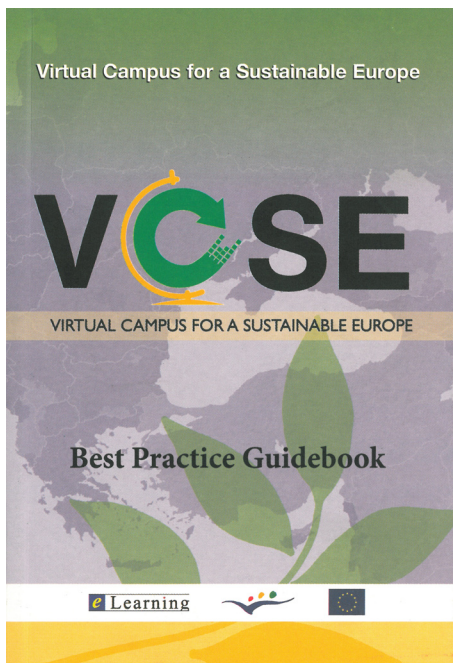


# Virtual Campus for a Sustainable Europe Newsletter Spring 2010

## From Implementation to Business-as-usual

Welcome to this, the fourth edition of the **Virtual Campus for a Sustainable Europe electronic newsletter**.

The Virtual Campus is now long past its phase of development and implementation, and is well and truly into business-as-usual mode. E-learning courses have been operated by VCSE partners for several semesters already, so they've built up a wealth of knowledge and experience of delivering education for sustainable development online. Feedback from students has continued to be positive, and their assessment of the courses and partners' assessment of student performance and course outcomes has been assisting in the ongoing cycle of improving and refining e-learning methodology and course delivery.



We've had to overcome some technological teething problems in the past few months with the outage of the server that hosted the Virtual Campus website, resulting in the loss of some important data; but we've recovered from that hiccup and are back up and running again. And on top of that, there were some management changes in the VCSE Secretariat when we were sad to see the departure of Laura Macháčková-Henderson on maternity leave with the loss of all her institutional

knowledge. However, we're back up to speed again with new management and strengthened contacts with the various VCSE members with full, partial or observer status. We're always pleased to welcome new members onto campus though, so please take a look at the website if you're interested.

In terms of upcoming activity, we hope to get the alumni section of the website established as soon as possible, while the annual general meeting of the Virtual Campus is due to be held in Prague, the Czech Republic, at the end of May in combination with the final [3-LENSUS Lifelong Learning for Sustainable Development](#) project meeting. See the article below for more information about 3-LENSUS.

Finally, don't forget that you're able to download a copy of the VCSE Best Practice Guidebook from the website, or by clicking the image of the Guidebook, or by emailing [Andrew Barton](#) to request a hard copy version.

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## Overview

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## VCSE Course Choices Expand !

The VCSE welcomed a new course from the University of Geneva onto its campus for the 2009/10 winter semester. The following is a brief outline of what the course offers students.!

### Human Ecology I

A self-paced course developed by the Institute of Environmental Sciences of Geneva University. 1ECTS (and probably 2 ECTS next year to accord with comments made by students).

### Summary

A presentation of the basic principles and concepts of human ecology from an integration perspective in order to constantly re-examine multiple dimensions and their inter-relationships (environmental, economic, social, political, etc).

### Course objectives

1. To understand the interdisciplinary nature of the human ecology approach
2. To study environmental and sustainability questions as they relate to the actors who confront real concerns, concrete projects and risks that must be managed.
3. To become familiar with e-learning and the learning tools that accompany it.

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## Content

- Definition of human ecology
- Environment - Society - Development: actors' inter-relationships and logic
- Analysis of key concepts and principles (environment, systems, actors, etc.)
- Thoughts on need-based human ecology
- Analysis of methodological concepts and principles (regulation, needs, sustainability)

## Pedagogy tools for this e-course

Portfolio, presentations (PPT with sound), reading & writing essays related to the readings, videos & quizzes.

## Learning Method

Apprenticeships Process for an overall vision of Human Ecology.

The learning method for this course is of the social constructivist type.

In regard to the theory of constructivism, the importance of social interactions and support relations has been added. The learner chooses the learning path that is best for him/her: each learner has his/her method and learning style, with preferences derived from individual experience.



