

Sustainability – the common denominator

A cooperative project between the Institute of Natural Resource Sciences (IUNR) and the Institute of Sustainable Development Eberswalde (HNEE) is taking shape. At the end of 2016 Swiss-European Mobility Programme (SEMP) contracts between the IUNR and the HNEE were signed near Berlin, and since then, a good deal has happened, Lara Haslmeier – an undergraduate environmental engineer specialising in nature management – is currently spending an exchange semester at the HNEE. More details of this follow, after a brief look at where it all started.



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How it all began

In my search for a university in German-speaking countries that, like the IUNR, deals intensively with issues of sustainable development, I came across the HNEE. I was interested in what sustainability means to companies, and with the aim of finding a suitable Master's degree programme, I discovered the Master's programme in 'Strategic Sustainability Management' at the HNEE. The introductory sentence 'Strategic sustainability management supports you – your company – your non-profit organisation in developing in a future-orientated and sustainable way' caught my interest. After thoroughly researching the different modules, I registered for the 2014–2016 Master's degree programme. While at the HNEE, I had the opportunity to interact with their lecturers, staff and students on the Bachelor's and Master's programmes, and experience Eberswalde campus life firsthand. It didn't take me long to realise that there were many similarities between the IUNR and HNEE. For example, the Bachelor's and Master's programmes cover environmental issues such as the use of landscapes, nature conservation, organic farming, agricultural marketing, regional development, renewable energies and environmental awareness, all with the aim of developing solutions for the sustainability challenges of today. And there it was, the common denominator – sustainability! A cooperative project between the IUNR and the HNEE via SEMP was the obvious next step.

From idea to implementation

At the end of 2016, I had my first exploratory discussions with the Dean of the Faculty of Landscape Management and Nature Conservation. The profile of this faculty, with its focus on organic agriculture, land use and nature conservation, regional planning and environmental education, is very similar to the IUNR's Bachelor's programme in Natural Resource Sciences. The idea of initiating cooperation between the universities to promote both student and lecturer mobility was consolidated quite quickly. In addition, initial discussions took place about how both univer-

sities could work together on digitisation and learning with the idea, for example, of developing and offering e-learning courses. In May 2017, an HNEE delegation visited the IUNR to continue the talks and put ideas into more concrete terms. In a larger discussion, an exciting exchange and a comprehensive collection of ideas were generated. In November 2017, the Head of the IUNR's Research Unit Organic Agriculture and representatives of the Nature Management specialisation (one from the student advisory service and myself from the Environmental Systems and Sustainable Development specialisation) went to Eberswalde for a return visit. Further intensive discussions and workshops took place on what form the cooperation between the two universities should take. Last but not least, presentations for students were given, and Prof. Jürgen Peters took us on a wonderful stroll through the old town of Eberswalde. With plenty to do and our heads full of ideas, we returned home.

What have we achieved so far?

Lecturer mobility: As a first step, Dr. Christina Bantle, a visiting Professor of Politics and Markets in the Agricultural and Food industry at the HNEE, worked on the newly launched Master of Science in Environment and Natural Resources (ENR) in the Agrofood Systems major, and gave lectures on methods of empirical social research over two days.

Student mobility: As previously mentioned, Lara Haslmeier (24) is studying Landscape Management and Nature Conservation for one semester at the HNEE. The subjects she is studying include, for example, applied landscape ecology, land use, geoeology, GIS, species recognition of flora and fauna, and cross-border nature conservation. Once she has completed her exchange semester, she will write a report detailing her experiences at HNEE.

Joint programmes: Every year a five-day conference on renewable energies – 'Master Class Course Conference Renewable Energies' – is held at the HNEE.



The talks between Prof. Jürg Rohrer, Head of the Research Group for Renewable Energy, and Frank Torkler, Faculty of Landscape Management and Nature Conservation, were recorded on video with an invitation to our IUNR students. The Master Class Course Conference Renewable Energies (MCCRE) was included in the 3rd semester of the IUNR Master's Research Unit Ecological Engineering (4 ECTS points). This means that the MCCRE is open to IUNR Master's students with full accreditation of ECTS points.

New e-learning proposal as a preparatory course for future Master's students: A joint e-learning programme for future Master's students at the HNEE and the IUNR is currently being developed. The aim is to close gaps in preparatory agricultural education and to provide important knowledge for the forthcoming Master's programme. The e-learning programme is being developed jointly, but will be implemented at each university within its own framework. Students will be able to acquire up to 6 ECTS points. Topics such as basic principles of organic farming, agricultural markets, organic crop production, and organic animal husbandry will be covered. The launch is scheduled for August 2018.

Challenges remaining

Despite many commonalities and ideas, the devil is often in the details when universities implement cooperative projects. Do courses fit into the semester



Greenhouses and photovoltaic systems on the IUNR campus (upper picture), HNEE representatives visiting the IUNR campus (lower picture, with author in the middle).

Photos: Frank Bröderl/Simone Gruber

schedule? Do courses take place as block courses or are they spread over the semester? In addition to content requirements, the framework conditions for student and lecturer mobility must also offer sufficient scope for fruitful university cooperation. We are working on these issues!

Outlook

What we are left with and continues to motivate us at the IUNR and the HNEE is the idea of promoting sustainability together with our students. We are looking forward to continuing our exciting partnership!

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