SSOAR

Open Access Repository
www.ssoar.info

Sustainability and widening access to adult learners in higher education

Schreiber-Barsch, Silke

Veröffentlichungsversion / Published Version
Zeitschriftenartikel / journal article

Zur Verfügung gestellt in Kooperation mit / provided in cooperation with:
W. Bertelsmann Verlag

Empfohlene Zitierung / Suggested Citation:
Schreiber-Barsch, S. (2014). Sustainability and widening access to adult learners in higher education. *REPORT - Zeitschrift für Weiterbildungsforschung*, 4, 41-53. https://doi.org/10.3278/REP1404W041

Nutzungsbedingungen:
Dieser Text wird unter einer CC BY-SA Lizenz (Namensnennung-Weitergabe unter gleichen Bedingungen) zur Verfügung gestellt. Nähere Auskünfte zu den CC-Lizenzen finden Sie hier:
https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0/deed.de

Terms of use:
This document is made available under a CC BY-SA Licence (Attribution-ShareAlike). For more Information see:
https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0

gesis
Leibniz-Institut
für Sozialwissenschaften

Mitglied der
Leibniz-Gemeinschaft

Diese Version ist zitierbar unter / This version is citable under:
https://nbn-resolving.org/urn:nbn:de:0168-ssoar-64132-3

wbv Publikation

Sustainability and Widening Access to Adult Learners in Higher Education

von: Schreiber-Barsch, Silke

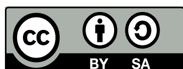
DOI: 10.3278/REP1404W041

Erscheinungsjahr: 2014
Seiten 41 - 53

Schlagworte: Erwachsenenbildungsforschung, Europa, Hochschule, Hochschulzugang, Weiterbildung

Das Verhältnis von Nachhaltigkeit und der Öffnung der Hochschulen ist nachvollziehbar und gleichzeitig ungenau zu fassen. Mit Segghezzo (2009) und Foster (2001) soll gezeigt werden, dass der Effekt, das Konzept der Nachhaltigkeit in diesem Kontext anzuwenden, nicht nur als operative Maßnahme oder als Lerngegenstand verstanden werden kann. Vielmehr wird aufgezeigt, dass das Verständnis von Nachhaltigkeit als Katalysator dienen kann, wenn es um die Möglichkeiten des Lebenslangen Lernens und um die Identifizierung von Gegenständen der Erwachsenenbildungsforschung geht. Mit Blick auf die an der Universität Hamburg gemachten Erfahrungen werden unterschiedliche Zugangswege zur Universität für Quereinsteiger sichtbar gemacht.

Diese Publikation ist unter folgender Creative-Commons-Lizenz veröffentlicht:



Creative Commons Namensnennung - Weitergabe unter gleichen Bedingungen 4.0 International Lizenz
https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0/deed.de

Zitiervorschlag
Schreiber-Barsch, S.: Sustainability and Widening Access to Adult Learners in Higher Education. In: REPORT Zeitschrift für Weiterbildungsforschung 04/2014. Opening Higher Education to Adult Learners - Concepts and Research Results, S. 41-53, Bielefeld 2014.

wbv
WIR MACHEN INHALTE SICHTBAR

Silke Schreiber-Barsch

Sustainability and Widening Access to Adult Learners in Higher Education

1. Introduction

Sustainability usually indicates that structural innovation, decision-making processes or also guiding principles are set in balance to the aims of longest possible (sustainable) preservation and proactive evolution of territorial, natural and societal resources. The relation between sustainability and widening access to adult learners in higher education is both well comprehensible and highly vague. Well comprehensible, because – as with similar buzzwords of academia and public discourse, for instance "lifelong learning" – ideas of sustainability are mostly positively perceived and thus present themselves as almost self-explanatory courses of action: "Education for sustainable development is immediately necessary for securing sustainable life chances, aspirations and futures for young people" – and adults (UNESCO 2009b). Highly vague, because, at the same time, the term sustainability serves a wide variety of masters and it may represent ambiguous objectives. Therefore, in order to understand what kind of sustainability is meant, its underlying normative concepts and leitmotifs need to be indicated in the respective context. Following the arguments of Seghezzo (2009) and Foster (2001) in demanding different visions of sustainability in the context of education, this article aims to complement the academic discourse on widening access to adult learners in higher education by showing the benefits of using the concept of sustainability not merely as an operational measurement index in higher education or as a specific content area in adult education. Rather, a different understanding of sustainability may serve as a catalyst to revisit the mandate of higher education institutions in providing lifelong learning opportunities to adult learners, and, furthermore, it poses questions for adult education research.

