

# DECLARATIONS, CHARTERS, AND PARTNERSHIPS AS MECHANISMS TO BETTER INCORPORATE SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT IN HIGHER EDUCATION

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## ABSTRACT

Since education was first formally recognised on an international level to play an important role in fostering environmental protection and conservation at the Stockholm Conference in 1972 many declarations, charters and partnerships have been developed and adopted by an increasing number of universities to foster the environment, and subsequently Sustainable Development (SD).

Most of the efforts emphasise the ethical obligation to reduce environmental degradation, threats to society, and unsustainable consumption. Some of the areas where they are being addressed include curricula, research, operations, collaboration and outreach to stakeholders, collaboration with other universities, trans-disciplinarity, assessment and reporting, institutional framework, on-campus experiences, and educate the educators' activities.

This article presents some of the most important efforts, their areas coverage, and their potential for being understood within Higher Education Institutions (HEIs). The analyses indicate that SD needs to be incorporated in a transdisciplinary manner throughout: (1) curricula; (2) research; (3) operations; (4) outreach and engagement with stakeholders (e.g. public, governments, non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and industries); (5) collaboration with other universities; (6) assessment and reporting; (7) institutional framework; (8) on-campus life experiences; and (9) educate the educators programmes.

## KEY WORDS:

Sustainable Development, higher education, declarations, charters, partnerships

## INTRODUCTION

Even though each university is unique, all of them present the same characteristic system. This system, according to Cortese (2003), has four dimensions: **a.** Education (referring to courses and curricula), **b.** Research, both basic and applied, **c.** Campus operations, and **d.** Community outreach. These dimensions must be also assessed and reported on in an on-going manner that leads to a fifth dimension: **e.** Assessment and reporting (Lozano, 2006b). These dimensions are not mutually excluding, on the contrary they are interlinked and interdependent.

This document presents some of the most generally accepted higher education declarations, charters, and partnerships that have appeared in order to foster and address the environment, and subsequently Sustainable Development (SD).

The paper first presents an overview of 13 of the most accepted efforts. Then it analyses how these relate to the university system aforementioned, complemented with collaboration with other universities, trans-disciplinarity, institutional framework, on-campus experiences, and educate the educators' activities.

## OVERVIEW OF THE MOST GENERALLY ACCEPTED HIGHER EDUCATION DECLARATIONS, CHARTERS, AND PARTNERSHIPS FOR SD

At the Stockholm Conference in 1972 education was formally recognised on an international level to play an important role in fostering environmental protection and conservation. Since then many efforts, under the terms declarations, charters and partnerships, to foster the environment and Sustainable Development (SD) have been developed and adopted by an increasing number of universities (Calder & Clugston, 2003; Lozano-Ros, 2003; Wright, 2004). Table 1 lists the most important ones, from which the most generally accepted are presented sections.

The increasing importance of such efforts is evidenced by the large number of university leaders, more than 1,000 in 2003, who had ratified their compromise to SD by signing the Talloires Declaration, the Kyoto Declaration, and the Copernicus University Charter. From these roughly one-third were from the global South, and one-fifth from countries in the former Soviet Union and Warsaw Pact nations (Calder & Clugston, 2003).

