FACULTY OF POLITICAL AND SOCIAL SCIENCES
DEPARTMENT OF POLITICAL SCIENCES
CENTRE FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

TOWARDS A SUSTAINABILITY TRANSITION STRATEGY FOR OTGONTENGER UNIVERSITY

Katrien Van Poeck | 16th February 2017

GHENT UNIVERSITY UPPSALA UNIVERSITET

ARGUMENTS FOR EMBEDDING SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT IN OUR UNIVERSITY

GHENT UNIVERSITY UPPSALA UNIVERSITET 2

AN EXAMPLE FROM GHENT UNIVERSITY

GHENT UNIVERSITY UPPSALA UNIVERSITET 3

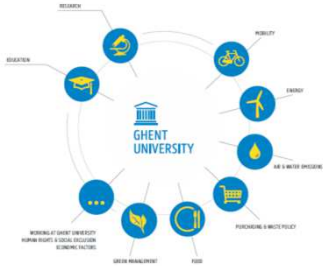
TRANSITION UGENT

- Think-tank, active since 2012
- Initiator: UGent's environmental coordinator
- Open innovation network,
- 75 → +200 participants: staff, students, experts, university management,…
- Knowledge workers, policy makers, dreamers, doers, translators to practice and builders from practice come together to formulate ideas for a sustainable university: bottom-up approach
- Aim: developing a long-term vision for embedding sustainability in UGent

GHENT UNIVERSITY UPPSALA UNIVERSITET 4

WHOLE INSTITUTION APPROACH

- Management
- Campus operations
- Education
- Research
- Policymaking



GHENT UNIVERSITY UPPSALA UNIVERSITET 5

UP-SCALING: SUSTAINABILITY VISION UGENT

Ghent University wants to be a leading knowledge institute for a future that is ecologically, socially and economically sustainable within a local and global context

(Ghent University Board, December 3013)

To this end:

- UGent creates a substantial foundation for sustainable development;
- UGent integrates sustainability in its education, research and services;
- UGent implements sustainability in its general management and organisation.

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SUSTAINABILITY TRANSITION MANAGEMENT

GHENT UNIVERSITY UPPSALA UNIVERSITET 7

SOME BASICS OF TRANSITION THINKING

- Transition = radical, fundamental change of dominant structures, practices, policies, technology, way of thinking, values, habits…
- Focus on socio-technical systems
- Dealing with high complexity and uncertainty in future developments
- Steering (command-and-control) is impossible → it may be possible to influence the direction and speed of a transition
- Long-term process
- Change systems through multi-level & multi-actor dynamics

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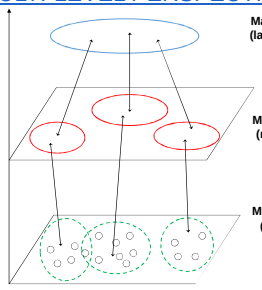
A MULTI-LEVEL PERSPECTIVE



Macro level (landscape): Large scale developments in politics, economics, world views, paradigms, global ecology

Meso level (regimes): Dominant practices, structures and culture (rules, habits, interests, ways of thinking…) shared by groups of actors)

Micro level (niches): Diverging technologies and practices in economics, institutions, behaviour, culture

UPPSALA UNIVERSITET GHENT UNIVERSITY

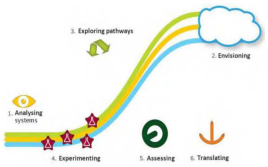
Source: Geels 2005, Kemp en van den Bosch 2006

SOME BASICS OF TRANSITION THINKING

- Niches: empowering and upscaling mature innovations
- Regime: lay bare contradictions within the system
- Landscape: mobilise trends that put pressure on existing regimes

→ The art of coupling processes and creating 'windows of opportunity'

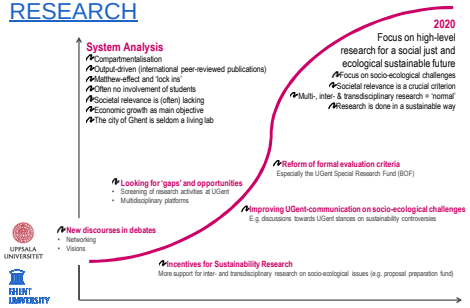
METHOD: TRANSITION MANAGEMENT



- Start with frontrunners
- Long-term process
- In the shadow of 'real' politics
- Creating space for innovation: experiments
- Learning-by-doing and doing-by-learning

TRANSITION ARENAS

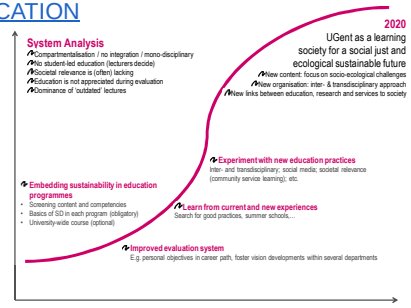
RESEARCH



EXAMPLE: TRANSDISCIPLINARY PLATFORM "SUSTAINABLE CITIES"

