



**Further challenges and priorities for the
European Higher Education Area:**

**How the Bologna Process should address the principle of
sustainable development**

**COPERNICUS Consultation Paper
to follow up the Communiqué of the
Conference of European Ministers responsible for Higher Education,
Bergen, 19-20 May 2005**

Towards the European Higher Education Area based on the principle of sustainable development?

Consultation on the possible ways and means to incorporate issues of sustainable development into the Bologna Process to follow up the Bergen Communiqué

The purpose of this Consultation Paper is to provide a basis for comments from the signatories to the COPERNICUS University Charter for Sustainable Development and other institutions of higher education

COPERNICUS-CAMPUS, formerly known as the COPERNICUS-Programme ("COoperation Programme in Europe for Research on Nature and Industry through Coordinated University Studies"), is a European university network founded in 1988 by the former European Rectors Conference (CRE). Since then the COPERNICUS network of signatories to the COPERNICUS University Charter for Sustainable Development is getting incessantly broader: By now, more than 320 universities and higher education institutions from 38 countries across Europe have signed the COPERNICUS-Charter, thereby declaring that they will give sustainable development an important place in their activities. The aims of COPERNICUS-CAMPUS reflect both the need to promote a know-how transfer among higher education institutions and to identify, promote and disseminate exemplary practices and strategies for making sustainability more central to university life, in order to contribute to sustainable development in Europe. By following this mission, COPERNICUS-CAMPUS is taking up these challenges and presents a pro-active approach on what universities could do to realize the Bologna reforms in order to face globalization, to serve the learners of the future and contribute to the "Europe of knowledge". For that reason, COPERNICUS-CAMPUS is taking up leadership in the European Higher Education Area to mobilize the resources of universities and academia around the theme of sustainability and to support higher education institutions in the implementation of issues on sustainable development, in order to create synergy with the Bologna Process. For more information, see <http://www.copernicus-campus.org>

1 Introduction

Higher education occupies a central position in shaping the way in which future generations in Europe learn to cope with the complexities of globalization. Here, universities are called upon to teach not only the skills required to advance successfully in the labour market, but also to nourish in their students, faculty and staff a positive attitude towards cultural diversity and to help them to understand how people can contribute to a better life in a safer world. It is essential that the European universities mobilize all appropriate resources in a general context of sustainable development. To that end, also the Bologna Process is to be seen in the wider context of the sustainable development requirement that present needs be met without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.

Consequently, the European Ministers responsible for Higher Education decided at their recent conference in Bergen in May 2005 that the Bologna Process for establishing a European Higher Education Area by 2010 and promoting the European system of higher education worldwide should be based on the principle of sustainable development. **The Bergen Communiqué “The European Higher Education Area - Achieving the Goals”** states in part III “Further challenges and priorities”:

“The attractiveness of the EHEA and cooperation with other parts of the world

*The European Higher Education Area must be open and should be attractive to other parts of the world. Our contribution to achieving education for all **should be based on the principle of sustainable development** and be in accordance with the ongoing international work on developing guidelines for quality provision of cross-border higher education.”*

Another high-level initiative that addresses sustainable development in higher education is the **UNECE Strategy for Education for Sustainable Development** adopted jointly by Environment and Education Ministries in March 2005. Since all European countries are members of the United Nation Economic Commission for Europe, this achievement might be formally reported by their respective governments at the first reporting cycle for the implementation of the UNECE Strategy for Education for Sustainable Development in 2010.

The **“Graz Declaration on Committing Universities to Sustainable Development”**¹, which was adopted at the International Conference on the occasion of the launch of the UN Decade of Education for Sustainable Development in higher education and which was organized by COPERNICUS-CAMPUS, UNESCO, oikos International, the University of Graz and the University of Technology of Graz, concluded that universities, as the location of academic education, bear a distinctive responsibility for the students and their professional and moral quality as future leaders in society and economy. As major contributors to research, they have to tackle questions which arise in connection with the transition of societies around the world towards more sustainable development paths. As significant societal actors, universities shape their local, regional and national environs and are therefore important partners of other stakeholders, and society at large, for a sustainable future. All these challenges and opportunities require universities to re-think their position in society in order to meet expectations as well as to take full advantage of emerging opportunities.

