Chapter 4
Implementing an Interfaculty Elective "Sustainable Development":
An Intervention into a University's Culture Between Organized Scientific Rationality and Normative Claim

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ABSTRACT

A university is a place of organized scientific rationality, but as a social institution it is also committed to future generations. Therefore, it can be argued that universities should act as "models for sustainability". It is thus not sufficient to spend public funds efficiently in achieving their educational mission. Beyond that, the social and the environmental effects of their actions also have to be considered. Having this in mind, the status quo of sustainability in research, teaching, and administration at the Alpen-Adria University Klagenfurt in Austria was examined in 2010. Results showed that although important approaches and several internationally acknowledged contributions in research and teaching do exist, at the same time a concise and focused strategy for these actions is missing. However, there was some commitment that a coherent strategy would strengthen our University. The major challenge is that a system based on individual freedom in research and teaching needs to intervene in order to create, implement and live such a strategy. The conception and implementation of an interdisciplinary elective open for all Master and PhD students seemed to be a first appropriate step to implement sustainability

at the University across disciplinary and structural borders. To increase general acceptance of such an intervention and to cause impacts towards sustainability at the university as a whole an interfaculty approach was chosen. The corresponding processes and challenges are described in this chapter.

ORGANIZATION BACKGROUND

This chapter describes the developments of the Alpen-Adria-University Klagenfurt, and milestones in the field of Sustainable Development (SD). The University founded in 1970 for "Educational Sciences" evolved into an institution with five different disciplinary approaches: three conventional faculties (Cultural Studies, Economics and Business Administration, Informatics), one inter- and transdisciplinary Faculty and a School of Education. The rather young university - compared to other universities in Austria (the University of Vienna was founded in 1365) - focused from its very beginning on linking research and teaching to its relevance in societal practice. The IFF-Faculty for interdisciplinary studies (founded 1979 by six Austrian universities as an inter-university institute for interdisciplinary approaches in research and education) has always played a very specific role. It became a faculty at Klagenfurt University in 2004. This faculty bundles scientists from different disciplines around a societal problem together with the parties involved. Their work is based on intervention oriented approaches in research and teaching such as group dynamics, action research, intervention research and others. From very early in the 1990ies ecological problems have been seen as a huge social and cultural challenge, leading to specific approaches to the concept of sustainability internationally as accepted in science and politics, such as *social metabolism* and *social ecology* or the *cultural sustainability* approach and the concept of *intervention research* as well as approaches of *Education for Sustainable Development* (ESD).

Therefore it was no surprise that the Alpen-Adria University Klagenfurt earned the *Sustainability Award* commissioned by the Austrian Federal Ministries of Sciences and Environment for its IFF-Faculty for Interdisciplinary Studies in 2008[1]. As a consequence Renate Hübner and Franz Rauch, the initiators of the submission, were authorized to research the status quo of sustainability throughout the whole university in research, teaching and organization. An investigation based on the approach of Intervention Research (Heintel, 2005; Hübner, 2012; Krainer & Lerchster, 2012) of the status quo of sustainability at the University (Hübner, Hadatsch & Rauch, 2010) made many initiatives and approaches[2] also in other faculties and administrative areas visible. At the same time it showed that these initiatives were not linked with each other and existed without a unifying or at least joint strategy. This, even though the development plans of the Alpen-Adria University Klagenfurt since 2006 have included sustainability as highly relevant from a social and cultural science perspective, as the following milestones prove:

2005: Implementation of a Master's program in social and human ecology;
2006: Implementation of an In-Service University Course and a network "ESD – Innovation in Teacher Education";
2007: Implementation of a professorship for environmental history;
2007: Implementation of an Institute of Intervention Research and Cultural Sustainability;
2008: Winner of the Sustainability Award (category "communication and decision processes") of the Federal Ministry of Science and Research as well as the Federal Ministry of Agriculture, Environment and Water management for IFF-Faculty of Interdisciplinary Studies;

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