

Intimate ties between Erasmus University and the fossil fuel industry

ROTTERDAM - The largest faculty of the Erasmus University, the Rotterdam School of Management (RSM), is highly entangled with fossil fuel energy companies like Shell, and in this way facilitates climate change. That is the main conclusion of a research published today by Changerism.¹

The report reveals, among other things, that Shell and RSM have contractually agreed that the company may influence student profiles and curricula. Shell also co-participates in formulating RSM's strategy, and annual dinners are held where RSM's activities are coordinated with the oil and gas major.

The ties also influence research carried out by the business school. RSM conducted research for NAM (Shell & ExxonMobil), Shell, GasTerra (the Dutch State, Shell, ExxonMobil) and GDF Suez (Engie) with the aim of contributing to a "broadly shared 'license to operate' of the gas sector", in response to resistance against gas production in the Netherlands. Shell also paid RSM for research that advised to reduce tax burdens on multinationals. Later, one of the authors, RSM professor Henk Volberda, successfully called on the government for far-reaching tax cuts. He did this on grounds of the research, without mentioning it was paid for by multinational Shell.

Vatan Hüzeir, Director of Changerism and lead author: "In various ways RSM supports business models that depend fundamentally on fossil fuels production and consumption. That makes the faculty complicit in facilitating climate change. In addition, the far-reaching conflation between science and industry undermines the societal role of universities and their independence. We ask the Erasmus University and other institutions to critically review their ties with the fossil fuel industry in face of the urgency of climate change."

Worldwide it is the first time a public institution is subjected to such research. Derk Loorbach, professor of socio-economic transitions at Erasmus University: "This research shows clearly that the ties between the university and the fossil fuel industry are not only self-evident and intricate, but also that they are much too involved. It is not only time to divest, but also to disconnect these relationships."

In addition to a description of the ties with the fossil fuel industry, research also shows that financial pressure and dependence on education rankings are systematic incentives that encourage the intensification of those ties.

The research will be presented to the Executive Board of Erasmus University on a yet to be specified moment.