

DECODE Empowerment Program

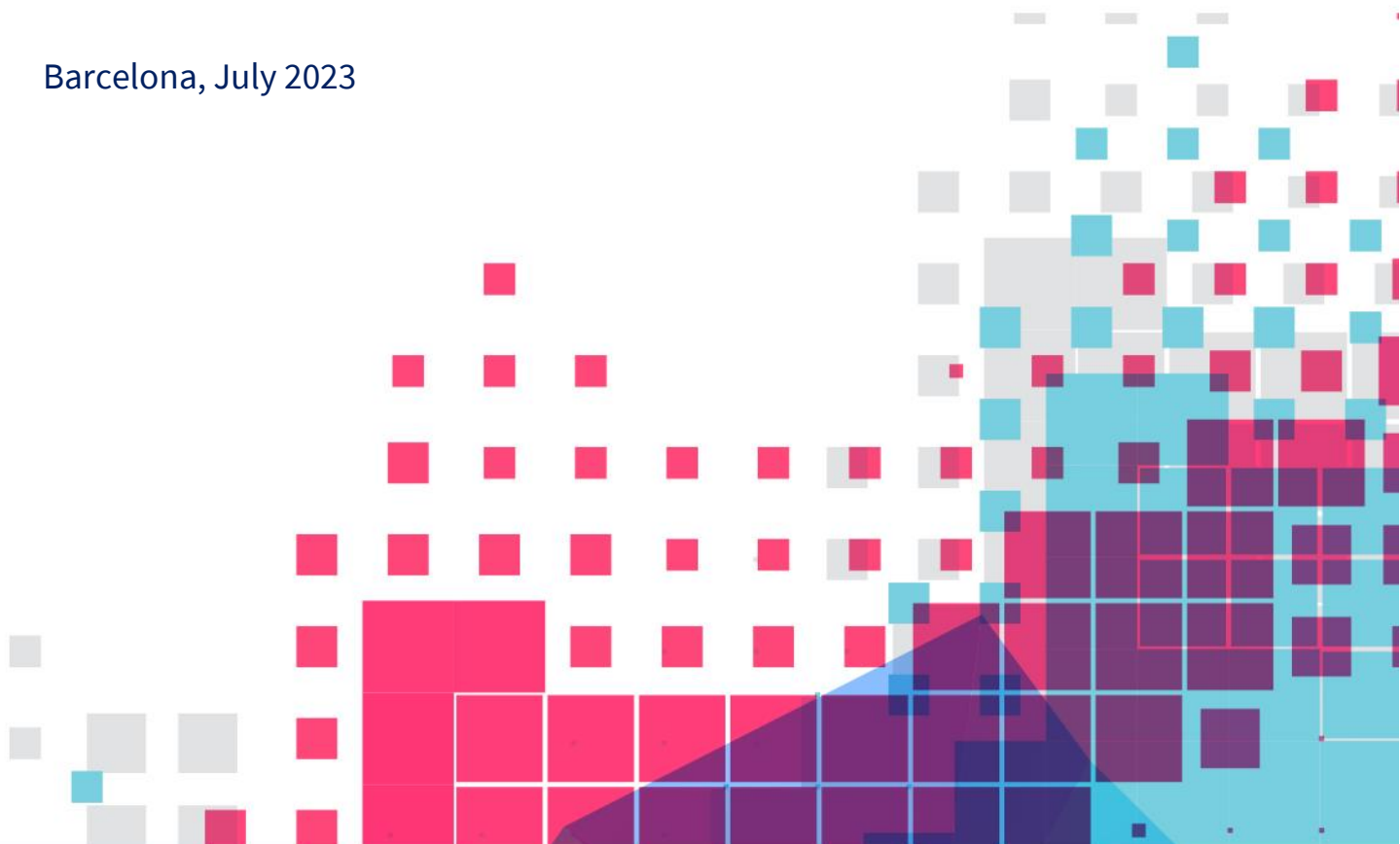
Reflection Report

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Introduction

From the 22nd until the 24th of March 2023, the DECODE Sustainability team organised in Barcelona a pilot of the Empowerment Program through a Learning Teaching Training Activity (LTTA) which served as a validation stage of the stand-alone online program.

