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# Unipoli Green—Four Universities Working Together for Sustainability

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## Abstract

This paper introduces the Finnish context for promoting sustainable development in higher education and describes and analyzes the development of cooperation in Tampere, Finland: its benefits, challenges and limitations. The expectations for universities to promote sustainable development are rising while the resources for sustainability work are scarce. In Tampere there are four universities, Police University College, Tampere University of Applied Science, Tampere University of Technology and University of Tampere, educating and employing over 40,000 people. Promoting sustainability is in different phases at each of these universities. The coordinators of sustainable development in these universities met in spring 2014 and agreed on information sharing and cooperation in the form of concrete events and thematic days. This initiative was supported by the existence of the universities' cooperation platform UNIPOLI. Later the cooperation has found three major fields: (1) awareness raising, (2) sharing information and influencing management and (3) curriculum development. Possibility of sharing knowledge and experiences and building a community has enabled more efficient actions in all these fields, but the vague mandate of network has caused confusion and hindered realization of some ideas.

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**1 Introduction**

The universities' and other higher education institutions' role as vanguards of sustainable development is stated in many international declarations (see e.g. Leal Filho 2010; Amaral et al. 2015). In Finland new goals for Education for Sustainable Development were set in the beginning of the UN Decade of Education for Sustainable Development (Melén-Paaso 2006). The sustainability coordinators of universities are agents of change who are expected to promote broad and strategic goals, turn them into practises or teaching modules and challenge prevailing ways of working. The typical obstacles hindering successful sustainability work characterized by Velasquez et al. (2005) are part of the Finnish sustainable development promotion reality. There is very little supporting staff or peer colleagues with whom one could share the challenges in integrating the sustainability aspects into education or into daily activities at campus.

According to Kurland (2011) a strong in-campus network is essential in promotion of SD. We, as authors, fully agree, but want to emphasize the importance of local inter-institutional cooperation in empowering the critical change agents. Four HEIs located in Tampere, Finland, have tackled this situation by networking. The Finnish higher education system consists of two complementary sectors: polytechnics (universities of applied sciences) and universities (Ministry of Education and Culture 2016). Two members of the network are universities (University of Tampere and Tampere University of Technology) and two polytechnics (Tampere University of Applied Sciences and The Police University College). The higher education institutions' collaboration network in Tampere, UNIPOLI, also participates in the cooperation.

The paper aims at critically reflecting the development of a cooperation network of professionals working to promote SD in universities located in same city. The paper starts with a general description of policies steering SD in higher education in Finland, which is essential in order to understand the context. Also the backgrounds, policies and developments before 2014 when the cooperation started are shortly reviewed. The main part of the paper describes how the cooperation between universities works in practise and assesses the achievements. As reflections of inter-institutional cooperation are rare, this example can provide useful insights which can help others in organizing inter-institution cooperation.

## 2 Methods

The paper is based on document analysis and authors' experiences and reflections. National policy papers and reviews on the development of SD in Finland are used to describe the context in which Finnish HEIs work in SD promotion. The networking institutions' policy papers and in-house documents are used to present local developments and describe the working environment of the network. Finally the authors' experiences and reflections of the cooperation are used to evaluate the success and development needs of the cooperation. Reflections of cooperation were collected and written down in two UNIPOLI Green meetings during autumn 2016. Quotes used in the paper are from these discussions.

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## 3 Sustainable Development and Higher Education in Finland

In Finland discussion about environmental education and education for sustainable development (ESD) in higher education began after Rio 1992 Summit and was followed by Agenda 21 for the Baltic Sea Region (Baltic 21 1998). In the early years of SD promotion education was considered as a cross-sectoral target but it was soon noticed that this was not enough to promote ESD. Therefore an Agenda 21 adapted for Education in the Baltic Sea Region was accepted in 2002 (Baltic 21E 2002). The same year the United Nations General Assembly declared the Decade of Education for Sustainable Development 2005–2014 (DESD). In Finland these two programs were joined into one action plan called *Sustainable Development in education; Implementation of Baltic 21E Programme and Finnish strategy for the Decade of Education for Sustainable Development (2005–2014)* (Melén-Paaso 2006).

