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Planetary well-being as a strategic goal – The University of Jyväskylä pursues Green Campus policies

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Innovative impact

Recognition by the scientific community within the University of Jyväskylä (JYU) of the green transition not just as a pivotal area of academic research and education, but necessarily as a key strategic goal for the higher education institution as a whole, is essential to the success of the environmental goals that the University has set for itself. In pursuing Green Campus policies, the University has committed to the development and provision of accessible, multidisciplinary academic education on the themes of sustainability and responsibility and to the dissemination of scientific research on these topics to society at large.

Keywords: sustainability, green campus, planetary well-being, MOOC

Introduction

As the ecological and systemic crises faced by humans and all life on Earth continue to intensify, societies increasingly face an urgent need for research and tools for promoting ecological, social and cultural sustainability. The scientific community within the University of Jyväskylä (JYU) has recognised green transition not just as a pivotal area of academic research and education, but necessarily as a key strategic goal for the higher education institution itself. In accordance with Green Campus ideals, JYU has established sustainable development policies to reduce its climate and biodiversity impacts, with the aim of reaching carbon negativity by 2030. Further, JYU prioritises the accrual of sustainability and planetary well-being knowledge within both formal degree studies and open university studies offered at the university.

Environmental programme of JYU

The University of Jyväskylä works actively to promote planetary well-being on the local, national and international level. In 2022, JYU's University Board approved a new environmental programme for 2022–2030, titled Roadmap to planetary well-being (University of Jyväskylä, 2022).

The programme states that by 2030 JYU will have achieved carbon neutrality and will cause no net loss of biodiversity. The vision is to be a carbon negative and nature positive higher education institute from 2030 onwards.

The programme sets the year 2019 as a baseline for measuring e.g. the carbon footprint and biodiversity impact of energy consumptions of the University. According to the roadmap, the calculations will be conducted annually to track the effectiveness of JYU's actions.

The intent of the University is to primarily avoid climate and biodiversity impacts altogether, and secondarily to reduce them. Compensation of impacts is viewed as the last option for achieving the desired

affect. The programme details eight goals to be achieved:

1. Changing consumption habits
2. Sustainability of ownership and investments
3. Change in travelling behaviour
4. Sustainable construction
5. Compensating the remaining environmental impacts
6. Campus development
7. Connecting planetary well-being to policy planning at JYU
8. JYU as a pioneer

The University of Jyväskylä will, as part of its annual sustainability and responsibility report, monitor the progress and attainment of these goals. The University has further committed to developing impact calculation methods and an offsetting model.

The environmental programme is also how JYU interprets and implements within its context the Green Campus philosophy: a college or university campus designed, built, and operated in an environmentally sustainable manner (EADTU, 2023).

School of Resource Wisdom

JYU.Wisdom is a multi-faculty community of over 200 sustainability experts in the University of Jyväskylä (University of Jyväskylä, 2023). The main task of the community is to foster the research and education of planetary well-being. JYU.Wisdom contemplates solutions for circular economy, responsibility, and sustainability in the use of natural resources. In addition, JYU.Wisdom advocates evidence-based decision-making by actively interacting with society and developing sustainability education.

The concept of planetary well-being was first launched by JYU.Wisdom (JYU.Wisdom Community, 2021). The term refers to a state in which the integrity of Earth systems and ecosystem processes is maintained to the extent that species (human and non-human) and populations can persist in their natural habitats into the future.

Planetary well-being is the overarching theme the University's environmental programme. Moreover, JYU endeavours to promote sustainability and to, for its part, implement UN Sustainable Development Goals (especially target 4.7 is relevant in this context) (United Nations), through for instance the university-wide adoption in degree programmes of a MOOC course on themes of sustainability.

Developed by JYU.Wisdom in collaboration with the JYU Faculty of Mathematics and Science and JYU Open University, *Introduction to Planetary Well-being* will be a compulsory course for all basic degree students at the University of Jyväskylä from 2024 onwards.

