them a mandate (e.g. no more greenwashing), so that we don't contribute to their false "green" image.

Their power and social image must go down. In fact, certain companies can really be given part of the blame of the current problems. When people who work there no longer feel they are valued, it hurts them. And that's a good thing.

- The idea behind the personal carbon footprint has been an initiative of the fossil industry. They put the blame on us as individuals. We now echo those views and we legitimize them with that. That has been a conscious marketing strategy.
- What the fossil industry seeks to do, is to create conflict among scientists. This meeting shows how industry is playing us against each other.
- Think of the obscene profits in recent years, during the war in Ukraine, for example. These companies don't care about ideas of equality, they don't care about hearing minorities. The money ends up with major shareholders who increase inequality in the world. We need equality for a more inclusive and greener society.
- The idea of collaboration is nice but I get the feeling that there is a generational conflict at play here. There is no more time for collaboration, time has run out. These big companies have done nothing in recent years.
- The university should no longer help to extract fossil fuels out of the ground.
- We have to come up with something new with our knowledge, in our own way, and together with companies that do really want to change. If you do not really need these companies, I would rather do the transition without them.
- We have to question the influence of the people we educate. For example, they can be fired if they try to change the industry from within. If people believe they can really contribute to the transition and then go to work in these companies only to be fired, I would feel bad. Because the real power at the fossil industry lies elsewhere, with the shareholders.
- The university has too little influence in large research partnerships. But we can have much influence if we make radical choices and show the way forward.
- The fossil industry not only damages the climate but also violates human rights. They have actively destroyed habitats, had people killed, etc. None of this is acceptable. We must also condemn those actions, not just the impact on climate.
- We should take a stance as a signal to our future students: what do we stand for, what are our principles?
- Many people work at the university because they would like to contribute to society. All students are on this side of the line!
- Investigate which organizations do not (or will not) move, in the transition, because of their investors, shareholders, etc. It is possible that we can distinguish there who we do and do not want to work with.
- Because of the money that fossil invests, and because of competition within the academic community (for grants, etc.), researchers who do not collaborate with fossil get into trouble and have to work harder because the group that is very rich "gets" the collaborations.

#### Arguments in favor of collaboration

- We should go for both options. Many students just say "no" to collaborations with fossil. But new, innovative companies should be given every opportunity. However, the scale is so immense, that you're not going to get it done with just new, small, innovative non-fossil companies which often don't have enough financing yet. So we need to encourage these new companies with our people. They need venture capital to grow into the employers of the future. That's a struggle. At the same time, we have to keep feeding the old fossil companies with new ideas and people.

- It is also my ambition to make the whole world fossil-free. But that is very difficult to achieve. How are we all going to do that? Then we really need everything and everyone.
- Morally, I am actually on the other side of this debate. But physically I'm standing on this side now. That has to do with scale. How do you get this challenge done without the fossil companies and their stakeholders? At the same time, I realize that the power relationship is all wrong. Still, I am on this side because we have to solve it together.
- We have processes by which we can greatly reduce CO2 emissions. But we have to get the companies on board - how can we do that? And are we doing enough? I sometimes find it difficult to explain to my children what I do in terms of work. I don't know if what I say is completely correct; I find that difficult.
- I love rules, and they can work in this system. Rules provide transparency about what we do and don't do and allow. But are rules enough, when we look at these companies' past (e.g., human rights violations)? Can we arrive at a gray area/intermediate solution, e.g. cooperation with restrictions, and only under strict rules? We need to explore what exactly those gray areas are.
- Morally and socially, fossil companies have had a negative role. But they are also very good at making useful materials from the oil they pump up. If we want to create a circular society, we need those materials and those steps in the system. The university's job is to develop more knowledge. We want to learn, and also teach these companies something.
- In addition to rules, I also want context. And context changes over time. Right now I think 'yes we need the fossil companies.' But who knows, maybe they won't make the transition in the future. Then we have to enforce the rules more strictly.
- As a university we are so much broader than just chemistry, we have so much expertise. Let's use that expertise in future rules and requirements for these companies. We don't resign ourselves to greenwashing. A clear point on the horizon can actually create additional leverage to get things done.
- It is shocking how much profit oil companies have made. The share they invest in green energy needs to increase; we may be able to enforce that.
- It makes me uncertain to have to choose one side in this debate. I think a camp that goes for both options a good idea. That's why I'm going to stand in the middle now.
- Technical contributions have a potential double positive effect. If we make a hard cut and break off all collaborations, I am afraid that the positive contribution we want to make to the future cannot be made. If the university dictates that I can no longer contribute to the energy transition, that affects me as a person.
- Much technology that we have developed (e.g., for coal) can also be used for a circular society. We need to use that knowledge to make the transition.  
My children are on the other side in this debate. Deep down, we all want the same thing, at least a lot of us do. But we differ in the way we want to achieve it.
- I hear a lot of arguments about shareholders. But we shouldn't underestimate that as a university we have an important and strong voice. What we say has a lot of influence on the reputation of these companies, look at tobacco industry. So we have to be super critical of e.g. greenwashing.
- We have very little time to invest and build. To make an equivalent of fossil, we have to start now.
- The biggest impact of the university is not in research but in the students we educate; they will become employees somewhere. If we educate them with sufficient critical capabilities, that will help change the sector. Exclusion is not the way.

