

# Role of Students in Shaping the Higher Education Towards Sustainability

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Author: Lenka Parkanova, President of oikos International

## Summary of the Presentation

The main purpose of this presentation is to introduce students' perspectives on higher education with special focus on sustainability in economic and management. During the presentation, three different angles of the mentioned topic are discussed. Firstly, the current critical reflection of higher education by students is presented. The results of the *Business as UNusual* survey by *NetImpact* and analysis by *PEPS-Économie* are introduced. Secondly, the possibilities of student involvement in shaping their education are analysed. Thirdly, concrete examples of student activities that shape current economics and management education are discussed.

## Reflection of Education by Students of Economics and Management

The recent edition (September 2, 2014) of *Business as Unusual* can serve as an example of students' perception on curricula. The survey features 3 352 student opinions on business programs. In this survey, students rate their graduate program's integration of social and environmental themes into curricula, career services, and student activities. Based on the survey, 93% of students consider social and environmental issues as important to a business' long-term success. Among the most important topics to be addressed are: climate, energy, sustainable product development, resource conservation, supply chain management and human rights. 88% respondents consider learning about social and environmental issues a priority, and 83% are willing to take a 15% salary cut for a job that makes a social or environmental difference in the world. Over the last years, the level of *complete satisfaction* with the sustainability curriculum at respective business schools has dropped. The percentage of students who say they are *completely satisfied* decreased from 27 % in 2010 to 16 % in 2014. The figures referring to *not at all satisfied* increased from 2 % in 2010 to 5 % in 2014.

The analysis of curricula in 50 French universities conducted by the PEPS Économie offers another critical perception of current economics curricula. Real world economic issues are addressed in 3,3% of all economics curricula. Additionally, the amount of what the analysis calls *reflexivity* (theory of knowledge, history of economic thought and economic theories) is represented by 2% in current economics curricula in France.

## Possibilities of Student Involvement in the Discussion

One strategy for students' engagement in the discussion about curricula change is campaigning. In May 2014, the International Student Initiative for Pluralism in Economics (ISIPE) was launched and the international manifesto calling for a change in economics education was officially released. The campaign, which aims at theoretical and methodological pluralism and embedding interdisciplinary in economics teaching, has met a large media attention worldwide.

### Excerpt from the ISIPE Open Letter

*"We are dissatisfied with the dramatic narrowing of the curriculum that has taken place over the last couple of decades. This lack of intellectual diversity does not only restrain education and research. It limits our ability to contend with the multidimensional challenges of the 21st century - from financial stability, to food security and climate change. The real world should be brought back into the classroom, as well as debate and a pluralism of theories and methods."*

Another approach can be a dialogue led by student initiatives at the universities. oikos has developed such a dialogue through 41 student chapters worldwide who with the help of their academic Advisors actively influence their university environment. oikos chapters run around 200 projects and events every year ranging from lectures, workshops, excursions, simulations towards long term projects focused on campus management or curricula change.

## Examples of Student Initiatives that Shape Economics and Management Education

The third part of this summary introduces concrete projects that have been managed and implemented by oikos members and which directly influence economics and management education.

In 2013, oikos Tübingen brought together bankers, money experts and a philosopher to reflect on the current banking system. The panel called *Good Money! Good Money?* allowed 170 participants to discuss the role finance and banking play in a sustainable economy. Another project run by this chapter was dedicated to controversies in microfinance, its benefits in Bangladesh versus its challenges as reflected in multiple suicides committed by farmers who had taken out microfinance loans in India. After the event, the university has taken over the topic and now runs a five-day seminar on microfinance.

Together with the regional group of the Post-Growth Network, oikos Lüneburg organised a series of lectures around the topic of *Post-Growth* at the Leuphana University. Participants explored consequences and limitations of economic growth and also took into account challenges of the current financial system. They had an opportunity to critically reflect on the concept of a green economy as well as corporate responsibility and discussed alternative solutions to the challenges posed by the current system.

In 2013, members of oikos Konstanz developed and implemented a new course on Sustainable Urban Development, which has been further improved and included in curricula in 2014.

The oikos Winter School 2014 was a 10 days event organised by oikos Witten/Herdecke, which aimed at providing a platform for discussion on crucial sustainability issues from a both mainstream and alternative economic perspective. The reflection video of the organising team demonstrates 5 key elements of education for sustainability:

1. *Ownership* = Responsibility for your own learning process
2. *Critical Thinking* = Willingness to understand mainstream paradigms and having the courage to challenge them
3. *Value Oriented Approach* = Starts with ourselves (e.g. respecting our team members) and continues towards addressing world's challenges
4. *Learning by Doing* = Experiencing and practising theoretical concepts
5. *Reflecting* = Realising and deepening your own learning experience

The video (second video on the respective page in English) can be streamed here: <http://www.uni-wh.de/universitaet/die-uwh-stellt-sich-vor/im-video/wirtschaft/oikos-witten/>

Lastly, the new concept of oikos Learning Circles helps the oikos community build, share and express knowledge through a process of open dialogue and deep reflection. Within each Learning Circle people with a common interest gain experience, knowledge and establish networks in their chosen subject area. There are seven Learning Circles in oikos on the topics of: economics, energy, entrepreneurship, fashion, finance, leadership and management.

## Questions for Discussion

How can students contribute to curricula change?

What needs to be done in order to allow students shape their education in terms of content and methodologies?

How can all the key stakeholders work together to improve our university environment?

## References

<http://www.isipe.net/>

<https://netimpact.org/business-as-unusual>

<http://oikos-international.org/>

<http://pepseco.wordpress.com/>

<http://www.uni-wh.de/universitaet/die-uwh-stellt-sich-vor/im-video/wirtschaft/oikos-witten/>

## Contact

[lenka.parkanova@oikos-international.org](mailto:lenka.parkanova@oikos-international.org)