

G7 side event

“Universities for Sustainable Development”

Bologna, 11th June 2017



Concept Note

Introduction

Worldwide, university systems are affected by increasing competition, the rise of social expectations and in many cases by the need to do more and better with less. The changes taking place in society, economy, environment, technology and legal systems, require universities to respond to a number of contingent interests in potential conflict.

At the same time, universities need to promote cooperation in academic systems as well as networks and lasting partnerships with business, government and other social actors in a forward-looking perspective. The UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development indicates the horizon, the commitments of the global community, objectives, targets and indicators for measuring its achievement.

In this context, in which universities need to combine competition and cooperation, academic excellence and efficiency, quality and equity, environmental sustainability is not just only one of many available options, but is instead a necessary and responsible development strategy.

Green university rankings are growing in prominence, as both students and universities place more importance on environmental responsibility. Sustainability at universities generally means to i) provide research and teaching on sustainability, ii) adopt internal measures addressed to reduce deleterious environmental effects and to cut carbon and energy bills, and iii) contribute promoting knowledge and science-based regulations and innovation on sustainability, joining public-private partnerships and actions.

University systems and institutional governance are facing the challenge of sustainability, having to promote multidisciplinary and cooperation, consistently orienting the internal decision-making processes, resource allocation, organizational redesign, incentives for

teaching and research, accountability to local territories, national governments and the international community.

All this falls within an overall context of opportunities, recognizing environmental sustainability as a new framework for an integrated approach to planning, reporting and networking through which providing strategic direction and capacity building to the many economic, social and government actors involved in environmental protection.

There is interest among many academics and practitioners in taking Sustainable Development practices within University, and there is recognition of the opportunity that the concept holds for a positive impact on the whole environment, economy and society.

However, there is limited understanding of what University can contribute to its full scale effective implementation. University can prominently contribute to the process by training the required scientists, engineers, economists and professionals along with the knowledge required for the development of improved technologies, regulations and business models. University can also contribute to the creation of new and tailored start-ups and spin offs as well as to the identification of new market potentials. This surely requires better linking of research, teaching and operations, and creating further interconnections between academic disciplines and between these and industry, government and society.