The Empowerment Program, aimed to equip deans with the right knowledge, skills, and tools to embed sustainability in their academic units by designing a department-specific Impact Roadmap, was complemented with the digital provision of pre-program and post-program content on DECODE Connect Platform. Each day of the program had a different focus: 1st day: Understanding challenges (status quo and needs of universities), 2nd day: Exploring DECODE concepts and tools (Impact tree and Pathways), and 3rd day: Applying the DECODE tools (Connect Platform, Self-evaluation survey, and Impact Roadmap).

Based on the valuable insights and contributions of the 25 participants coming from 12 different countries who attended this face-to-face activity, the modules of the Empowerment Program, the DECODE Toolkit, and the Impact Pathways and Roadmap frameworks were revised and further developed in view of making them available to a broader community of deans from Europe and beyond.

This present report includes a summary of the feedback of the participants in the Empowerment Program and of the consortium of partners (collected through personal interviews and through an online satisfaction survey) and the reflections of the Catalan Association of Public Universities as LTTA host (collected through an internal evaluation form), together with a description of the experience, lessons learned and challenges.

Summary of the personal interviews with some participants and partners

Participant	Objectives	Evaluation of the training	Takeaways	Next steps	Wish
Ariadna Moreno, Project Manager, Center for Studies on Planetary Wellbeing, Pompeu Fabra University.	Learn about new methodologies on how to integrate and embed sustainability in higher education and, in particular, in the own institution.	Great experience allowing to meet other people interested in working on the same topic and providing them with the necessary tools to embed	Shared knowledge and experiences with colleagues. Provided methodology helping to systematically address	Define well the strategy and awareness (1 st building block of the impact roadmap).	Have a meeting with university managers .

		sustainability as part of the daily activities of academic units and institutions.	institutional challenges.		
Modris Ozolins, Department Director, International MBA Program on Innovation & Entrepreneurship, Riga Technical University	Follow-up on the participation in a previous stage of the project (interviews to deans of different institutions and countries).	Discover new things, acquire interesting knowledge and ideas.	Utility of the tool to be further promoted among colleagues in future events.	Getting together, discuss, bring input from the faculty side in the framework of the strategy put in place by the new management team of the university. At the faculty level, figure out weakness and use the tools and practices provided by the decode platform to improve and develop the strategy.	Attract some young personnel with a mind-set more oriented towards sustainability.
Vittorio Mato, Director of the Department of Political Sciences, University	Embed sustainable development in the practices of their own department.	A lot of ideas to implement in the daily life of the department.	The process of decision: The use of some tools, which help to understand what to do in the	To make the central government of the university aware of the necessity to implement sustainable	Save energy.

of Naples Federico II			matter of sustainability.	development policies by listening to the ideas of the different departments (bottom-up approach).	
Alex Baker – Friesen, Strategic Sustainability Coordinator and Greenup Coordinator, University of Twente	<p>The systematic approach in different dimensions of the project and its holistic nature tackling the areas of education, research, engagement, operations and governance.</p> <p>The potential to hit the middle management part of the university (deans) in view of the organisation transformation.</p> <p>Interact with deans and heads of department and learn</p>	<p>Learn a lot of things. Examples and interactions that helped to overcome an unclear start.</p> <p>A lot of personal and professional experiences in between the training sessions that helped to connect with other participants and exchange some good knowledge.</p>	<p>The pathway and roadmap approach (general framework vs. specific application).</p> <p>Session on challenges, tools and best practices according to the matrix.</p>	<p>Look at an education pathway which present weaknesses.</p> <p>Foster training and capacity building among deans on sustainability using the Empowerment programme.</p>	<p>More staff, a bigger coordinating team spread across the university (including academic, administrative staff and paid students or interns).</p>

