



ERSCP-EMSU "Knowledge Collaboration & Learning for Sustainable Innovation", 25-29 Oct 2010, Delft, NL

Wednesday, 27 October 2010, 09:00-10:30

[Parallel Session 3 - 1B. Sustainable campus and organisational change](#)
[- Workshop SC in Higher Education](#)

Promoting a »Culture of Sustainable Consumption« in Institutions of Higher Education

The workshop 'Promoting a Culture of Sustainable Consumption in Institutions of Higher Education' is organised by Matthias Barth and Daniel Fischer (Leuphana University Lüneburg). It brings together results from the BINK project and will stimulate a discussion on new ways and paths to change institutional culture in higher education. It also reports on new ways and approaches to change universities into places that promote a more sustainable lifestyle among young adults by connecting the concept of sustainable development with innovative processes of university development.

Minutes

Chair: Dr. Maik Adomßent, INFU Institute for Environmental & Sustainability Communication, Faculty of Sustainability Sciences, Leuphana University Lüneburg, adomssent@uni.leuphana.de

1. Introduction

The background of the Project BINK

Presenter: Claudia Nemnich, INFU Institute for Environmental & Sustainability Communication, Faculty of Sustainability Sciences, Leuphana University Lüneburg, nemnich@uni.leuphana.de

In the project BINK, scholars and practitioners cooperate for 3 years to explore ways and paths in which educational organizations can contribute to the promotion of sustainable consumption among students. The main assumption in the project was that we need to broaden our scope when we think about consumer learning in school settings. Most educational strategies focus on the provision of formal learning, that means curricular contents and structured teaching and learning setting, for example in classroom contexts. This certainly is important. Yet, schools are also places in which consumption takes place. Consequently, both types of learning need to be addressed, in order for educational organizations to tap their full potential as promoters of sustainable consumption.

The project pursues goals on two levels. On the organizational level, it seeks to establish a culture of sustainable consumption in the affiliated schools and universities. On the individual level, the project aims to promote sustainable consumer competence and practices among students and young adults. The project pursues a participatory approach.

For further information visit the project website on www.consumerculture.eu



2. Fields of Action

What do we know about relevant fields of action for universities

Presenter: Daniel Fischer, INFU Institute for Environmental & Sustainability Communication, Faculty of Sustainability Sciences, Leuphana University Lüneburg, dfischer@uni.leuphana.de

In his input, Daniel Fischer pointed out that a great number of elaborated tools and instruments exist to evaluate and assess university's sustainability performances in the different sectors of education, research, operations, society outreach and mission. Yet, a lack of adequate approaches exists to account for cultural realms of educational organizations. In the project BINK, a framework of educational organizational "culture of consumption" was developed as a heuristic for the identification and analysis of different cultural realms. The framework comprises six domains (Disciplines & Themes, Resource Management, Participation & Communication Structures, Performance Orientations, Educational Goals and Objectives and Consumer Pedagogical Assumptions) that differ according to their visibility and accessibility. For evaluation and monitoring, the analysis of the bottom realm of basic underlying assumptions remains a challenge. The BINK project proposes an approach to monitoring that seeks to enhance the organizational actors' capacity to critically reflect the effects and responses of change measures and to interpret them against the background of underlying assumptions.

3. Implementing Change

What do we know about processes of implementing participatory change processes related to sustainable consumption in institutions of higher education?

Presenter: Malte Nachreiner, Hochschule Fresenius (University of Applied Sciences), Idstein, nachreiner@hs-fresenius.de

While the project BINK fundamentally is about initiating change processes in organizations, Malte Nachreiner emphasized the special focus of the project on an extensive participatory process, the complex topic of sustainable consumption and the context of educational institutions. The project comprises three main phases, starting with the formation of change management teams, including representatives from all relevant stakeholder groups. These teams derive institution-specific goal hierarchies on the basis of the analysis of the organizations' cultures of consumption, which eventually lead to the development of sets of interventions which are then implemented in the second phase. The third phase focuses on the reflection and stabilization of the achievements.

In all three phases, the practitioners from the educational institutions are supported by a multidisciplinary team of researchers, who not only adequately compile and convey existing knowledge about sustainable consumption, the development and implementation of interventions and general project management but also conduct studies pertaining to the specific focuses of the project and develop strategies for effectively dealing with occurring challenges.

Discussion: The available time resources of the persons involved in the project are significant success and risk factors for the projects progress/process. Therefore, the project sought to consider the lack of time among students by linking its concerns with the students' curricular obligations. BINK specifically offered a lecture in which students together with university staff (Car Sharing, Canteen...) had to develop measures that make "Sustainable Consumption" visible on the campus. It was beneficial to the participation in the intervention that the



involvement of the students was part of their studies and their working time invested hence rewarded with credit points.

4. Student Orientations

What do we know about student orientations towards sustainable consumption?

Presenter: Wolfgang Krug, German Youth Institute, Munich, krug@dji.de

What do we know about student orientations towards sustainable consumption? In order to further examine this question, group discussions were conducted with students and other young people on the topics of consumption and sustainability. The objective was to gain more insights into how students define consumption, how they perceive consumer culture and what they perceive as problems arising from their own consumption patterns.

