

Press release 03

Launch of the DECODE Council for Sustainable Development

- **The DECODE project launched the European Deans Council for Sustainable Development on Nov. 3rd, 2021, in an event hosted online.**
- **The event was attended by 40 founding members of the DECODE Council.**

11th November 2021

Last November 3rd, the DECODE Sustainability project celebrated its first webinar with the aim of officially launching and presenting the **European Deans Council for Sustainable Development**.

The webinar was hosted by the Global University Network for Innovation (GUNi) and counted on the participation of all project members, **Prof Charles Hopkins, UNESCO Chair in Reorienting Education towards Sustainability at York University**, as guest speaker, and around 40 founding members of the Deans Council.

Victoria Gómez, project officer at GUNi, gave a warm welcome to participants and conducted the overall event. She first gave the floor to Josep M. Vilalta, director of GUNi, who introduced the event by stating the key role that Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) have in fostering sustainable development and by summarising the programme for the webinar. He thanked all team members and participants and gave the word to Mariarosalba Angrisani, research consultant at Federico II University of Naples. Mariarosalba gave a very clear overview of the DECODE project, which **aims at fostering Sustainable Development in university faculties, departments and schools to spearhead their contributions to sustainability**, considered key for addressing challenges in European societies, industries and economies.

The partners of the project are Federico II University of Naples, the Accreditation Council for Entrepreneurial and Engaged Universities (ACEEU), the Association of Catalan Public Universities and the Global University Network for Innovation (ACUP-GUNi), the Center for Higher Education Policy Studies (CHEPS) at the University of Twente and Riga Technical University. Together, partners are planning to work on **5 main project outcomes: The**

Sustainability Analysis and Literature Review, the Deans Council and Platform, a Toolkit, Impact Pathways and Impact Roadmaps and an Empowerment Program for deans and other heads of academic units.

After Mariarosalba Angrisani's overview of the project, Prof Charles Hopkins, UNESCO Chair in Reorienting Education towards Sustainability at York University, gave a presentation on the crucial role of HEIs in fostering sustainable development, and gave an overall framework on the opportunity that the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the 2030 Agenda pose in this quest. He welcomed the DECODE Deans Council for Sustainable Development initiative for its purpose, as a group coming together to work on shared values and interests, and for its focus on management and change management as the missing piece, because we all know the changes we want, but how do we make them real? Prof Hopkins also discussed the importance of including a transdisciplinary approach in education and the importance of localizing the SDGs. He discussed also the need for respectful listening, the need to look for strengths, the need for universities to reward deans and other heads of academic units who are fostering change and to seek the engagement of students, to listen to their voices, as they are a central and key part of the university and might help think "outside of the box".

Next, Thorsten Kliewe, chair of the Accreditation Council for Entrepreneurial and Engaged Universities, presented the Council itself, its huge potential, goals, main characteristics, preliminary structure and governance, and he also included a sneak peek at the **Council Platform**, that will be launched very soon. He highlighted the uniqueness of the project: the philosophy "**from deans to deans**" and shared values as the main driver as well as the importance of building a community on shared commonalities, because people are at the center of DECODE's work. He commented on the next steps that will follow the launch event, and informed participants that they will receive an invite to join the DECODE Connect web platform to start working together and collaborate very soon. He also advanced that a call for nominations to become part of the Council's governance structure will follow in the coming weeks. One of the participants asked if the main outcomes, information, and good practices worked at the heart of the Council would be available for the wider public. Thorsten explained that more than 1 dean/head of the academic unit from the same institution can join, but only 1 voting right is given per institution. In any case, the results will be mainstreamed and open to the public as open access is one of the key elements of the project.

Then, Anete Veidemane and Ben Jongbloed from the Center for Higher Education Policy Studies (CHEPS) at the University of Twente presented some of the results of the first work package of the project: the literature review and the analysis of the results on the surveys and interviews conducted to more than 600 hundred people around Europe in relation to the main barriers and opportunities in embedding sustainable development at faculties, departments and other academic units. The work done constitutes a solid foundation for the Deans Council and an in-depth presentation of the results will be held on the 13th of

Other questions included “On what topics would you like to collaborate with your fellow members? Which gathered answers such as transdisciplinary collaboration, strategy development, involvement of students and staff, etc. In addition, some questions delved around the Council’s platform features and participants highlighted the need to have agile and attractive communication channels. The interactive activity ended up with an engaging game-like 3 question quiz to check participants’ understanding of the philosophy of the project and key data discussed during the presentations.

The webinar was concluded by Marina Albanese, from Federico II University of Naples. She highlighted the main take-aways from the webinar, as well as explained the next steps for the project and dean’s council. Among these, the **next webinar of the project** that will be held on January 13th 2022 at 3pm and that will focus on the results of the first work package of the project: barriers and opportunities to embed sustainable development at academic units, with **Daniella Tilbury** as guest speaker. The webinar will be open to the general public and more information will follow in the coming weeks.

Get to know more about the DECODE project: www.decode-council.org

Project Partners



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Co-funded by the
Erasmus+ Programme
of the European Union

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Project Number: 2020-1-IT02-KA203-079952

The European Commission support for the production of this publication does not constitute an endorsement of the contents which reflect the views only of the authors, and the Commission cannot be held responsible for any use which may be made of the information contained therein.