



ACTION PLAN 2019-2020



The COPERNICUS Alliance (CA) is the European Network on Higher Education for Sustainable Development.

The present document was prepared by Ingrid Mulà (CA Executive Director, University of Girona, Spain), Anne B. Zimmermann (CA President, University of Bern, Switzerland), and Mario Diethart (CA Network Manager, University of Graz, Austria), on the basis of the Vision-and-Action Workshop that took place with present, past and future CA members in Girona, Spain, from 31 January to 1 February 2019. The document benefitted from two rounds of consultation: the first with the CA Advisory Board and the second with CA Members.

Published by:

COPERNICUS Alliance e.V., Scharnhorststrasse 1, Lüneburg 21335, Germany

COPERNICUS Alliance Executive Office, Universitat de Girona, Plaça Sant Domènec 9, 17002 Girona, Spain

© COPERNICUS Alliance 2019

CONTENTS

- Our vision, mission and values..... 4
- Context and purpose 4
- Strategy development 6
- Our strategy 2019-2020..... 7
- Goal 1: Promote ESD leadership and professional development 7
- Goal 2: Develop transformative quality assurance and assessment for the SDGs..... 8
- Goal 3: Foster experience-based support for ESD 8
- Goal 4: Conduct advocacy work for higher education for sustainable development 9
- Goal 5: Ensure CA’s organisational resilience, capacity to innovate, and ability to serve its members . 10
- Strategy implementation indicators 12

Our vision, mission and values

Vision

“The COPERNICUS Alliance will be the leading European network helping people and institutions in a higher education environment to creatively address the challenges of tomorrow in a collaborative way, to jointly build the knowledge and competences needed for global sustainable development, and to actively engage with policy-makers and community stakeholders.”

Mission

The COPERNICUS Alliance (CA) aims to enable European higher education institutions and their partners to jointly identify challenges in higher education for sustainable development (HESD) and spearhead development of processes, tools, and knowledge to address these challenges from a whole-institution perspective. The CA provides a platform and organizes events where its current and future members can share resources and co-develop innovative education for sustainable development initiatives. It provides Micro Funds for members’ networking efforts and supports joint HESD proposals through advice and alliances. The CA also promotes engagement with policy-makers and community stakeholders at the European and global levels and regularly celebrates members’ ambassador activities. The CA resolutely commits to reducing the ecological footprint of its activities.

Values

Respect, commitment, and collaboration are deemed the highest values of the CA.

- **Respect** underpins members’ interactions and collaboration. Our members greatly appreciate the diversity of the CA community and the inspiration they get from exchanging.
- **CA members commit to walk the talk**, guided by a holistic perspective of HESD and the Agenda 2030. This commitment is supported by the possibility of exchanging with other people and institutions, and engaging in common activities.
- **Collaboration** is the mode of work of the CA community, who shares knowledge and resources, seeks to increase the impact of their work together, and find common solutions and funding for projects.

Context and purpose

An increasing number of higher education institutions in Europe acknowledge the urgent need for rapid and radical transformation towards sustainable development and agree that higher education has an important role to play in this process. The question is: How can this role be assumed and what values should lead the process? Four stumbling blocks need to be addressed to answer the question. First, value-based research and teaching are often believed to be problematical by academics, who consider freedom of thinking to be the highest good at a university; sustainable development is often perceived as an imposed norm and therefore rejected on principle. Second, assessment processes are currently measuring what *can* be measured instead of what *should* be measured, and the entire institutional set-

up of higher education institutions relies on competition rather than on collaboration. Third, activities at higher education institutions tend to be compartmentalized; while this is necessary to ensure expertise and efficiency in science, teaching, and operations, it also hampers the systemic, interdisciplinary, and inter-operational approach needed for sustainable development and for moving from “knowing to doing”. Once these three stumbling blocks have been addressed, a fourth stumbling block remains: Are we able to take up the challenge of teaching and researching with sustainable development in mind? This requires a focus on competences in addition to knowledge, as well as a shift from teaching to learning – which lecturers find challenging, in particular given the notorious lack of professional development to support these changes towards education for sustainable development.

