

Universities talk, students walk: promoting innovative sustainability projects

Innovative
sustainability
projects

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Claus-Heinrich Daub, Marina Hasler,
Arie Hans Verkuil and Uta Milow

*Institute of Management, University of Applied Sciences and
Arts Northwestern Switzerland, Windisch, Switzerland*

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Abstract

Purpose – This paper aims to describe an innovative approach of integrating sustainability into the structures and processes of a business school without creating resistance.

Design/methodology/approach – A sustainable entrepreneurship competition was embedded as an independent programme in an already existing business plan competition at the School of Business FHNW. The paper shows, which structural elements of the competition had to be adapted to the needs of sustainable entrepreneurs.

Findings – The paper outlines aspects that need to be considered and steps that need to be taken to run a sustainable entrepreneurship competition supporting as many high-quality projects as possible. It describes the importance of developing an independent instrument that meets the specific needs of sustainable entrepreneurs in project planning. The sustainable innovation plan is explained.

Social implications – The student projects are developed at the School of Business FHNW as part of the entrepreneurship competition, which has been successfully carried out twice. They have numerous measurable positive social and ecological effects, which are described by the students in their sustainable innovation plans and are subsequently reflected in the realization of the projects.

Originality/value – Using the example of the Swiss Student Sustainability Challenge, the paper demonstrates under which conditions a sustainability project can be successfully integrated into the existing structures of an institution of higher education and develop into a beacon project of the university. Other universities can make use of these findings to launch comparable projects at their institutions.

Keywords Sustainable development, Sustainable entrepreneurship, Sustainable innovation, Business schools, Business incubators, Business plan competitions

Paper type Conceptual paper

1. Introduction

Institutions of higher education are linked to sustainability issues in a variety of ways. Since the publication of the *Talloires Declaration*, signed 30 years ago by over 500 university presidents, chancellors and rectors ([Association of University Leaders for a Sustainable Future, ULSF, 1990](#)), they have made various efforts to contribute to sustainable development ([Wu and Shen, 2016](#); [Amaral et al., 2015](#)). First and foremost, they follow their



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educational mission and use education as a tool to teach young people the skills that enable them to become critically reflective, responsible professionals and change agents (Mochizuki and Fadeeva, 2010). This is a great responsibility, not least because young people undergo profound changes in the course of their undergraduate years with regard to their epistemological assumptions and their identity, and an examination of the sustainability issue offers them the opportunity to receive important new impulses for their intellectual-moral development and identity development (Myers and Beringer, 2010). The concept of education for sustainable development (ESD) has been the subject of intense discussion for some 20 years (Springett and Kearins, 2001; Fien, 2002; Wright, 2002; Wals and Jickling, 2002). However, many universities still lack a systematic integration of sustainability issues into curricula (Findler *et al.*, 2019; Wu and Shen, 2016). This applies in particular to non-environmental disciplines. Quian, for example, describes the path, paved with numerous stumbling blocks, of anchoring the topic of sustainability in accounting (Quian, 2013) and Barber *et al.* (2014) report similarly on numerous barriers that had to be overcome in the attempt to develop and implementing ESD at the *University of New Hampshire* business school. However, both business schools and technical faculties face challenges in this respect. In their study of technical universities, Holmberg *et al.* (2008) state that the academic and engineering culture is relatively resistant to sustainability integration. They diagnose internal factors, as well as societal-contextual factors as the most important factors influencing resistance. Further, they propose the solution of intensive cooperation with lecturers as sources of knowledge rather than as subjects of teaching efforts.

