

Sustainability Science Partnerships in Concept and in Practice: a Guide to a New Curriculum from a European Perspective

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Abstract

This paper makes the case for advancing sustainability science partnerships (SSPs) both within universities and through innovative means of integrating universities with external public-private and civil sectors. It links the basic principles of sustainable development with an emerging science of cooperative learning that connects researchers to a wide range of partners. SSPs are specifically designed to be transformational through becoming active agents for societal change. Universities play a special role here because they can act both as communication networks and as laboratories for developing the capability to design and manage SSPs in the creative transition to sustainability. It is gratifying to note that these ideas are beginning to emerge in a number of universities, with European examples being highlighted in this paper. Further steps towards introducing full-blooded SSPs across the university spectrum are suggested.

KEY WORDS *Sustainability science; higher education; cooperative learning*

ACRONYMS

SSP Sustainability science partnerships

Introduction

Throughout this paper, we concentrate on the over-arching concept of sustainability science partnerships (SSPs). We suggest that such partnerships foster innovative science, and promote its attractive role for the betterment of society and its changing processes of knowledge creation, dissemination and uptake. SSPs are coming of age, as combinations of academia and various partners, whose activities and relations are integral to the promotion and pursuit of sustainable development. For example, connecting with energy companies and taxation consultancies

would provide insights for carbon accounting and carbon offset arrangements (Jones, 2007). By working through academia, the inevitable tendency for 'partner capture' can be detected and, with thoughtful determination, deflected, while collaboration with non-academic actors encourages scientists to address their own biases. Hence the partnerships should be true 'learning companionships' born of common understanding and mutual respect.

This paper first explores the new realm of sustainability science and what it means for curriculum development, learning and teaching practice.

1 It then explains the main drivers that are promoting
2 promoting SSPs. Multiple versions of SSPs are
3 emerging and flourishing in many parts of the
4 world, with Anglo-Saxon countries often playing
5 a leading role. Some promising initiatives from
6 diverse continental European universities are
7 presented. The paper concludes by suggesting
8 how such initiatives may be adopted elsewhere,
9 and why such experiments are required so
10 urgently.

11 European universities remain very wary of
12 vague, multi-disciplinary and non-departmental
13 initiatives. This is partly because they are admin-
14 istratively messy. It is also because they require
15 sound leadership and vision by senior manage-
16 ment, since sustainability science benefits from
17 close financial and learning-through-training co-
18 operation with public, private and civic sector
19 bodies. Addressing all of these opportunities,
20 however, has proved to be difficult. As reviewed
21 here, the obstacles are being patchily overcome
22 in a number of emerging initiatives in European
23 universities.

24 **What is sustainability science?**

25 Sustainability science is a special discipline
26 which focuses on the dynamic interactions
27 between nature and society geared to social
28 justice, reliable prosperity, and ecological
29 resilience. It has its own website (www.sustainabilityscience.org)
30 emanating from Harvard University, and a special place in the
31 Proceedings of the US National Academy of
32 Science (www.pnas.org). A group of authors, led
33 by Robert Kates, published a statement in
34 *Science* on 27th April 2001 (www.sciencemag.org)
35 on the establishment of a new scientific
36 paradigm called 'sustainability science'. The
37 notion of sustainability science further emerged
38 from the Johannesburg Summit on Sustainable
39 Development in 2002. It was supported by
40 the International Scientific Unions and Third
41 World Academy of Science, and subsequently
42 promoted in the educational component of
43 Agenda 21, and the decade of education for
44 sustainable development, currently spearheaded
45 by UNESCO (for example, http://portal.unesco.org/education/en/ev.php-URL_ID=27234&URL_DO=DO_TOPIC&URL_SECTION=201.html).

50 Essentially, sustainability science informs and
51 interprets the transition to sustainability. More
52 challenging, it prepares a citizenry and a particu-
53 lar form of governance to support this transition
54 (Irwin, 1995; Dobson, 2003). The notion of 'sus-
55 tainable development' has been defined in many

56 different ways and has been heavily criticised
57 for its vagueness (Robinson, 2004). However,
58 Kates *et al.* (2005) have carefully related the
59 different interpretations of sustainability to its
60 overall goals and implementations. The United
61 Kingdom official Sustainable Development
62 Strategy (DEFRA, 2005, 16) also offers a set of
63 principles that provide a framework for moving
64 towards sustainability. Figure 1 summarises
65 these five major principles.

