S2 E5 2\_final

**Darian:** [00:00:00] Good morning, Constance.

**Constance:** Good morning, Darian, and good morning, everyone. Welcome to our podcast, Woke as Science.

**Darian:** It's been quite a long time since we recorded our last episode. A lot has happened in the university, in the world as well. And I think maybe that's just us, but we still keep coming back to, I think, one of the questions that drove us to start making this podcast in the first place.

**Constance:** Basically, the question is, what is the role of the university as an institution in the kind of questions that we've been dealing with in this podcast, in questions of public concern that concern and affect all of our community members or many of our community members? And I think since I started the job in the D& I office, I received so many requests or questions of whether a university could issue a statement in favor of or against, you know, [00:01:00] whatever kind of public matter was important at that moment.

And I think we've been trying to figure out in various conversations in the last two years, what actually is the role of the institution? Does the institution have an institutional voice? And how does it use this institutional voice? Or should it use that institutional at all.

**Darian:** I guess one of the, one of my annoying functions in this podcast is to always try to ask for some clarification.

So when we talk about matters of public concern or public issues or public matters, what are we talking about, really?

**Constance:** I think that when you look at some of the broader statements that university have issued, coming to the question of whether university should issue statements at all, It is often subsumed under, like, there's a list, natural disasters, social justice issues, and let's say political conflicts.

**Darian:** So really it's about politics. I think so, yes. It's about where the university should stand, how the university should use its [00:02:00] voice, if it has a voice, if it should use its voice at all. in relation to questions about political conflict?

**Constance:** Yes, I think so. I think we put natural disasters in there, but I think that's, which can also have a political dimension to them, see it clearly.

But I think mostly, yes, it is about political conflict, which could be national political conflicts or are between states or within a state or broader issues like racism, sexism.

**Darian:** It seems pretty clear to me that the university or any university is always a kind of political actor. It's a large employer and universities’ core function is to educate young people, to educate students who will then enter the workforce, who will enter professional life, who will enter civic life, et cetera. On the other hand, universities do research, which has impact in how it is we go about addressing these issues of important public concern or how we issue, how we address these public [00:03:00] matters.

Uh, at the outset, it seems to me, we have to say that universities are always going It's going to be political in some sense. They're never completely outside of the fray of politics. And of course we now see debates in the Netherlands as well as in other countries about how universities will be funded, how that funding depends on the, let's say, political leaning of the governments that come into power in different places.

We're now looking at funding cuts in the Netherlands as a result of the, let's say, quite right wing government that is being formed. So For me, it's, I think it's important to say that outside universes are always political. When we start to talk about having a voice in specific political debates, then, or having institutional voice in specific political debates, then it seems to be something slightly different.

Am I getting that?

**Constance:** I think so. At least that is what we hear and read from the institutional voices themselves, right? There seems to be this attempt to maybe eclipse the kind of [00:04:00] political role that you just sketched when, when, when determining what kind of voice the institution should have in matters of public concern, if we keep it that broadly.

So let's start with the kind of argument that is always put forward, or not always, but is often put forward, why the university should not take a stance in matters of public concern, and that is, I think, the argument that the university is a forum, and a forum for, as you already said, academic research and academic teaching.

It provides an environment in which these core tasks can be fulfilled, and in order to provide an environment in which there's open inquiry, in which different evidence is weighed against each other, in which all of this is possible the university needs to stay - and now comes the, what kind of term are we gonna use?

Universities have used the term neutral, or apolitical, or impartial. or objective. Which of these terms do you [00:05:00] think fits?

**Darian:** Yeah, I think all those terms are probably problematic in different ways. I think we already established that universities are not apolitical in any sense. Universities are political institutions, the way they structure education, the way they structure research has a political impact, uh, plays a role.

And so let's say that dynamics of the political ecologies that they are based in. I think it makes a lot of sense at the outset. So intuitively to say, yeah, universities are forums where all of these matters are public concerns or where political issues among other issues. And also let's say, I mean, also questions about what research we should be doing in areas that may not seem immediately political, but these kinds of questions can be investigated.