This action plan set objects or recommendations for all levels of education in Finland. For the universities and the universities of applied sciences there were separate recommendations. The universities were supposed to (1) integrate sustainable development into their education, research and strategies, (2) create partnerships with universities in developing countries and (3) implement environmental action plans that also include goals for sustainable consumption. The universities of applied sciences were expected to consider sustainable development in their strategies, daily practises, curriculum development, research and development, and in international cooperation (Melén-Paaso 2006, 62–64).

Partnerships with universities in developing countries were enhanced when eleven Finnish universities decided to promote international development as a part of their international strategies in 2002. An inter-university network UniPID was started also in response to the Johannesburg Summit on Sustainable Development. The UniPID network provides the strategic coordination to build ties and increase cooperation between Finnish universities in the field of international development

cooperation (UniPID 2011). University of Tampere and Tampere University of Technology are members of UniPID.

In the early years of DESD the Ministry of Education promoted research projects about ESD in higher education and supported implementation (e.g. Kaivola and Rohweder, 2006, 2007). With the support of these research projects and the national ESD resource center in Åbo Akademi University a Finnish SD Forum in Higher Education was started in 2008 (BUP 2016). This Forum aims at supporting especially university teachers in integrating SD into higher education. It received some funding during its early years, but later no resources have been allocated for coordination. Therefore the Forum works only if some university is active in summoning a meeting or organizing a seminar. The Forum has a mailing list which enables information sharing between the HEIs. During the years the Forum has collectively tried to influence on the Ministry of Education to add some elements encouraging universities to promote SD into governmental steering.

The Rectors' Conference of Finnish Universities of Applied Sciences (ARENE) responded to the Ministry's guidelines by ordering a report on developing indicators of SD for Finnish Universities of Applied Sciences. This report states that work on SD in Universities of Applied Sciences should focus on (1) sustainable management and organization culture, (2) sustainable teaching and learning and (3) research and development activities promoting sustainability (Virtanen et al. 2008). This report has served well in promoting sustainability work in UASes, also in TAMK.

In 2011–2013 a project called Education for Sustainable Development in Academia in the Nordic countries (ESDAN) was carried out by three Nordic universities: Novia University of Applied Sciences in Finland, University of Gävle in Sweden and University of Roskilde in Denmark. Purpose of the project was to help Nordic HEIs to integrate SD into education (Holm 2014). The special focus was to use the already existing quality systems in the integration work.

All together 11 HEIs took part the project in Sweden, Denmark and Finland. The project resulted in developing a process model to enhance ESD in HEIs with management systems. Also relevant sustainability aspects in the degree programs were identified. The experiences and results were disseminated in four seminars (Ibid. 139–151).

The historical review shows that there is a political consensus on the importance of sustainable development in higher education in Finland and the Ministry of Education has supported many publications on ESD (see e.g. Kaivola and Rohweder 2007). However, resources to support universities in their sustainability work and inclusion of sustainability into the steering mechanisms of the HEIs have been missing. This has resulted in great variation in the implementation and goals of SD work in Finnish universities. Some have adopted environmental management systems (Holm 2014) or used their green campus developments in marketing (LUT 2016). Some are still in the beginning of their sustainability work. This indicates that without clear objects and steering measures, sustainability work is easily overlooked. As an answer to the situation the HEIs in Tampere started creating local network.

## 4 Local Background

Each participating HEI in Tampere has its own area of expertise and they work in close collaboration “to form one of Finland’s most attractive and multidisciplinary consortia for education, research and regional development” (TAMK 2016c). TAMK, TUT, UTA and the Police University College comprise a dynamic and a regionally and globally connected network of expertise.

