Sustainability at Universities

The Potential of International Networks to Trigger Innovation: The "University Alliance for Sustainability"

20th REFORM Group Meeting

2015-09-03, Salzburg

SUSTAIN ABILITY
Freie Universität Berlin

Overview

The Role of University to Foster Sustainable Development

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Network Memberships as an Innovation Factor

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      Objectives UAS

      Governance, Strategies and Tools

      Long-term Goals and Achievements

Opportunities and Challenges

Conclusion

THE ROLE OF UNIVERSITIES TO FOSTER SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

"[Sustainability] is a problem in which the discovery and dissemination of knowledge will play a critical role. And it is a problem that must be faced … in ways that universities are uniquely suited to model." President Drew Gilpin Faust, Harvard University

Universities

- are focused on research, teaching and service

- train the world's future leaders

- are single decision-makers and often owner-occupiers

- are public institutions, or have a public mandate

- are not directly tied to financial or political gain

→ Universities have the capacity to test systems and technologies, and to advance innovative solutions to global challenges in ways that companies and municipalities cannot

Sources: Robinson et al, 2013; IARU Green Guide

Universities as Living Labs - Opportunities

- Experimentation is a key requirement of sustainability (Dryzek, 1997 in König and Evans, 2013)

- Living Laboratories provide a space for multiple stakeholders to address local challenges by jointly framing issues and producing new knowledge deemed by all an adequate basis for concerted action. (König and Evans, 2013)

- Purpose:

  - Try novel things that would not be possible in conventional urban settings
  - Monitor social and physical impacts to provide knowledge base for learning
  - Platform for visioning processes, with the power to stimulate change

- Living laboratories are a key mechanism through which universities are seeking to contribute to a wider societal transition to sustainability

Universities as Living Labs - Challenges

- Implementation of institution-wide projects requires strong leadership support

- Time, financial and personnel resources need to be allocated

- Engagement of a diverse group of stakeholders requires special communication strategies and participatory methods

- Sustainability and Living Lab projects need to be integrated in the curriculum of all students => administrative hurdles

- Partnerships with external stakeholders need to be established and maintained

- There needs to be a vision that is shared with all stakeholders

Case I: University of British Columbia

- UBC Sustainability Initiative (USI) aims to create institutional culture change by deeply integrating operational and academic sustainability

- Goal: To simultaneously increase human & environmental well-being.

- Use campus as living lab and buildings as research instruments.

- Teaching and Learning Vision: Integration of sustainability curriculum across the university "Sustainability Pathways" (UBC Sustainability Academic Strategy, 2009)

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Case I: University of British Columbia

Key Sustainability Initiatives & Outcomes

1996 — Adopts sustainable development policy

1998 — Opens Campus Sustainability Office

2007 — Meets Kyoto Protocol GHG reduction targets

2009 — Integrates sustainability as core pillar in UBC's strategic plan; Develops Sustainability Academic Strategy

2010 — Establishes University Sustainability Initiative (USI); Sets bold targets to reduce GHG emissions

2011 — Receives Canada's first Gold rating in STARS

2014 — Embeds Regenerative Sustainability into 20-year Plan

Network Memberships as an Innovation Factor

Aims for networking are multidimensional (see Sliwka, 2003):

- *A political function*: Networks can serve as lobby groups for innovative ideas.

- *An information function*: Networking allows for the rapid exchange of information relevant for individual and organizational development processes.

- *A psychological function*: Innovators are often isolated within their organizations. Networking provides them with opportunities for collaboration and exchange and thus can empower innovative individuals.

- *A skills function*: Networking provides innovators with opportunities for learning skills from their colleagues.

Networking among institutions and individuals in education is seen as a powerful stimulus to organizational learning and development.

Network Memberships - Challenges

- Stability of networks varies considerably, because of their loosely-coupled nature, they are relatively fragile social organisms

- Experience often described as doubled-edged => stimulating and frustrating (Sliwka, 2003)

- Management structures and institutionalized leadership for ongoing participation is needed

- in international networks mutual social stimulus and control are limited

- Trust is a precondition of "give and take"

- => trust and social competence need to be deliberately developed through training and team-building activities (Sliwka, 2003)

Case II: University Alliance for Sustainability

Project Period: April 2015 – December 2018 funded by DAAD

Core partners: Freie Universität Berlin, Germany
Hebrew University of Jerusalem, Israel
Peking University, China
Saint Petersburg State University, Russia
University of British Columbia, Canada

Guiding principles

- **Whole institution approach**: whole institution approach implies the placement of sustainability issues in all structural and thematic entities of the universities, going beyond the usual segmentation of different parts of a higher education institution.

Annual topics

- **Education for Sustainable Development (2015)**

- Governance of Sustainable Development (2016)

- Societal Challenges of Future Environmental Change (tbc)

- Sustainability on Campus (tbc)

