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Sustainability in learning mobility: an exploratory study

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1. Introduction

Sustainability is becoming a more pressing issue in various spheres of human activity, including the area of youth learning mobility. In order to support the learning mobility field in its efforts to be more sustainable, it is necessary to first explore and understand the concept of sustainability itself, then apply it to the youth learning mobility field in such a way that it can be implemented in practice.

This study presents one of the first steps in this effort. It begins by exploring the concept of sustainability, based on the definitions of sustainable development and three vital dimensions of sustainability: environmental, social and economic. Despite the absence of a common defining framework, key concepts are outlined as comprehensively as possible.

The second section deals with sustainability in youth learning mobility by exploring sustainability in learning mobility organisations. This approach is based on the premise that organisations are the ones that enable the implementation of learning mobility and, therefore, it is these organisations that need to tackle sustainability and introduce it into the learning mobility field. In this section, processes and contents used by organisations are explored, the link between these two levels is outlined in the sustainability domain and the difference between sustainable organisations and activist sustainability organisations is debated. The second section is concluded by outlining a definition of sustainability in learning mobility.

The third section uses the analytical framework described in the first two sections to present the results of a mapping exercise focused on practices related to sustainability in learning mobility. The environmental dimension of sustainability is dominant, especially at the processes level. However, examples of social sustainability are also present. The list of identified organisations is not exhaustive. It is a first step towards highlighting valuable practices in the processes, content and activism of organisations. Further qualitative research based on specific indicators is needed.

Exploring the topic of sustainability in youth learning mobility, the study presents an original analytical framework that has the potential to further develop as more data on sustainability in learning mobility are collected. At the same time, the presented analytical framework proved sufficiently robust to accommodate the results of the exploratory mapping of sustainable learning mobility practices conducted within this study, and it can therefore be considered a useful tool for further explorations of the field.

2. Defining sustainability

Sustainability is not a new concept. It emerged in the 1960s (McKenzie 2004; Purvis, Mao, Robinson 2019) and was influentially defined in 1987 when the UN General Assembly published its Report of the World Commission on Environment and Development: Our Common Future, in which sustainability[1] is described as follows (UN General Assembly 1987, the so-called "Brundtland definition"):

1. We are aware of the distinction between "sustainability" and "sustainable development" and of the connected criticism of "sustainable growth" as an oxymoron (Purvis, Mao, Robinson 2019); as much as we can

> Sustainable development is development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.

This definition is still surprisingly up-to-date almost 35 years after its initial publication (see current works such as Andriessen 2021; Becker et al. 2015), as are the three vital dimensions also identified in this report: environmental, social and economic (ibid., underline added; cf.: Al-Hagla 2008 in Chookah et al. 2021; Rasul and Thapa 2004 in Roesch, Nyfeler-Brunner, Gaillard 2021; Cresta 2021; Andriessen 2021; Dasgupta et al. 2021; Frehner 2021; Keen [ed.] 2018; Kuns 2021; Correia 2019; Pham et al. 2021):

> What is needed now is a new era of economic growth – growth that is forceful and at the same time socially and environmentally sustainable.

Utilising these three main dimensions[2] (or "pillars"; Purvis, Mao, Robinson 2019) became known as the Triple Bottom Line[3] approach in the 1990s (hereinafter referred to as TBL[4]; Elkington[5] 2018; Elkington 1999). TBL stresses the need to balance the three dimensions to keep development sustainable (Correia 2019; Roesch, Nyfeler-Brunner, Gaillard 2021), or to "at minimum, progress on two dimensions while the third remains unaffected" (Elkington 2018). In other words, the TBL underlines the need to focus on "economic prosperity, environmental quality, and — the element which business has tended to overlook — social justice" (McKenzie 2004:6). TBL can be visualised in two different ways, as shown in Figure 1.

> A common method of visualizing the pillars of sustainability is a Venn diagram, with each circle representing one of the three primary pillars. However, a more accurate depiction of sustainability is achieved by using concentric circles to symbolize the pillars, with the most important aspect, the Environment, represented by the outer circle.
>
> The Environment is of primary importance because a healthy ecosystem is required to nourish a robust society. Consequently, Society and Social Responsibility are of secondary importance. Economic Sustainability is third because a prosperous economy cannot exist without a healthy and just society. (University of Maine not dated)

agree with the criticism, reconciliation of these two terms is not the aim of this article, so they are treated as equal concepts for the purposes of this study.

