

ASEM LLL HUB PRESENTS ASEM DESKTOP STUDY ON SUSTAINABILITY AND LIFELONG LEARNING (PART 1)

A main result from the first part of ASEM Desktop Study on sustainability and lifelong learning shows many diverse and creative initiatives as well as considerable progress in education for sustainable development and in understanding the learning dimensions of sustainability. Looking across the results it goes from the need for approaches that move beyond rigid disciplinary boundaries, over the need for change processes leading to a holistic, institutionalized, value-based framework for sustainability, to the need of questioning previously held assumptions and concepts of sustainability. In 2017, a second part will perform a comparative analysis of how selected countries in Asia and Europe work to promote lifelong learning in relation to ESD.

ASEM LLL Hub has for some years been working on developing the so-called ASEM Reviews. The first part of these reviews is now born, but at the same time a name change takes place. ASEM Desktop Studies will now be the new title – a name change that is connected to a different search method that relates to the time and financial frame given.

The ASEM Desktop Study was commissioned by the ASEM Education and Research Hub for Lifelong Learning (ASEM LLL Hub) and was conducted by Danish Clearinghouse for Educational Research. The aim of this ASEM Desktop Study was to find relevant research literature about the role higher education plays in relation to lifelong learning and sustainable development in Asia. In a later report, the intention is to perform a comparative analysis of how selected countries in Asia and Europe work to promote lifelong learning in relation to ESD. This first report was guided by the following study question: *How does higher education in selected countries in Asia contribute to sustainable development by working with the continuous development of lifelong learning skills?*

Methods

The first phase in the ASEM Desktop Study was the formulation of the study question, including the formulation of criteria for the inclusion or exclusion of studies.

The second phase was the search process, which was carried out based on an explicit search strategy. This strategy took into consideration the time and resources available, placing an

upper limit on the number of studies that could be processed and included in the ASEM Desktop Study. The search resulted in 194 studies.

In the third phase, the screening phase, explicit criteria, based on the study question of the ASEM Desktop Study, were applied to each reference in order to determine if the study should be included or excluded from the ASEM Desktop Study. This process resulted in 23 included studies.

The final phase of the ASEM Desktop Study was the reporting phase. In this phase the results of the ASEM Desktop Study were reported and the studies were characterized. The data were then searched for patterns and themes among the included 23 studies, all of which in various ways examined the overall theme of the ASEM Desktop Study.

First, all studies were analysed in relation to higher education and lifelong learning; next, they were analysed in relation to higher education and sustainable development. The analysis in relation to higher education and lifelong learning revealed three main themes:

- Curriculum development; University networks; Community learning

The analysis in relation to higher education and sustainable development likewise resulted in two main themes:

- University teaching,
- Community learning

These two sets of themes was combined and resulted in the following three main themes regarding higher education, lifelong learning, and sustainable development:

- University teaching and curriculum development,
- University networks,
- Community learning

Main findings

The 23 studies showed the including of different projects with the aim of contributing to sustainable development by working with the continuous development of lifelong learning skills. Changing curricula to include sustainable development is the most common approach and has been done in a range of diverse disciplinary areas. The establishment of stand-alone courses in sustainable development is also used, in some cases as a temporary measure before integrating sustainable development in existing disciplinary curricula. Community learning is also an effective approach, using participatory communication and participatory action

learning to create self-reliance, enthusiasm, and a sense of ownership. University networks can strengthen capacity, but the studies show that policy development and the involvement of top-level university staff must be carefully aligned and coordinated with respect for local variations in resources, capabilities, culture, and traditions. Out of campus activities can give useful experiences and knowledge that can be disseminated. Last but not least, teacher attitudes are important and often need to be worked on to permeate ideas of academic freedom and independence.

Altogether, the 23 studies offered many diverse and creative initiatives and shows considerable progress in education for sustainable development and in understanding the learning dimensions of sustainability. Looking across the 23 studies, there are a series of common topics that are useful to know. They are:

- Interdisciplinarity/multidisciplinarity - the need for approaches that move beyond rigid disciplinary boundaries.
- Sustainability wholly integrated into all disciplines - the need for change processes leading to a holistic, institutionalized, value-based framework for sustainability, as well as establishing cultural norms/values for sustainability.
- Collaboration between multiple stakeholders - universities, industry, professional organizations, NGOs, government etc.
- The applied, local/contextual/situated nature of sustainability.
- Barriers to the integration of sustainability - lack of expertise, lack of resources, rigid disciplinary boundaries and divisions, traditions of disciplines resistant to change towards including sustainability, teachers' and students' attitudes.
- Importance of teaching reflectiveness and critical thinking - problem-based and active learning.
- The combination of both bottom-up and top-down approaches - the importance of both leadership and grass-roots levels.
- Sustainability as a controversial concept (value-based and political) - questioning previously held assumptions and concepts, forcing a critical reflection on unexamined/ taken-for-granted ideas.