66 At the heart of this figure lie the fundamental
67 purposes of sustainable development. These are
68 the design of economies located within the
69 boundaries set by planetary life support systems,
70 and creation of just and fair societies living
71 within these limits. However, these 'planetary
72 boundaries' remain largely uncertain, and human
73 societies do not easily accept the necessity to
74 accommodate to unknowable limits.

75 There have been many assessments of nature's
76 tolerance to change (Vitousek *et al.*, 1997;
77 UNEP, 2002; MA, 2005; WRI, 2005; WWF,
78 2006). Concepts such as *Carrying Capacity*
79 and *Ecological Footprint*, and measures such as
80 the *Living Planet Index* provide useful frame-
81 works (Wackernagel and Rees, 1996; Chambers
82 *et al.*, 2000). However, none of these efforts has
83 yet provided a practical guide for identifying
84 possible thresholds beyond which the 'normal'
85 functioning of Earth systems jumps into less pre-
86 dictable modes (Rees, 1992; Van den Bergh and
87 Verbruggen, 1999; Lenzen and Murray, 2003;
88 Gausset *et al.*, 2005; Schellnhuber *et al.*, 2005).
89 Progress in this area will involve a blend of estab-
90 lished scientific knowledge, human monitoring,
91 and socially mediated interpretations of appro-
92 priate behaviour towards the strengths and weak-
93 nesses of natural systems functioning (Scheffran
94 and Stoll-Kleemann, 2002; Walker *et al.*, 2006).

95 In this context it is useful to introduce the
96 concepts of resilience in general, and social and
97 ecological resilience in particular. These con-
98 cepts aim for the evolution of a citizenry that
99 shares responsibility for its use of the planet and
100 promotes personal obligations as a necessary
101 counterpart to the notion of individual right.
102 Lying behind resilience is the capacity to absorb
103 stress, to adapt peaceably to change, and to build
104 on mutual self-support arrangements. Modern
105 society is continually creating economic and
106 social arrangements, which are brittle and resis-
107 tant to adjustment. The global economy is one
108 such case, as is the building of unsuitably large
109 energy and agricultural structures for a future
110 that will rely on being carbon neutral.

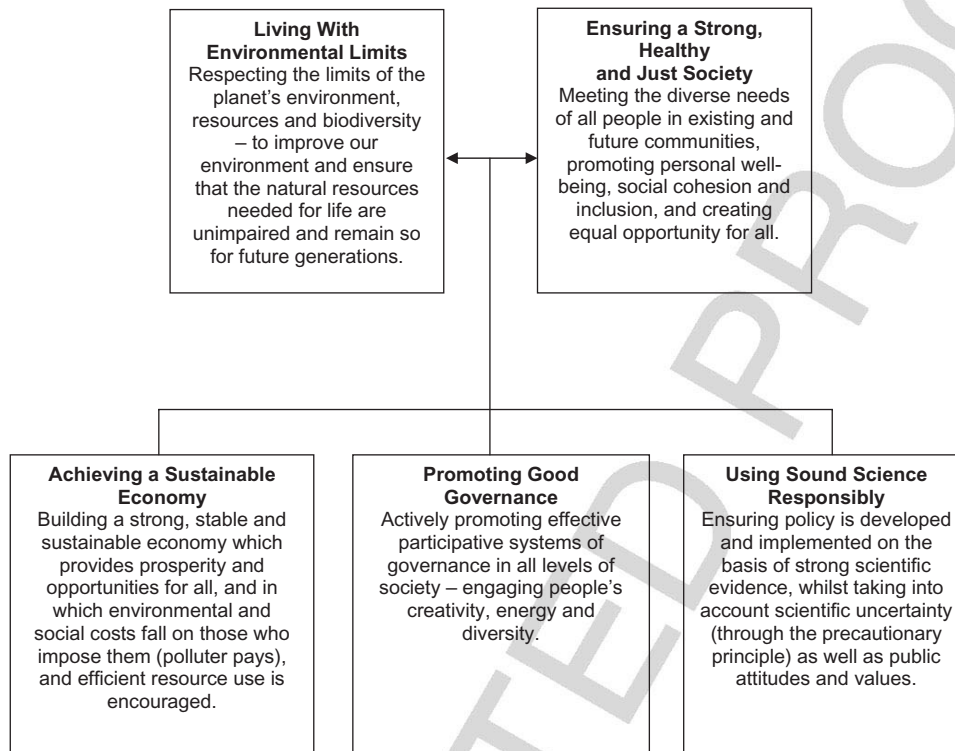


Figure 1 The five guiding principles of the UK Sustainable Development Strategy (Source: DEFRA, 2005).