University of Tampere (UTA) is a culturally-committed higher education institution with the social mission of educating visionaries who understand the world and change it (UTA 2016b). UTA is committed to creating a sustainable world in which all people have an equal right to well-being. UTA is Finland’s biggest provider of higher education in social and administrative sciences, and has strong profile in the multidisciplinary research and education on society and health. UTA offers 26 Degree Programs in Finnish and 12 Master’s Degree Programs in English. It is a community of 15,000 students and 2000 employees and operates on three campuses in Tampere (UTA 2016d).

Tampere University of Technology (TUT) explores new avenues of research and education in the fields of engineering. The University acknowledges its responsibility for the future by maintaining high ethical standards in all its endeavors for the benefit of the environment, Finnish society and humanity as a whole (TUT 2016b). TUT campus is a community on 10,500 undergraduate and postgraduate students and nearly 2000 employees. There are 7 Bachelor’s Programs (one in English), 21 Master’s Program’s (eight in English) and 5 Doctoral Studies Programs in technology and architecture. TUT’s leading-edge fields of research are signal processing, optics and photonics, intelligent machines, bio-modelling and the built environment (TUT 2016a).

Tampere University of Applied Sciences (TAMK) merged from two Universities of applied sciences in 2010. Engineering, business and health care form the backbone of TAMK, but the degree programs cover a diverse range of professions from music to business, forestry and media. About 10,000 degree students and 700 staff members study and work in over 40 degree programs—seven of which are in English—on seven campuses in Tampere region. Sustainable development is one of the values stated in the strategy of TAMK, and TAMK is committed in making Finnish education competence available worldwide (TAMK 2016a).

The Police University College (POLAMK) is the only institute in Finland training police officers. It is responsible for police training recruitment, for selection of students for diploma and advanced programs, for organizing diploma and advanced studies, for further training given in the training institute and for research and development in the police field (POLAMK 2016). The Police University College employs approximately 200 people, over half of whom are teaching staff. Broad social responsibility is one of the objectives expressed in the strategy and in the police officer’s oath (Police of Finland 2016).

UTA, TUT and TAMK signed Unipoli Tampere Agreement in 2006. Police University College joined the Unipoli Tampere network in 2013. The agreement aims at establishing closer ties between the institutions, supporting efficient use of resources and promoting the city's development into an international hub of expertise. Unipoli collaboration focuses on four strategic areas: education, internationalization, research and development, and support services, which are all related to sustainable development (Unipoli 2015). In autumn 2014 UTA, TUT and TAMK started discussion on even deeper cooperation and possibly merging the universities in near future. This process was named as Tampere3 (TAMK 2016c).

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## 5 Sustainability Work in the Universities

The four universities have developed SD promotion independently and thus arrived in varying solutions in organizing sustainability work. Also the weight given to SD varies. Features describing the each university's SD work have been compiled in Table 1 and are discussed next.

In UTA and TUT SD promotion started in 1996 and in TAMK 2003. Origins of SD work in the universities vary. UTA had an active group of students, who started Ecocampus project aiming at diminishing environmental impacts of the university (UTA 2013). In TAMK the original driving force was the Degree Program of Environmental Engineering, which used the polytechnic as living lab in Environmental Management and organized many awareness raising campaigns for other students and staff (TAMK 2012). In TUT the initiative came from an active teacher and in POLAMK from the management.

The commitment of top management plays a vital role in SD promotion. In UTA, TAMK and TUT there is strategic commitment to SD (TAMK 2016b; TUT 2016b; UTA 2016b). TAMK has also given a public commitment in sustainability (Commitement2050 2016). One common feature of organizing SD work in these universities is having an official advisory group to support SD coordinator's work. However, the resources allocated to, and organization of sustainability work, varies greatly in the universities (see Table 1). Whereas in UTA there is a full-time environmental coordinator, in TAMK sustainability work is led by a lecturer along with her teaching duties. TUT has an environmental expert, but there are no resources for wider sustainability work. In POLAMK the organization of SD work is still taking shape.