Perception of consumption: For most of the students, consumption usually carries a negative connotation. Different reasons are given for that:

- the rapid pace in our consumer culture,
- the focus on cheap products,
- the role of fashion and outfit in distinguishing themselves from others or
- a critical attitude towards our production and consumption system

They also reflect that they are being influenced in their own consumption. Influences they quote are advertising, social environment (like parents or peers), education and not at least the things offered in the shops. These effects are evaluated differently: while advertising is mainly seen as a bad influence, their own education, or the consumer behavior of their parents is often viewed positively. Also, the image of brands and lifestyle are regarded as influential on the formation of their own consumption behavior. This influence is sometimes perceived as negative but as something quite naturally given that cannot be avoided.

Decision problems: Whether clothes, mobile phone or sustainable products, shopping always requires a decision. And because of the incentives by the variety of products, the multiplicity of information and a lack of transparency, students often find it difficult to choose correctly.

Sustainable Consumption? – Energy saving and eating habits: Many of the students claimed that they use energy efficient. But this is only loosely related to sustainability and rather motivated by economic reasons (saving money). When it comes to eating habits, however, sustainability is at least sometimes an issue. There are few students who already eat organic or regional/local products. Also, there are vegetarians or students who only rarely eat meat. Many of them argue that this is due to sustainability issues – there was no other group of young adults except the students that made this explicit link. Yet, there are only a few vegetarians. Apart from them, the majority of students refuse to reduce meat consumption when they are confronted with negative side effects of meat consumption.

Summary: Overall and contrary to other groups of young adults, university students show a high degree of reflection when relating to consumption. In particular, consumption is critically reflected in its social forms and effects. Yet, this does not straightly lead to behavioural change. It often tends to result in decision problems mentioned above. Consequently, more information does not help to bridge the gap. Many of the students have good knowledge of the relationships between consumption and sustainability. Yet, that knowledge is mostly not



activated in everyday life and in shopping contexts. So what is needed are immediate options and role models like universities to show how sustainable consumption practices are possible.

Discussion: In light of the importance of the normative underpinnings of the idea of sustainable consumption, the role of values and an organizational commitment to and engagement with values were discussed. It was argued that for universities to actively take on the issue of sustainable as a challenge for organizational development, some requirements exist. These comprise the equal treatment and involvement of all stakeholders, the administration's commitment to the values of sustainability as well as trust and confidence as principles for collaboration. The participants from three different European countries argued that these prerequisites differ between organizations and potentially also in different national and regional cultures.

In the further discussion, *interfaces* between different organizational actors were considered as a potential doorway to initiate whole-of-system approach to implementing sustainable development and sustainable consumption. In light of the experiences made with implementing the BINK approach it was argued that a transdisciplinary project design offers several opportunities for different stakeholders to participate in the process.

5. Learning Sustainable Consumption

What do we know about triggering consumer learning among students?

Presenter: Judith Bauer, Humboldt University Berlin, judith.bauer@geo.hu-berlin.de

One special intervention offered to the educational institutions was the media intervention: groups of youths and young adults have been involved in the professional production of a short film on "sustainable consumption" (in the fields of energy, mobility or nutrition). The film production was coached by professional filmmakers.

From the scientific perspective, the question to be explored is how and why the participation in the production affects one's own behaviour. In particular, the effects of voluntary agreements (commitment) in the media, the acquirement of knowledge and expertise and the significance of identity shall be investigated. Therefore, three film groups (*knowledge*, *behaviour*, and *commitment*) were compared with each other and a control group. Some first results indicate that all groups showed a significant increase in knowledge, favourable opinions and behaviour intentions compared to the control groups. As expected, the Knowledge groups learned more facts about sustainable consumption than the other two groups. In contrast, the Behaviour and Commitment groups learned more about behavioural options and indicated a stronger change in behaviour than Knowledge groups.

In summary, producing films on the topic of sustainable consumption bears the potential to increase knowledge and sustainable behaviour intentions. To change behavioural intentions, it seems to be better to focus the films on behavioural options or commitment than on knowledge.

Discussion: Regarding the potential of a media-assisted approach to further sustainable consumption, possible ways to disseminate the films clips created in the project were discussed. As pointed out by Judith Bauer, a subset of the clips has already been uploaded on the website youtube (<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9a7aJD7tCYY>).



Further Reading

- Fischer, D. (2010). Sustainable Consumption - Mapping the Terrain: An Exploratory Review of Contested Themes and their Representation in Consumer Education. *The International Journal of Environmental, Cultural, Economic and Social Sustainability*, 6, (3), 207–226.
- Fischer, D. (2010, in press). Transdisciplinarity: A New Perspective for Partnership in Education? The Case of Sustainable Cultural Change in Educational Organizations. In: Masson, P.; Baumfield, V.; Otrell-Cass, K. & Pilo, M. (Eds.). (Re)thinking Partnership in Education / (Re)penser le partenariat en Education (bilingual publishing)Lille: Book Edition.
- Fischer, D. (2010, accepted). Monitoring Educational Organizations' »Culture of Sustainable Consumption«: Towards a Participatory Initiation and Evaluation of Cultural Change in Schools and Universities. *Journal of Social Science*
- Fischer, D. & Rieckmann, M. (2010). Higher Education for Sustainable Consumption: Concept and Results of a Transdisciplinary Project Course. *Journal of Sustainability Education*, 1, (1). Available at: http://www.journalofsustainabilityeducation.org/wordpress/content/higher-education-for-sustainable-consumption-concept-and-results-of-a-transdisciplinary-project-course_2010_05/print/
- Fischer, D. (2010), Educational Organisations as »Cultures of Consumption«: Cultural Contexts of Consumer Learning in Schools. Paper presented at the European Conference on Educational Research, 23rd to 27th August 2010, Helsinki, Finland