Maintaining natural processes and creating self-aware and just social relations can be seen as complementary components of resilience (Agyeman *et al.*, 2002). This is why Kates *et al.* (2005) correctly noted that sustainability is an extension of peace, anti-poverty, civil rights and environmentalism. The parallels between ecological and social capital are very close. We neither know their limits of tolerance, nor do we recognise that both provide significant roles as economic services when allowed to function effectively. And we do not count adequately the huge costs of restoration or replacement in case of their disruption or destruction.

For sustainability science, the issue here is two-fold. First, the mechanism for devising comprehensive assessments of policy and decision chains along the grounds of these two boundary conditions (of ecological resilience and social justice) will need both 'duration proofing' and 'social justice proofing' to take into account the very long-term ramifications of any policy theme. This in turn means elaborating scenarios of how various conditions might change, including thresholds or abrupt changes in the earth

system (Swart *et al.*, 2004; Lenton *et al.*, 2008, EEAC, 2008).

Lying below the challenging aspirations of ecological and social resilience in Figure 1 are three mechanisms for achieving sustainability, at least in essence. One is the well-established, but as yet poorly implemented principle of 'polluter pays'. There is a vast literature on this (for example, OECD, 1972; 1989; Bugge, 1996; O'Riordan, 1997; De Lucia and Reibstein, 2007). While few of the long-term economic and social costs are known for any given policy or action, especially regarding social justice and ecological well-being, some notion of paying for non-sustainable actions remains on the political agenda. So too does the notion of dedicating incentives for promoting sustainable behaviour from the revenues associated with penalising non-sustainable behaviour. The current debates over pricing carbon (Stern, 2007), biodiversity losses (MA, 2005), and water scarcity (WBGU 1999; UNEP, 2002) all attest to the liveliness and durability of this debate. One clear role for sustainability science is to fashion a better arrangement for justifying a levy or cap-and-trading

1 scheme on the mix of property rights, and to
2 create joint compensating mechanisms to special
3 sustainability-directed behaviour.

4 Precautionary science is a further important
5 issue mentioned in Figure 1 (*Using sound*
6 *science responsibly*). Precautionary science is
7 defined as science, which follows the require-
8 ment of the Precautionary Principle (for a
9 definition see Dovers and Handmer, 1995;
10 O’Riordan *et al.*, 2000). The essence of precau-
11 tion is to accept that uncertainty is endemic in
12 any future action or prediction, so that we need to
13 plan for a set of plausible scenarios, worst cases,
14 most affected peoples and places, all in a proba-
15 bilistic context. This is a rich area of science
16 communication. It allows for honest debate over
17 all assumptions and forecasts, and enables any
18 effective modelling to be more as a dialogue
19 amongst engaged scientists and citizens, than as
20 a set of science-led prognoses (Stoll-Kleemann
21 *et al.*, 2003; Turnpenny *et al.*, 2003; Dessai and
22 Hulme, 2004; de la Vega-Leinert *et al.*, 2008).
23 Precaution helps to change the balance of liabil-
24 ity, forces the scientist to share different kinds of
25 knowledge and learning, and expects that dealing
26 with uncertainty is always a learning experience
27 (Burgess, 2002; Kaiser, 2002; Tickner, 2002, Patt
28 *et al.*, 2005).

□

29 Finally, in the trio of lower tier supporting
30 principles, as illustrated in Figure 1, is the appli-
31 cation of good governance and civic virtue.
32 These enter the territory of responsive, open and
33 accountable governance (rarely found), and a
34 participatory democracy that is inclusive and
35 effective in guiding decisions for both pre-
36 sent and future generations (even more rare). In
37 the centre of this notion is the Aristotelian
38 concept of civic virtue, the responsible citizen
39 who recognises the right of existence as an indi-
40 vidual, but also accepts membership of a wider
41 civic democracy, obliged to care for others and
42 for the planet (O’Riordan and Stoll-Kleemann,
43 2002; Stoll-Kleemann *et al.*, 2003; Dobson,
44 2009).

