

Virtual Campus for a Sustainable Europe

Newsletter Winter 2010–11

Greetings to e-learning enthusiasts everywhere

2010 was a busy and eventful year for the university members of the Virtual Campus for a Sustainable Europe, as no doubt it was for students engaged in the VCSE e-learning courses. Apart from their myriad other activities, most of the university partners were caught up in the EU-funded project, **Life-long Learning for Sustainable Development (3-LENSUS)**, which includes an element of e-learning and the creation of virtual learning spaces. A highly successful final conference and workshop was staged in Greece's second city of Thessaloniki at the beginning of November 2010 to present the main findings and outcomes of the 3-LENSUS project in which members of the wider European e-learning were involved. You can read a fuller report on the conference and other 3-LENSUS activities below.

The VCSE annual meeting was also held in Thessaloniki where it was agreed that VCSE Secretariat responsibilities will be transferred from Charles University in Prague to the Open University of the Netherlands. These responsibilities include maintenance of the VCSE website, fielding queries from the wider e-learning public, managing applications from new members, and publishing the VCSE electronic newsletter.

This semester the VCSE was very happy to welcome a new e-learning course onto the campus in the form of the Interdisciplinary Study Programme on Sustainability (IS-PoS) coordinated by Leuphana University of Lueneburg and Charles University in Prague. The course will culminate in a Summer School in September 2011 where students and tutors will have the opportunity to meet face-to-face for the first time and complement their e-learning studies by examining a specific real-life case study in sustainability on the Czech-German border. More information on ISPoS is contained in a short article below.

Finally, the VCSE is very pleased to welcome two new participating universities into its fold: FernUniversität in Hagen, Germany, represented by [Daniel Otto](#), and Universum University College in Prishtina, Kosovo, represented by [Alejtin Berisha](#).

The VCSE wishes everybody a Happy New Year and more successful e-learning in 2011!

A change in the VCSE Secretariat

For the next two years, Merel van der Wal of the Open Universiteit The Netherlands will take over the coordination of the VCSE project from Andrew Barton of the Charles University Environment Center.

Merel started working as a PhD Candidate at the Open Universiteit in May 2010. Previously, she worked at another university where she was the international coordinator for exchange students before becoming responsible for international marketing and recruitment for Master's programmes from 2007-2010. For several years she has been looking after international students, international programmes and visitors in Master's programmes, Erasmus Mundus and Intensive Programmes.

"I am very pleased that making the decision to focus on my own research project still gives me the opportunity to be involved in an international community where students and staff are crossing their borders to learn. I have had some first-hand experience during my studies and I believe that this is the key to gaining a better understanding of our own world and perceptions," says Merel.

"E-learning is a relatively new area for me, but the topics and courses in the VCSE combine my fields of interest: I have a Bachelor's and Master's degree in Environmental Social and Political Sciences, as well as in Educational Sciences, and my PhD project focuses on the use of climate models as social learning tools. I will be happy to tell you all about it, and hopefully we will have that opportunity sometime in the near future!"

You can contact Merel [here](#).

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The European Virtual Seminar reaches a milestone by being offered for a 10th time

The European Virtual Seminar on Sustainable Development (EVS) is currently running for the 10th time.

This is a milestone in e-learning, because EVS is a joint course offered by a partnership of universities who share their expertise and invest staff time and resources. Since the start of EVS in 2001, the network has undergone substantial enlargement and consists nowadays of a group of 10-15 universities with a clear distribution of tasks and responsibilities among the partners.

EVS is basically about 'transboundary competence', which is the competence of students – who will become academic professionals in the near future – to think, communicate, learn and collaborate across boundaries, such as the boundaries between different disciplines, between different nationalities and cultures, and between science, policy and society. The aim of EVS is

to provide a learning environment in which these transboundary competencies can be developed. Therefore EVS tries to foster an international, multidisciplinary dialogue between geographically diverse students by using modern ICT and the Internet.

The overall theme of EVS is sustainable development in Europe and the students work in small group on different case studies. In the current EVS course (October 2010-March 2011) 85 students are participating from 10 different universities. The students are from 16 different nationalities and represent more than 20 different disciplines. They work in small groups on 9 different case studies, supervised by tutors and experts from the participating universities. A new dimension of this EVS run is that at the end of the run, staff members as well as a couple of students from each university will meet in Romania for the EU-funded inten-

sive programme called European Seminar on Sustainable Development. This 14-day programme will give students and staff the opportunity to meet for a face-to-face experience, to attend lectures about EVS case study topics, to defend the research reports of their EVS case studies in front of different experts, other students and local stakeholders, to join a field trip and to socialise. As part of this programme there will also be a workshop about the advantages of using social software (web 2.0 technology) in the next EVS run in order to make this e-learning course even more innovative. The programme in Romania will be coordinated by the University of Bucharest, one of the core partners of the EVS. The EVS is coordinated by the Open Universiteit in the Netherlands (<http://www.ou.nl/evs>).