And where, let's say, we can have open debate with both sides being taken into consideration, and so on. And I think this is really closely linked to this idea that gets talked about a lot, I think, especially within our community now about academic freedom. And academic freedom being the freedom [00:06:00] that academic researchers have to ask and investigate and investigate.

The kinds of questions that they think are relevant, right? So I don't want to say ask and investigate any questions, but questions that they feel are relevant to the scientific debate and discourse around them.

**Constance:** And I think that is exactly the kind of point when you hear the arguments for not getting involved from an institutional perspective, it is that the institution has to protect this kind of academic freedom that you just sketched from outside pressures because they will always be outside pressures, right?

We are currently experiencing strong outside pressures when it comes to the war in Gaza. But the argument is these kind of outside pressures, we have to protect the university environment from it so that we can actually do our part in also contributing to the, to debates around the, the war Gaza, for example, so that people can do the research within this - I now use the word impartial forum. So it's really that, it's, the framing [00:07:00] is there is from the outside, there's pressures. The role of the institution has to be to keep these pressures out so that within the institution, we can focus on our core function.

**Darian:** There's a kind of strange idea that, yeah, the university has this core function relating to teaching and to research.

I think everyone can admit that this core function or these core functions that universities have are political in nature. So they have a political importance in the, in the countries, in the regions and cities that they are in. And at the same time, the specific type of, let's say, political role that a university has Is to be a kind of forum where ideas matters of public interest matters of public concern matters of public contention can be openly discussed.

Right? So while we admit that universities are political bodies, there's this kind of idea that some sort of insulation is also needed from the outside political pressures, whether those are coming from government, whether those are coming from interest groups, from. Civil society, et cetera, even if universities are [00:08:00] continuously working with those same types of bodies, working with government, working with civil society, working with interest groups, et cetera.

And I think the idea is that if the university takes a specific position on a particular issue of public concern, public contention, on a particular controversy, then that will somehow limit the freedom and the capacity of its researchers to conduct the debate.

**Constance:** Right. The idea would be then that we close the book, science that actually shouldn't be closed.

**Darian:** That we close the book on certain types of questions or that the university, by taking a particular stance, by taking, by making particular types of statements, says, okay, we're not going to, we're in effect, not going to legitimize any more questioning or debate around this specific issue. And I think that is seen perhaps rightfully to a direct threat.

To academic freedom and as a direct threat then to the core functions of the university to be this place of open research. Open learning, open [00:09:00] investigation. Sure. However,

**Constance:** yeah. At the same time, this seems to then as a solution, offer this kind of divide. Or this kind of idea of a bubble that needs to be protected from outside forces, without having any impact on the actual outside forces that also come back in, seems a bit naive.

I understand why, because it is a, I think it's a quite an attractive way of framing it, because it keeps the university, or it keeps the institutional voice manageable. Also in the view of, what then are you gonna say something about, what are you not gonna say something about, right, is it just depending on the amount of pressure where you finally vote to and then say, okay, now I will say something.

So these kind of issues, but also the framing of a forum is just a very clean cut between the university as a former protagonist. I understand why we would go down that road, but I also think it's pretty naive from some of the points that you already sketched. But also for the fact that we seem to only think about the outside pressures coming in, but the fact that we as a university, as you already said, we are an [00:10:00] employer in the region, we can.

Lobby, the kind of science we produce, the knowledge we produce has real life impacts in the world.

**Darian:** Absolutely, and I think it's quite, I'm not, I'm not saying that anyone in the university would deny this, but I think it's quite naive to think that the university or academia can be this kind of open forum where the pressures and the power dynamics that are happening outside of the gates, let's put it that way, don't have some impact on what's going on inside.

