

## EUROPEAN SCHOOL OF SUSTAINABILITY SCIENCE AND RESEARCH





## BACKGROUND

The United Nations Summit on Sustainable Development, held on 25-27 September 2015 in New York, adopted the post-2015 development agenda and a set of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) which are outlined in the document "**Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development**". This Agenda, according to the UN, is a plan of action for people, planet and prosperity, which seeks to strengthen universal peace in larger freedom. It contains 17 Sustainable Development Goals and 169 targets, which demonstrate both a vision and an ambition. It seeks to build on the Millennium Development Goals and complete what these did not achieve. The document "Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development" also clearly show the need for an integrated handling of the three main dimensions of sustainable development: the economic, social and environmental.

There is a world consensus in relation to the fact that Sustainability Science -i.e. a branch of science concerned with an integrated view of the three main dimensions of sustainable development, can provide an important contribution in order to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals. Even though in the past the potential of Sustainability Science has been largely overlooked – some say underestimated – it is clear that it can provide a key contribution to the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and, more specifically, the realisation of the vision set at the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

The majority of European universities are engaged with the theme "Sustainable Development", but with different degrees of depth: some have sustainability as a central part of their teaching, research and operations, some have the theme as one of the many areas of activities, whereas others are just getting started. But in all of them, there is a desire to expand their teaching, to enhance their research, PhD training and perform further education programmes on matters related to sustainable development.

There is at present in Europe no single organization or setting, which coordinates efforts in the field of sustainability science teaching and research on the continent, in an integrated way. Yet, much could be gained if the extensive body of knowledge, expertise and resources which European universities currently have available, could be consolidated, with a view to strengthening their profiles, activities, and scientific outputs. It is on the basis of the need to address this gap, that the "**European School of Sustainability Science and Research**" (ESSSR) has been created.

## WHAT IS THE EUROPEAN SCHOOL OF SUSTAINABILITY SCIENCE AND RESEARCH?

ESSSR is an **inter-university consortium** composed by members which share an interest on sustainability science and on matters related to sustainable development. It is a key organization, filling in a gap in respect of the coordination of sustainability science teaching and research at European universities seen today.



The **mission** of ESSSR is:

*“To provide a framework upon which teaching and research within the remit of sustainability science may be further developed at European universities, by means of joint, digitally-oriented teaching programmes, research projects, PhD training and quality scientific publications to be published in high calibre journals”.*

ESSSR has been brought to life based on the perceived need to explore new ideas, develop new approaches and new methods in the field of sustainability science, to meet current and future needs, and which can also help to achieve the many goals listed in the document "Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development".

## **AIMS OF THE EUROPEAN SCHOOL OF SUSTAINABILITY SCIENCE AND RESEARCH**

Consistent with the goals of the **2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development** and the many requirements to be fulfilled so as to allow its implementation, the aims of ESSSR are as follows:

- I. to provide a platform for universities to discuss the contribution of Sustainability Science and Research towards the implementation of the SDGs;
- II. to mobilise universities working with sustainable development, to gather, deliberate and implement joint initiatives, especially online courses, research projects and specialist publications, which show how Sustainability Science and Research can help to achieve the SDGs;
- III. to contribute to the education of next generation of sustainability scientists, by means of on-line courses and joint PhD programmes on sustainability science

A further aim of ESSSR is to link European sustainability researchers with their counterparts in other parts of the world (north-south and south-south cooperation on sustainable development). ESSSR strengthens interdisciplinary research on sustainability issues, and also paves the way for post-doctoral positions and fellowships across its members.



## OPERATIONS

The ESSSR undertakes activities focusing on four main areas:

- Area 1- Courses on sustainability science, especially online ones, hence furthering the digitalisation of teaching and learning
- Area 2- Research projects on sustainability science
- Area 3- Research publications on sustainability science
- Area 4- Joint training of PhD students on sustainability science, as well as post-doctoral positions and fellowships