	which tools work for them.				
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Partner	Favourite element	Learning	Next steps
Marina Albanese, Professor, UNINA (Italy)	Opportunity to deepen into the topic of sustainable development from the university's perspective.	Becoming conscious of the fact that there are many things to do which require the instruments / tools that we are developing all together.	Share the results and create a very strong and engaged community on Sustainable Development Goals.
Carina Garcia Mesegué, Communication Officer, ACUP/GUNi (Spain)	Working with the consortium members who come from different institutions and countries.	Seeing deans placed in the position of the students, learning, sharing and interacting with the others.	Wrap up everything that we have been working on and putting it together in a way that it can be taken into other contexts thus, benefiting more people and universities.
Emmanuel Ohene, project manager, ACEEU (Germany)	The aim of the project (looking at sustainability in terms of Higher Education Institutions) and the quality of the pathways and tools that was developed in its framework.	There are a lot of tools and pathways that could be adopted to implement sustainability not just on the central level but also in different levels in Higher Education Institutions.	Fine-tune the toolkit and the pathways by enriching them with all the knowledge generated and the contributions received.
Ben, professor, CHEPS (The Netherlands)	Focusing on Deans, who from their middle	The difficult task with which deans have to face when	Continue helping the community of deans of Europe by

	management positions, usually struggle when they have to embed sustainable development in their university.	implementing sustainable development in higher education and research portfolios. We can help them in this process by cutting it up into manageable pieces and building and individual roadmap for their department.	suggesting tools and inspirational cases of other institutions dealing with the same task.
Thorsten, professor, ACEEU (Germany)	The combination of research and practice through the analysis of the needs and challenges of the deans and the building of the tools accordingly. The offer of these tools in a digital format so that the deans can continue the transformation towards a more sustainable academic unit.	There is an urgent need for these practical tools, instruments, and approaches to help deans when embedding sustainable development in academic units.	Integrate the feedback received from the training to advance the tools and make them available to a broader community.

Results of the online satisfaction survey replied by the participants

Participants were broadly satisfied with the time allocated to each session as well as to the group exercises. Likewise, they were very pleased with the employed training and learning materials in relation to the achievement of the goals of the program and to the acquisition of knowledge and competence in building impact roadmaps for their academic units. Concerning the understanding of this latest element, attendees vastly confirmed their contentment.

In sum, the general impression of the Empowerment Program was overwhelmingly positive for the participants who highlighted its extreme utility, good organisation, and nice atmosphere. The opportunity to meet great people and share interesting ideas and case studies given by the program was also an aspect pointed out by the attendees. Finally, yet importantly, participants made some suggestions to improve the program:

- 1) Allocating more time to social interactions.
- 2) Dealing with more technical aspects of sustainability.
- 3) Sending homework to participants on the approach of their institutions in addressing sustainability prior to the programme.
- 4) Including sessions where participants could share among themselves what their academic units are doing in terms of sustainability.

Findings of the internal evaluation by the host

The Catalan Association of Public Universities (ACUP), host of the LTTA, assessed that, overall, the training achieved its objectives. It provided the participants with appropriate training materials as well as opportunity to share and exchange with other deans and their representatives' ideas regarding sustainability in the framework of a dynamic environment for learning, co-creating, and fostering stakeholder interaction. Furthermore, it served the purposes of putting the DECODE outputs into practice, testing the methodology developed along the project, and connecting with a rather large group of deans who will be able to apply the tools in their academic units. Last but not least, ACUP stressed that the main challenge of making the knowledge and tools gathered throughout the project clear, comprehensible, and practical were successfully managed.

Description of the experience, lessons learned and challenges.

Overall, the participants were highly satisfied with the whole process of the preparation, invitation, and execution of the activities and workshops planned within the DECODE Empowerment Program, including the training materials which significantly increased their knowledge and skills on the topic of sustainability and how to embed that in their academic units.

It was considered a great feat the combination of research and practice entailed in the project and, particularly, materialized through the analysis of the deans' needs and the building of the tools responding to these necessities.

Lessons learned and related challenges in view of upcoming training programs are the following:

- Prior to the training program, promote the reflection of participants on embedding sustainability in higher education by asking them specific questions regarding the strategy implemented by their academic unit or institution.
- Organise peer-review sessions in which each participant could present what their academic unit is doing in terms of sustainability (inspirational cases) and receive recommendations from others.
- Allocating more time for participants to network and exchange.



Project Partners



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