



Emerging areas in research on higher education for sustainable development – management education, sustainable consumption and perspectives from Central and Eastern Europe

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ABSTRACT

Management education for sustainable development, sustainable consumption in higher education institutions, and higher education for sustainable development in Central and Eastern Europe can be considered as three highly relevant emerging areas in research on higher education for sustainable development. The transformation of management education to meet the increasing societal demands for responsible business has been reinforced in the light of the current economic situation. In this context, it is explored which competencies are needed for tomorrow's business professionals and which concepts and approaches are useful to foster these competencies. With regard to sustainable consumption, several universities have initiated creative projects that have transformed campus life and have had an impact on staff's and students' attitudes and behaviour. Moreover, initiatives in Central and Eastern Europe show interesting developments, for example how sustainability issues have been integrated into the curriculum, particularly in the context of intense coal mining as well as urban planning. Thus, this Special Volume of the Journal of Cleaner Production presents the current progress in concepts and practices in the three emerging areas management education for sustainable development, sustainable consumption in higher education institutions, and higher education for sustainable development in Central and Eastern Europe, which to date have not been intensively discussed in the scientific discourse on higher education for sustainable development. In an overall manner, the Special Volume provides evidence that the following issues are of particular importance for future research and development in higher education for sustainable development: measuring learning outcomes; accounting for different geographical, political and cultural contexts for higher education for sustainable development; and prioritising strategies for sustainable organisational change.

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1. Introduction

Current trends of natural resource consumption have been causing irreversible damage to the planet and its atmosphere and cannot be continued indefinitely (see e.g. Meadows et al., 2004; IPCC, 2007; Rockström et al., 2009). Additionally, competition for natural resources is exacerbating the gap between the world's rich and poor (see e.g. Davis, 2004; Lean, 2011). In this respect, global

justice and mutual respect for cultural diversity play a pivotal role if development is to continue indefinitely (e.g. Shiva, 2005). Therefore, socio-economic, cultural and ecological dimensions must be taken into account in order to find and follow a path of sustainable development that ensures justice across the generations (e.g. Costanza et al., 2007; Blewitt, 2008; Weizsäcker von et al., 2009; Randers, 2012).

Against this backdrop, a vital question is: How to progress the path towards sustainable development? It is apparent that existing ways of thinking (and acting) need to be overcome in order to enter a process of transition in terms of sustainable development. To achieve this, learning processes on a local, regional and global scale

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need to be initiated so that the sustainability paradigm can be further developed within the areas of academia, policy-making and administration as well as business management. Both existing and emerging problems, globally interrelated and complex “ill-defined problems” (Scholz et al., 1997), can only be solved if professionals have integrative competencies (cf. Barth et al., 2007; Lambrechts et al., 2013; Rieckmann, 2012; Shephard et al., 2011; Wals, 2010; Wiek et al., 2011) – these competencies include the ability to cooperate with scholars from different disciplines (*interdisciplinarity*) and practitioners (*transdisciplinarity*) (cf. Godemann, 2011; Lang et al., 2012). A paradigm shift towards sustainability will thus greatly impact the education and training processes of future professionals, opening up new perspectives on lifelong-learning processes and developing new attitudes towards nature, different cultures, and consumption patterns.

It is therefore that education has been prioritised as an important strategy that has a major role in bringing about sustainable development (cf. Vare and Scott, 2007). With the Agenda 21 (Chapter 36) emphasising that education will play a major role in achieving sustainable development (UNCED, 1993), ESD has received increasingly political attention. Worldwide there is a strong political commitment to integrating education for sustainable development (ESD) at all educational levels (cf. Wals, 2012). Its importance has been globally recognised with the establishment of the United Nations Decade for Education for Sustainable Development (DESD) (2005–2014). UNESCO, as the Decade’s lead agency, defines ESD as “a process of learning how to make decisions that consider the long-term future of the economy, ecology and equity of all communities” (UNESCO, 2005: 17).

