

Briefing: First Steps in Education for Sustainability – sense-making and transformative pedagogy




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Step 1 – Making Sense of Sustainability

Connecting an academic field and sustainability often starts with identification of relevant issues or content in the discipline or course, which act as initial ‘doorways’ into the territory. Professional practice guidelines or industry frameworks can be useful, or an alternative is to work with themes from the UN Sustainable Development Goals.

The example below identifies 6 potential doorways for sustainability in sport – these themes range from the most obvious entry points, to bigger picture ways of viewing sustainability agendas in relation to sport. Quotations are from the London 2012 Olympics statement of key principles for understanding the role of sports in sustainability.




<p>Sport for Health and Wellbeing</p> 	<p>Understanding and extending the contribution of sport to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Promotion of active lives and healthy communities • Understanding social determinants of health • Tackling health impacts linked to social deprivation and inequalities 	<p><i>“Improving socio-economic conditions by working to change consumer habits, ensuring health protection... developing individuals and by extension the wider community, providing health education and improving local environments for physical activity”</i></p> <p>Sustainability in Sport, IOC London 2012, p22</p>
<p>Responsible Sports Business Practice</p> 	<p>Modelling sustainability through corporate social responsibility:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Addressing impacts across the ‘triple bottom line’ • Increasing accountability in decisions over investment and procurement • Building community and business partnerships that support sustainability 	<p><i>“The transition to a green economy requires the commitment of the corporate world. To expect the world’s seven billion consumers to consistently exercise wise, green choices is unrealistic... but through its own supply chains the Olympic Movement can influence producers and their own suppliers”</i></p> <p>Sustainability in Sport, IOC London 2012, p90</p>
<p>Sports and Social Change</p> 	<p>Sport as vehicle to enable people to work for social-structural change:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Promoting empowerment and tackling inequalities (e.g. disability, gender, race) • Responding to global sustainability goals through initiatives and campaigns (e.g. Sports for Peace) 	<p><i>“Sports should be used in addressing other social and economic priorities such as the fight against poverty and the spread of HIV/AIDS, and in the promotion of social justice, human well-being and gender equality”</i></p> <p>Sustainability in Sport, IOC London 2012, p29</p>




<p>Lowering the Footprint of Sport</p> 	<p>Delivering best practice in all areas of sports organisations and events:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Carbon footprint and energy management • Design, construction and use of facilities • Water and waste management • Procurement and supply chain management • Sports travel impacts and scope 3 emissions 	<p><i>“Integrating sustainability information streams into management accounts and decision-making processes is fundamental for a positive legacy... The strongest results are achieved when sustainability is emphasised and promoted throughout the entire ‘product chain’ of supplies, products and services”</i></p> <p>Sustainability in Sport, IOC London 2012, p30</p>
<p>Sports in Community Building</p> 	<p>Contributing to legacies for communities to promote participation and inclusivity:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Multi-faith and inter-cultural understanding to support community integration • Older people and inter-generational encounters to tackle fragility or isolation • Raising aspirations to improve social cohesion and address inequalities (e.g. income, disability, gender) 	<p><i>“Sport has shown its potential to be a catalyst for creating more sustainable, healthy urban and non-urban environments and economies.... It also can be a means of achieving peace and reconciliation as a fundamental prerequisite for sustainability”</i></p> <p>Sustainability in Sport, IOC London 2012 p2,5</p>
<p>Sports as Global Connector</p> 	<p>Using the global-local connectivity of sports to support sustainability:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sport as connection point and unifying activity across divides and conflicts • Using sports to challenge neo-imperialism and the export of dominant values • Analysing how sports reflect or contest economic interests, global inequalities and established privilege 	<p><i>“Sport’s power for positive global change – its ability to initiate intercultural dialogue and the ways in which it can enhance equality, personal freedom and development – has repeatedly been recognised”</i></p> <p>Sustainability in Sport, IOC London 2012, p54</p>

Step 2 – Developing Pedagogy for Sustainability

Moving on from including relevant content that touches on sustainability concerns, the next step in developing an education ‘for’ (not just ‘about’) sustainability is to build in teaching and learning approaches that equip people to understand systems, envisage alternatives and lead change. These principles of pedagogical practice feature in the Education for Sustainability scholarship and are underpinned by transformative learning theories.

The example below shows 6 pedagogical principles important in Education for Sustainability and uses them to imagine possible learning activities in relation to Tourism. These pedagogical principles underpin the University’s *LIFT: Learning Innovation for Tomorrow* programme and support development of its graduate attributes (5E’s).