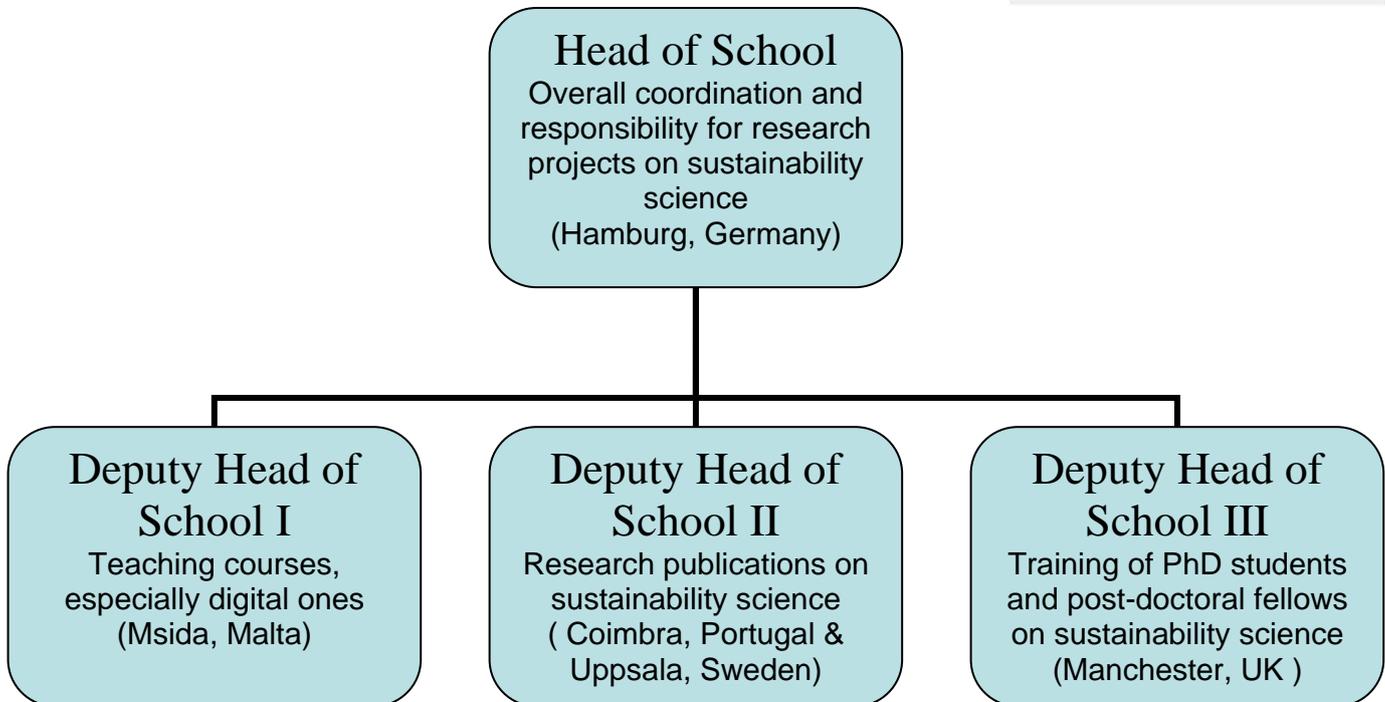
All these four areas are part of the research agenda of many universities across Europe. These four key areas also address the need for integrated approaches towards sustainable development, and hence contribute to the implementation of the SDGs. The themes ESSSR focuses on, are as follows:

- Theme 1:** Political, social and economic dimensions of sustainable development
- Theme 2:** Environmental and technological dimensions of sustainable development
- Theme 3:** Holistic approaches to sustainable development
- Theme 4:** Stakeholders' engagement in sustainable development
- Theme 5:** Education for sustainable development

Other themes may be added by ESSSR members, to be agreed with by the Consortium.

## STRUCTURE OF THE EUROPEAN SCHOOL OF SUSTAINABILITY SCIENCE AND RESEARCH

The main office of the ESSSR in Hamburg (Germany), based at the Hamburg University of Applied Sciences, Faculty of Life Sciences. Consistent with the need to ensure a balanced collaboration, it is structured as follows:



*The Chairperson and Head of School (Prof Walter Leal, HAW Hamburg)* coordinates the ESSSR and oversees **research projects** on sustainability science.

*Deputy Head 1-* Digitally-oriented courses: new courses on sustainability science (University of Malta)

*Deputy Head 2-* Research publications on sustainability science (University of Coimbra, Portugal and Uppsala University, Sweden)

*Deputy Head 3-* Joint training of PhD students and post-doctoral fellows on sustainability science (Manchester Metropolitan University, UK)

Whereas the Chairperson catalyses, encourages and oversees all activities of ESSSR, the Deputy Heads, spread across well-established European universities, are responsible for the coordination of each thematic area.

## ADVANTAGES TO ESSR MEMBERS

The ESSSR is a **worthy investment** for a number of reasons:

- members can join efforts to perform works on sustainability in an integrated way and do not work alone.
- ESSSR supports the research strategies of member universities in four central areas:
  - an internationalisation by being part of a strong European consortium, collaborating with many member universities;
  - increase in the income from research projects by having qualitatively and quantitatively more projects on sustainability issues;



- d) training of **more PhD students**, by means of joint supervisions of more PhD theses and post-doctoral fellows, engaging **interested professors** from different Faculties;
- e) fosters technology transfer by bringing the results of scientific projects to use, supporting societal changes
- f) ESSSR **equally** fosters teaching (by digital means) and research, with contents which may be beneficial to many university students
- g) It enhances the image of the member universities as internationally-oriented research organisations, and markets them internationally as key players on the subject
- h) The new projects generated, automatically lead to additional income and overheads
- i) The investment needed is modest, with an office and contact person to serve as the link and coordinate the inputs of each member university.

Finally, being part of an institution such as ESSSR will assist members' efforts to access mainstream funding from research, being part of many other projects, hence increasing their presence in the international research arena.

## RESOURCES REQUIRED

In line with the principles of sustainability, ESSSR will operate as a virtual organization, i.e. it entails no new building or facilities, meaning **it leads to no additional costs to members**. However, it requires a committed person (a permanent member of staff) with the usual office facilities, so as to allow coordination within each institution. The use of these resources will be optimized and, by means of joint initiatives, it will strengthen the profile, performance and scientific outputs of the member universities in the field of sustainable development, making the modest investment they make, a worthy one. The **income streams and expected revenues are as follows:**

1. Revenues from research projects member universities will apply together
2. Revenues from PhD student fees (for those universities which charge them)
3. Revenues from courses and events member universities will jointly perform

Combined, the 3 revenue streams ensure that ESSSR provides an added value to each member. Member universities are free to define their own finance and activity plans, based on their own resources.



## GOVERNANCE

### Coordination

- Hamburg University of Applied Sciences, Research and Transfer Centre “Sustainable Development and Climate Change Management”

### International Partners

- United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)
- UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation, Man and Biosphere Programme (UNESCO-MAB)
- UN Environment Programme (UNEP)
- Baltic University Programme
- Inter-University Sustainable Development Research Programme (IUSDRP)

## CONTACT POINT FOR SCIENTIFIC AND STRATEGIC COOPERATION

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