The goal is to give the learner a rich environment that encourages free exploration. This practice is different from the behaviourist approach, which encourages close guidance and training of the student using a precise series of exercises and tasks to be accomplished in a predetermined and progressive manner.

This paradigm is learner-centered, and knowledge is no longer transferred passively or mechanically from the teacher to the learner. The student is the active master of his/her own learning process, and the teacher coordinates and supervises via path by coaching (he/she continually helps the learner, depending on their need: attention is focused on an aspect, feedback is given, certain tasks are simplified, etc.) and "scaffolding" (knowledge scaffolding is one of the specific aspects of coaching: teaching supports the learner, providing a stimulus or homework to accomplish, etc.).

## Learning objectives for each lesson

### Session 1. Course Presentation and General Organisation

#### Learning objectives:

- Learn about the progression of the course and about the personal investment required;
- Understand the interdisciplinary nature of the human ecology approach.

### Session 2. Society and the Environment: historical perspective, systemic interrelationships and integration trials

#### Learning objectives:

- Analyse the components and interactions between society and the environment (S. Boyden, S. Moscovici)
- Learn about the evolution of the principal approaches to human ecology and examine the interrelationships between society and the environment using ecosystem analysis diagrams (A.T. Rambo, J.-B. Robinson)
- Learn about a case study on rain water management in Cherapunjee (India)

### Session 3. Actors' logic, land and environmental management - Rain Water Management in Cherapunjee (India)

#### Learning objectives:

- Discover the complexity of interactions between people, societies and ecosystems based on a case study.

### Session 4. Thoughts on need-based human ecology

#### Learning objectives:

- To show the implication of social cultural factors in redefining needs caused by technological innovation processes.

### Session 5. Analysis of concepts & methodological principles (regulation, needs, durability)

#### Learning objectives:

- Argue the pertinence of the human ecology approach for implementing sustainable development.

For further information, contact [Nicole Efrancy](#).

## New e-learning Course Development

Within the next two years the Charles University Environment Center (CUEC) in Prague and the Institute for Environmental and Sustainability Communication (INFU, Leuphana University Lüneburg) will develop and implement a two semester blended learning study programme for bachelor students called Interdisciplinary Study Programme on Sustainability (ISPoS).

The programme is intended to offer an interdisciplinary and international learning environment for students to acquire compe-

tencies for contributing actively to and shaping sustainable development.

The programme will consist of three concerted eLearning modules providing the background for the students to participate in a final summer school, which will take place somewhere in the Czech-German border region. During the different e-learning modules students will work collaboratively on future and sustainability related topics, analyse the consequences of global change and acquire corresponding competencies. During the summer school, students will par-

ticipate in lectures on methodological instruments and apply their knowledge afterwards in international and interdisciplinary teams to real life case studies in the border region, and elaborate sustainable options for solving given problems.

The project continues the fruitful cooperation between the [CUEC](#) and [INFU](#) over recent years and projects. It is funded by the [Deutsche Bundesstiftung Umwelt \(DBU\)](#).

Please contact [Simon Burandt](#) for further information.

## VCSE COURSES FOR THE 2010 SUMMER SEMESTER

### Sustainable Spatial and Regional Development

In summer term 2010, the online course "Sustainable Spatial and Regional Development" will again be offered by Prof. Zimmermann from the Department of Geography and Regional Science and his team of e-tutors, Elisabeth Görsdorf and Marlene Trummler.

In eight modules, this course illustrates the various approaches of and concepts for sustainable spatial planning and regional development, with Europe as its main focus of interest. Students will gain insight into the history of planning as well as be confronted with current projects, which will be presented as case studies. Furthermore, the course covers concepts, such as New Urbanism and New Regionalism and also gives a future outlook on sustainable planning. The assessment consists of three project assignments that students will have to do individually and in

group work, which gives them the opportunity to put newly gained knowledge and skills into practice. Each project assignment is rounded off with a live conference where we get the chance to meet and discuss the project results.

Here's what one student said of the course in 2008:

"I liked the flexibility that e-course offered in general. The assignments were very interesting and inventive. I think there was

good balance between theoretical and practical parts."

The course addresses all students interested in issues of sustainable development who want to acquire and deepen their knowledge and skills in the fields of regional development and planning. Registrations closed on March 5th, 2010.