Overall, academic literature agrees that the topic of sustainability is rarely systematically integrated into teaching, research and operations at universities or schools. There are concepts such as the *Whole-of-University Approach to Educating for Sustainability* developed and published by Mcmillin and Dyball (2009). There are also several universities such as the *Eberswalde University for Sustainable Development*, which sees its entire teaching and research offering as a contribution to sustainable development. Finally, the key competencies that students should acquire in the field of sustainability have largely been clarified (Wiek *et al.*, 2011). For many institutions of higher education, however, such models, role models and theoretical findings are not sufficient to anchor sustainability in teaching, research and practice. Structural or procedural obstacles often hamper well-intentioned initiatives and projects launched with a great deal of commitment by individual lecturers, so that many of these initiatives and projects quickly lose momentum and the results are not convincing. The literature rarely reports such failures. From the descriptions of various case studies, which ultimately led to a successful result, it can be seen, however, which hurdles had to be cleared and resistance overcome to lead the projects to success (Barber *et al.*, 2014; Peet *et al.*, 2004; Holmberg *et al.*, 2008; Pesonen, 2003). Not only does this mean that valuable energy is lost; many universities but also fail to fulfil their social mandate of acting as change agents in the process of sustainable development (Mcmillin and Dyball, 2009).

One of the main reasons why many efforts fail is directly linked to the nature of the initiatives and projects. What almost all of them have in common is the fact that they come “from outside” and have to be implemented or integrated into an existing structure, curriculum or programme. One possible way forward could be to develop and implement projects that promise immediate benefits for universities in one of their core areas of teaching and research, while at the same time contributing to sustainable development as a side effect. This insight is based on considerations developed within the academic debate on corporate social responsibility and corporate sustainability (Schaltegger, 2014; Salzmann *et al.*, 2005; Marrewijk, 2003; Carroll, 1999). Both concepts, which are largely identical, reflect the fact that companies can and should exploit global social and environmental challenges as business opportunities

(Hart, 2007). Universities are mostly nonprofit organizations and not companies, so the idea of taking advantage of business opportunities is not directly transferable. However, the idea of an entrepreneurial university developed in the early 1980s is still being intensively discussed today (Klofsten *et al.*, 2019). In addition, the discourse on corporate responsibility increasingly calls on nonprofit organizations such as associations, societies and universities to incorporate ecological and social aspects into their structures, processes and activities (Daub *et al.*, 2014). From this perspective, sustainable campus initiatives can be seen as the immediate reaction of universities to such demands (Alshuwaikhat and Abubakar, 2008). Vaughter *et al.* (2013) have recently elaborated on the great importance of such initiatives as one of three areas of research on sustainability in post-secondary education.

A direct benefit for a university or a school such as a business school can arise from the fact that a project may contribute to measurable savings, for example, in resources. This is regularly the case when sustainable campus initiatives or campus greening programmes lead to energy savings and the funds released can then be used by the university for further energy optimization or for other purposes (Faghihi *et al.*, 2016). Another example of this occurs when a sustainability activity is consistently linked to an existing activity or structure that is not directly related to the sustainability issue. It was originally established by the university to provide a core service in the areas of teaching or research. This could be, for example, a regular teaching module, a research project or a centre for transferring research findings into practice. The latter in particular is attributed to increasing importance today (Friedman and Silberman, 2003). Or, as in the case discussed here, the business plan competition of a school of business was taken as a basis for the development of a student sustainability challenge. Originally emerging from considerations as to how the societal commitment of students could be strengthened, this programme for the promotion of sustainable and social entrepreneurship was embedded in the business plan competition and was able to develop independently and successfully.

In the following, we first provide an overview of the concept of sustainable entrepreneurship with the aim of presenting this programme as an innovative alternative approach to sustainability initiatives and programmes at universities, which have to be implemented from the outside, sometimes in the face of considerable resistance. Subsequently, we present support systems, which empower entrepreneurs to develop an innovation and to transform it into a venture, namely, business incubators, business plans and business plan competitions. Universities are involved in these areas in many ways (Shane, 2004; Honig, 2004). Finally, in the specific case of the *School of Business FHNW*, this paper describes how it was possible to embed a sustainability challenge into an existing business plan competition as an independent programme. This has already generated various successful student projects in the field of sustainability and is now regarded by the university as a beacon project with which it can evidence its commitment to sustainability.

