



## DOCUMENTATION OF THE INTERNATIONAL PRACTICAL-RESEARCH-SESSION „Strategic Networking for Sustainability: Insights from Research and Practice“

### ABSTRACT

Higher education institutions (HEIs) increasingly discern their role and capacity as important societal actors to address sustainability problems. In this session we want to elaborate how networks between HEIs, can help to jointly utilize already existing expertise and jointly foster innovation to advance efforts towards sustainability?

For so doing we want to explore potential benefits and challenges of HEI-networks as well as to collect concrete ideas for successful collaboration.

We will depart from theoretical and empirical insights gained in two German case studies:

a) *The University Alliance for Sustainability:*

This contribution includes a case study of the innovation potential that an international network of strategic partner universities committed to sustainable development can unfold in the area of university teaching.

b) *The research project Sustainability at HEIs:*

Empirical insights depict the current landscape of sustainability-oriented research at German HEIs. They are complemented by good practices on how to implement research results in order to exemplify potential for mutual exchange, learning and collaboration across HEIs.

Building on these inputs we engage participants in an interactive session discussing their experiences and expectations as well as measures to utilize the strategic advantages of networks at their home institution.

### Organisers

HOCH-N work package research, Leuphana University Lüneburg, University Alliance for Sustainability, Freie Universität Berlin.

Supported by the LMU of the work package research and in coordination with the AP networking.

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15:00 – 17.00 Uhr

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## AGENDA

- Greeting
- Getting to know each other; Visualization of the participants' diversity
- Input 1: The Research Project „Sustainability at HEIs“: Concrete Steps how a single university can contribute to establishing a HEI-network for sustainability  
*Daniel J. Lang, Judith Kahle*
- Input 2: The “University Alliance for Sustainability”: Concrete Benefits of a single university in a HEI-network for sustainability  
*Andreas Wanke, Katrin Risch*
- Discussion in small groups:
  - a) Expectations and experiences in higher education networks. Erwartungen und Erfahrungen in Hochschulnetzwerken
  - b) Entwicklungspotenzialen von Hochschulnetzwerken und Vorteile/Benefits für die einzelne Hochschule
- Concluding plenary session on the results of the group discussions

## SUMMARY - INPUT 1

### The Research Project „Sustainability at HEIs“: Concrete Steps how a single university can contribute to establishing a HEI-network for sustainability

- In the framework of HOCH-N, the work package Research contributes to the establishment of the national Hoch-N network on four levels:

(1) National level	Vice presidents of all 399 German higher education institutions invited into the Hoch-N network
(2) Higher education institution level	President, researchers, administrative staff and students of the Leuphana university invited into the Hoch-N network
(3) Work package level	Feeding empirical information into the network through an application-oriented handbook and scientific publications
(4) Individual level	Becoming a member of Hoch-N yourself

- The work package focusses its contribution on networking between sustainability-oriented higher education institutions in Germany on level 3, empirical research
- For this, the expertise gathered so far in sustainability-oriented research at German institutions of higher education will be made visible and usable for a broader professional audience consisting of institutions of higher education, research funders and the interested public. This in turn lays the foundation for an informed knowledge and experience exchange and future collaborations between institutions of higher education.

**Preliminary result of the quantitative study**



Fig. 1: Current response to the online survey of the quantitative study



Fig. 2: Area proportional to Size Diagram: To which of the development goal(s) formulated by the United Nations do you contribute with your research? [Multiple answers possible]

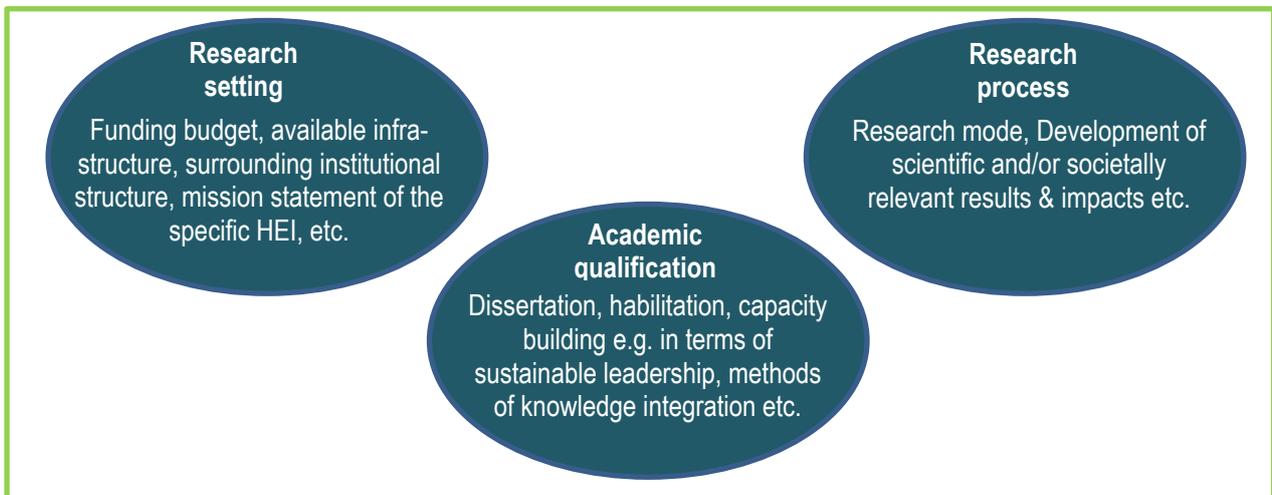


Fig. 3: Literature-based and theoretically clustered design fields of sustainability-oriented research at institutions of higher education

