

Multilingualism, Cultural Diversity, and Education for Sustainable Development in Higher Education

Call for proposals

September 24-26, 2024

University of Poitiers, France

Multilingualism and linguistic/cultural diversity are pillars of European Union's strategy. According to the Treaty of the European Union, the EU "[...] shall respect its rich cultural and linguistic diversity and shall ensure that Europe's cultural heritage is safeguarded and enhanced" (Article 3, C326 / 17). In addition to the general principle of linguistic diversity mentioned in the founding treaties, the European charter for regional or minority languages, adopted in 1992 and entered into force in 1998, is designed to protect regional and minority languages as European cultural heritage. The idea of studying and teaching languages -and cultures- other than those that have major international presence is also stressed. In the multilingualism strategy adopted in 2005, three main objectives are highlighted: (1) language learning and the promotion of linguistic diversity in society; (2) promotion of the multilingual economy; and (3) access by citizens to European legislation in their own language. In 2008, a further multilingual objective was launched: multilingualism as an asset for Europe and its intercultural dialogue. The key instrument is intended to encourage the removal of language barriers and to implement the learning/teaching model, which consists of strengthening communication in one mother tongue, as well as in two other languages.

Multilingualism and cultural diversity are inextricably linked to the education for sustainable development. According to UNESCO, one of the current challenges facing educational curricula is the implementation of education for sustainable development:

Education for sustainable development (ESD) gives learners of all ages the knowledge, skills, values and agency to address interconnected global challenges including climate change, loss of biodiversity, unsustainable use of resources, and inequality. It empowers learners of all ages to make informed decisions and take individual and collective action to change society and care for the planet. ESD is a lifelong learning process and an integral part of quality education. It enhances the cognitive, socio-emotional and behavioural dimensions of learning and encompasses learning content and outcomes, pedagogy and the learning environment itself.¹

Consequently, several studies are beginning to emerge focusing on the implementation of sustainability in Higher Education Institutions (HEIs), as well as the issues that need to be addressed in this regard. However, as pointed out by Mokski et al. (2022²), "it has been widely observed by academics that the implementation of sustainability in HEIs has been slower than needed." Multiple references develop different aspects of this implementation and the

¹ <https://www.unesco.org/en/education-sustainable-development/need-know>

² Mokski, E. (2022), "Education for sustainable development in higher education institutions: an approach for effective interdisciplinarity Education for sustainable development", *International Journal of Sustainability in Higher Education*, Vol. 24 No. 1, pp. 96-117.

challenges it presents (Lozano et al., 2013³; Aktas, 2015⁴; Howlett et al., 2016⁵; Berchin et al., 2021⁶). At the same time, global challenges such as climate change, human mobility, migration and displacement, or other social asymmetries based on various factors such as gender, ethnicity, education, or other social identities, highlight a clear and urgent need to rethink educational programs to foster critical reflection, systemic thinking and analysis, participatory learning, creative thinking for future scenarios, and collaborative learning.

In this context, Moksiki et al. (2022) emphasized the need for an interdisciplinary approach, in which humanities and social sciences are positioned to provide paradigms and perspectives (see also Hensley 2020⁷). According to Fettes (2023⁸), language is not mentioned in the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), nor was it seriously considered as an important dimension of social and economic development in the UN planning process that preceded them. Thus, he underscores the fact that:

If what is needed are language policies that help maintain and develop close ties between people and the places where they live, a concerted effort is needed to invest in robust systems of language diversity rather than in linguistic monocultures of the kind we are familiar with.

All higher education institutions can play an important role in language policy in various ways: by establishing international networks, by engaging in joint projects related to the teaching and learning of foreign languages, and by promoting multilingualism and multiculturalism in language centers. Considering their strategy, several topics may arise concerning various aspects:

- Higher Education institutions' language policy and linguistic situation in their (multilingual/multicultural) territory,
- Higher Education institutions' language policy related to the language used in research and knowledge dissemination,
- Higher Education institutions' funding aimed at developing research about multilingualism or heritage languages,
- Higher Education institutions' actions regarding the training of prospective language teachers,
- Higher Education institutions' decisions concerning the languages taught to students (personal development, career-oriented, etc.),
- Higher Education institutions' strategies used to promote linguistic diversity and multilingual education.

