

SUMMARY SELF-EVALUATION 2019-2024

Guided by the mission 'Integrating knowledge for sustainable societal choices', the Amsterdam Sustainability Institute (ASI) serves as an inclusive umbrella for sustainability-related research at VU Amsterdam. Through inter- and transdisciplinary research, ASI investigates the interactions between people, socio-economic change and the global environment in the ongoing polycrisis and contributes to sustainable societal innovations for the Netherlands, Europe and beyond.

STRUCTURE

Set up as an interdisciplinary research network in 2019, ASI spans across all faculties of VU and has grown a 150-researchers strong community. ASI has a lean organisational structure, consisting of a small management team that reports to the board of deans and is advised by an expert committee.

The network of ASI researchers is organised in seven research clusters:

- Arctic Change
- Behaviour and Governance
- Biodiversity and Natural Resources
- Climate Change and Energy Transition
- Food, Agriculture and Land Use
- Natural Hazards and Society
- Security and Justice

STRATEGY 2019-2024

Our strategic goals were:

1. To build a strong community of VU researchers across disciplines and faculties.
2. To provide a breeding ground for innovative inter- and transdisciplinary research.
3. To be a catalyst for bridging the science-society gap via co-creation;
4. To be a platform for communication, co-creation, valorisation and implementation of sustainability research.

ACCOMPLISHMENTS

The panel highlights ASI's excellence in fostering interdisciplinary collaborations, building bridges to stakeholders and realising societal impact. It finds that "ASI has made remarkable progress in advancing interdisciplinary sustainability research at VU Amsterdam" and that ASI has a "catalytic role, particularly in fostering interdisciplinary collaborations that are unlikely to have emerged organically within existing faculty structures."

Our accomplishments in short:

- A fast-growing and thriving interdisciplinary community across seven research clusters;
- Impactful seed money and innovation booster programmes support 37 research projects with more than 152 researchers across all participating faculties;
- A strong impact network with external partners such as the City of Amsterdam;
- Successful project acquisition with a total volume of 12.9 million EUR;
- Improved national and international visibility via our fellowship programme and expertise centres;
- Lasting policy impact on critical issues such as fossil free research.

KEY FACTS

ASI INSTRUMENTS

- ASI research grants programme
- Expertise centres
- Visiting Fellow programme
- Innovation accelerator
- Events programme
- Communication and outreach programme

RESULTS SEED MONEY PROGRAMME

Projects financed: 37
 Researchers involved: 152
 Follow-up funding acquired: 12.9m EUR

RESULTS EVENTS PROGRAMME

Events organised: 94
 Of which SDG Academies: 17
 Of which events organised by clusters: 22

OVERVIEW OF SCIENTIFIC OUTPUT SUPPORTED BY ASI

Publications¹	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	Forth coming	Total
<i>Article</i>	0	2	3	15	6	7	11	44
<i>Book</i>	0	0	1	1	1	0	1	4
<i>Book chapter</i>	0	0	3	4	0	0	2	9
<i>Conference paper</i>	0	1	2	0	0	2	0	5
<i>Registered report</i>	0	1	0	1	0	0	0	2
<i>Whitepaper</i>	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	1
Total	0	4	10	21	7	9	14	65

FUTURE STRATEGIC FOCUS

- Providing actionable insights for societal challenges
- Securing additional external funding to lessen the dependence on VU funding
- Building a convergence space as a place for innovation and impact
- Improving branding and international visibility as expert for sustainability

¹ These are publications that have directly resulted from ASI programmes and that we were able to trace back, and does not encompass the total output of the researchers linked to our network.

HIGHLIGHTED ACCOMPLISHMENTS

Project acquisition: Festivals as innovative spaces

In 2021, ASI granted seed money to the “Festivals as innovative spaces” project that aimed to explore how music festivals can serve as experimental spaces, or “living labs,” to test innovative sustainable solutions. By using festivals as microcosms of society, the project sought to prototype circular and sustainable systems, such as energy, water, food, and waste management, while fostering cultural norms and practices that promote sustainable communities. The outputs of the project include student projects with external stakeholders, presentations at two academic conferences and at ADE Green, the sustainable conference of renowned Amsterdam Dance Event. In addition, the project is linked to two follow up grants, the smaller EURAM grant and the EUR 3 million NWO grant “Learning from physical experimental environments”, which had been granted to the consortium “EXTRA - From EXperiment to sustainable change: TRAnsformative methodologies for innovation and learning”, a collaboration between VU, TU Delft, WUR, EUR, UvA, and multiple public and private partners, to research and advance physical and experimental environments for learning and innovation.

Policy impact: Fossil-free research framework VU

In 2023, VU decided not to enter new research collaborations with companies of the fossil fuel industry that do not comply with the Paris Agreement. This decision followed an extensive consultative process to which ASI contributed with expert input and by organizing an expert session for decision-makers and the VU community. After the landmark decision had been made in April 2023, ASI was heavily involved in the follow up actions, including a **dialogue series**, which engaged universities, societal partners, and the fossil energy and broader industry sectors to explore the implications of **fossil-free research** and accelerate the energy transition. The process ended in April 2024 with the signing of the VU fossil-free research framework, complemented by a final ASI-organized public dialogue event in De Balie in Amsterdam and a concluding SDG Academy, for which 98 participants from 28 countries registered, reflecting the interest within the higher education sector in this visionary decision. The global attention has been further manifested by the Green Gown Award 2024 which VU had received for its fossil free research framework.

Societal impact: Climate stories for world leaders

“Dear world leaders, many people are blind to the climate crisis...” is the title of ASI's collection of stories about climate change, which had been produced during Sjoerd Kluiving's tenure as VU's fellow of the Anthropocene in 2023. As world leaders gathered at the UN climate summit in Dubai (COP28), amateur writers of the VU community were trained in **storytelling**. Students, employees, scientists, climate activists, professional writers and an indigenous author got together and wrote 22 compelling short stories that addressed the decision-makers at COP28. From true stories to fiction and from cartoons to an AI-generated piece, the 22 stories conveyed urgent messages unified by a common theme: the need for climate action now. While some stories acknowledged the severe impacts of this complex crisis, they also discerned wisdom and hope in human choices in shaping a better future. Most explored deteriorating environments and climates in the not-so-distant future. The result, an interactive digital storybook, was showcased by one of the participants on the stage of the **IUCN pavilion**.