LECH-e e-learning project nearly ready for pilot testing



The LECH-e project was launched in October 2009. The acronym stands for 'Lived Experience of Climate Change: interdisciplinary e-module development and virtual mobility'.

The project brings together eight European universities across six countries, including three VCSE members (Open Universiteit, the Netherlands; FernUniversität, Germany; Universidade Aberta, Portugal). Supported by the EU Lifelong Learning Erasmus Programme, the project develops online curriculum resources and virtual learning communities. These resources will support Masters' dissertations in the broad area of the lived experience of climate change -- how individuals and organisations conceive and respond to its perceived local impacts, for example, extreme weather or biodiversity changes. They can be used flexibly by universities to complement existing post-graduate programmes. At the end of the project in May 2012 they will become open educational resources for any university to use.

By March 2011, three e-modules will be ready for pilot-testing:

- an introduction to climate change in the context of sustainable development,
- comparing the experience of climate change in the global South and North, and
- interdisciplinary research methods for investigating the lived experience of climate change.

For the pilot, a virtual learning space will be developed and implemented on the VCSE Moodle platform. This virtual learning space will contain several learning communities centred around the content modules, Masters' dissertation research, and science-stakeholder dialogue, respectively. Learning materials, multimedia resources, dissertation topics and completed dissertations can be found in these learning communities, as well as a range of tools for communication and collaboration.

The pilot-testing not only concerns evaluation of the module materials and the facilities offered by the virtual learning space, but also involves a test of the virtual mobility part of the LECH-e initiative. Students enrol in the virtual learning space for a module of their choice, discuss and work together in internationally and disciplinarily mixed groups and are guided by staff from the participating universities. When successful, the LECH-e modules and Masters' community may become part of the expanding VCSE choice of courses. We also welcome students for the pilot-test from VCSE member universities that are not participating in the LECH-e project.

For more information about participation in the pilot-test, contact: joop.dekraker@ou.nl

For more information about the LECH-e project, see: <http://www.leche.open.ac.uk/>

A successful start to the latest VCSE e-learning course: Interdisciplinary Study Program on Sustainability (ISPoS)

The two-semester ISPoS study programme has been running since October 2010. About 20 students from Prague, Lüneburg, Konstanz, Hamburg and Graz are studying and collaborating in an interdisciplinary and international learning environment to acquire knowledge and competencies for contributing actively to the sustainable development of our society.

The students have already passed the first e-learning module which dealt with the theoretical and historical background of sustainable development in Europe, the Czech Republic and Germany. Now they are currently engaged in the second e-learning module about globalisation issues and case studies. The third module will follow in March

2011, teaching a trans-disciplinary research methodology that will be used to analyse the situation in Krušné Hory/ Erzgebirge on the Czech-German border.

In summer 2011, after having successfully passed all the e-learning modules, students will meet each other and their tutors and work together during a 10-day summer school in Krušné Hory/ Erzgebirge and apply their knowledge to a real-life case study.

ISPoS is run in cooperation by [CUEC](#) and [INFU](#). It is funded by [Deutsche Bundesstiftung Umwelt \(DBU\)](#). For more information visit <http://www.czp.cuni.cz/ispos> or contact [Simon Burandt](#).

Human Ecology update

The University of Geneva is running the same course as 2009 in Human Ecology with a flexible agenda, so students are free to start the course whenever they want. The course is available online for visitors at <http://moodle.unige.ch/course/view.php?id=606>.

The very good news at the University of Geneva is that the online courses offered by VCSE partners are now officially part of its Master of Environmental Sciences (MUSE) as optional courses. The new study plan, including VCSE e-courses, will be effective as of autumn 2011.

European Higher Education Institutions for Sustainable Development: The COPERNICUS Alliance

In July 2010, the kick-off meeting for the newly revived COPERNICUS Alliance, the European Network on Higher Education for Sustainable Development, was held at University of Graz.

The network is strongly connected to and based upon the COPERNICUS Charta that was already developed in 1993 and signed by 326 universities. These universities signed the Charta as a commitment to follow ten principles: institutional commitment, environmental ethics, education of university employees, programs in environmental education, interdisciplinarity, dissemination of knowledge, networking, partnerships, continuing education and technology transfer.

As part of the 3-LENSUS project, partners of the VCSE network declared the goal of establishing a network in the field of Education for Sustainable Development at the European level that continues to live up to these principles.

The COPERNICUS Alliance now aims to promote the role of sustainable development in European higher education to improve education and research for sustainable development in partnership with society and policy focussing on these main goals:



Network: Exchanging and enhancing knowledge on Education for Sustainable Development between European Higher Education and student organizations that work for sustainability

Policy: Promoting Higher Education for Sustainable Development in European policy

Service: Disseminating tools for sustainability integration in higher education

Outreach: Promoting sustainable development in European Higher Education

Representation: Representing European Higher Education for Sustainable Development in international committees on Education for Sustainable Development

At the moment, the COPERNICUS Alliance has 15 members from 7 countries (as of November 2010). Based on their activities, it forms an innovation network for integration of sustainable development at Higher Education Institutions with multi-

ple contacts and possibilities of exchange at the European level. Members are encouraged to participate in working groups that bring together universities from across Europe: 'Innovative Teaching & Learning', 'Implementation of Sustainability in Universities', 'COPERNICUS Alliance Management', 'Policy Lobbying', 'Students Involvement', 'Outreach', 'European Interdisciplinary Research on Sustainability'.

