

Sustainability Governance at Higher Education Institutions (HEIs)

Insights and experiences from German HEIs

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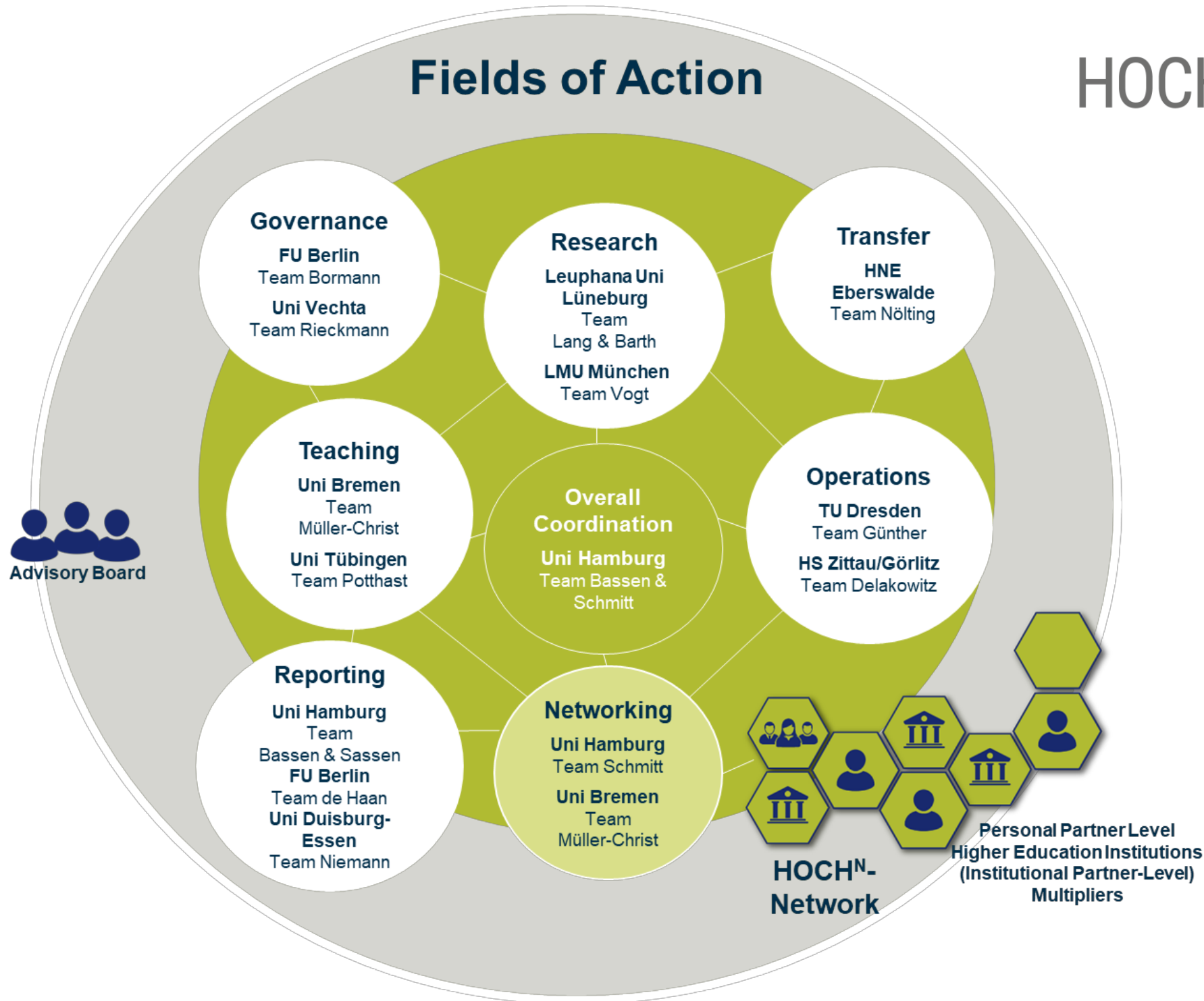
Sustainability at Higher Education Institutions: develop – network – report

- Collaboration of **eleven German higher education institutions** (HEIs) in order to multiply, refine and expand expert knowledge and process skills for sustainable development.
- All partners are **dedicated to create a strong inter- and transdisciplinary network** on research as well as applied topics of sustainability.
- The HOCH^N network is an **open innovation platform** for all who are interested in participating.

