

Active8-Planet Newsletter

Newsletter #1

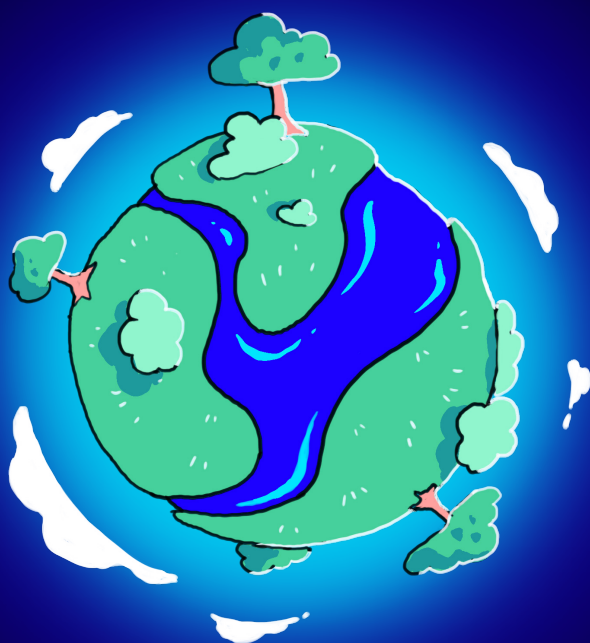
July 2021

www.active8-planet.eu

DIALOGUE BETWEEN PEOPLE-CENTRED ENTHUSIASTS:

“We are challenged to think bigger and better of our actions and creations.”

Ellen Bal and Dan Podjed



ENJOYING RELIABLE EDUCATION & COMPANY PARTNERSHIPS IN ACTIVE8

By Vaike Fors

WHAT IS HAPPENING AT POLICY LEVEL? TOWARDS A NEW HIGHER EDUCATION TRANSFORMATION

An interview with Joerg Niehoff

ACTIVE8 PLANET'S MATRIX: THE WAY TO AN ETHICAL AND BALANCED FUTURE?

By Evy Puelinckx

In the Active8-Planet project we aim to research and experiment with unconventional approaches towards teaching and learning in higher education that would empower and mobilize students towards future-oriented climate and sustainability actions and enhance transformation of the university research and knowledge in planet-centred interventions. We provide young people a platform to act!

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PREFACE

Welcome to our first newsletter, glad to have you reading and hope we can inspire you to read further and wait with anticipation for the next newsletters.

We are excited to introduce you to our tantalising new project Active8-Planet. The main idea behind this European, Erasmus+ Knowledge Alliances funded project is that students, academic supervisors, professionals and other stakeholders will work in multidisciplinary teams to develop an approach, an intervention or a solution toward a better future for people and the planet. That may sound like a mouthful, but... in essence, it's all about collaboration! In the project, higher education institutions (HEIs) are working together with tech-oriented businesses, and together we are innovating education whilst also addressing real-life business challenges. In this collaboration, we ensure that the technical mindset that often dominates innovation in the business world is coupled with both people- and planet-centred approach. After all, what would be the value of a high-tech solution, when it is not meaningful to the people it is intended for or when it does not work in terms of future sustainability for the planet we live in?

The challenges we are currently defining and that our students will be working on from next academic year range from sustainable mobility, to healthcare, to the built environment. But we don't want to reveal too much now ...

In this first newsletter, we share some insights into the theories that underlie our project, we introduce some of the project team members, and we present one of the inspiring HEI-business partnerships that we are running. Most importantly, though, we hope to get you inspired, so you will want to keep up to date with the project in the upcoming newsletters. You can expect to read more from us every six months! In the meantime, you can already follow us on Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn, Twitter, YouTube and, of course, on our project website: www.active8-planet.eu.

Please also feel free, anytime, to drop us a line at info@active8-planet.eu

Soesja van Wijgerden and Giulia Sinatti

CONTENT

DIALOGUE BETWEEN PEOPLE CENTRED ENTHUSIASTS

1

ENJOYING RELIABLE EDUCATION & COMPANY PARTNERSHIPS IN ACTIVE8

4

WHAT IS HAPPENING AT POLICY LEVEL? TOWARDS A NEW HIGHER EDUCATION TRANSFORMATION

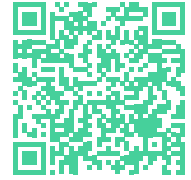
7

ACTIVE8-PLANET'S MATRIX: THE WAY TO AN ETHICAL AND BALANCED FUTURE?

11

DIALOGUE BETWEEN PEOPLE-CENTRED ENTHUSIASTS

On June 8th, 2021, I interviewed Ellen Bal and Dan Podjed. I had specific questions prepared on understanding the society's need for anthropologists and translating the people-centred approach into a planet-centred approach. However, current affairs such as digitalization and COVID-19 were very present in our dialogue, since these challenges are top of mind and also easily linked to the topics of our conversation. Despite these side tracks, I did manage to get new insights and answers regarding the Active8-Planet challenge that I'd love to share with you here. If you're curious to watch some snippets of the interview, you can view them on our [Active8-Planet YouTube channel](#) by clicking the link or scanning the QR code.