And on the other hand, I think the point you just made about, yeah, the impact going the other way is extremely important. Universities do take institutional stances on all sorts of matters of public concern. So whether it's about public health, whether it's about gender equality, whether it's about racial equality, whether it's about socioeconomic questions, Universities themselves, not just the researchers within universities, but universities themselves take [00:11:00] positions and they take those positions, not just by issuing statements, but in the way that we teach, in the kind of programs that get funded, in the type of initiatives that get supported, in where we put money internally for research, etc.

**Constance:** I think that's a really important distinction because often, of course, what is also used as an argument in the kind of university as a forum argument is that, of course, our researchers and students, they have to be able on their own title to say all kinds of things that they can defend with it from their academic expertise.

So that is clear. I think that we can all agree on, right? But then the question is, when is it the institution that actually says something? You already gave some examples of Well, it's actually quite clear that, that the institution, our institution, also takes a pretty clear stand on many things, whether that is in the way with, indeed, what we teach, the curricula that we have, where does the kind of research proposals we select as an institution go to, outside funding [00:12:00] bodies trying to get the funding for it.

So we have quite some control over the kind of topics that we discuss and the framings that we think are appropriate for these topics. Plus, I also think, when you look at mission statements of our university, but of many other universities also, matters of public concern are at the core of how we position ourselves in society, and that is, whether that's sustainability, whether that is inclusivity, global citizenship, global engagement, and Right.

These are not just somewhere mentioned, but they are the core values that the university stands for

**Darian:** and they're highly political. Yeah, I think one distinction that we've seen made by other universities has been that there's a slight difference, right? So we can make a couple of distinctions. So on the one hand, Um, maybe there are some matters of public concern, some questions where there's a kind of broad agreement, right?

So let's say the book has been a little bit closed, right? On [00:13:00] those types of questions. And I think we can point to some of those, but I think as we start to go on and start to look at all the areas in which the university is taking this kind of active political role, it becomes less and less clear. So I think on the one hand, yes, of course, there's The university would say or universities would say questions about gender equality are settled in our society, right?

They're embedded in our constitutions. They're embedded now in foundational documents of the European Union, etc, etc, right? So, Sustainable Development Goals. Sustainable Development Goals might be another, although, of course, now we find the Sustainable Development Goals become increasingly contentious as the political landscape shifts and universities start to take a more and more active and contentious political role.

And the other thing that I was thinking about is, of courses the area that you work in. So, diversity and inclusivity. We might say within the university, yea, of course, these are settled matters, of course the university should be interested in this. But when we look outside the university, when we look at what's happening in government, for example, that certainly doesn't seem to be [00:14:00] the consensus, right?

There's real pressure, real push from outside for the universities to stop doing or stop taking these kind of measures, stop investing in these kind of programs. And that's a political battle that is occurring and the university is taking an active political role in those battles. Now one thing that we've seen is that we could make, maybe make another distinction between you.

Those questions, those matters of public concern or those matters of contention that are directly related to the core functions of the university, so to teaching and to research, and those that are somehow seemingly distinct from the core function of the university. And there I think that distinction that you made a moment ago between the voice of the university has.

And the voice that researchers have, or centers have, or smaller, let's say, bodies have within the university are two different things, right? So on the one hand, researchers in public health or disaster response might make particular, [00:15:00] very politically charged statements about the response to a natural disaster in a specific country.

where the university doesn't have any activity, the university doesn't have any other connections necessarily, but researchers within the university are aware, are studying, are carrying out research, and so they feel qualified to then make statements about that, right? Whereas the university as an institution would say, yeah, we have no voice in this.

We, we don't have a say. We don't really have a legitimate role to play in deciding, for example, how disaster relief is carried out in country X following natural disaster Y.

**Constance:** What you're just saying is basically the university would say, we don't have a responsibility in this, right? I think that is, that seems to be the bottom line here, right?

We don't have a say in this. We are not involved in this. But in the end is we don't see a responsibility for us in this. So we also don't have to.