<p>FUTURES THINKING</p> 	<p><i>Futures thinking engages people in imagining their preferred visions for the future as well as the ways to achieve them. It involves exploration of assumptions and the creation of meaningful interpretations of sustainability in practice.</i></p> <p><i>The process of envisioning new alternatives helps people to see how they can take ownership and responsibility for creating more sustainable futures.</i></p>	<p>Learning Activity:</p> <p>Students imagine new models for tourism development in cities engaged in regeneration such as Gloucester. They map the aims of their development ideas in relation to desired sustainability outcomes, propose new tourism products and untapped potential aligned to those goals, and ‘back-cast’ the steps and policies that would be needed to bring these new scenarios to life.</p>
<p>SYSTEMS THINKING</p> 	<p><i>Systems thinking is an essential tool for sustainability, to move past silo-based and piecemeal responses that solve one problem whilst creating others. It recognises the complexity of sustainability across economic, human and natural systems.</i></p> <p><i>Systems thinking for sustainability requires approaches that take account of the ‘triple bottom line’ in real systems and that move beyond linear problem-solving responses and simple ‘cause-effect’ solutions.</i></p>	<p>Learning Activity:</p> <p>Students explore tourism dynamics in popular growth areas such as the Annapurna trail. They analyse the whole local system, integrating impacts on natural resources, relationships between visitors, tour operators and locals, alongside economic dynamics and power relations. They map wider interests at play, expose contradictions and propose possible ways to influence the whole system for the better.</p>
<p>CRITICALLY REFLECTIVE PRACTICE</p> 	<p><i>Authentic critical reflection enables people to critique existing practice establish new ways of thinking and acting, make informed decisions, and create real alternatives to present choices.</i></p> <p><i>It involves not just reflection on experience but interrogation of how people inter-relate and power operates and can be challenged, understanding differences, spotting embedded bias and exposing assumptions in current thinking.</i></p>	<p>Learning Activity:</p> <p>Students engage in socially critical analysis of tourism development plans and policies for a region or country. They consider the ways the area is marketed, how tourism businesses operate, consequences for ‘host’ communities and the hidden realities being sidelined in policy and proposals. They propose the ways they might engage and influence in similar scenarios in their future professional lives.</p>

<p>DECOLONISED LEARNING</p> 	<p><i>Decolonised learning develops intercultural understanding and helps people to think and work with global perspective, linking global-to-local in the context of divergent needs and values.</i></p> <p><i>It considers not just culture but power - going beyond the use of an international lens by including culturally-diverse content or global examples. Decolonising learning exposes dominant worldviews and fundamental interests that drive educational experiences and real world scenarios in all professions.</i></p>	<p>Learning Activity:</p> <p>Students analyse examples of tourism operations in action in a specific zone experiencing rising tourism development such as Costa Rica. They identify the realities of how power and inclusion works, as well as likely outcomes and the potential legacies for different stakeholders and players within the industry. They attempt to find hidden voices and to understand their own views and assumptions about the region and its needs in tourism development.</p>
<p>STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT</p> 	<p><i>The active engagement of people is needed to build sustainable futures collectively. Engaging diverse stakeholders and communities is essential to ensure that responses use and value different knowledge systems and perspectives.</i></p> <p><i>Learning how to conduct processes of participatory engagement and methods of action learning are key to motivation and ownership and to achieve positive change.</i></p>	<p>Learning Activity:</p> <p>Students work out how to generate their own certification models for sustainability in tourism, proposing suitable criteria and methods for achieving appropriate participation in developing the framework. They scope the types of activities that could be assessed and their underlying priorities or values, set possible indicators for impact and/or performance and compare their models against existing examples used in the industry.</p>
<p>LEARNER EMPOWERMENT</p> 	<p><i>Learner empowerment challenges the basis of interaction between educator and learner, supporting people to see themselves as leaders who can bring about change.</i></p> <p><i>Involving people actively to co-create academic experiences and establish the 'intellectual commons' for their learning helps to develop change skills and supports them to be influential in their profession. Enabling students to bring change to the curriculum and assessments supports this learning and provides experience in influencing change.</i></p>	<p>Learning Activity:</p> <p>Students devise interventions in tourism to make progress on significant sustainability concerns of importance to them and perhaps not addressed through existing learning experiences, such as child exploitation in the tourism industry. They identify issues, evidence and arguments, defining desired outcomes as well as proposing ways to input to real scenarios, where possible gaining real experience and understanding of change processes or analyzing others' experiences.</p>

Reference Points: this briefing draws on key principles of Education for Sustainability as reflected in reports to mark the United Nations Decade of Education for Sustainable Development (2005-2014) - see [Tilbury \(2011\)](#) and materials created for [academic development in sustainability](#) at the University of Gloucestershire, by Dr Alex Ryan and Prof Daniella Tilbury.