**Table 1** History of the efforts taken in Higher Education to foster Sustainable Development

Year	Event/Declaration
1972	Stockholm Declaration on the Human Environment, United Nations Conference on the Human Environment, Sweden.
1975	The Belgrade Charter, Belgrade Conference on Environmental Education, Yugoslavia.
1977	Tbilisi Declaration, Intergovernmental Conference on Environmental Education, Georgia.
1987	“Our Common Future”, The Brundtland Report
1990	Talloires Declaration, Presidents Conference, France.
1991	Halifax Declaration, Conference on University Action for Sustainable Development, Canada.
1992	Report of the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development; Agenda 21, Chapter 36: Promoting Education, Public Awareness and Training.
1992	Association of University Leaders for a Sustainable Future founded.
1993	Kyoto Declaration, International Association of Universities Ninth Round Table, Japan.
1993	Swansea Declaration, Association of Commonwealth Universities’ Fifteenth Quinquennial Conference, Wales.
1993	COPERNICUS University Charter, Conference of European Rectors (CRE).
1994	The Earth Charter
1996	Ball State University Greening of the Campus conference was held. Since then conferences were held in 1997, 1999, and 2001.
1997	Thessaloniki Declaration, International Conference on Environment and Society: Education and Public Awareness for Sustainability, Greece.
1999	Environmental Management for Sustainable Universities conference first held in Sweden. Following conferences in 2002 (South Africa), 2004 (Mexico), and 2006 (U.S.A.).
2000	Global Higher Education for Sustainability Partnership (GHESP)
2001	Lüneburg Declaration on Higher Education for Sustainable Development, Germany.
2002	World Summit on Sustainable Development in Johannesburg, South Africa (Type 1 outcome: decade of education for sustainable development; Civil Society outcome: the Ubuntu Declaration)
2004	Declaration of Barcelona
2005	Start of the Decade of Education for Sustainable Development (DESD)

Source: Adapted and updated from Calder & Clugston (2003), Lozano-Ros (2003), and Wright (2004).

This paper presents an overview on the Talloires Declaration, the Halifax Declaration, Agenda 21 (focusing on chapter 36 specific to education), the Swansea Declaration, the Kyoto Declaration, the Earth Charter, the GHESP, the COPERNICUS Charter, the Lüneburg Declaration, the Ubuntu Declaration, the Declaration of Barcelona, and the DESD.

### The Talloires Declaration

The Talloires Declaration was signed in October 1990 by twenty university rectors, presidents, and vice chancellors from different parts of the world. They were concerned about the environmental degradation, pollution and the depletion of natural resources, the

threat that these present to human and biodiversity survival. Since 1990, the number of signatories has increased to 356 (ULSF, 2007).

The Talloires Declaration addresses environmental changes, considered to be caused by inequitable and unsustainable production and consumption patterns, through 10 action points:

1. Increase Awareness of Environmentally Sustainable Development;
2. Create an Institutional Culture of Sustainability;
3. Educate for Environmentally Responsible Citizenship;
4. Foster Environmental Literacy For All;
5. Practice Institutional Ecology;
6. Involve All Stakeholders;
7. Collaborate for Interdisciplinary Approaches;
8. Enhance Capacity of Primary and Secondary Schools;
9. Broaden Service and Outreach Nationally and Internationally; and
10. Maintain the Movement. (ULSF, 1990)

### The Halifax Declaration

The Halifax Declaration was signed in December 1991 at Halifax, Canada. The declaration recognises the role of universities in improving the capacity of countries to address environmental and development issues, such as the continuing widespread degradation of the earth’s environment, the pervasive influence of poverty on the process, and the effect unsustainable environmental practices (IISD, 2003a).

The Halifax Declaration presents a broad action plan that identifies short- and long-term goals at the local and regional, national and international levels. The work of the Halifax Declaration was to a large extent parallel to the Talloires Declaration.

### Agenda 21, chapter 36

One of the most important outcomes of the Earth Summit in Rio in 1992 was Agenda 21. The Agenda was intended to be a framework of action for achieving SD, where particular emphasis was given to the creation of adequate knowledge and institutions to foster it. From the different chapters in Agenda 21, Chapter 36 focuses on education, and is supported by Chapter 35, which focuses on Sciences for SD and improving capabilities for scientific research in national, regional and global levels (UN, 1992a), and Chapter 37 which focuses on the Creation of Capacity for SD (UN, 1992b).

