

Sustainability Visionary Group



Future UniLab Sustainability Visionaries:



How should universities take the lead in the search for a new balance between human society and the natural environment?



Dr Michael Bies – Visiting Professor at the Peter Szondi Institute of Comparative Literature, Freie Universität Berlin



Prof. Giovanni Emanuele Corazza – Full Professor at the Alma Mater Studiorum University of Bologna, President of the Fondazione Guglielmo Marconi, founder of the Marconi Institute for Creativity



Prof. Rose Thorogood – Assistant Professor in Behavioural Ecology and Chair of Bioresilience Grand Challenge at the University of Helsinki



Prof. Marcin Grynberg – Assistant Professor at the Institute of Biochemistry and Biophysics, Polish Academy of Sciences



Prof. Dave Reay – Professor of Carbon Management & Education, Director of the Edinburgh Climate Change Institute, University of Edinburgh

Table of Contents



Introduction

General questions

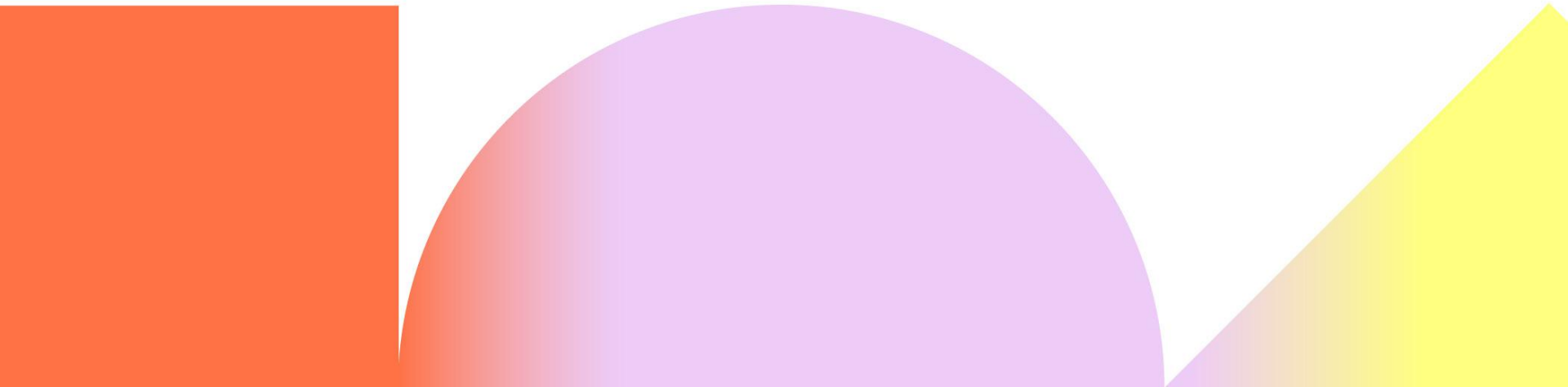
Recommended Actions and Processes

Path for universities to take
the lead

Conclusions

Summary

Introduction



General Questions



What is sustainability?

- Sustainability is a fuzzy concept that needs constant clarification.
- What do we mean when we talk about sustainability?
- Is sustainability still the right concept to find a new balance between human society and natural environment?

Can universities take a lead?

- Of course, they can.
- However, they depend on being recognized by society as institutions that should take a lead.
- And they must be able to deal with the fact that sciences are multi-voiced and often contradictory among themselves.

How can they take a lead?

