

# CHAPTER 20

## The Responsibility of Universities to promote a sustainable society

*Luc Weber*

### PREAMBLE

**W**e are living in a period of deep and rapid changes which are offering great hopes for peace and prosperity, but which are also the source of important challenges and even threats. The direction of change will depend on the capacity of governments, governmental and international non-governmental organizations, business and churches, as well as — last but not least — the contribution of education to confront these challenges.

This chapter aims at revisiting the role that universities and other higher education institutions could and should play to improve the state of the world. It is divided into two parts. In the first part, we shall briefly describe why the present time offers great hope, but also great challenges and threats. Then, we shall suggest that these challenges can be reduced to the fact that many present developments are not sustainable. The second part will be focused on the role of higher education institutions, in particular research universities. We shall recall that higher education institutions should not only be responsive to these changes, but also have a major responsibility towards society, and argue that they are often not doing all that they could and should to fulfil this responsibility. We shall try to suggest why, describe a few initiatives taken to raise their awareness about their responsibilities and propose one solution capable of improving their contribution to a better and more sustainable world.

## A WORLD OF HOPES AND CHALLENGES

### The new world at the beginning of the 21st century

Never has the world been changing so rapidly and deeply as today. Moreover, there are strong reasons to believe that this trend will continue to accelerate. The most significant causes are diverse and strongly interdependent:

- The scientific and technological progress which is feeding a continuous increased productivity of labour and dramatically reduces all distances.
- The fall of the Soviet Union, marking the end of the cold war. Considering that more or less at the same time, other communist regimes like those of China and Vietnam or very regulated and protected countries like India have also adopted a market type of economy and are deregulating accordingly, today's world is largely dominated by market rules. Competition is becoming the driving force in the private, but also partly in the public, sectors. These developments also mean that democracy is gaining in importance in most regions of the world.
- Another phenomenon, closely linked with the previous one, is the rapid economic take-off of China, South Korea, India, which, in a few decades, have become important economic, political and military powers. Other countries are following the same path like Malaysia, Vietnam and Brazil.
- A last interdependent factor of change is the dramatic growth of population which increased from 1.65 billion in 1900 to 6.6 billion in 2007 and is expected to reach more than 9 billion in 2050 (US Census Bureau, 2007; United Nations, 1999). At the same time, thanks to progress in medicine and improved standards of living, life expectancy is increasing continuously.

This period of economic prosperity driven by science and technology, and the search for efficiency and competition, as well as by the rapid economic emergence of densely populated countries, offers a fantastic opportunity for further developments and long-lasting prosperity at world level. However, most of these developments contain in themselves characteristics which have turned or could easily turn them into threats, which are at least equal in importance to the opportunities. These threats are global or regional, but with the potential danger to impact on the whole world; they are also interdependent:

- Today, many agree with the United Nations Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (2007) that the observed climate change is

one of the most important threats. Even if purely natural phenomena are at work, there is widespread agreement that the present warming of the earth atmosphere is mainly due to human activities, in particular to the greenhouse gas produced by burning fossil oils and gas to heat houses and to power vehicles. The consequences of climate change are threatening in the medium term and their very long term impact is in fact unpredictable.

- A closely linked phenomenon is the threat to biodiversity, which, among others, will make nature more vulnerable.
- The rapid demographic growth is very imbalanced according to the region, which is at the origin of large migration flows, mainly from those countries which experience a fast growing population, but haven't managed to take off economically, to developed countries with aging populations.
- Another serious threat is the growing gap between the developing world and those countries which haven't be able to take off, as well as the growing tension between different cultures, those being in general more or less strongly coloured by differences in religions, even between different ethnical groups within a country. These tensions are at the origin of internal conflicts (Lebanon, Burundi), regional conflicts (Middle East) or conflicts with a world impact (Iraq war). They are also the cause of growing immigration, mainly of young people, in search of job opportunities or simply fleeing from regions of conflicts. This important consequence of globalization contributes strongly to the increased blending of population in some parts of the world, in particular in the Western world. This diversity is certainly a source of enrichment, but also of tensions.
- The impact of some of these events is reinforced by the development of global TV channels, like CNN, BBC World, Deutsche Welle, France 24 or Al Jazeera, which are quick to report any event, therefore spreading local tensions all over the world.
- Although it is difficult to measure it, the increased prosperity seems to be accompanied by an increased individualization of our societies. Individual success is increasingly well considered and rewarded. This can be observed in the increasing inequality of income distribution, in particular due to the extremely high incomes of a few. This growing cult of individual success is also accompanied by a reproofing tone towards those individuals who are living on State support and/or do not manage to get out of the poverty trap. In other words, the power of money has increased compared with the power of politics and citizenship.