People-centred enthusiasts

I approached Ellen and Dan specifically because the people-centred approach, of which they are both great advocates, plays an important role in the Active8-Planet project. As they explain, it is important for our societies that we push for a paradigm shift from the expert mindset to what we call a people-centred approach. Which in short entails: asking the people. Who these 'people' we need to engage with are, might differ from case to case - they might be the existing users of a car-sharing service for whom we're developing a better

smartphone app - but likewise, we'd want to talk with those who are not yet registered users (but we'd like them to be), or to the local governance policy-makers who might integrate the app and the service into their local development agenda, and so forth. In short, our 'people' might be experts in their own right and in their specific fields. Identifying the stakeholders is therefore the first and crucial step in the research and development (R&D) process, which we will explain in more detail in a bit.

A short introduction to the expert-, people- and planet-centred mindset

When you work in a field for many years and experience many different challenges, you start to consider yourself an **expert**. This is not only very normal, in our world this expert-mindset is powerfully rewarded. Experts are often rewarded financially, with more prestige, a larger audience, and sometimes even with more friends. On the other hand; being humble, expressing doubt and uncertainty is met with displeasure, less job opportunities, and a much smaller audience. Likewise, many organisations and businesses rely on the expertise of their employees. They rarely imagine that this may be exactly the thing that prevents them from achieving their goal. Unfortunately, this often happens in technical or engineering fields. As social scientists we aim to understand **people and societies they live in**. Especially anthropologists have a lot of experience researching and analysing the practices, values and meanings people ascribe to their everyday experiences. As people ourselves, we unfortunately have this nasty habit of projecting our own ideas and needs onto others, in particular when we consider ourselves experts on the topic. However, people are not that predictable. The people-centred mindset acknowledges this knowledge gap and urges you to test your assumptions by talking to (engaging with, observing, spending time with) exactly those people that you're targeting with your design, service, ideas or product.

This first paradigm shift from expert- to people-centred mindset already leads to a big improvement. But now we introduce the third layer of reality! We are not only no longer an expert (#Socrates "We know that we don't know"), nor can we fill in the needs of other people with our own, neither can we ignore the environment a.k.a. our **planet**. We are as a species being challenged to think bigger and better of our actions and creations. Taking into account what we do to our environment, which resources we deplete, which toxins we exude is our final step into a better and more realistic future. This perspective is what we call a planet-centred mindset.



Opening up this conversation allows for a more tailored design to their actual needs, whereas ignoring their input has often led to useless or unusable products, designs, services, or ideas. Do you want to hear Dan explain this? Watch the video 'People-centred approach in four steps' on our YouTube channel.

Becoming an anthropologist

When asked about their introduction to anthropology, neither Ellen nor Dan had a linear start with their field of study. Both had not aimed to become anthropologists. Ellen simply picked the study that she felt had the broadest approach, social history, which would allow her more time to decide on a more concrete direction. During her studies, however, she discovered how anthropology particularly helps us understand people, diversity and cultural differences across the globe. Her own life trajectory led her to India and Bangladesh. Here, she slowly transformed into a historian cum anthropologist, realizing the beautiful combination the two disciplines make.

Dan, on the other hand, was more interested in the natural sciences and computer technology, and even dabbled in some astrology (I should still ask him to elaborate on this last one, next time we meet). However, failing to be admitted to his preferred studies, he ended up taking anthropology classes. It did not necessarily peak his interest in the beginning. But through some ethnographic experiences and reading up on some of the greats, i.e. Bronisław Malinowski and Marcel Mauss, he discovered anthropology actually had much to offer. Proving again that, though his current passion is unmistakable, it's not always love at first sight.

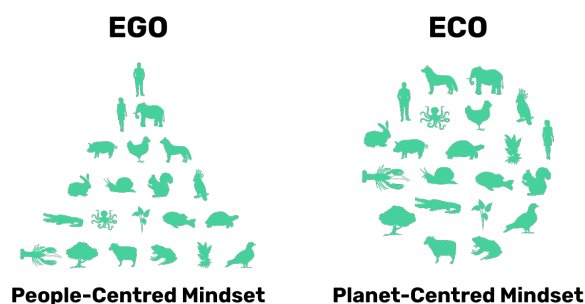
Applied anthropology

The way Dan and Ellen 'bumped into' anthropology by simply looking for theory and methodological approaches that would help them understand the world around them, definitely fits with their interest in applied anthropology. They truly see anthropology as a means to an end, an approach that can help us work towards a more just and nurturing society and a healthy planet. And that is what, to them, applied anthropology stands for. Anthropology should not be limited to knowledge production for an academic audience only. The world needs anthropologists! They need to share their findings and insights, and also their techniques and challenges, with a broader audience, where it can actually make an

impact. Because our world, though in many ways an impressive place, can truly benefit from learning from and understanding its diverse inhabitants. And this is exactly what anthropologists do. Hence the alternative description of 'applied anthropology' as a people-centred approach.

