

A SYNERGISTIC APPROACH TO SUSTAINABILITY IN HIGHER EDUCATION

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As the war caused by Russia's occupation in 2014 and full invasion in 2022 goes on, Ukrainian citizens are showing their resilience by continuing with life's activities, including work, taking care of family, and pursuing an education. The impact on the environment from the war has also been tremendous, disrupting efforts to clean up industrial pollution of the air, water, and land caused by decades of irresponsible operational practices during Soviet times. Ukraine has endorsed United Nations efforts on clean water and engaged in interstate cooperation on management of water resources and efforts to ameliorate the environmental consequences of armed conflicts. The country has also signed on to other international environmental protocols and many Ukrainians support environmental initiatives such as recycling and spending time in nature as good for physical and mental health.

In talking with Ukrainian educators and government officials, it is clear there is a need to increase awareness, ecological knowledge, and civic engagement regarding the environment with students and the public. This is especially true because of the war and past mismanagement, as well as the progression of a modernizing society on track to join the European Union. International investors and others considering contributing to the rebuilding of the country are also figuring these elements of sustainability into their assessments of potential projects and the workforce and good governance necessary for long-term success. It is no surprise that environmental science areas of most interest in Ukraine include ecological systems management, land and water pollution, and minimizing the consequences of radioactive pollution. Reinforcing the nature-culture connection that is so strong in Ukraine will enable teachers to address social-emotional needs of their students. In this United Nations Decade of Ecological Restoration (2021-2030, #GenerationRestoration), an initiative to include sustainability throughout the curriculum and practices of higher education is greatly needed. Wals and Jickling (2002, p. 230) noted that "Sustainability provides colleges and universities an opportunity to confront their core values, their practices, their entrenched pedagogies, the way they program for student learning, the way they think about resources and allocate these resources and their relationships with the broader community."

As we enter a fifth decade of trying to infuse sustainability into every part of life, it is still not common for higher education institutions to connect human

ecology, resiliency, and environmental science throughout their curriculum. At the same time, more attention is being placed on the need for higher education to participate as part of the sustainability movement. Incorporating culture and art into sustainability efforts is imperative, especially to address social-emotional health. Culture is a critical piece of scaling up to “sustainable, inclusive and equitable outcomes” (Singh et al., 2019, p. 237) that includes transfers of knowledge from one place to another and one human generation to another. Higher education institutions are uniquely placed to integrate science, sustainability, and culture, and to show the necessity for all of them to be present in order to facilitate innovation.

What would a curriculum oriented to take advantage of the synergies of integrating science, sustainability, and culture look like? A university’s psychology department could be the place to pioneer such a curriculum. In the new Ukraine, focus will be on:

- A workforce prepared for the industries and services of the future;
- Civic engagement empowering citizens to take leadership in their communities;
- Democracy-building, with ethical expectations for public officials and citizen participation in voting and running for public office;
- Good governance, incorporating best practices for business and government; and
- Accomplishing all of these measures sustainably, with consideration for the environment at the forefront.

Preparing young people for these transformative challenges will be the job of higher education. Including them in the drive to rebuild the economy and society is critical, as their skills and ideas are needed. Having experienced the occupation and war firsthand as children and young adults, and as the leaders of tomorrow, students have views about the kind of society in which they want to live. They are also underestimated in their ability to advocate for and initiate change (Trott, 2019). Their views need to be incorporated into a synergistic, future-forward approach to curriculum addressing the challenges and opportunities (of which there are many) ahead. Psychology departments are well-suited for trying new initiatives to understand how best to do it.

A start could be to remap existing curriculum and incorporate sustainability elements into it. This move would ensure that students and teachers-in-training are exposed to environmental science, ecological systems, climate change, and environmental resources management. Ecological systems management is the connection between our planet’s ecological boundaries and human dimensions, so students would learn about the psychological benefits of being in nature, how they translate to children’s learning, resilience, and behavior change, and how pedagogical methods used in sustainability education can help teachers provide more learning opportunities. Other opportunities could include:

- Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) seminars for ecology and psychology subjects, including English as a Tool in Teaching Critical Thinking through Environmental Education. This seminar would incorporate environmental literature, social-emotional health, and critical thinking activities for graduate students and experienced teachers.
- Certificate Programs with the Psychology and Pedagogy faculty on Integrative Approaches to Ecological Education and Practical Psychology: Innovative Technologies in Education for future teachers that focus on integrating ecology, mental health and resilience, and English language.

With more time, new curriculum can be proposed, written, approved, and made part of the university's offerings. A model for such a course could be Schoobio (2023), written by the author for middle and high school students but adaptable for university level. This curriculum guides students through a collaborative civic engagement process, enabling students to research, design, and make decisions about a place close to them: their school grounds.

Schoobio uses increasing biocultural diversity on school grounds as the vehicle for teaching middle- to high school students as well as college students the process for driving change in their communities. In most cases, driving change means addressing policies and getting the attention of decision makers who may be resistant to change or focused on budgets or "the way we've always done things." By engaging in transdisciplinary activities that encompass science, social science, communication, design, planning, and making presentations, students discover that making change happen takes perseverance, research, attention to detail, including all voices, coming to consensus, and clear communication of intentions, needs, and solutions.

Schoobio walks students through this process, starting with researching the concept of biocultural diversity and defining terms such as "culture" and "nature," which may have different meanings to different people. They then utilize field research protocols to make a baseline map of their school grounds and collect data on the types of plants and animals present. Next they look at how other school grounds are designed with these features in mind. With all of this information in hand, students work together to create their own ideal biocultural school ground, plotting their ideas on updated maps and writing a plan with details to show how their ideas can actually happen. They then present their plan to school leaders with a specific request to change the policies or management necessary to implement it.

While Schoobio focuses on biocultural school grounds, thus transforming local habitats to benefit humans and wildlife, the model can work for any project intended to improve society. The key is that students are driving the change and teachers and others from the community are supporting them in building their civic engagement skills.

Positioning the higher education system for the new Ukraine is essential so that

its citizens can take advantage of the opportunities to come. Approaching education reform in a synergistic manner will ensure that along with economic advances, renewal of the environment and civil society will also make great progress.

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IMPLEMENTATION OF THE “WRITING FOR INCLUSION” (WIN) PROJECT IN THE CONDITIONS OF WAR IN UKRAINE

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Inclusion is a long-term key priority for the European Union to ensure diversity in Europe. In 2010, the European Commission launched the Europe 2020 Strategy, which promotes social cohesion and development. The “Writing for Inclusion” (WIN) project focuses on raising awareness, changing perceptions, and providing resources to implement inclusion in education through the conception of Care in Education.

The start of the war in Ukraine in February, 2022 fundamentally changed the socio-economic, cultural and educational situation. This situation had a particularly strong impact on to educational system as well.

Due to this the purpose of the article is to analyze the peculiarities of implementation of the “Writing for inclusion” (WIN) project in the conditions of war in Ukraine.

The “Writing for inclusion” (WIN) project focuses on raising awareness, changing