In UTA, TAMK and TUT sustainability work is steered with sustainability action plan (e.g. TAMK 2012; UTA 2012), but there are remarkable differences in the scope, accuracy and ways of monitoring of the plans. The UTA and TUT action plans include indicators to monitor development and are published yearly (see e.g. UTA 2016c).

Promoting ESD started in UTA in 2007 with a survey for the university faculties resulting in a report (Lindroos and Raatikainen 2007) and a special course on "*Climate change from the social sciences point of view*". In 2011–2013 UTA

participated in the Nordic ESDAN project and with the support of the project ESD was integrated in all the UTA curricula. Courses which contain sustainability aspects are now labelled in the curricula. Since 2013 a multidisciplinary sustainable development study module has been open to all UTA students (UTA 2015).

TUT's new strategy for 2016–2020 states that the technological expertise of students is built on a solid foundation in mathematics and natural sciences. Students learn to understand the importance of technology in addressing the challenges of SD. One of TUT's four high-quality research fields is energy and eco-efficiency—circular economy for a greener tomorrow. The integration of environmental requirements and SD issues in teaching is—and has been—done throughout research and degree programs. An excellent specimen is the work which has been going on consistently at the Department of Chemistry and Bioengineering on International Water Education and Training Activities in Eastern Africa, Namibia, the Baltic-Nordic region and Eastern Europe. TUT holds a Unesco Chair in Sustainable Water Services (TUT 2016b; UNESCO 2012).

Degree studies in TAMK and POLAMK lead mainly to professional bachelor degrees. In these degrees ESD is embedded in the professional competences. For instance in the education of policemen social sustainability is considered as the most important dimension of sustainability as the task of the police is to uphold social order and juridical system, maintain public order and safety and prevent and investigate crime. The values and good practises underlying police operations are incorporated into the ethical oath of the police (Police of Finland 2016). Inclusion of sustainability in the value bases of all bachelor degrees was surveyed in TAMK in 2012. At least one dimension of sustainability was mentioned in the value bases of 68 % of the degrees (TAMK 2012).

All universities have taken actions to reduce the environmental impacts of university buildings, facilities and everyday actions. UTA has been a pioneer in using fair trade products in university catering and was the first university in Finland to achieve the Fairtrade University title in 2009. That requires university to promote fair trade, take into consideration its responsibility for the community and acknowledge its social liability and ethical values when making acquisitions (UTA 2016a).

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## 6 The UNIPOLI Green Network at Work

The UNIPOLI Green network was launched in the spring of 2014. The environmental coordinator of UTA convened a meeting to discuss the situation of sustainable development in the universities operating in Tampere. The meeting resulted in a decision of establishing a loose cooperation network to help sharing ideas, promote sustainability campaigns and gain new momentum for the sustainability work. The network started to call itself UNIPOLI Green referring to the co-operation platform of the HEIs.

For the time being the UNIPOLI Green group has mainly had resources for electronic communication. The members of the network meet approximately monthly during the semesters and the meetings are hosted alternately by member universities. All members are able to raise issues on the agenda and there is no chairperson in the network. The agenda for the next meeting is agreed in the end of each meeting and in e-mail discussions. Summaries of meetings are distributed to all members of the network. Matters discussed in the meetings and promoted together can be divided into three major themes (1) promoting awareness of sustainable development practices at the campus and in the community (2) sharing information and influencing management to make commitments on sustainability and (3) developing curricula.

## 6.1 Promoting Awareness

Events promoting sports on campuses and sustainable commuting (e.g. bicycling) are an established part of UNIPOLI cooperation under UNIPOLI Sport. Therefore combining SD with sports promotion proved easy. The first UNIPOLI Green activity was together with the Fairtrade City Tampere-project to donate Fair Trade balls for UNIPOLI Sport (universities joint sport services) and the student unions of all universities.

