

Jury Report KPMG - RSM Sustainability Master Thesis Award 2015

10 April 2015

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Each year, as chair of the jury, it is a great privilege to announce the winner and runner-up of the KPMG-RSM Sustainability Master Thesis Award and address the outcome of our jury discussion on the theses.

The Award recognizes a business student whose master thesis does not only demonstrate academic excellence, but also contributes to business and society alike by advancing applicable knowledge to address an important issue of our time.

Today, discussions on sustainability often encompass both environmental challenges, like climate change and resource scarcity, as well as pressing societal issues like poverty, corruption, conflict and human rights. Moreover, topics such as sustainable consumption, supply chain responsibility, new innovative business models, corporate volunteering and even mindfulness in business education have been addressed. Therefore, a broadly defined understanding of sustainability was applied when assessing this year's cohort of master theses.

The Sustainability Thesis Award 2015 covers the period September 2013 until August 2014.

A new master rule, that required finishing the master thesis within one year, resulted in a steep increase of master theses. Whilst last year 'only' 954 master theses were defended, this year an amount of 2309 theses were defended. Of the 2309 theses that were defended during this time, 57 deal with a sustainability-related topic and passed the academic qualifier requirement of 8.5 or higher.

Identifying the best theses among these potential candidates can be challenging. Hence, Sustainable RSM has developed a comprehensive and rigorous framework to complete this task. The RSM student workgroup assisting the jury did a tremendous job by making a pre-selection of the total of 57 theses. All the members of the jury can assure you ladies and gentlemen that this is an awful lot of work. The jury received from the workgroup a thorough report with an appendix that contains a detailed evaluation of only the 5 shortlisted theses. According to the workgroup, these theses were perceived as the best 5 of the total group.

How did the jury evaluate and assess the five preselected theses? Logically we used the same framework as the student workgroup, applying the following four selection-criteria :

1. Academic excellence (qualifier)

A grade of 8.5 or higher was set as a minimum requirement

2. Possible reception by companies (40%)

This encompasses the questions:

How practically relevant is the thesis for companies?

Can companies use the results of the thesis in their business?

Will the findings of the thesis encourage sustainable behavior of managers?

3. Potential environmental/social impact (40%)

Are topic and findings of the thesis of importance to society at large?

Will the thesis influence policy makers or civil society leaders to drive change?

4. Originality (20%)

Does the thesis show independent thinking, a critical attitude and innovative ideas?

To which extend does the candidate develop fresh and creative ideas, an unconventional approach regarding the research question, method, process and conclusions?

Is there a discussion of the contribution of the findings to the current debate?

A jury of practitioners from the area of Business and Sustainable Development has reviewed the selected top 5 theses. Most jury-members have many years of experience, not only in the field of Sustainability or Corporate Social Responsibility, but also as members of the jury. Three jury members are already in place since the year 2006, when it all started at the RSM with the so called *KPMG Business Society Master Thesis Award*.

So let me introduce the members of the jury to you:

- **Jan Bom**, Chief Editor of the CSR magazine P+
- **Elfrieke van Galen**, partner with the Rock Group and former Director CSR with KLM
- **Huib Klamer**, former senior advisor CSR with employers association VNO-NCW and senior advisor Global Compact Netherlands
- **Tim van Kooten**, former Issue Manager with Shell in the Netherlands
- **Jan van den Herik**, Chairman of the jury, Director Strategy & Innovation with KPMG

The five selected excellent Sustainability Master Theses were written by five students. These students are not only competing for the honor and recognition, but also for a financial prize.

Since 2006 KPMG provides the winner of the Master Thesis Award with a prize of EUR 1.000 and the runner-up with a prize of EUR 500.

Before I will announce the runner-up and the winner, my fellow jury member Huib Klamer will provide you with some brief insights regarding the different theses. I therefore would like to hand over to Huib.

In addition to the students presentations some observations of the jury, Huib Klamer:

It is the first year ladies and gentlemen that I am participating in the jury and I must say I slightly underestimated the time consuming work it takes to carefully read and review the five selected theses.

Let me first say that I was struck by the high quality of the theses we reviewed.

The jury is this year convinced that the five theses were all very well written, impactful and practical relevant. Let me now give you some remarks on the five individual theses we as a jury assessed.