2. Sustainable entrepreneurship and hybrid organizations

The term sustainable entrepreneurship combines two terms with very different traditions. The idea of entrepreneurship originates from Schumpeter's work on the significance and function of innovations, in particular, in times of technological and economic change (Schumpeter, 1934, 1939, 1942). The entrepreneur is understood as an innovator who identifies entrepreneurial opportunities, evaluates them and finally turns them into a successful business model (Shane and Venkatamaran, 2000). He explicitly focuses on expected profit. Schumpeter sees this as the particular potential of entrepreneurship as an agent of social change. Only if an entrepreneur has the prospect of economic profit can he overcome insecurity, uncertainty and resistance (Zapf, 1989, p. 175). In business school teaching and research, entrepreneurship has played an

important role for many years. The relevance of this topic has grown once again since an emerging stream of academic literature has shown the great potential of entrepreneurial thinking for regional economic development (Fretschner and Weber, 2013). Results from research on entrepreneurship are reported to an academic audience in specialized journals such as *Entrepreneurship Theory and Practice*, the *Journal of Business Venturing* or the *Strategic Entrepreneurship Journal*. The OECD has also dealt extensively with the subject of education for entrepreneurship in a report (OECD, 2009).

The concept of sustainability, in turn, became more widely known through the publication of the report by the Brundtland Commission, which was launched by the United Nations in the early 1980s. It concludes that sustainable development can only be achieved if each generation ensures that the next generation will also be able to meet its essential needs (World Commission on Environment and Development, 1987). Sustainability is thus a normative guiding idea. It calls on humanity to act collectively to ensure its own long-term survival on planet Earth. The idea of sustainability is often represented graphically in the form of three interlocking circles or three pillars. Each circle or pillar symbolizes one of the three target dimensions of society, environment and economy. The sustainability concept assumes that the other two dimensions must be taken into account when concrete measures are implemented in one area (Interdepartmental Sustainable Development Committee, 2007). The idea of sustainability is operationalized internationally in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, a global roadmap that names 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDG), 168 targets and around 220 indicators, whereby the specification and implementation of concrete measures for implementation are left to the individual countries (United Nations, 2017). The combination of the ideas of entrepreneurial thinking and sustainable action is based on the assumption that entrepreneurial thinking and behaviour can be a key to overcoming environmental and social challenges ahead. If entrepreneurs recognize existing problems as challenges and develop profit-oriented business models to address them, this could make an important contribution to solving them (Hanhohov and Baldacchino, 2018). Sustainable entrepreneurship is thus “the discovery, creation, evaluation and exploitation of opportunities to create future goods and services that are consistent with sustainable development goals” (Pacheco *et al.*, 2010, p. 471).

Thereby, it does not matter whether a sustainable, environmental or social entrepreneur brought about the solution to the problem. Rather, the concepts from which these terms emerged overlap in numerous ways. Sustainable entrepreneurship differs from the concepts of environmental entrepreneurship, ecopreneurship and green entrepreneurship (Binder and Belz, 2015; Nikolaou *et al.*, 2011; Dixon and Clifford, 2007) and social entrepreneurship (Defourny and Nyssens, 2010) primarily in its broader focus on all three dimensions of sustainability (Hall *et al.*, 2010). Ecopreneurs usually focus on technical solutions to environmental problems, while social entrepreneurs, in turn, seek targeted solutions to social challenges, using a mission-driven approach and aiming to create social values (Dean and McMullen, 2007; Phillips *et al.*, 2015). With regard to the procurement and use of financial resources, social entrepreneurship literature presents numerous debates between different schools (Defourny and Nyssens, 2010; Dees and Anderson, 2006). The literature agrees that there are two forms of organization of social enterprises: they are either organized as non-profit organizations that pursue commercial activities solely for the purpose of financing their mission or as social enterprises that see themselves as entrepreneurs in the Schumpeter sense. They generate revenues on the market in a targeted manner, with their profit orientation also taking a back seat to the mission (Littlewood and Holt, 2018).