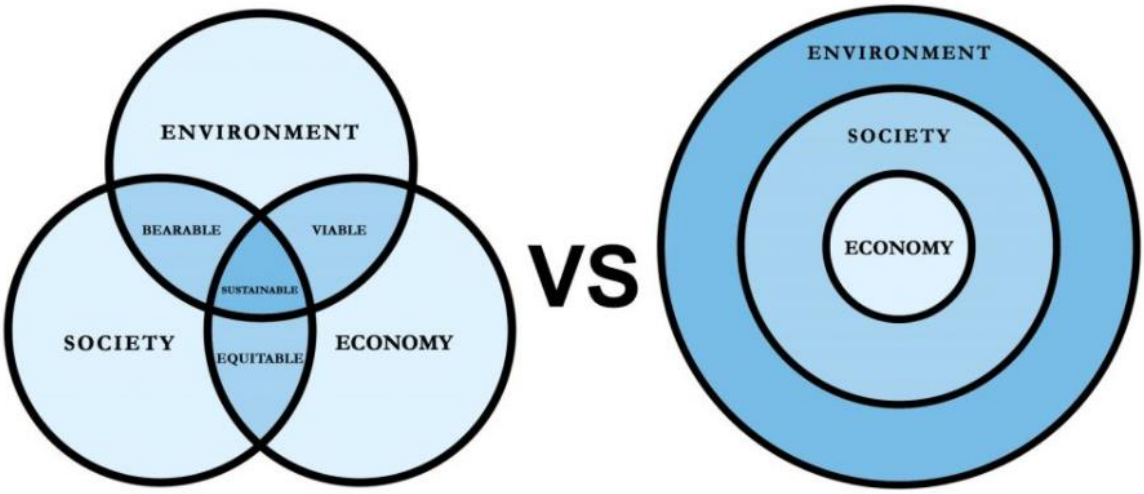
[2] At times, these three dimensions are also called a triple-P (Pruijsen 2021): "People, Planet, Profit" (or "Prosperity"; see Yang 2021). Some authors also introduce their own dimensions (see Place, Permanence, Persons in Seghezzo 2009) and others add more dimensions to the ones mentioned above (Peace and Partnership in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (UN General Assembly 2015)), but these are not widely used. In this paper, we stick with the much clearer labels of social, environmental and economic dimensions.

[3] The name logically follows the previous developments: originally, the bottom line stood for financial performance of a given subject and, subsequently, the double bottom line emphasised balancing the financial and social impacts of a given enterprise. Unsurprisingly, the quadruple bottom line emerged after 2010, adding the dimension of "cultural impacts", hence taking into account also cultural and spiritual values when thinking of sustainable development (Commonwealth of Australia not dated[a, b]).

[4] In some sources, the abbreviation 3BL can also be found (Elkington 2018).

[5] It should also be noted that Elkington himself is an entrepreneur (Elkington 2021) and, as such, could hardly overlook the economic dimension. There are authors, however, who see sustainability simply as a balancing act between human beings and the ecosystem they live in: a much simpler, but also much less frequently used, concept (Morelli 2011).

Figure 1: Visualisation of the Triple Bottom Line (University of Maine not dated).



In order to move forward, it is vital to be clear on the three dimensions of sustainability mentioned above. It should be noted that defining any of the three dimensions is at least as problematic as defining sustainability as such. Definitions are not coherent and the meaning shifts from one policy or research document to the next.

Environmental sustainability "could be defined as a condition of balance, resilience, and interconnectedness that allows human society to satisfy its needs while neither exceeding the capacity of its supporting ecosystems to continue to regenerate the services necessary to meet those needs nor by our actions diminishing biological diversity." (Morelli 2011:5) In other words, in order to operate sustainably, we cannot overstep environmental limits, also labelled as planetary boundaries. So far, nine planetary boundaries have been identified by scientists (Steffen et al. 2015; Keppner, Kahlenborn 2020; Rockström et al. 2009; Häyhä et al. 2018), these are:

- climate change
- novel entities (i.e. chemical pollution)
- stratospheric ozone depletion
- atmospheric aerosol loading
- oceanic acidification
- biogeochemical flows
- freshwater use
- land-system change
- biosphere integrity.

The current status of these planetary boundaries can be monitored at the website of the European Environment Agency (2020). For further information on the evolution of the concept and its links to policy documents, please visit the website of the Stockholm Resilience Centre (not dated).

In the case of social sustainability, authors in the field agree that there is no common definition to be shared (Missimer 2015; McGuinn et al. 2020). As McGuinn et al. (2020) state, social sustainability before the 2000s was largely understood as intertwined with the other two domains of sustainability, hence consisting of "social factors that must be considered in addition to environmental or ecological factors in sustainable development" (ibid.:22), while post-2000, social sustainability becomes

perceived as more of a standalone dimension. Given the variety of available definitions (see Figure 2), some authors take the approach of identifying various aspects of social sustainability that are common across various definitions (McGuinn et al. 2015:26-27). Rasouli and Kumarasuriyar (2016 in McGuinn et al. 2015:26-27) list the following key aspects of social sustainability:

> 1. Macro-level: basic level of physical well-being: housing, food, clothing, health, sanitation;
>
> 2. Micro-level: quality of life and equity:
>
> 2.1. Social: social and cultural life, social homogeneity and cohesion, integration, diversity, sense of place, communication and participation, social justice and equity, social amenity, social security, social capital and well-being;
>
> 2.2. Services: access to goods, service and employment, education, training, equitable income;
>
> 2.3. Governance: democracy, engaged governance, system for citizen engagement.

Therefore, social sustainability spans a wide range of topics, from basic human needs, through quality of life, all the way to the political and social organisation of communities and societies.

"In the economic debate, sustainable development is most often described as the need to maintain a permanent income for humankind, generated from non-declining capital stocks (Hicksian income)." (Spangenberg 2005:48) This is the basic assumption of economic sustainability, the one dimension of sustainability which is most criticised for both its potential counter-factuality (i.e. the inconsistency of growth and sustainability), and its implicit assumption that economic growth leads to social improvements (a causality which is more problematic than it would seem; Spangenberg 2005). All in all, however, this dimension refers to designing such economic systems that work within social and environmental boundaries, not at their expense.