Chapter 36’s main foci are reorienting education towards SD, increasing public awareness, and promoting training (UN, 1992b). The chapter reinforces the statements of the Brundtland Report (WCED, 1987) in regards to education. One of the key points in this chapter is the call for universal access to education, achievement of primary education 80% for boys and girls, and the reduction of illiteracy level, while at the same time increasing environmental and development awareness and the integration of these to the education. The chapter urges governmental leaders to give a higher priority to the educational sector, and the promotion of public awareness of environmental and development issues and the interrelation of these. The chapter also calls for the promotion of training and job creation within the environmental and developmental fields (UN, 1992b).

### **The Swansea Declaration**

The Swansea Declaration was the outcome of the Association of Commonwealth Universities' Fifteenth Quinquennial Conference, in August 1993 in Swansea, Wales. It was inspired by the examples of Talloires and Halifax, and was driven by the disappointment of the insufficient university presence in Rio de Janeiro and their contribution to Agenda 21. As with the aforementioned efforts, the Swansea Declaration aims to tackle the degradation of the Earth's environment, the pervasive influence of poverty, and the urgent need for sustainable practices. The Swansea Declaration has the following action points:

1. To urge universities to seek, establish and disseminate a clearer understanding of SD and encourage more appropriate principles and practices;
2. To utilise resources of the university to encourage a better understanding on the part of governments and the public at large of the inter-related interdependences and international dimensions of SD;
3. To emphasize the ethical obligation of the present generation to overcome unsustainable practices;
4. To enhance the capacity of the university to teach and undertake research in SD principles and literacy;
5. To co-operate with all segments of society;
6. To encourage universities to review their own operations;
7. To request the implementation of the declaration (IISD, 2003b).

### **The Kyoto Declaration**

The Kyoto Declaration was signed in November 1993 in the 8<sup>th</sup> Round Table of the International Association of Universities (IAU). It is composed of 8 points, of which the first one borrows the words of the Brundtland report; the second one urges universities to better utilise the natural resources; the third demands the present generation to stop unsustainable practices; the fourth urges educators to teach and do research on the principle of SD; the fifth urges co-operation with all segments of society; the sixth urges universities to review their operations; the seventh urges them to implement the declaration; and the eighth reinforces the Halifax and Swansea declarations (IISD, 2003b).

### **The COPERNICUS Charter**

The Co-operation Programme in Europe for Research on Nature and Industry through Co-ordinated University Studies (COPERNICUS) The Charter was signed in Geneva in May 1994. The Charter is an inter-university co-operation programme focusing on the environment and SD. It encompasses more than 320 European universities (COPERNICUS, 1994).

### **The Earth Charter**

The Earth Charter was created in 1994, and the Earth Charter Commission was established in Costa Rica in 1997. The Earth Charter is a declaration of fundamental principles for building a just, sustainable, and peaceful global society. The goals of the Earth Charter are:

- *"To promote the dissemination, endorsement, and implementation of the Earth Charter by civil society, business, and government.*
- *To encourage and support the educational use of the Earth Charter.*
- *To seek endorsement of the Earth Charter by the UN."* (Earth Charter, 2003)

The Earth Charter is comprised of 16 principles, divided into the following four categories: Respect and care for the community of life (principles 1 to 4); Ecological integrity (principles 5 to 8); Social and economic justice (principles 9 to 12); and Democracy, non-violence and peace (principles 13 to 16). The Earth Charter principles are of vital importance to be included in the educational system as they seek to make progress with SD.

### **Global Higher Education for Sustainability Partnership (GHESP)**

The Global Higher Education for Sustainability Partnership (GHESP) was formed in 2000, when the association of the Association of University Leaders for a Sustainable Future (ULSF), COPERNICUS-Campus, the International Association of Universities (IAU), and UNESCO. GHESP seeks to develop and share effective strategies, models and best practices for promoting higher education for sustainability, and to analyse experiences in the south and the north (GHESP, 2003).

According to GHESP higher education must play a central role in the process of achieving SD. GHESP is aimed at promoting better understanding, more effective implementation of strategies to incorporate SD in higher education institutions, assess the progress of making SD central to curricula, research, outreach and operations, disseminate and promote higher education efforts towards SD, make stakeholders consultations, and demonstrate that it is possible to form a partnership of NGO working with the UN system to develop and achieve a common goal (GHESP, 2003).