The following is an extract from the 2008 course:

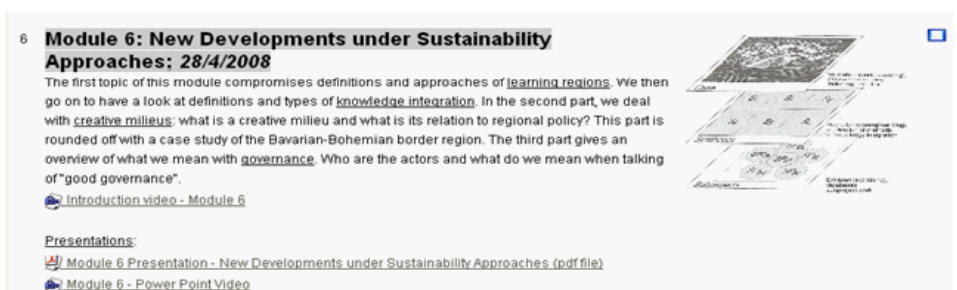
**6 Module 6: New Developments under Sustainability Approaches: 28/4/2008**

The first topic of this module comprises definitions and approaches of learning regions. We then go on to have a look at definitions and types of knowledge integration. In the second part, we deal with creative milieus: what is a creative milieu and what is its relation to regional policy? This part is rounded off with a case study of the Bavarian-Bohemian border region. The third part gives an overview of what we mean with governance. Who are the actors and what do we mean when talking of "good governance".

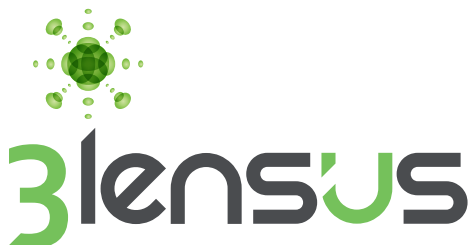
[Introduction video - Module 6](#)

**Presentations:**

- [Module 6 Presentation - New Developments under Sustainability Approaches \(pdf file\)](#)
- [Module 6 - Power Point Video](#)



## The Lifelong Learning for Sustainable Development Project Gathers Pace



The 3-LENSUS Lifelong Learning for Sustainable Development project has made significant progress during its first year of implementation. It seeks to engage universities with other societal actors, primarily Regional Centres of Expertise on Education for Sustainable Development (RCEs) and other learning networks, to develop contextualized knowledge for sustainable development. It will do this by creating an web-based European Learning Space to share innovative approaches among and between regional, multi-stakeholder learning networks for sustainable development. It will also build capacity for furthering these activities by developing a Best Practice Handbook on innovative practices with a variety of tools for regional multi-stakeholder learning for sustainable development (including innovative approaches to e-learning); and it is holding a seminar series and will stage a conference for academic and non-academic participants

interested in education for sustainable development (ESD) via the RCE approach.

The consortium brings together a geographically diverse range of universities from northern to south-eastern Europe with inter-disciplinary perspectives on ESD, as well as three RCEs (one formal partner and two informal) and their accompanying well-established learning networks that provide a multi-sectoral and trans-disciplinary approach to the project. As two of the consortium partners operate in areas where there are currently no RCEs, value will be added to Europe-wide ESD networks by expanding access to the expertise and knowledge needed to establish RCEs in those regions.

The consortium partners are making ample use of the experience they developed during their collaborative work on the establishment of the Virtual Campus for a Sustainable Europe, and of existing European RCEs and other learning networks to add value to their own research knowledge. An exchange of knowledge and information has taken place with ESD practitioners during the development of various stages of the project to ensure the final products and outcomes cater to the direct needs of RCEs and ESD stakeholders via a series of seminars and workshops and surveys.

While final project outcomes will not become evident until 2010, a great deal of preparatory work has taken place. European ESD network connections have been strengthened by the preparatory work done to relaunch the COPERNICUS Alliance among European universities which aims to exchange and enhance knowledge on ESD between European higher education and student organisations that work for sustainable development. The

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COPERNICUS website will go online in 2010 and the Alliance itself will be formally relaunched in July 2010 (see page 8). A [freely accessible database on ESD](#) has just gone online thanks to the work undertaken to create a user-friendly database form that includes quality indicators which will be used for identifying examples of best practice in ESD. European RCEs and learning networks that focus on sustainable development are currently being canvassed to enter their ESD projects into the database. Exemplary projects will be used to inform a Handbook of Best Practice that will be published and presented at a 3-LENSUS Final Conference in Thessaloniki in November 2010. The conference will be preceded by a Summer School where case studies of ESD projects will be delivered to RCE representatives and other ESD stakeholders. The Final Conference will also be the occasion at which other final pro-

ject products are presented, including a prototype learning network for regional lifelong learning for sustainable development and a prototype virtual European Lifelong Learning Space for Sustainable Development.

