

Developing Key Competencies for Sustainable Consumption through Mindfulness Training: Results of a Qualitative Study

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Higher education is considered as a key facilitator of a shift towards more sustainable lifestyles. Education for sustainable consumption (ESC) aims to enable people to acquire competences that enable them to shape their consumption practices in a sustainable way. This includes knowledge, values and skills alike. ESC does not convey values or ready-made solutions, but also works to encourage people to reflect on social values and to place them in relation to their own motifs of action and life goals.

In search of new pedagogical approaches to achieve these aims, approaches from the field of mindfulness have received increasing attention in recent times. Mindfulness can be understood as the deliberate and conscious focus on the present moment that includes a dispassionate, but open-hearted awareness of perceptible mental states and processes. It is considered to bear the potential to break routinized actions and to promote the reflection on non-material values. Furthermore, it is also expected to contribute to greater compassion and social action.

This contribution presents the approach and findings from a qualitative study of a 8-week long mindfulness training intervention that was delivered to university students in the project BiNKA (ESC through mindfulness training). It consists of a weekly session of 90 minutes, daily informal practice and a 4-hour day of mindfulness. A goal of the qualitative study was to gain empirical insights into how far mindfulness can stimulate competence development among students. For this purpose, individual interviews were conducted with the students participating in the course. These were supplemented by the student's experience diaries, as well as detailed, written reports by the mindfulness teachers. The data was evaluated on the basis of combined qualitative methods, which were adapted to the specific requirements of the research field between mindfulness and ESC.