- Not funded experiment established at the end of 2015
- 20 UGent academics (different disciplines) + 20 policymakers Ghent municipality
- Collaboration & dialogue: knowledge platform on unstructured sustainability issues
- Interdisciplinary workshops and discussions
- City of Ghent as a 'living lab' for researchers
- Policymakers and other urban stakeholders can benefit from using the knowledge and expertise ('brain power') available within the university community
- Initial focus on 2 topics put forward by the policymakers: housing & food

EDUCATION

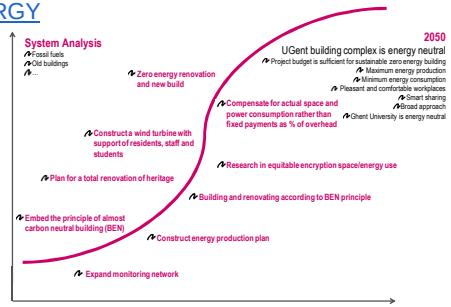


EXAMPLE: A NEW COURSE

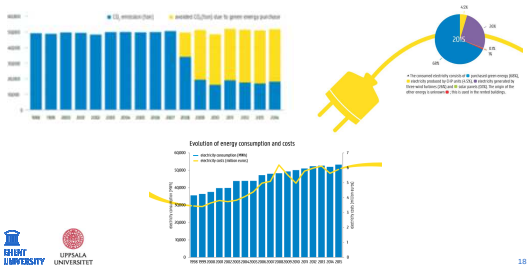
University-wide elective course "Sustainability thinking"

- Two introductory lessons: basics sustainability thinking, sustainability Science
- Studium Generale: 4 evenings with 1 or 2 keynotes and some reflections
- Two concluding lessons: reflections and group discussions, Transition Thinking

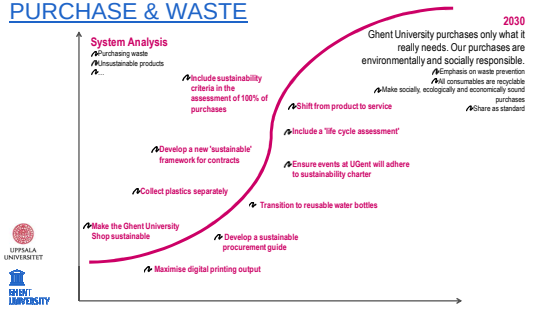
ENERGY



EXAMPLES



PURCHASE & WASTE



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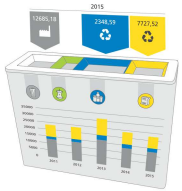

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REFLECTIONS – LESSONS LEARNED

- Transition management: mixed feelings, ambiguous evaluation
  - stimulates long term visions, networking, experiments,…
  - insufficient acknowledgement of complex power settings

  → important element for agenda setting (but not in a linear way)
- More widespread support for the sustainable development of management and organisation issues at UGent, a lot of scepticism and resistance on core business, i.e. research and education

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REFLECTIONS – LESSONS LEARNED

- Importance of some 'policy entrepreneurs'
- Involvement of students (i.c. sustainability-oriented student organization UGent1010) = crucial
- Visions = more or less radical (on the long term) ↔ current actions = harvesting "low hanging fruit"
- Social issues and challenges were too often hidden away in Transition UGent

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SUSTAINABILITY **CHALLENGES**

FOR OTGONTENGER UNIVERSITY …

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TRANSITION ARENAS

OTGONTENGER UNIVERSITY…

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AREAS

- Education
- Research
- ???
- ???
- ???

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SYSTEMS ANALYSIS

Describe the main characteristics of the current situation

26

FUTURE VISION

What should research – education - … look like at Otgontenger University in 2030?

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TRANSITION PATHWAY: ACTIONS & EXPERIMENTS

How will you realise the future vision?

Identify and list short-term, medium-time and long-term ambitions (targets), actions, and experiments

ACTORS

List the key actors at Otgontenger University that should be involved in this transition pathway

SHARING OUTCOMES

FUTURE: NEXT STEPS…

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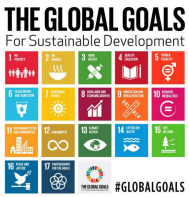
EMBEDDING SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT IN UNIVERSITY EDUCATION

Katrien Van Poeck | Leif Östman | 16th February 2017

"Sustainable Development Begins with Education" (UNESCO)

ESD ON THE GLOBAL POLICY AGENDA

2016: UN Agenda 2030: Sustainable Development Goals



SDG-ESD MATRIX:

SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS IN THE CURRICULUM

SUSTAINABILITY EDUCATION @UGENT

UGENT SUSTAINABILITY VISION

"Integrating sustainable development systematically and substantively in the entire range of education"