A [project information and communication portal](#) has also been established with material developed in collaboration by project partners for dissemination of project aims and objectives. This was complemented by the publication of a [project promotional flyer](#) which consortium partners are using to circulate within their own ESD stakeholder networks.

3-LENSUS is funded by the Education, Audiovisual and Culture Executive Agency, Lifelong Learning Programme 2008 for the period January 2009 to December 2010.

[www.3-lens.us.eu](http://www.3-lens.us.eu)



### 3- LENSUS consortium

- Charles University in Prague, Environment Centre (coordinator)
- Open University of the Netherlands
- Karl-Franzens-University of Graz and RCE Graz-Styria
- Leuphana University of Lüneburg, Institute for Environmental and Sustainability Communication
- University of Macedonia, Social and Economic Sciences
- Regional Centre of Expertise Rhine-Meuse

## Life on the Virtual Campus

To get an insight into how students view the courses offered on the Virtual Campus, we asked a few of them to provide their impressions. E-interviews were conducted with the following students: Jule Plawitzki (JP) and Svea Wehling (SW) from the Multiple Perspectives on Globalisation course run by the Charles University Environment Centre, Lars Brugman (LB), Manuela Kofler (MK), and Maria Ionescu (MI) from the European Virtual Seminar on Sustainable Development operated by the Open University of the Netherlands, and Oliver Hösl (OH) from the University of Geneva's Human Ecology course.

### What attracted you to the course?

**JP.** First, I was really interested in the theme of the course: A multidisciplinary topic with theoretical bases, but with huge relevance for the future as well. Secondly, practicing English is more efficient for me when I have to write it. And last but not least, I was interested in communicating with students not only from Germany in an unusual study-sphere (internet).

**LB.** I was attracted by the focus on sustainable development and the prospect of working together in a new and innovative learning environment with other European students. The international dimension of the course and coming into contact with people from different cultural backgrounds were other important reasons to enrol in EVS.

**MK.** I was interested in the topic of sustainable development in Europe and thought it might be a good chance to get in contact with people from all over Europe who share that interest. Furthermore, I wanted to try out my abilities to work in a research team that didn't only consist of people from my own university who I already know.

**MI.** I was attracted by the new experience, the opportunity to study within an e-lear-

ning interactive course with people from different countries, speaking different languages and with very different educational backgrounds.

**OH.** During my studies of Cultural Anthropology I participated in courses dealing with questions of „Political Ecology“ and I wondered in which way „Human Ecology“ approaches are different from this field of research. Secondly, I thought that it would be a great chance to do some work at home and to have more options in terms of time-management. Last but not least, a course with 1.5 credits fitted in well in my semester plans.

**SW.** I was especially attracted by the idea of working together with various students with different origins and backgrounds. The idea of providing a platform for exchanging different thoughts on globalisation interested me.

### What were your original expectations? Were these met or were they replaced by something else?

**JP.** They were met. Besides that, in my every day studies (ecological sciences) I am surrounded by people who think similarly to me –sometimes, therefore, I forget that there is no consensus about climate change, globalization and social justice. Therefore, this course opened my eyes again - there is still a huge

debate. Through the medium of the internet in the course this debate were characterized by arguments and not by personalities.



**Manuela Kofler**

**LB.** One of my main goals for the course was to get a better grip of the complex issues surrounding sustainable development and discover fresh multidisciplinary solutions to important European environmental problems. These expectations were met to a considerable degree through the different perspectives, skills and expertise that each group member brings to EVS.

**MK.** My original expectation was that it would be a seminar where discussion and qualitative research would be more important. It rather turned out to be an experience in how to organise a research project and work accor-

ding to pre-arranged time tables. Of course, these are also important abilities in order to be able to work effectively in a team, but sometimes I missed hot debates because our group was always very „friendly“ and tolerant towards inputs from all its members. This led to a loose collection of concepts and figures that at the end I had to summarize in a part called „discussion“, which was quite a difficult task for me but which turned out to be the most efficient phase of my learning process within the seminar.