After this first experience of arranging activities together, organizing and informing together about activities soon became an important branch of action in UNIPOLI Green. So far the common campaigns include tips for energy saving distributed in all universities during the National Energy Saving Week 2014, Fair Trade Treasure Hunt in the National Fair Trade Week 2014 and 2015 and arranging and informing about Earth Hour activities in 2015 and 2016. Arranging fair trade activities revealed that the fair trade idea was quite poorly known among the students of TAMK. Jointly organized and promoted Earth Hour activities gained publicity in the local media.

As a part of promoting sustainable lifestyles the members of UNIPOLI Green have recognized the need for effective communication on campuses. UNIPOLI Green's solution for this was to establish a character contest in the fall of 2014. The contest was open for students and staff of all universities and it resulted in thirteen proposals. The winning character was called "Nipoli" referring to nagging—but not that badly nagging—with the person looking like a senior lecturer. According to the description of the character, "Nipoli" is more like a house elf—a tiny creature reminding everybody about the importance of sustainability in the daily actions (Picture 1). The UNIPOLI Green group was very satisfied with this character and ordered some cartoon with special messages from the artist. This character is used UNIPOLI Green's online ads.

**Table 1** Comparison of sustainability work in UNIPOLI Green Universities

University	University of Tampere (UTA)	Tampere University of Technology (TUT)	Tampere University of Applied Sciences (TAMK)	Police University College (POLAMK)
University profile	Research oriented: Bachelor's, Master's and Doctoral degrees	Technological, Research Oriented: Bachelor's, Master's and Doctoral degrees	Professionally oriented Bachelor's and Master's degrees	Professionally oriented Bachelor's and Master's degrees
Students and staff	15,000/2000	10,500/2000	10,000/700	1000/200
Origin of SD work and starting point	Student activism on environmental impacts, 1996	An active lecturer, 1996	D.P. in Environmental Engineering, 2003	Management, 2014
Commitment in SD	Strategic	Strategic	Commitment 2050	Strategic (social sustainability)
Organization of SD	Full time coordinator (since 2006) in facilities management, steering group appointed by rector (since 2007)	Environmental specialist (since 2009) in facilities management, no special resource in SD	Group for SD, work lead by teaching staff, real estate management cooperates	No special resource in SD
Reporting	Yearly, indicators are set	Yearly in a report together with safety issues	Yearly reporting developing through commitment 2050	Not systematically organized
SD in curriculum development	Systematically checked and marked in curricula since 2013	Not systematically organized	Part of curriculum update 2016	Not systematically organized
SD related contents	Multidisciplinary SD study module (emphasis on social sustainability), Global Health and Development Program	Part of professional studies in most programs, emphasis on ecological and economical sustainability	Part of professional studies in most programs, ecological, social and/or economic sustainability	Social sustainability part of professional growth

(continued)

Table 1 (continued)

University	University of Tampere (UTA)	Tampere University of Technology (TUT)	Tampere University of Applied Sciences (TAMK)	Police University College (POLAMK)
SD in real estate management and construction	In cooperation with the real estate owners, e.g. new BREEAM certified building	In cooperation with real estate owners, e.g. new BREEAM certified building	Own buildings, Energy-Efficiency Agreement: goals for diminishing use of energy, student projects	Operates in facilities provided by real estate owners committed to sustainable development
Awareness raising	Trough sustainability guide, cooperation with students, university staff and stakeholders	Through cooperation with students, university staff and stakeholders	Through student projects, cooperation with stakeholders and University FB profile	Social sustainability is integrated into Finnish police organisation by legislation and approach
SD and research, development and innovation	Networks for researchers interested in SD interested researchers in international development and SD	Technologies promoting environmental sustainability International Water Education	Technologies promoting sustainability. Sanitation and sustainable tourism projects in developing countries	



Originally UNIPOLI Green sook wider use of the character, but this was hindered by objection coming from the university services and communications departments of some universities. Firstly they have expressed concerns that using this character widely would disturb the aesthetics of university interior. Secondly it has proven very difficult to find more permanent campaign topics which could be agreed by all universities until UNIPOLI Green’s mandate is not sufficient.