To support these working groups, the COPERNICUS Alliance is managed by its secretariat at RCE Graz-Styria and led by the elected President, Prof. Dr. Friedrich M. Zimmermann, (University of Graz) and Vice President Prof. Dr. Gerd Michelsen (Leuphana University of Lüneburg).

Future activities will include acquisition of new members and ongoing activities within the working groups, as well as organisation of events for COPERNICUS Alliance members, such as workshops.

Further information is available on the network's website: <http://www.copernicus-alliance.org> or by contacting Mario Diethart.

3-LENSUS winds up with a final conference in Greece

The EU-funded [Lifelong Learning for Sustainable Development](#) (3-LENSUS) project completes its activities at the end of 2010, with a final report on its outcomes due in Brussels by February 2011. The project formally finished on a high note with a very successful final conference and workshop hosted by the University of Macedonia in Thessaloniki, Greece, with participation by all 3-LENSUS consortium members and invited Learning for Sustainable Development (L4SD) experts from throughout Europe.



Dr. Jana Dlouhá participates in a discussion at the 3-LENSUS final conference while Dr. Maik Adomssent listens in the background.

3-LENSUS members presented well-received papers on a range of topics ranging from e-learning methodology, indicators for evaluation of L4SD projects based on the [3-LENSUS open database](#), the role of universities in developing a knowledge triangle of education, research and innovation for regional sustainable development, analysis of the literature on L4SD, networking in the interaction between regional and higher education actors, and online network services for sustainable development. One conference day was also devoted to presentation of a series of L4SD case studies selected as examples of best

practice by the experts involved in the studies. All these presentations, as well as a further report on the conference proceedings in the form of e-minutes can be found on the [3-LENSUS website](#).

The two-day workshop that followed the final conference included a seminar on Virtual Learning for Sustainable Development led by members of the team working on the Sustainable Urban Neighbourhoods project in the Euroregion Rhine-Meuse. This included a presentation conducted via Skype by Franz Nahrada, the man behind the [Global Village Initiative](#). A further presentation was made by Philipp Schöffmann of the [International Network for Educational Exchange \(INEX\)](#) on Intercultural learning for students in regional contexts. The workshop was rounded off with a meeting of the new RCE Central Macedonia, including presentations based on the experiences of the RCE Rhine-Meuse and the RCE Graz-Styria.

Most papers prepared and presented at the final conference have been compiled for publication in book format, and a deal has been signed with the Grosvenor House Publishing in the United Kingdom to have the book issued in early 2011. This will be available in a print-on-demand hard copy format or as an e-book via Amazon, although it will also be possible to download PDF versions of the book and individual chapters at the [3-LENSUS website](#).

Finally, negotiations are under way at the time of writing with the Journal of Cleaner Production to publish peer-reviewed academic articles in a special edition of the journal based on the 3-LENSUS outcomes later in 2011. A further update will be provided in the next issue of the VCSE newsletter.



Some of the participants at the 3-LENSUS final conference.

Sustainable Spatial and Regional Development update

The VCSE course 'Sustainable Spatial and Regional Development' was offered by the Department of Geography and Regional Science at the University of Graz in the 2010 summer semester. Four students from Austria, Mexico, Mauritius and Indonesia participated in that course. They came not only from different countries and time zones but also from different educational and professional backgrounds. Hence multicultural and interdisciplinary working took place, which presented an added value both for the students as well as for the university professors and e-tutors. New and interesting perspectives resulted from presentations and discussions where students talked for example about joint assignments where they had to compare case studies from their home countries. Students had to search for examples regarding sustainable planning or tourism in their regions. They therefore learned more about developments in their home countries, learned to reflect on those developments, as well as get to know similar projects and challenges in other countries. That kind of assignment was remarked up positively by the students during evaluation of the course. For instance, one student stated:

'I would like to emphasize that I really enjoyed the assignments. I think they were a very useful way to make us think about the course concepts and contents. They were varied in form and they focused on key aspects relevant to the course, but not repetitive. They were also very well designed to adapt the topic of the assignment to our particular context.'

The evaluation of the 'Sustainable Spatial and Regional Development' course confirmed the feedback of the students given during the live conferences, and showed that they were satisfied. In regard to possible improvements, students mentioned that additional papers and readings would be useful to complement the course materials – a point the university will definitely consider for further e-learning courses. Besides the interactive assignments, the students especially enjoyed the online exchanges both with students as well as professors, and the multicultural and interdisciplinary learning environment.

The University of Graz will offer the Sustainable Spatial and Regional Development course again in the 2012 summer term.

For more information, contact [Marlene Trummler](#).