

THE UNIVERSITY REBELLION MANIFESTO





PREAMBLE

In this manifesto a concise overview of the climate & ecological crisis, its relation to global injustices, the fossil fuel industry, and the role of universities is given. Each of these chapters builds up to the vision that we express in our demands for all Dutch universities. This manifesto is a result of contributions of students and scientists of all Dutch universities. The manifesto is written from a western, European perspective, by people with an academic background and knowledge which derives from this specific context, aimed at acting on the frameworks of our modern society. Our experiences are diverse and international, but we recognize they are a fragment among the many epistemologies, beliefs, and ways of life that are shared by many other communities in the world. We call upon injustices which affect other communities, not in an attempt to speak for or to empower, but to raise awareness within our society and institutions, and encourage the people around us, and the people in power, to acknowledge, to listen and give space to the voices and ways of being of others. Our aim is to transform Dutch universities by publishing our demands and through actions that raise awareness about these issues. The chapters in this manifesto form the legitimisation for our demands as University Rebellion.

“In the course of history, there comes a time when humanity is called to shift to a new level of consciousness, to reach a higher moral ground. A time when we have to shed our fear and give hope to each other. That time is now.”

- Wangari Maathai

THE CLIMATE AND ECOLOGICAL CRISIS

During the 1960s and 1970s it became increasingly clear that our climate is warming due to the emission of greenhouse gasses¹⁻⁵. This led to an international climate conference in Geneva in 1979, which acknowledged that global warming is human-made, warned of its consequences, and called for urgent action⁶. Since then, the call for action has become more and more urgent while yearly greenhouse gas emissions have kept rising and are now 57% higher as compared to 1990.^{7,8} In 2018 the IPCC urged governments to stay below 1.5 °C of global warming to prevent mass extinction of species and limit the risk to "health, livelihoods, food security, water supply, human security, and economic growth"⁹. However, in 2019 the Earth had already warmed by more than 1.1 °C since pre-industrial times¹⁰.

At current emission rates, we only have approximately seven years left before we have depleted the carbon budget that corresponds to 1.5°C of global warming^{9,11}. However, we might even prematurely reach 1.5 °C. This is because most models used by the IPCC include negative emissions while they do not include all existing positive feedback loops⁹. Moreover, there is still a 33 % chance that we will exceed 1.5 °C of warming even if we do not deplete the carbon budget⁹.

Anthropogenic global warming initiates positive feedback loops which consequently amplify the warming process¹². Some positive feedback loops, such as the melting of the ice caps, thawing of the permafrost, and forest fires, have already been set in motion^{13,14}. The natural emissions caused by these decrease the 1.5 degrees carbon budget significantly. Above 2 °C of temperature rise, there is a serious risk that certain tipping points may be reached causing positive feedback loops to uncontrollably accelerate. If these tipping points are reached, global warming will continue irrespective of whether anthropogenic emissions are halted or not, leading towards a "Hothouse Earth" pathway^{12,15}.

Amongst countries, there is a serious lack of action in the face of an obvious crisis. At the moment, only two countries are reaching the targets of the Paris Agreement¹⁶. To make the situation even more pressing: Even if all countries were to reach their self proposed targets, there is only a 1 % chance of staying below 1.5 °C by 2100 and it is most likely we will reach approximately 3.2 °C of global warming, a temperature that has been warned to have catastrophic impacts¹⁷.

Not only are we in a climate crisis but we are also facing an ecological crisis. The climate crisis, combined with other anthropogenic pressures like the over-exploitation of animals, habitat destruction, pollution and introduction of invasive species, are driving the ecological crisis^{18,19}. The situation is so dire that biologists have long suggested we could be already witnessing a 6th mass extinction. Species are going extinct with a rate of tens to hundreds times the natural background rate^{20,21}. Moreover, it is expected that over 1 million animal species will be threatened with extinction by 2050¹⁹. Ecosystem services around the world, on which the survival of humankind depends, are in the process of collapsing¹⁹. Therefore, we are facing a huge risk that we will not be able to sustain a growing human population.

Moreover, the role of mass animal agriculture in this is profound, even if most ethical considerations are left aside. Animal agriculture uses 70% of the overall agricultural land and a third of the available plough-land. It is thereby responsible for a large share of natural habitat and biodiversity loss²². Furthermore, land use for soy production to feed livestock is the main driver of deforestation world wide^{23,24}. The leader in this process is Brazil at still accelerating rates^{25,26}. What's more, Dutch financial institutions such as ING, ABN Amro, Rabobank, and the pension fund ABP, still support deforestation by funding the soy and meat industry²⁷. Such deforestation and greenhouse gas emissions by livestock are responsible for 12-18% of the total greenhouse gas emissions^{22,28}. That said, using the available crops only for feeding humans could increase available calories by as much as 70%, thereby solving the challenge of feeding the growing world population²⁹.

