

### B3.1.

#### Can universities contribute to sustainable development through lifelong learning?

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Sustainable development is often defined as "the development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs" (WCED, 1987). It is generally schematized at the intersection of three constituents: namely the social, economic and environmental parts (Barbier, 1987).

Since the Sixties, human capital theories have studied the link between growth and education (Schultz, 1961; Becker, 1964). More contemporary theories suggest that investing in human capital (and thus in education) leads to an increased economic growth via an enhancement in technological innovations (conceived as an "endogenous" factor) (Romer, 1990). Those theories have contributed to the development of lifelong learning policies, as a way to improve economical growth. Lifelong learning policies are indeed conceived to increase access to knowledge and, therefore, to widen diffusion of scientific results and technological innovations.

On the other hand, lifelong learning lead to an increased access to qualifications (notably via the recognition of informal and non-formal learning). This increase allows higher employability and thus higher social cohesion.

For many experts, the technological progress will be a keystone for environmental preservation and in particular, to tackle global warming (IPPC, 2007). The trainings intended to spread the scientific results and more specifically, the technological innovations obtained by university research groups in this particular field allow lifelong learning policies to be therefore conceived as a way to contribute to sustainable development in its three dimensions.

In practical terms, however, is it possible to conceive training programs within the universities, which can clearly respond to the three (social, economic and environmental) "pillars" of sustainable development?

In this article, we will describe a training program on "rational use of energy" designed by the Université Libre de Bruxelles (ULB) in partnership with the Université de Mons (UMons) that tries to take up the challenge. In its first part, we will describe the partnership, involving both actors from the universities (researchers, teachers, institutional representatives) and public authorities, which allowed the conception of a coherent program combining both theoretical and practical aspects. In the second section, we will set out a typology of the profiles of the participants and analyse briefly their motivations. In a third part, we will describe the contribution of this training program to the implementation of sustainable development strategies in the public and private sectors. We will underline the necessary conditions for such a contribution to succeed. Among them, we will pinpoint the prerequisites that directly concern universities. As a conclusion, we will present a general strategy to set-up such trainings and therefore to increase the contribution of universities to sustainable development through lifelong learning.