

THE CHARTER OF GREEK UNIVERSITIES FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

At the beginning of the 21st century and in the third millennium of modern times, Humanity is facing a number of challenges. These challenges are related to the exceptional problems created by the absence of proper management of the natural, anthropogenic and cultural environment and natural resources and are both directly and indirectly associated with the dramatic dispatches and inequalities in the socio-economic and cultural development of the planet.

This Charter is drafted in a historic moment that is internationally characterized by a series of crises at the economic, ecological, political, cultural and institutional level including the crisis of values. In Greece, these crises as well as the disproportionate, for the greek society, interventions for their management, are particularly perceptible in intensity and depth.

Universities and Education, as a whole, are influenced by the crisis but at the same time recognize that only with a radical reorientation of their function and role pertaining to both Society and State, could they contribute to a way of overcoming the crisis and founding a sustainable future for the coming generations.

Taking into consideration that:

- *The process to Sustainable Development as initiated by the Rio Summit of 1992, and the resulting Agenda for the 21st century (Agenda 21) and specifically chapter 36 in which the role of all levels of Education is acknowledged and Universities are called upon to play a leading role. [The recommendation is repeated in 1996 from United Nations Commission on Sustainable Development (UNCSD) in the International Work Programme for Education, Public Awareness and Training for Sustainability. Since then, the International Convention of Thessaloniki "For Environment and Society" (1997) set the path towards Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) at all levels.]*
- *The need for the promotion of education as an exceptionally important factor in the achievement of Sustainable Development and the role that the Universities will play, as well as the necessary and appropriate changes in Higher Education itself, was formulated in various ways in the declarations and conclusions of a number of International Conventions such as: the "World Conference on Higher Education" (Paris 1999), the "World Conference on Science" (Budapest 1999), the COPERNICUS Conference on "Higher Education for Sustainability" (Lüneburg 2001), the World Education Forum "Education for All" (Dakar 2002). All the above as well as the recognition of ESD at the World Summit of*

Johannesburg, in 2002, have led UN General Assembly to declare the decade 2005-2014 as “The UN Decade of Education for Sustainable Development”(UN DESD) led by UNESCO and with the Universities being vital levers in its realization.

- *The adoption of the “Strategy for ESD”, by the 56 member states of UNECE (Economic Committee for Europe), in 2005, in a milestone Conference in Vilnius of Lithuania. The Strategy requests that Governments and all relative institutions promote ESD at all levels and invites Universities to considerably contribute by developing appropriate capacities and knowledge to reform their paradigms through their teaching, operation and governance.*
- *In a time when the boundaries of the planet are “shrinking” in a variety of ways and the problems and prospects of climate change, poverty, hunger, immigration, globalized economy and, undoubtedly, globalized knowledge are increasing, the close collaboration of Greek Universities with each other and with the corresponding Universities on a European, Mediterranean and Global scale, as well as with the corresponding networks (such as UNU, GUNI, MEDIES, The Network of the Mediterranean Universities for Sustainable Development, etc.) is absolutely necessary.*

The Session of Rectors that has jointly undersigned the present Charter embraces the principles of Sustainable Development, International Treaties and the results of International Conventions and is committed to the accordance of Greek Universities. Specifically, Greek Universities will closely and thoroughly collaborate in the following axes:

1. Education and Research: Through these, the principles and essential knowledge and practices of Sustainable Development are promoted. The curricula should encourage the interdisciplinary approach and the various collaborations between Universities, Research Institutions and Social Partners, to promote both relevant and suitable basic and applied research, endorse innovation, strengthen the scientific and institutional background for the promotion of friendly to both the environment and society methods and modes of production and consumption alongside the evaluation of suitable new and/or “clearer” technologies, the relative possibilities that they provide and their potential dangers, but also for the environmental and energy planning of infrastructure and the built environment and the Protection of the Cultural Heritage with techno-economic optimization, aesthetic compatibility and the terms for quality of life. In all the above, a close collaboration within the Network of Sustainable Greek Universities will be sought, but also with foreign Universities, in the framework of existing exchange programmes and international networks:

a. With an emphasis on assisting and promoting interdisciplinary undergraduate courses and curricula and particularly inter-university networks of distinction of postgraduate curricula.

b. With an emphasis on assisting research in the fields of Environment, Energy, Quality of Life and Sustainable Development for the realization of which, the support of the State is welcome, through prioritisation of the aforementioned themes within the financing strategy for both pure and applied research.

They should also promote the appropriate education and training, according to the principles of ESD, of new teachers that are intended for all levels of formal, non formal and informal learning, as well as the relevant “in service” training of teachers, that are already in schools, and for lifelong learning according to the principles of Sustainable Development.

2. Application of suitable Principles, Methods and Practices that promote Sustainability within Universities: With the promotion of the planning and construction of buildings, means of transportation and management of materials and services that achieve the reduction in energy and raw materials; consumption, promote renewable energy sources, recycling, proper management of toxic, dangerous or contagious substances and waste, the promotion of green products -including in the related food services- and in general the development and application of pioneering technologies, methods and practices that strengthen Sustainable Development in academic workspaces.

3. Governance of Higher Education Institutions: According to the principles of Sustainable Development with an emphasis on the principles of a democratic, constructive dialogue and consent, absolute transparency, reciprocal respect and responsibility of all elements of the Academic Community, as well as the principles of meritocracy, justice and self-government of Universities and free Public Education. The general administration of Universities should be compatible with a system of Integrated Environmental Management, including procedures such as procurement auctions, tenders, supplies etc. that should take into serious consideration the criteria and practices of Sustainable Development, e.g. by applying the E.U. Directive about Green Public Procurement (GPP), while simultaneously decreasing unnecessary bureaucratic processes.

4. Relationship between Higher Education Institutions and Society at both Local and International Levels: Taking into consideration the collaboration with all social partners, local society and the general public and the promotion of

public awareness, dissemination and understanding through the distribution of valid and objective viewpoints and opinions around critical issues of our time, as well as the development of know-how and good practices in production and the facilitation of local societies in important communal decision-making for sustainable development. In this respect, Universities will contribute to the sustainable national orientation and planning, which also undeniably depends on the corresponding provisions and intentions of the State, so that it decrees scientifically-informed measures and processes in political decision-making with the active participation of Universities and their representatives.

The support of initiatives from University volunteer organizations and particularly from students, towards green actions, viable mobility and energy conservation with novel and contributing applications is of particular importance in strengthening the role of Universities in Society.