

**Format:** Research lab (60 minutes)

**Topic:** Moving from learning *about* to learning *for* and *as* sustainability

Higher education institutions (HEIs) act as a catalyst for a transformation towards sustainability as they not only educate future change agents and prepare graduates and new leaders to pursue sustainability in their various professions, but they also conduct innovative and engaged research that addresses global challenges, in collaboration with societal stakeholders of different kinds (Mochizuki & Yarime, 2016, p. 21, Sachs et al., 2019; UNESCO, 2020, p. 14). Thus, according to a joint statement by several higher education associations, “None of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) can be achieved without the contribution of higher education and research” (IAU et al., 2019). But how can HEIs integrate sustainability in a deep-rooted and comprehensive way to provide transformative learning environments? There seems to be a lack of knowledge about the conditions for and strategies of successful (deep-rooted and comprehensive) implementation processes with specific implementation patterns and driving and hindering factors (Barth & Thomas, 2012; Fien, 2002). It is, therefore, necessary to explore which strategies and processes have worked and could be applied at other HEIs.

The aim of the research lab is to collaboratively design actions to transform higher education institutions. The research question is: How can individual leadership be supported to “transform and redesign” (Sterling & Thomas 2006) higher education institutions (HEIs) and provide education (and research) “as sustainability”? As a basis for such a discussion, we will briefly present results from two studies. First, results of a meta-study (case-survey analysis) of 131 HEIs around the world showing six distinct implementation patterns: (1) collaborative paradigm change, (2) bottom-up, evolving institutional change, (3) top-down, mandated institutional change, (4) externally driven initiatives, (5) isolated initiatives, and (6) limited institutional change. We will also show what drivers and barriers can be derived from these implementation patterns.

Second, to illustrate some drivers, especially individuals taking leadership to transform their HEIs, we will present results from a qualitative study based on interviews with sustainability champions from six different European HEIs. This research was done in close collaboration with the Copernicus Alliance. These insights illuminate how individuals help transform their HEIs and how they cope with barriers. One insight from this study was that cultural contexts can play a significant role, and that networks, such as the Copernicus Alliance, provide support for individual leaders.

Participants will be invited during the presentation of the results to contribute through interactive reflection tasks. For instance, where would they situate their HEIs? What role are they taking in supporting moving toward education as sustainability? What role does context play in their HEI? What drivers and barriers are most pertinent at their HEIs?

We also hope to use this Research Lab to collaboratively design more detailed action steps (solutions) for different stakeholder groups. Through this, not only action steps but also research gaps can be identified. For instance, what kind of support is needed? How can such support be developed? What kind of support should and can international HEIs and networks provide to support individual leadership for steering a transformation of HEIs toward learning as sustainability?

The Research Lab will thus offer an explanatory framework for ways of promoting transformation towards sustainability at HEIs and an opportunity to exchange about what the next steps could be in transforming HEIs.

## References:

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