

Call for Abstracts for the Annual Conference of the Subdivision on Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) within the German Educational Research Association (GERA/DGfE)

**"Controversies and debates in the context of education for
sustainable development"**

from 25. to 27.09.2023

at the Heidelberg University of Education

The societal debates on transformation processes towards sustainability are becoming more challenging as the windows of opportunity to mitigate the most severe consequences of non-sustainable developments are increasingly closing (IPBES 2019, IPCC 2021). This toughness is expressed, for example, in conflicting goals between the individual Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), such as economic growth and ecologically oriented SDGs, or in the question of whether incremental reforms or radical transformation approaches (Brand 2016) are more needed. Multiple dilemmas also accompany an emotionalisation and polarisation of political debates for research on transformation processes (e.g., Henkel et al. forthcoming). In addition, there are critical perspectives on sustainability efforts from postcolonial discourse (for ESD, e.g., Palmeiro Neves Fonseca da Costa 2021). Intense debates, controversies and conflicting goals can initiate and promote sustainability transformation processes as well as slow down and hinder them.

While the tensions outlined above are implicitly present at all times, they are rarely explicitly focused on in ESD discourses (e.g. Boström et al. 2018), and neutrality of educators is often demanded (critically: Lösch 2020, Weselek/Wohnig 2021, Wohnig/Zorn 2022). In contrast, the current UNESCO program ESDfor2030 argues that ESD should promote a "critical and contextualised" understanding of the Sustainable Development Goals and draw attention to "interlinkages and trade-offs between different SDGs" (UNESCO/DUK 2021: 16, own translation). For the realisation of a more sustainable and equitable future, transformative action, structural changes, and a reflexive approach to technologies are named in the program and a "certain degree of disruption" (UNESCO/DUK 2021: 18) is called for to establish new patterns of thinking and behaviour.

In the various current subject areas of ESD research, such as digitisation (Weselek et al. 2022, Kmínek/Wahl 2023), inclusion (Vierbuchen/Rieckmann 2020), or climate protection (Hippe 2016), (goal) conflicts and controversies are indeed the order of the day. However, even here, there are only hesitant approaches to the question of how to deal with these conflicts and controversies. Moreover, various controversies arise between more affirmative and policy-oriented research projects on mainstreaming ESD (for example, in the context of empirical educational research, e.g., Diedrich et al. 2022), and more distanced and critical perspectives (Slimani et al. 2021, Stein et al. 2022).

Also, in ESD research, or in the community itself, various debates and controversies become apparent: points of friction between subject-didactic approaches, different disciplinary and

educational perspectives, or between research approaches and approaches that consider transdisciplinary or/and transformative claims in research processes as essential. Therefore, the conference will address the following questions.

- Which conflicts and controversies are becoming increasingly evident in the context of ESD? How can they be dealt with theoretically and revealed empirically?
- How can the outlined tensions be productively turned around so that disruptive moments stimulate new (research) perspectives and do not contribute to aggravate different positionings?
- How can controversies and debates within ESD be addressed and taken up in concrete educational work? What implications can be formulated for teachers and learners?

The conference from Sept. 25 to Sept. 27, 2023, invites abstracts of up to 2,500 characters (including spaces, excluding references) on ESD-related research projects focusing on the conference theme. Abstracts should include information about the authors (name, institution, research focus) and be sent to the following e-mail address by May 14: bnezentrum@ph-heidelberg.de.

In addition to individual contributions, the submission of working groups is possible. Working groups should have two to three contributions focused on a joint research question. A concept paper for the planned working group, which outlines the individual contributions of up to 5,000 characters (with spaces excluding references), should also be submitted to the above address.

Literature

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