45 These principles are nearly always violated in
46 day to day life and decision making. Yet as the
47 world faces a prolonged recession, and as global
48 efforts to restore the former economy, admittedly
49 with some regulatory safeguards, are continually
50 failing in their objective, so it is becoming more
51 and more evident that some form of sustainabil-
52 ity renaissance economy has to emerge. This is
53 the message of the UK Sustainable Development
54 Commission (Jackson, 2009), reflecting the argu-
55 ments above.

Sustainability science and wicked problem analysis

56 Nowadays there is a much more supportive atmo-
57 sphere for sustainability science partnerships,
58 inside and external to academia. This is due to
59 important shifts in interests of national science
60 research councils as well as the push from gov-
61 ernments and business (for example, National
62 Research Council, 1999; Adger and Jordan,
63 2009). Thus, since the 1990s, research on climate
64 change impacts and adaptation, and on biodiver-
65 sity loss, which accompanied the ratification of
66 UN Conventions on Climate Change and Bio-
67 logical Diversity, has drawn on the focus on envi-
68 ronmental and development issues in previous
69 decades to pave the way to sustainability science.
70

71 Van den Hove (2007, 818) usefully distin-
72 guishes between two complementary aspects of
73 contemporary science, issue-driven ‘science for
74 action’ and curiosity-driven ‘science for science’.
75 Jane Lubchenco (1998), in her presidential
76 address to the American Association for the
77 Advancement of Science, called for a ‘new social
78 contract with science . . . that would more
79 adequately address the problems of the current
80 century than does our current scientific enter-
81 prise’. Lubchenco’s comment also recognises
82 that too much emphasis on problem identifi-
83 cation may result in the emergence of unsolv-
84 able or ‘wicked’ problem analysis. Verweij and
85 Thompson (2007) characterise ‘wicked prob-
86 lems’ as being so narrowly structured that any
87 attempted solution generates new ‘problem out-
88 comes’. This is because problem analysis is set in
89 patterns of thinking and knowledge training
90 which are unable to see the breadth and length of
91 opportunity ‘chains’. Lying alongside any
92 ‘problem’ is an ‘opportunity’, if the knowledge
93 frame and implementing institutional arrange-
94 ments are altered suitably.
95

96 An example of wicked problem creation lies in
97 the biofuel debate, where efforts to deal with
98 climate change have pushed the opportunities for
99 fossil, carbon-free fuels. This exciting option is
100 backfiring because the total carbon footprint over
101 the link between production and consumption
102 may not be carbon neutral. Moreover, in the
103 current context of worldwide inflation of staple
104 food prices, such a strategy may eventually widen
105 social injustice if staple foods become econo-
106 mically inaccessible, as biofuel crops absorb
107 limited land and economic space (Boddiger,
108 2007). SSPs would aim to find a form of biofuel
109 production and transportation that generates
110 sustainability on the basis of the principles out-

lined in Figure 1. Similar 'wicked problems' can be found for dealing sustainably with very heavy rainstorms, which overload urban drainage and sewerage systems and cause devastating local and short-term flooding. Such arrangements for sustainability certification are particularly suitable for SSP treatment. Right now, there is no agreement for sustainable sourcing and accreditation for either biofuels or water.

Exploring the transformational qualities of SSPs

For SSPs to work they will have to confront four tests of excellence in both research and implementation of any transition to sustainability.