SW. I was pleasantly surprised by the high degree of communication of thoughts and opinions. Although this is indeed time-consuming, it was definitely worth it.



Jule Plawizki

***What were the most interesting and most difficult aspects to participating in such an e-learning course?***

JP. In an internet forum discussion all information is available for everyone instantaneously - therefore your argumentation must be researched in a proper way. Moreover, you have to structure your argumentation better than in a „real-life-discussion“ because if you don't formulate it well you will be easily misunderstood. Essentially, you have to be more precise with everything - this experience was interesting and at the same time a difficult one for me.

LB. The modern communication techniques used in the course (such as Skype and Black-Board) offer new possibilities to share different experiences and knowledge. Collecting, integrating and eventually transforming this information into a research report was one of the most interesting parts of the course. Another important but also difficult aspect of the course is the group process. Reaching consensus, managing disagreement and fulfilling different team roles are all an inevitable part of working together as a group and bring various challenges to the course.

MI. The most interesting aspect of the e-learning course is the result that the students,

helped by their tutors and experts, have to reach by the end of the course, and the way that the relationship is handled between them. The most difficult part is understanding everyone's ideas and to make yourself understood in order to have a good result, without face-to-face meetings.

OH. The most interesting aspect was the free time management. The most difficult aspect was to unwind the language barriers.

SW. Besides the technical aspects, the challenge of finding a solution for a case study was both interesting and difficult. It really is amazing how your own opinion broadens by dealing with all the different aspects coming up from within the discussion process.

***In what ways do you feel you've benefited from the course?***

JP. There are two main aspects: On the one hand, in the beginning it was hard for me to work so continuously - every week by yourself. Because in a normal university course with an exam in the end during the semester there are some weeks where you can work less - in the end you have to catch up. But in this course I learned to work every week organized by myself. On the other hand I think it is a great opportunity to improve your English!



Svea Wehling

LB. I've benefited from the course in different ways. Discussing subjects with others gives much more than reading alone - a better and deeper understanding of complex concepts such as climate change in our case study. And because of the importance of the group process and the requirement to communicate in English, EVS also helps to improve your English and to understand what is needed to work constructively in a group.

MK. I think that I strengthened my communicative competence in English and learned a number of new technical terms that I was not used to before. I also expanded my technical abilities using an online learning platform as well as Skype to chat with my colleagues.

MI. I've benefited in many ways from this

course, but the most important is that I could develop my social skills, I learned a lot of interesting things from the other people from my group and I met really nice people that I know I'll keep in touch with after we finish this project.

OH. I got some practice in writing English, and could make connections to other courses I took in Cultural Anthropology and Geography.



Lars Brugman

***Would you be willing to undertake further e-learning in future and would you recommend it to others? What are the advantages and disadvantages of e-learning in your experience?***

JP. You can debate with students from different countries without causing CO<sub>2</sub>-emissions.

I already recommended it to others. Of course I would undertake another e-learning course - but I think the best model would be a combination between e-learning and real life discussion. Maybe an e-learning course during the first part of the semester and in the end a small conference hosted by one university for a real life discussion (well ok - then there's no longer the CO<sub>2</sub>-emission argument).

LB. Yes, I would both recommend e-learning to others and would participate in future e-learning courses. One of the great advantages of e-learning is that it makes distances obsolete. You can participate from any location if there is a computer and internet connection available. There is, however, a small down-side. The lack of face-to-face contacts and the fact that a lot of communication is not in „real-time“ can potentially lead to a lack of commitment and makes it somewhat harder to make quick decisions. In that regard, the Skype meetings definitely add extra value to the course.

MK. Not seeing the people I am working with was a completely new experience for me and I have to admit that I found it a pity and would have preferred to at least get to know them once. The main advantage probably is

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**Oliver Hösli**

that the time and place of the individual contributions to a common final report are not so important as everyone can post his/her part according to his own possibilities.

MI. I would like to participate in this kind of course in the future and I recommend them to people I meet. E-learning is a very interesting way of finding out new things and meeting new people. E-learning courses have the big advantage of creating a virtual relationship between people from all over Europe, making them focus on the same subject, at the same time, and using their own point of view for a common result.