**Darian:** Yeah, we don't see your obligation. We don't see a responsibility and outside [00:16:00] of the core function of teaching and learning and research, so of running the universities, how a certain government responds to a natural disaster somewhere far away, doesn't have anything to do or has very little to do with how this university or any particular university in the Netherlands, for example, is doing

**Constance:** At the same time, we are also, we have our core functions, teaching and research, and our researchers having the prerogative to say from whatever their academic expertise is, to make statements on all kinds of matters.

But at the same time, I'm also thinking we are also an employer, right? We're not just a forum in that sense, right? We also are an employer, and we also host 25, 000 students. So I think that maybe it's also an explanation why matters like anti racism, gender equality, and other topics that certainly play a role in a political landscape, but why a university might feel more comfortable [00:17:00] also making them their own, because in the end we also have a responsibility towards our own staff and students in making sure, in acknowledging that racism, gender inequality, or any sort of discrimination also exists in our community.

Right, so I could imagine that makes a step easier from the outset pressures when it comes to issues like race anti racism that we can take them on board more easily because we are aware that we also have to cater to our community and to address these issues that affect their work and study or sustainable work and study.

**Darian:** Yeah, so you want to say that the university has competency or has some responsibility Over or in relation to public matters, that issue matters. Public contention that also directly affect community. Right. And when we talk about issues about gender, about race, about inclusion, about social and PO and economic inequality, those of course are also relevant to the university

**Constance:** community.

Yeah, I can imagine that's makes it easier for. An institution to have a voice in these matters because in the end, it does also [00:18:00] affect our community

**Darian:** and it directly, and

**Constance:** therefore the kind of work that we do.

**Darian:** Yeah. And it directly affects the way that we do teaching and the way that we do research as well.

What communities are involved in research, what we, how we participate, where we gather data, how we teach, what kind of methods do we use in our teaching to ensure inclusivity in the classroom, these kind of things. Yeah.

**Constance:** In the episode with Andreas on ‘Is University too the left’, we discussed some of the ideas of the consequences of adopting what some people, what currently, probably currently the Dutch government would consider this woke or left ideas in the way, not only in, in the way that we fashion ourselves as an employer and as an university, because it does have impact on the kind of questions that we will ask on the research that we do and the teaching that we do.

**Darian:** Yeah. So these two things are not at all separate in what we're coming to is there's no way for us to find a formulation where [00:19:00] in some idea of a pure neutral forum for discussion and debate where objectivity reigns supreme, where evidence reigns supreme can, can take place inside the university or outside the university.

There are always going to be questions about internal pressures, external pressures, and also how we simply, how we structure things, right? And of course, if the university is actively engaged in all sorts of initiatives, anti racism, gender equality, whatever you, whatever it might be, That one way or another is going to have some kind of impact on the kind of research, the kind of questions that get debated.

And also the kind of people, I think that was one of the points that Andreas really wanted to make, the kind of people that

**Constance:** So where does it leave us? Where does it leave the institutional voice? When we acknowledge that it is not a clear cut distinction between a forum and a protagonist, the university is both.

It is a forum for academic research and for within the confines of that context to [00:20:00] offer some sort of freedom and doing that research. And it is also a protagonist.

**Darian:** Yeah. So I think that leads us to another kind of sticky question, right? We could make a distinction between the university as an institution, having a voice, making statements on specific issues and also acting in relation to specific issues, right?

And then we make this distinction between that and And individual researchers, individual research groups who have, let's say, a broad, much broader leeway to actively insert themselves into any political debate, right, or any matter of public contention. And that happens in all sorts of different ways, right?

So that happens in what research you choose to do. Even if that research doesn't seem immediately political, but it also, even when that research is, does have obvious immediate political significance, how you address it, what positions you take, what presuppositions you have, what you rule out, et cetera, right?

But I think there is a problem here, right? If we expect the university To start to take [00:21:00] positions on matters of public concern, who speaks for the university, right? So how is it that the university makes those kind of judgments and those kind of decisions, not only as what matters to speak on, but what to say on those matters, what statements to make, right?

