

THE JENA DECLARATION

Humanities and Social Sciences for Sustainability.

Cultural and regional dimensions of global sustainability

SUMMARY

Humanity is very close to missing a last chance to reach the broadly agreed Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in time. This insight is shared by most experts. Top-down approaches often face significant obstacles to implementation. To increase the speed and depth of the needed societal transformations the key change agents must be reached. These are the everyday actors, ordinary citizens, with their routines and habits. In order to reach them, cultural and regional diversities must be respected. In this context, the design and implementation of culturally and regionally differentiated pathways towards global sustainability calls for a stronger engagement of the humanities, social sciences, and the arts.

We, the participants of the conference on “Humanities and Social Sciences for Sustainability“ (October 21–22, 2020), organized in partnership with the Canadian and German Commissions for UNESCO, the International Council for Philosophy and the Human Sciences, the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada, the World Academy of Art & Science, The Club of Rome, the Academia Europaea, and the International Geographical Union having considered that the world is very close to the last chance to attain the broadly agreed Sustainable Development Goals

Declare that:

1. Accelerating the progress towards achieving the Sustainable Development Goals and implementing the UN “Decade of Action” successfully, requires a move from talking about sustainability to living sustainably. Such a shift implies the need to focus especially on peoples’ everyday practices. This includes developing policies that enable, promote and support radical change in peoples’ everyday actions.
2. Many sustainability policies stem from a human-nature dichotomy, understanding nature as humanity’s surrounding environment. Yet with our body we are ourselves an integral part of nature, and we also incorporate it into our practices in specific ways, depending on what we are doing. This premise inverts the perspective on sustainability from a nature-society opposition to a society-nature interdependent relation.
3. Most of the present crises find their roots in unintended, often foreseeable, problematic consequences of human actions that are, ultimately, of global significance. This implies the need to frame the crisis as primarily a societal rather than purely an environmental issue, and to expand what is understood to be its knowledge base.
4. Establishing long-term sustainable ways of living requires recognizing everyday practices as key drivers of the transformation. This calls for respecting those practices’ cultural, social, and regional diversity, as well as past experiences of adaptation. In this context, the social sciences and the humanities must play a central role in shaping sustainability policies.
5. Transformations towards living sustainably will be broadly accepted if they are co-developed by everyday people, specific stakeholders, and policy-makers at all levels working together with academic experts and scientists. This implies a radical paradigm shift away from imposing “one size fits all” top-down strategies and towards specifically tailored approaches.
6. Cultural, social and natural dimensions of everyday practices are all inherently connected, locally embedded, and globally interrelated in specific ways. This insight requires scholarship that transcends disciplinary silos while benefiting from each discipline’s findings, and is supported by new forms of research organization.

7. Genuine transdisciplinary research should provide information and insights in an accessible form, and facilitate participatory knowledge production. This requires supporting bottom-up movements among relevant communities, allowing them to offer effective contributions and to take action.
8. A deep societal transformation across generations requires that young people are especially strongly involved in this shift from the start. This demands that they have access to robust information and education, civic involvement, as well as political participation.
9. To establish culturally and regionally diverse ways of living sustainably, creativity and a new aesthetic are necessary. How we do things depends very much on what they signify to us, how we see the world and our place in it. The arts in all their forms, together with the humanities and social sciences are crucial for expanding mindsets, providing new perspectives on ways of living. This shall allow humankind to move from the age of extraction towards cultures of regeneration, to reach the SDGs with increased speed and depth, and to ensure measurable success.
10. To that end, we call upon all relevant political and scientific institutions, including funding agencies, to use the UN “Decade of Action” as a time to ensure that the cultural dimension is at the core of sustainability programs. This includes the need to:
 - Reframe the basic perspective from an environmental issue to a societal challenge
 - Complement solution orientated top-down strategies with more inclusive, regionally differentiated problem-avoiding bottom-up approaches
 - Promote participation of younger generations in decision-making processes
 - Reform sustainability research, its funding and organization
 - Strengthen transdisciplinary cooperation in all domains of research
 - Revamp the curricula of all educational institutions, focusing on global social emergencies and their mastering
 - Establish universities, research and educational institutions as authentic examples for societal transformation
 - Integrate the arts, as well as findings from the humanities and social sciences into the co-design of future, culturally and regionally diverse “ways of living sustainably”.

Jena, March 18, 2021

The signing participants of the Conference are

- Carlos Alvarez-Pereira**, *Executive Committee member of The Club of Rome*
- Howard Blumenthal**, *Founder of Kids on Earth and Producer of Reinventing School, The University of Pennsylvania*
- Dr John Crowley**, *Chief of Section for Research, Policy and Foresight in the UNESCO Sector for Social and Human Sciences*
- Dr Mathieu Denis**, *Science Director of the International Science Council (ISC)*
- Prof Tiago de Oliveira Pinto**, *UNESCO Chair on Transcultural Music Studies, University of Music FRANZ LISZT Weimar, Member of the Academia Europaea*
- Prof Fadwa El Guindi**, *Trustee of the World Academy of Art & Science, University of California, Los Angeles (Retired)*
- Garry Jacobs**, *President and CEO, the World Academy of Art & Science*
- Dr Joanne Kauffman**, *Independent Expert, Sustainability Science, Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) (Retired)*
- Prof Melissa Leach**, *Director Institute of Development Studies (IDS), University of Sussex, Member of the Academia Europaea*
- Prof Martin Leiner**, *Co-Founder & Director of the International Association for Reconciliation Studies, Friedrich Schiller University Jena*
- Dr Lutz Möller**, *Deputy Secretary-General, German Commission for UNESCO*
- Prof Luiz Oosterbeek**, *President of the International Council for Philosophy and the Human Sciences (CIPSH), UNESCO Chair on Humanities and Cultural Landscape Management, Instituto Politécnico de Tomar*
- Dr Mamphela Ramphele**, *Co-President of The Club of Rome & Co-Founder of ReimagineSA*
- Prof Thomas Reuter**, *Executive Member & Trustee of the World Academy of Art & Science, Member of the Academia Europaea, Professional Fellow, University of Melbourne*
- Prof Hartmut Rosa**, *Director Max Weber Center for Advanced Cultural and Social Studies, University of Erfurt, Professor the Friedrich Schiller University Jena, Member of the Academia Europaea*
- Prof Paul Shrivastava**, *Director of the Sustainability Institute and Chief Sustainability Officer, Pennsylvania State University, Member of The Club of Rome*
- Branko Šmon**, *Conceptual Artist*
- Dr Anne Snick**, *Transdisciplinary Education in STEAM, KU University Leuven, The Club of Rome-EU, Fellow of the World Academy of Art & Science*
- Dr Lucilla Spini**, *Independent expert for sustainable development*
- Prof Sander van der Leuw**, *Director of the ASU-SFI Center for Biosocial Complex Systems, Arizona State University*
- Prof Liette Vasseur**, *President of the Canadian Commission for UNESCO & UNESCO Chair on Community Sustainability: from Local to Global, Brock University, St. Catharines, Ontario*
- Prof Benno Werlen**, *UNESCO Chair on Global Understanding for Sustainability, Friedrich Schiller University Jena, Fellow of the World Academy of Art & Science, Member of the Academia Europaea*
- Prof Tilo Wesche**, *Carl von Ossietzky University, Oldenburg*