### **The Thessaloniki Declaration**

The Thessaloniki Declaration, signed in 1997, recalls the Belgrade and Tbilisi Declarations and indicates that their potential is not yet fully explored. It indicates that production and consumption behaviours and lifestyles, including the environment poverty, population, health, food security, democracy, human rights and peace, need to be radically changed to achieve Sustainability. Formal Education in all subject areas and public awareness and are essential for this. Such efforts need to be acted upon by collective action from governments, international, regional and national organisations and financial institutions, the private sector and the media (UNESCO, 1997).

### **The Lüneburg Declaration**

The Lüneburg Declaration was signed on the International COPERNICUS Conference under the umbrella of GHESP, in Lüneburg, Germany in October 2001. The main points of the Declaration are:

- a. The building of networks of the ULSF, COPERNICUS and IAU;
- b. Increase the inclusion of sustainable development in higher education;
- c. The importance of education, and of higher education specifically, in achieving sustainable development;
- d. Create a global learning environment, the signing of the different declarations of higher education; and
- e. The production of a toolkit as a concrete action for the universities (COPERNICUS, 2001).

### **The Ubuntu Declaration**

On September 9<sup>th</sup> 2003, during the World Summit on Sustainable Development held in Johannesburg, 11 of the world's foremost educational organisations and scientific academies issued the

Ubuntu Declaration. The Ubuntu Declaration demands for the integration of SD into the curriculum at all levels of education. It aims to create a global alliance to promote SD globally. The goals of Ubuntu Declaration are:

- *“Curriculum development;*
- *North-South networking;*
- *Strategic educational planning and policy-making; and*
- *Capacity building in scientific research and learning.”* (UNU, 2002)

The Ubuntu Declaration explicitly indicates the co-operation between the North and the South, a focus that the other declarations only point out implicitly.

### **The Declaration of Barcelona**

The Declaration of Barcelona was signed in October 2004. It calls for multi-disciplinary, systems oriented, critical thinking, and participative and holistic education of engineers. To achieve this, the following need to be reviewed simultaneously: The links between all different levels of the educational system; the content of courses; teaching strategies; teaching and learning techniques; research methods; training of trainers; evaluation and assessment techniques; the participation of external bodies in developing and evaluating the curriculum; and quality control systems (EESD, 2004).

### **United Nations Decade of Education for Sustainable Development (DESD)**

As a follow-up to the meetings in Johannesburg during the 57<sup>th</sup> Session of the United Nations General Assembly, in 11 December 2002, the Decade of Education for Sustainable Development (DESD) for the period 2005 – 2014 was proclaimed.

The DESD is a complex and far-reaching undertaking. Its overall goal is to integrate the principles, values, and practices of sustainable development into all aspects of education and learning. Its sub-goals at the national level are to: Provide an opportunity for refining and promoting the vision of and transition to SD; and give an enhanced profile to the important role of education and learning in SD. (UNESCO, 2005)

Its objectives are to:

- Facilitate networking, linkages, exchange and interaction among stakeholders;
- Foster an increased quality of teaching and learning in education for SD;
- Help countries make progress towards and attain the millennium development goals through ESD efforts; and
- Provide countries with new opportunities to incorporate ESD into education reform efforts. (UNESCO, 2005)

The DESD specifies four thrusts of education for SD: Improving access to quality basic education; reorienting existing education programs; developing public awareness and understanding of sustainability; and providing training.

These four dimensions summarise with great precision the steps to follow so that the Earth and future generations are protected.