2. Framing the issue of widening access: the European lifelong learning agenda and its impact on the higher education systems

Against this backdrop, the paper firstly sets the framework for linking the issues of sustainability and widening access by identifying the relevant key drivers in European policy discourse for reorganizing entry routes to higher education. The drivers identified are the conceptual transformation towards a labor-market-oriented approach of lifelong learning and the interest in widening participation to higher education in

order to maximize the full potential of the working population, “no talent should be left behind” (European Commission/EACEA P9/Eurydice 2012, p. 83).

2.1 Transformations within the European lifelong learning agenda and its impact on the higher education systems

Since the mid-1990s, a consensus has formed in political agenda setting on European and nation state level on using a lifelong learning approach in policy objectives (Ioannidou 2010). Therewith, the (indeed even older) normative idea of lifelong learning with its origins in the early 1970s has undergone a transformation into a widely recognized “master concept for educational policies”, as the FAURE-Report already stated in the 1970s (Faure et al. 1972, p. 182; see also Schreiber-Barsch 2007). The current UNESCO (2009a) definition of lifelong learning still nurtures the holistic understanding of lifelong learning argued for by the FAURE-Report, ranging from aspects of active citizenship, personal fulfilment, and social inclusion to employment-oriented activities. A similar understanding is also found, for example, in the European Commission’s 2001 statement towards creating a European area of lifelong learning. It is clear, however, that since then the integral parts of the lifelong learning master concept have indeed changed within policy discourse in their prioritization amongst themselves.

Alongside this shift, there have also been fundamental changes in education systems, with the replacement of traditional input- and supply-dominated perspective, the providers, so to speak, by a learner-oriented one, by learning outcomes (Slowey/Schuetze 2012, p. 34; Cedefop 2009); the European Qualifications Framework (EQF) may serve as an example. These transformations are highly significant as they frame the development of one of the system’s subsectors: the European higher education systems.

Although the latter are deeply rooted in a somewhat European idea of the university with its Humboldtian legacies of ‘Freedom of teaching and learning’ (cf. Holford 2014), the processes of establishing a European Higher Education Area (EHEA) have had deregulation and harmonization as key drivers (Chisholm 2012, p. 337). Being part of the intergovernmental BOLOGNA process, which translates to the EHEA context the conceptual shift named above in terms of comparability, transparency and permeability of qualifications and standards, the European higher education systems have gradually transformed from BOLOGNA’s first declaration on in 1999 and have undergone crucial changes in the overall *modi operandi* of their higher education institutions (e.g. forms of provision, governance and funding mechanisms, harmonization of degrees).

That means that although a transnational consensus on using a lifelong learning approach in policy objectives can be identified as one of the core elements of the political agenda setting, the integral parts of its definition have come to be understood differently from the traditional holistic interpretation. The current reference points are to a much lesser extent the Humboldtian legacies, but the well-known objective of rendering the European Union “the most competitive and dynamic knowledge economy in the world” (European Commission 2001, p. 3) against the backdrop of

issues of ageing populations, needs for a highly qualified workforce and individual employability, growing unemployment, the pace of transformation in today's globalized world, etc.

This process of agenda setting whilst changing the prioritizations of its integral definition towards first and foremost labor-market-oriented elements can be observed in the growing link between the concept of lifelong learning and reforms in higher education in the respective communiqués of the BOLOGNA governmental meetings. Whereas the first communiqués put forward a social dimension of the BOLOGNA process linking lifelong learning to promoting social cohesion and overcoming social disparities in access to education (Holford 2014, p. 17), this lost its momentum in the face of growing demands of measuring learning outcomes and providing comparable data (ibid.). The Bucharest communiqué, the latest EHEA ministerial document, stresses the role of lifelong learning as being "one of the important factors in meeting the needs of a changing labour market"; within this, "higher education institutions play a central role in transferring knowledge and strengthening regional development" (EHEA Ministerial Conference 2012, p. 2).

