

BOOK REVIEW

Sustainability in Higher Education: Strategies, Performance and Future Challenges

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Higher education institutions have the responsibility to lead the transformation of thinking through education, promoting a healthier, fairer, and more sustainable world, and playing a crucial role in the development of a sustainable society. The main challenge they face is to promote the principles of sustainability in society while adhering to their traditional missions, and at the same time becoming more sustainable organizations themselves. Over the past three decades, higher education institutions around the world have undertaken numerous sustainable development initiatives and have made significant progress. Sustainability in Higher Education: Strategies, Performance, and Future Challenges [1] aims to provide guidance for higher education institutions in managing and leading sustainable transformation.

This book [1] presents a conceptual framework that elucidates and quantifies the incorporation of sustainability within the fabric of higher education institutions. It delves into the strategic realignment of these institutions to actively contribute to a more sustainable societal evolution. Articulated across three distinct sections, the book furnishes an extensive panorama of the endeavors of higher education institutions in the pursuit of sustainability. It presents cross-country analyses to accentuate the variegated tapestry of differences, parallels, and exemplary models of sustainability innovation. Furthermore, it sheds light on the pivotal roles and instrumentalities, mechanisms, and inherent challenges entailed in the stewardship of sustainability performance.

The first part of the book consists of five chapters that systematically analyze how higher education integrates and contributes to the goal of sustainability. The first chapter delves into the evolution of sustainability principles in Italian business studies and proposes a conceptual framework to diagnose and promote the integration of sustainability into the business models of higher education institutions. Chapter 2 emphasizes the importance of the personal inner sphere in driving change in higher education and shares theoretical and practical insights on the concept of the “caring university”. Chapter 3 explores the role and best practices of higher education institutions in implementing sustainable development from the perspective of constitutional and legislative frameworks. Chapter 4 identifies the potential and challenges of higher education institutions in driving systemic change through case studies. Finally, Chapter 5 analyzes the role of higher education institutions in supporting industrial development and the achievement of SDG 9, highlighting the key role of higher education in fostering collaboration between researchers and practitioners.

Part II consists of seven chapters that provide insights into the measurement, reporting and evaluation tools and skills used by higher education institutions in contributing to sustainability performance. Focusing on middle management in higher education institutions, Chapter 1 reveals the role of deans in driving sustainability transformation and the barriers they face, providing a roadmap for academic leaders to transform. Chapter 2 examines the moderating role of governance functions on the relationship between communication and sustainability implementation performance by comparing the cases of South African and UK higher education institutions, emphasizing the importance of effective communication strategies. Chapter 3 analyzes the impact of performance-based funding mechanisms on strategic planning in higher education

institutions. Chapter 4 explores the role of national regulatory frameworks and the drivers of reporting by comparing sustainability disclosure in Dutch and Italian higher education institutions. Chapter 5 presents the DKSB framework and explores the learning outcomes of sustainability education and its assessment tools. Chapter 6 investigates sustainability practices and assessment tools in different countries. Chapter 7 provides a comprehensive study of the development, challenges and future directions of sustainability rankings. Part II provides valuable perspectives and tools for understanding and enhancing the capacity of higher education institutions in sustainability performance management.

Part III consists of five chapters showcasing practical examples of systemic integration and institutionalized sustainability in higher education institutions around the world. Chapter 1 highlights the responsibilities and challenges of higher education institutions in preparing experts who can lead the world towards sustainability, providing a framework and lessons learned for curricular reform through the case of a reformed degree program at the University of Helsinki. Chapter 2 summarizes the progress, challenges and commitments of higher education institutions in Latin America and the Caribbean to sustainable development in the context of the 2030 Agenda. Chapter 3 explores the practices and challenges of monitoring and quantifying sustainability course content in French business schools, emphasizing the importance of continuous improvement and an integrated approach. Chapter 4 reviews the role of Italian and Spanish higher education institutions in promoting sustainable development and analyzes how higher education institutions can contribute to the achievement of the SDGs by comparing their constitutions and practices. Finally, Chapter 5 analyzes the unique role of island universities in sustainable development, exploring the projects of higher education institutions in the development and preservation of territories, cultures and environments through the cases of Sardinia and the Canary Islands. These cases provide valuable insights and inspiration for understanding the efforts of higher education institutions to implement sustainability in different contexts.

This book [1] stands out in several ways. First, it adopts a multidisciplinary perspective. The book combines the knowledge and perspectives of scholars from different disciplines to provide a comprehensive view of the practices of higher education institutions in sustainable development. Secondly, cross-country comparisons are provided. The book offers different practices and experiences of higher education institutions in different countries and regions in terms of sustainable development, which helps readers to understand the differences in practices in different cultural and policy contexts. Third, a lot of case studies are used, which can provide readers with a rich empirical basis, making the theoretical analysis closer to the reality and enhancing the practicality and persuasiveness of the book. Fourth, a comprehensive framework for assessing the sustainability performance of higher education institutions is presented, which helps institutions to conduct self-assessment and improvement.

Although the book provides many meaningful insights, it has some limitations. First, while the book provides a rich theoretical framework and case examples, it may lack an in-depth analysis of the practical application of these theories to different types and sizes of higher education institutions. Second, the book may not provide enough operational guidance, especially for higher education institutions that have limited resources or are in the early stages of development. Third, the book may be primarily geared towards academics and policy makers and may not be friendly enough for front-line educators and students. In addition, the fact that the book was co-edited by three people may lead to inconsistencies throughout the book.

Overall, this publication discusses how higher education institutions can systematically reposition themselves to help society become more sustainable. In particular, strategic management approaches are used to overcome the fragmentation of sustainability initiatives that are increasingly being undertaken by higher education institutions worldwide. In this book, leading scholars in the field of sustainability in higher education combine their diverse backgrounds to propose a conceptual framework for explaining and measuring the integration of sustainability in higher education institu-

tions Contains chapters exploring which processes and management tools should be used and the challenges to be faced in order to make sustainable innovations effective. Despite limitations such as lack of coverage and limited impact, this book can provide important lessons for sustainability in higher education institutions.

Conflicts of interest

The author declares that she has no conflict of interest.

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