## **Today's challenge: promoting sustainable development at world level**

Obviously, recent developments bring hope, but also hold serious challenges and threats. There are many good reasons, depending on our personal mind set, to feel either optimistic or pessimistic.

One promising way to synthesize the challenge to which governments, international organizations, business and citizens, as well as educational institutions, are confronted is to state that societies should aim for sustainable development (Huber & Harkavy, 2007). Sustainability is defined here as all efforts made to secure the long-term prosperity and stability of humankind and the different societies composing it.

Well established in the framework of environmental protection, the extension of the paradigm of sustainability to other domains is, to our knowledge, new. This is relatively surprising as the problematic of short- and medium-term developments which are not sustainable in the long run and will therefore end up in costly crisis are obviously not limited to the environment, but concerns also at least the economic and political spheres. As the generalization of the concept of sustainability is still in its early development, there are different ways to name the main distinctive domains where it is applicable. We propose to distinguish between:

- environmental sustainability, in line with the well known concept of sustainable development;
- economic sustainability, where economic has to be understood exhaustively to cover all question raising economic issues;
- political and institutional sustainability, which focus on the political system.

### **Environmental sustainability**

The tension between economic growth and environmental protection has made the notion of sustainability quite popular. The negative impact on the environment of an uncontrolled economic growth became a concern in most developed countries 40-50 years ago. The concepts of “economic development” or “sustainable development” replaced the notion of “economic growth”. The reason is the necessity to take into account that what is important is not economic growth, as such, but economic development, where the positive impact of the economic growth is not more or less completely compensated by a simultaneous decrease in environmental quality.

However, even if this negative impact of economic growth was identified a long time ago (see for ex. Pigou, 1932), the willingness to avoid or reduce it was “moderate”. There was a great suspicion that environmentalists are exaggerating the risk for the environment and that business is either exclusively

maximizing profit or anxious that paying much attention to the environment was a threat for their survival. Moreover, the attitude in favour of the environment was quite different from one region or country to the others, Northern Europe being for example, more sensitive to the threats than Southern Europe, or North America. Moreover, being focused on their economic take-off, the new developing countries do not like to bother with environmental protection, arguing among others that they are much less responsible for the current climate change than developed countries. The situation might change today now that it appears clearly that the earth's climate — not only the pollution of rivers and air — is rapidly changing and that it is mainly due to human activity.

More than ever, today, the concept of sustainability applies perfectly to the environment. If one believes that sound economic policy promoting prosperity while safeguarding the environment and avoiding a change of climate impossible to control, economic and energy policies, to mention the two most important ones in this regard, should have as main target to be sustainable in the long run. What is the point of reaching short- or medium-term good results in terms of economic growth if this success will necessarily be followed by disruptive impacts on the environment and dramatic climate changes which will make significant parts of the world unliveable and force masses of people to flee these regions. In addition to the immediate social costs, there will inevitably be an economic cost affecting development.

### **Economic sustainability**

The case of the environment is not the only one where incorrect economic policies are not sustainable, which means that they will sooner or later end up in crisis, source of a substantial social cost, forcing eventually the country or the firm to dramatically modify the way they are run. There are numerous examples of such failures. Let us mention for example the Weimar Republic in Germany, which failed, in the early 1930s, to control the money supply. This led to hyperinflation and high unemployment, which created the perfect conditions for the birth and rise of Nazism. Also, after decades of relative success, the centrally planned economy of the Soviet Union began to stagnate because it was unable to cope with the increasingly diversified needs of the population and failed to plan for replacement investments. Finally, many developing countries were unable to control the expansion of the State, which was increasingly financed by issuing debt. It provoked a loss of confidence among the creditors and ended up in a (re)payment crisis and invariably in the imposition of a rigorous cure by the International Monetary Fund. These few facts prove that insane economic policies do not last for ever, even if they might have created for some time the illusion of success.

Diverging demographic trends may also be the source of economic difficulties. Rapid population growth is either supporting economic growth in those

countries which are rapidly developing or imposing a high burden in those which have not taken off. In developed countries, the impact of an aging population is less visible, but nonetheless important. In particular, it might put at risk social security systems, developed during the golden period of the 1960s. Moreover, a population with a high proportion of retired people is less of a risk-taker and tends more than a young population to protect what they have acquired, rather than being entrepreneurial.