2.2 "No talent should be left behind" – increasing and widening access to higher education

At the same time, it has been realized on the policy level and translated into European-wide benchmarks within the Europe 2020 strategy that, in order to reach the objectives set in the BOLOGNA agenda or in the Europe 2020 strategy related to participation (i.e. increasing the share of persons completed tertiary education from 37% in 2013 to at least 40% of the EU28 population in this age group by 2020; EUROSTAT 2014), it may not be sufficient to merely quantitatively *increase* participation of the traditional student body, but rather participation needs to be qualitatively *widened* beyond the established access routes to higher education (see e.g. Orr/Hovdhaugen 2014; Freitag 2010).

Following this thread, the Leuven communiqué (2009) argues that Europe can succeed only "if it maximises the talents and capacities of all its citizens and fully engages in lifelong learning as well as in widening participation in higher education" (EHEA Ministerial Conference 2009, p. 1). Three years later, in the updated Bologna Stocktaking Report (2012), a clear link is stated between the objective of widening access for non-traditional students and lifelong learning policies in higher education:

> The objective to increase the number and diversity of the student population goes hand in hand with the need to create an institutional environment that values the recruitment of non-traditional learners and pays particular attention to student retention in the higher education system. […] In the current policy context, promoting the idea that no talent should be left behind, the theme of non-traditional pathways into higher education gains particular attention. The

> objective is to extend admissions criteria so that all those who have a capacity to follow higher education studies would be provided with the opportunity to do so, regardless of their prior formal learning achievements (European Commission/EACEA P9/Eurydice 2012, p. 83).

Whereas the policy discourse seems to follow a relatively consistent programmatic strategy, the litmus test starts at the moment of adapting higher education systems to the objective of widening access routes to tertiary education.

3. Are formal rights enough? Alternative entry routes to higher education in Germany

For Orr and Hovdhaugen (2014), the question of access routes into higher education comes down to the criteria of "quality and quantity; a matter of *who* should get in and *how many* people should enter higher education" (ibid., p. 58; emphasis in original).

This question has been answered in various ways: Historically in Germany, the arguments for opening up alternative access routes to higher education have changed from the leitmotif of first and foremost 'individual talent' in achieving academic merit to policy measures in favor of a higher institutional permeability in the education system (Wolter 2012, pp. 95). Nevertheless, the idea of achieving academic aptitude through completing the traditional formal entry qualification (*Abitur*) has remained prominent and is highly interwoven with a substantial antagonism between the vocational education sector on the one hand and the general education sector on the other. This has, of course, significant consequences for the issue of acknowledging vocational experience to be equivalent to traditional formal entry qualifications. A milestone was the decision by the Standing Conference of Education and Culture Ministers (KMK 2009) to launch new regulations opening up access routes to higher education for vocationally experienced learners without the traditional formal entry qualifications. Today, second chance learners may apply for a (sometimes subject-bound) entry qualification or a general entrance admission and, in doing so, can enter higher education via the third educational route.

3.1 The third educational route in the German higher education system

The third educational route points to the significance of access to higher education for adults holding VET qualifications and awards. For Wolter (2012), the group of adult learners entering or seeking to enter university via this route represents the "core of non-traditional students in the German understanding" (ibid., pp. 91–92). What distinguishes this group in and amongst the diversity of second chance learners?

Although the question has to be raised as to whether such differentiation is still valid looking at the increasingly heterogeneous student body in European societies during the last decades, the distinction of so-called traditional students, of the one part, and non-traditional students, of the other part, remains constitutive in the academic

discourse. Non-traditional students are, according to Freitag (2010), basically defined by age (older than 24 years at the point of first higher education registration) and by social background (mostly from families with low-educational level) (p. 6) (see also Wolter 2012, pp. 89–90). This group of non-traditional students comprises *inter alia* "second chance learners" (Slowey/Schuetze 2012) who (a) are lacking the "traditional formal entry qualifications", (b) "who enter higher education via special entrance examination or assessment", and this (c) usually "later in life on a *second chance* basis" (p. 39). Wolter further specifies:

> Those without the *Abitur* who are admitted by one of the special admission procedures at university level are subsumed under the category 'third educational route' (*Dritter Bildungsweg*). They are also 'second chancers' but via an alternative non-school route. Different to the second educational route … that has been regulated by school laws, the third route is subject to higher education legislation (Wolter 2012, pp. 91–92).