To achieve this, the DESD proposes seven institutional strategies:

- Vision-building and advocacy;
- Consultation and ownership;
- Partnership and networks;
- Capacity-building and training;
- Research and innovation;
- Use of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs); and
- Monitoring and evaluation. (UNESCO, 2005)

The DESD is an important, and necessary, step for changing behaviours and lifestyles towards more sustainable societies. It can serve as a leading agent of change and challenge to the different governments and educational institutional to educate the future generations (and hopefully some individuals of the current one) with the aspects of SD.

### **EFFORTS DISCUSSION**

The works of Calder & Clugston (2003), Lozano-Ros (2003), and Wright (2004) have brought to light the following themes of the declarations, charters and partnerships:

- Focus on environmental degradation, threats to society, and unsustainable consumption;
- Ethical or moral obligation of universities to work towards sustainable societies, including the inter-generational perspective;
- Inclusion of SD throughout the curricula in all disciplines;
- Encouragement of SD research;
- Move towards more sustainability orientated university operations;
- Collaboration<sup>1</sup> with other universities;
- Stakeholder, e.g. public, governments, non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and industries, collaboration, engagement and outreach;
- Trans-disciplinarity<sup>2</sup> across the previous points.

Wright (2004) offers a comprehensive analysis on the emerging themes in the declarations. However, her research was published before the Declaration of Barcelona and the Decade of Education for Sustainable Development (DESD). Two other efforts not considered in her analysis are the Earth Charter and the Ubuntu Declaration, mainly because their scope is the education sector and not just higher education. Additionally, she does not consider the following themes: (1) Assessment and reporting, where tools such as the Auditing Instrument for Sustainable Higher Education (AISHE) (Roorda, 2001), and the Graphical Assessment of Sustainability in Universities (GASU) tool (Lozano, 2006a) are available; (2) Institutional framework, where SD should be made the ‘Golden Thread’ integrating all of these (Lozano, 2006b; Lozano-Ros, 2003); (3) On-campus experiences, by incorporating SD into the day-to-day activities in the university life experience (Lourdel, Gondran, Laforest, & Brodhag, 2005; Lozano, 2006b; Lozano-Ros, 2003); and (4) Educate the educators (Huisinigh & Mebratu, 2000), by

<sup>1</sup> Some authors, (e.g. Calder & Clugston, 2003; Lozano-Ros, 2003; Wright, 2004) use the term co-operation; however collaboration is a better-suited term (see Lozano, 2007a, 2007b for more details).

<sup>2</sup> Wright (2004) uses the term inter-disciplinarity; however trans-disciplinarity is a broader encompassing concept, see (Lozano, 2007b; Lozano-Ros, 2003; Roorda, 2001) for further explanation.

multiplying effects and reducing the SD adoption time (Lozano, 2006b; Lozano-Ros, 2003).

Table 2 shows the comparison of the efforts' themes, based on Wright's (2004) work. It incorporates the aforementioned themes, with the exception of two themes that are overarching: (1) Sustainability issues, i.e. focus on environmental degradation, threats to society, and unsustainable consumption; and (2) the Ethical or moral obligation.

Table 2 shows that three themes are considered by almost all of the efforts: *Curricula, Research, and Collaboration and outreach*. Three themes are considered by almost half of the efforts: *Trans-disciplinarity, Educate the educators, Universities collaboration*. Finally four themes are considered by only a small number of the efforts: *Operations, On-campus experience, Assessment and reporting, and Institutional framework*. The institutional framework is only mentioned by the Declaration of Barcelona. Assessment and reporting is mentioned explicitly in GHESP, but in the Declaration of Barcelona and the DESD is mentioned only as assessment.