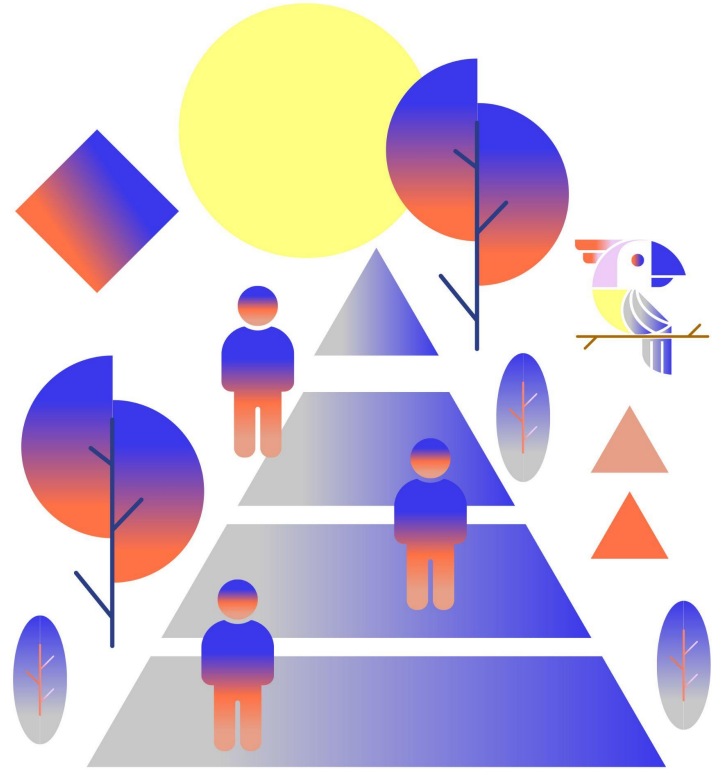
- By example, by concept, and by imagination.
- Sustainability has to shape every “mission” of the university.
- Universities must create within themselves a new balance between human society and natural environment.

General Questions

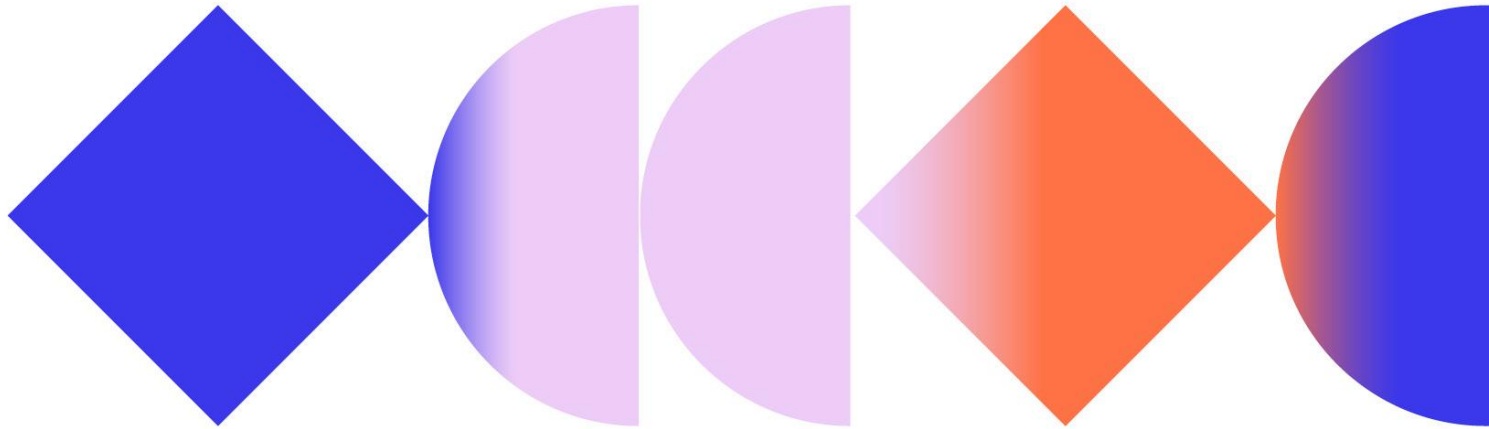


What is most important?

- Promises are not enough. We need actions.
- Taking single actions is not enough. Universities must engage with parallel actions which are mutually synergic.



Recommended Actions and Processes



Mainstreaming Green Skills and Education: Plan



Assess current provision

- How is the climate emergency and nature crisis currently addressed in the curriculum?
- Do our Universities currently provide all graduates with the attributes required for the net zero transition and green careers?