The complexity of the definition of sustainability based on the three dimensions (social, economic and environmental) is now apparent. What also needs to be pointed out is the interconnectedness of the dimensions themselves suggested by the TBL approach: despite each of the dimensions focusing on a different aspect of sustainability, implementation of any measures within the given dimension cannot be done without also influencing the other two dimensions.

Figure 2: Examples of social sustainability definitions (Missimer 2015:14).

McKenzie, 2004, 12	Social sustainability is a life-enhancing condition within communities, and a process within communities that can achieve that condition.
Barron and Gauntlet 2002, vi	Social sustainability occurs when formal and informal processes, systems, structures and relationships actively support the capacity of future generations to create healthy and liveable communities. Socially sustainable communities are equitable, diverse, connected and democratic and provide a good quality of life.
Stren and Polese 2000, 15-16	Social sustainability of a city is the "development and/or growth that is compatible with the harmonious evolution of civil society fostering an environment conducive to the compatible cohabitation of culturally and socially diverse groups while at the same time encouraging social integration, with improvements in the quality of life for all segments of the population.
Littig and Griessler 2005, 72	Social sustainability is given, if work within a society and the related institutional arrangements satisfy an extended set of human needs and are shaped in a way that nature and its reproductive capabilities are preserved over a long period of time and the normative claims of social justice, human dignity and participation are fulfilled.
Sachs, 1999, 32–33	Social sustainability includes achieving a fair degree of social homogeneity, equitable income distribution, employment that allows the creation of decent livelihoods, and equitable access to resources and social services, […] a balance between respect for tradition and innovation, and self-reliance, endogeneity and self-confidence.
City of Vancouver, 2005, 12	For a community to function and be sustainable, the basic needs of its residents must be met. A socially sustainable community must have the ability to maintain and build on its own resources and have the resiliency to prevent and/or address problems in the future.
Partridge (in Spangenberg and Omann 2006)	A socially sustainable society is one that is just, equitable, inclusive and democratic, and provides a decent quality of life for current and future generations.

The Brundtland definition of sustainable development mentioned at the beginning of this chapter and first published in 1987 (UN General Assembly) has been widely used and stayed virtually unchanged over more than three decades. This, as some authors point out (Brønn and Brønn 2018), is not for lack of trying, but for lack of a common measurement approach which makes more detailed definitions impossible to design. A starker criticism of the vagueness of the Brundtland definition suggests that it:

> is a smokescreen behind which business can continue its operations essentially unhindered by environmental concerns, while paying lip service to the needs of future generations. (McKenzie 2004:2)

This marketing strategy, widely called "greenwashing", is well explained by Sydnes and Aarvold (2021):

> As a consequence of sustainability becoming more prevalent in consumers' preference and decision-making process, many firms' positioning strategies have taken a shift towards accommodating the sustainability dimension. However, the growing popularity of sustainable consumption has also led to firms attempting to falsely market their brands as sustainable to benefit from the new customer demand. Some firms market their positive sustainable efforts, while simultaneously concealing their negative activities in an attempt to create an inaccurately positive impression of their environmental footprint. Furthermore, some firms exaggerate the environmental benefits of their products and services to increase sales.

It is, therefore, vital to distinguish between real changes in the operations of companies, governments and any other public, non-governmental or private bodies and attempts to falsely present inexistent changes and continue what is widely labelled "business as usual". Greenwashing not only does not represent sustainable development, but potentially hinders it by concealing the true nature of environmental, social and economic impacts of the bodies who use this deceptive strategy to their benefit.

Defining sustainability through the three dimensions of environmental, social and economic concerns, it is now key to explore how these apply to the learning mobility area. How does sustainability across all three dimensions relate to learning mobility? How can organisations active in the learning mobility field operate sustainably without the fear of being accused of greenwashing? Is a sustainable organisation the same as an activist one?

3. Sustainability in learning mobility

The European Platform on Learning Mobility (EPLM)

> defines learning mobility in the youth field as mobility of young people (transnationally, regionally or online) undertaken freely and voluntarily for a specific period of time, consciously organised for educational purposes, to impact on the local community or to acquire new competences (knowledge, skills, attitudes or values). It encompasses a wide variety of project formats and activities, and can be implemented in informal or non-formal education settings. (Council of Europe 2021a)

This chapter explores implications of sustainability and its three dimensions for the organisations working in the field of youth learning mobility. This is based on the premise that learning mobility does not happen of its own accord, but that it is implemented by organisations, i.e. by any bodies with particular legal and practical capacities to implement learning mobilities. Such organisations are called "learning mobility organisations" in this text.

First, it needs to be stressed that all three domains of sustainability are applicable in learning mobility settings.