Table 2 Comparison of the efforts' themes

Effort	Curricula	Research	Operations	Collaboration and outreach	Universities collaboration	Assessment and Reporting	Trans-disciplinarity	Institutional framework	On-campus experience	Educate the educators
The Brundtland Report			x							
Talloires Declaration	x	x	x	x			x			x
Halifax Declaration	x			x						
Agenda 21, Chapter 36	x			x			x			x
Kyoto Declaration	x	x	x	x	x					
Swansea Declaration	x	x	x	x	x					
COPERNICUS Charter	x	x		x	x		x		x	1/2(x)
The Earth Charter	x									
Thessaloniki Declaration	x			x			x			x
GHESP	x	x	x	x	x	x	x		x	x
Lüneburg Declaration	x	x		x						x
Ubuntu Declaration	x	x		x	x					x
Declaration of Barcelona	x	x		x		1/2(x)				x
DESD	x	x		x		1/2(x)				x

Source: Adapted and incorporating new ideas to Wright (2004)

An additional analysis of the efforts can be made according to their complexity, number of bullet points<sup>3</sup>, and length, as shown in Table 3. This analysis provides a guide to the intelligibility of the efforts. For example, on one hand, the Talloires, Halifax, Kyoto and Swansea tend to be clear, with few bullet points, and short in length, thus making them easier to be understood. On the other hand, Chapter 36 of Agenda 21, and the DESD tend to be more complex, provide more narrative with few or no bullet points, and are considerably longer, thus making them more difficult to understand.

Table 3 Comparison of the complexity, length, and bullet points of the efforts

Effort	Wording	Bullet points	Length	Number of words (approx)	Notes
Brundtland Report	Clear	-	Long	400 pages	Not directly linked to HE
Talloires	Clear	10	Short	717	
Halifax	Clear	6	Short	652	

<sup>3</sup> The bullet points provide a structure where the key ideas can be shown.

Agenda 21, Chapter 36	Complex	-	Long	3,744	
Kyoto	Clear	8	Short	281	
Swansea	Clear	7	Short	740	
COPERNICUS	Clear	10	Medium	997	
Earth Charter	Clear	-	Long	4,934	Not directly linked to HE
Thessaloniki	Medium complex	29	Medium	1,213	
GHESP	Clear	28	Long	4,869	
Lüneburg	Medium complex	7 with 25 sublevels	Medium	955	
Ubuntu	Medium complex	-	Short	719	
Barcelona	Clear	27	Medium	911	
DESD	Complex	-	Long	2,627	Education as a whole

Considering both analyses it is possible to observe that from the 13 efforts the ones with the most themes coverage are GHESP, the Declaration of Barcelona, and the Talloires Declaration (9, 6.5, and 6 respectively). GHESP is considerably lengthier than the other two and has a considerable number of bullet points. The Declaration of Barcelona is slightly longer than The Talloires Declaration and has considerably more bullet points. Although, the Talloires has the advantage of being clear, with a relatively low number of bullet points and words, it does not cover all the themes.

Engaging in any of these three efforts could offer higher education institutions (HEIs) an almost complete coverage of the themes. However, for full coverage the following options could be taken: (1) engaging in GHESP and complementing it by incorporating SD as the 'Golden Thread' in the institutional framework, or (2) combining the Talloires and Barcelona declarations, and complementing them collaboration with other HEIs and a more comprehensive view of assessment and reporting.

## CONCLUSIONS

The different declarations, efforts, and initiatives that have appeared indicate that universities have an ethical or moral obligation to work towards sustainable societies, focusing on environmental degradation, threats to society, and sustainable consumption for this and future generations.

Analysing the key elements and principles of the efforts it can be observed that SD needs to be incorporated in a transdisciplinary manner throughout: (1) curricula; (2) research; (3) operations; (4) outreach and engagement with stakeholders (e.g. public, governments, non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and industries); (5) collaboration with other universities; (6) assessment and reporting; (7) institutional framework; (8) on-campus life experiences; and (9) educate the educators programmes.

A caveat is in order, although the efforts are intended to serve as supporting, guiding, and challenging documents throughout universities systems, they do not ensure that the signatory institutions apply SD within their systems. They might also be institutions that are not Signing a declaration or belonging to a

charter indicates a first step towards SD. It is then the obligation of the leaders of the institution to guarantee its incorporation as a 'Golden Thread' throughout the university system. Neither does it mean that non-signatory institutions are not involved with SD.

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