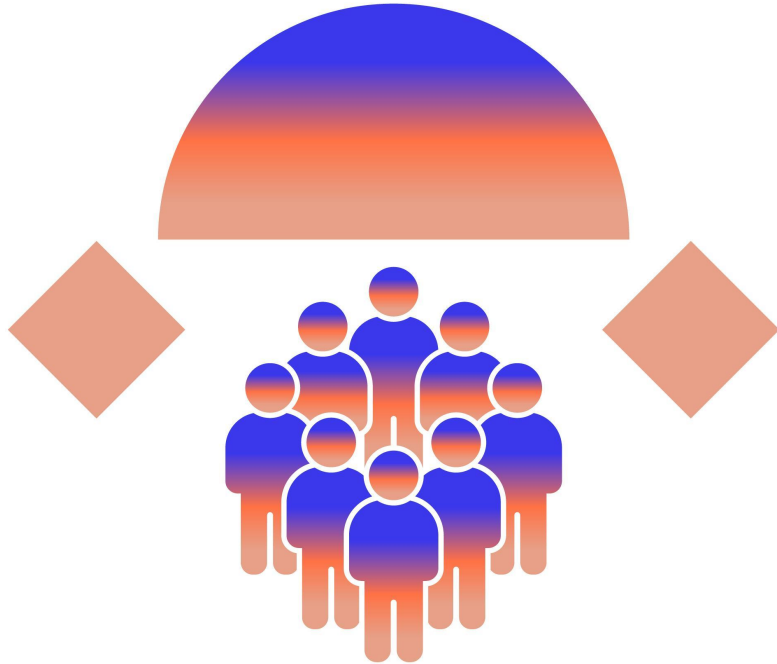
Identify needs now and in future

- What new courses and/or curriculum reforms are required to meet the needs of all students and graduates in the climate emergency?
- How can capacity of staff and support services (e.g. careers) be built to deliver on these needs?

Agree a Green Skills Action Plan

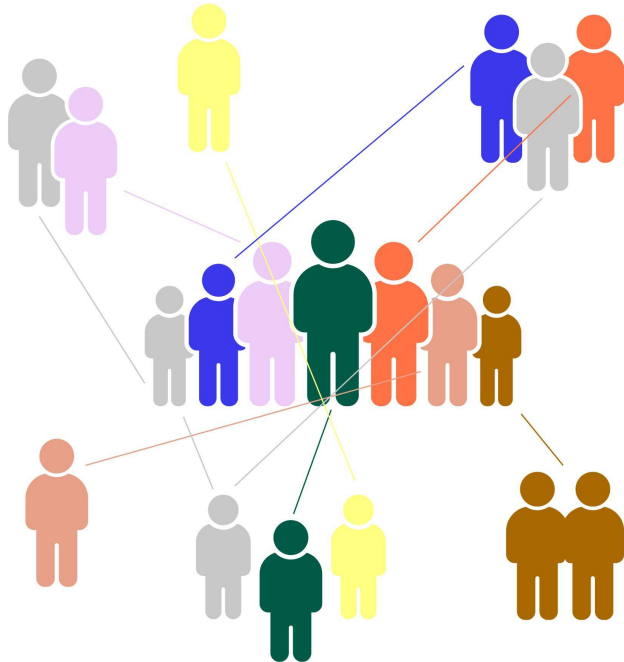
- Engage with students, employers and alumni to agree a Green Skills Action Plan
- Set clear timelines and resource needs for capacity building and implementation
- Confirm top level support from University leadership

Mainstreaming Green Skills and Education: Act One



- All UNA Europa Universities to form a Green Skills Action Plan (GSAP) expert working group, co-led by the specific institution and UNA Europa.
- GSAP expert working groups in place by summer 2022 to coincide with preparations for the new academic year.
- GSAP working groups to provide an interim assessment of existing provision and net zero alignment needs by Easter 2023.

Mainstreaming Green Skills and Education: Act Two



- First GSAP for each institution by summer 2023 with recommendations on immediate (i.e. academic year 2023-24), medium term (academic year 2024-30) and full term (post-2030) actions.
- Timetable for full implementation to reflect provision types (e.g. modular short course vs full undergraduate degree) with all GSAPs being fully implemented by the 2029-30 academic year
- A core of GSAP expert working groups (e.g. UNA Europa and the Institution leads) provide an annual review and, where required, adjustment of strategy in line with new demands locally, nationally and globally.

Future Studies for the University of the Future

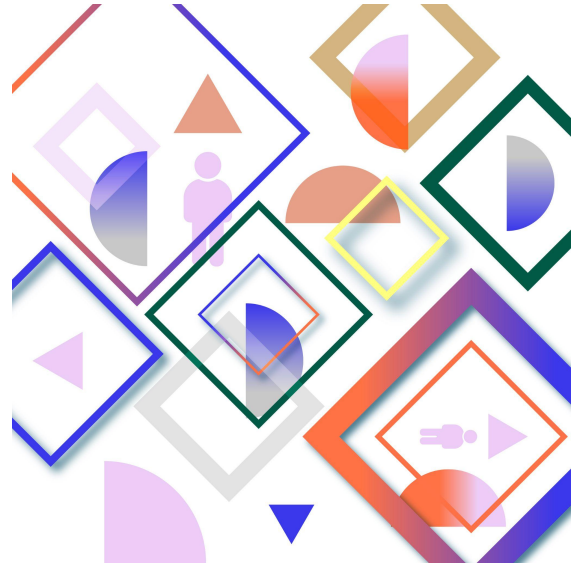


RATIONALE: Using foresight and anticipation methodologies to create alternative scenarios, develop future studies with a 20-30 years time span, and then take decisions based on these visions of the future.

