Report development meeting MSc Environment and Society Studies
Date and time: 20th of March 2024, 2.30 - 3.15 pm
Place: Radboud University, Nijmegen School of Management, Elinor Ostrom building, Heyendaalseweg 141, 6525AJ Nijmegen.
Prepared by: Floor Bessems (policy advisor education)

Accreditation panel: Hans Bressers (chair), Sarah Cornell, Ana Vasques, Marisa Beunk (student), Anne-Lise Kamphuis (secretary)
Programme: Ingrid Visseren-Hamakers (Management Team), Adam Calo, Cristina Inoue, Maria Kaufmann, Jennifer Telesca

This development meeting took place on the 20th of March during the site visit in the context of the NVAO reaccreditation of the master's degree in Environment and Society Studies from Radboud University. This report was drawn up by the program and submitted to the panel for approval.

Introduction
The programme prepared two topics to discuss with the panel. First, the programme would like to hear more about their opinion regarding two new specialisations. Secondly, how the programme can position itself among new, similar programmes.

New/renewed specialisations
The programme asks how new specialisations resonate as to where the field is going, and if they are going in the right direction. The panel answered that rethinking specialisations is a positive thing and that they need to understand the lines of the new specialisations.

Environmental Justice and Governance
The programme replaced the specialisation European Spatial and Environmental Planning with a new title: Environmental Justice and Governance. The European aspect is important, but less important than awareness of different value systems. The specialisation addresses multiple issues in the governance space, including the division between global, European, and local perspectives. Some aspects of this division may be artificial, as local inequities can sometimes be produced at a global scale. It emphasizes the importance of considering both human and non-human elements, particularly in understanding the harms experienced by marginalized groups. To summarize, the specialisation revolves around questions of value, the production of marginalization, and how these emerge systemically.

The panel expressed interest in the concept of environmental justice and inquired about the perception and outcome of the pilot. The reply indicated a very positive response to the pilot course Environmental Justice, with broad interest across faculties and engagement in interdisciplinary discussions and real-world applications of concepts. Further discussion ensued regarding environmental justice, particularly in a context where different perspectives coexist. There could be discomfort in discussing issues concerning marginalized communities

in the classroom. Strategies such as using films and bringing in guest speakers were mentioned as ways to diversify voices and perspectives within the course.

The panel values global examples, but it should also be a specialisation with a Dutch and European focus, particularly in light of populist movements and anti-elitist sentiments in the region. The response acknowledged the importance of addressing practical consequences for non-elitist individuals and efforts to integrate such considerations into the programme content.

Questions were raised about the types of students the specialisation aims to attract and whether it seeks to engage a diverse range of perspectives. The programme aims to attract a broad range of students, including those who may initially feel disengaged and hopes to foster a diverse learning community. The upcoming academic year will provide further insight into the student demographics attracted to the specialisation.

The discussion touched upon pedagogical approaches and the importance of offering action-oriented opportunities for students. The programme emphasizes the development of practical skills alongside critical reflexivity, aiming to empower students to take action in addressing environmental justice issues. The panel raised concerns about the risk of overemphasizing certain aspects of inequality in the programme and the need for a balanced approach. The response highlighted the importance of embedding considerations of environmental justice into broader discussions of sustainability and societal transformations. The topic concluded with a commitment to further develop and refine the specialisation in line with the ethos of critical reflexivity and action-oriented learning.

Sustainable Economies and Corporations
The programme renamed the specialisation Corporate Sustainability into Sustainable Economies and Corporations. The renaming highlighted the need to focus on how different firms interact with each other, rather than solely concentrating on individual firms' corporate social responsibility. The course Rethinking Sustainable Economies helps to rethink corporate social responsibility and sustainability frameworks and to analyze interactions between firms on a broader scale. The addition of a more reflective dimension was included in the curriculum.

The panel started a discussion regarding the necessity of educating companies on the broader implications of their actions, particularly about their role within systems and potential legislative changes. The programme noted that efforts to educate companies are already underway, with examples such as deforestation initiatives. The importance of internships within educational organizations was also discussed.

Questions were posed about the inclusion of entrepreneurial start-ups in the programme and whether courses would be added or revised. The programme indicated that internships with smaller start-ups, such as those focusing on zero waste, could be beneficial. Additionally, there is one new course, there were adjustments within other courses and changes to recommended elective courses. The list of elective courses will be shortened.

The programme is in the middle of critically evaluating the programmes' direction and asks whether additional specialisations should be considered. The panel responds that it is better to limit changes in the programme to what can be handled. The programme acknowledged the importance of limiting scope while staying true to core themes and responding to contemporary debates and employer needs. The interface between science and business was highlighted as a key consideration. The programme recognized the need to incorporate new research directions into teaching, highlighting recent hires as a step towards achieving this goal.

Position of the master in the field

The programme states there are upcoming programmes in the same field as Environment and Society Studies, such as the interfaculty programme Science for Sustainability at Radboud University and a likewise programme at the HAN, Applied Sciences. How to manage the positioning of the master in this changing field, and how to maintain and communicate its uniqueness?

The panel acknowledged the importance of occupying a niche and modernizing periodically. They mentioned the significance of providing clear examples of the strengths of the programme. The programme highlighted the international nature of their field, with the recognition that uniqueness within the Netherlands is less crucial than international recognition tied to the strengths. There was a discussion regarding the international position concerning the renewed specialisations.

This topic was not discussed thoroughly, because the emphasize has been put on the other relevant themes. The panel referenced previous experiences with workshops and guest lecturers, suggesting potential collaborations and methods for engaging students in practical change-making efforts.

Closing

The panel really enjoyed being part of the discussion, and how they all try to respond in our teaching to a changing world. The programme thanks the panel for the enriching development meeting.