- Students are already being trained with a lot of knowledge and ideas about where the climate needs to go.

### Final thoughts from participants

- The price per share of fossil companies has not gone down lately. I want to collaborate but I am still standing on the other side, because we need a loud signal. I only want to collaborate if it really contributes to transition. And I want to stay away from anything that has a risk of greenwashing.
- Fossil companies have lost their moral license; there is a total mix of political and economic power. They are intertwined with society and have long been perceived as a force of good. But they are not. Their history is one of opposition in every form. We are here at the university for truth-telling; so we simply cannot cooperate with them.
- Two important things to keep in mind: first, the timeframe. We have known since 1990 that we have to reduce emissions. What is the track record of the companies in doing this? They have always put profit maximization above livability of people and planet. So: we have to put strict conditions on all companies we want to work with. What is their ultimate value: is it profit maximization? Then we don't collaborate.  
Second, I hear a lot of technology arguments. But what is the evidence for these? How scalable are those technologies? We have ten years. So companies have to make commitments.
- The fossil industry is the biggest delayer in the energy transition. Maybe something new will be discovered, but we have been at it for so long. What we can do now, immediately, is to stop emitting.
- Many arguments include something about "in the future": but only in twenty years, the current students would be part of an executive board. And so you give the problem back to the students once again. But the few students who are here now, want to see action. I haven't seen anything change in recent years.
- I was involved in the campaign to make ABP greener. ABP's conclusion was: we don't have enough influence on the companies we invest in. So we're cutting ties with them. It's all about the social signal there. That values aspect resonates very much in society: it's about values and basic morality.
- Image is very important in this discussion and is a great strength, in addition to the knowledge and insights we can provide. Purely through image, the idea arises that we can solve the nitrogen crisis. But in fact, we can't.
- As a university, we must take a moral stand on these collaborations. Pragmatic, technological objections must be given a place within a moral framework. The decisions must have a moral character, to which an appendage can be given with practical objections.
- Compare this problem to the tobacco industry: suppose they were to say "We want to develop a less harmful cigarette". We as a university would not cooperate with that either. Because we want a totally new alternative.
- I think that in fifteen years, we will be facing fossil as we are now facing tobacco. So why don't we take a stand now? The methods of fossil are exactly the same as those of tobacco twenty years ago.
- Our students today will probably not be members of the executive board twenty years from now, that will probably take longer. Indeed, I do not want to use students to solve the problem for us later. But the question is: what is realistic?
- I only want cooperation on projects with an eye for society and transition.



- A clear moral standpoint of Utrecht University can contribute to the mental health of staff and students.
- Why are we really only talking about the fossil industry? Why not make a list of ten commandments for all companies? I think it should be broader.
- Moral positions tend towards dogmatism. On the contrary, I am in favor of dialogue. Utrecht University should not be acting as a moral police.
- If fossil cannot invent a new product, there will soon be no fossil industry. For me, that is related to making new, sustainable, circular inventions.
- It's not a bad idea that everyone, so all parties we work with, have to comply to existing human rights. A set of basic values that you strive for collectively is pretty normal, right?
- You have the planetary boundaries framework: a framework within which you can work while keeping the earth livable for the human species. But you can also say: that framework doesn't interest me. There is no morally neutral position, so boundaries for the industry would be a good thing.
- Will we soon have this dialogue about other companies and parties too? Because where does it end?
- We have codes of conduct and a code of scientific integrity at UU. These already impose many norms and values.

Read the various codes of conduct at Utrecht University here:

<https://www.uu.nl/en/organisation/about-us/codes-of-conduct>

## Closing remarks

What argument came in and what does that say about you?