Environmental sustainability can be present as a topic (e.g. focusing on sustainability competences; see Guia 2020 and UNESCO 2019) and is always present as a procedural aspect of organising learning mobility initiatives (i.e. the learning mobility can be organised in a more or less sustainable manner). In order to achieve procedural environmental sustainability (i.e. to design such processes for learning mobility initiatives so that their environmental impact is as low as possible), it is crucial that personnel have awareness of the concept. There are numerous resources which relate to environmental sustainability in various spheres of human activity or cover the topic in a more general manner. The EU-Council of Europe Youth Partnership's Sustainability Checklist by Tumėnaitė (2021) ably presents

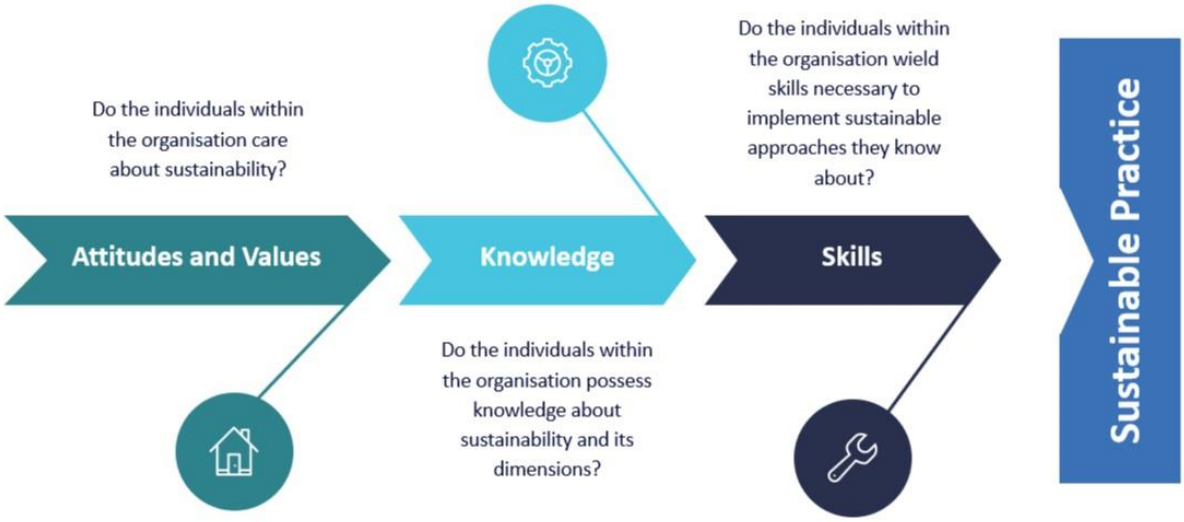
practicalities related to the youth field, taking into account various aspects such as accommodation, venue, consumables, water, transport and many others. This particular publication relates well to the domain of learning mobility and can be recommended to learning mobility organisation personnel as quality, practice-oriented reading, focusing on procedural aspects of their work.

Social sustainability is a (cross-cutting) topic inherently present in many learning mobility initiatives and connected to the nature of learning happening within these mobilities (e.g. the emphasis on social inclusion, see Cairns 2015). Multicultural environments, in which learning mobility takes place and which efficiently bring together young people from different walks of life, have the potential to bring up social sustainability topics. Non-formal and informal learning methods often capitalise on this natural resource of learning mobility projects. As suggested above, social sustainability can be dealt with as a topic, but should always be present as a procedural element, utilising such processes which in themselves bring about reflection on various social sustainability topics (e.g. equity, cohesion, diversity, participation, well-being and many others).

Economic sustainability may be harder to encompass in learning mobility organisations, which often do not focus (primarily) on profit. Nevertheless, as learning mobility organisations frequently use public funds to financially support learning mobility projects and their own internal processes, there are economic sustainability domains that should be taken into account: in procurement and anti-corruption areas, for instance (Global Reporting Initiative (GRI) 2020). Learning mobility organisations should also show economic sustainability in efficiently using financial resources while achieving goals in the environmental and social sustainability domains.

Second, it needs to be noted that there are preconditions to developing sustainability measures in learning mobility organisations, namely individuals' attitudes, values, knowledge and skills. All these personal characteristics of the concrete actors in the field determine the practices which are implemented by these actors. Figure 3 shows that, initially, attitudes and values are of importance: do the actors care about sustainability as such? Do they care about the three dimensions of sustainability? Subsequently, knowledge comes into play: how much do they know about sustainability and its dimensions? In case attitudes and knowledge are present, skills can be developed; only then can meaningful practices be implemented.