The UN Decade of Education for Sustainable Development and ensuing Global Action Programme on ESD have been instrumental in broadening the call for change in higher education. This call was expressed already very early on in the history of sustainable development and was eventually translated by concerned European university rectors into the 1993 COPERNICUS Charta, originally signed by 326 universities – the CA’s founding document. The CA is indebted to this framework and to related policy action both at the global and the European level. It is committed to cooperative action that helps its members take up the challenges of HESD, in the spirit of the goals formulated in Agenda 2030. The present Action Plan is therefore framed to address the four stumbling blocks mentioned above in the context of the global and European debates on HESD, and with the principles of a whole institution approach¹ and the “five Ps” of Agenda 2030² in mind.

¹ For the “whole institution approach”, see the UNESCO Roadmap for Implementing the Global Action Plan on ESD: <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000230514>

² For the “five Ps” of Agenda 2030, see: <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/post2015/transformingourworld>

Strategy development

On the occasion of the 2018 CA Annual General Assembly, a key suggestion made by the new Leadership Team was to develop an Action Plan for the coming two years, with the following general aims:

- 1) **COPERNICUS Alliance 2020:** develop a strategic plan with key priorities and targets
- 2) **Ownership and enhancement:** build upon previous work and open up new opportunities
- 3) **Financial stability:** secure funds for the secretariat and ensure greater professionalism
- 4) **Branding:** enhance the attractiveness of the network
- 5) **Influence and representation:** strengthen the European focus and develop North-South cooperation

In order to ensure greater ownership of the Action Plan from the very beginning of the two-year period lasting from 2019 to 2020, the new Leadership Team decided to organise a Vision-and-Action workshop with its past, current, and future members. This workshop took place in January 2019 and initiated a process of co-development of the Action Plan as presented in the following figure:



Our strategy 2019-2020

Goals for CA activities have always been the result of a bottom-up process, with members contributing in a substantial way on different occasions. For the period 2019-2020, participants in the Vision-and-Action workshop identified five priorities that characterise the CA’s unique strengths and important areas of action. The first two are thematic priorities (Goals 1 and 2), the third epitomises the CA’s mode of operation and commitment to sharing resources and learning (Goal 3), the fourth confirms the CA’s involvement in European and global policy work (Goal 4), and the fifth characterises the CA’s operational needs as a learning organisation (Goal 5). They constitute five stars in the constellation that will orient the work of the CA community in the next two years, as illustrated below. The goals are starting points and by no means exclude CA member activities in new areas.



Goal 1: Promote ESD leadership and professional development

Professional development is a prerequisite for effective curriculum change and innovation in higher education. To date most staff development offers have aimed only at improving teaching practices. The CA believes that there is a need to explore the type of capacity-building processes that are contributing to changing teaching and learning cultures in higher education; there is also a need to provide opportunities for educators to develop academic leadership skills and abilities to influence and change the way the higher curriculum is shaped, taking into account existing networks in the field.

OBJECTIVE 1.1 Offer short-term professional development opportunities				
Action	Description	2019	2020	
1.1.A	Develop an online incubator workshop series based on hot HESD topics chosen by members.	●	●	
1.1.B	Advertise HESD professional development events organized by members and encourage organisers to offer discount vouchers for CA members.	●	●	

OBJECTIVE 1.2 Design an European Academy for the SDGs in Higher Education			
Action	Description	2019	2020
1.2.A	Design a European leadership and professional development programme that engages university teams in institutional change for the SDGs.		●
1.2.B	Raise funds to pilot and implement the Academy.		●
1.2.C	Define standards for a European professional development certificate in HESD and align the standards with the EU's standards.		●

Goal 2: Develop transformative quality assurance and assessment for the SDGs

The CA seeks to scale up engagement with sustainable development in higher education by connecting sustainability with systems for quality assurance and quality enhancement and by exploring how existing systems can be transformed to ensure quality and cooperation rather than quantity and competition. The CA promotes whole-institutional approaches by supporting universities and colleges engaging in reframing sustainability as part of their quality goals and processes.

OBJECTIVE 2.1 Challenge current SDG rankings in higher education			
Action	Description	2019	2020
2.1.A	Support networking and raising of funds to challenge existing rankings in higher education (e.g. Times Higher Education SDG ranking, green rankings, etc.; instead: "Sustainability Barometer").		●
2.1.B	Offer a platform for discussing innovative approaches and initiatives for ESD-relevant quality assurance and assessment for the SDGs.	●	●
2.1.C	Support design of an alternative self-assessment tool to measure the efforts carried out by universities in implementing the SDGs.		●

OBJECTIVE 2.2 Encourage dissemination of and debate about sustainability reporting			
Action	Description	2019	2020
2.2.A	Invite members to provide information about their sustainability reporting for the CA Newsletter and website.	●	●
2.2.B	Offer a platform for comparing different forms of sustainability reporting.	●	●