Finally, let us mention that a very unequal distribution of income and/or wealth, within a country or at world level, or a health system benefiting only part of the population, is disruptive for social cohesion. In addition to being considered unjust by part of the population, it has a negative impact on the willingness of segments of population to work and may even create costly social movements (strikes, etc.), if not the access to political power of a political majority whose politics is clearly unfavourable to economic development.

### **Political (institutional) sustainability**

The third dimension of sustainability lies with the political and institutional organization of countries, and of the world. The political regimes and institutional organization are different, sometimes quite different, therefore not all as likely to promote long-term stability and prosperity. Dictatorial regimes, in particular, can be successful for some time. The economic performance of the Soviet Union in the 1950s and 1960s for example had not much to envy to those of the free world. However, regimes based on the tough restriction of individual liberties, on incentives based on fear of punishment and on a State which decides much for its citizens, as well as on confiscating private wealth, cannot last for ever. They all finish by collapsing like the Roman Empire, the Nazi government in Germany, the communist regime in the Soviet Union and the regimes of many African leaders.

To last, political regimes must not only respect their citizens, but also give them the possibility to participate to the running of the country. This is the essence of democracy, which has basically two types of justifications. The first one, rather pragmatic, is teaching us that it is not possible to govern for ever against the interest and wills of the population and without respecting citizens. Another one, inspired by ethical values, highlights the necessity to respect human liberty and dignity.

At the international level, even if there are already many specialized international organizations like the United Nations, the World Trade Organization, the International Monetary fund, etc., or non-governmental organizations like the World Economic Forum, all these organizations are not global and/or comprehensive enough or do not dispose of the necessary instruments to impose their decisions/resolutions. In order to cope with problems affecting the whole globe like climate change and the substitution to renewable energy,

as well as man-made humanitarian disasters and/or regional conflicts, the present worlds need to be better governed by international organizations that have the tools of their missions. In other words, the challenge of the governance of the world is becoming one, if not the main, challenge for building a politically sustainable world.

## THE ROLE OF UNIVERSITIES

### Responsive and responsible Universities

All through their long history, the responsibilities of universities have had two faces, which are contradictory in the short term and converging in the long term (Weber, 2002). On one hand, universities should be responsive to the short-term needs of the private economy, the State and their main stakeholders, the students; in other words, universities should respond to what society demands at any one time, in particular their students, the economy and the public sector. This influence is in general positive: universities should take these needs or requests very seriously as they are legitimate public demands (Glion declaration, 1998).

On the other hand, while responding to society's needs and demands, universities have also to assume a crucial responsibility towards society (Grin *et al.*, 2000; Weber, 2002). In addition to being one of the oldest surviving institutions, universities are best placed to secure and transmit a society's cultural heritage, to create new knowledge and to have the professional competences and the right status to analyse social problems independently, scientifically and critically. The great difference between being responsive and being responsible lies in the fact that, in the first case, universities should be receptive to what society expects from them; in the second case, they should have the ambition to guide reflection and policy-making in society. While universities excel at making new discoveries in all disciplines of science and technology, they must also scrutinize systematically the trends that might affect sooner or later the well-being of populations and, if necessary, raise criticism, issue alarm signals and make recommendations.

It is precisely this responsibility that justifies why universities have been granted "autonomy", which is unique in the whole education sector, not to speak of other sectors or the State. This responsibility used to be a strong mission of the press; however, the political and economic pressures of our time push the media to be too responsive to the tastes of their audience, their government or the business world. Therefore, the responsibility of universities is even greater (Weber, 2002).

This responsibility, as well as the principles necessary to allow universities to assume them, was confirmed with great conviction by a thousand rectors and presidents of European universities gathered in 1988 in Bologna for the

ninth centenary of the oldest university in Europe. In “The Magna Charta Universitatum” signed on this occasion, it is first of all stressed that Universities “must also serve society as a whole” and “must give future generations education and training that will teach them, and, through them, others, to respect the great harmonies of their natural environment and of life itself”.

The fulfilment of their responsibility towards society and in particular the contribution to improve the sustainability of societies, goes, as described above, through the three traditional channels of their basic missions: teaching and learning, research and service to collectivity. But universities should also be a site of citizenship, that is set a high standard of behaviour towards their students, within the staff (academic and non academic), in research (respect for ethical principles and honesty of approaches), and should also demand such a high standard from students, in particular the absence of cheating (Bergan, 2004; Kohler & Huber, 2006).