Including the environment

But our planet is not only inhabited by many different people. We share this planet with many other species. Moreover, we are 100% dependent on its natural resources. Our treatment of our planet, however, does not relay this awareness. In many different forms we are extracting, polluting and destroying this planet in order to fulfill our consumption needs. This is a challenge that Ellen and Dan are most definitely aware of. And according to them, this being the biggest challenge of our time, anthropologists cannot ignore it. Setting up the Active8-Planet project is one of the ways anthropologists can help understanding its complexity and contributing to a way forward.



People-Centred Mindset vs Planet-Centred Mindset Diagram
© This diagram has been designed using resources from Freepik.com

Expert advice

Both Ellen and Dan see different roles that anthropologists can play in tackling environmental decay by applying, what we are calling, a planet-centred approach. Interestingly, they mention first and foremost the people-centred approach as a solution. Simply by designing products (or services, or systems) that fit the people's needs one can reduce consumption. This approach can result in solutions that actually add value to people's lives, and therefore will not be discarded or replaced easily. Of course, the people-centred approach plays a big role in Active8-Planet.

Secondly, they argue that people need the planet. This conscious awareness is spreading throughout society, especially in the younger generations. Therefore, people's needs **are the planet's needs**,

enforces Ellen. Nobody wants to trash the planet, destroy the rainforests or deplete our freshwater supplies. Collaborating with people from a planet-centred perspective, allowing their voices to change the process, will inevitably lead to a future proof planet-centred approach. I'm afraid this is where my views as an ecologist slightly differ from these people-centred enthusiasts. But it might be the case that this is exactly why inter- or even trans-disciplinarity is a key ingredient in Active8-Planet's people- and planet-centred concept!



Sustainability Matrix

Of course, it's not always 100% clear what the planet needs. Unlike people, we can't just ask the planet or other species what they need. Therefore we risk slipping back into the expert-mindset when it comes to assessing the planet's needs. Something I noticed, unfortunately, even planet-centred anthropologists can get tangled up in. Asking Ellen and Dan how to assess the planet's needs, they recommend being aware of every action you take and asking yourself how to make less of an impact. My experience is that, though in some cases this indeed can work, it is not always the case. A people's perspective on the planet's need, is nothing less and nothing more than just that; a people's perspective. When, what I believe we really need for this second paradigm shift is a true unadulterated planet-centred perspective. To facilitate this, Griet Verbeek and Evy Puelinckx from the Hasselt University come to the rescue! They have designed a sustainability matrix for the Active8-Planet project to avoid assumptions on sustainability and use decades of independent quantifiable research on what the planet needs. Now, it's up to all of us planeters to acknowledge the priority of these needs and implement them in our challenges.



that I'm working on with De Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam (VU) and Huygen Installaties (HIA), an engineering and consultancy agency specialised in technical building installations and building physics. Here you can see how we want to apply these two paradigm shifts, from the expert mindset to a people- and planet-centred approach.

The built environment can play an important role in the well-being of healthcare professionals and patients. Appropriately designed indoor heating, ventilation and air conditioning systems, for instance, can reduce infection rates and medical errors, improve indoor air quality, speed up patient recovery and even shorten the duration of hospital stay. These systems, however, are often designed from an expert-mindset - in line with the technical standards. What's currently often missing is a deeper understanding of the impact of the built environment on people. Likewise, we need to better understand how people perceive and (re)shape that environment according to their needs. How do staff and patients perceive the indoor environment and interact with the built environment? Does it contribute to their perceived well-being? How do vulnerable people respond to these systems?

This September, with the support of the VU faculty and HIA engineers, four students at VU will start tackling these challenges by experimenting with and testing the people- and planet-centred approach to examine a Dutch healthcare facility. They will use the research methodology and the theory they acquired during the course of their studies, supplement them with new skills and knowledge through engaging in interdisciplinary and cross-sector teams, and apply them to a concrete and challenging R&D problem. By June 2022, they will present their research findings and concept designs. (We will also get to see how the university, the higher education teachers, the engineering company, its employees, and the students benefited from and co-created impact through an intensive collaboration within an Active8-Planet team!)