As the dividing lines are rarely clear, the academic literature has for some time referred to hybrid organizations (Holt and Littlewood, 2015; Battilana and Lee, 2014; Haigh and Hoffman,

2012). These are characterized by the fact that they pursue commercial activities exclusively to achieve their ecological or social objectives. They carry out their activities based on ethical convictions, as they want to create social benefits or bring about social change, combining aspects of charity and business (Hahn *et al.*, 2018; Ebrahim *et al.*, 2014). Bringing these considerations together, one could, therefore, state that hybrid organizations are organizations developed and managed by sustainable entrepreneurs whose activities are more or less explicitly oriented towards the guiding principle of sustainable development. They see business opportunities in problems and transform them into innovative products or services that can survive on the market. Often they regard their activities as a creative act (Schaltegger and Wagner, 2011). They differentiate themselves from nonprofit actors mainly by tracking down, developing and marketing future goods and services (Venkataraman, 1997; Cohen and Winn, 2007) and thereby exposing themselves to economic and financial risks.

Current papers on the state of research in the field of sustainable entrepreneurship (Sarango-Lalangui *et al.*, 2018; Gast, *et al.*, 2017; Binder and Belz, 2015) show that there are still numerous unanswered research questions in this field. It is not surprising that the literature is developing in such a dynamic way: sustainable entrepreneurs are subject to particularly high social expectations in view of climate change. They are regarded as “wealth generators” (Tilley and Young, 2006) and, as such, their innovations should contribute to solving global problems. Various concepts have already been discussed in the literature on how this can be achieved. Several authors have pointed out that entrepreneurial orientation and the availability of business knowledge are two important prerequisites for successfully implementing sustainable business models (Kuckertz and Wagner, 2010; Politis, 2005). Other scholars have examined support systems that empower sustainable or social entrepreneurs to develop, advance and implement their ideas. These include in particular government-funding agencies, venture capitalists, designers, technology and human capital accessible to social entrepreneurs (Gundry *et al.*, 2011). Two of the support systems that can be regarded as particularly promising in terms of using the capacities of sustainable entrepreneurs to overcome global problems are business incubators and business plan competitions tailored specifically to sustainable entrepreneurs. We discuss these in the following.

3. Business incubators and business plan competitions

For many years entrepreneurs are the subject of numerous political hopes regarding their potential contributions to regional economic development, including job creation (Eriksson and Rataj, 2019). The first system for promoting innovative business startups was established in the USA as early as the 1950s. Business incubators proved to be one of the most important institutions. These are organizations that were established to specifically support entrepreneurs and help startups grow into successful companies. The business incubator itself is often a company that operates a physical facility that is used by several startups. It provides them with a bundle of resources and services. These include management guidance, consulting and the provision of a network in which the startup is supervised and supported over a certain period of time (Hackett and Dilts, 2004). Although the effectiveness of such business incubators is controversial in the current literature (Lasrado *et al.*, 2016; Chwolka and Raith, 2012; Al-Mubarak and Schrödl, 2011), they have been growing steadily in recent years. University-managed incubators are a special case. They are part of academic entrepreneurship, with which students and graduates of a university are specifically supported (Shane, 2004). These include patent applications, support for the transfer of spin-offs into new companies, industrial research collaborations and targeted entrepreneurial training.

Part of such training is often formalized management practices, with the help of which startups can develop their innovation in a standardized, systematic way. Business plans are

an example of this. Today, they are primarily required by banks and other investors before a decision is made on a financial commitment. It is important to mention that the benefits of business planning are controversially discussed in the academic literature, as it can be harmful to creativeness and the openness to innovative approaches if entrepreneurs have to please potential investors in these written documentations (Fichter and Tiemann, 2015). Still, there is widespread agreement that a carefully prepared business plan is a useful instrument for describing business and explaining which strategies are needed to operate successfully in which markets (Brinckmann *et al.*, 2010; Gruber, 2007; Delmar and Shane, 2003). Accordingly, many universities also enable their students to create a business plan through teaching modules or special programmes. Honig has identified that 78 of the 100 top business schools in the US offer courses on business plan preparation (Honig, 2004). A special form of business planning promotion is business plan competitions, which are now held in many countries to strengthen entrepreneurial thinking and promote regional development (Tipu, 2019; Lange *et al.*, 2007). Individual entrepreneurs or teams compete against each other with their business plans to convince a jury of their business idea. If they prove successful, they can expect benefits such as corporate sponsorship, prize money or prizes in kind such as free professional services (Russell *et al.*, 2008). In practice, a written business plan is usually drawn up on the basis of an instrument that contains the most relevant questions to which entrepreneurs must find answers. These include which key partners they would like to involve in the development of their venture, which customer segments they would like to address with their products or services or where they obtain their resources from. A widely used tool in the market is the business model canvas by Osterwalder and Pigneur (2010).

