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Communicating the sustainability issues in higher education institutions World Wide Webs

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Abstract

Higher Education Institutions play a key role in building more sustainable societies and creating new paradigms. As educational institutions, they are responsible for promoting sustainability issues through research and teaching, disseminating new knowledge and building capabilities. However the ill-defined nature of sustainability manifests have focused on the reasoning for why sustainable development needs broad adoption, but not on the clear sustainability evidences analysis. Firstly this paper shortly discusses the importance of Universities roles in meeting sustainability challenges. Secondly this paper explores the research results based on Lithuanian higher education institutions World Wide Web communication channel to demonstrate how close or far they are to the sustainable development approach.

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1. Introduction

Over past few decades sustainable development has become a common interest for the academic community. Nobody argues that sustainability is an important issue. Education for sustainable development started with an ambitious task in a period of 2005 – 2014 years to achieve sustainable development in the way that we think and act (UNESCO, 2005). Since 2005, UNESCO as a leading agency for the UN Decade of Education has been working on facilitating networks, linkages for exchanging practices among education for sustainable development stakeholders;

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on fostering quality of teaching, learning; on building research and capacity in education for sustainable development; on supporting countries in realizing the Millennium Development Goals through education for sustainable development efforts; on offering education for sustainable development as an umbrella concept for emerging education.

2012 Report on the United Nations Decade of Education for Sustainable Development presented that higher education is taking right place in collaborative, trans-disciplinary, cross boundary contexts. However, the biggest growing field in education for sustainable development is climate change problems analysis and drawing higher education institutions responsibilities in that way. Only some universities understand sustainability issues in a broader way. Sustainability issues are used to organize and profile universities activities. Consequently, solving these problems "Rio +20" conference participants were focused on the challenges for the green economy and institutional framework. Moreover, university is a microcosm of the larger community, and the manner in which it carries out its daily activities is the important evidence for the environmental responsibility demonstration. "By practicing what it preaches, the university can both engage students in understanding the institutional metabolism of materials and activities, and have them actively participate to minimize pollution and waste" (Talloires Declaration, 1990). Domarkas, et al (2012) emphasized that sustainable development issues could be achieved through the institutional environment. While universities and their decisions affect economic, social and environmental dimensions, in turn it affects public authorities. However, the scientific literature (Barth, et al., 2007; Dawe, Jucker, & Martin, 2005) deals with sustainability issues only with a focusing on the economic, social and environmental triad despite focusing to the universities environmental decisions based on sustainable development issues.

Usually universities present their social and environmental performance through sustainability report which is placed in the universities websites. Consequently universities sustainability report is not intended to be an integrated report that covers a full range of socio-economic data. Expansion of networks and websites which are based on information technology development ensure attractive opportunity to communicate and disseminate all universities sustainable development issues.

This paper is a continuation of the first paper "Dissemination of Sustainable Development on Universities Websites" by Katiliūtė and Daunorienė presented on the 6th World conference on Education Science in 2014. The main aim of this paper is to analyze the level of particularity of sustainable development issues presented on universities websites. Firstly the paper offers a description of the method used to carry out this research. Secondly this study presents the research results based on 14 Lithuanian universities websites analysis in order to determine which issues of sustainable development are presented on it. Finally, to demonstrate the value of the research, the paper concludes with a discussion on opportunities to universities as agents for initiating, managing and presenting sustainability results.

2. Method

A content analysis (Krippendorff, 1980) methodology was used to analyze the sustainable development information issues of 14 Lithuanian universities websites. Research background was created (see details in ongoing Katiliūtė and Daunorienė paper "Dissemination of Sustainable Development on Universities Websites" article) by the analysis of the Global Reporting Initiative (2013), the ISO 26000 (2011) and Capriotti & Moreno (2007) developed method. The identified characteristics corresponding to sustainable development issues are shown in Table 1. Content analysis of the identified universities sustainable development issues took place, disclosing qualitative aspects, with the aim to portray a summary of the existing sustainability evidences and identify improvement opportunities in it.

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