

Charting New Horizons for Education for Sustainable Development

International conference of VolkswagenStiftung, German Commission for UNESCO and German Rectors' Conference, Hanover, 19.–21.11.2025

Call for papers

Education for sustainable development (ESD) is the key enabler of a global sustainability transformation. ESD goes beyond addressing the climate crisis; it tackles the complex and intertwined challenges of the global polycrisis humanity is facing. ESD covers all dimensions of sustainability; it creates the cultural and educational foundations for peace, diversity, democracy, global justice, and inclusion.

Higher Education plays a pivotal role in shaping sustainable futures. As institutions of knowledge creation and dissemination, Higher Education Institutions are key actors in transforming learning, research, and societal engagement for sustainability.

This conference will bring together researchers, educators, administrators, policymakers, and practitioners to discuss innovative and interdisciplinary approaches to ESD. A key part of the sustainability transformation involves looking to the past as we envision the future. Heritage – both cultural and natural – provides the stories, wisdom, and values that can guide us toward a more equitable and sustainable world. It tells us who we were, and more importantly, it shapes who we wish to become.

Join us in reimagining Higher Education for Sustainable Development!

We invite contributions that critically engage with the role of education in shaping sustainable futures, exploring how ESD can draw on heritage to inspire change and foster agency, in various ways, including storytelling, democracy, and institutional transformation.

The conference aims to explore ESD in four streams:

1) ESD, storytelling, and arts-based methods

Incorporating storytelling, arts, and creative methodologies into Higher Education fosters deeper engagement with sustainability. This stream explores:

- narrative and arts-based pedagogies for transformative learning
- the role of creative methodologies in fostering key sustainability competencies
- indigenous knowledge, decolonial approaches, and multimodal learning in Higher Education
- case studies of interdisciplinary, Culture and Arts Education for Sustainability

2) **ESD and heritage(s) for the future**

Higher Education Institutions are uniquely positioned to link cultural and natural heritage to sustainability education. This stream explores:

- the role of Higher Education Institutions in leveraging UNESCO World Heritage, UNESCO Biosphere Reserves and UNESCO Geoparks sites for sustainability education
- place-based and experiential learning in heritage and sustainability education
- the role of cultural and natural heritage in guiding us towards sustainable futures
- critical perspectives on heritage, environmental justice, and decolonization in higher education

3) **ESD, democracy, and peace**

Higher Education Institutions are democratic spaces for fostering critical thinking, civic engagement, and peacebuilding. This stream explores:

- ESD's role in fostering democratic citizenship and participatory governance in Higher Education Institutions
- peace education, conflict resolution, and social justice in Higher Education curricula
- the ethics and politics of sustainability in university governance and pedagogy
- case studies of universities as catalysts for democratic, peaceful societies and social cohesion

4) **ESD and Whole-Institution Approach**

A Whole-Institution Approach (WIA) integrates sustainability into teaching, research, operations, and community engagement. This stream explores:

- institutional strategies for embedding sustainability in Higher Education
- curriculum transformation for ESD in Higher Education Institutions
- sustainability leadership, governance, and policy frameworks in universities
- challenges and best practices in implementing whole-campus sustainability

Please submit an abstract (max. 800 words) of your proposed 20-minute presentation or 60-minute workshop outlining the title, objectives, methodology, key findings and significance of your research. Indicate, to which stream you see your abstract best placed. In addition, please submit a short academic CV until **30 June 2025**: empower@hrk.de. Notification of acceptance will be given latest by 15 July 2025. For speakers, funds for partial reimbursement of travelling costs and accommodation are available.

Venue: Xplanatorium, Schloss Herrenhausen, Herrenhäuser Straße 5, 30419 Hannover (in person only).

Organization: Jacobus Bracker & Maike Land, German Rectors' Conference Berlin // Bianca Bilgram, German Commission for UNESCO.