### **An example for a responsible University: the promotion of a democratic culture**

Without any doubt, it is a permanent responsibility of democratic regimes and political leaders, supra-national organizations, the media and educators to act democratically, to contribute to the improvement of democratic regimes and processes and, more generally, to promote these values, fundamental for the sustainability of society, nationally and internationally.

Nationally, the basic principles are fixed in the Constitutions. Internationally, they are laid down in fundamental documents as the “Universal Declaration of Human Rights” of the United Nations adopted in 1948, the “Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms” of the Council of Europe adopted in 1950 or in the “Geneva conventions on humanitarian law” (first in 1864). These Constitutions or Declarations also set up the means to implement the principles, like the European Court on Human Rights, the UN Commission on Human Rights, replaced in 2006 by the Human Rights Council, or the International Committee of the Red Cross.

These principles, however noble they are, have no chance to be broadly respected if they are not taught to children from a relatively early age and repeated to a wide public on any occasion. Democracy, and its main pillars citizenship, human rights and, what has been recognized more recently, sustainability, requires — in order to last and improve — the application of the same rules as a happy and long-lasting marriage: a strong belief in its virtues, trust between partner(s) and the active and tireless commitment of all actors (Huber & Harkavy, 2007).

Primary, secondary, as well as higher education institutions share a great responsibility in heightening the awareness of school children, adolescents, as



well as traditional and mature students, to democracy, human rights and sustainability, all necessary conditions for the development, or even the survival of humankind. This is not “just” a question of learning a set of theoretical principles — it is a question of learning in the true sense of the word by internalizing a set of principles and acting upon them.

The implementation of this role is not without difficulty. Regarding education, higher education institutions have to teach young and mature students how to learn and transmit to them the essence of knowledge accumulated over decades, as well as the methodologies to acquire new knowledge and finally to give them the curiosity and the drive to continuously acquire the latest knowledge. Today’s requirements in any discipline mean that disciplinary programmes (courses, seminars, writing essays) are very much focused on specific academic disciplines. In other words, in Europe certainly, but less so in the US where the first year(s) of college is (are) equivalent to the last year(s) of high school in Europe, higher education institutions are no longer responsible for the general education of their students (Weber, 2007). Students who moved to higher education institutions have opted for a high level professional training or academic education in a specific topic. This means that, in general, higher education institutions, apart from those disciplines dedicated to the question, do not bother to raise the awareness of their students to the democratic culture, as they are fully focused on the core of the discipline. This does not mean however they are impermeable to values: sustainable development and ethics have gained a respectable attention in many disciplines over recent years or even decades.

The same type of limitations appears at the level of research. Although there is bias towards certain topics and methodologies at the cost of others, the research community is in principle keen on identifying new promising and relevant topics of research. Regarding the question of democratic culture, it is necessary to distinguish between democracy and human rights on one hand and sustainability on the other hand. Democracy and human rights are a standard theme of research in particular within the disciplines of law, history, political science, sociology and history. The emergence and development of democracy and the practice of democracy in specific countries, as well as the definition and practice of human rights, is the object of numerous publications and conferences. Sustainability itself must be looked at from two relatively different points of view. The imperative of economic development respectful of the environment has been a concern for many decades for economists, geographers and lawyers, as well as many scientists, in particular chemists, physicists, climatologists and applied scientists. The other aspect of sustainability, whose importance emerged more recently, that is the capacity of an economic and political system to be stable over generations, is a much more complex issue. However, we know that, for demographic, political and economic rea-

sons, some systems are more likely to escape deep disruption than others. Europe is, for example, preoccupied by the sustainability of its social security systems in a time of rapidly aging population. Specialists of the disciplines concerned are now beginning to tackle this issue, but a much greater effort remains to be made.

