The Potential of International Networks to Trigger Innovation: The “University Alliance for Sustainability”
Overview

The Role of University to Foster Sustainable Development

Case I: University of British Columbia

Network Memberships as an Innovation Factor

Case II: “University Alliance for Sustainability”

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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)
Case I: University of British Columbia

Key Sustainability Initiatives & Outcomes

- Adopts sustainable development policy
- Opens Campus Sustainability Office
- Integrates sustainability as core pillar in UBC’s strategic plan
- Develops Sustainability Academic Strategy
- Establishes University Sustainability Initiative (USI)
- Embeds Regenerative Sustainability into 20-year Plan


- Meets Kyoto Protocol GHG reduction targets
- Sets bold targets to reduce GHG emissions
- Receives Canada’s first Gold rating in STARS
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 role 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

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Day 1</th>
<th>Day 2</th>
<th>Day 3</th>
<th>Day 4</th>
<th>Day 5</th>
<th>Day 6</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Registration</td>
<td>Research Incubator, 3 days</td>
<td>Identification of joint projects, focus on joint graduate programs</td>
<td>2 senior, 1 junior scientist per university</td>
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<td>Welcome</td>
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<td>15 persons</td>
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<td>Intro University</td>
<td>Public Lectures, half day event</td>
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<tr>
<td>Alliance for Sustainability</td>
<td>Research Incubator, 3 days</td>
<td>Identification of joint projects, focus on joint graduate programs</td>
<td>2 senior, 1 junior scientist per university</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Key Note speeches by renowned experts of all partner</td>
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<td>universities</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Management Incubator, 3 days</td>
<td>Administrative staff of partner universities</td>
<td>Participants could include but are not limited to administrators doing Administrators Explorative Stays</td>
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<td>15 Persons</td>
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**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!

Contact:
Katrin Risch
Program Manager “University Alliance for Sustainability”
Katrin.Risch@fu-berlin.de

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