Whereas this last point, being subject to the respective higher education legislation, points to a significant feature, the absolute figures provide a common framework: In Germany, of all students enrolling at universities in 2010, a total of 2 per cent gained access to higher education via the third educational route (Autorengruppe Bildungsberichterstattung 2012, p. 127; BMBF 2008, pp. 35–37). Accordingly, the Bologna Stocktaking Report (2012) groups Germany with those countries having adopted systematic policies and having a substantial share of non-traditional students via alternative access routes (meaning between 2% and 15% of all admissions; European Commission/EACEA P9/Eurydice 2012, p. 86). Nevertheless, as Orr and Hovdhaugen (2014) pointed out in their comparative analysis of second chance entry routes into higher education, Germany can be identified as a "late starter" (ibid., p. 58).

Zooming to the overall higher education system, the European comparative analysis EUROSTUDENT IV (2008–2011) clearly labels the German higher education sector as an "exclusive system" (Orr/Gwość/Netz 2011, p. 51), referring to the outcomes "low education group underrepresented" and "high education group with relatively high overrepresentation". Other figures support this, e.g. by relating social background and age bracket: Germany belongs to those countries that have – in European comparison – a below average quantity of older students (30 years and older) who have, at the same time, a below average social background; thus the older the students, the lower their social background.[1]

1 "High education/social background: Socio-economic background of a student due to his/her parents' social standing. The parents' social standing is approximated by their highest educational attainment according to the International Standard Classification of Education (ISCED 97). The highest educational attainment of either the father or the mother is taken into account. The ISCED levels 5 and 6 are considered as high social/education background. […] The ISCED levels 0, 1 and 2 are considered as low social/education background" (Orr/Gwość/Netz 2011, pp. 211–212).

Within this framework, the higher education institutions are bound by Basic Law, yet Germany's federal structure entitles the *Länder* to substantial power in the area of education and lifelong learning, which strongly influences public decision-making procedures and the respective implementation of lifelong learning infrastructures. Due to this, the concrete regulations of the entry routes to a higher education institution are not only subject to the national legal framework and the level of the *Länder*, but furthermore to regulations of the higher institutions themselves.

3.2 An exemplary insight: the case of the University of Hamburg

The highly scattered field of regulations, entrance criteria and study programs has an enormous impact on an adult lifelong learner taking a decision to enter higher education via the third educational route. A brief glance at an exemplary case, the University of Hamburg, illustrates this:

At the University of Hamburg, the opening of access to second chance adult learners without the traditional entrance qualification (*Abitur*) via their VET awards and qualifications – a possibility first introduced in 1992 – corresponds to the cited regulations made by the Standing Conference of Education and Culture Ministers (KMK 2009) and is defined in the Hamburg Higher Education Law (HmbHG 2014). This law specifies that, in contrast to other *Länder* regulations, the choice of a specific study program is not subject-bound to the former profession or VET award (Universität Hamburg 2014a).

Widening access to adult learners in this particular case breaks down into three different entry routes:

- According to § 38 HmbHG, adults are entitled to apply who have completed a professional apprenticeship or equivalent training, have been active professionally for at least three years and have succeeded in proving their ability to study by passing an entrance examination in their chosen study program (ibid.).
- A different route is laid down in § 37 HmbHG, whereby the completion of a professional apprenticeship or equivalent training and, furthermore, of a specific further training examination (e.g. *Meister/Meisterinnen*) entitles to apply without having to pass an entrance examination (Universität Hamburg 2014b).
- Unique to Hamburg is the study program 'social economy' that, grounded in the tradition of trade unions and cooperatives, has been open to adult learners without *Abitur* since 1948 (Sozialökonomie 2014). Since being merged with the University in 2003, the study program still offers 40 percent of its study places to adult learners via the third educational route, upon completion of an entrance examination.

Due to the overall low numbers of students embarking on university studies via the third educational route, the University has also introduced a quota: Since the winter term 2014/2015, between three and ten percent of the total study places per faculty has to be given to students applying according to the §§ 37 or 38.

Regarding these absolute figures, how many students are indeed benefitting from widening access to higher education via the third educational route at Hamburg University (table 1)?

entry route	number of students enrolled	thereof students in teacher study programs	thereof students of social economy
§37 HmbHG	61	35	2
§38 HmbHG	121	20	81
students enrolled in total	**182** (= 3% of all students enrolled)		

Table 1: Allocation of study places, Bachelor study program winter term 2013/2014 according to §§ 37 and 38 HmbHG and study program 'social economy' (Universität Hamburg 2014)

In some study programs (e.g. Chemistry or Biology), only one adult learner of this kind was enrolled (Universität Hamburg 2014d). These figures underline that only a small number of adult learners obtained a third educational route, and this even taking into account that the overall numbers are positively influenced by the particular case 'social economy' with its historically very welcoming tertiary institutional culture and its quota.