2 The Bologna Process in the context of Education for Sustainable Development

Seeing the Bologna Process against the background of the United Nations Decade of Education for Sustainable Development (UN DESD) in a global perspective, the Bologna Process is not only about structures, such as the degree systems, recognition and quality assurance, but there is also a social dimension to this process. The Bologna Declaration

¹ See <http://www.uni-graz.at/sustainability/>

stated that a 'Europe of Knowledge' is an important factor for social and human growth. Education and educational cooperation has a role in the development of stable, peaceful and democratic societies. Universities have been important partners in the building of transnational understanding and cooperation, thus also in contributing to the European dimension of higher education. This will be needed also in coming years.

*"A Europe of Knowledge is now widely recognised as an irreplaceable factor for social and human growth and as an indispensable component to consolidate and enrich the European citizenship, capable of giving its citizens the necessary competencies to the challenges of the new millennium, together with an awareness of shared values and belonging to a common social and cultural space."*²

This extract from the Bologna Declaration of June 1999 encapsulates the importance of the Bologna Process to promote sustainable development as well. It is not the sole remit of academics or students, of Governments or institutions. It is not just an educational agenda, nor an economic one. There is a very strong social and cultural dimension to this process. There is also a wider political dimension of the Bologna Process. It does not operate in a vacuum – it has a context and a set of broader European policy issues.

3 The function of sustainable development to make higher education more attractive

Sustainable development addresses three areas which are absolutely central to the future of most higher education institutions in Europe:

- Cost-effectiveness of higher education systems and management
- Improving the quality of higher education and making it more attractive and future-oriented
- Internationalization of higher education in a global civil society

It is commonly agreed that pro-active universities are critical for the complex processes of innovation, economic prosperity and social cohesion. Consequently, universities must create a better sense of common purpose and leadership in the community to achieve sustainable development. Universities must develop their role much stronger as models for society in the pursuance of sustainability. They are critical social multipliers in achieving sustainable production and consumption patterns. Universities are important actors in the community, as employers, purchasers and service users. Universities are also enterprises where the prudent use of resources saves money and safeguards reputation.

Sustainable development as guiding principle for the European universities can convey properly what challenges students of each discipline will face to solve global problems, in what ways their science can and must contribute to the necessary innovations, further, how they are expected to contribute to a sustainable and future-compatible development on the way to sustainable development later in their daily working life.

If sustainability is fully incorporated into the mission of universities, it will also respond to the three priority areas for reform of European universities which have been identified in the 2005 Communication from the Commission³: (1) enhancing the quality and attractiveness of Europe's universities, (2) improving their governance and systems, and (3) increasing and diversifying their funding.

² See Bologna-Declaration

³ COMMUNICATION FROM THE COMMISSION "Mobilising the brainpower of Europe: enabling universities to make their full contribution to the Lisbon Strategy", Brussels, 20.4.2005 COM (2005) 152 final

Sustainable development offers the opportunity to overcome the great disadvantage of not looking at these issues in relation to their environment and provides a logic in keeping together the priority areas, attractiveness, governance and funding of the modernization agenda in higher education that may appear not to be related.

The objective to achieve sustainable development and to bring Europe to the leading edge in the knowledge economy and society will present universities with a number of challenges and opportunities in the Bologna Process. Some principles of the Bologna Process are of particular importance while focussing on sustainable development:

- To prepare individuals for the labour market
- To prepare for life as active citizens in a democratic society
- To contribute to personal growth
- To maintain and develop an advanced knowledge base

Higher education has both societal dimensions and individual components and they can only partly be separated if higher education should contribute to sustainable development. To meet the challenge of a sustainable society in a more and more global society, universities have to re-think their position: Which innovative approaches in teaching and learning are needed?

The overall objectives of the incorporation of the principle of sustainable development into the Bologna Process can be described as follows:

- To support existing innovative approaches to elaborate modules on sustainable development for modularized study courses
- To improve the contribution of higher education institutions to sustainable development, in particular to creating equal standards of living
- To strengthen the role of higher education institutions in society based upon the principles of sustainable development and solidarity
- To improve the future compatibility and innovation potential of higher education institutions
- To make a long-term contribution to the UN Decade on Education for Sustainable Development

