

ENHANCING SUSTAINABILITY THROUGH QUALITY ASSURANCE

Collaborative approaches at Swiss Universities

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Positioning as a Researcher

Research focus

Interest in Cross-Context Adaptation - Analyzing how different institutional contexts shape the adaptation of regulations, especially in relation to sustainability objectives.

Theoretical Lenses & Methodology

Institutional Theory - Examining how external regulations influence organizational practices and strategic alignment within universities.

Interpretive Approach - Interested in how people within institutions understand, interpret, and make sense of these regulations—how these perspectives shape sustainability practices

Looking forward

Interested in engaging with participants on shared experiences and challenges in embedding sustainability through quality assurance frameworks

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Higher education institutions are uniquely positioned to contribute to the social, economic and environmental transformations that are required to tackle the world's most pressing challenges.

UNESCO (2022). *Knowledge-driven actions: transforming higher education for global sustainability*



Introduction

Purpose: Explore how quality assurance can facilitate interdisciplinary and institutional collaboration for sustainability

Focus: Best practices, success factors, and challenges identified in institutional accreditation reports.

Target Audience: Institutions beginning to integrate sustainability into their quality assurance processes.

CONTEXT OF SWISS QA

1

- Federal Act on Funding and Coordination of the Swiss Higher Education Sector
- reflects the UN's framework of goals; the Swiss government has adopted a strategy and an action plan to promote sustainable development.

2

Universities must set sustainability-related objectives within their internal QA systems.

- Three Dimensions of Sustainability
 - Economic
 - Social
 - Environmental.

Sustainability in Higher Education: Holistic Approach

Social Sustainability

Focuses on equitable working conditions and staff development across all levels.

Emphasizes transparency in income policies and prioritizes health and safety.

Economic Sustainability

Manages finances with a long-term perspective, aligning with institutional objectives.

Ensures transparency in fund usage and considers ethical sourcing in purchasing.

Environmental Sustainability

Optimizes energy resource management and adheres to environmental protection standards.

Promotes soft mobility solutions for personnel and students.

Integration in Core Activities

Incorporates sustainability into teaching, research, and service provision.

Promotion and Support

Actively promotes sustainability initiatives and supports sustainable practices among stakeholders.

Comprehensive Strategy

Implements a holistic sustainability policy covering all institutional activities.

TRENDS IN COLLABORATION FOR SUSTAINABILITY

Key trends observed in Institutional Accreditation Reports (2021-2023)

1. Strategic integration of sustainability in university missions and planning.
2. Collaboration across departments and networks to address sustainability challenges / interdisciplinary approaches
3. Sustainability Governance - development of structures ensuring integration of sustainability in all university activities.

TRENDS IN COLLABORATION FOR SUSTAINABILITY

Trend 1: Strategic integration

What It's About

- Strategic Mission & Planning: Universities position sustainability as a core element of their missions and long-term goals.

How Collaboration Unfolds

- Internally - integrating sustainability across departments, aligning it with institutional priorities.
- Externally - engaging with external stakeholders around sustainability as a shared objective.

TRENDS IN COLLABORATION FOR SUSTAINABILITY

Trend 2: Interdisciplinary Approaches & Networking

What It's About

- Sustainability requires multi-disciplinary expertise and diverse perspectives for effective solutions

How Collaboration Unfolds

- Cross-departmental collaboration
- External networking



[www.https://www.he-sustainability.ch/workshop2024.](https://www.he-sustainability.ch/workshop2024)

TRENDS IN COLLABORATION FOR SUSTAINABILITY

Trend 3: Sustainability Governance & Policy Development

What It's About

Policy & Structures: Creating governance mechanisms to embed sustainability into institutional operations, teaching, and research.

How Collaboration Unfolds

- Formal Structures - committees or commissions that oversee sustainability-related policies and initiatives.
- Policy Alignment - developing frameworks to ensure that sustainability objectives are aligned across university functions

KEY SUCCESS FACTORS FOR SUSTAINABILITY INTEGRATION

- Since sustainability is a multilayered and complex topic, a phased, step-by-step approach to integrating it into institutional practices can be more sustainable and manageable.
- Creating opportunities for public discussions on sustainability within the institution can raise awareness, foster a shared vision, and identify areas for improvement.
- Reflecting on Challenges ("Dark Sides") of Sustainability Efforts (critical evaluation of formal structures, trying to avoid competitive silos).

KEY SUCCESS FACTORS FOR SUSTAINABILITY INTEGRATION

- Behavioral and Systemic Thinking - fostering sustainability requires engaging not only with knowledge but also with the values and emotions that drive behavior.
- Systemic and Holistic Approaches are needed that recognize that sustainability impacts and is impacted by various interconnected systems within the institution.
- Collaborative, Inclusive, and diverse Engagement - innovative ideas often come from a wide range of backgrounds and expertise levels, and minimizing hierarchical barriers can foster more inclusive and effective collaboration.
- Increased networking within and beyond institutional boundaries enhances knowledge sharing and collaboration, especially when individuals working on similar projects can connect.

Some Questions for the Discussion

1. Can you share an example, from your experience or observation, of interdisciplinary collaboration that has advanced sustainability, either at your university or elsewhere? What key factors contributed to its success?
2. From a quality assurance perspective, what are the challenges of promoting interdisciplinary collaboration to meet sustainability goals in universities, even if it's not yet fully implemented at your institution?
3. How do you think existing policies and governance structures, in your context or from other examples, can support or hinder the integration of sustainability initiatives across different departments and faculties?

THANK YOU

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