The first thesis is from Berdien Fennema:

Title: Less is more: an evaluation of sustainable supply strategies

Her central issue is waste prevention in the supply chain of the Damen Shipyards Group.

A very relevant theme, for companies and for society at large.

We all know about the growing scarcity of resources and pollution.

Fennema investigates the opinions of suppliers. This is important because often most gains

can be won with suppliers. The thesis gives good insights in the arguments and considerations of suppliers and other parties involved including the pressures from the environment and society.

When we read the case of shipyard Damen – a company the Netherlands is proud of -, we see how much still can be improved. Collaboration with suppliers appears to be the most promising strategy. And as always the commitment of top management is crucial.

The quality and practicality of the thesis is proven by the fact that Fenema has got a job at Damen where she can now implement her findings.

The second thesis is from Stephanie Maas.

Title: DO-IN-A-DAY EPISODIC VOLUNTEERING AS A GATEWAY TO LONG-TERM VOLUNTEERING

Maas investigates how episodic or temporary volunteers that are participating in the yearly Dutch volunteers-day, named NLDoet, can become interested for long term volunteering.

This subject interests me in particular because I myself participated on the NLDoet days three weeks ago.

The issue is also socially important because our society needs volunteers.

Voluntary work forms an important social capital, especially in a time of an aging population and reduction of public care provisions.

Important is the emotional experience that volunteers get with the voluntary activities.

With a positive experience they can be interested to become a volunteer for life.

Maas gives useful recommendations and considerations how to create conditions for such a good experience, so that long term volunteers can be attracted by charities and NGOs.

Especially interesting for all the many organizations that depend on volunteers.

Third thesis is by Maaïke Antrag.

Title: Designing a take-back network for the e-waste from webshops' customers -

The PostNL Case

This thesis seeks a practical solution for a growing and complex problem: how to handle the take back of electronic waste by Webshops?

Legislation requires the supplier to organize the take back process. To organize take back on a larger scale is not easy.

The environmental interest is evident: how prevent all too many transport movements and recycle the e-waste and contribute to the circular economy.

Antrag conducts a detailed research in which she interviews all parties involved.

She discusses the strength and weaknesses of different business solutions and at last presents a best, optimal solution and innovative business model.

The jury is very curious to know how Antrag's recommendations finally have been received and probably have endorsed by the management of the company PostNL.

Fourth thesis is by Sjaak Heuvels.

Title: Transitioning towards a biobased and sustainable construction industry - The case of hempbased applications in the Dutch construction industry

It is on the use hemp. The jury knows hemp as the basis of drugs.

But Heuvels shows that hemp also has many useful applications, since centuries.

He elaborates on the use of hemp as a bio-resource for the construction industry.

A simple product could become a solution for a huge problem.

This is important because the construction sector is one of the least sustainable and innovative industries and has an enormous ecological footprint.

Moving towards more bio-based materials, such as hemp, will have a strong environmental impact and helps reducing pollution.

For this purpose in the Netherlands in 2013 a Green Deal has been accorded.

By interviewing stakeholders Heuvels investigates the opportunities, describes thoroughly a wide range of existing barriers, for example barriers in legislations, but also cultural barriers. The jury found this piece of work very innovative and well researched. Although we missed a discussion on the effects on food production by using more land for hemp as bio-resources.

The fifth thesis is by Michelle Engert.

Title: Taking an Environmental Perspective on Supply Chain Management – A Study on the German Automobile Industry

Engert investigates Green Supply Chain Management in the German Automobile Industry. The choice for the sector is important because automobile industry contributes considerably to global warming – through production and consumer utilization -.

The study gives a good theoretical insight in the factors relevant for Green Supply Chain Management and Business Performance.

Engert proves with figures that employee satisfaction, operational efficiency and relational efficiency - trust, cooperation - are important factors for attaining good environmental and business results.

She recommends a holistic approach, which not only focuses on one isolated factor.

Once more she proves that also in a technical sector people and relations matter, a fact that sometimes seems to be forgotten.

And now for the announcements of the runner-up and the winner of the KPMG-RSM Sustainability Master Thesis Award 2015 I like to hand over again to the chair of the jury Jan van den Herik:

Runner-up is: Sjaak Heuvels

Winner is: Maaïke Antråg