1. They will need to contribute to creating a new form of governance and coherent mechanisms that help to combine lateral networks and a horizontal hierarchy of cooperative institutions of formal government and to bridge global to local scales. SSPs have to address the growing interconnections between public, private and civil sectors so that they become more integrated rather than a series of disconnected parts. (See Adger and Jordan (2009) for an extended review.)
2. The long-term impacts of past decisions are already influencing today's world, as much as current decisions are shaping the range of options in future. Governing and regulating institutions need to be so designed that they address the consequences of their actions for several generations ahead. Currently there is no effective mechanism for bridging the gap between short-term electoral pressure, which, by and large, maintains unsustainable decision-making and behaviour, and long-term ecological resilience and social justice requirements (O'Riordan, 2009).
3. Since the long term combines the uncertainties of both planetary and political reaction to change and crises, together with the uncertainties of how policies and cultural outlooks and behaviour may shift as a consequence, approaches based on conventional modelling and scenarios offer limited and scientifically problematic insights into the future. Moving away from exclusive, top-down, 'exact' science, sustainability science is thus inclusive, participatory and adaptive. It encourages innovation, exploration, reflection, exchange and mixing of knowledge genres. Thus, alongside scenarios and computer models of change, art and drama can be valuable tools

to develop narratives and creative interpretations of how visions may be generated and realised. For example, powerful and inspiring inquiring methods, such as role-plays or World Cafés, substantially draw on alternative modes of expression and experiencing, which stimulate creative collaborative thinking (Bolton and Heathcote, 1999; Brown *et al.*, 2005, Stoll-Kleemann and Welp 2008).

4. Markets may deal with risk, but have no capacity to cope with the long-term futures of a transition to sustainability. For markets to work effectively, as currently being observed with the global dialogue for new market structures, regulatory criteria for guaranteeing both social justice and ecological systems values will have to become an intrinsic part of the pricing process. This will require completely new institutions combining public-private and civil integration into operational markets. Universities and other higher education institutions can, and effectively in places already do, play an over-arching role of mediator (O'Riordan 2009).

All of this suggests that SSPs incorporate a group of particular qualities as summarised in Figure 2.

This is a possible template for sustainability science partnerships. It involves deep, prolonged and creative interaction with a variety of parties inside and outside academia. The aim is to build an effective and case-based alliance for both research and experimentation to review possible pathways to sustainable futures.

Two critical features of SSPs emerge from this analysis. One is the notion of *sustainability transitions*. Sustainability transitions are step changes in governing arrangements involving fresh approaches to regulation, markets, cooperative budget coordination and local-scale, integrated policy delivery. These transitions involve convulsive institutional shifts. They are in part creative scenarios, in part intensive zones of learning and re-analysis, and in part joint policy initiatives among politicians, businesses and civic society. An example is the effort currently being pursued by a group of major cities, including the administrations of New York and Rotterdam, to devise how their infrastructure and economies and social values might look in the event of becoming both carbon neutral and sustainable by 2050 (www.drift.eur.nl).

This theme of embedding social justice into sustainability transitions also applies to caring

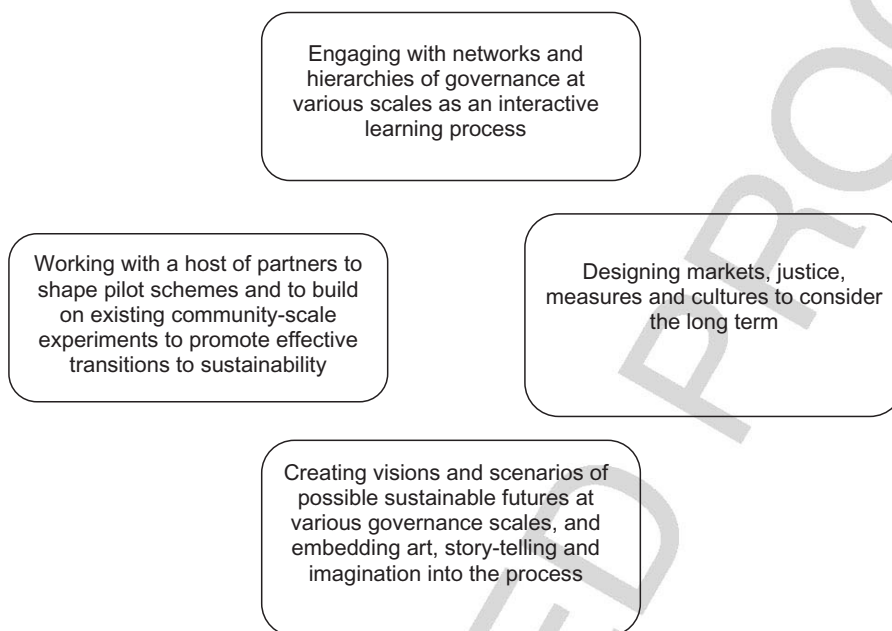


Figure 2 Key qualities of sustainability science partnerships (own compilation, 2009).

for those whose livelihoods are dependent on non-sustainable activities, and who are displaced by the shift to sustainability. Examples include fishing communities bordering on overfished coasts, and coal miners in a world of removing coal-fired power plants. Here is where sustainability transitions could prove of immense value, namely to assist the transformation of a society and economy from dependence on non-sustainability to acceptance of sustainability as the social and economic norm.