The course, which is one of four MOOCs under the headline *Planetary Well-being*, is offered for degree students and anyone interested alike, via JYU's Open University. As such, the emphatic role conferred by the University on this course, not just within degree provision but openly accessible higher education, is testament to JYU's pioneering stance on the priority of sustainability themes within Finnish higher education.

Open University of the University of Jyväskylä

An independent institute within the University of Jyväskylä, the Open University promotes lifelong learning by making university education accessible to all, with no prerequisites for entry. Another key factor in that ethos of openness is the Open University's commitment to flexible modes of study and its emphasis on distance learning.

Online courses on climate change and sustainability

The Planetary Well-being MOOCs (Open University of University of Jyväskylä, 2023a) were first introduced into the study offering of the Open University of Jyväskylä in 2021. Fully online and free of charge, these MOOC studies cover themes such as climate change, biodiversity loss and resource wisdom. As of spring 2023, three courses have been released in English, with the fourth and final course to be published later in 2023.

All *Planetary Well-being* study materials are offered freely through JYU's online platform to enable anyone in the world interested in building their knowledge and learning from scientific research to complete studies at

JYU Open University. All the MOOCs are offered in Finnish and English. The completion of the courses and the attainment of ECTS are dependent on the student registering (electronic identification via EU ID or passport) for the course.

The first MOOC, *Introduction to Planetary Well-being*, examines the environmental crises of climate change and biodiversity loss. The course also introduces the multidisciplinary concept of planetary well-being.

The second MOOC, *Systems and Planetary Well-being*, explores the properties and interactions of natural and social systems from a systemic perspective, emphasising sustainability issues.

The third course, *Good Life and Planetary Well-being*, introduces ethical perspectives on environmental and sustainability issues and considers the good life in the context of planetary well-being.

The fourth MOOC, *Pathways to Planetary Well-being*, introduces the contents and means of promoting sustainability, with an emphasis on a systems perspective and planetary well-being.

In 2023, JYU Open University has further added to its selection of studies within the field of sustainability and the environment by introducing *Nature Under Threat* courses (Open University of University of Jyväskylä, 2023b). The two new online courses are multidisciplinary, combining elements of humanities to the field of biological and environmental sciences. *Nature Under Threat* offers insight into endangerment and the surrounding ecological and social phenomena in an accessible way.

The first course delves into the causalities behind biodiversity loss as well as the societal implications of endangerment. Further, the first course introduces the concept of red-listed assessments, which are used to evaluate the risks of extinction and ecological collapse. The second course clarifies e.g. how the risks of extinction and ecological collapse (for species and ecosystems, respectively) are evaluated as part of red-list assessments that are conducted according to the IUCN (International Union for Conservation of Nature) methodology.

Similarly to *Planetary Well-being*, *Nature Under Threat* courses are also fully online and fully flexible, free of charge for anyone to study and with no requirements of prior education. Access to study materials as well as completion of the courses requires

registration. Both courses are offered in Finnish and English. The first *Nature Under Threat* course is currently available for study, while the second course will be published later in 2023.

Nature Under Threat was created in collaboration with the Universities of Jyväskylä, Helsinki, Turku, Eastern Finland and Oulu, as well as the Finnish Museum of Natural History. The courses are included in the study selection of the Biodiversity Education Network of Finnish Universities.

Conclusion

The University of Jyväskylä's policies are imbued with Green Campus ideals. The environmental programme of JYU meticulously directs the University's operations and practices towards a culture of sustainability and states that the themes of sustainability and responsibility are to be included in the learning outcomes of all JYU degree programmes. JYU's curriculum policies specify sustainability knowledge as essential to acquire within one's university studies by making one of the *Planetary Well-being* courses compulsory for its degree students from 2024 onwards. This, in addition to the continued development of accessible education on environmental issues, is one measure through which JYU strives for a position of leadership in sustainable development and responsibility both in Finland and internationally.

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