# Sustainability at Higher Education Institutions: develop – network – report

## HOCHN Working Package RESEARCH

### Research questions

Through targeted research, Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) can generate insights into global development towards sustainability. They thus play a decisive role in the transformation towards a sustainable society. Our overarching research questions are: How do we define sustainability in the context of Higher Education? How can sustainability-oriented research be fostered and implemented at German HEIs?

### Research objectives

- Development of a deep understanding of sustainability in the context of Higher Education, while reflecting on the purpose of HEIs and distinguishing between related issues (e.g. Climate Change, Bioeconomy)
- Identification of fields of action and criteria for sustainability research at HEIs
- Identification and structuring of sustainability-oriented research activities at HEIs in Germany

### Current state of research and intermediate results

#### Conceptualising sustainability

- Analysis of sustainability definitions of German HEIs
- First draft of sustainability definition presented and discussed
- Reflection on the coherences of and distinctions between sustainability and related issues, such as resilience, bioeconomy etc.
- Normative reflection on the purpose of Higher Education

#### Collaboration and exchange with other working packages and beyond

- Two feedback loops for the conceptualization of sustainability across all HOCHN working packages
- Collaboration in preparing the interviews with working package GOVERNANCE as well as knowledge exchange regarding research design with working package ESD & working package OPERATIONS
- PRAFO-session focussing on analysis and integration of LeNa into HOCHN

#### Empirical data collection (Phase I)

- Literature survey and study of previous research with a special focus on results of the research project LeNa (Leitfaden Nachhaltigkeitsmanagement in außeruniversitären Forschungseinrichtungen, BMBF)
- Analysis of the LeNa guidelines ('Reflexionsrahmen'). How can the LeNa results be adapted to suit and benefit the specific context of research at HEIs?
- Literature driven collection of practices, facilitating and aggregating aspects regarding the initiation, implementation and upgrading of sustainability research at HEIs
- Theoretical sampling of first three HEIs for Good Practice Study
- Identification of potential interview partners at 5 different levels of HEI governance incl. (1) University directorate, (2) sustainability management, (3) research and teaching on post-doc level and beyond, (4) research and teaching on pre-PhD and PhD-level, (5) non-academic practice involved in research (transdisciplinarity)

### Next steps & upcoming events

- Qualitative interviews in the Good Practice Study
- Pretest of structured questionnaire for Mapping Study
- Discussion of draft definition with sustainability experts of working packages
- Identification of criteria for research in sustainability and conceptual clarification of the tension between sustainability and other normative strategies

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**INVITATION TO UPCOMING PRAFO-SESSION:**

November 23rd – 24th 2017 @ Leuphana University Lueneburg

Together with the working package GOVERNANCE – we will present intermediate research results on current sustainability-related practices in research and governance and create a space to jointly discuss the requirements for the implementation of sustainability research at German Higher Education Institutions.

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