## 6.2 Sharing Information and Influencing Management

The top management’s commitment to promote sustainability is of vital importance for successful SD promotion. This is a clear message from the success stories of building sustainable universities like Chalmers in Sweden (Holmberg et al. 2012) or Novia in Finland (Holm 2014). UNIPOLI Green helps all participating universities in influencing top management by providing a platform for sharing and evaluating national and international developments and discussing possible directions of actions.

For example in spring 2014, when the Finnish Ministry of Environment launched a public pledge campaign “Commitment 2050” (Ministry of the Environment

2015), UNIPOLI Green soon discussed this possibility for making a stronger statement on sustainability in the HEIs of Tampere. It was suggested that the universities would make a shared commitment to sustainability and UNIPOLI Green members discussed this option with the top managements. The initiative was not successful. Tracking exact reasons is difficult, but clearly timing was unfortunate. The economic situation of universities was difficult and UTA, TUT and TAMK started Tampere3 process possibly heading to merger. This took the top management's attention. However, the "Commitment 2050" was taken on the agenda in two of the universities. TAMK joined the commitment in October 2015 and the process is going on in UTA (Asikainen 2015; Commitment 2050 2016).

When the merger process started, UNIPOLI Green discussed its threats and possibilities for SD in the campuses. The members of the network have actively raised up SD issues in all possible forums, discussed together about the developments in each university and made initiatives. So far this has resulted in establishing an official working group to coordinate ESD in Tampere3 process. The mandate of this group is limited, but still it proves that the unofficial cooperation has been able to bring SD part of the agenda of the merger process at least in the shape of ESD. This work is discussed more in the next chapter.

Affecting top management is not easy, but a larger group can help in formulating initiatives in such a way that they realize at least partially. UNIPOLI Green has also been able to convince the top management about the importance of SD in the Tampere3 process.

### 6.3 Curriculum Development

Each university has its own curricula and curriculum development processes. UNIPOLI Green's interest in curriculum development is in providing as wide as possible range of sustainability studies open for all students in the member universities.

In UNIPOLI Green, UTA is the pioneer in curriculum development as it took part in the Nordic ESDAN project during 2011–2013 (Holm 2014). In UTA a special SD label was added to the curricula. Some of those SD labelled courses that were open to all students were chosen to form a SD study module. This multi-disciplinary study module is open for all the students of UTA (UTA 2015). The experiences of UTA have helped in convincing the TAMK management about the benefits and importance of ESD and organizing ESD curriculum development work. Renewed curricula with more emphasis on ESD are introduced in September 2016. The need for more transparent expression of sustainability issues has been raised also in POLAMK.

In spring 2015 UNIPOLI Green members from UTA, TUT and TAMK raised the matter of joint sustainable development studies in various discussions arranged as part of Tampere3 process. The purpose of these statements and remarks was to make vice-rectors conscious of the special opportunity the universities have. Contacting the vice-rectors proved effective. In October 2015 a group was

appointed to find and select courses which could make up a joint study module of SD for the students of UTA, TAMK and TUT. The draft of this study module was presented in December 2015 and it is based on the existing SD study module of UTA arranged around three main themes: environment and society, responsible business and entrepreneurship, and health and global development (UTA 2015). TUT and TAMK widen the perspectives to technology and sustainable use of natural resources. Most challenging part of this work has been identifying suitable courses bearing in mind that the students' backgrounds can vary greatly. Another challenge is that UTA and TUT are more research oriented universities, whereas TAMK and POLAMK have professional education orientation.

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## 7 Achievements, Challenges and Aspirations

This section discusses the experiences of UNIPOLI Green group on inter-institutional cooperation in promoting SD. The section is based on discussions of the group members i.e. the authors.

In the case of Tampere, the universities have made strategic commitments to promote sustainability. Nevertheless there are profound differences in organizing the practical work and in allocating resources into sustainability work. The people responsible for SD are in all these universities quite solitary and feel the lack of collegial discussion in their work.