Sounds interesting? Follow our challenge on www.active8-planet.eu/vu

Active8 Challenge - Healthcare Environment

To give this generalistic story some body I'd love to introduce you to the Active8-Planet challenge



Soesja van Wijgerden

ENJOYING RELIABLE EDUCATION & COMPANY PARTNERSHIPS IN ACTIVE8

I am part of a team of researchers within design ethnography and informatics at Halmstad University that has teamed up with researchers and developers at Volvo Cars to participate in Active8-Planet. It is a unique opportunity for us to involve our students in our bachelor program in Digital Design and Innovation in co-designing for future sustainability within the key areas in the project, with a lot of inspiration from our wonderful project partners in Active8-Planet.

It is also a good opportunity to continue our long-term collaboration with Volvo Cars.

In fact, by the end of Active8-Planet, our collaboration will celebrate its 10th anniversary! Over the years we have conducted people-centred research together on autonomous future mobilities in various projects, and have been developing ways to create bridges between ethnographic engagement with people and places, industrial development and urban planning.

And now it is time to invite students into the partnership and learn from their experiences and ambitions, and at the same time develop our long-standing collaboration from an educational perspective. In these times, when we have understood the necessity and urgency of interdisciplinarity when developing people- and planet-centric sustainability solutions, I think it is key for higher education to engage students and provide them with opportunities to develop interdisciplinary skills and experiences. Participating in Active8-Planet creates an opportunity to reflect on these

issues, and the key principles for these kinds of engagements. What does it take to infuse industrial technical development with social science and design ethnography? Looking back at our long-term collaboration with Volvo Cars we have learned a few things through both mistakes and successes. And the conclusion is that even though it might be hard to create common people- and planet-centric agendas across industry, cities and academia, it is sure worth a try! I will give a couple of examples below.

How it all started

Our collaboration with Volvo Cars began in 2014 when I was approached by Robert Broström, senior technical leader at Volvo Cars, with a special interest in user experience and interaction design. We started to talk to each other about the development of self-driving cars and the fact that the technology had come so far that it was possible to not only imagine a future use of self-driving cars, but also to research what happens when people use such technology in cars on public roads. We came to the conclusion that design ethnographic research could be one key to fully understand the potentials of automated vehicles, since it would be able to provide insights into how people go about solving their everyday logistics as well as their fears, hopes and imaginations for how these technologies could be part of their future social life. We decided on bringing together our two different teams of researchers and developers, our international ethnographically oriented social scientific team at Halmstad University and the more psychology/technically oriented team of researchers and



Photo 1: This is how happy an international, interdisciplinary multi-stakeholder team of researchers, developers and urban planners look like when coming together to develop people-centric mobility solutions. Including Halmstad University, Monash University, Aarhus University, Volvo Cars, Helsingborg City, Gothenburg City and Public Transport companies. Photo: Patrik Palo

developers at the UX department at Volvo Cars. What brought us together was our joint interest in how emerging technologies are perceived, experienced and used, and we outlined the HEAD-project - Human Experiences and Expectations on Self-Driving Cars - funded by VINNOVA between 2016-2018. This was the first ever research project led by Volvo Cars that had its foundation in tailor-made applied ethnographic research methods within the framework of a multidisciplinary research model. By introducing everyday life based research through design anthropology, sociology, pedagogy, and informatics to the more laboratory and experimental set-up at Volvo Cars, was inspiring. And a lot of hard work.

Understanding self driving cars through cards

For a social science researcher, the set-up of the HEAD project was an amazing opportunity. Volvo Cars invested in providing families with cars that were equipped with the newest self-driving technologies available and we got the opportunity to follow these people for 1,5 years by doing ethnographic fieldwork in their homes, when they were driving, and by inviting them to events where they got to see and try cutting edge self-driving technologies. Part of our research was to provide the project with ethnographic materials that could be used to develop insights together with our industry partners, for example tailored AD futures cards to be used in workshops. These cards literally brought people's everyday life to the table,



Photo 2: A deck of workshop cards with ethnographic insights about people's experiences and expectations of self-driving cars derived from research in the HEAD project.

since they structured our ethnographic findings in 10 themes based on real-life stories, insights, implications, questions and future scenarios. These and other ethnographic impact materials that we have produced can be downloaded for free [here](#).

Through the life of the HEAD project we also got the opportunity to invest in the trust foundations of what has come to be a long-term research collaboration, both through developing our collaboration in practice but also through hiring two industry PhD-students employed by Volvo Cars and enrolled in PhD-education at Halmstad University. After the HEAD project we followed up with the TIC-project (Trust in Intelligent Cars), that included combined ethnographic research with so-called Wizard of Oz - experiments on test tracks and the ongoing RELEVANT project in which we are following families that are trying out new ways to charge their electric cars.