The climate and ecological crisis is a moral and ethical issue, projections expect 140 million climate refugees by 2050 and according to the most conservative estimates 250.000 humans will die annually between 2030 and 2050 due to impacts of the climate crisis such as diseases, food scarcity, water scarcity and extreme weather events^{30,31}. This will almost certainly exacerbate civil unrest and military conflicts³².

Even though countries in the Global Southⁱ are barely responsible for the climate crisis, they will be disproportionately more affected than countries in the Global North, which have been and continue to be the largest contributors to greenhouse gas emissions. There is no other conclusion possible than that the climate crisis is a harrowing violation of human rights and a prime example of global injustice³⁴.

ⁱWe use the terms Global North and Global South to describe different statuses within the global context without using negative descriptions such as poor/developing countries which reproduce racist and classist structures. This naming goes far beyond the geographic location and relates to different experiences people have made with colonialism and its consequences. Therefore, people can live in the Global North, but still belong to the Global South, as well as the other way round³³.

GLOBAL JUSTICE

During the 15th, 16th and 17th centuries - a period commonly known in the Netherlands as the "Golden Era" - European ships arrived at many shores across the globe. Ever since that time, Europeans have acted as an invasive, violent and wealth seeking colonising force. From Asia to Africa to South America, 'modernist ideals' or rather dehumanization, destruction and environmental degradation was enforced. This resulted in, among other things, the assault on local knowledge and indigenous communities³⁵. Unsustainable land use was the norm - continuous exploitation of arable land and extraction of commodities, often leaving previously fertile and lush areas barren and lifeless^{36,37}. Large-scale deforestation^{38,39} had dramatic effects on water bodies, caused soil erosion and led to the extinction of much wildlife^{40,41}. The extraction of minerals such as phosphate, gold, and silver led to extreme changes in the functioning of ecosystems^{42,43}.

These dominating and exploitative modes of interacting, both of non-human nature and of humans, permeate our society today, still, around 600 years later. They are visible in what is called the 'coloniality of power'ⁱⁱⁱ. The Global North is depicted as modern, superior and civilized while the non-European, is seen as the 'primitive other', to be forced into the modernist ideals of development. Genocides of (native) populations,⁴⁴ the destruction of indigenous lands, amid other human rights violations continue to justify a supposed journey towards human civilization⁴⁵. It is hugely evident that Global North countries continuously exploit Global South countries in various ways.

Many direct violations of human rights and unsustainable practices in the Global South are largely performed by companies from the Global North. An example of this was the oil spills caused by the Dutch company PlusPetrol, where 2000 different locations in the Amazon were affected, leading to the contamination of the lands of indigenous Achuar, Kichwa and Quechua communities. Contaminated lands are associated with health issues such as "high levels of cadmium and other heavy metals in blood, miscarriages, diarrhea and skin diseases"^{46,47}. Numerous other examples can be found where violence and human rights violations follow the presence of multinational companies in the Global South.⁴⁸ The discoveries of coal-rich grounds in the north of Colombia caused around 57,000 peasants to be displaced and 6000 to be killed between 1997 and 2003⁴⁹. In Nigeria, multinational oil corporations have been found to be complicit in forced displacement, beatings, murder and rape⁵⁰. These examples make it unarguably clear how the exploitation of natives and their land continue today under the guise of 'modernity'.

The coloniality of power additionally manifests itself in more indirect ways. The Global North is largely the biggest driver of climate change. From 1751 to 2017, Europe and North America together have emitted 62% of all carbon emissions⁵¹, while they hold less than 15% of the world's population⁵². The per capita carbon footprint of many Sub-Saharan African countries is more than 100 times lower than that of the Netherlands.⁵¹

Nevertheless, countries that contribute the least to the climate crisis are the ones who suffer the most from it. A global temperature increase of 2 degrees will have devastating effects in countries that find themselves oppressed by the coloniality of power. Statistics confirm this by large: Global South countries bear 99 % of all deaths caused by weather-related disasters⁵³. Moreover, countries in the Global South often have fewer possibilities to adapt to changes induced by the climate crisis, due to a lack of resources⁵³. This unequal vulnerability causes and will continue to lead to mass migration of an unprecedented scope. As many as 130 million people are expected to be displaced alone due to the effects of desertification by 2045 - 60 million of which from Africa⁵⁴.