OBJECTIVE 2.3 Bring the worlds of sustainability and quality assurance together			
Action	Description	2019	2020
2.3.A	Invite quality assurance, sustainability reporting, and ESD specialists to contribute to a round table at the CA Conference 2020		●

Goal 3: Foster experience-based support for ESD

The CA seeks to support members' sustainability work by making available tools and resources and by encouraging the sharing of good practices in the field of ESD. In the next two years, we plan to improve our communication tools and further promote the resources, projects, and activities developed by members. The CA also seeks to walk the talk by combining virtual and face-to-face conferences with the aim of reducing its carbon footprint and innovating in the organization of sustainable events; this practice should be communicated as an example and best practice; in addition, CA members will also reflect on failures in order to learn from them.

OBJECTIVE 3.1 Continue to share news stories through CA newsletters				
Action	Description	2019	2020	
3.1.A	Increase the frequency of newsletters by sending out special/thematic newsletters throughout the year.	●	●	
3.1.B	Update the layout of the newsletter while the branding is being completed.	●	●	
3.1.C	Introduce interviews featuring the work of key persons in CA member institutions.	●	●	
OBJECTIVE 3.2 Create a resource hub with CA members' best practices and tools				
Action	Description	2019	2020	
3.2.A	Integrate newsletter news stories and resources into the CA website.	●	●	
3.2.B	Create a new website section with the newsletter interviews.	●	●	
3.2.C	Develop a template and instructions for collecting case study material and encourage development of videos to showcase institutional members' projects on the CA website.	●	●	
3.2.D	Explore the possibility of developing a booklet showcasing best practices.		●	
OBJECTIVE 3.3 Develop a presence in social media and share news of CA and CA members on a regular basis				
Action	Description	2019	2020	
3.3.A	Create a Twitter account and share news on a regular basis.	●	●	
3.3.B	Integrate social media in the CA website. Explore the option of a blog that could be run by a group of members.		●	
OBJECTIVE 3.4 Continue to innovate and exchange "next practices" through CA Conferences, explicitly reflect on failures				
Action	Description	2019	2020	
3.4.A	Develop a plan to combine face-to-face and virtual conferences to reduce the carbon footprint associated with annual international events. Start by piloting a virtual CA conference in 2019 that brings innovation in CA events.	●		
3.4.B	Develop a plan to strengthen face-to-face CA Conferences as a key international event on HESD in Europe.		●	
3.4.C	Organise the next CA face-to-face Conference in Bern in 2020 in collaboration with local and national stakeholders.		●	
3.4.D	Ask members what face-to-face conferences they go to and encourage them to organize pre-conference CA meetings.		●	

Goal 4: Conduct advocacy work for higher education for sustainable development

CA members expect the CA to engage in advocacy of HESD and become an important actor in Europe. In order to increase our influence across Europe and globally, the CA will engage its members more meaningfully in representation tasks. It will also identify and create key strategic partnerships to inform policy and practice.

OBJECTIVE 4.1 Inform higher education policy-making in Europe and globally				
Action	Description	2019	2020	
4.1.A	Increase our influence at the European level by identifying and supporting champions who advocate European policies that advance sustainability in higher education.	●	●	
4.1.B	Join and create strategic partnerships to influence policy and practice at the global level.	●	●	

OBJECTIVE 4.2 Engage and participate in international gatherings, dialogues, committees, and expert groups				
Action	Description	2019	2020	
4.2.A	Develop and periodically update a database of sustainability and higher education networks/organizations/forums in which CA members participate.	●	●	
4.2.B	Engage CA members to represent the CA in their non-CA membership activities and provide them with material to do so.	●	●	

Goal 5: Ensure CA's organisational resilience, capacity to innovate, and ability to serve its members

The CA is a small network with modest resources to run its secretariat and develop key activities. In order to ensure our resilience, we must become more attractive and increase our capacity to innovate, to retain members, and to attract new ones. Identifying key selling points will be an essential task for the network in the next two years as well as raising funds for collaborative projects that can help support the secretariat.