Support systems, programmes and instruments tailored specifically to the needs of social or sustainable entrepreneurs have been developed and offered in recent years. One example of a business incubator specializing in sustainable entrepreneurs is the global network of *Impact Hubs*, which was founded in London in 2005 and currently includes some physical facilities where startups can work and network. In Switzerland, such hubs exist in Zurich, Geneva, Lausanne, Bern and Basel. There are also specific sustainable, social or “green” entrepreneurship competitions. These usually give young people – often students – the opportunity to develop a business plan individually or in groups, to defend their idea of a new product or service before a jury and, if successful, to win prize money. The formats range from simple teaching modules to quite complex competitions that run over a period of several months and into which various elements known from business incubators are integrated. One example is the *Global Social Entrepreneurship Competition (GSEC)* at the *University of Washington* (Huster *et al.*, 2016). An example of a competition that was not initiated by a university and is specifically aimed at green entrepreneurs is the ideas competitions *Climate Launchpad* of the public-private partnership *Climate-KIC* supported by the *European Institute of Innovation and Technology (EIT)*.

Since juries in competitions need standardized documents on the basis of which they can decide on the placement of individual entrepreneurs, planning instruments have been developed in the context of business plan competitions and adapted to the specific needs of social and sustainable entrepreneurs. An example of this is the *Sustainable Business Canvas* developed at the University of Oldenburg in Germany. Overall, the support systems for sustainable entrepreneurs are still in their infancy. Even universities have numerous deficits in supporting sustainable entrepreneurs, as Tiemann *et al.* (2018) recently discovered.

4. The Swiss student sustainability challenge

The *Swiss Student Sustainability Challenge (SSSC)* was launched in 2016 at the *School of Business FHNW*. The FHNW is one of Switzerland’s leading universities of applied sciences

and arts, actively involved in teaching, research, continuing education and service provision. It is both innovative and practice-oriented. The starting point for the SSSC was a request from the *Mercator Foundation Switzerland*, which was looking for partner universities to establish a programme to strengthen the voluntary social commitment of students. This was based on the observation that there are hardly any established programmes at universities that motivate students to get involved in community work and support them when they embark on a project. The *School of Business FHNW* awarded funding by the *Mercator Foundation* for its innovative approach to promote the social commitment of students. Instead of simply building up a support office for the consultation of interested students, the programme was outlined as an annual sustainability competition, to which students can submit their ideas and projects. The innovative approach was to take the best of two worlds: Elements from the classical business plan competitions have been enriched with elements from the non-profit sector and made accessible to all types of student initiatives in the field of sustainability – from associations over one time events to green startups. The challenge was designed on the basis of experience gained at the *School of Business FHNW* since 2014 with a conventional business plan competition called *Swiss Startup Challenge*. The following structural elements were adopted from this competition:

- The set up as a competition that starts at the beginning of the spring semester and extends into the autumn semester.
- The milestones, starting with the submission of a project outline, pitching it before a first internal jury, the elaboration of a detailed project plan by the teams encouraged by the jury, and finally pitching a second time before a final jury.
- Extensive support services in the form of training sessions and coaching from experienced coaches, which students can take advantage of free of charge during the competition.
- The provision of an online tool with which students can illustrate and systematically work on their project by writing a Sustainable Innovation Plan. Despite the controversial discussions on the benefits of such extensive documentation, the need to support the students with guiding questions was stronger. Especially regarding the fact that most are not experienced in setting up such extensive projects at all.
- An award in the form of prize money awarded to the best three project ideas.

Many of the elements have been adapted to meet the specific needs and characteristics of the sustainability projects submitted. Coaches with specific expertise such as development cooperation have been provided and the topics of input sessions or workshops have been expanded e.g. with sessions on impact investing. An overall list of relevant changes can be found in [Table I](#).