- …

Governance
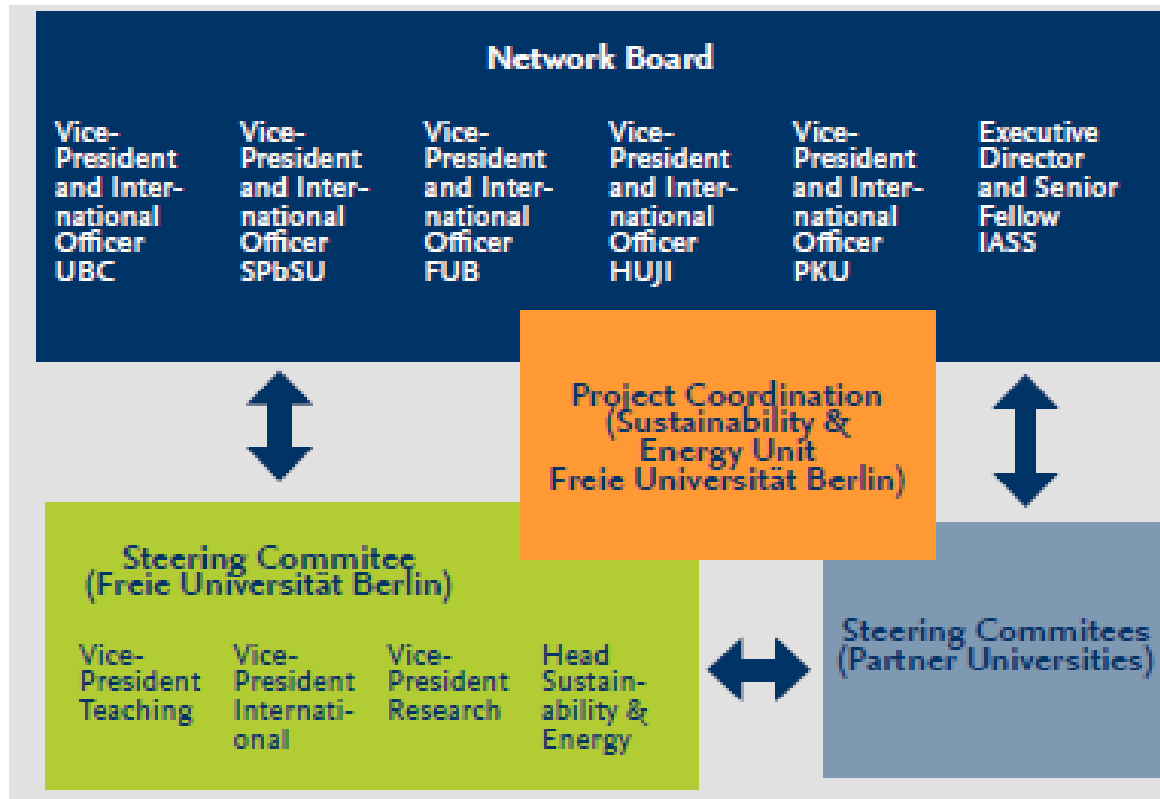
* The Institute of Advanced Sustainability Studies (IASS) in Potsdam, Germany, has agreed to be a patron of this alliance.

Mission and Objectives of the UAS

- strengthening the partnership through the cross-sectional topic of sustainability

- intensifying the partners' efforts in researching, teaching, and managing sustainable development by

  - researching the interlinked aspects of sustainable development, particularly in the fields of ESD, societal challenges, governance and other related aspects in all scientific disciplines

  - creating a network of both established and emerging researchers and practitioners in various fields of sustainability that spans disciplines, institutions, and cultures

  - offering students international study opportunities, joint teaching modules and – in the long run – joint degrees with a special focus on sustainability

  - fostering environmental sensitivity and providing basic knowledge as well as latest research results on sustainable development

  - exchanging good practice, developing joint policies, and acting as roles models in the field of sustainable campus management & outreach activities

Overview of measures

Stakeholder Mobility (both ways):

- Explorative Research Visits (1 week)
- Senior Research Stays (4 weeks)
- Junior Research Stays (2 months)
- Student Research & Study Stays (3 months)
- Administrators' Explorative Stays (1-2 weeks)
- Volunteer Swap (10 days)

Incubators (in Berlin)

- Teaching Incubators for identifying suitable modules / content
- Management Incubators for sharing good practice and developing joint procedures
- Research Incubators for developing new joint projects

Overview of measures
Spring campus program 2016-2018

Day 1	Day 2	Day 3	Day 4	Day 5	Day 6
Registration Welcome Intro University Alliance for Sustainability **Public Lectures, half day event** Key Note speeches by renowned experts of all partner universities	**Research Incubator**, 3 days Identification of joint projects, focus on joint graduate programs 2 senior, 1 junior scientist per university 15 persons **Management Incubator**, 3 days Administrative staff of partner universities Participants could include but are not limited to administrators doing Administrators Explorative Stays 15 Persons				
Sustainability Spring Board, 6 Days 4 doctoral students per university (up to 16 students), spring school format including site visits, places allocated on competitive basis; 20 Persons					

(Proposed) accomplishments by 2019

- International research projects (bilateral or multilateral) dealing with different aspects of sustainable development

- Course offerings on sustainable development, including e-learning, as well proposals for joint master programs (bilateral or multilateral)

- Framework for an interdisciplinary doctoral program on questions of sustainability at FUB with at least one partner

- Sustainable spring campus as an annual series where students, young and senior researchers, environmental and sustainability managers discuss most recent topics on sustainable development and exchange knowledge

- regular staff exchange

- experience with managing strategic partnerships and transfer of this knowledge to future areas of collaboration

Challenges and Conclusion

- Extend existing strategic partnerships in the field of sustainability

- Communication routines have to be established

- Coordinators and committed key stakeholders at each university need to be identified and integrated into the program

- Mobility program and individual research projects need to be tied into the wider framework of the program

- Establish a framework for network and connected projects to continue beyond the funding period of 2018

➢ *We will use the multidimensional opportunities of this network to trigger innovation in sustainable development both at our home university and in the overall sustainability discourse of universities.*

Thank you for your attention!

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www.fu-berlin.de/sites/nachhaltigkeit/01_ueberuns/Netzwerke/UAS.html