A sustainability approach of higher education

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Introduction

- The complex nature of education
- Human capital investment
- Includes various stakeholders: students, academics, businesses, the community
- Educational policies must include the interest of all stakeholders
- Overload of information for policy makers
- Need to acknowledge cross-sector issues
  - Environment
  - Ethics
  - Equity
  - Health
  - Finance
  - Politics
Differentiation of approaches (Glouberman, S., and Zimmerman, B. (2002))

- Simple systems
  - Cause equals effect
  - Situations identified
  - Solutions at hand
  - Best practices useful
- Complicated systems
  - Expertise and data analyses
  - Analysis needed to show cause-effect relationship
  - Solutions can be replicated
• Complex systems
  - Constant flux of unpredictability
  - Dependant of behaviours
  - Space needed for emerging ideas
  - Need for interaction and communication
  - **Education considered as complex**
    - “Value is created as a result of individual interactions, and often the emergent result is more than, or qualitatively different from, the sum of individual actions” (Haffeld 2012).
Sustainable campus
Sustainability as a prerequisite of effectiveness driven higher education

- new public management paradigm
- higher education in CEE countries is put under pressure to adopt a new efficiency driven management approach that would:
  - answer the expectations of all stakeholders
  - effective employment of public and private funds
- growing complexity of the global economy,
- the demands concerning enhanced knowledge and effective learning has increased since a new paradigm is embraced revolving around the concept of sustainability.
• This integrative approach puts the entire education system (including higher education as well) in perspective,
• its outcome, i.e. the ability of graduates to meet the requirements of their fields of expertise and employability, should revolve around the principles and values promoted by businesses and the community for sustainable development.
• sustainable development consider the long term connection between the elements that should be enhanced and supported in a durable manner:
  - nature through biodiversity and ecosystems,
  - life support – resources and quality of the environment,
  - community – cultures,
  - groups,
  - places, with the elements that should be developed (people – education, equity, life expectancy, equal opportunity, economy– wealth, consumption, society – institutions, social capital, regions, etc.)
• Sustainable education at early stages of implementation.
• There are only a handful of universities that can be cited as being considered sustainable, from the above definition perspective.
• *nevertheless*, since the circular economy becomes the new teaching paradigm, it is compulsory that universities embrace a new educational stance.
• It becomes even more ardent since businesses start to align to the new business criteria that obviously will spread and shape the behaviour of all companies that want to meet the new competition trends.
• Since businesses are, on a fairly large scale, submitted to sustainability auditing it is expected that higher education and research policies should converge to such an approach in order to equip students with the required knowledge.
Blooms taxonomy – when to teach sustainability
Meeting the market requirements

Embedding sustainability in higher education
• the employability of future graduates will also depend on their ability to comply with the sustainability approach of major companies,
• they should be accommodated with critical thinking, creative problem solving, teamwork, equity, responsibility.
• According to UNESCO, the key aspects to promote quality education consist of:
  - seeking out the learner,
  - acknowledging the learners’ knowledge and experience,
  - making content relevant, enhancing the learning environment.
The present stage – interdisciplinary approach
Sustainability centres – emerging holistic approach

- The involvement of all stakeholders in the governance process breaks down eventually to the governance of knowledge production, mediation and utilisation (OECD 2012).
- Knowledge produced in universities throughout the teaching and research processes is used by the businesses, communities and policy makers,
- It is obvious that these entities will seek the highest effectiveness from the higher educational system in order to minimise further actions in preparing their experts.
- On the other hand, universities are not able to provide the entire set of competences required by practitioners and, consequently, a tighter collaboration within collaborative centers is beneficial.
Cascading effects of collaborative capacity

Sustainability centres - Global learning space
Regional Centres of Expertise on Education for Sustainable Development

RCEs around the world
There are 146 acknowledged RCEs as of January 2016

www.rce-network.org/

For more information
rceservicecentre@unu.edu

The Global RCE Service Centre
Education for Sustainable Development Programme
United Nations University Institute for the Advanced Study of Sustainability (UNU-IAS)
• The appropriate entities that support society oriented multi-sectorial and interdisciplinary learning and research and an effective knowledge management system
• They allow the involvement of all stakeholders, support regional and local development, learning networks
• Transition from the finite game approach to the infinite game approach as a global learning space
• Can be regarded as:
  - hubs,
  - meeting centers,
  - knowledge brokers,
  - information exchange platform
• Communication: face to face or web
Academia

NGO, media, knowledge based institutions

Businesses

Sustainability center (global learning space)
- trainings,
- train the trainer lectures,
- tutoring and mentoring,
- multidisciplinary applied research,
- Conferences
- Presentation of companies and their curricula and research needs
- Platform of interaction
- Best practices in sustainability issues
- Scientific approach
- Sustainability projects
- Presentation of companies and their curricula and research needs
- Skills and knowledge
- Sustainability analysis
- Sustainability audit reports
- Environmental research
- Social research
- Local community development

Local community
Policy lessons

- knowledge creation should bring under the same roof *formal* and *informal* education, fostering a close collaboration between all the interested stakeholders (universities, schools, businesses, local/regional communities).
• **Sustainable leadership** (accommodation with sustainability dimensions, social responsibility, innovation for sustainability, circular economy, working within complex multicultural systems, bridging the gap between education- research-stakeholders-community, green procurement, tutoring and mentoring),

• **Greening the curricula** (connecting and understanding the connection between theory and practice through case studies, lifelong learning, creative thinking, a research driven learning, teamwork, computer skills, soft skills, etc.),

• **Green initiatives** (entrepreneurial skills, effective and responsible use of resources, sustainable business models, green procurements, applied research, volunteering, bridging the intergenerational gap, etc.),

• **Promoting and developing local/regional culture and values** to raise awareness on local specificities and how they can be interconnected globally,

• **Promoting campus sustainability** that may induce a shift in behaviours that further on spill over in a beneficial manner on the community,

• **Supporting the foundation of Sustainability centres** for multidisciplinary research, tutoring and mentoring, informal education, etc.