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D3.3.2 Publication on technical universities' approaches towards sustainability

INSTITUTIONALISING TRANSDISCIPLINARITY: AN EMPIRICAL STUDY OF TECHNICAL UNIVERSITIES IN THE ENHANCE ALLIANCE (Manuscript title)

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// SUBMISSION INFORMATION

The article has been submitted for peer-review to the “International Journal of Sustainability in Higher Education” on 27th November 2024

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// ABSTRACT

Purpose

Higher education institutions can play a crucial role in developing solutions for societal transformation and driving sustainable development (SD). Transdisciplinarity (TD) is a mode of research and operation that incorporates multiple knowledge perspectives, fosters collaboration between science and society and offers a way to tackle societal problems. This study aims to explore the institutionalisation of TD for SD in universities and use empirical data to show how it can be supported through strategy, research and educational practice.

Design /methodology /approach

The study takes a normative approach and builds on a corpus of research on the institutionalisation of TD by examining the empirical context of seven technical universities in the European ENHANCE Alliance. Qualitative methodology is used to combine previously mapped case study data from the Alliance with primary interview data from 25 participants, which is analysed using open coding.

Findings

The findings identify traditional disciplinary structures, culture clashes or prejudice and a lack of resources or recognition as common barriers to the implementation of TD initiatives, whilst enabling factors include explicit support from leaders, engagement with bottom-up and diverse communities, directed funding, criteria for recruitment and curricula and nurturing cultures of trust and openness.

Originality /value

Although it largely supports current literature on this topic, the study’s value is in answering a call for more empirical evidence to support the institutionalisation of TD in higher education, as well as insights from localised contexts.

// KEYWORDS

sustainable development, transdisciplinarity, institutionalisation, ENHANCE alliance, strategy, research, education

// JEL

I23 Higher Education and Research Institutions, I25 Education and Economic Development

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