

Sustainability in Higher Education: A Case of Transition Management from a Private University in Turkey (Ongoing Study)

Authors : Ayse Collins

Abstract : The Agenda 2030 puts Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) in the situation where they should emphasize ways to promote sustainability accordingly. However, it is still unclear: a) how sustainability is understood, and b) which actions have been taken in both discourse and practice by HEIs regarding the three pillars of sustainability, society, environment, and economy. There are models of sustainable universities developed by different authors from different countries; For Example, The Global Reporting Initiative (GRI) methodology which offers a variety of indicators to diagnose performance. However, these models have never been developed for universities in particular. Any model, in this sense, cannot be completed adequately without defining the appropriate tools to measure, analyze and control the performance of initiatives. There is a need to conduct researches in different universities from different countries to understand where we stand in terms of sustainable higher education. Therefore, this study aims at exploring the actions taken by a university in Ankara, Turkey, since Agenda 2030 should consider localizing its objectives and targets according to a certain geography. This university just announced 2021-2022 as "Sustainability Year." Therefore, this research is a multi-methodology longitudinal study and uses the theoretical framework of the organization and transition management (TM). It is designed to examine the activities as being strategic, tactical, operational, and reflexive in nature and covers the six main aspects: academic community, administrative staff, operations and services, teaching, research, and extension. The preliminary research will answer the role of the top university governance, perception of the stakeholders (students, instructors, administrative and support staff) regarding sustainability, and the level of achievement at the mid-evaluation and final, end of year evaluation. TM Theory is a multi-scale, multi-actor, process-oriented approach with the analytical framework to explore and promote change in social systems. Therefore, the stages and respective methodology for collecting data in this research is: Pre-development Stage: a) semi-structured interviews with university governance, c) open-ended survey with faculty, students, and administrative staff d) Semi-structured interviews with support staff, and e) analysis of current secondary data for sustainability. Take-off Stage: a) semi-structured interviews with university governance, faculty, students, administrative and support staff, b) analysis of secondary data. Breakthrough stabilization a) survey with all stakeholders at the university, b) secondary data analysis by using selected indicators for the first sustainability report for universities The findings from the predevelopment stage highlight how stakeholders, coming from different faculties, different disciplines with different identities and characteristics, face the sustainability challenge differently. Though similar sustainable development goals ((social, environmental, and economic) are set in the institution, there are differences across disciplines and among different stakeholders, which need to be considered to reach the optimum goal. It is believed that the results will help changes in HEIs organizational culture to embed sustainability values in their strategic planning, academic and managerial work by putting enough time and resources to be successful in coping with sustainability.

Keywords : higher education, sustainability, sustainability auditing, transition management

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