The second key element of SSP is the devising of innovative *boundary organisations* – understood as ‘new forms of academic organisation that occupy the space between science, policy and business concerns’ (Hellström and Jacob, 2003, 235). These are structures of creative learning where organisations and their employees transcend their boundaries of familiarity, where they embark on creative ways of measuring such outcomes as loss of social trust and civic virtue, and where sequential changes to established bodies such as local government and business responsibility units actually melt into interconnected organisms.

Higher education and sustainability

Educational institutions and educators have a particularly important role to play. Academics

and universities have responded to vast societal changes by inspiring several important conceptual and methodological thresholds over recent decades, resulting in the establishment of sustainability as a legitimate research field. These include:

1. development of the systemic approach, which has opened the road for the now accepted view of ‘co-evolving’ natural and societal systems, ‘holistic’ approaches and the complex interplay between local to global scales (Harris, 2007);
2. acknowledgement of the need for inter- and trans-disciplinarity, which have fuelled a vast body of work on the hurdles and possible ways to overcome them (Graybill *et al.*, 2006, ZumBrunnen and So-Min, 2009);
3. development of inclusive, participatory exploratory research approaches and key principles for transformational collaborative inquiry (Himmelman, 1996; Freyvogel, 1998; Reason, 2002), as well as a wide range of methodologies (for example <http://www.learningforsustainability.net/research/>);
4. in response to gradual professionalism in the fields of environmental resources management, development aid and interpersonal conflict, the design and compilation by academics of new curricula and knowledge and method-

- 1 ologies from widely different scientific disci- 55
2 plines to produce practice-orientated train- 56
3 ing in cross-thematic issues. The emergence 57
4 of the 'management' professionals has thus 58
5 inspired the production of encyclopaedic 59
6 guides and technical handbooks (Ryding, 60
7 1994; Brune *et al.*, 1997; Mirovitskaya and 61
8 Ascher, 2001; Pretty *et al.*, 2007 – 'just' for 62
9 the field of environment management). 63
- 10 5. At the same time, the dominance of techno- 64
11 cratic hierarchies, based on exclusive, top- 65
12 down decision-making, has often reached the 66
13 limits of societal acceptance, as demonstrated 67
14 by the recent food scandals around the 'mad 68
15 cow' disease crisis and genetically modified 69
16 organisms since the 1990s (Finucane, 2002; 70
17 Horlick-Jones *et al.*, 2007). In response, aca- 71
18 demics have produced a critical reflection on 72
19 the role of experts, scientists and academic 73
20 institutions in relation to policy-making and 74
21 more broadly in fostering societal change 75
22 (Jasanoff, 1994; Horlick-Jones *et al.*, 2007; 76
23 Adger and Jordan, 2009) 77
- 24 6. Finally, universities have been affected by 78
25 dwindling State resources, the growing influ- 79
26 ence of private sponsors, and increasing com- 80
27 petition at national and international levels 81
28 of research and higher education establish- 82
29 ments (Pyle and Forrant, 2002). Universities 83
30 face difficult ethical dilemmas (for example 84
31 on independence, property of, and access to 85
32 results) and must make critical choices to 86
33 achieve sustainable financing (OECD, 2004). 87
34 Since the 1990s, these dilemmas have gener- 88
35 ated much needed debate and fuelled the 89
36 elaboration of strategic policy guidance, 90
37 which have reframed higher education as the 91
38 cornerstone of sustainable, knowledge societ- 92
39 ies (UNESCO, 1998; 2005) 93
- 40 Sustainability is progressively gaining the status 94
41 of paradigm, and as such is helping to reframe 95
42 educational contents, reform pedagogical and 96
43 learning processes, and question existing higher 97
44 education institutions (Jucker, 2002). The last 98
45 decade has been fruitful with a multitude of ini- 99
46 tiatives developed across the world to develop 100
47 locally-meaningful ways of incorporating sus- 101
48 tainability in higher education (Leal Filho, 102
49 2002a). In doing this, five distinct, though inter- 103
50 related, goals are noticeable. 104
- 51 1. The notion of 'campus greening' encom- 105
52 passes all efforts towards making universities 106
53 more sustainable in practice, such as recy- 107
54 cling, water clearing and energy-saving 108
measures, as well as in employment practice 109
(Allen, 1999; Leal Filho, 1999). 56
2. An effort has been made to include sustain- 57
ability in taught pedagogical contents through 58
curriculum and textbook development (for 59
example, Leal Filho, 2002a). 60
3. Pedagogical practice and process themselves 61
have been scrutinised to incorporate interdis- 62
ciplinarity, a more active learning approach, 63
student participation, and programs which 64
closely integrate partners in local communi- 65
ties and industry (Cahill and Chalker Scott, 66
2002; Leal Filho, 2005; Dengler, 2008, Fox 67
et al., 2008; Siegel, 2008). 68
4. Disciplinary departmental structures, univer- 69
sity institutions and governance, and decision- 70
making processes have also been questioned to 71
create more inter-departmental fora, interdis- 72
ciplinary study programs and student-led cur- 73
riculum development (Wiewel and Lieber, 74
1998; Lock and Mohns, 2002; Graybill *et al.*, 75
2006; M'Gonigle and Starke, 2006). 76
5. Experiments in sustainability education are 77
being documented, shared and published 78
through a number of active platforms (such 79
as the peer-reviewed journal *International 80
Journal of Sustainability in Higher Educa- 81
tion*, and academic book series such as Peter 82
Lang's *Environmental Education, Communi- 83
cation and Sustainability* series), which have 84
substantially contributed to the establishment 85
and maturation of this novel academic field 86
(Leal Filho, 2002b; 2005). 87

