

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

TRANSITION PATHWAYS TOWARDS MORE SUSTAINABLE UNIVERSITIES

Katrien Van Poeck | Leif Östman | 14th February 2017

TO MAKE OUR UNIVERSITY MORE SUSTAINABLE, AN IMPORTANT GOAL IS TO...

INTERNATIONAL POLICY CONTEXT

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- 1994: **Copernicus University Charter for Sustainable Development**: call on universities 'to play a leading role in developing a multidisciplinary and ethically-oriented form of education in order to devise solutions for the problems linked to sustainable development'
- UN Decade of ESD (2005-2014) & **Global Action Programme (GAP)** on ESD: crucial role of universities in reorienting education toward sustainability
 - Whole-institution approaches to ESD in higher education institutions
 - Integrating ESD into faculty training to enhance capacity in teaching sustainability issues, conducting and supervising solution-oriented interdisciplinary research, and informing policy-making on ESD and sustainable development

INTERNATIONAL POLICY CONTEXT

2016: UN Agenda 2030: **Sustainable Development Goals**

THE GLOBAL GOALS

For Sustainable Development

#GLOBALGOALS

TRANSITION UGENT: A PARTICIPATORY APPROACH FOR CREATING A MORE SUSTAINABLE UNIVERSITY

TRANSITION UGENT

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

WHOLE INSTITUTION APPROACH

- Management
- Campus operations
- Education
- Research
- Polymaking

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

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RESEARCH

System Analysis
 • Compartmentalisation
 • Output-driven (international peer-reviewed publications)
 • Matthew effect and 'lock in'
 • Little involvement of students
 • Social relevance is (often) lacking
 • Economic growth as main objective
 • The city of Ghent is seldom a living lab

Looking for 'gaps' and opportunities
 • Screening of research activities at UGent
 • Multidisciplinary platforms

New discourses in debates
 • Networking
 • Visits

Incentives for Sustainability Research
 More support for inter- and transdisciplinary research on socio-ecological issues (e.g. proposal preparation fund)

Reform of formal evaluation criteria
 Especially the UGent Special Research Fund (SRF)

Improving UGent-communication on socio-ecological challenges
 E.g. discussions towards UGent stance on sustainability controversies

2020
 Focus on high-level research for a socially just and ecologically sustainable future
 • Focus on socio-ecological challenges
 • Social relevance is a crucial criterion
 • Multi-, inter- & transdisciplinary research = 'normal'
 • Research is done in a sustainable way

EDUCATION

System Analysis
 • Compartmentalisation / no integration / mono-disciplinary
 • The student-led education (lectures decide)
 • Social relevance is (often) lacking
 • Education is not appreciated during evaluation
 • Commencement of 'outdated' lectures

Embedding sustainability in education programmes
 • Screening content and competences
 • Basics of SD in each program (obligatory)
 • University-wide course (optional)

Improved evaluation system
 E.g. personal objectives in career path, foster vision developments within several departments

Experiment with new education practices
 Inter- and transdisciplinary, social media, societal relevance (community service learning), etc.

Learn from current and new experiences
 Search for good practices, summer schools...

2020
 UGent as a learning society for a social just and ecologically sustainable future
 • New content: focus on socio-ecological challenges
 • New organisation: inter- & transdisciplinary approach
 • New links between education, research and services to society

ENERGY TRANSITION PATHWAY

Our vision: in 2050 the UGent building complex will be energy neutral.

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SUSTAINABLE PURCHASING TRANSITION PATHWAY

Our vision: Ghent University does not purchase waste. We purchase only what we really need. Our purchases are environmentally and socially responsible. This way we avoid producing general waste.

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UP-SCALING: FROM MARGIN TO MAINSTREAM?