And usually when we're talking about the university, right, so the institution, we're actually talking about a group of people who are the upper management of the institution. How is it that group of people who are the ones ultimately who are responsible for these kind of institutional statements, institutional voice, how is it that they make these kind of decisions?

How is it that they, you know, Come to a conclusion about, okay, we're going to make a statement about this, but not this. Right. And we're going to make this statement and we're going to word it in this way. We've seen how this can go, yeah, can get quite messy, right? We're going to make this statement and we're going to word it in this way.

Who speaks for whom, right? And when the institution speaks. Who is it speaking for? What is it? Is it just the higher, the upper management of the institution that it, that the institution represents? Or is it the entire university community? [00:22:00] And if it is the entire university community that is being spoken for, of course, within any community, there's going to be dissent.

But if when the institution speaks, it speaks, for example, on behalf of its staff or its students, what democratic mechanisms or what mechanisms do we have for deciding what that voice should be? And I think this is, this comes back in a way to a point that is often made by our dear colleague, René Gabriels.

This is, yeah, the University needs to be democratized for precisely this reason, because it is a political institution.

**Constance:** Because the democratic structures we have at the moment, they are not built. They are not set up in order to indeed have this kind of representation or to give our executive boards, the Insight and support it needs in order to take such a stance.

No,

**Darian:** certainly not. The, the mechanisms, the checks and balances, the democratic mechanisms that we have are largely their oversight for process, right? And so to ensure as oversight for, for various process and policy or to comment on [00:23:00] policy, the policy largely or entirely, I think, relate what we just, the core functions of the university teaching on the one hand, education and research on the other.

**Constance:** You said something interesting before, because you said, We want the university to take a stance. We want the university to act. I think that is quite important, because when I think of, when people want a statement from the university, that's usually not, it can be the symbolism of a statement, that can be important at times, and it can actually carry weight.

But quite often it is more than that. Because once you issue a statement, there's accountability that you also do something with it. The action. And I think that is what, We, when we talk about statements, we always talk, yeah, we shouldn't take a statement, we shouldn't speak for the whole community, there's all of these arguments coming back.

But I also think in the end, we are scared because once we make a statement, it means that there is accountability on the institution to do something. And are we ready to do that, whatever it then is, and who decides [00:24:00] what is now the right action in order to do something with a statement or the steps that you took?

**Darian:** Yeah, absolutely. A statement is a form of action, right? So speech is a form of action. We accept that. When a person, an individual, or an institution speaks into the world, right, into the, it's a kind of action, and you're right, it also creates then not just expectations, but perhaps a responsibility, right?

So, if you want to be seen, let's say, as a good faith actor, if you want to be seen as a trustworthy and an honest player, In the world of public affairs and public matters and public debate, then you have to actually act on the statements that you make. You can't just make statements and then say, okay, actually, we're just, uh, we're, we're just concerned with our forum, our objective impartial forum.

And we're not really involved in these other debates. Even if we did make a statement about that, we made that because some group. I

**Constance:** think that's the fear, right? That's

**Darian:** the fear. Of

**Constance:** everyone, by the way.

**Darian:** Yeah. Of

**Constance:** groups that push for it, and [00:25:00] of university administration also. But then, okay, let's say we would like some action.

Who then has to take action? Because we are still busy with research and education. Basically, as our researchers and our educators, and everyone facilitating research and education, they are the ones that have to then take action.

**Darian:** I think there, again, it's about, there are two different things. So on the one hand, yeah, Researchers.

And educators are always involved in taking action, right? I think

**Constance:** Not always confined by whatever statement the administration made.

**Darian:** No, certainly not. They take action often independent. Yeah, on the

**Constance:** basis of their expertise.

**Darian:** Exactly. So who is responsible for taking action? I guess it's the, it's the The university, as a bureaucratic machine, is responsible for then taking some action in relation to whatever matter, public interest, public affairs that it's involving itself in.