"familiarise students with sustainability issues and potential solutions"

EDUCATION INNOVATION PROJECT

- Funded by UGent Dept. of Educational Policy (€ 45,000)
- 20% FTE, 2014-2016
- Pilot cases: business administration, electromechanical engineering
- Workshops: further embedding sustainability in the curriculum:
  - self-evaluation
  - detecting gaps
  - defining needs
  - discipline-specific vision texts
  - strategies and action plans

SELF-EVALUATION

Mapping the current situation:

- SD in policy documents of the faculty/programme?
- SD themes: Relevant for the programme? Addressed?
- Courses: SD-content? Didactic methods?
- Sustainability competences as explicit objectives? E.g. SD knowledge, critical reflection, systems thinking, multi-perspectivism…
- Why should SD be more strongly embedded?
- Strengths and opportunities?
- Weaknesses and threats?

WORKSHOPS

- Working groups + regular consultation of larger group of colleagues
- Self-evaluation:
  - Screening programme catalog (course specifications)
  - Questionnaire for students, teachers, (future) employers
- Vision:
  - Discussion: Why embedding SD in the curriculum?
  - Faculty training (task force) about sustainable development
- Action plans

PILOT CASE BUSINESS ADMINISTRATION

SELF-EVALUATION

- Marginal attention for SD: e.g. optional courses
- Many thematic opportunities: consumption and production, social marketing, green finance, fair trade, growth versus de-growth, corporate social responsibility (CSR), etc.
- No attention for sustainability in the education policy plan of the Faculty
- Explicit SD competencies at the level of the BA/MA programme 'Business Administration'

VISION

- Why?
  - Broad education (Bildung)
  - Preparing students for complex societal challenges
  - "Intellectual fairness": SD goes to the core of economics (needs, choices…)
- How?
  - Disciplinary knowledge, insights, skills
  - Multi-perspectivism
  - Awareness-raising, arousing interest, critical reflection… rather than clear guidelines for well-defined behavior change

ACTION PLAN

- Goal 1: Coherent, integrated attention for SD throughout the curriculum
  - No blind spots – no overlap
  - Clear and visible for students and teachers
- Goal 2: Education innovation
  - Faculty training
  - Disseminating didactic materials, tools and methods
- Goal 3: Structurally embedding SD in educational policy
  - Faculty's policy plan
  - Programme catalog – course specifications

PILOT CASE ELECTROMECHANICAL ENGINEERING

SELF-EVALUATION

- Broad support (e.g. 70% students and 100% employers want more ESD)
- Marginal attention in the curriculum today (in some courses)
- Mentioned in programme's vision text
- Sustainability in the faculty's research
- Industrial support: important for companies, regulation…
- Focus on sustainable/green technology – not on social, political, economic dimensions of SD
- ESD requires time and space in the curriculum
- Academic freedom

VISION

- Why?
  - Good engineering: responsibility future engineers to find solutions
  - Societal relevance: urgent concern, hot topic
  - Industrial relevance: demand from employers
  - Scientific relevance: important for (future) pioneering research
  - Good education: critical, broad,…
  - Branding: attractiveness of the programme, employability students
- How?
  - Disciplinary knowledge, insights, skills
  - Multi-perspectivism
  - Awareness-raising, arousing interest, critical reflection… rather than clear guidelines for well-defined behavior change

ACTION PLAN

- Goal 1: SD as a structural, connective thread in the curriculum
  - Mapping themes and relevant content
  - Connecting content to courses, didactic methods and competences
- Goal 2: Faculty training
  - On sustainable development (broad view – beyond "techno-fix")
  - On sustainability education and didactics
- Goal 3: Education innovation
  - Follow-up project (application submitted)
  - Focus on course BA3: interdisciplinary engineering project

LESSONS LEARNED

10 RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Focus on the process – not only the outcomes/output
2. Start with enthusiastic frontrunners
3. Provide support by experts (SD content – didactics – practical help)
4. Avoid to "get lost" in details
5. Strive for broad support

10 RECOMMENDATIONS

6. Create space for discussion and reflection
7. Make sustainable development concrete
8. Act – collaborate on concrete initiatives
9. Dare to let students think for themselves
10. Be ambitious

SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT IN THE CURRICULUM

MAKING A SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT **CURRICULUM PLAN**…

SHARING CURRICULUM PLANS

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FUTURE: NEXT STEPS…

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INTERNATIONAL THEMATIC NETWORK

"Sustainability Education – Teaching and learning in the face of wicked socio-ecological problems" (SEDwise)

- UGent professors in different fields + international ESD-researchers
- Conceptualise (theoretically) and develop (experimentally) adequate forms of teaching and learning in the face of sustainability issues
- Fruitful interactions between theory and practice
- Action research: UGent = 'living lab' – ESD-researchers = 'critical friends'
- Pilot experiments, seminars, summer schools,…

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