According to Haigh (2005: 32) the Decade “offers academies the best chance to date for making the deep and radical changes that will be necessary if the world’s higher education institutions are to enact their responsibilities for creating a better and self-sustainable world.” Through their major functions of education, research and outreach, universities are able to generate new knowledge and contribute to developing competencies and raising awareness towards sustainability issues. Moreover, they can directly make effective regional impacts (Dlouhá et al., 2013b). The goal of higher education for sustainable development (HESD) is to enable individuals to reflect, through multicultural, global and future-oriented perspectives, on their responsibility for the complex effects of decision-making and behaviour. New learning cultures are vital which do not merely confirm academic traditions but, in an open-minded, reflexive and participative process, examine their potential for a sustainable future. To this end, each university should become a learning institution that creates teaching and learning settings characterised by aspects of inter- and transdisciplinarity, participation, problem orientation as well as the linking of formal and informal learning. These learning settings must support the development of key competencies for dealing with the challenges of (un)sustainable development (Barth et al., 2007; Lambrechts et al., 2013; Rieckmann, 2012).

Over the last 20 years, a number of declarations on HESD have been adopted (cf. Lozano et al., 2013b), and there has been considerable progress in implementing sustainability into higher education institutions (cf. Karatzoglou, 2013; Lozano et al., 2013a). Universities have implemented a wide range of ESD activities and have created ESD networks (cf. Barth et al., 2011). In his review of learning and institutionalisation processes, Wals (2013) concludes that although integrating sustainability learning into institutions like universities has proven to be difficult because of other educational reforms which follow sometimes different or even contrary goals, “Higher Education Institutions are beginning to make more systemic changes towards sustainability” (Wals, 2013). Particularly “[t]he UNESCO ESD Chairs mainly play a role in conceptualizing

learning, competence and systems change” (Wals, 2013). However, Wals emphasises that “in practice learning processes and multi-stakeholder interactions (...) oftentimes involving the development of alternative values, are still scarce around the globe” (Wals, 2013). Despite these positive developments, it can be seen that there is still a long way to go until sustainability becomes a widely accepted guiding principle in higher education (cf. Lozano et al., 2013a, 2013b).

Against this background, the UNESCO Chair for Higher Education for Sustainable Development, located at Leuphana University of Lüneburg, Germany, organised the 4th International Conference on Higher Education for Sustainable Development, with the title: “Higher Education for Sustainable Development: Moving the Agenda Forward”. The conference took place from 14 to 16 September 2011 at Leuphana University of Lüneburg, Germany, and was jointly organised with the German Commission for UNESCO, the International Centre for Corporate Social Responsibility of the Nottingham University Business School, the COPERNICUS Alliance and the working group “Higher Education” of the UN Decade in Germany (“AG Hochschule”). It was the fourth in a series of conferences that had already been organised by the Chair together with different cooperation partners in 2005, 2007 and 2009 in Germany (Lüneburg), Mexico (San Luis Potosí) and Malaysia (Penang).

While the previous conferences dealt with general developments and challenges in HESD (Barth et al., 2011; Adomßent et al., 2009, 2006), the 4th Conference focussed on three emerging areas in HESD research: (1) management education for sustainable development; (2) sustainable consumption in higher education institutions; and (3) HESD in Central and Eastern Europe. This Special Volume presents and analyses developments, concepts and practices in these three areas, which to date have not been discussed intensively in the scientific discourse on HESD. It is structured as follows: In the next section we present the findings in the three thematic streams; in the conclusion we make recommendations for educators, managers and other stakeholders to engage with HESD as well as for future research.

2. The three thematic streams

2.1. Management education for sustainable development

The emerging debate about management education for sustainable development is reflective of the growing questions about the role of business schools and other management education institutions (Khurana, 2010; Pfeffer and Fong, 2002; Starkey et al., 2004). In the light of governance scandals and other crises such as the economic downturn and climate change, management education has been accused of having failed to integrate reflections on ethical values, social responsibility and sustainability into the curriculum and to educate future decision-makers to act in the long-term interests of business and society (Currie et al., 2010; Herzig and Moon, 2013). As a consequence, there are renewed calls for reconsidering management education; and the heightened attention to this emerging field has led to an increase in literature on management education for sustainable development over the last years. Several journals have published special issues on management education, social responsibility and sustainability including the Journal of Management Education (Egri and Rogers, 2003; Forray and Leigh, 2012; Rusinko and Sama, 2009), Business Strategy and the Environment (Springett and Kearins, 2005), and Academy of Management Learning and Education (Starik et al., 2010). The development of the first global initiative on responsible management education – the United Nations supported Principles for Responsible Management Education (PRME) (UN

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