- The urgency is felt on both sides. The students here have been struggling for four years or longer, and have not seen any change. But also the urgency among researchers working on inventions needed for transition.  
That gave me the insight that I also feel the turmoil of urgency. I've wanted to contribute for twenty-five years, and it's super hard, it still only half succeeds.
- I was on the side in favor of collaboration a lot. I get angry when I hear that large parts of fossil companies' profits are not used for the energy transition. Companies are too concerned with shareholders and fringe issues. I feel internal conflict and anger. I begin to feel the urgency more and more.
- I am being tossed back and forth by the signal argument and technology argument. Can I look myself straight in the eye in a few years? That hit me more than I thought it would when I came in at 9 AM today. I doubt if I am doing enough? Does it take more than what I can currently contribute?
- What affected me deeply is how much influence fossil has on people's lives now. It's not just about what happens within UU; it affects all people. We can take a step in that now. So I'm very motivated to continue in climate activism for a long time. I feel the drive.
- I often walked back and forth today because I struggle with my personal opinion and the role of the university. What is the position of science in this discussion? What role does UU have, what role do I have myself and what can I actually do?
- What was positive for me is that when we spoke about a potential moral framework, many people moved in that direction. Within that moral framework, we can talk about exceptions. It positively surprised me how many people shared that view. The emphasis of the university is too much on knowledge, and too little on values and morality. Its influence is



underestimated because we are a knowledge-based institution. We should not participate in crime out of idealism.

- The morality point actually made me uncertain, because are we going to make it on moral appeal? First I was on the technological side, but we have to come to action. Action works. But what kind of action? What kind of agenda should the university lay down?
- On what basis do we actually do things? We are a knowledge institution, first and foremost. But we know much less about what our public role is. Assumptions play a big role there, we don't have much knowledge about that (yet). The choice of a moral framework cannot be 100% knowledge-based, and that might be weird for a university.  
We don't know the consequences of immediately cutting off all collaborations. Still, that is what we should do if you follow the reasonings of the activists present today. So it is difficult to take a stand because of our own lack of knowledge and knowledge of the consequences. We have to weigh that against the signal function of breaking up collaborations.
- The analogy with the tobacco industry hit me. In the end, that ban had an effect. That fanned my sense of urgency. If we do nothing now, nothing is going to change. Academia has more influence than we might think.
- What hit me was collaboration: I think that's important. We all want change, and we have to do it together. That's why I get emotional and a little angry. For me, fossil is a wrong partner. From my generation, I often feel that we are not listened to. Look at the Fridays4Future protests: young people are taking to the streets all over the world, but people in positions of power – often old, white, cis men - are not listening. They don't work with us, they prefer to work with the old, colonial companies. That's why I think cooperation is so important.
- We should not let fossil companies dictate the agenda. We can go to court for a carbon tax: to skim off the huge profits.
- Fossil is entrenched throughout society. We are dependent on it. So if you oppose the arguments for a moral framework, you are very deeply woven into this dependency.
- I think the comparison with the tobacco industry is not quite right: because the world does not depend on cigarettes for all its materials. We have to take that into a moral framework.
- Personal stories emerged from both sides. For example, dilemmas about your (grand)children, and explaining to them how you have tried your best. That is transcendent beyond the parties. There is more that binds us than we realize.  
> This sentiment was shared by almost the entire room.
- Both sides were not as far apart as you might think. The dialogue was nuanced but tougher action is needed.
- What touched me was how honest people were in their doubts today: I myself probably think too easily about certain opinions sometimes.
- I often heard the term risk when we talk about stopping collaborations. For me, that is a realization of how far apart we are: because for me, the risk is in saying "we hope they change," or "we hope they do X or Y in 10 years."  
So I realize that despite having the same goal, we have very different positions in how to achieve it. I have lost the faith in recent years. But with others, it's still there.
- What gets me is urgency, but the question remains how we are going to take action. So we have to change things in our behavior. How strict do we want to be in our own actions? Think about flying, driving a car, and other everyday things. I struggle with that; because then we can't really do that either.

- On the contrary, there is a lot we can do. For example, making suggestions about how profits should be used differently. People can continue to talk to people who work in the fossil industry.
- My insight is that we need to have this debate with people from more universities, and with more students.

#### Central closing remarks

Yonathan asks the attendees to rate the session: a 1 stands for useless and a 5 stands for very good and useful. One attendee raises their hand at rating 1, zero at rating 2, then about 20 people at rating 3, 20 at the rating 4, and a few hands at rating 5. When asked if people were inspired by the meeting, most hands go up. Comments that were shared by attendees:

- I have not heard any argument that I have never heard before. We didn't talk about what would actually happen if we cut ties or not. The debate was ideological rather than what a university should be concerned with.
- This meeting gave me hope because many people appear to feel something about UU taking a clear moral standing on this topic.
- I am skeptical about what will really happen with the proceedings from this session and the next.

Then Yonathan summarizes the session in an audio file (in Dutch), and Henk Kummeling closes the session.