Some recent initiatives in continental Europe

European universities have started to take their responsibility towards a transition to sustainability seriously. There are several initiatives, including Master's programs, which teach sustainability science. Interesting initiatives reported here are primarily from Germany, Switzerland and Austria, although this list is by no means exhaustive.

At Lüneburg University in Germany, a three-year research and development project called 'Sustainable University – Sustainable Development in the context of university reverts' investigates how universities meet the challenges connected to the new paradigm of sustainable development and how they change by implementing a sustainable development vision. Lüneburg University also established a study program entitled 'sustainability science'. Initiated in 2004, this course lasts two semesters and comprises students and scientists from different

1 disciplines (http://www.leuphana.de/graduate_
2 [school/die-masterprogramme/arts-sciences/](http://www.leuphana.de/graduate_school/die-masterprogramme/arts-sciences/sustainability-sciences.html)
3 [sustainability-sciences.html](http://www.leuphana.de/graduate_school/die-masterprogramme/arts-sciences/sustainability-sciences.html): see also Beringer,
4 2007).

5 In Switzerland, at Basel University, a Master's
6 degree in Sustainable Development is offered.
7 This interdisciplinary endeavour is a joint initia-
8 tive by the Faculties of Science, Humanities and
9 Business and Economics. This full-time course
10 lasts four semesters. Methodological aspects of
11 the curriculum include the analytical and integra-
12 tive skills and knowledge necessary to work
13 on complex questions relevant to sustainability,
14 together with reflexive skills and proficiency in
15 dealing with policy instruments. Considerable
16 importance is placed on competence in commu-
17 nication, team development and project manage-
18 ment in order to facilitate constructive work in
19 transdisciplinary settings (for more information
20 (see www.msd.unibas.ch/).

21 In Austria, the rescoping of Graz University
22 along sustainability lines started in the early
23 1990s with the Environmental Systems Sciences
24 study program. In 2002, the student organisation
25 for sustainable economics and management,
26 'oikos Graz', was founded, which, together with
27 the Vice-President for Research and Knowledge
28 Transfer, furthered the integration of sustainabil-
29 ity issues. A task force, 'Sustainable University
30 Graz', was founded in 2004 with the common
31 goal of publishing Austria's first University
32 Sustainability Report in 2006. Today, a range of
33 study programs in the field of sustainability
34 science is available (for more information, see
35 www.rce-graz.at).