Such a welcome culture is indeed not the standard case in tertiary education institutions; the criterium 'ability to study' without having completed the *Abitur* remains contested terrain in academia (see e.g. Freitag 2010). Current research projects, e.g. at Hamburg University, draw attention to this topic and analyze the issue of entrance examinations (Brändle/Ordemann 2014). At this point it becomes clear that the granting of formal rights is indeed not enough to achieve a substantial share of widening access to adult learners via the third educational route. A closer look to the category 'entrance examination' (by means of the example of Hamburg University), valid for the cited group of the § 38 HmbHG entry route (Universität Hamburg 2014a), reveals its complexity and challenge to adult learners. The latter group has usually had little contact with formal learning settings in the years prior to applying to university and, furthermore, tends to have a lower educational background (see chapter 2.1). They are forced to achieve a precarious balance between being in work, yet planning to re-enter student life with fewer financial resources and less security (especially due to the fact that standard student loans are usually limited to applicants until the age of 30).

The entrance examination, offered once a year in spring time, comprises (besides the usual submission of certificates) a motivation letter; two written exams (one on the chosen subject of study, one on current issues); one oral exam (with representatives both of the University and of the vocational sector); proof of having taking part in a guidance and counselling meeting with an academic advisor of the chosen study

program; and the payment of 204 EUR fee (Universität Hamburg 2014a). Passing this examination is, however, no guarantee of a study place: the applicant is then merely eligible to join the pool of all university applicants. The new quota recently adopted at the University (see above) aims, at least, at improving this competitive situation in favor of second chance learners.

The granting of formal rights to widening access of adult learners to higher education remains in this sense "a half-open door", citing the results of an empirical study in the Australian higher education system concerning the same group of adult learners (Watson/Hagel/Chesters 2013). Besides the level of regulations, higher education systems should place priority on aspects of broad recognition procedures of prior learning of today's heterogeneous student body; on flexible and tailor-made study programs that suit individual obligations and allow a balance between family, private life, work and studies; on transparency of and access to relevant information and regulations; on providing target group-oriented educational guidance and counselling for (potential) students (as established in the Hamburg University context since 2012); as well as on a long-term approach to transforming the tertiary sector's culture itself (Hanft/Brinkmann 2012). The latter objective refers to a point made in the latest communiqué of the BOLOGNA governmental meetings held in Bucharest 2012: "We will support our institutions in the education of creative, innovative, critically thinking and responsible graduates needed for economic growth and the sustainable development of our democracies" (EHEA Ministerial Conference 2012, p. 1). What does this reference to the higher education institutions' mandate and sustainable development imply for the issue under debate?

4. Education *as* sustainability

As outlined introductorily, sustainability usually indicates that structural innovation, decision-making processes or also guiding principles are set in balance to the aims of longest possible (sustainable) preservation and proactive evolution of territorial, natural and societal resources. Transforming this idea of sustainability to an organizing principle, the concept of 'sustainable development' is usually put into place. The Brundtland-Report (WCED 1987) deserves the merit of having introduced this concept on the global agenda, referring to development as being "sustainable" if it "meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs" (ibid., p. 8).

In the decades since, sustainable development has most commonly been categorized by means of the three pillars economy, society and environment. This triangle has been widely used as common ground in approaches to measure the performance of sustainability and introducing standards and certification systems, also in the (higher) education sector. The Global Reporting Initiative (GRI G4 2013) uses, for example, the triangle for its guidelines to prepare sustainability reports of educational institutions

or organizations (e.g. in the sustainability report of the University of Hamburg, oikos Hamburg 2012). However, critical voices in the academic discourse call into question these widely-used conceptual approaches to sustainability and offer, as the paper argues, a different vision of the relation between sustainability and (adult) education which may serve as catalyst to revisit the mandate of higher education institutions and which raises questions for adult education research.

Alternatives to conceptual dichotomy and instrumentalization

In criticizing the traditional three pillar model of sustainability and its conceptual framework in the Brundtland-Report (WCED 1987), Seghezzo (2009) proposes an alternative sustainability triangle that is formed by place, permanence and persons. The category of ‘place’ comprises the three dimensions of space and underlines the understanding of space as being a physical, geographical and culturally constructed dimension; ‘permanence’ represents the fourth, temporally defined dimension which is highly relevant in a concept that knows the interrelatedness of past, present and future and a long-term perspective in its cause and effect agenda as baseline; finally, Seghezzo identifies ‘persons’ as the fifth dimension and, in doing so, puts priority on the individual as an individual and not merely as one of many members of society (ibid., p. 540).