A Human Approach

However, the projects that really paved our way into the Active8-Planet are the two methodologically oriented projects [AHA I](#) and [AHA II](#). AHA stands for 'A Human Approach' and both projects are part of the strategic project portfolio of Drive Sweden (one of Sweden's government-funded strategic innovation programs). AHA I aimed at creating a collaborative research and design methodology for future urban mobility by aligning stakeholders from cities, public transport, car industry and academia through a people-centric approach. Ethnographic material from our previous projects was used to create a joint starting point in people's everyday mobilities, nudging the different stakeholders into discussing people as 'people' and not primarily as 'users' or 'citizens' (which is usually the case in industry and cities respectively). Among other things, AHA I resulted in a series of workshops where stakeholders from the car industry, academia, city planning and public transport met, discussed and tried to solve each other's issues and problems from people-centric real-life perspectives based in ethnographic research.

In the ongoing AHA II project, we have pushed the collaborative agenda even further to also engage people living in particular residential areas in co-design activities by establishing two Urban Living Labs in Gothenburg City and Helsingborg City in Sweden. Through a participatory design ethnographic approach, we are aiming at creating new concepts for future mobility that is not only

based on ethnographic understandings of these areas, but that also engages the people who live there in designing and trying out the concepts. By doing this we are being able to scrutinize the taken for granted ideas of what should be developed and for whom and why, as well as come up with alternative ways of defining the driving forces for new mobility that are more aligned with what people already do, feel and value.

Engagement is key

Our experience is that one major struggle to create successful collaborations regards engagement. How do we create an engaging project culture with distributed and shared responsibilities

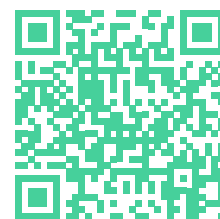


Photo 3: Stakeholders in the AHA I project from the cities of Gothenburg and Helsingborg, public transport, Volvo Cars and Halmstad University, workshopping how a future shared family shuttle could look like, based on real-life situations presented through ethnographic research. Photo: Patrik Palo

across stakeholders? Especially when the different stakeholders are working along completely different agendas set by politicians on the one hand, and business interests on the other, with subsequent different mindsets regarding the people they interact with through their services. Are they ‘citizens’, and part of realising the city’s visions, or are they ‘users’, who should be provided with the right kind of vehicles and services to become ‘customers’? These different agendas need to be aligned to create the desired synergies. What we have found out is that by providing the project with a real life based understanding of ‘people as people’ can serve as the neutral common ground where different agendas and goals can be, at least partly, merged. The other key for overcoming difficulties that should not be forgotten is to work on the similarities and joint interests between the different stakeholders and not only continuously powerpointing each other with

the company or city ‘grand narrative’ of purposes and goals to point out the differences. Or, for that matter, deliver ethnographic material in academic lingo without taking an active part in transforming the material into insights together with the other stakeholders. In AHA I, we did follow-up interviews after a particularly bad experience of talking over each other’s heads in one of our first workshops, and we identified a need to move the conversation out from facilitated workshops in meeting rooms into informal conversations in smaller blended groups of people working together on particular tasks. In Swedish, we sometimes talk about this as the ‘cinnamon bun - effect’, which refers to the Swedish ‘fika’ tradition. ‘Fika’ is our daily 10 o’clock ritual, making time for friends and colleagues to share a cup of coffee and maybe a cinnamon bun. Lessons learned from AHA I underlined the obvious fact that you need these types of informal ‘cinnamon-bun’ conversations to create teams, also in multi-stakeholder teams.

Listen to the “fika” song: [Click here](#) or scan the QR code.



Infusing more collaborations

As said in the beginning, we are very happy to now take the highly relevant next step to also include students into this collaborative work through Active8-Planet, as well as exchanging ideas and learning together with other like-minded partners in the project! In this way, we will be able to provide students with collaborative experiences that they can bring with them, and hopefully also advocate for, in their coming professional life. At the same time, our already existing collaborations will be infused with new perspectives from a new stakeholder group; young people in the beginning of their career that really want to be part of a change toward more sustainable living from no other agenda than their own.

Vaike Fors, Professor of Design Ethnography,
Halmstad University



WHAT IS HAPPENING AT POLICY LEVEL?



Joerg Niehoff, Policy coordinator for
University Business cooperation at
European Commission, DG EAC

TOWARDS A NEW HIGHER EDUCATION TRANSFORMATION

Due to deep technological and structural changes, accelerated by the COVID-19 pandemic, the higher education sector across Europe is changing rapidly, affecting teaching, learning, research and university-business cooperation. On 30 September 2020, the European Commission adopted two initiatives that aim to strengthen the contribution of education and training to the EU's recovery from the coronavirus crisis, and help build a green and digital Europe. Setting out a vision of the [European Education Area](#) to be achieved by 2025, the Commission proposes new initiatives, more investment and stronger cooperation of Member States to help all Europeans, of all ages, benefit from the EU's rich education and training offer. The Commission also adopted a new [Digital Education Action Plan](#), reflecting the lessons learned, and devising a plan for a high-performing digital education ecosystem with enhanced digital competences for the digital transformation.