### **Are Universities doing enough?**

Are universities taking upon themselves fully the responsibility to contribute to a sustainable society? Are they doing all that they could and should do? The response to the question is obviously mixed. Researchers in universities are doing work on many aspects of the question and teachers may refer to these questions, although more in social sciences and humanities than in live and hard sciences. Assessing if they are doing enough is delicate. My point of view is, however, that it is not the case. The organization of science production, in particular the financing of research, the editorial policy of journals, the fact that renown is the main — if not the only — reward for research results and that frontier research in a specific discipline is better quoted than interdisciplinary research, as well as the tendency of most human beings to “follow the crowd”, contribute to the fact that in fact relatively few researchers follow ways outside the mainstream (Weber, 2007). Moreover, pure scientific questions are, for most researchers, more attractive than complex societal ones: the former are more likely to bring renown among colleagues, whereas the latter imply a delicate civil engagement. There are encouraging exceptions to that; in particular some very renowned scientists, often physicists, are taking strong positions on societal and political issues. Finally, if a discipline like climatology benefits from large amounts of money, the financial means available to study democracy, human rights or social security systems are in general very scarce.

The comparatively low interest in questions related to society is unfortunate as good solutions to questions like intercultural and inter-religious dialogue, the acceptance of the rules of law to solve conflicts, the acceptance and good practice of democratic rules, the respect of human rights or a sustainable economic development are all win-win strategies for societies. On the other hand, the social and economic costs of dictatorship, tyrannies or wars, whatever their justification, are easy to demonstrate.

Moreover, because of the increasing specialization of disciplines and increasing standardization of their teaching, there remains in general not enough time left to cover anything else. However, there is suddenly an encouraging trend: the fact that higher education institutions are increasingly considered to have also the responsibility to contribute to the personal development of students. They should be taught to work in groups, to speak in public, to write for a different audience, to search for money, to respect ethical considerations, etc. All this is positive, but not enough. Why not include

under the chapter of personal development the education for democratic culture, and more generally for sustainable development?

### **A few solutions**

Aware of this unsatisfactory fact, a few ad hoc groupings have taken initiatives to raise awareness about the necessity for universities to promote societal values and to create a real dynamic towards this goal in the university community. In addition to the Magna Charta Universitatum mentioned above, we would like to mention three initiatives aiming at emphasizing the societal responsibilities of higher education institutions:

- the 2003 Wingspread Declaration: A national Strategy for Improving School connectedness;
- and two “Talloires declaration”;
  - one initiated in 1990 by the Association of University Leaders for a Sustainable Future (ULSF) and,
  - the other one in 2005 on the Civic Roles and Social responsibilities of Higher education.

These declarations invite those universities signing them to commit to act according to the principles laid down in the declaration.

More recently, convinced by experience that democratic culture must be permanently kept in mind, examined and discussed, and convinced that higher education institutions are not doing enough in this respect, the Council of Europe and its Steering Committee for Higher Education and Research, and the US Steering Committee of the International Consortium for Higher Education, Civic Responsibility and Democracy, have decided to join forces to take a new initiative aiming at encouraging higher education institutions to assume more fully their responsibility towards democratic culture, and more generally towards sustainability, in their teaching, as well as research missions.

Even if, at first sight, this new initiative is not different, in particular from the second “Talloires declaration” on the civic roles of universities, it is to our knowledge the first time that the values to be promoted through higher education encompass both the values of democratic culture and human rights, as well as sustainability. Moreover, sustainability is given here, as mentioned since the beginning, a broader sense as traditionally, covering both environmental protection and the economic and political sustainability of societies.

Second, the initiative is convened and led by the Council of Europe, the oldest pan-European political organization, which counts 46 members, and was founded in 1949 to “defend human rights, parliamentary democracy and the rule of law”. Two hundred legally binding treaties or conventions have been signed under its umbrella. Education and higher education and research have a privileged position as a means to reach the objectives of the Council.

Third, the initiative benefits from the support of the leading university organizations, both in the US and in Europe.

However, economists like to repeat: “Supply does not create demand”, which means that it is not enough to have a great product or service if buyers have not realized it or do not need it. The history of industry counts numerous examples of products or services flops, despite huge marketing efforts. The situation is unfortunately similar with noble ideas beneficial for society at large. We wonder if a researcher has already measured the impact of promoting noble ideas. We hope to be wrong, but, we suspect that only a minority has been successful. This is true for international organizations passing resolutions or multilateral agreements which remained “lettres mortes”, or had little impact. This is also true for many initiatives taken by associations, foundations or individuals. However, and this is encouraging, some initiatives are extremely successful. Let us mention, for example, some fund-raising campaigns launched after a natural catastrophe. The frontier between success and failure is often very thin; in other words, one falls easily on one or the other side of the ridge, without knowing why or without having made an error.