4 Sustainable Development to link the Bologna Process with the Lisbon Strategy

The Bologna Process must not only be seen in the framework of the UN Decade on Education for Sustainable Development and of the objectives of the UNECE Strategy for Education for Sustainable Development, but also in that of the educational political issues of the Lisbon Strategy. As far as the European Union is concerned, the Bologna Process fits into the broader framework of the Lisbon objectives, particularly in view of the educational programmes. The goals of the Bologna Process mirror in many ways the objectives of the Union's own programmes in the field of higher education.⁴

Sustainable development covering economic, societal-cultural and environmental aspects in a mutually reinforcing way provides an important link between the Bologna Process and the Lisbon Strategy. Based on the principles of sustainable development, the Bologna Process and the Lisbon Strategy share the same values. Both have endorsed sustainable development as a major priority and both have developed their own way to contribute to sustainability. They share the same regional context as well as a common responsibility towards present and future

⁴ See: The New Generation of Community Education and Training Programmes after 2006 – Com (2004) 156 March 2004

generations. Hence, sustainable development constitutes the intersection between the Lisbon and Bologna processes.

The Lisbon Strategy is a commitment to bring about economic, social and environmental renewal in the EU. In March 2000, the European Council in Lisbon set out a ten-year Strategy to make the EU the world's most dynamic and competitive economy. With the Strategy, a stronger economy will drive job creation alongside social and environmental policies that ensure sustainable development and social inclusion. On the occasion of the relaunch of the Lisbon Strategy, the Spring European Council in March 2005 reaffirmed that the Lisbon Strategy itself is to be seen in the wider context of the sustainable development. In this context, the European Commission has adopted on 20 April 2005 a Communication which recognizes the pivotal role of education and training in the knowledge society and which calls upon universities to deliver their full potential to contribute to the Lisbon Strategy. Knowledge and innovation are the engines of sustainable growth in Europe today and universities are crucial for achieving the goals set by the Spring European Council.

For European universities this means that they must play an eminent role in enhancing the knowledge base for a sustainable society in Europe in line with the targets set by the European Council in Lisbon. However, sustainable growth and greater social cohesion can not be realized without paying attention to ecological, social and cultural aspects. Therefore, it is crucial that, in addition to the economic function of universities which is very important indeed, also the cultural function of universities remains important. Social and cultural diversity should also be seen as an important resource. As technological innovation is a complex process that cannot really be managed by top-down policy alone, academic diversity could also be seen as a potential stimulus for creativity. It is commonly agreed that universities must have 'old-fashioned' academic freedom, but in addition to a European policy targeted at large-scale standardization, bottom-up empowerment is also worth pursuing. For European universities living with and drawing from this European diversity this is an important value in addition to sustainable development.

By revitalizing the Lisbon Process, the European Union has put itself on the frontline of the implementation of sustainable development in the global context. The Bologna Process constitutes one of the most efficient means to realize this ambitious objective in the arena of Higher Education. Already in the Communiqué "Realising the European Higher Education Area" of the Conference of Ministers responsible for Higher Education in Berlin in September 2003, the Ministers took into due consideration the conclusions of the European Councils in Lisbon (2000) and Barcelona (2002) aimed at making Europe "the most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economy in the world, capable of sustainable economic growth with more and better jobs and greater social cohesion" and called for further action and closer co-operation in the context of the Bologna Process.

5 Issues for consideration

The implementation of the Bergen Communiqué requires the strategic incorporation of the principle of sustainable development into the Bologna Process. The Bologna Process must address the challenges higher education institutions face through striving for sustainability and should give them orientation for establishing higher education for sustainable development as a lifelong learning process. The following issues for consideration have been identified as being crucial for this consultation:

(1) How to integrate sustainable development into the degree structure (modules)

The Bologna reforms provide the opportunity to renew teaching and learning in accordance with sustainable curricula and training methods. Bachelor- and Master-degree studies shall in

the future also correspond to international educational standards (e.g. DeSeCo of OECD) for sustainable development. Especially by the development of the degree structures – the so-called two- (and now after Berlin, three-) cycle degree system, it is necessary to generate binding requirements of competence of sustainable development. Therefore, the objective should be to establish a framework for the initiation of modules on sustainable development for modularized study courses in higher education and to provide help in modularization. Therefore, the modules should also polish interdisciplinary and intercultural working skills. It also appears advisable that higher education institutions elaborate the modules in co-operation. Regarding the integration of the sustainability paradigm into higher education, it can be observed that the implementation and institutionalization of the model discourse in the existing studies can basically be accomplished through new study modules. The introduction of the two-cycle degree system makes it easier to introduce curricula which include sustainability issues as central or peripheric contents. Above all comprehensive study offers such as a 'studium fundamentale' provide opportunities here to develop interdisciplinary approaches. Diverse real-life examples show that in the course of reform measures taken in order to introduce multi-cycle courses, concepts of higher education didactics are elaborated which can accomplish the fundamental aspects of education for sustainable development on a higher education level. The cases in point show that a modular structure is very well suited to the integration of sustainability issues into higher education studies also from a disciplinary point of view.

