

Welcome Roelien Ritsema van Eck, Erasmus Sustainability Days

Monday 4 March 2019

Dear students,

On behalf of the Executive Board I'd like to welcome you to the Erasmus Sustainability Days. It's great to see you here at this opening ceremony. It shows that you care about sustainability, and that you care about your university.

I'm sure that today and the next three days will be both inspiring and insightful. I hope we can inspire you to become even more familiar with sustainability.

As you probably know I recently joined Erasmus University, as member of the Executive Board. One of the reasons I choose to work for the Erasmus University is that this institution really cares about being sustainable. For me personally sustainability is a far reaching concept. For me it means doing good for society. And for generations to come. In this context I want to tell you a story. These are my three daughters; Sofie, Floor and Lotte. Last summer we spent a couple of weeks in Sweden and we read a book together; 'De Verborgen Impact' written by Babette Porcelijn. It describes the impact of our behavior on the planet, but additionally gives you very practical advice how to live an Eco positive life. One of the decisions we made in order to reduce our footprint is to stop eating meat. So we became a vegetarian family (although I have to admit that I am secretly a flexitarian). It made me feel very proud of these little girls. I want them to treat this planet in a sustainable way and I want them to think of solutions in order to solve the current problems. And that's what I expect from all of you as well. I want to enable you to be part of our changing world.

As you might know, we're working on a new strategic plan leading up to 2024. Amidst all kinds of plans for top education and research, sustainability is an important pillar in the strategic framework. Stepping up our sustainability efforts is one of the 7 priorities. And being sustainable also fits in perfectly with our new mission: creating a positive societal impact.

The beautiful thing is that this 7th pillar was added thanks to you, the students of Erasmus University. It were the students who really convinced us that sustainability should be a separate element in building a new strategy. And you were right, of course.

We'll be presenting this new strategy in a couple of months, but I can tell you that sustainability certainly won't be ignored in the plans. In fact, we're very ambitious - and I like that.

In 2024, we want to be the most sustainable university in the Netherlands. A carbon neutral university. Reaching that goal is not gonna be easy, but I know this university doesn't shy away from a challenge.

So how are we going to achieve this goal?

By making sustainability an important aspect in our daily operations.

By paying attention to sustainably produced food.

By energy savings, smarter waste management and reducing our carbon footprint.

Just to give a few examples: this year, we'll start building a new, energy neutral sports building here at the Plaza. This new building will be fitted with solar panels, and circular materials will be used in the construction.

Also, we'll be putting solar panels on three roofs here at Woudestein. The roof of Theil Building already has a lot of these panels, generating clean electricity. On the ground, more water points will be added.

And a funny detail: every year we're participating in Warm Sweater Day, with the central heating here at Woudestein turned down by 2 degrees. Of course, the Executive Board joins in as well, as you can see here. Unfortunately, Warm Sweater Day this year was quite a warm day, so there was little need to wear a sweater!

Together with students of Erasmus Sustainability Hub, we're creating a campus garden. A garden with its own vegetables and even bee hives! By organizing workshops on growing food, composting and bees, this campus garden has a great potential for awareness. I'd also like to mention the opening of the Erasmus Food Lab, in which a lot of students are involved.

Ladies and gentlemen, stepping up our sustainability efforts also means something else: improving the access to the scientific knowledge we have in this area. After all, we're a university, full of data and insights. With our knowledge, we can have an impact. In the south of Rotterdam for example, our scientists work on improving the sustainability of that area.

But we also need you, students, to reach our goal of becoming the most sustainable university in the Netherlands. I'm glad an increasing number of students and staff realizes that a sustainable way of living – both here, at home and worldwide – is essential. Not just for us, but also for future generations.

I see a lot of great examples. Last year, the first Sustainability Congress took place, attended by both students and staff. Students challenged the Executive Board in giving sustainability a place in the curricula. That is a hefty task, I have to admit. We, the Board, are discussing this with the deans at the moment. I think adding sustainability to the education programme is key in training future leaders.

Back to the Erasmus Sustainability Days. A four day happening, full of workshops, business cases, round table discussions, speeches, film screenings and vegan cooking workshops - organized by a great team of enthusiastic students. I thank you for that!

The theme of this year's Erasmus Sustainability Days is 'breaking the barriers'. For me this means connecting. Connecting disciplines, ideas and generations. Let's join forces in making this university as sustainable as possible. I believe that by doing so, we'll have an impact that far outreaches this campus.

I wish you an inspiring event!