The most important adaptation concerned the tool used by the students whose projects reached the final to systematically develop and present them. The already existing business plan instrument from the startup challenge had been developed on the basis of the business model canvas by [Osterwalder and Pigneur \(2010\)](#) by a spin-off of the university called *getLaunched* and was available to the students in the form of an online tool. However, this tool was only partially suitable for the development and mapping of a sustainable initiative and led to the development of a tool called the *Sustainable Innovation Plan (SIP)*, which was integrated into the *getLaunched* platform. The SIP differs from a classic business plan in several respects. In the first step, it allows a detailed description of the sustainable development challenge to be addressed by the innovation. Potential social and ecological

Table I.
Synergies between
the incubators and
necessary adaptation

	Synergies with existing conventional startup incubator	Adaptation for sustainable innovation incubator
SIP	Using existing business plan platform getLaunched.ch, questions in both tools partially overlap	Adding and emphasizing topics such as initial situation, impact and outcome as well as evaluation. Allowing for more options in terms of money streams – as recipients are often not the ones paying for an offer, especially in the non-profit segment. Strengthening the role of strategic partnerships
Coaching	Some coaches are coaching in both programmes, especially in the field of marketing, communication, legal, accounting, and finance	Additional coaches in specific fields have been provided, e.g. in development cooperation, life cycle assessment, project management, non-profit management
Input sessions and workshops	Participants of the SSSC can attend input sessions of other incubation programmes on various topics – from social media marketing to human resource management and patent rights	Additional workshops complete the offers, e.g. on purposeful pitching, impact investing or introduction to the SIP
Jury sessions	Taking the overall structure of two jury sessions to create selection funnel, a limited number of 1-2 jury members can and should be the same in both programmes	Setting up the jury with experts in sustainability, sustainable entrepreneurship and from the non-profit sector allows for the right deep-dive questions and a better selection
Prize money	Similar sum of prize money makes sure the programmes are valued equally amongst students and staff	The need to have a designated prize for sustainable startups and not just a special price in a conventional startup competition allows for quality, interesting cases and real benefits for participating project teams
Networking possibilities	–	Inviting social or sustainable entrepreneurs to an interactive dinner with programme participants where exchange on experiences is the key
Award ceremony	Taking over the idea of an award ceremony	Making sure to create a unique event set-up that fits the audience (e.g. vegetarian buffet)

challenges, which are related to the solution, should be explicitly described in this section of the plan. In addition, the needs and requirements of stakeholders are to be presented and taken into account in further planning. This should ensure that students systematically reflect on the potential impact of their innovation from the very beginning of their planning. This allows them to measure this impact at a later stage in a specific section of the SIP. A conventional business plan lacks such a module in which the social and ecological impact of the venture can be mapped. The question of measuring performance is highly relevant, in particular for social and sustainable entrepreneurs, whose innovations often lead to the founding of a social enterprise or a hybrid firm (Holt and Littlewood, 2015; Ebrahim and Rangan, 2014). The SIP also offers the possibility of adequately mapping the sometimes complex financial relationships between the project, the service recipients and the service providers. Depending on the type of problem solving, hybrid organizations draw their financial resources from different sources (Haigh and Hoffman, 2014). Finally, the SIP allows

its users to explore in detail potential partnerships with whom the innovation can be jointly implemented. In their study on hybrid organizations in early phases of path generations, [Alexius and Furusten \(2019\)](#) describe how such organizations like to strive for dialogue and want to be a partner rather than a rival.

As a deviation from the startup challenge, it was stipulated for the SSSC that all coaches and members of the two juries should work free of charge. This was intended to signal that not only were the students making a commitment to society but also that the professionals who supported them were doing so too. The fact that the attempt to win voluntary supporters for the project proved to be problem-free and that renowned professionals could be recruited both for the juries and for the coaching activities was probably due not least to the type of projects submitted and the basic setting of the competition. This is because ventures that are mission-driven usually meet with greater sympathy than conventional business ventures. In this respect, it was not surprising that a cooperative life insurance company could be won as the sponsor of prize money of 25,000 Swiss francs per year without any major acquisition effort. This sum also corresponded to the sum provided for the conventional startup challenge. This was intended to signal to the student that projects designed for sustainability are to be seen as being on a par with conventional startups. Of course, the mixture of financing partners with Mercator Foundation, the cooperative life insurance company and FHNW involved also led to conflicting interests, for example, in terms of the target group of the programme (staying local vs expanding to other universities, students only vs young people in general etc.). In addition, one of the major assets of the SSSC – the high interlinkage of the competition with study programmes – sometimes led to friction as academic standards and methods not always correspond to the practical implementation approaches.