As a disadvantage, I've found there are misunderstandings that came along in an online colle-

ctive conversation - misunderstandings that can be explained only in a one-on-one live dialogue.

OH. Yes I would. If you bear the pain and do the requested work well, you may retain more of the topic in question than in a lecture course where you hear it and forget it.



**Maria Ionescu**

SW. I would definitely recommend everyone to participate in such an e-learning course, although finding enough self-motivation can be challenging sometimes!

***Has your participation in e-learning altered the way you think about learning and teaching?***

JP. I still think that in the internet, the same as in the university there are teachers/tu-

tors that can offer information, give tips and sometimes fill students with enthusiasm for a specific theme. But in the end they cannot learn for me; it is my responsibility to think and to make the best of it.

LB. It has certainly altered my way of thinking about studying. First of all there is no book, so gathering your own sources is an important part of the course. That means much more than a lot of traditional courses, and you continually have to critically examine the reliability of the sources you find. Moreover, it requires more discipline than most traditional courses and a very active and involved approach on your part to finish it.

MK. No, it has just confirmed what I already thought before: E-learning for me is just a supplement to 'proper' teaching, which has to take place between 'real' people in a face-to-face setting. There you can clarify misunderstandings more easily, you can pose questions more directly and on the whole it is a more 'natural' process. In my future career I want to become a teacher for English and Geography and I am looking forward to seeing my pupils in a classroom that is not only virtual.

## Tutor Interview

We also talked to Rebeka Lukman, who is a tutor for the European Virtual Seminar course.

***What were your expectations of teaching an e-learning course? Did you need to prepare in some special way?***

I was acquainted with the work of a tutor because I was an EVS student last year. I also went to the EVS meeting where I met other tutors and talked with them about various issues regarding virtual tutoring. I didn't, therefore, have many expectations about the students, but rather I expected that I would be able to motivate all the students for their group as well as individual work, and help them in the best way I could so that their study process would be successful. I did not prepare for tutoring in some „special“ way. I read a few papers and literature about tutoring, and have frequent conversations with our university EVS coordinator, who has a lot of experience in e-learning environments.

***What are the challenges and rewards of online tutoring?***

There are many challenges, which I categorise as personal, process, and communication ones. From the personal perspective, the challenge was whether I would be able to be a „real“ tutor - direct, mentor, monitor and help students when it is required and that the students would be satisfied with my tutoring.

From the process perspective, it was a challenge to proceed with study processes and manage all the tasks on time. Of course, in a group we could not fulfil this requirement and submitted reports with delays (but I believe this is a reality in the e-learning courses where we were expecting the unexpected). From the communication perspective, it was really a challenge to organise virtual meetings and to achieve a consensus within a group. However, there are many rewards, such as personal satisfaction, broadening personal horizons (cultural experiences, communication, new knowledge) and the successful realisation of the learning process.

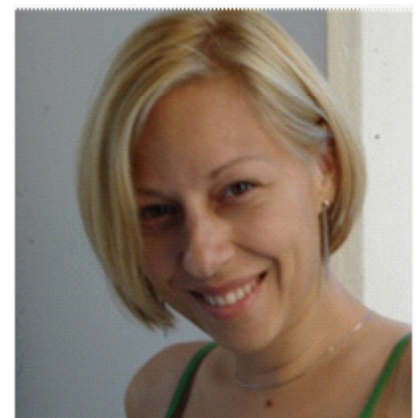
***Does your relationship with students change in an online course setting? What are the advantages and disadvantages in comparison to the traditional classroom setting?***

I don't believe that my relationship with students changed. Online learning and teaching is simply a different approach to the study process. In my opinion, there are many advantages - as a tutor you are available 24/7 for the students and I was really trying to give them prompt replies, develop a sense of community and build a trusting environment - therefore, I believe that students felt safer,

and I always „looked after them“. On Fridays, I also had a half-hour consultancy when I was available on Skype for all their questions or doubts. As a disadvantage, I would mention the stress and frustrations connected with the absence face-to-face interactions and asynchronous communications, which sometimes cause negative feelings.

***Has the experience changed your perception of and role in teaching and learning?***

No, it hasn't. Basically, I know what I can expect and I am in favour of virtual learning.



## The Expert's View

And finally, to get a rounded view from all the main actors involved in EVS, we asked one of the course experts, Matthias Barth, to briefly describe what being a course expert involves.