With these five dimensions of sustainability, Seghezzo not only puts emphasis content-wise on highly relevant topics of the sustainability issue, but also argues for unhinging its binary logic of dichotomies, according to which economy, society and environment appear to be isolated pillars that, furthermore, represent potentially conflicting parts (ecological reasoning versus economical profit-maximizing and so on).

The risk of isolating categories rather than linking their causes and effects is reinforced by approaches to measure the performance of sustainability through standards and certification systems, like the cited Global Reporting Initiative (GRI G4 2013) and its guidelines to prepare sustainability reports of educational institutions or organizations. These guidelines are adopted e.g. in the sustainability report of the University of Hamburg (oikos Hamburg 2012). In trying to follow the threads between the GRIG4 guidelines and the Hamburg University sustainability report with regard to the topic of widening access of adult learners to higher education, the subcategory “Diversity and Equal Opportunity”, as part of the ‘social’ dimension, appears relevant (GRIG4 2013, p. 9). In the sustainability report, however, this subcategory is focused on short reports on gender equality and equal opportunities – there is no trace of widening access to second chance learners (oikos Hamburg 2012, pp. 97–102). One could argue that the issue is just one among many; yet its omission nevertheless raises the question of what the category of sustainability in the higher education context is operationalized for.

Concerning this crucial point, the Foster’s (2001) arguments seem rewarding. Central to his line of thought is the differentiation between ‘education *for* sustainability’

and ‘education *as* sustainability’. The former, he argues, is not to be linked with higher education, because “education at university level, cannot be *for* sustainability in this way at all … in neither case can sustainability be seen as an aspiration which higher education *subserves*, a goal towards which it can be purposefully directed” (Foster 2001, p. 156; emphasis in original):

> What we are constantly liable to forget in the press of our techno-managerial preoccupations is that indicators do not read themselves – or do they simply *register* whether particular forms of development are ‘sustainable’ or not. The parameters which we aspire to measure do not get identified and created *as* indicators in a cultural void – they are not simply offered us on the face of nature or human activity. The processes of constructing and interpreting them rely on collaborative judgment … Education cannot be instrumental to operational sustainability, cannot be *for* sustainability in that sense, because it is among the essential preconditions of our ability to determine in any collectively intelligent way what is to *count* as such sustainability (ibid., pp. 157–159; emphasis in original).

In this process of determining “what is to *count* as such sustainability” (ibid., p. 159; emphasis in original), Foster strengthens the mandate of higher education institutions due to the “university’s proper intensity of dialogic interdisciplinary concentration” and to being a highly reflexive discourse arena (ibid., p. 158). In this way, they support the logic of education *as* sustainability, representing an important lifelong learning stakeholder in society and for society’s well-being – a line of thought also present in the cited Bucharest communiqué, aiming at the “education of creative, innovative, critically thinking and responsible graduates needed for economic growth and the sustainable development of our democracies” (EHEA Ministerial Conference 2012, p. 1).

5. Conclusions

The purpose of setting the issues of sustainability and widening access to adult learners in higher education in relation was to revisit the mandate of higher education institutions in providing lifelong learning opportunities to adult learners, and to open up further questions for adult education research. Following Seghezzo (2009) and Foster (2001), the concept of sustainability within the higher education context is compatible and useful in a variety of tasks and its different visions may coexist in a complementary picture; yet this strongly reinforces the need to continuously reflect upon its respective underlying normative concepts and ideas as a collaborative endeavor.

Academia, and with this also the adult education discipline and its research, is called upon to re-evaluate its role in the different arenas between sustainability and higher education (see e.g. Adomssent et al. 2006; Sterling/Maxey/Luna 2013; Stoltenberg/Holz 2012). It should reveal the system’s own potential as a resource (see e.g. Schüßler

2012, pp. 18–20) in providing "the values, knowledge, skills and competencies for sustainable living and participation in society and decent work" (UNESCO 2009b). This follows a logic of education *as* sustainability (Foster 2001). At the same time, and Seghezzo (2009) underlines this with his fifth dimension of sustainability, 'persons', the reference point is not exclusively the student body as a collective, but the individual lifelong learner and his or her highly various entry routes, needs and requirements within higher education – exemplified in this paper by means of adult learners entering higher education via the third educational route.

