Preliminary findings of the SPHERE Study in Greening in HE

Howard Davies, Barcelona, December 4 2023

The publication

We intend to analyse, through document review, surveys, interviews and focus groups:

- how national policies in HERE Partner Countries are responding to the European Green Deal
- how far universities are committed to greening activities
- what has been achieved until now

We will examine a range of approaches to greening: through institutional strategy, learning and teaching, programme design, student and staff mobility, research/innovation, local outreach, campus infrastructure

We will convene National Focus Groups:

- to assess involvement and commitment at national levels
- to meet a range of actors and stakeholders in their national context
- to take an in-depth, tailored, qualitative approach in a sample of Partner Countries to understand greening policy initiatives locally
- to identify potential short case studies for the publication

We intend to publish in January

Which Partner Countries we invited to convene focus groups

- Albania
- Algeria
- Armenia
- Jordan
- Kazakhstan
- Moldova
- Montenegro
- Morocco
- Uzbekistan

The level of participation was variable, partly due to technical problems

The active participants were predominantly academics and researchers

What we already knew

All Partner Countries / UN members have embraced the **Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)**

- Half-way point to 2030 just reached; September UN Summit meeting agreed to accelerate

All Partner Countries / UN members have filed **Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs)**:

- Stating by what percentage they will reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 2030
- Variations in length from 10 to 150 pages; variations in baseline dates
- Typically express a need for capacity building, technical assistance and international funding
- All address the five **headline issues**: energy, land use, waste, water, transport + the cross-cutting priority – gender

Partner Countries on the road to EU accession are / will have to negotiate Chapters 25 (science and research), 26 (education and culture), and 27 (environment), to align with the *acquis communautaire*

What we wanted to find out

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- Whether there were higher education strategies at national level
- **Whether – at national level – the climate change and HE strategies were explicitly linked**
- Whether their integrated policy lines had been passed down to HE institutions
- **What action was being undertaken by universities**: curriculum development, mobility, research and innovation, international collaboration, service to the community, etc
- And whether these actions came from **bottom-up, top-down pressure, or both**
- Whether they were located only in **specialist faculties** and departments
- Whether they were monitored by **targeted quality assurance** and what were the outcomes
- And finally, how university work to mitigate and adapt to climate change took account of **gender**

Which policy framework we are working in

Within the umbrella framework of the EU Green Deal, we take as our guide the **Council Recommendation on learning for the green transition**

The Council calls for over-arching national strategies. In a **key paragraph** it notes that, where they exist…

'**Whole-institution approaches** to sustainability incorporating all areas of activity **are not always sufficiently present**. Such approaches can include teaching and learning; governance; research and innovation; and infrastructure, facilities and operations, and should engage learners, staff, parents, and local and wider communities.' (Preamble 18)

What we discovered

The **Focus Groups** told us that…

1. Universities are very active, but at different levels: institutional (green campuses), faculty, research institute, department; whole-institution approaches are not widespread
2. HEIs act on their own initiative but worry about the sustainability of their action; guidance and funding by central government vary from country to country
3. Some have important roles in environmental consultancy and intervention
4. In nearly all respects, the picture across Partner Countries is very varied
5. Targeted quality assurance does not exist, but gender issues have high priority

What we intend to recommend

- That the national HE strategy takes due account of the national environment strategy and that policies and measures are effectively disseminated to HE institutions and supported by funding
- That universities adopt a ‘whole-institution’ approach, mapping and integrating existing initiatives without limiting their effectiveness
- That universities strengthen synergies of programme design and delivery, research and innovation, social outreach and international collaboration, in line with UN climate policy goals
- That internal quality assurance procedures are adapted accordingly
- That Partner Country HERE teams use SPHERE capacity building opportunities (TAMs) to raise awareness, train a climate-ready labour force and enhance cross-border climate measures
- That HERE teams develop future annual workplans giving high priority to greening

What we invite the break-out groups to discuss

Please consider some of these questions:

- What are the obstacles to a ‘whole-institution’ approach to climate change?
- How can you judge the appropriateness of your institution’s greening strategy?
- How do you obtain the active involvement of all categories of staff and students?
- What instruments exist to facilitate institutional engagement with society at large?
- How would quality assurance of climate-related activities actually work?
- How would you characterise your institution’s approach to gender and greening?
- What steps can you take to get your institutional good practice adopted in national policy?
- What is your institution’s strongest point of leverage?
- What recommendations would you like to see in the SPHERE publication?

Thank you for your attention!

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