Higher education institutions in Europe are at the heart of both the European Education Area and the European Research Area, and are particularly well placed to connect them together. We were discussing some of the current challenges and future prospects of interdisciplinary and cross-sectoral collaboration in European higher education with [Joerg Niehoff](#), who is the Policy Coordinator for University Business Cooperation in the Directorate General for Education, Youth, Culture and Sport. He is responsible for the development and implementation of policies and specific initiatives to support innovation and entrepreneurial culture in and by higher education institutions, and their cooperation with business in a broad sense.

Hi Joerg. Thank you for taking the time to speak with us today. Let's start with a slightly provocative question. In your opinion, why is university-business cooperation so hard to achieve and sustain?

Joerg Niehoff: Well, when I listen to you explaining your projects [[PEOPLE](#) and [Active8-Planet](#)], together with what you have achieved so far, you don't make it sound so hard. What I do believe is a major issue is that university business cooperation is not part of the DNA, not always part of our institutional set-up, and complex due to the different languages, speed and expectations on the side of academia and industry. It relies on individuals establishing this connection, it can often only happen with external funding, which in itself can never offer a sustainable solution. We have seen that these collaborations can achieve tremendous results at local level that really make a difference for the citizens. We all have to do more to give better visibility to the positive impacts university business cooperation can achieve, and that this has to become integral part of our approach.

In your opinion, which are currently the main barriers and gaps when it comes to university-business cooperation in Europe?

Joerg Niehoff: A main barrier that has been identified again and again is the lack of recognition and incentives to engage in university business cooperation. It depends often on the individuals, but should rather become a priority for the leadership and part of the institutional strategy. In our recent survey among Knowledge Alliances, we asked the same question: what are the main barriers that you face, and we got interesting responses. The lack of funding and economic incentives came out quite clearly, including the possibility to create a larger impact of projects that have been successful, something where respondents are also looking for a better support from national policies. They also underlined that collaboration between companies, universities and research centres generally takes the form of transfers of knowledge, creation of new useful products, new jobs, and business models. However, this is hindered by various factors, including cultural differences between the business and science communities, lack of incentives, legal barriers, and fragmented markets for knowledge and technology. Of course, one of the main barriers of the last months was the Covid-19 pandemic that prevented the strengthening of relations between the various partners and a greater involvement of the corporate partners.

How do Knowledge Alliance projects contribute towards bridging these gaps? What are the key impacts that the European Commission wants to achieve with these projects?

Joerg Niehoff: The Knowledge Alliances funded under Erasmus+ (2014-2020) are designed to develop new, innovative, and multidisciplinary approaches to teaching and learning, stimulating entrepreneurial skills and competences of higher education and company staff. And key to their success is that the collaboration between higher education institutions and businesses is at the core of each of the 158 projects that have been funded. Bringing together those two perspectives, from the moment that a proposal is developed, allows co-ownership and ensures that the needs of the users can be reflected from the beginning. We have learned from a recent survey that these projects are very successful in creating knowledge and results that can be used beyond the consortium partners, and thus create broader impacts that allows upscaling, possibly also by using other forms of funding such as from the Cohesion policy. The importance to have this kind of projects has also been fully recognised under the new Erasmus+ programme (2021-27), where we continue with annual calls for what is now called “Alliances for Innovation”, with the 2021 call closing on 7 September.

Our Active8-Planet project aims to demonstrate the added value of interdisciplinarity when it comes to tackling key challenges of our planet. Could interdisciplinarity present a driver for university-business cooperation or is it just an additional burden?

Joerg Niehoff: I believe interdisciplinarity is not a burden, but a necessity, and certainly in the collaboration between higher education institutions and their environment, be it enterprises, or other forms of partners. Today's problems need to be addressed with a broad mix of skills and backgrounds, and have to reflect better the perspectives of our citizens and society. And part of that is also the need for more diversity. Without a gender, cultural and social diversity among those defining the problems that we address, and those working on the solutions we hope to solve with research and innovation, we miss important perspectives, limit the co-ownership of results and allow that valuable human resources remain untapped. This was also confirmed at the consultation meeting with the Knowledge Alliances

on 3 June, where supporting interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary education and research was discussed as one of the urgent challenges to address.

What will be the key future perspectives and policy developments in the area of European university-business cooperation?

Joerg Niehoff: The main drivers for our activities are of course the COVID-19 recovery, and the green and digital transformation of our society. Higher Education Institutions in their interaction with their environment will be key in adjusting their educational offerings to the quickly changing labour market needs, and educate the young people that we need to build back better. At the same time, they, as institutions, should become drivers of transformation in their ecosystems and become an actor of change towards greener societies. And this needs to happen in a geographically sensitive way, to ensure that less developed and peripheral regions have the capability to create and retain talent, create a culture of innovation and entrepreneurship as well as to absorb new ideas and technologies. The policy context will be defined by a European Strategy for Universities. The Commission has started to co-create this strategy, together with Member States and stakeholders, to accelerate the transformation of Higher Education. We expect the interaction between higher education institutions and businesses to play a crucial role within this strategy.