At this point, the gaps in (adult) education research are obvious: Whereas the quantitative empirical data available on the issues of access to higher education has been constantly growing (see e.g. Orr/Gwosć/Netz 2011; Nickel/Duong 2012; Orr/Riechers 2010; Orr/Hovdhaugen 2014), what is still missing to a large extent are surveys following a qualitative approach, conducting research on e.g. the individual motives of students who enter the higher education system via the third educational route, their mastering of the ambitious transition phase of going back to university after years in the world of work and/or without traditional formal entry qualifications to higher education, and, not least, the understanding of (higher) education not solely *for* sustainability, but also *as* sustainability.

References

Adomssent, M./Godemann, J./Leicht, A./Busch, A. (2006) (eds.): Higher Education for Sustainability. New Challenges from a Global Perspective. Frankfurt a.M.

Autorengruppe Bildungsberichterstattung (eds.) (2012): Bildung in Deutschland 2012. Ein indikatorengestützter Bericht mit einer Analyse zur kulturellen Bildung im Lebenslauf. Bielefeld

BMBF – Bundesministerium für Bildung und Forschung (2008): Stand der Anerkennung non-formalen und informellen Lernens in Deutschland im Rahmen der OECD Aktivität „Recognition of non-formal and informal Learning". Bonn/Berlin

Brändle, T./Ordemann, J. (2014): Studierfähigkeit und die Aufnahmeprüfung von Studierenden ohne Abitur am Fachbereich Sozialökonomie der Universität Hamburg. Hamburg

Cedefop – European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training (2009): The shift to learning outcomes. Policies and practices in Europe. Luxembourg

Chisholm, L. (2012): Higher Education and Lifelong Learning: Renewing the Educational and Social Mission of Universities in Europe. In: Aspin, D.N./Chapman, J./Evans, K./Bagnall, R. (eds.): Second International Handbook of Lifelong Learning (Part One). Dordrecht, pp. 337–348

EHEA (European Higher Education Area) Ministerial Conference (2009): The Bologna Process 2020 – The European Higher Education Area in the new decade. Leuven Communiqué. Leuven and Louvain-la-Neuve. URL: www.ehea.info/Uploads/about/Leuven_Louvain-la-Neuve_Communiqu%C3%A9_April_2009.pdf

EHEA (European Higher Education Area) Ministerial Conference (2012): Making the Most of Our Potential: Consolidating the European Higher Education Area. Bucharest Communiqué. Bucharest. URL: www.ehea.info/Uploads/%281%29/Bucharest%20Communique%202012%281%29.pdf

European Commission (2001): Making a European Area of Lifelong Learning a Reality. COM/2001/0678 Final. Brussels. URL: http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=COM:2001:0678:FIN:EN:PDF

European Commission/EACEA P9/Eurydice (2012): The European Higher Education Area in 2012: Bologna Process Implementation Report. Brussels. URL: www.ehea.info/Uploads/%281%29/Bologna%20Process%20Implementation%20Report.pdf

EUROSTAT (2014): Europe 2020 education indicators in the EU28 in 2013. URL: http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/cache/ITY_PUBLIC/3-11042014-AP/EN/3-11042014-AP-EN.PDF

Faure, E./Herrera, F./Kaddoura, A.-R./Lopes, H./Petrovsky, A.V./Rahnema, M./Champion Ward, F. (1972): Learning to be: The World of Education today and tomorrow. Paris

Foster, J. (2001): Education as Sustainability. In: Environmental Education Research, No. 2, pp. 153–165

Freitag, W.K. (2010): „Recognition of Prior Learning" – Anrechnung vorgängig erworbener Kompetenzen: EU-Bildungspolitik, Umsetzung in Deutschland und Bedeutung für die soziale und strukturelle Durchlässigkeit zur Hochschule. Düsseldorf

GRI G4 (2013): G4 Sustainability Reporting Guidelines. Implementation Manual. Amsterdam

Hanft, A./Brinkmann, K. (2012): Lifelong Learning als gelebte Hochschulkultur. In: Kerres, M./Hanft, A./Wilkesmann, U./Wolff-Bendik, K. (eds.): Studium 2020. Münster/New York/München/Berlin, pp. 135–142