**Constance:** And now we circle back, I think, to the very beginning, if that is the case. So if the action of, for example, changing our curricula, or of what kind of research questions to ask, what kind [00:26:00] of research is interesting, if these actions do not come like in a grassroots rave from the experts themselves, but are imposed, by making a statement by the university as an institution, where does that leave us with the question of academic freedom?

**Darian:** Yeah, I think that's the major, that's the major concern. So I think the major concern is that once the university starts to take and starts to take positions and starts to act on positions of matters of public concern in relation to politics, for one, there's a question of, you know, who decides what positions to take, who decides when to take a position or when not, who decides when an issue is significant enough.

for the university to take a position. How does this depend on what internal lobbying within the university, internal and external lobbying within the university? And if the university starts to take continuous positions on particular issues, yeah, I think there is a reasonable concern that has a kind of chilling effect on academic freedom.

That creates an impression perhaps [00:27:00] rightly, perhaps wrongly that, okay, only certain types of positions are possible. Let's say welcome or tolerated only certain types of questions really can be asked. There's a certain envelope

**Constance:** and Can I say I want to say two things about this first? Isn't that a naive way of thinking of academic freedom?

There's always an envelope It's not as if now you can ask whatever question you want and that's not just because the book of science is closed by Scientific consensus on some questions, but also because we are operating in a political context Whether it is as in the university context or a national political context or a funding political context You Right, so there's always an envelope.

**Darian:** Yeah, no, I agree with you completely on that. So I don't think that the notion of academic freedom means you can simply ask and try to do research on anything that you want. There are certainly, let's say, external pressures that are then internalized on what kind of questions are legitimate to ask.

Certain types of questions, maybe you can try to ask that question, but you run simply [00:28:00] into a wall of silence around you. And so you're not able to engage with your peers and colleagues in an academic way in relation to those, to those questions. And of course that is a kind of limitation on freedom. And of course there is, we tried to uphold a certain principle or a certain idea of academic freedom.

But of course there are enormous external pressures on what types of questions get asked and what types of questions don't get asked. So

**Constance:** if that's already the case. I think we can, we at least, the two of us can agree on that, that's the case, and I think more people agree on that, that that's the case.

Then it's not anymore a question when it comes to an institutional voice of protecting this kind of freedom, right? The question then becomes, how far can we stretch it, the envelope? How far are we willing to create this kind of framework, not just by external pressures we don't have any control over, But also as an institution by the kind of decisions that we make.

I think that is then the question. It's not an either or question, it's more a question of how far are we willing to create a framework as an institution. You lost me, can you explain [00:29:00] that again? In this kind of, in the debate on this, it is always made into an either or question, right? Either we take a stand and thereby limit academic freedom, or we just protect academic freedom by whatever means necessary.

We just already came to the conclusion that this latter argument, this idea of academic freedom as this whatever existing in some sort of vacuum that doesn't exist, right? So that is why I think this framing as an either or question doesn't work because the question actually that we have, that an institution will have to ask itself is how much more framing or how much more how, what kind of envelope Do we want, in the end, in, in which academic freedom is happening?

**Darian:** Yeah, that's right, and I think that What can we

**Constance:** defend? What can we defend? What, what kind of stance can we actually defend? Because I think it's important enough, we know it might have a chilling effect maybe on the kind of questions that are being asked, but we think this is a, as an institution, we have the responsibility to take a stance here, and we can defend it, and we think it is worth it that the envelope then changes, if you want.

**Darian:** Yeah, I think that's right. And I [00:30:00] think that also really calls into question this notion of institutional neutrality, right? And I think it shows the kind of argument that you're making now, the kind of point you're making now shows that this notion of institutional neutrality, pretty empty. I think, right?

Science, we've talked about this from the very beginning, science, research, academia, education is never neutral. And the kinds of claims that we make, even on the basis of our, let's say, desire to be a sort of a forum for pure research, et cetera, are still not neutral, right? We still say, no, we seek truth, we seek objectivity, we seek evidence, and that evidence, those findings will guide us.

in whatever direction. And once we do that, we're not neutral on anything anymore. So I think there is this real what the point that you make is super important. There is a distinction that comes up between two things that are often conflated on the one hand objectivity and the other hand neutrality and objectivity [00:31:00] in terms of seeking evidence that can be reproduced.