PRACTICES	MOTIVATIONS	FACILITATORS / BARRIERS	OUTCOMES
Establish sustainability- as a guiding principle	former environmental orientation sustainability: high future relevance in society & science sustainability: unique feature	(+) intrinsically motivated researchers (+) openminded principal (-) criticism/fear- by researchers: limitation of freedom of research (-) lacking example for orientation	topic-focused inter- & transdisciplinary research across institutes incl. dissertations national & international reputation targeted recruitment- & attraction of- top (inter-national) researchers Concrete sustainable solutions

Fig. 4: Good Practice example at the interface of governance and research of institutions of higher education aimed at sustainable development; Basis: Pretest-interview with representatives of the administration of institutions of higher education

## SUMMARY - INPUT 2

### The “University Alliance for Sustainability”: Concrete Benefits of a single university in a HEI-network for sustainability

**Basic principle:** „Whole Institution Approach “. Sustainability should be incorporated into all structural and topical entities of institutions of higher education.

#### Measures:

<b>Mobility programme</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Exchange visits for researchers, PhD-candidates, students and administrative staff</li> <li>• Volunteer exchange between student initiatives</li> </ul>
<b>Conferences and Workshops</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• „Teaching Incubators“: Discussion of new teaching methods and development options between lecturers and staff in</li> </ul>

	charge of developing curricula <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• „Management Incubators“: Managers present best-practice examples</li> </ul>
<b>Communication and stakeholder involvement</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Programme management in Berlin with coordinators from all partner universities</li> <li>• Publishing of first research results in the UAS Working Paper Series</li> <li>• Common website and channels of communication</li> <li>• Publishing journal articles and taking part in international conferences</li> </ul>

## Area „Sustainable Development“ at a Glance

	Managing Sustainability	Communicating Sustainability	Shaping Sustainability	Researching Sustainability
Groundwork	Overarching themes: Global societal challenges, guiding principles of sustainable development, 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) of the UN, Education for Sustainable Development (ESD), Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR), Service Learning, and sustainability management			
	Key question: Which strategies and means enable us to integrate sustainability management into companies and institutions?	Key question: Which channels and instruments of communication are suitable for sustainability strategies and activities?	Key question: How can we turn the complex subject of sustainability into concrete projects?	Key question: How can we integrate the crosscutting theme of sustainability into research projects or focus on it?
Practical Part	Overarching task: Guided interdisciplinary teams take on sustainable project tasks from real-world areas			
	Goal: Developing and realizing sustainability-orientated management projects (e.g. on university campus, procurement, energy, facility or personnel management etc.)	Goal: Developing and designing communication concepts and strategies for science, politics and business	Goal: Developing and realizing action-orientated workshops and sustainability related activities as living labs during the university days or in public institutions (campus community partnerships)	Goal: Developing and realizing sustainability related research through collaboration with current and planned research projects of the university or private-sector companies
	Overarching Methods: Interactive and participatory engagement of students to foster shaping skills			

Fig. 5: The basis of integration of sustainability in institutions

### Effects at the Freie Universität Berlin

1. Advantages through the involvement in UAS (University Alliance for Sustainability), e.g. provides a gateway; new projects can use experience gathered elsewhere for orientation.
2. Cooperation between stakeholders of the FUB and other institutions of higher education responsible for the development of the curriculum and the better integration of sustainability into teaching.
3. Fostering exchange between institutions of higher education via the UAS network.

4. The topic sustainable development is now a basic element of bachelor programmes at the FUB.
5. Expansion of interdisciplinary cooperation at the FUB.
6. Project for more sustainability on campus (e.g. bikes for hire at the university etc.)

Experiences	Expectations
Networks not that formal	Learn from each other/knowledge input and exchange
If expectations not met: step out of network	Funding
Many network memberships	New projects and ideas
Who is member? (Expertise, individuals vs. institutes/institutions, ownership/group identity)	Different perspectives and diverse perspectives (interculturality)
Social capital/socialization	Contacts
Hierarchies: steep ↔ flat (more innovation?)	Exchange good practices
Needs a focus → who is setting the agenda?	Exchange success factors
Funding: amount; funded by whom?/funding criteria	

7. Emergence of new courses on sustainability at the FUB.

## RESULTS OF THE SMALL-GROUP DISCUSSIONS

Tab. 1: Expectations and experiences of PraFo-participants concerning sustainability networks of HEIs

Tab. 2: Aspects of strategic development and successful utilization of HEI-networks collected by PraFo-participants

Advancement	Strategic impact
Peer review resources → people you trust	Choose the right network
Local conferences: carbon footprint ↓, cultural diversity ↓?, virtual meetings? → disconnecting people/"basis" from the "top" → networks falling apart → lacking ownership	Advocacy for change → "bring in the bigger guns" to unlock blockages
Local networks	Benchmarking and learning
Regular meetings	
External opinion → evaluation → initiate self-reflection → being transparent	