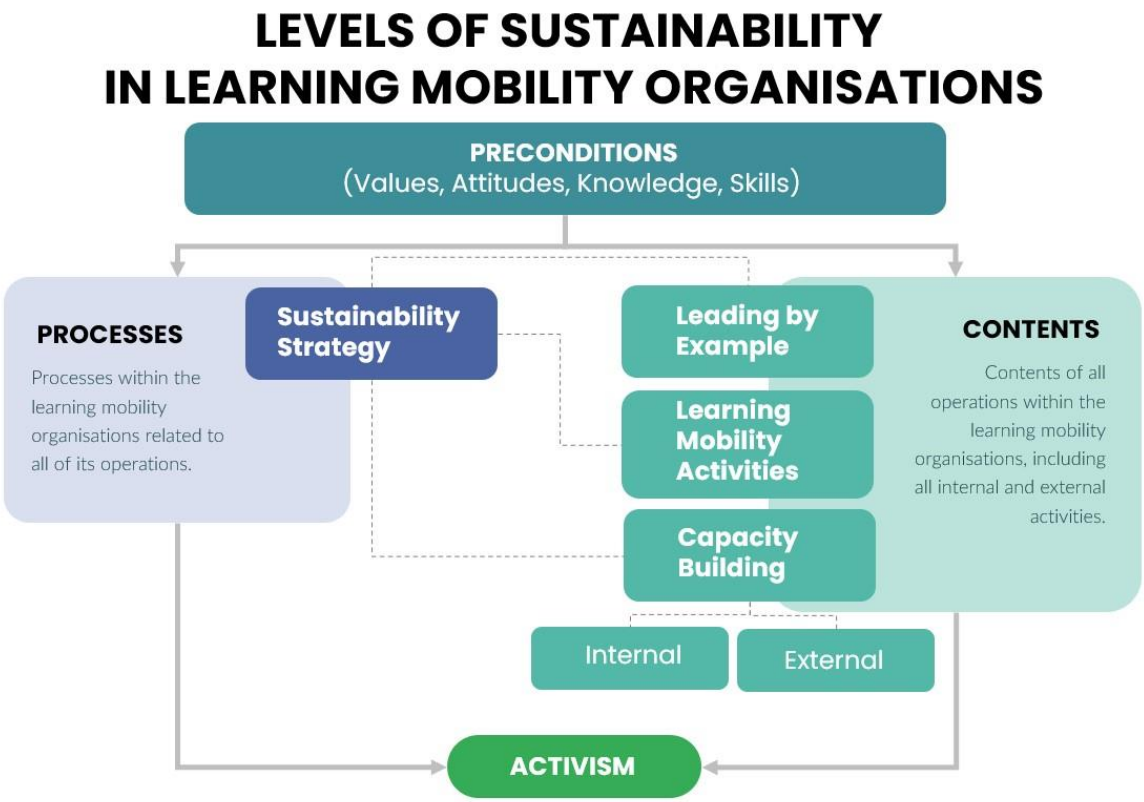
Figure 3: Preconditions to sustainable practice.



Third, as is now apparent from the above, there are in principle two levels on which learning mobility connects with sustainability: in the procedural area (i.e. how sustainable the operation of a given organisation is); and in the area of learning mobility content (i.e. how the given organisation treats sustainability as a topic of learning mobility initiatives[6] and capacity-building activities). As can be seen in Figure 4, both these levels are interconnected via the measures that can be taken within each of them. Additionally, developments on these two levels can be combined and utilised in case the organisation aims at becoming an activist structure, as is explained below.

[6] For further reading into quality in learning mobility, see work done by the EU-Council of Europe Youth Partnership (Kristensen 2019; Council of Europe 2021b).

Figure 4: Levels of sustainability in learning mobility organisations.



At the procedural level, sustainability strategy is discussed below as a tool to enable learning mobility organisations to operate in a sustainable manner, transparently and meaningfully. It needs to be emphasised that in the case of learning mobility organisations, the procedural aspect also needs to include implementation of learning mobility activities as such. At content level, three main tools are outlined as potentially useful in enhancing sustainability in learning mobility: leading by example, learning mobility activities themselves and capacity-building activities. Leading by example refers to sharing and disseminating sustainable practices the learning mobility organisation is implementing. This can happen through a variety of channels (yearly reports, social-media sharing of good practices, attending various stakeholder meetings, or applying criteria for choosing partner organisations). Learning mobility activities themselves can, of course, be used to further explore the topic of sustainability in general (e.g. towards young people interested in the subject), as well as the topic of sustainability in learning mobility (e.g. towards youth workers). Capacity-building activities can also be used to support sustainability in learning mobility, either aimed at increasing capacities within organisations (internal capacity building), or at providing opportunities for further education to other professionals (external capacity building).

Sustainability measures and practices implemented on the procedural level should constitute the necessary first step before tackling sustainability on the content level. This is simply because young people, as well as other actors in the learning mobility field, are sensitive to any potential discrepancies between what is claimed and what is done (the term “green hypocrisy” is fittingly used in these cases; Traynor, Lange, Moro 2012). Moreover, sustainability on the procedural level ensures the impacts of the learning organisation operations are as much in line with sustainability principles as possible, no matter what topics the given learning mobility organisation focuses on. In other words,

even an organisation specialised in enhancing youth participation via learning mobility can, and should, operate in a sustainable manner. As pointed out above, the key measure on the procedural level is the sustainability strategy.

In order to operate consciously, transparently and systematically in a sustainable fashion and avoid allegations of greenwashing, concrete action plans or sustainability strategies should be put in place. Galpin, Whittington and Bell (2013; cf. Ene 2021) give a rather detailed account of how an organisation can compile their sustainability strategy and, despite the model being primarily prepared for private sector bodies, it can rather easily be utilised even in the learning mobility sector. Figure 5 provides an overview of the key aspects of sustainability strategies.

Figure 5: Sustainability strategy for learning mobility organisations (based on the model of Galpin, Whittington, Bell (2013) and adjusted for the learning mobility context).

The first step in outlining a sustainability strategy is to define the overall sustainability priorities embedded in mission statements or other similar documents linked to the general functioning of the organisation (e.g. “We are a youth organisation operating sustainably and respectfully to future generations in all of our activities.”). Second, concrete organisational goals need to be set, such as: reducing plastic use in our organisation by 50% over the next three years; cutting down on the energy consumption of our offices by 15% over the next three years; ensuring meat consumption decreases by 75% at events we are hosting over the next three years. Third, external actors need to be engaged, for example by inviting young people on board, or by selecting partner organisations with similar values and sustainable processes. Eventually, it is a must to evaluate the performance of the organisation at critical points. Evaluation can take place yearly, or in line with rhythms of strategic planning in each organisation (e.g. if an organisation has three-year planning cycles, then these can also be used to set evaluation timelines). Dissemination of the results of the sustainability strategy, including examples of good practices and the results of evaluations, should also be planned for in the sustainability strategy in order to become a beacon of sustainable practice in the given local and

professional context and to avoid greenwashing or green-hypocrisy claims. And last but not least, adjustments should be made to the sustainability strategy based on the results of evaluations in order to reflect on the past achievements and design appropriate sustainable strategy for the upcoming time period (cf. Galpin, Whittington, Bell 2013).

