

# EDITORIAL

## UNIVERSITY LIFELONG LEARNING AND THE QUEST FOR A GREENER FUTURE

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Europe is working to transform “into a fair and prosperous society, with a modern, resource-efficient and competitive economy where there are no net emissions of greenhouse gases in 2050 and where economic growth is decoupled from resource use” (European Commission, 2019b, p. 2). Sustainable development, green transition and green skills are terms that are often used when it comes to Europe’s future. However, it is questionable, whether all these promising terms and formulations, despite their persistent urgency, will remain high on the political agenda considering the current political storms, wars, resurgent nationalism and climate catastrophes faced by Europe and around the globe. As we examine climate data, the question of how we can live in a shared future on earth, how to regain our footing and how to reorient ourselves, is of utmost importance for our survival – at least on *this* earth (Latour, 2022; Latour and Schultz, 2023).

Within the international context, the United Nations has already worked for decades towards an understanding of sustainability, sustainable development and education for sustainable development that connects society, the economy and the environment (Combes, 2005). It is this engagement that led to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, operationalised through a framework of 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) (UNESCO, 2015) with a universal claim and a global social contract (Messner, 2018).

The European Green Deal (European Commission, 2019b), which brings together the different strands of the European engagement for green skills and a green transition, is part of the strategy of the European Commission to implement the United Nations’ 2030 agenda and the SDGs, and aims to address a just and inclusive transition, promising that “no one and no place is left behind”(European Commission, 2019a, p. 2). During this transition, there is a need for developing competencies to assist in navigating these complex, interconnected issues and to envision desirable futures and strive to make them a reality. In the European Competence Framework for Sustainability – GreenComp – four interrelated competence areas provide evidence for these needs: as *embodying* sustainability values, *embracing* complexity in sustainability, *envisioning* sustainable futures and *acting* for sustainability (Bianchi, Pisiotis and Cabrera, 2022). Green competencies are not useful if developed in isolation or separated from digital or innovation transitions; rather, they are understood by

the Commission as part of responsible and sustainable strategic behaviour of individuals and organisations (ibid.).

The 2024 eucen Autumn Seminar introduced the terminology, discussed sustainability values, complexity, sustainable futures and actions for sustainability by universities. This current volume of the European Journal of University Lifelong Learning presents a collection of articles that address different aspects of and connections between universities, university lifelong learning and our quest for a green(er) future.

The first article by Eva CENDON, framed as thematic paper, sets the scene. The paper provides an overview and a systematisation of the topic of this edition of the EJULL. After outlining key perspectives on education for sustainable development, the Green Deal and green skills, the article explores how university lifelong learning can contribute to developing the competencies and skills needed for strengthening sustainable development.

Katrin MÄNNIK and Kai PATA present and discuss a study on an innovative learning practice approach to enhancing a university's sustainability capacity by involving students from diverse disciplines in the co-design of a micro-credential course on circular bioeconomy roadmapping. The guiding research question was: How can an innovative capacity-building practice for sustainability development in course design support the development of students' sustainability competencies?

Sara BECKER-SCHRÖER, in her innovative practice article, highlights the innovative design and practice of the Interdisciplinary Distance Study Programme in Environmental Sciences (infernum), a University Continuing Education (UCE) programme offered by the FernUniversität in Hagen and Fraunhofer UMSICHT in Oberhausen, Germany. She explores how the infernum programme integrates interdisciplinarity – a core principle of education for sustainable development (ESD) – with flexibility and individualisation, which are fundamental to lifelong learning, to promote ESD for adult learners.

Seldom presented in a paper, but most relevant for ULLL/UCE, is the topic of its marketing and bringing ULLL/UCE to prospective participants. This perspective is addressed by Wieger BAKKER, Michelle JANSEN, Marianne FLORIJN and Magreet MOLENKAMP in their innovative practice article. Exemplified by theme pages that function as an online space where the relation between research, societal challenges and UCE is made visible at the website of Utrecht University, the authors sketch the background, aims and design of the theme pages, taking the theme page on sustainability as a starting point and as an example.

The three questions, this time posed by Katrin MÄNNIK, Visiting Research Fellow in Sustainable Education at the University of Tallinn, and answered by Simon ROY, leader of the Higher Education Policy Team in the OECD's Directorate for Education and Skills, take a more general view on the role of universities with regard to the green transition, emphasising the role of university lifelong learning for up- and reskilling.

And, last but not least: there is an invention and the beginning of a new tradition within our journal. We all know that traditions, practices and policies of University Lifelong Learning (ULLL) in a broad sense, and, in a narrower sense, UCE (Cendon, Bakker and Halttunen, 2021, p. 2) differ from country to country. However, as we are quite aware within eucen, knowledge of and insight into the similarities and differences of ULLL and UCE, from an international comparative perspective, can stimulate cooperation, learning and its further development. For this purpose, the EJULL aims to host and collect a series of comparable country reports on ULLL and UCE. In this edition of the journal, we start with a contribution from Canada. Christie SCHULTZ, Dean of the Centre for Continuing Education (CCE) at the University of Regina, Canada and former president of CAUCE, the Canadian Association of

University Continuing Education, first situates UCE's context before considering Canada's contemporary UCE landscape. After this overview, she goes on to present challenges and opportunities in UCE in Canada today and provides an assessment of what the future of UCE in Canada might look like.

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