The coloniality of power also becomes visible in the increased vulnerability of indigenous peoples. The interdependence between indigenous peoples, their lands and the environment makes indigenous

ⁱⁱⁱThe concept of 'coloniality of power' was introduced by Anibal Quijano in 1992. It describes a global structure of power that is centered around the social classification of race that was established by the conquest of the Europeans and continues until today. This concept includes the imposition of Eurocentrism, the perspective of knowledge established in Western Europe during the 17th century, which creates a pyramid of power that places the colonizer at the top and the colonized at the bottom.³⁷

peoples highly vulnerable to climate change⁵⁴. The responsibility of governments to protect indigenous communities and guarantee environmental and territorial preservation of the lands they occupy, is granted in Convention 169 of the International Labour Organization (1989) and the UN Declaration of the Rights of the Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) of 2007^{55,56}. These documents state the right of indigenous communities to be fully included in consultation and decision-making processes on exploration and exploitation of (natural resources on) their lands⁵⁷. Sadly though, these rights are often violated. Structural discrimination of indigenous communities is still commonplace, land-grabbing is frequently seen and megaprojects continue to start without prior consent from indigenous communities^{58,59}. In fact, indigenous activists face an even higher rate of violence and homicide than non-indigenous activists; and extreme violence, disappearance, rape, torture, forced displacement, murder and even massacres are repeatedly seen in the contexts of land development. As it remains difficult for indigenous communities to access national justice systems, impunity often prevails^{58,60}.

Discrimination, and therefore increased vulnerability often intersects on multiple levels. Women*ⁱⁱⁱ, especially women* of colour and indigenous women*, constitute a vulnerable group within society. Due to persisting gender inequalities, women* find themselves in vulnerable positions, having a lower income and higher unemployment rate, being dependent on male family members and being at risk of becoming victims of rape and other sexual violence. With an increased risk of climate change, these inequalities will only increase^{38,61}.^{iv}

We have shown how the climate crisis should be understood in a wider socio-historic context. The domination by the Global North makes this an extremely unjust crisis. It is based upon racism, sexism, trans- and xenophobia and many other forms of discrimination that arise from a history of exploitation of the other. We, as students and university staff from the Global North must therefore recognize our responsibility and our role within the global context and must act accordingly.

ⁱⁱⁱIn this text, we use the asterisk "*" to include gender identities that find themselves beyond the binary, such as trans*, non-binary*, and inter*. With this we also refer to female-socialized and femme perceived individuals, since society tries to pressure them into the binary gender structures³³.

^{iv}We realize that there exist many more groups that suffer from discrimination and that are therefore more vulnerable to climate change. Since, unfortunately, the list is extremely long, we could not include all groups, but only a few that should serve as example for how certain groups are more vulnerable due to the domination of some.

THE FOSSIL FUEL INDUSTRY

The fossil fuel industry is a particularly malignant industry, being one of the main drivers causing the climate and ecological crisis, in addition to being a prime example of neo-colonialist extractivism. The 20 largest fossil fuel companies together are responsible for more than a third of the global CO₂ and methane emissions since 1965^{62,63}. Next to this enormous contribution to global warming, the extraction of fossil fuels threatens biodiversity, even far beyond the near surroundings of extraction sites⁶⁴. Furthermore, the desirability of fossil fuel extraction in the future is highly questionable: over 80% of coal, 50% of gas, and 30% of oil currently discovered needs to stay in the ground to remain below 2°C of warming⁶⁵. We cannot, by any means, go to 2 degrees, due to the enormous risks this entails⁹. Therefore, the amount of fossil fuels which need to stay in the ground are even higher. The fossil fuel industry does not seem eager to change course, however. Big oil companies made extraction investments in 2018 that are not in line with the 2016 Paris agreement⁶⁶. Moreover, the investments in renewables of major oil companies in 2018 were only one percent of their total investments⁶⁷, while falsely claiming to be in line with the Paris agreement⁶⁸. Manipulation like this is common in the fossil fuel industry, as these companies have led and funded misinformation campaigns^{69,70} and have kept insights about their climate impact in secrecy for decades⁷¹. Internal reports stated – already in the 1980s – that large scale CO₂ emissions would lead to multiple degrees of global warming and meters of sea level rise^{70,72,73}.