In learning mobility organisations, any sustainability strategy should also include rules on mobility that adhere to all three dimensions of sustainability. Such rules outline implementation principles for mobility activities and can be based on existing literature, such as the Sustainability Checklist (Tumėnaitė 2021) in the case of environmental sustainability and human rights; social inclusion and democratic engagement principles in the case of social sustainability; and following explicit rules outlining due diligence in financial matters in the case of economic sustainability.

Since evaluating the performance of learning mobility organisations in the sustainability domain is one of the key aspects of the sustainability strategies suggested above, examples of measurements and evaluation frameworks should also be mentioned. While measuring sustainability can be challenging given the vague and incoherent definitions, there are examples of initiatives that focus on this particular domain. The Global Reporting Initiative (2021) provides open-source reporting standards which cover all three aforementioned domains and includes detailed guidelines for each particular standard (GRI 2020). The most applicable standards can be used for any given organisation, utilising the detailed guidelines either as a roadmap to establish one's own concrete measures in the given area, or at least as an inspiration in the specific domain.

The global indicator framework for the Sustainable Development Goals and targets of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (2021) can serve as yet another example of measurement-specific targets and indicator setting in the sustainability domain. Ene (2021) suggests a combination of "SMART"[7] goals and key performance indicators as a basis of any well-designed sustainable strategy.

As suggested above, developments connected to sustainability on the procedural and content levels can create favourable conditions for a given organisation to become an activist one, i.e. to make sustainability an explicit aim of its operations, with a focus on impacting wider society through its activities. This development does not necessarily happen in all organisations who strive to be procedurally sustainable or who tackle sustainability as a topic of their learning mobility and capacity building activities. Becoming an activist organisation can be seen as yet another step beyond the procedural and content levels and potentially constitutes a specific type of learning mobility organisation: those that actively campaign for sustainability in learning mobility.

3.1. Defining sustainability in learning mobility

Based on the two previous sections, we are now able to define sustainability in learning mobility as follows:

"Sustainability in learning mobility" means aligning operations of a given learning mobility organisation on the procedural level with environmental, social and economic sustainability principles.

[7] This abbreviation refers to such goals that are Specific (defining concrete outcomes), Measurable (based on quantifiable metrics), Achievable (realistic in the given timeframe with the given resources and in the given context), Relevant (connected to the overall goals) and Timely (with concrete deadlines).

In other words, sustainable learning mobility organisations need to ensure that processes within the organisation, including implementation of learning mobility activities, are environmentally, socially and economically sustainable. Sustainability can be further developed on the content level, giving learning mobility organisations options to (a) lead by example, (b) prepare specific content for their learning mobility activities, and (c) engage in capacity building both internally (focusing on their own personnel) and externally (spreading capacity-building opportunities to a wider audience and inviting external actors to take part). It is vital that any content focusing on sustainability also follows all three dimensions to provide the full picture. At the same time, adding the content level is a voluntary step and, as such, does not have to be present for the learning mobility organisation to adhere to sustainability principles via their internal processes and mobility implementation approaches. This enables the learning mobility field to stay diverse in the thematic focus of organisations and learning mobility activities, while becoming as sustainable as possible when implementing them.

Procedural and content alignments with the sustainability principles can lead to the learning mobility organisation becoming an activist structure that actively seeks this change also in a wider community or in society at large. Becoming an activist organisation is, however, not necessarily the aim of procedural- and content-level alignment with sustainability principles and, by the same token, this alignment in itself does not turn the given organisation into an activist one. Becoming an activist organisation can be seen as a follow-up process in itself, not as an automatic result of aligning processes and content to the sustainability principles. In other words, a sustainable learning mobility organisation is not necessarily an activist organisation.

All in all, learning mobility organisations can affect sustainability in the learning mobility field via the following steps:

- aligning their internal procedures with all three domains of sustainability;
- including content on all three domains of sustainability which focuses on:
    - their own personnel (internal capacity building);
    - participants of the learning mobility activities;
    - other professionals from the learning mobility field (external capacity building);
- becoming an activist structure aimed at influencing society at large.

Despite the fact that it is, in principle, possible to include content on sustainability in learning mobility activities by organisations which do not adhere to the sustainability principles in their own processes, it needs to be emphasised that this can lead to allegations of greenwashing or green hypocrisy.

4. Mapping actors and examples of practices

The youth sector has been active in the sustainability field for many years. There are numerous initiatives coming from the grass roots. Young people and youth organisations advocate for different aspects of sustainability, as this issue matters especially for this generation. The Youth stand for the future (Magapolou 2021) report, from recently conducted research by the European Youth Card Association, clearly shows that environment and climate change issues (environmental sustainability aspects) and education, mental health and comparable living standards (social sustainability aspects) are important for young people and have emerged as the most significant priorities for the future of Europe.