We can talk about all the different ways we can discuss objectivity. Objectivity is certainly not the same as neutrality. In fact, you assume a position of neutrality. When you are not able to be objective, right, when you are not able to refer to evidence, to refer to propositions that you think are true or false, then you say I have to stay neutral on something.

The moment you start to take these kind of positions, if the evidence shows us this, Societal consensus says this, Societal consensus, okay, or I stand behind this, oh this is whatever it is, you're no longer neutral, right, you can still say I make a claim to objectivity, but no longer to neutrality. And I think that's a very important thing that we're, the business that we're in is not the business of being neutral.

**Constance:** Basically, everything that we discussed, it's not about the researchers. It's about the university taking a stand, which is something different than the kind of objectivity that you just read from that. How do you get from the objectivity that you just described to the fact [00:32:00] that the university adds a framework to doing this kind of objective work?

**Darian:** I think that the university, especially public universities, Do share, for the university as institutions, do share with their researchers or their, their teachers a kind of commitment to certain forms of objectivity, to certain, we, we talk a lot about this term, but to certain epistemic values that may not necessarily be shared by other types of institutions, right, in, in, in society, that are not shared, for example, by uh, political parties or lobbying organizations or civil society organizations, which operate in much different ways, right?

Which have certain goals, operate towards those goals. And, and don't have the same kind of commitment to a certain, yeah, to certain forms of epistemic values, to certain forms of evidence based or whatever. However, we, we have constantly discussions about what we mean by these things as well. But I do think that universities as institutions, [00:33:00] not just the researchers, have certain types of commitments, right?

And they have those types of commitments on the basis of the type of institutions that they, that

**Constance:** they are. But then we come back to the point that the institutions, that would basically, what you just said, would. perfectly play into the argument the university should not get engaged in something else because of that specificity of the institution.

But yet we do, because we do, our institutions do.

**Darian:** Yeah, I'm not so sure. I just think that the criteria, maybe we want to say something like the criteria for our engagement or for the institution's engagement. are different than the criteria for other types of institutional institutions and engagement.

The university is not a political party. The university is not a civil society organization. The university is not a business for, so it's a specific type of institution. It has specific type of commitment, for example, to certain forms of objectivity, to certain [00:34:00] processes by which we come to conclusions, et cetera, et cetera.

And on the basis of that, we have to make some or the, the university has to make some kind of institution, has to make some kind of judgments about where it intervenes and where it doesn't intervene and the kind of intervention that it does.

**Constance:** So every time it's a negotiation basically between that kind of responsibility that you just sketched and the other responsibilities when it comes to our own impact in the world.

And responsibility maybe towards external pressures that come in. That this is the constant negotiation between the two, because our main goal is not a political one. Whereas we, you know, university is a political organization. But the main goal is not political.

**Darian:** Well, it depends on how we define a political goal.

I think that the goal of a public university is a political goal. So the widespread access to higher education is in itself a political goal. But okay, I understand what you mean. It's almost a kind of meta political.

**Constance:** Yes,

**Darian:** right. Although actually, These sort of biopolitical goals get more and more called into question.

So I'm not sure everybody agrees that this is a role they should have or that we [00:35:00] have in societal consensus on this, but I think none of this actually solves a problem of how do these judgments get made. So we might say, okay, there are certain contexts, there are certain situations in which it is certainly appropriate for a university to make a judgment in relation to a matter of societal or political contention.

And on the basis of that judgment to make statements to issue or whatever it is. And then also as to act, right? But we still haven't figured out on what basis do we make those judgments? What are the mechanisms for make, for arriving at those positions? But

**Constance:** basically we are now at that point, right? We're not anymore at the point where we can get away with, for anyone get away with this kind of framing.