The mere existence of the ever-hungry fossil fuel industry lies in great tension with its *modus operandi*: the extraction of inherently scarce natural resources. The necessity to continuously find new extraction sites has direct and indirect implications on communities and their (human) rights worldwide. The injustices and human rights violations that arise from the practices of the fossil fuel industry, are present all over the globe and can be seen all along the supply chain^{74–78}. Especially at extraction sites these injustices occur, since pollution there is often under-studied, this leads to so-called 'sacrifice zones'⁷⁹, which are zones that become uninhabitable due to pollution and destruction of the ecosystem.

From the above analysis it should have become clear that the fossil fuel industry is an example of an industry which through its mere continued existence causes tremendous environmental and social harm. While not disregarding the significant impacts of other industries, the mere continued existence of the fossil fuel industry, in contrast to other industries, represents a threat to all life on earth. Moreover, the fossil fuel industry is particularly strongly interwoven with Dutch universities, and therefore universities legitimise and sustain the destruction caused by the fossil fuel industry.

Fossil-fuel companies aim at maintaining present industry-university collaborations using effective marketing strategies. For instance, mere job adverts on student associations' web pages, combined with sponsorships of certain events, already have impacts on future employment decisions of graduates⁸⁰. Research showed that pictorial display of sponsorship through brand-logos fosters brand awareness, and memory, especially when congruence is high^{81,82}. On top of that research found that brand logos, and other brand exposure can prime, hence subconsciously influence, people to act similarly to the brand characteristics⁸³.

Involvement in the above-mentioned practices stand in gross conflict with the goals and principles of universities. The fossil fuel industry influences a multitude of processes inside Dutch universities, such as research cooperation, advisory boards and career events. For example, an extensive report shows the collaboration of the Rotterdam School of Management with the fossil fuel industry⁸⁴. In the summary that the Stockholm Environment Institute wrote for the UNFCCC stated⁸⁵, "We are now at a turning point where policymakers and civil society are realizing that managing the transition away from fossil fuels is an essential element of achieving climate goals." In our opinion it is time for universities to realise the same.

THE ROLE OF UNIVERSITIES

Neoliberalism and the subsequent marketisation of our universities puts profits over people and the planet, perpetuating inequality and exploitation. Higher education institutions are increasingly ruled by a market logic which calls for the generation of economic profit, rather than the dispensation of knowledge to the population⁸⁶. This leads to a decline in independent knowledge and allows corporations to influence our education. Universities are increasingly mirroring the behaviour of capitalist market bodies and therefore strengthening those structures that are responsible for the climate and ecological crisis we are facing today^{87–89}. Therefore, the university has the duty to decrease the influence of profit-driven bodies on our education.

Within our society, universities should serve as independent knowledge provider for the population and politicians. Decisions within national policy making must be based on the most recent scientific research, regarding emergencies such as the climate and ecological crisis⁹⁰. Concerning these current crises, politicians tend to ignore the most recent scientific predictions. This "science-policy gap" arises from a lack of transdisciplinarity and communication between science and politics⁹¹. Scientists must speak up and demand change, because inaction is a political act endangering millions of people and other species. Scientists and other academics both have the knowledge of the lethal severity of the crisis, as well as authority toward the public and politicians in their fields of expertise. As such, scientists and other academics have a moral responsibility to call for radical change, in accordance with the IPCC and IPBES. For the reasons mentioned above, it is the duty of the university to take a stance and close the knowledge gap to make politicians listen and act according to the most recent scientific findings. At the same time, it is the duty of the university to create critically thinking students that are aware of this gap and that are able to fight against it. Topics such as global and social injustices are often left out of the curriculum, students are often not aware of the Global North perspective they have on knowledge. Students and staff must become aware of their privileged position as a university of the Global North. The University has the duty to teach about personal responsibilities within a global context of racism, sexism, and all other forms of discrimination to make everyone understand the socio-historical context of the climate and ecological crisis.

If universities want to play an active role in the fight against severe social, economic and climate issues, they must transform the university and create an educational model that enhances the students' and staffs' perception and awareness around these issues⁹². The university community must become aware that "rapid, far-reaching and unprecedented changes in all aspects of society" is needed to achieve the 1.5 °C target⁹. Universities are a strong pillar of authority and play a significant role in shaping society. Therefore, they must use their capacity to pressure the government to action, since universities are essential to transforming society to achieve long-term sustainability⁹³. Universities can no longer pretend that solving the climate crisis is possible by using recyclable cups and separating waste. They must create critical and aware students, take responsibility in providing knowledge to both government and society,

OUR DEMANDS

The following demands are based on and justified by the discussion above. The university community must understand the urgency of the climate and ecological crisis. The demands under *Tell the Truth* are the easiest to implement, while the demands *Act Now* and *Let the Community Decide* follow naturally when acknowledging the severity of the crisis we find ourselves in. Immediate radical action is essential and due to the severity of the matter at hand we, *University Rebellion*, must take action if the universities decide to ignore our demands.