*You are working as an expert in the EVS, offering a case study. Could you tell us more about your case and its meaning for the EVS process?*

In the EVS, students work on specific case studies and generate their own research questions and results. The case study I offer is about sustainability communication (SC). Based on general background material about the concept of SC and its methods, students do research on different SC strategies comparing the approaches of various stakeholders

in different European countries. By comparing and evaluating the approaches, students work on general suggestions for the development of SC strategies and learn more about the development process of such strategies.

*Within the process, what are the challenges for the students and how can you help them in their progress?*

First of all, it is great to work with these students involved in the EVS. They are enthusiastic about working in interdisciplinary and interna-

tional teams; they have great ideas and often produce really interesting results. Probably the most critical part is to help them formulate a research question that is both interesting and realistic. Students tend to challenge themselves in the beginning with over-optimistic goals. Working together in an e-learning platform, without meeting physically, makes it really difficult to agree on a shared idea of an approach and to develop a realistic working plan. So, helping to find an adequate research question and sufficient specific cases to work on is probably the most important part of my work. After that, students normally work very independently and it is a pleasure to read their reports at the end of the course.

## Continued success for one of the VCSE's stalwart courses

For several semesters now, Dr. Jana Dlouhá has taught her Multiple Perspectives on Globalisation and Sustainable Development course from Charles University in Prague. Here she provides an overview of the approach taken to the course in the 2009/2010 semester and how student activity is assessed.

### How we teach and learn

In very traditionally taught courses, students are passive recipients of information from books and teachers. Research into teaching shows that students learn more and find education more fulfilling when they participate actively: contributing their own experience, interests and opinions through the actual tasks of the course.

Learning in this way is more democratic: students and tutors all have a voice and are all encouraged to share their ideas. With the guidance of tutors and course materials (texts, web resources, etc), students use these and build on the material with their own contribution to create new knowledge. This doesn't mean tutors expect each student to think of new theories. It just means that they have more control over, and responsibility for what they learn during the course.

### What is taught

During the course we looked at the economic, social, cultural and political process of globalisation, and the diverse ways of acting to counter its negative side effects. We connected local and global issues by reflecting on our own experiences and values, how they shape our actions, and how these relate to global political/social/economic issues. We examined the diversity of values which generate different investments in the "common good" of society by non-governmental organisations, national and international institutions, multi-national corporations, religious organisations, etc.

In the context of this course, sustainable development was viewed from a personal standpoint – as a value-based decision that everybody has to follow through on to face up to numerous global problems with environmental, social, economical, security and other aspects. A common interest to solve these problems for the benefit of humanity was the general approach cultivated throughout the course, while multiple approaches to this perceived "common good" were discussed from different disciplinary perspectives. Strong value-based decisions to defend certain positions and justify some solutions were developed (especially) throughout the introductory stages of the course and this focus appeared to also be crucial for the required outcomes of the course – an essay on a globalisation risk theme. Strong conclusions could be elaborated only when the values behind the topic were clear; this helped to identify and analyse the main problem, narrow the question around which the text was built and channel it towards practical conclusions at the end of the writing process.

### Focus and outcomes

Students were engaged in three types of activities:

1. Communication (including peer review at the end of the writing process) was a very important aspect of the course as the value-based discussions prepared students for their "decision making" that was revealed in the selection of the theme and method

of work. Communication was also a kind of brainstorming that provoked thinking about controversial issues, and moreover served as important feedback for teachers. In the peer review, the students' discussion was a professional way of exchanging expert ideas.

2. Content of the text & other students' contributions – a knowledge of globalisation was displayed within the attributes of any of the written products. This was visible not only through using of a good information from reliable resources, but also the context of other (similar or diverse) pieces of knowledge and arguments that showed an understanding of the theme

3. Formal aspects of the written products (essays) were assessed not only through the citation "culture" and other "external" features, but also the logic, clarity of the text and its structure so that the writer proved himself capable of mastering a good method and the process of writing. Those who started out with a clear research question and worked systematically towards the "answer" showed themselves to be formally proficient in many aspects.

Within the first range of expected activities a discussion on a hypothetical copper mine on Isoman Island was developed throughout the whole course. Students started with their initial perception of the problem (a company that was planning an environmentally damaging investment in the under-developed country) who was in most cases were not supportive of the idea of building the mine. After they had explored all of the possibilities most of the students changed their mind – they realised that there could be a considerable

number of regulations that could prevent an ecological disaster (as well as social, economic disasters, etc.). The outcome of the discussion is summarised at [this link](#).