Consider trends and small signals concerning the environment, demography, technology, politics, society should be taken into account.

Ideal balance in the University of the future can only be found with a system view.

Partial exercises run the risk of leading to imbalanced solutions

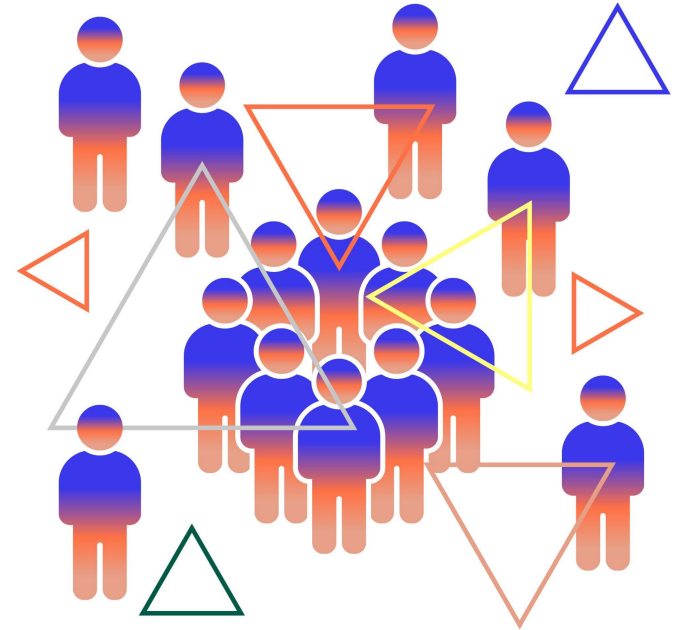


Co-creation Methodologies



Use engagement strategies that involve several stakeholders, within and **outside of the university boundaries**.

- Adopt **co-creation methodologies** in order to make the design of sustainability actions not only a top-down but also a bottom up effort.
- Actions must follow-up in order to avoid that these bottom-up activities do not have any practical bearing!
- Launch **European-wide contests for students**, with prizes for the best ideas. UNA Europa can design the call and act as a jury.



Multidisciplinary Research

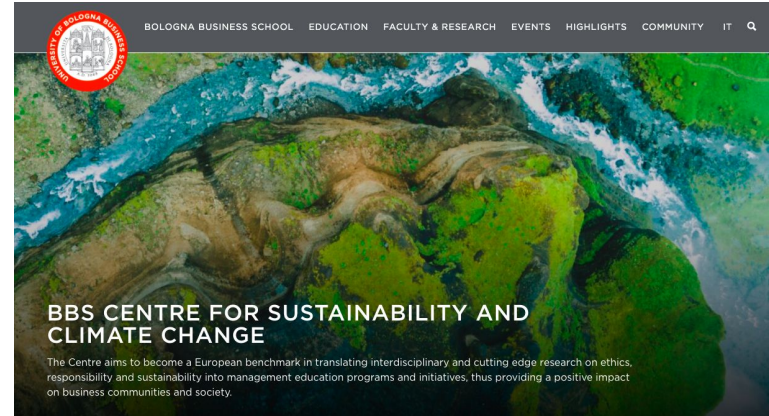


Invest in multidisciplinary research flagships with sustainability as their common core.