Holford, J. (2014): The lost honour of the Social Dimension: Bologna, exports and the idea of the university. In: International Journal of Lifelong Education, No. 1, pp. 7–23

HmbHG (2014): Hamburgisches Hochschulgesetz. URL: www.landesrecht-hamburg.de/jportal/portal/page/bshaprod.psml?showdoccase=1&st=lr&doc.id=jlr-HSchulGHArahmen&doc.part=X&doc.origin=bs

Ioannidou, A. (2010): Steuerung im transnationalen Bildungsraum. Bielefeld

KMK (2009): Hochschulzugang für beruflich qualifizierte Bewerber ohne schulische Hochschulzugangsberechtigung. Beschluss der Kultusministerkonferenz vom 06.03.2008. URL: www.kmk.org/fileadmin/veroeffentlichungen_beschluesse/2009/2009_03_06-Hochschulzugang-erful-qualifizierte-Bewerber.pdf

Nickel, S./Duong, S. (2012): Studieren ohne Abitur: Monitoring der Entwicklungen in Bund, Ländern und Hochschulen. Gütersloh

oikos Hamburg (2012): Nachhaltigkeitsbericht für die Universität Hamburg. Hamburg

Orr, D./Riechers, M. (2010): Organisation des Hochschulzugangs im Vergleich von sieben europäischen Ländern. Hannover

Orr, D./Gwość, C./Netz, N. (2011): Social and Economic Conditions of Student Life in Europe. Synopsis of indicators. Final Report. Eurostudent IV 2008-2011. Bielefeld

Orr, D./Hovdhaugen, E. (2014): 'Second chance' routes into higher education: Sweden, Norway and Germany compared. In: International Journal of Lifelong Education, No. 1, pp. 45–61

Schreiber-Barsch, S. (2007): Learning Communities als Infrastruktur Lebenslangen Lernens. Vergleichende Fallstudien europäischer Praxis. Bielefeld

Schüßler, I. (2012): Nachhaltigkeit in der Weiterbildung. Theoretische und empirische Untersuchungen zum nachhaltigen Lernen. 3rd ed. Baltmannsweiler

Seghezzo, L. (2009): The five dimensions of sustainability. In: Environmental Politics, No. 4, pp. 539–556

Slowey, M./Schuetze, H.G. (2012): All Change – No Change? In: Slowey, M./Schuetze, H.G. (eds.): Global Perspectives on Higher Education and Lifelong Learners. New York, pp. 19–49

Sozialökonomie (2014): Geschichte des Fachbereichs. URL: www.wiso.uni-hamburg.de/fachbereiche/sozialoekonomie/startseite/geschichte-des-fachbereichs/

Sterling, S./Maxey, L./Luna, H. (2013) (eds.): The Sustainable University. Progress and Prospects. New York

Stoltenberg, U./Holz, V. (2012) (eds.): Education for Sustainable Development – European Approaches. Bad Homburg

UNESCO – United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (2009a): Harnessing the power and potential of adult learning and education for a viable future: Belém Framework for Action. Paris

UNESCO – United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (2009b): Bonn Declaration. UNESCO World Conference on Education for Sustainable Development. URL: www.esd-world-conference-2009.org/en/documents.html

Universität Hamburg (2014a): Informationen zum Besonderen Hochschulzugang für Berufstätige nach § 38 des Hamburgischen Hochschulgesetzes. Hamburg

Universität Hamburg (2014b). Hochschulzugangsberechtigung nach abgeschlossener Fortbildungsprüfung. URL: www.uni-hamburg.de/campuscenter/bewerbung/hochschulzugang-berufstaetige/hochschulzugang-nach-fortbildungspruefung.html

Universität Hamburg (2014c): Vergabe von Studienplätzen, Abt. 3, Ref. 33, Bachelor WiSe 2013/2014. Hamburg

Universität Hamburg (2014d): Studienplatzvergabe ntS MIN-Fakultät Vergabe von Studienplätzen, Abt. 3, Ref. 33, Bachelor WiSe 2013/2014. Hamburg

Watson, L./Hagel, P./Chesters, J. (2013): A half-open door: pathways for VET award holders into Australian universities. Adelaide

WCED – World Commission on Environment and Development (1987): Our common future. Oxford

Wolter, A. (2012): Germany. From Individual Talent to Institutional Permeability. In: Slowey, M./Schuetze, H.G. (eds.): Global Perspectives on Higher Education and Lifelong Learners. New York, pp. 81–108