



## CALL FOR PAPERS/CONTRIBUTIONS

### International Symposium

**Fédération de Recherche en Environnement et Durabilité (FERED) (Strasbourg/France)**

### **IS THE CONCEPT OF "ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY" MISLEADING?**

#### **MIXED PERSPECTIVES**

The recently set-up **Fédération de Recherche en Environnement et Durabilité (FERED) (University of Strasbourg/CNRS/INSERM)**, with the goal to inaugurate this new research structure, launch a Call for contributions. The event will be held in Strasbourg (and if needed, also online) on 20-22 October 2021 on the topic :« *Is the concept of "environmental sustainability" misleading? Mixed perspectives* ». The Symposium will thus offer an excellent opportunity to question the concept of sustainability at the crossroads of our various disciplines and practices, in order to better understand and master the way it affects environmental research *lato sensu*.

At a time of the climate emergency, the dramatic loss of biodiversity and the awareness of the need for a transition to the "future world", the concept of "sustainability" has become a buzzword that cuts across our disciplines. Although the concept covers a very old reality, it has been universally defined and recognised, notably in the United Nations' Bruntland report "Our Common Future" (1987), as satisfying the needs of the present without affecting those of future generations. This broad definition leaves a wide margin of appreciation to those who refer to it. Above all, the use of the concept seems to have been largely circumvented to cover processes that have a detrimental impact on the environment.

Thus, the guiding thread of this event will be to assess how the concept of sustainability and the practices claiming to rely on it have evolved. We formulate the hypothesis that, because of a broad definition, it is necessary to assess how this room for manoeuvre has been exploited, and how in return the use made of it has made the concept of sustainability evolve and transform our disciplinary research. The ambition of this symposium will be to contribute to the emergence of a "new innovative sustainability science discipline" by questioning the misuse that may have been made of the concept over the last forty years, by reflecting on the means of ruling out such abuses, by rigorously drawing the contours of "environmental sustainability" and by trying to understand how it still makes sense.

#### **Project proposals are invited in four directions:**

##### **Session 1: Sustainability or Environmental Sustainabilities? A Plural Concept?**

This session, which is intended to be introductory, aims to contribute to clarifying the plural, dynamic and even vague concept of "sustainability". What have been the role of temporal, geographical, cultural, social, environmental, geo-political, economic or other contexts in the diversity of meanings and representations given to the concept of "sustainability"?

Contributions on the following questions will be particularly appreciated:

Temporal trajectories of the concept of "sustainability", particularly on theoretical, philosophical and/or ideological levels. What has been the multi-level governance of sustainability? Is the concept of environmental "sustainability" understood in the same way across states of Europe and worldwide? What are the determinants controlling the way in which this concept is understood and/or used? Contributions focusing on specific territories and/or crossing diverse cultural/national approaches in Europe, or according to a vertical articulation (local, national, supranational) will be particularly appreciated.

### **Session 2: Sustainable goods, services and processes: a multiple implementation?**

The objective of this second session is to enter through sustainable goods, services and processes in order to deepen the knowledge of the evolution of the concept of environmental sustainability and the characteristics that resulted from its implementation. Many uncertainties remain at the implementation stage. These include, but are not limited to, covering the following topics.

How definitions and characteristics of environmental sustainability have evolved in the following areas: Agriculture/fisheries, food systems, cultivation, manufacturing, construction, marketing, distribution and consumption processes? Transportation systems? Urban planning, urban mobility, architecture, building design, construction, housing? Management and rehabilitation of agro-ecosystems and river socio-ecosystems? Management of natural resources?

### **Session 3: The evolution of measures and indicators of environmental sustainability**

The aim of this session is to question the changes that have taken place in the assessment or measurement of "environmental sustainability" according to the various scientific disciplines. What is the state of science on the observation, measurement and assessment of environmental sustainability? What are the scientific controversies in this regard, and if so, how are they being overcome or even circumvented? How can "ecological limits" be measured in the long term and at what scale (local/national/international)? How to define the indicators? How are boundaries, limits, thresholds set? How to consider their evolution over time, particularly in relation to emerging disturbances and/or technological progress?

How does the proliferation of "sustainability" diagnostics and indicators change the concept of "sustainability" and the public's perception of it? Should they be regulated? If so, by whom and how?

Interventions involving modelling, in hard sciences as well as in human and social sciences, will help us understand these issues.

### **Session 4: The sustainability of the concept of 'environmental sustainability': Is this the sustainability our anthropocene era needs?**

Drawing upon the lessons of the last 30 years and upon current literature, this last session is intended to be forward-looking and will question the evolution and possible impact of the concept of sustainability in the medium/long term. It will also question the development of sustainability sciences based on the classical disciplines of environmental sciences. With which models does the concept of environmental sustainability compete or which models does it favour? What do related concepts such as "Planetary Boundaries" offer us, and how can the concept of "environmental sustainability" be insufficient? It will also be about questioning concepts that are potentially similar, such as resilience, and



of assessing how they do not cover the same thing, such as, for example, public goods or common goods in law.

How should the transition to sustainability be steered? What instruments/tools should be combined to deploy sustainability? What are the technical, economic and political challenges of environmental sustainability? Is the transition towards a "sustainable" tomorrow desirable and can it, should it, be sustainable? Doesn't the sustainability approach reproduce the anthropocentric approach that is now so decried? What are the potential downsides of development that is focused, or too focused, on sustainability? How can intergenerational equity be prioritised again and from a North-South perspective?

**Please send your resume, title and abstract (1000-1500 words) of the proposal before Monday 15th February 2021 to [fered-symposium@unistra.fr](mailto:fered-symposium@unistra.fr)**

Abstracts of the work that is to be presented at the Symposium should be written in English. Every abstract should present unique/original research not previously published. Abstracts can be for oral or poster presentations, but please note that orals are not guaranteed. A poster presentation is organized in a poster session (Day 2 and/or 3). The programme committee will schedule your presentation and recommend either an oral or poster presentation. You will be informed by email when your time is assigned.

**The results will be communicated at the beginning of March. Final papers in view of the publication process will have to be submitted end of 2021. Depending on the number of papers being selected, a collective publication under the form of a special issue in a journal, or a book or Dictionary will be prepared for 2022.**

Thanks for your interest !

We would also greatly appreciate your assistance in circulating this message—please forward it to any groups or individuals that might be interested!

Sincerely,

The Selection Committee