(2) How to integrate sustainable development into quality assurance

Innovative learning and teaching methods, the promotion of project initiatives of students as well as external learning processes (like environmental and social responsibility, cooperation in local and regional Agenda 21 processes, etc.) shall be accredited. Therefore standards (in terms of ecological and social qualifications) of education for sustainable development as part of an integrated and sustainable system of quality and accreditation for higher education institutions and for degrees (Bachelor and Master) should be included into the system of evaluation and accreditation of study courses and institutions. Binding guidelines on criteria for the sustainability for organs of accreditation and accreditation agencies should be elaborated, so that these criteria can be taken into account during external reviews for the quality assurance for higher education institutions.

(3) How to integrate sustainable development into the qualifications framework and learning outcomes

The concept of learning outcomes will probably be central in the development of national qualification frameworks. Learning outcomes have been defined as statements of what a learner is expected to know, understand and/or be able to do at the end of a period of learning. It is important for institutions to be aware that in addition to a professional education in the respective disciplines, the labour market will ask for cross-disciplinary qualifications and competencies. Interacting in socially heterogeneous groups, acting autonomously and using tools interactively are indispensable prerequisites for an individually successful life and for the sustainable socio-economic and democratic development of society. And that is where education for sustainable development comes in: to learn to know, to do, to understand, to be, also to be aware of our individual responsibilities to contribute, to make responsible choices, to respect diversity. These reference points support in particular the articulation of outcomes-focussed approaches to national higher education frameworks of qualifications. Learning outcomes, including competences, represent one of the essential building blocks for transparency within higher education systems and qualifications. The Berlin Communiqué (2003) called for the creation of an overarching qualifications framework in terms of workload, level, learning outcomes, competences and profile for the European Higher Education Area.

(4) How to improve the social dimension and the attractiveness of the European Higher Education Area

Higher Education Institutions are also an element in the societal structure where they are located. Their research and teaching activities reach out to local industry and administration and to the general public. In some places, students have reached out to underprivileged youth and helped them to a start in higher education. Taking part in university governance prepares students for active participation in a democratic society based on the principles of sustainable development. Studying in an international environment may hopefully develop tolerance for the multicultural society we all will be members of in coming years, i.e., the European Higher Education Area.

Questions for the debate:

- How can sustainable development be incorporated into methodology, curricula, textbooks and studies?
- How can quality standards for sustainable higher education be developed?
- In which ways will the labour market ask for cross-disciplinary qualifications and competencies related to issues of sustainable development in a globalizing world?
- How can a high level of employment be achieved under the aspects of social cohesion by means of political participation and the development of social competences?
- How can lifestyle be influenced by learning processes in higher education to make students aware of our individual responsibilities to contribute to a sustainable society, to make responsible choices and to respect diversity?
- How can students get involved in political activities, participation and democracy?
- How can higher education deal with the challenges and aspects of globalization by applying the various educational approaches of global learning, e.g. e-learning?

6 The next steps

This consultation will close on 15 February 2006. A website <http://www.copernicus-campus.org/bologna/html> will be established to facilitate the consultation. After this, a report summarizing the main issues of the consultation will be elaborated and forwarded to major stakeholders such as the Bologna Secretariat, the Bologna Follow-Up Group, the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe, and to UNESCO. The consultation report will also be made available on the website.

Finally, on the basis of the consultation report, COPERNICUS-CAMPUS, in co-operation with others, will propose to the Bologna Secretariat to develop an agreed set of standards, procedures and guidelines on incorporating sustainable development into the Bologna Process and to give feedback through the Bologna Follow-Up Group to the Ministers in 2007.

Any response to this Consultation Paper should be directed to:

consultation@copernicus-campus.org

by 15 February 2006 latest. Submissions being made after this date will not be considered.