5. Conclusion

Experiences from numerous projects and programmes at institutions of higher education have shown that attempts to integrate the topic of sustainability into teaching, research and operations often encounter resistance ([Barber et al., 2014](#); [Quian, 2013](#); [Peet et al., 2004](#); [Holmberg et al., 2008](#); [Pesonen, 2003](#)). This means that much valuable energy is lost and the results of projects and programmes rarely meet the expectations placed on them. Moreover, the systematic integration of sustainability into teaching, research and the operation of an institution of higher education is only sporadic. In this article, a new strategic approach is presented as a possible way out of this situation. It aims to embed a sustainable project into the structures and processes of a school of business in such a way that it recognizes an immediate benefit and is therefore interested in its implementation. The prerequisite for this is that there is a teaching unit, a project or a programme at the school concerned to which the sustainable project can be connected. This was the case with the case study presented here, the *Swiss Student Sustainability Challenge*. It was integrated into the structure of the already existing business plan competition of the *School of Business FHNW*. It was also possible to use a great deal of the experience gained in the existing competition for this project to promote sustainable entrepreneurship. At the same time, some important adjustments were made to the existing concept. This was due to the observation that sustainable entrepreneurs have particular needs compared to conventional entrepreneurs.

The specific constellation within which the SSSC could be developed and which led to its success also marks the most significant limitation of this study. However, assuming that business planning is widespread in an increasing number of business schools ([Honig, 2004](#)) and that business plan competitions enjoy a high level of popularity ([Tipu, 2019](#); [Russell et al., 2008](#)), there is some potential to develop a project like the SSSC elsewhere. However, research in the field of sustainable entrepreneurship must also continue to develop for this

purpose. More business schools are likely to be interested only if the potential of this particular form of entrepreneurship becomes apparent for the development of innovative contributions to sustainable development. Future research projects could focus on identifying further settings at an institution of higher education in which a sustainable project could be embedded without operating like a foreign body.

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About the authors

Claus-Heinrich Daub PhD, works as a Professor of Sustainable Management and Marketing at the School of Business, FHNW University of Applied Sciences and Arts Northwestern Switzerland. His research focus on sustainable management, corporate sustainability, corporate social responsibility, sustainable development, sustainable marketing and sustainable entrepreneurship, and has been published in the *Journal of Business Ethics*, *Journal of Cleaner Production*, *Business Strategy and the Environment*, *European Journal of Marketing*, *International Journal of Sustainable Development and World Ecology*, among others. Claus-Heinrich Daub is the corresponding author can be contacted at: clausheinrich.daub@fhnw.ch

Marina Hasler, MA, works as a Research Associate at the School of Business FHNW. Her areas of responsibilities are practice oriented research and development projects in the fields of sustainability, entrepreneurship and organizational development. Within this scope, she is responsible for the overall management of the Swiss Student Sustainability Challenge described in this article.

Arie Hans Verkuil, PhD, works as a Professor of Management and Leadership, Head of the Institute of Management and member of the Institute Leader Conference, FHNW School of Business. His recent research and publications center on entrepreneurship and innovation. He serves as jury president of the Swiss Startup Challenge, the Swiss Student Sustainability Challenge and the Swiss Innovation Challenge.

Uta Milow, PhD, works as a Professor of Economics at the School of Business FHNW. Her research focuses on sustainable entrepreneurship, especially on circular economy business models. Other areas of interest are national and international market entry conditions and international and development economics. She is head of an MBA program. Her past work includes development of new executive programs and other university development tasks.

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