OBJECTIVE 5.1 Assess existing network offers in higher education for sustainable development and identify unique CA selling points				
Action	Description	2019	2020	
5.1.A	Develop an exploratory mapping report of networks focusing on higher education for sustainable development (market research)	●		

OBJECTIVE 5.2 Organise a vision and action workshop to convene past, present and future members to envision the future of CA and design project ideas for different funding calls				
Action	Description	2019	2020	
5.2.A	Refresh CA's vision, mission, and values in collaboration with members.	●		
5.2.B	Identify key strategic priorities and potential projects for CA.	●		

OBJECTIVE 5.3 Build a stronger and more engaged community				
Action	Description	2019	2020	
5.3.A	Continue to provide Micro Funds that encourage collaboration amongst members and capacity building for sustainable development.	●	●	
5.3.B	Create a calendar on the website to feature CA events, CA members' activities, and HESD-relevant conferences.	●		
5.3.C	Acknowledge and reward members' exceptional contributions to CA through official recognition (CA Ambassador label, to be awarded at the AGM)	●	●	

5.3.D	Launch and support a diversity of co-creation labs facilitated by members to encourage collaboration, networking, exchange of good practices and interdisciplinary learning amongst colleagues.	●	
5.3.E	Encourage mobility of CA members' staff, using EU funding mechanisms, e.g. Erasmus Teacher exchange		

OBJECTIVE 5.4 | Develop a unique brand identity for CA

Action	Description	2019	2020
5.4.A	Update the design and content of all communication tools and promotional material (flyer, website, newsletter) with updated branding	●	
5.4.B	Work together with a communications agency and selected CA members to create a unique brand identity for the CA		●

OBJECTIVE 5.5 | Devise a campaign for retaining existing members and attracting new ones

Action	Description	2019	2020
5.5.A	Review and update member benefits	●	●
5.5.B	Increase membership, starting with allies	●	●
5.5.C	Re-engage with UE4SD partners	●	●
5.5.D	Invite non-CA partners to join project bids under the condition that they become members of the network	●	●
5.5.E	Offer special promotional discounts	●	●
5.5.F	Review membership categories and fees in light of the results of the mapping exercise	●	

OBJECTIVE 5.6 | Raise funds through European calls to increase the significance and financial stability of the CA secretariat

Action	Description	2019	2020
5.6.A	Seek resources to provide opportunities for members to meet and work on collaborative European project proposals	●	●
5.6.B	Take the lead in developing project bids focused on CA strategic priorities	●	●

OBJECTIVE 5.7 | Draft one-page version of the CA Charta

Action	Description	2019	2020
5.7.A	Work with selected CA members on drafting a one-page version of the Charta		●
5.7.B	Encourage existing members and new members to sign the Charta		●

Indicators for the implementation of the strategy

	Indicator/evidence	Actions	Source	Units
1	Number of participants in professional development events organized by the CA	1.1.A	Registration lists	Number of participants/year
2	Number of CA members participating actively in designing the European Academy for the SDGs in higher education	1.2.A 1.2.B 1.2.C	Professional development programme/project	Number of CA members
3	Number of events and platforms to challenge existing rankings in higher education	2.1.A 2.1.B 2.1.C 2.3.A	CA Annual Report	Number of participants/year
4	Number of new stories about CA members' sustainability reporting	2.2.A 2.2.B	Newsletter Website	Number of new stories/year
5	Number of special newsletters	3.1.A	Mailchimp records	Number of special newsletters/year
6	Number of interviews included in the newsletters	3.1.C	Mailchimp records	Number of interviews/year
7	Number of new resources included in the CA website, new branding	3.2.A 3.2.B 3.2.C 3.2.D 5.4.B	Website	Number of new resources/year
8	Number of entries in social media	3.3.A 3.3.B	Website	Number of new social media/year
9	Number of participants in face-to-face as well as in virtual CA Conferences	3.4.A 3.A.B 3.4.C 3.4.D	Registration lists	Number of participants/conference
10	Number of meetings of CA members with education policy-makers, committees and expert groups	4.1.A 4.1.B 4.2.A 4.2.B	CA Annual Report	Number of meetings/year
11	Number of key strategic priorities and potential projects for CA identified, analyzed and considered for the next action plan	5.2.A 5.2.B	CA Action Plan	Number of key priorities and projects
12	Number of benefits for CA members	5.5.A 5.5.E	Membership benefit document	Number of new benefits/year
13	Number of CA members	5.5.B 5.5.C 5.5.D	List of members	Number of new members/year
14	Number of project bids submitted	5.6.A 5.6.B	CA Annual Report	Number of project submissions/year
15	Number of members signing the updated Charta	5.7.A 5.7.B	Signatory list	Number of members signing the Charta/year