The sense of this remark about the uncertainty of success in marketing a product or service, as well as implementing a resolution, a multilateral agreement or a noble initiative, is that it is, by far, not enough to have a good idea, but that it is necessary to fight for its success, probably also that it is necessary to be accompanied by a bit of luck and, eventually, that engagement for it should be rewarded.

The challenge within universities to develop more initiatives promoting sustainable development, is basically twofold:

- to overcome a feeling or behaviour of indifference, motivated by the conviction that these values are “part of the environment”, that is accepted by everyone, and therefore does not have to be repeated or promoted;
- the feeling that the “university agenda is already full” and that there is no room left to do something further, considering all that is already expected from them.

These two attitudes which contribute to neglecting the importance of doing research and promoting, through teaching and learning, a sustainable society are raising a serious question of priority setting within higher education institutions and universities. The present climate of competition pushes universities to be more responsive to the short-term needs of their stakeholders or pressures from society or politics at the cost of their long-term responsibility towards society. This means that the priority given to these domains is lower than what would be justified.

The leaders of higher education institutions should be aware of these biases and compensate for them. In other words, the recent Council of Europe — Consortium’s initiative, as well as all previous initiatives, requires the full engagement of university leaders. This implies for them two challenges:

- they are convinced that not only it is a responsibility of universities, including the university he or she leads, but also that he or she is convinced enough to act;
- he or she takes the lead in an initiative. However, it might appear particularly difficult for him or her to convince faculties and researchers to do something of significance. This implies at least a strong personal involvement.

However, one knows by experience that moral suasion, whatever the origin (government, signed declaration, etc...) remains a weaker means to convince people to move into the desired direction if the existing incentives (financial or others) are going in another direction. This is true both at the level of the institution leaders and within the institutions, at the levels of deans, directors, faculty and researchers.

However, it is amazing to observe in the higher education sector the impact of financial incentives. When additional funding is potentially available, most academics are prompt in competing for those funds by way of preparing projects and being ready to implement them if their bid is successful. In other words, university leaders and academics who are slow to respond to moral suasion and tend primarily to resist change, are suddenly quite ready to “move mountains” if there is a chance of additional funding, even if this activity is not considered a priority. This is why, we argue that the best — if not the only — way to encourage higher education institutions, faculty and researchers to give more importance to their long term responsibilities towards society is to modify the set of incentives, financial or others — in particular in matter of individual visibility and power. This applies both to action to increase the relative part of funding earmarked for activities (teaching and research) focused on the promotion of a sustainable society and seriously working on the image linked to different academic activities, among others the engagement in interdisciplinary research.

## BY WAY OF CONCLUSION

The world is changing at an ever-increasing speed. This strongly contributes to the prosperity of societies and bring with it great hopes for a better society. But, at the same time, the fast-changing world is bringing quite new challenges and even threats to prosperity and stability. Probably, more than ever, it appears that to be positive to society, it is not enough for development to be — for some time — positive; they have to be sustainable over time.

Basically, governments, international governmental and non-governmental organizations and big business, should contribute to sustainable development. But, education, as well as higher education and research, has a crucial role to play. Higher education institutions in particular, thanks to the autonomy they enjoy and to their mastering of scientific methods and broad scholarship, are best placed to identify unsustainable and dangerous trends, speak out about them and contribute to solve societal problems. They exercise this responsibility through their research and research-driven teaching and learning, and by showing the right example.

The question we were asking is: do they do it sufficiently? The answer is probably not. The obligation to fulfil multiple objectives in teaching and the strong competition in research mean that other considerations or objectives benefit most of the time (or in most cases) from a higher priority. This is why we argued that, even if higher education institutions are spontaneously or indirectly doing a lot in favour of a sustainable development, they could and should do more. Hence, the fundamental question of how do we make it possible. The solution to this challenge has two levels. Basically, the norms of correct behaviour should be put right. This is true for the set of regulations fixing the framework of the university autonomy and/or stating the fundamental values promoted by higher education institutions. Moreover, these norms can be declined openly and give raise to collective engagements from groups of higher education institutions committing to work for these values (Magna Charta, Talloires Declarations, etc...). But, this is not enough. It is crucial to realize that the climate of competition between institutions and faculties and researchers does not leave enough room for this type of consideration in the teaching programmes or does not put a high professional reward — in terms of scientific visibility — to those doing research in these questions. This is why we have argued that society, in particular government, should increase the financial and all other incentives to engage in this type of activities in increasing the funds available on a competitive basis for research on societal problems, as well as the rewards in terms of visibility and power.

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