36 Several other sustainability initiatives are
37 being introduced at other European Universities
38 such as at the School of Global Studies in Goth-
39 enburg University, Sweden and the Free Univer-
40 sity of Brussels, Belgium. There, a curriculum in
41 human ecology has been developed to teach sus-
42 tainable development issues (Luc Hens at: [http://](http://www.vub.ac.be/MEKO/gen/introd.html)
43 www.vub.ac.be/MEKO/gen/introd.html).

44 Finally, at Greifswald University (Germany),
45 the Master of Science Program in 'Sustainability
46 Geography' (due to start in 2010) aims to prepare
47 future decision-makers and practitioners in the
48 field of conservation, natural resource manage-
49 ment and development to face global change
50 challenges through an interdisciplinary and
51 solution-orientated approach rooted in the prin-
52 ciples of sustainability. Its original focus on
53 international nature conservation, landscape
54 ecology and geography combines state-of-the-art
55 theoretical and methodological frameworks with

a strong focus on empirical research through
hands-on experience in various sites of the
international network of UNESCO Biosphere
Reserves. Run across two key institutes (the
Institutes of Geography and of Botany and Land-
scape Ecology), this Master of Science is a cor-
nerstone of the process of founding a dynamic
Sustainable Science Partnership at Greifswald
University, with two further strategic partners
being the recently created Global Centre for Bio-
sphere Research Advancement (for academic
excellence – <http://biosphere-research.org/>) and
the German Society for Technical Cooperation
(GTZ – for practice-orientated expertise [http://](http://www.gtz.de/de)
www.gtz.de/de).

Readers are invited to add to this list by creat-
ing a discussion in this Journal to promote the
best examples of SSPs that are emerging
throughout the world.

Concluding observations

Universities could be poised to adopt the frame-
work of SSPs. But to do so with verve, will
require a number of innovative procedures. Here
is a possible set of actions.

1. Develop your own sustainability management team and prepare a sustainability action plan, ideally encouraged by the relevant national science funding councils, and linked to budget allocation and performance indicators.
2. Establish SSPs with local and regional government, businesses, civil society and key local actors. A clear business plan should be devised, the implementation of which should be facilitated through effective and inspiring partnership leadership with funding from all involved parties.
3. Develop a strategic set of projects, work plans and collaborative funding based on what partner members are seeking from the SSP. This should be transparent and accessible to the wider public. There is much need for serious involvement and 'ownership' of SSPs by local community groups, who can be key players in SSPs. Surprisingly; this has proven to be quite a difficult arena for universities to embrace, partly because relations between powerful local civic interests and the university community have not always been very collegiate.
4. Develop a support-based research and training outreach process with partner organisations. This should be accompanied by a web platform and local sustainability initiatives

1 that bring in, and in part are led by, local
 2 communities.
 3 5. Create postgraduate courses in sustainabil-
 4 ity enterprise initiatives, and fuel them with
 5 funding originating from the partners. These
 6 should be professional development courses
 7 providing the opportunity for mixed learning
 8 between university researchers and partner
 9 employers. This may involve working
 10 arrangements that combine placements with
 11 research seminars and joint research initia-
 12 tives across the university walls. A more
 13 radical suggestion is the eventual introduction
 14 of twinned arrangements for joint Master's
 15 and Doctoral dissertations linking students to
 16 politicians, local businesses and local com-
 17 munity organisations.

18 Academia is changing and the idea of a sustain-
 19 ability transition is becoming more commonly
 20 accepted. Creative opportunities are being fos-
 21 tered in many campuses, going well beyond good
 22 housekeeping and viable research into green
 23 technology and business management for sus-
 24 tainability. The key here is to encourage a dia-
 25 logue amongst a range of faculties and academic
 26 establishments, possible sponsors from chari-
 27 table institutions, together with the public and
 28 private sectors, so as to open up various
 29 approaches to SSPs. The further task will be to
 30 build on these foundations in terms of career
 31 development and training programs amongst
 32 cooperating faculties, external parties, future
 33 managers and policy promoters, active citizens
 34 and social entrepreneurs.

35 All of this will require a step change in the
 36 normal processes of academia. While of their
 37 time outside the university walls, SSPs are still to
 38 come of age inside the campus.

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