

COPERNICUS Alliance Conference 2016: Sustainability Transformation of Science Systems

Sustainability in Research, the answer to societal challenges

Filip Colson, Leen Audenaert

(filip.colson@lne.vlaanderen.be; ecocampus@lne.vlaanderen.be)

Number of participants: 6

There were basically three parts to the interactive session. Firstly, an overview of the landscape of Sustainable Higher Education in Flanders was given. Next, the concept of 'sustainability in research' was introduced through a 12-minute interview film, in which a few Flemish researchers and research policymakers share their views. Thirdly, and most importantly, we used a journalism technique to invoke some deeper thoughts and reflections on the issues at hand.

In this report I synthesize the answers to the questions that were raised. Important notice: The answers given below are verbatim quotes of participants.

FEEDBACK on Interview Film: <https://youtu.be/nirZ5gBR82I>

What could the concept of 'Sustainability in Research' mean for your research?

- Good point to address. Funders should be aware of the fact that transdisciplinary sustainability research requires more time, money etc., but at the same time promises to have problem-adequate solutions.
- I guess sustainability for me somehow also emphasizes "endurance/support" and not instant gratification. While much of what we do or we know, may or may not have application in the future, the reward response has always been instant -take for example publications, conferences, credibility, etc. We need to change this and bring in the notion that you "endure" for a productive research.
- Not only research on sustainable development but also a sustainable way of conducting research. What is a sustainable way? Ethically, morally accepted; socially, ecologically oriented; moving towards trans-disciplinarity, across sections.
- Being more open to other perspectives. Building new networks.

Does the amount and kind of information enable you to act within your research group / faculty / institutional policy? What may still be lacking to get the debate on Sustainability in Research going?

- The interview film is a great means to raise awareness for the issue.

- What is missing are the next steps:
 - How to engage researchers in transdisciplinary projects?
 - How to enable researchers to participate in such projects?
- Lacking: public funding [not focused on] quick results, success for labourmarket, innovation, technology
- [We should] make it more “inviting”, eg by examples that are closer to scientific disciplines. Climate change, for example, is often too big to understand how to relate one’s own work/discipline to. In contrast, research SD-problems on the local/regional level might help to adapt researchers to *sustainability research*.
- The interview film is inspiring but not giving a certain structure or opportunity to change my policy (like new method etc.).

Further questions for discussion

Which wicked problem could your research help ‘solve’, and how does/should it take into account complexity, uncertainty, and values?

How could your institutional research policy improve its impact on wicked problems?

What is required for emergent researchers to play a bigger role in mainstreaming sustainability?

References

<https://lne.be/ecocampus-english>

Jean Hugé, Thomas Block, Tom Waas, Tarah Wright, Farid Dahdouh-Guebas. How to walk the talk? Developing actions for sustainability in academic research. *Journal of Cleaner Production*, Volume 137, 2016, 83-92