Tell the Truth

Declare the climate and ecological emergency with a call for social and climate justice.

Several governments and universities have declared the climate and ecological emergency in order to acknowledge the crisis and to increase awareness. We demand universities to release a joint public declaration which condemns government inaction on climate change mitigation. The declaration should present the crisis as one that affects humans and stresses the global injustices arising from it.

Educate about the climate and ecological crisis and its root causes.

Currently, high schools and universities barely educate on the climate and ecological crisis and its socio-historical context, such as the underlying colonialist structures. Therefore, students are not aware of the severity and complexity of the current situation. Universities and other educational institutions must introduce compulsory courses to enhance awareness of their position as a university of the Global North, address the crises, and their socio-historical contexts.

Teach the truth to citizens.

The public is not sufficiently educated about the climate and ecological crisis. It is the universities' duty as independent educational institutions to also teach the public in an audience-suitable manner.

Act Now

Demand action from the government.

The government is not living up to its responsibilities in climate mitigation. Therefore, universities must pressure the government to do so. Universities should provide the necessary scientific data, tools and scenarios to aid this process.

Become carbon neutral by 2025.

Universities are still emitting greenhouse gases through energy usage in their buildings, transport and food sales on campus. Becoming carbon neutral includes direct emissions such as emissions from buildings, as well as indirect emissions such as emission from transport, energy production and food.

Offer only plant-based food in university canteens.

The university should significantly decrease their indirect greenhouse gas emissions by exclusively offering plant-based food in their canteens.

Cut ties with the fossil fuel industry.

Dutch universities are strongly linked to the fossil fuel industry, most notably to Royal Dutch Shell. We demand that universities take immediate action to stop the involvement they currently have in the destruction done by the fossil fuel industry and other harmful industries. Due to the issue's complexity, the demand is subdivided into specific measures that have to be taken.

- **Ban fossil fuel marketing.** Fossil fuel marketing is all over university buildings and fossil fuel companies are often present at career and educational events, offering jobs and internships to students. To stop giving these companies a social licence, we demand a ban on the presence of fossil fuel companies in university buildings.
- **Cut research and educational collaborations with fossil fuel companies.** Universities work together with fossil fuel companies in their research and education. Although we recognize that there is a severe lack of funding by the government, going down the road of public-private partnerships is not a solution and can result in strongly biased knowledge.
- **Minimize the influence of fossil fuel companies on university governance.**
- **Demand that banks and insurance companies divest from harmful industries.** Most universities employ financial service providers that invest in harmful industries^v, among which is the fossil fuel industry. If no significant improvements are made, we demand that the university switches to more sustainable and socially responsible providers.
- **Hold the pension fund ABP accountable.** Dutch universities are obliged to pay into the pension fund ABP, a pension fund that invests *inter alia* in the fossil fuel industry. We demand that universities do everything within their means to pressure ABP to divest from harmful industries like the fossil fuel industry.

Address internal discrimination.

Universities must create ways to anonymously report instances of discrimination - such as the racial discrimination aforementioned - where they are taken seriously and thereby change is generated. Dismantling colonialist structures underlying the climate and ecological crisis begins with fighting instances of discrimination at our universities. People experiencing discrimination can no longer remain unheard.

Diversify the student and staff body, to achieve a diversity in knowledge.

We need a diversity of perspectives to understand the socio-historical context underlying the climate and ecological crisis. Therefore, the university must broaden their traditional ways of learning and open up to non-Eurocentric perspectives. This means that the university takes concrete steps to create and sustain the environment necessary for equal contribution and experience for everyone.

^vHarmful industries include, among others, the fossil fuel industry, weapon industry and mining industry.

The Community Decides

Establish a student and staff assembly.

Currently, universities are managed in an undemocratic way. Although a university council is a democratically chosen body, it has a solely advising role. Because of this, university politics are not engaging, which results in very low voter turn out. The current policy making results in a system where universities are increasingly governed as market bodies. Independent research and education is under pressure and universities continue to have a responsibility in world wide human right violations. An inclusive deliberative democratic system is a crucial base for universities to design, implement and evaluate the university's policies. Therefore, the university must launch a student and staff assembly which creates a comprehensive set of (climate) policies and monitors their implementation. The assembly is a group of randomly selected^{vi} students and staff, representing the university community, in which marginalized groups are sufficiently represented.

^{vi}Selected people have the right to refrain from participating. Furthermore, members of the assembly should be compensated for their efforts.

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