This is probably the most important reason why networking is experienced as meaningful, effective and rewarding. It offers platform for continuous improving and learning from each other, which encourages everyday work. As the SD coordinator of UTA described in one discussion: *“If you suggest something at work, it comes back to you and you’ll have to do it yourself. Here you can find somebody to do at least part of it. And you also get the feeling that your work helps others. It spreads to other universities”*. This has been true for example in the case of spreading fair trade awareness through joint campaigns and in starting the joint SD study module work.

The representative of the Police College University has stated quite clearly that learning from other universities experiences has been most helpful in deciding how to proceed in arranging SD work. *“It is also good to hear that it has not been easy to get started anywhere - and you can always come here and let the steam out”*. Also other members of the group have mentioned this supportive, encouraging and motivating dimension of UNIPOLI Green.

Among the participating institutions UTA has the longest, best established and resourced tradition of sustainability work. Other participants have benefited from UTA's experience for example by learning about wider national and international networks. This helps using resources allocated in SD more effectively. Also writing this paper has been a very revealing learning experience on the history of Finnish HEIs and SD networks for those who have only short experience in SD work.

One clear benefit mentioned by the participants is professional heterogeneity. The coordinators from UTA and TUT come from university services (facilities management) and the coordinators of TAMK and POLAMK have teaching-related positions. Also the members have various academic backgrounds: engineering, environmental policy, ecology and education. As the backgrounds and expertises on sustainability work differ, many questions rise during meetings. “*Having to explain helps you organize your thoughts and takes you further in your own work*”, comments the coordinator of TUT. This way UNIPOLI Green helps spreading information inside HEIs and covering all areas of SD work: education, research and everyday actions.

The examples above demonstrate that the solitary work of SD coordinators can be boosted by collegial inspiration. A strong in-campus network would be ideal for that (Kurland 2011), but our experience is that a local inter-institutional network can also prove beneficial. UNIPOLI Green has offered this and thus catalyzed SD work. It has also given more weight on the SD work and helped influencing on the top management.

The voluntary network has also met its limitations. As the group does not have formal status and has only very limited budget, it is often dependent on the university services’ or communications departments’ will to take ideas forward or implement them. This was clearly noticed in the case of trying to launch the common character for communicating SD more effectively on campuses. Finding common understanding about the ways of using the character as part of communications has proven very difficult.

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## 8 Concluding Remarks

In this paper we have described voluntary cooperation for sustainable development between four Finnish HEIs located in the same city. Our conclusion is that local inter-institutional cooperation can facilitate and strengthen SD promotion in the HEIs joining the network. According to our experiences the mechanisms contributing to this are based in the power of group. A peer group of professionals sharing same aspirations, interests and problems helps otherwise solitary working professionals share their problems, knowledge and experiences, be credited and share ideas. This opportunity is missing from the daily working life of sustainability coordinators at least in most Finnish universities. The coordinator may have an advisory committee or working group that supports the work, but often his or her role in the actual lobbying and promotion work is to convince others and advocate new ideas.

Furthermore, our experiences indicate that during a great change process, like the ongoing merger in three higher education institutions of Tampere, voluntary cooperation between HEIs helps keeping sustainability aspects on the agenda. When the same message comes repeatedly from all universities it cannot easily be left unattended. This way the UNIPOLI Green network was able to start

preparations for sustainable development study module for open for students from all universities in Tampere.

Voluntary inter-institutional network does, however, have its limitations. At least in our case they are related to unclear mandate and position of the group. However, the benefits of networking outweigh the difficulties: awareness raising campaigns are more visible and creative, management takes commonly addressed initiatives or ideas already tested in one university more seriously than completely new thoughts. And finally, sustainability coordinators have found a new working community, which motivates their work.

Thus inter-institutional networking speeds up adoption of new, more sustainable practices, which is the ultimate mission of promoting SD in universities. Based on our experiences, we recommend local collegial collaboration between educational institutions for all SD promotion professionals.

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