To conclude, what would be your final advice for our Active8-Planet project?

Joerg Niehoff: For me your project is very inspirational in the way how you build interdisciplinary teams, where social sciences students become aware of the practical value of their contributions, and how they acquire valuable skills and confidence. And the fact that in the previous project PEOPLE three students could find employment in efficiency/energy sector speaks for itself. Putting enough effort on communication, spreading the word, and encourage others to follow a similar path to inspire institutional change would be important from my perspective. And of course, we are more than happy to help from our side to communicate the success of your projects.



by Gregor
Cerinšek

Gregor Cerinšek



ACTIVE8-PLANET'S MATRIX: THE WAY TO AN ETHICAL AND BALANCED FUTURE?

Exploring the Active8 Sustainability Matrix

There once was...

...a 6-year old me who visited a bulb park for waste sorting (see photo 1) on a school trip and images of the famine in Ethiopia started to appear, which left a big impression and was a tipping point in my childhood.



Photo 1: Bulb park for waste sorting

From that moment on, I saw it as my mission to keep a watchful eye on the separation of household waste, and food waste was for me a big no-go. To the point of annoyance of my housemates, I took my role as “trash can police” very seriously. I certainly had my priorities straight as a child.

And now we're here // purpose

40 years later, under the wings of Griet Verbeeck, I am working, together with Hasselt University on Active8-Planet's matrix, supporting a methodology to properly apply sustainability in higher education. I guess my priorities didn't change much over time. The more I immerse myself in the research, the more that feeling of injustice and wanting to take care of people and the environment becomes inevitable.

Just like when I was a child. I carried this urge to make a difference also as a student, as an architect, as a teacher and as a business leader.

Designing for the sake of designing did not give me fulfillment. Doing business for the sake of doing business did not give me satisfaction. Making a positive impact, helping to eliminate waste, acting to give people equal opportunities, to let them discover their talents and to inspire them. That is what gave, and still gives, me tons of energy and is something I want to put my mind to. Everyday.

My way of thinking wasn't always popular, I admit. I also received lots of support, but when it came to the social dimension of my approach, a link with amateurism was often made. More than once I received remarks such as: “Evy, are we talking about a company or a hobby club here?”, “You won't be able to pay your bills with that”... But along the way, you meet people who are looking for that exact same balance between the (social/ecological dimension) purpose and profit.

Progress is being made on a global scale

It took some time (read: several decades), but it looks like we're finally moving forward when it comes to sustainability. With the Sustainable Development Goals, the UN is clearly putting social and sustainable issues on the agenda. The EU follows with the Green Deal. And then there is the great Kate Raworth who managed to bring social and ecological dimensions together in a simple, economic model. And so, she creates a clear framework of thought that can guide governments, businesses & civil society organizations and many more in their decisions and actions.

The goal of Raworth's model is to put two very important values in the picture in every decision you make. A sustainable, clean and green earth on the one hand, and an inclusive, equitable and ethical

Active8-Planet's matrix explained

Therefore in Active8-Planet, we are designing a matrix for teaching sustainability at Hei's and we took the DEAL approach as the starting point.

