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Track proposal: 2b. Educating for Sustainability

Sustainability teaching in Higher education institutions: gaps between practices, ideal competencies and pedagogical approaches

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Abstract (484 words)

Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) play a critical role in the transformative shift of values and actions across all society members and have ethical and moral responsibilities to increase awareness, knowledge, skills, and values in the target community. Given the importance of HEIs and considering the increasing number of students, teaching staff as well as administrative and management staff, it becomes more fundamental to ensure that sustainability is not only taught but also practiced within universities. Therefore, sustainability values need to be incorporated in all HEIs' missions and practices. However, a holistic understanding of how to incorporate sustainability-related initiatives into HEIs in an integrated way is still a critical challenge in HEIs teaching and learning plans. This was the fundamental reason for building a strategic partnership across four European universities and an international Non-Governmental Organization (NGO) to set up an ERASMUS+ EUSTEPs project - Enhancing Universities' Sustainability Teaching and Practices through Ecological Footprint – in order to undertake both theoretical and practical activities to develop a new generation of sustainable citizens. With the inclusion of the Ecological Footprint concept and tools in educational models it aims to educate students and the wider university community on the sustainability implications of personal behaviors. As a great number of scientific papers has been published since 2000 with a focus on education, including curricula, pedagogies, competences, and educating the educators for sustainability, this paper aims to analyze and summarize this literature focusing on: the emerging trend themes and patterns of research, teaching and curricula in the area of sustainability worldwide and the sustainability competencies needed and pedagogical approaches used within HEIs education and teaching for sustainability.

Relevant examples of Footprint teaching methods applied in HEIs and other schools will be also reviewed to determine which type of tools are employed, their outcomes and key challenges. Based on this, a new students' sustainability teaching module produced by EUSTEPs team will be disclosed by analyzing its main teaching and learning activities, the applied educational materials and the expected outcomes based on each thematic areas. Then the results of testing the proposed module in multiple courses for one semester in the four HEIs involved in the project will be analysed and discussed. The gaps in current teaching given by the literature review, the analyzed Ecological Footprint practices and the testing of the EUSTEPs teaching module will then be discussed to inform EUSTEPs project and to understand how the new learning tool can contribute to the developing of ideal competencies and pedagogical approaches towards sustainability and the fostering of collaboration between HEIs. The results of the research will also contribute to shaping a new generation of sustainability-conscious citizens and professionals who will be trained to assess and analyze impact drivers with the use of dedicated tools and to enhance new professional expertise in the society and in the future labor market.

Keywords: Higher education institutions, sustainability, Ecological Footprint, teaching module, EUSTEPs