Non-governmental organisations have been developing sustainable practices, among them learning mobility ones, since long before specific policy strategies were published. However, in 2021, major EU programmes providing funds for learning mobilities in Europe, Erasmus+ and the European Solidarity Corps, introduced a new priority focusing on the environment and fighting against climate change, which has already boosted initiatives devoted to this topic.

The major international organisations dealing with youth include sustainability in their agenda. The Erasmus Student Network (ESN) aims to organise greener activities and raise awareness among students regarding this topic. Recently, ESN has become one of the partners in the Green Erasmus project, which will focus on developing an educational portal on sustainable internationalism and analyse the environmental impact of Erasmus mobilities. Greening Youth Information Services (Firth et al. 2020), published by Eurodesk and the European Information and Counselling Agency (ERYICA), gives recommendations on building a sustainable strategy in organisations and presents examples of "green" non-formal education activities. Furthermore, ERYICA has developed a sustainability strategy, where it set specific targets and commitments towards becoming a sustainable organisation and undertook actions for "greening" their office (ERYICA Green Policy 2020). The European Youth Card Association (EYCA) emphasises in its quality standards the importance of social responsibility and environmental sustainability. The European Youth Forum has been promoting youth participation in sustainable development processes in all their aspects and advocating in this matter. The first Policy Paper on Sustainable Development was outlined in 2006 and, since then, this topic has become one of the core principles of European Youth Forum policies.

The EU-Council of Europe Youth Partnership published T-Kit 13: Sustainability and youth work (Keen 2018) and Greening the youth sector: Sustainability checklist for youth organisations (Tumėnaitė 2021), which give a series of recommendations for organisations on sustainable practices that can be utilised in a learning mobility context.

SALTO Resource Centres have developed various suggested actions to support learning mobility organisations in achieving Sustainable Green Europe status through the involvement of young people. Through its flagship projects collection, SALTO Participation & Information (PI) disseminated examples of successful projects. A new category of SALTO PI Awards was introduced, Environment and Climate Action - towards a sustainable green Europe with the power of youth. The Green Steps, an environmental-artistic project, where urban waste is collected and turned into massive art installations, won the prize in 2021. SALTO PI prepared a new section, Digital Transformation, in the Participation Resource Pool, where characteristics of a sustainable and inclusive digital transformation are explored.

IJAB (the International Youth Service of the Federal Republic of Germany) is implementing a Learning Mobility in Times of Climate Change project (LEMOCC). This research-based project focuses on gaining knowledge of good practices and aims to develop recommendations for organisations and policy makers on how to organise international, non-formal learning mobility projects in a sustainable way.

Plenty of regional and national organisations do implement learning mobility activities in a sustainable way. Some of them have placed environmental or/and social sustainability in the core of their activities by organising youth exchanges, seminars and training courses about different aspects of sustainable development. Some of them are in a process of moving towards advocacy and some of them are established activist organisations.

A mapping exercise was conducted in order to identify examples of environmentally, socially and economically sustainable practices in the context of learning mobility. A focus on the environmental aspect of sustainability is dominant. However, there are examples of social and, to a lesser extent, economic sustainability practices as well. Below, examples of organisations that are advanced in all three levels of sustainability – processes, content, and activism – are present.

The list is not exhaustive; rather, it is a sample that could inspire and lead to continued exploration of this topic. All these practices require further research based on qualitative data. The recommendation is to develop a list of specific indicators for each level of sustainability of learning mobility organisations.

4.1. Examples of actors: process, content, and activism Levels of sustainability in learning mobility practice.

Youth and Environment Europe (YEE)

YEE is a European network of environmental youth organisations, which is very active in environmental advocacy, encourages young people to get involved in activism and focuses on youth participation in environmental decision making. YEE places strong emphasis on the social angle of sustainability. According to YEE's members, climate justice cannot exist without social justice. Environmental protection should be complemented by respecting human rights and combating social inequalities. YEE supports youth organisations in their daily sustainable practices and publishes guidance and recommendations. The examples are the Guides for Youth NGOs (Fioravanti et al. 2016) and A short guide to a long impact. Building the Vision of Environmental Youth Organizations of the Future (Bayramov et al. 2021), which cover strategic planning, sustainable project management and sustainable principles. YEE organises international training courses and youth exchanges for young people on different aspects of sustainability with the financial support of the European Youth Foundation and Erasmus+.

Global Ecovillage Network (GEN)

GEN is an umbrella organisation that embraces a holistic approach to sustainability, integrating the social, cultural, ecological and economic areas of human existence. GEN has embedded in its philosophy and practices all three dimensions of sustainability and it is advanced in all levels of sustainability in the context of learning mobility. GEN developed a precise set of conditions for member organisations regarding their processes and the content of their activities: the Ecovillage Map of Regeneration, which consists of 32 principles. GEN gathers ecovillages, which are intentional communities that live together based on specific participatory principles of regeneration in ecological harmony. GEN is composed of five regional networks and NextGEN, which is a youth ecovillage network. NextGEN focuses on connection, inspiration, empowerment and action projects for and with young people. GEN Europe brings together 100 ecovillages and aspiring ecovillage projects in 26 European countries and 18 national ecovillage networks. Although learning mobility is not a principal activity of GEN, many of its members are very active in this field. GEN Europe itself, as well as its members, implement numerous Erasmus+ and European Solidarity Corps projects. The Sustainable Communities Incubator Partnership Programme was recognized as an Erasmus+ Good Practice Example.