³ Lozano, R. et al. (2013), "Declarations for sustainability in higher education: becoming better leaders, through addressing the university system", *Journal of Cleaner Production*, Vol. 48, pp. 10-19.

⁴ Aktas, C.B. (2015), "Reflections on interdisciplinary sustainability research with undergraduate students", *International Journal of Sustainability in Higher Education*, Vol. 16 No. 3, pp. 354-366.

⁵ Howlett, C., Ferreira, J.-A.L. and Blomfield, J.M. (2016), "Teaching sustainable development in higher education: building critical reflective thinkers through an interdisciplinary approach", *International Journal of Sustainability in Higher Education*, Vol. 17 No. 3, pp. 1-22.

⁶ Berchin, I.I., de Aguiar Dutra, A.R. and Guerra, J.B.S.O.A. (2021), "How do higher education institutions promote sustainable development? A literature review", *Sustainable Development*, Vol. 29 No. 6, pp. 1-19.

⁷ Hensley, N. (2020), "Re-storying the landscape: the humanities and higher education for sustainable development", *Högere Utbildning*, Vol. 10 No. 1, pp. 25-42, doi: 10.23865/hu.v10.1946, higher education to national law. Environ. Econ. 2 (2).

⁸ Fettes, M. (2023), "Language and the Sustainable Development Goals: Challenges to Language Policy and Planning", in L. J. McEntee-Atalianis and H. Tonkin, *Language and Sustainable Development*, pp. 11-25, Springer.

Our conference aims to explore foreign language and culture representations (including less-taught languages) and effective teaching methods from an inclusive viewpoint. Several matters may be addressed:

- Innovative practices and tools to address multilingualism and cultural diversity in Higher Education: What is the impact of multilingualism on the sustainability of education: inclusion, equal opportunities, professional sustainability?
- Multilingualism and intercultural education in higher education: What are the benefits of multilingual and multicultural education in the context of education sustainability? This includes benefits on a personal level, such as enhanced cognitive abilities (e.g., the development of a bilingual brain), as well as benefits on a professional level, such as improved decision-making skills and increased professional vitality, which introduces the potential for professional evolution. Additionally, there are societal benefits, including the evolution of professions and the development of multi-competencies among individuals. Moreover, such education contributes to the evolution of teaching techniques and methodologies.
- Academic mobility and exchange as tools for promoting intercultural awareness and multilingual education in Higher Education.
- Policies and practices for embedding intercultural education in academic curricula.
- Teaching multilingualism, diversity, and intercultural communication both online and offline.
- Introducing multilingualism and multiculturalism through the teaching of less commonly taught languages in schools in response to the globalizing linguistic context.

Language:

Authors are encouraged to communicate in one of the seven languages of the EC2U Alliance and to provide a PowerPoint presentation or handout in English, or vice versa.

Organization:

The conference will be organized into six sessions; four sessions will be dedicated to presentations, one session will focus on a case study (workshop on teaching a less-taught language), and one session will be dedicated to a workshop reflecting on the establishment of a list of best practices to promote languages and cultures for sustainable teaching. At the conclusion of the conference, a study will be initiated involving participating universities. This study aims to launch a project conducting surveys, language biographies, and semi-structured interviews on learning activities and teaching practices.

Abstract: Title of the proposal, Last name and first name, Affiliation (University and Research Team), abstract of 500 words (theoretical framework, objectives clearly announced and corpus, 5 bibliographical references). Times New Roman, 12, margins 2,5 cm, line spacing 1,5 cm

Submission deadline: June 15, 2024

Language of the abstract: English

Language of the presentation: Authors are encouraged to communicate in one of the seven languages of the EC2U Alliance (Italian, Finnish, French, German, Portuguese, Romanian, and Spanish) and to provide a PowerPoint presentation or handout in English, or vice versa.

Notification: June 30, 2024

You are kindly requested to submit your proposal to: fvaletop@univ-poitiers.fr

Publication: It is planned to call for contributions at the end of the conference.

Presentation: 20 minutes and 10 minutes for discussion