

# Strengthening higher education institutions' will to change: A Manifesto for Transformative Learning

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## Short abstract:

To support a paradigm change in Higher Education, we developed a robust **Manifesto for Transformative Learning**. Participants will have a chance to respond to the Manifesto and discuss possibilities of contributing to change in their contexts.

## Extended summary:

To date, many Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) in Europe have committed to integrating sustainability in their strategies. As underlined by Sterling (2021) and numerous others, we are far from having completed the paradigm shift that is needed in teaching to achieve a meaningful integration of sustainability in curricula, in the sense of "Education for Sustainable Development" defined by UNESCO in its 2030 Roadmap (UNESCO 2020). Teaching in higher education is still mostly conceived of as serving a knowledge transfer purpose. Specialized knowledge and skills are offered with the aim of building students' expertise in a specific field. The assumption is that this knowledge and specialized skills will also contribute to the nation's innovation power. This paradigm of higher education has worked for nearly a century and has supported the Global North's economic development (Kläy et al 2015), but it has also blinded us for the destructive power of the Growth Ideal upon which it is based (Wals 2021).

With disciplinary knowledge and skills alone, students will hardly be sufficiently equipped for engaging in *transformative* action, i.e. the type of action now urgently needed to make a true difference for sustainable development (UNESCO 2020). In addition to learning to *know*, students need to learn to *do*, to *care*, to *be*, and to *transform* (Wals 2020). This is only possible with transformative learning (TL) (UNESCO 2021), which implies consciously dealing with values, being willing to change one's meaning perspective, relying on emotions and empathy, and being willing to act (Singer-Brodowski et al. 2022). Most HEIs' visions and strategies rely on a fact/value split, implying that facts are objective and values are subjective (Putnam 2002); how can transformative learning and teaching be integrated in HEIs given the latter's fundamental epistemological resistance to an explicit and reflective value-orientation?

To make change happen at the institutional level, we believe that more broadly formulated and widely accepted guiding principles can help (Bornemann et al. 2020). We – the ESD Working Group of the Swiss Academic Society for Environmental Research and Ecology (SAGUF) –

developed a **Manifesto for TL** with **four straightforwardly formulated demands** and **twelve core messages**; each of these core messages is expanded with simply formulated **explanations** that are based on long-term practice and theory of TL and ESD.

We will offer participants a chance to respond to the Manifesto, reflect about TL, and discuss their possibilities of contributing to the paradigm shift by explicitly addressing values in their higher education context. We would like to address university educators and trainers, study directors, faculty members, and anyone involved in higher education (HE) policy who would like to contribute to outscaling the paradigm change in HE teaching by making ESD and transformative learning principles possible in curricula. We assume that they are frustrated by the slowness of the paradigm change in HE – from mere knowledge transfer to the kind of education proposed by the UNESCO’s 2021 Berlin Declaration – and are looking for allies to speed up the change.

#### REFERENCES

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#### **Answer to the question ‘How does your contribution on higher education generate an impact in the field?’**

We will present our practice- and theory-based Manifesto for Transformative Learning, then invite participants to discuss strategies to implement the Manifesto in various contexts, as a means of scaling out sustainability integration efforts. Participants will get to know the Manifesto and have an opportunity to reflect on stumbling blocks that impede the paradigm change in HE teaching. Their feedback on the Manifesto will be most welcome. The Workshop

will also aim to build new alliances and a Community of Practice based on other practices and theoretical insights. The overall aim of the workshop is to scale out better and faster.