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Introduction to the UNESCO-Japan/MEXT Project on “Broadening the Application of the Sustainability Science Approach” and objectives of the symposium

*Third Symposium on Sustainability Science:
Towards Guidelines on Research and Education*

31 May – 1 June 2017

UNESCO Headquarters - Room XIII (Bonvin Building)



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RATIONALE

- ▶ Need to achieve an operational statement of how new approaches to science can promote the achievement of the 2030 Agenda.
- ▶ Science is crucial in this regard. Unlocking the potential of science requires both new ideas and new ways of doing and using science.
- ▶ A new approach of “Sustainability Science” is emerging that seeks to integrate knowledge in all areas including social, human and natural sciences, for the purpose of building a sustainable global society.
- ▶ **Main question:** Who needs to do what, in practice, in this regard.

BACKGROUND

- ▶ The project “Broadening the Application of the Sustainability Science Approach” has its origin in an initiative of the Government of Japan, in 2013.
- ▶ The language of “sustainability science” was written into UNESCO’s Medium-Term Strategy (C/4) and four-year Programme (C/5) as adopted by the General Conference in November 2013.
- ▶ The project was established, with generous financial support from the Japanese Funds in Trust, to give a clear focus to UNESCO’s commitment to sustainability science, as required by the General Conference of UNESCO.

OVERALL PURPOSES

- ▶ To explore new ways to bridge academic work on sustainability science with growing interest in this approach among policy-making communities in Member States.
- ▶ Fostering a pioneering platform through the demonstration of scientific perspectives and successful case studies, and prioritizes opportunities for multi-stakeholder involvement and multidisciplinary approaches.
- ▶ To shift from academic questions of definitions and methods to the challenge of how sustainability science can be applied to transforming society by solving real problems, in particular through:
 - Moving from interdisciplinarity to transdisciplinarity;
 - Education and capacity building;
 - Networking and collaboration, including linking local and regional networks with global networks, such as the Future Earth Initiative.

MAIN CHALLENGE

To “broaden the application” of the sustainability science approach, building on what already exists in many academic networks, in order to strengthen the scientific knowledge base in support of the global 2030 Agenda.

Sustainability Science

A SERIES OF EVENTS

- ▶ Three symposia with a mixed target audience spanning from decision-makers to academics, building on the know-how of several stakeholders with experience in the emerging approach of sustainability science and also on natural and social sciences past learning and achievements
- ▶ **Inception Symposium** (Paris, 5-6 April 2016): to gather feedback on sustainability science general policy messages in the presence of steering committee members, key experts in sustainability science and policy representatives from Member States .
- ▶ **Regional/Thematic Symposium on Sustainability Science** (Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, 19 to 21 December 2016): focus on how to apply a sustainability science approach in UNESCO's five regions.
- ▶ **Third Symposium on Sustainability Science** (Paris, 31 May-1 June 2017): to discuss the main deliverable of the project: the Guidelines on Research and Education

OTHER ACTIVITIES

- ▶ **Regional Dialogue on Sustainability Science Policy to Support the Post-2015 Development Agenda** (Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, 4-6 March 2015).
- ▶ **Reception** jointly hosted by the Assistant Directors-General of the two UNESCO's science sectors to promote the project among Permanent Delegations to UNESCO (Paris, 12 October 2016).
- ▶ **Panels** organized by the project in the context of the 22nd Session of the Conference of Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (COP22), held in Marrakech, Morocco, November 2016.



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MOST Schools on Sustainability Science- 2017

**MOST School
« Sustainability
Science », Cape
Town, South Africa,
14-17 February 2017**



**MOST School
« Sustainability Science:
Linking Science with
Social Action and Policy
Making", Padang, West
Sumatra, Indonesia, 1-3
February 2017**



MODALITIES OF THE PROJECT

- ▶ The project has operated through three main modalities.
- ▶ **Modality # 1**: clarifying a notion of sustainability science sufficiently broad to be acceptable to diverse academic and policy communities from different disciplines and regions, and drawing out its main conceptual and methodological features.
- ▶ **Modality # 2**: reviewing the range of projects within UNESCO's programmes that correspond to these general features, whether or not they use the language of sustainability science, in order to identify what light they shed on the relevance and applicability of the term.
- ▶ **Modality # 3**: elaborating **guidelines** that offer a template for how sustainability science can be pursued more effectively in the future, both as a research paradigm and as a mode of policy support.

ELABORATION OF THE GUIDELINES

- ▶ A number of partner institutions have been very active through the project steering committee and its **drafting group**, including:
 - the International Council for Science (ICSU)
 - the International Social Science Council (ISSC)
 - the International Council of Philosophy and Human Sciences (CIPSH)
 - the United Nations University (UNU)
 - the Japan Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (Japan/MEXT)
 - the German National Commission for UNESCO
 - Leuphana University Luneburg
 - Indiana University and Future Earth
 - the National Research Center (NRC) representing the Government of Egypt, and
 - representatives of several UNESCO's sectors

Broadening the application of the sustainability science approach

THE WAY FORWARD (I)

▶ The approach applies first to UNESCO, which needs to clarify how its various sectors and programmes can work together to support science-informed responses to the challenges of inclusive and sustainable development. We need to do so more ambitiously and more coherently in UNESCO's *Draft Programme and Budget for 2018-2021 (39 C/5)*.

- Significant synergies remain to be unlocked between UNESCO's six international and **intergovernmental science programmes**.
- Designing **regional and national projects** with buy-in from governments and other relevant stakeholders that can deliver tangible benefits, especially to vulnerable communities, while at the same time consolidating and sharpening scientific concepts and methods.

UNESCO cannot convince the world of the importance of sustainability science if it is not acting resolutely within its own programmes

Broadening the application of the sustainability science approach

THE WAY FORWARD (II)

► Broadening the application of the sustainability science approach beyond UNESCO. The draft guidelines are perhaps too generic.

With the help of our partners, and without turning the guidelines into an action plan, which is not their purpose, we should be able to give an indication of how sustainability science can be picked up by ICSU, ISSC and CIPSH, and how it relates to existing international initiatives, in particular Future Earth, and more generally to science advice within the UN system.

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THE WAY FORWARD (III)

▶ The guidelines once finalized and adopted need to speak to a wide range of actors not directly involved in their elaboration. Governments and higher education institutions, as well as potential funders, are explicitly addressed in the draft guidelines.

We need to make sure that our messages are focused and actionable, and that they are combined with advocacy at the right level.

Broadening the application of the sustainability science approach

ONE FINAL WORD ON THE VALUE OF THIS PROJECT

This project is a starting point.

Its value will be determined by what we do with its outputs – which means by what we convince the world to do with them.

It is in this ambitious spirit that I look forward to our discussions over the next two days.



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Sustainability Science

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