Mind maps to support the decision-making were developed [here](#) and [here](#).

The other detailed activity included a "live record" of discussion with Jana Hybášková, a Czech politician engaged in numerous activities at the EU level. Students set up a procedure for selecting their best questions which were subsequently answered by Jana Hybášková. This helped in both directions – students received information for their themes and essays and Jana Hybášková gained experience with online discussions and a sometimes controversial discussion (students defended sustainable development principles against a rational, enlightenment-inspired world view. A record of the discussion can be found [here](#).

The most important outcome of the course – students' articles – were constructed systematically in four stages according to instructions relevant to the different phases of the writing process. They started with brainstorming about the most important globalisation themes (as part of the introduction to their texts), and then they explored the risks of globalisation (posed a research question).

Finally, these articles were compiled into a Globalisation Risks and Opportunities handbook and copyright was assigned to each of them (at the bottom of the page).

### Assessment

This course required continuous engagement,

and students were assessed in each of the five stages on different tasks. There was no final exam. As written work and communication/peer learning are both important aspects of this course, students were assessed in each stage in relation to the learning goals.

The goals were focused on different skills which were initially difficult to evaluate online – the evaluation had to be as fair as possible due to the tremendous engagement of the students. To make the assessment possible, several types of rubrics were designed so that diverse aspects of the required skills could be captured and the assessment made as objective as possible.

### Social aspects of e-learning– communication

In e-learning, communication is a core principle of virtual community building. In an online environment, the teaching/learning process is continuously changing from training/fulfillment of the prescribed tasks to the mentoring/independent work of students similar to research coached by tutors. A vital tool for the "coaching" method (tutor – student relationship) or the cooperative, non-competitive learning environment (student – student relationship) is online communication.

### Building an online community

As we didn't have any face-to-face contact and discussion, we needed to make an effort to build our learning community online. This meant that, during this course, we used modern communication tools to help us get to know each other, share ideas, discuss course work and learn from each other.

### Teachers' feedback

Generally, the course was very good with respect to its "action orientation": there was excellent engagement with students and provision of sufficient final "products" and materials that could serve as feedback for those who want to observe course activities (see [web](#)).

We were pleasantly surprised by the degree of dedication and interest students showed in the course. They worked very hard and made the most of all the types of activities, and were respectful, supportive and communicative with their peers in pair and group activities. Students took a polite and positive approach, showed energy in communicating with their peers and tutors and in the amount of work devoted to the assignments. Without all of this, distant teaching/learning would not be possible.

One of the students, Jule Kathinka Plawitzki, finished the course without losing a single point in any of the stages and contributed to the Handbook with two articles. Many other students invested enormous effort not only in their required essays but also in the discussion, which increased communicative skills and a critical approach to the student themes; it also helped to form a common experience, etc.

### Evaluation of the course

To evaluate the course itself, students were asked to fill in pre-entry and final questionnaires that included individual learning reflection records.

For more information contact [Jana Dlouhá](#).

As we noted in the LENSUS article above, efforts are currently underway to re-establish the COPERNICUS Alliance, European Network on Higher Education for Sustainable Development, at a launch workshop on 2-3 July 2010 at the University of Graz in Austria.

The COPERNICUS Alliance was originally established back in 1993 to motivate and enable European universities to foster environmental education and research. It eventually included a network of 326 universities, but later went into abeyance.

The COPERNICUS Charter will be updated during the course of the workshop, while future development and tasks required for the maintenance of the Alliance will be discussed with all participants.

For further information, please contact [Clemens Mader](#).

## Relaunching the Copernicus Alliance

### VISION

- The vision of the COPERNICUS ALLIANCE is to promote the role of sustainable development in European higher education to improve education and research for sustainable development in partnership with the society.

### GOALS

- NETWORK: to exchange and enhance knowledge on Education for Sustainable Development between European higher education institutions that work for sustainable development.
- POLICY: to promote Higher Education for Sustainable Development in European Policy
- SERVICE: disseminate tools for sustainability integration in Higher Education
- OUTREACH: to promote sustainable development in European Higher Education
- REPRESENTATION: to represent European HESD in international committees on Education for Sustainable Development