We are just a form. We don't have to do any, we shouldn't engage in anything.

**Darian:** Yeah, I don't think that makes much sense.

**Constance:** So then the next point is indeed. So if we accept that this is not the case We are a political institution with maybe the political goal of educating and of bringing knowledge to the world Maybe other political goals depending on the context in which you're in we have responsibility we give to ourselves in [00:36:00] educating global citizens who are capable of doing all kinds of beautiful things in the world.

So if we accept all of this, then indeed I think we are left now with the question of how then can we think of a process that gives the institutional voice the kind of support and insights it needs in order to indeed speak for the institution.

**Darian:** I think that's right. And I think Um, we have a, we're faced with the question of does that process within the university somehow mirror the process outside of the university?

So is it a kind of mixture of some forms of democratic decision making together with all sorts of lobbying from all sorts of different places? And so it's not always clear whether it's the minority voice that gets an outsized role. Yeah, I think we are certainly faced with exactly those kind of questions and I think a university Precisely because of the kind of core functions that it has and the kinds of commitments that come with those core [00:37:00] functions is different than a company for itself, right?

Uh, where we have, where you accept, okay, the shareholders have a certain voice and the upper management, whatever, has a certain voice. And maybe there are some democratic mechanisms, maybe there is some countervailing powers from the, from labor organizations, et cetera, et cetera. But a company is owned either by publicly or, or privately and that ownership structure be, you know, I'm glad.

**Constance:** Yes.

**Darian:** And I, and I think universities, public universities especially are different. When we talk about. Universities that are maybe private universities that have specific aims, maybe religious universities, maybe that's a different story, but I think public universities are, are a kind of special type of institution in that way.

**Constance:** That would probably also add some rethinking of what an administrator does at the university. I

**Darian:** think it certainly makes the role of an administrator, More difficult. Yes. And more political.

**Constance:** But the question is, yeah, is maybe it's a reality that's already there and we just try not to face it.

**Darian:** I think that's right.

And I also [00:38:00] think there's a question of do administrators feel competent to involve themselves in these types of, these types of decisions? Are they trained at all to do that? When we hire people to take on administrative roles that actually become very quickly quite political in many instances. Have we ever thought about whether or not these people want to take those kind of roles, are able, have the required training, what skills they need?

**Constance:** Yeah, and whether they should take these roles under the current circumstances in which we don't have the kind of democratic processes in place. That's right. Yeah,

**Darian:** exactly. Allow them to do that

**Constance:** with a certain sort

**Darian:** of trust, confidence. Yeah, otherwise we end up in a kind of situation of a kind of a bureaucracy.

**Constance:** Yeah.

**Darian:** In the proper sense of, in the proper sense of a term. Yeah. And I'm not sure that's how the university wants to see itself, especially given its supposed core commitments to being a forum for the open democratic deliberation and debate over over any [00:39:00] idea under the sun almost.

**Constance:** Thank you for the discussion.

**Darian:** Thank you. It's always, it's really important, I think, for, also for academics like myself to, this is a little bit just patting ourselves on the back because, but it's important for academics like myself to, yeah, to understand also the perspectives of the administrators that we work with. Because as we discussed, their role becomes increasingly political, increasingly fraught with this kind of judgments and decision making that have real political consequences within the university and also outside of it.

**Constance:** Yes, so let's see what happens with the institutional voice.

**Darian:** As usual, any and all opinions or positions expressed during this podcast are solely those of the hosts or the guests and absolutely not the official positions of Maastricht University.

**Constance:** If you have any questions or ideas for future episodes, please write us a message at wokeascienceatmaastrichtuniversity.

[00:40:00] nl and follow us on Instagram. woke as science to listen to previous episodes and also of course get the latest news on our new episodes.

**Darian:** You can listen to past episodes and future ones wherever you get your favorite podcast.

**Constance:** Thank you for listening.

**Darian:** Till next time.

**Constance:** Ciao Ciao.