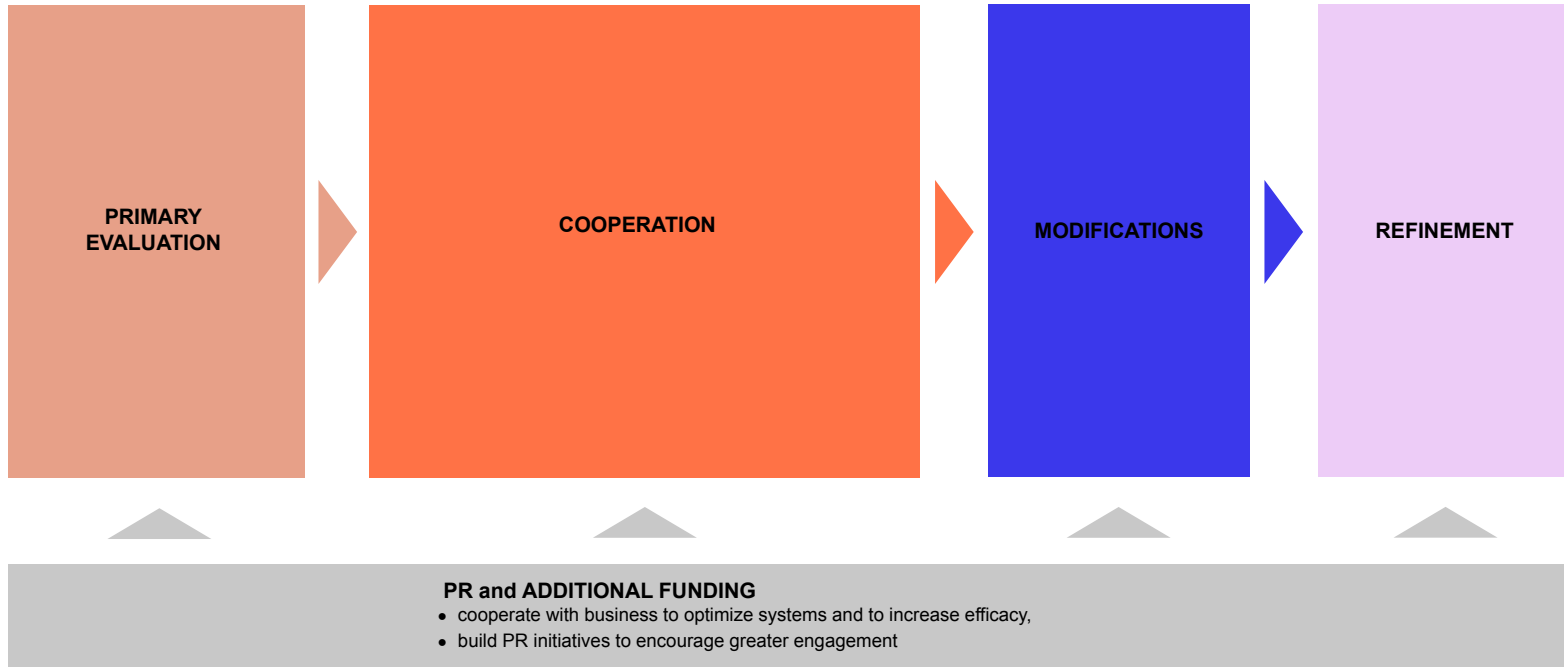
As an example, the University of Bologna, through its Business School, has very recently launched a new multidisciplinary Centre for Sustainability and Climate Change:

<https://www.bbs.unibo.eu/sustainable-development/> .

This is an example of a **concrete action** through which Universities can take the lead in addressing the challenge of finding a new balance.



Engagement Strategies



Engagement Strategies



Primary evaluation

- evaluate the current state of universities,
- organize structures to change teaching schemes,
- adapt administration to new tasks,
- increase information on negative impact of climate change, lack of separation of human populations from nature, risks and advantages of future human mass migrations, energy shortage etc.

Modifications

- evaluate implemented methods,
- introduce changes to better fit communities and nature,
- with implemented procedures lobby for broader changes in the environmental politics,
- cooperate with local administration.

Cooperation

- open universities to local cooperations,
- further change administration procedures to adapt to cooperations,
- **implement ideas/methods focused on changes in environmental politics at universities** embracing local and social communities/networks,
- **build groups of experts to invent methodologies, manage groups of volunteers at lower administrative levels and teach them about climate change, methods to be implemented,** cooperation etc.,
- flatten the hierarchical structures of teaching, enhance cooperation methods rather than talks,
- work on social reforms to minimize the impact of human large scale migrations.

Refinement

- introduce low-cost, effective self sufficient universities (water, energy, structural reforms),
- work on social reforms to minimize the impact of human large scale migrations.

Summary



Conclusions



Parallel routes needs to be taken in terms universities are to take a lead

1. Mainstreaming Green Skills and Education
2. Future Studies for University of the Future
3. Co-creation Methodologies
4. Multidisciplinary Research
5. Engagement Strategies

Sustainability Visionary Group



Thank you!