Work package Governance

- consists of 7 scientists from Freie Universität Berlin and Universität Vechta,
- started in December 2016,
- examines processes and structures of sustainability implementation at HEIs,
- brought about working papers, articles and guidelines on/for sustainability governance at higher education institutions.

Please find the publications and information on the project on www.hoch-n.org



Research at eleven HEIs

- Basis: 61 stakeholder interviews in 2017 with stakeholders from five different status groups (students, scientific staff, administrative/technical staff, sustainability officers and top management)
- General findings:
 - There is no general concept for successful sustainability governance!
 - Factors like size, location, institutional history and traditions or the range of disciplines of an HEI create very different starting points and need to be taken into account while designing governance measures for sustainable development.
- Outcome: Guide “[Sustainability Governance at Higher Education Institutions](#)” offering i.e. a self-appraisal tool for structures and processes

Examples of central governance measures

**Sustainability
officers**

**Steering
committees**

**Mission
statements and
other official
declarations**

**Sustainability
reporting**

**Qualification
activities**

Sustainability Governance at the University of Vechta

- 2015: university-wide workshops on sustainable development at the University of Vechta
- 2015: foundation of the Sustainable University Working Group
- July 2015: Prof. Dr. Marco Rieckmann appointed as Presidential Advisor on Sustainability of the University of Vechta
- June 2017: adoption of sustainability guidelines
- Since 2018: staff training series and an action week on education for sustainable development (ESD)
- 2019: Sustainability as an essential element in the target agreements of the University of Vechta
- December 2020: Publication of the first sustainability report

Sustainable University Working Group

- Impulse generator for sustainable development at the University of Vechta
- Open and cross-status working group, approx. 15 members
- Coordinated by Marco Rieckmann and a staff member
- Resources: 0.25 research staff position



Sustainability Guidelines of the University of Vechta

- Adopted by the Senate of the University of Vechta at its 65th meeting on 21 June 2017.
- Preamble: "The University of Vechta embeds the principles of sustainability in all its areas – teaching, research and campus."
- Areas of action:
 - Education for sustainable development
 - Research for sustainable development
 - Living sustainability on campus
 - Joint action for sustainable development
 - Cooperation and networking for sustainable development
- <https://www.uni-vechta.de/uni/sustainable-university/home/sustainability-guidelines/?L=3>

Target agreements of the University of Vechta (2019 - 2021)

- "The University commits itself to working 'For a Culture of Sustainability' in the spirit of the 25th General Assembly of the German Rectors' Conference in Lüneburg on 06 November 2018." (p. 5)
- In addition, sustainability as an essential element in the university development plan.

Publication of the first sustainability report

- Aims: Presentation of the sustainability process to the public, self-reflection and identification of further measures and goals in the university sustainability process.
- Participatory creation (workshop, survey)
- Orientation towards the criteria of the university-specific German Sustainability Code (HS-DNK)
- Publication: December 2020

Online (in German):

https://www.uni-vechta.de/fileadmin/user_upload/Nachhaltige_Hochschule/Nachhaltigkeitsbericht_2020_Universitaet_Vechta.pdf



Illustration: Jonas Heidebrecht

Staff training series and an action week on education for sustainable development (ESD)

- ESD training series for lecturers (every summer semester since 2018): workshops about ESD and different learning approaches and methods
- ESD Action Week in November (since 2018), with a public event



Thank you!

Find more information: www.hoch-n.org

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Bormann, I.; Rieckmann, M.; Bauer, M.; Kummer, B.; Niedlich, S. ; Doneliene, M.; Jaeger, L.; Rietzke, D. (2020): Sustainability Governance at Higher Education Institutions. BMBF-Projekt „Nachhaltigkeit an Hochschulen: entwickeln – vernetzen – berichten (HOCH^N)“, Berlin und Vechta. Available at <https://www.hochn.uni-hamburg.de/-downloads/handlungsfelder/governance/guide-book-sustainability-governance-at-higher-education-institutions-edition-2020.pdf>

Niedlich, S., Bormann, I., Kummer, B., Rieckmann, M., Bauer, M. (2017): Governance-Verständnis des AP Governance. AP Gov. Arbeitspapier No. 1. [PDF](#) (German only).

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Niedlich, S., Bauer, M., Doneliene, M., Jaeger, L., Rieckmann, M., Bormann, I. (2020): Assessment of Sustainability Governance in Higher Education Institutions – a Systemic Tool using a Governance Equalizer. In: Sustainability 12 (5), S. 1816, <https://doi.org/10.3390/su12051816>.