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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 2013)

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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SOME POLICY INITIATIVES

- Ambitious **vision text**: e.g.: *"Integrating sustainable development systematically and substantively in the entire range of education"*
- **Sustainability coordinator** + 6 employed students (20% FTE) in **Green Office**: Facilitating actions and projects initiated by staff and students
- New **policies**: sustainable meals in the restaurants, green guide for foreign students, travel policy, waste policy, parking policy, fossil divestment, new courses...
- Sustainability **report**: monitoring

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EXAMPLES: MANAGEMENT AND OPERATIONS

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COMMUTER TRAFFIC

- Ambitious corporate transport plan
 - Experimenting with sustainable models, managing the parking issue!
 - Optimization of the cycling infrastructure, such as parking stations and charging points and electric scooters etc.
 - Flexibility communication, such as going mobility, etc. & other solutions with new staff, etc.
 - Optimization of the parking infrastructure, such as implementing a sustainable parking policy, etc.
 - Flexibility communication, such as working flexibility control issues from the structure to operational planning, etc.
 - Optimization of non-related issues: sharing company cars, separating the types of company bikes using a parking system within Ghent, etc.
- More than 50% of UGent staff uses sustainable transport methods

ENERGY – WATER – ...

EXAMPLES: RESEARCH

WICKED SUSTAINABILITY ISSUES DEMAND OTHER APPROACH TO RESEARCH

TRANSDISCIPLINARY PLATFORM "SUSTAINABLE CITIES"

TRANSDISCIPLINARY PLATFORM "SUSTAINABLE CITIES"

- Not funded **experiment** established at the end of 2015
- 20 UGent **academics** (different disciplines) + 20 **policy makers** 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**

EXAMPLES: SERVICES TO SOCIETY

SOME INITIATIVES

- Policy plan for the **social valorisation of research**
- **Science Shop**: socially relevant thesis subjects
 - Non-profit organisations: free/affordable scientific research, carried out by students
 - Connecting suitable supervisors, master's students and organisations to determine the scope and follow-up research
- **Community Service Learning (CSL)**: social engagement in academic education
 - Students = actors of social change
 - Within their curriculum: concrete contribution to communities or social initiatives
 - Addressing real needs within society
 - Encouraged to critically consider their current and future role in society

EXAMPLES: EDUCATION

EDUCATION INNOVATION PROJECT

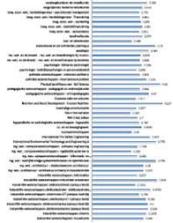
- Funded by UGent Dept. of Educational Policy (€ 45,000)
- 20% project coordinator (1 day/week), 2014-2016
- Pilot cases:** business administration, electromechanical engineering
- Workshops: further embedding sustainability in the **curriculum**:
 - self-evaluation
 - detecting gaps
 - defining needs
 - discipline-specific vision texts
 - strategies and action plans



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MONITORING

- Final programme evaluations:** 3 questions regarding sustainability
- Student survey
- All UGent Master programmes




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ESD = A POSSIBILITY FOR EVERY STUDENT

- University-wide elective course** "Sustainability thinking"
 - Two introductory lessons: basics sustainability thinking, sustainability Science
 - Studium Generale: public lectures series: 4 evenings with 1 or 2 keynotes and some reflections
 - Two concluding lessons: reflections and group discussions, Transition Thinking



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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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INSPIRING EXAMPLES? TAKE-HOME IDEAS...



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DRAFT PRIORITY ACTION CHARTER FOR A MORE SUSTAINABLE UNIVERSITY TAKE-HOME IDEAS...



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WHOLE INSTITUTION APPROACH TO ESD

LINKING CAMPUS OPERATIONS, RESEARCH AND SERVICES TO STUDENTS' LEARNING



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ARCHITECTURE & URBAN PLANNING: JOKER WEEK

- Recipe project:**
 - Full week (before the Easter break)
 - All regular classes are suspended – mandatory but not for credit
 - Students from all 5 years work together (450 students – 50 staff)
- Theme 2016: "University and the city" (spatial impact UGent)




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ARCHITECTURE & URBAN PLANNING: JOKER WEEK

- 'Real' challenges**, e.g. impact car traffic
- Experimenting with **re-designing** university neighbourhood




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ARCHITECTURE & URBAN PLANNING + POLITICAL SCIENCES: "URBAN ACADEMY"

- In-the-making...
- Developing a **new course**: sustainable cities
- Linked to interdisciplinary research platform "**Sustainable cities**"
- Addressing **real challenges** in the city, selected by **urban government**
- Involving master thesis students
- Alternative for contracted research? Dialogue with urban stakeholders
- Teaching and learning in city library



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LINKING PRIORITY ACTION CHARTER TO STUDENTS' LEARNING...



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SHARING PRIORITY ACTION CHARTERS



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FUTURE: NEXT STEPS...



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