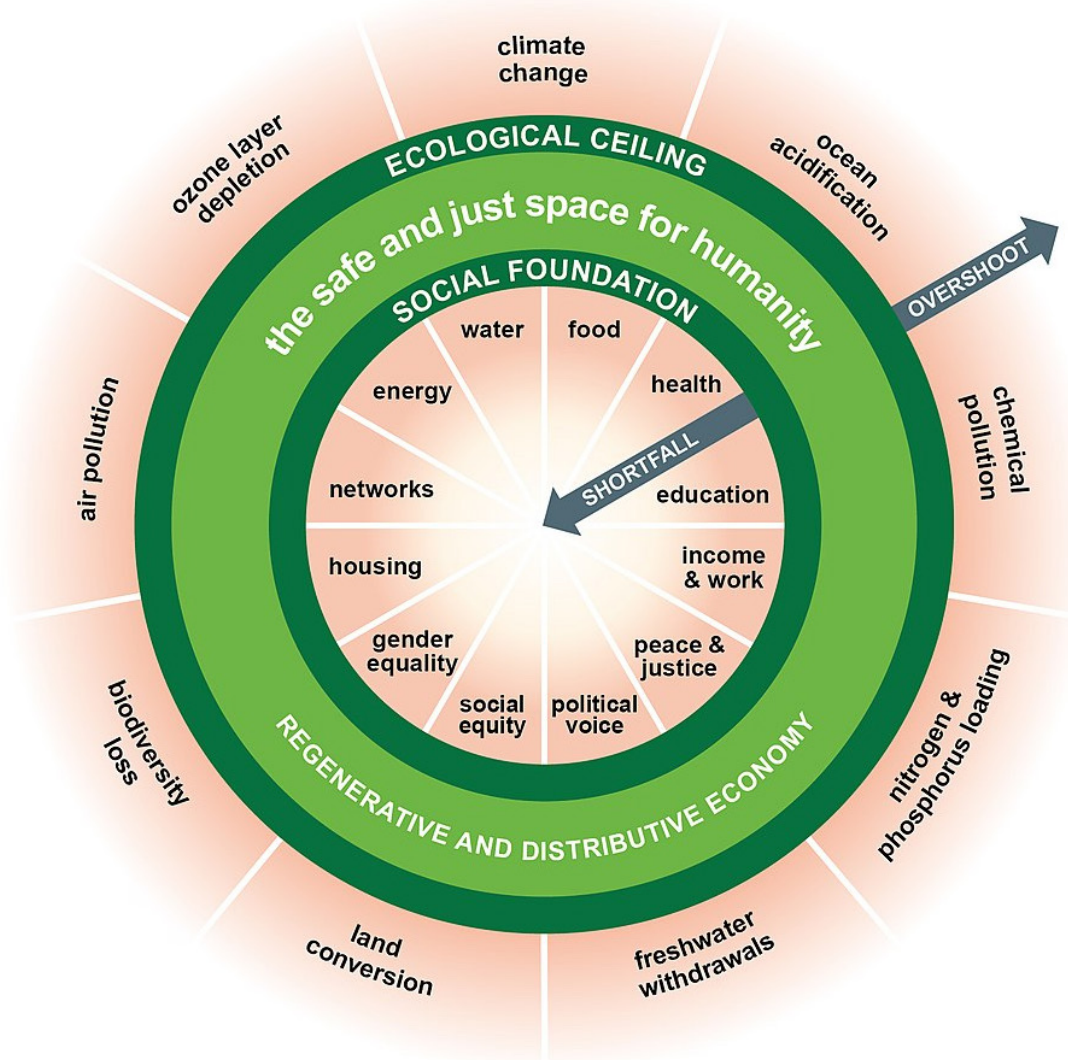


Photo 2: Raworth's model
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society on the other. The matrix visually represents the boundaries of the earth's possibilities and the basic needs of the people living on it. In between these 2 boundaries there's a - you'll never guess - doughnut shaped area. When you accomplish all 12 social elements of the inner circle (such as housing, gender equality, education etc.) without crossing the border of the ecological 'ceiling' (such as biodiversity loss, climate change etc.) you have reached a prosperous and just economy. It might sound like a utopia on a global scale. But nothing's impossible, right?

DEAL stands for Doughnut Economics Action Lab. In this approach, the ecological and social dimensions are not only analyzed and evaluated on a local scale, but also globally. Something we undeniably learned from the covid pandemic is that what we do on a local scale can have a huge impact on the other side of the world. So we look at a given challenge from four different lenses. Social, ecological, local and global.

In Active8-Planet, we propose a challenge-based approach to teaching and learning. By introducing a challenge, students will engage more quickly by

relating to personal experiences, motives, or passions, resulting in a greater chance of success. By working across the established boundaries of the study programmes and approaching a challenge from different angles, we create added value. Not just financially, but also socially and ecologically.

At the start of the challenge-exploration process, the matrix can serve as a tool to inspire and broaden the scope. While at the same time, it provides a clear focus on where we set the bar. In the course of a student project, it's ideal to take a look at the state of affairs and make adjustments where necessary. In the final phase, the matrix is the basis for the evaluation of the students' work.

The application of the matrix regarding a furniture design challenge, for example, would deal with the choice of materials, production techniques, transport, business model, etc., while meeting ecological standards, both locally and globally. But also aspects with impact on people, behaviour, such as working conditions and health, that specify the social dimension need to be taken into account at a local and global level.

Long story short

It is certainly not easy to take the social and ecological aspects into account and actively apply them in practice. My own career path is a great example of this. Despite the challenge, I now do

	SOCIAL	ECOLOGICAL
LOCAL	What would it mean for the people in this city to thrive?	What would it mean for this city to thrive within its natural habitat?
GLOBAL	What would it mean for this city to respect the wellbeing of people worldwide?	What would it mean for this city to respect the health of the whole planet?

Photo 3: Active8-Planet's matrix
©Doughnut economics

notice that more and more people are drawing attention to this new way of thinking and that it will become increasingly important. Our students applying this matrix to their projects, will become 'planeteers', pioneers. Our matrix is essential to offer a ready-to-use, low-threshold platform on which people can build their own sustainable action and enterprise.

Evy Puelinckx



by Evy Puelinckx

Are you ready to accept the challenge?

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