Ecovillages often host international events like work camps, European Solidarity Corps projects, youth exchanges, training courses, seminars and other educational activities. They are an example of connecting sustainable practices with educating about them.

Yes to Sustainability is an example of a project run by NextGEN Europe that focuses on learning mobility. It is an international initiative and movement aimed at organising youth projects in ecovillages and at empowering young people through giving them life-changing experiences in ecovillages and sustainable communities.

One of the examples of a learning mobility venue is the Ecovillage Torri Superiore. It is a medieval village in the foothills of the Ligurian Alps (Italy) built entirely of stone, with more than 160 rooms connected by staircases and passages. The village has been renovated and today is a home for a community, whose life is based on ecological principles and social sustainability. Torri Superiore is a part of GEN and the international permaculture movement.[8] The Ecovillage also welcomes guests and volunteers and hosts various environmental education activities, as well as European Solidarity Corps volunteers and youth exchanges.

AEGEE

AEGEE is a large, international student organisation that focuses on wide thematic areas. It is an example of a recent transition from the process and content level of sustainability to the activism one. It has developed sustainability strategies and interesting sustainable practices such as fully vegetarian or vegan events or calculation of CO_2 emissions of events and offsetting them. The Climate Emergency Working Group and Sustainability Committee work within the structure of the organisation. Although AEGEE covers many topics, in 2020 the climate emergency became one of its strategic priorities. At the moment, the organisation is active in advocacy. A policy paper, Sustainable and affordable travel options for young Europeans (Niedringhaus 2020), provides insights into current challenges in travel by young people and recommendations for policy makers on how to support the mobility of young people without harming the environment. The organisation co-founded Generation Climate Europe, which is a large climate coalition of youth-led networks in Europe. Within the social sustainability dimension, Generation Climate Europe works actively in the field of equality.

Generation Climate Europe (GCE)

GCE is a climate coalition of youth-led networks in Europe that advocates for stronger action from the EU on climate environmental issues and empowers young people to engage in EU decision-making processes on sustainability. The activities of GCE are grounded in its guiding principles: youth-led, democratic, evidence-based, diverse, intersectional and human rights-based. One of the main work areas is sustainable development.

Coordinating Committee for International Voluntary Service (CCIVS)

CCIVS is a global network engaged in the field of International Voluntary Service (IVS). IVS projects have been organised for over 100 years, many of them focusing on the environment. Members of the

[8] Permaculture is a framework for creating sustainable ways of living, a practical method of developing an ecologically harmonious, efficient and productive system. For further reading, see materials on the Permaculture Research Institute website (www.permaculturenews.org/what-is-permaculture) and Permaculture Principles website (https://permaculturepriciples.com).

movement participate in direct action all around the world for climate justice. Around 30 000 volunteers take part in them every year in 79 countries, with the support of 188 organisations with a motto reading "Hands on action". The role of CCIVS is to raise awareness, to educate and to put into place practical work at a grass-roots level. One examples of a learning mobility project was IVS for climate justice - don't just say it, do it, aimed at creating a network of knowledge through ecological and sustainable practice in volunteering. Participants will work on formulating a social and environmental responsibility policy that will be adopted later.

Group of European Youth for Change (GEYC)

GEYC is a Romanian youth organisation whose aim is to empower young people to create a positive change in their communities. Sustainable development is one of the main areas of GEYC's work and, within this direction, GEYC develops projects on climate justice and solidarity with a focus on social inclusion, gender equality, health and well-being and partnerships for sustainability. GEYC implemented the European Fellowship on Sustainable Development, an intense programme for young people, which includes formulating social and environmental responsibility policy recommendations and developing activities by participants for a wider audience. The organisation is also a partner of numerous learning mobility activities like youth exchanges, training courses, and seminars devoted to sustainability.

International Young Naturefriends (IYNF)

IYNF is a network that brings together organisations that share the values of respect, solidarity, equality, sustainability, care for nature, youth participation, and non-formal and experiential education. IYNF organises value-driven youth exchanges and capacity-building activities, including outdoor programmes, art and environmental education. Members of IYNF are active in advocacy at the European level.

Go Green

Go Green is a youth environmental organisation located in Skopje (Republic of North Macedonia) and providing climate change education in learning mobility settings. It implements international and local projects and initiatives aimed at raising awareness on sustainability issues. The following strategic priorities were set by the organisation in 2020-2023: youth eco-activism, education on climate change and sustainable development, social inclusion for a green economy, and organisational development. Go Green is active in the field of research and advocates at the local level.

YouthLink Scotland

YouthLink Scotland is Scotland's national agency for youth work. It runs a Learning for Sustainability programme which works on global citizenship, sustainable development education and outdoor learning. In 2021, ahead of COP26, YouthLink Scotland organised a conference called Our Climate Emergency – Youth Work's Role for People and Planet, which highlighted the urgent and significant challenges that society and the planet are facing and explored the power of learning for sustainability through youth work.

5. Concluding remarks and avenues for further inquiry

This study is a prelude to further exploration of sustainability in the youth learning mobility field. As such, it presents sustainability as a concept, including all three vital dimensions, and it offers a definition of sustainability in learning mobility. This definition is based on an analytical framework focusing on providers of learning mobility opportunities (i.e. any bodies implementing learning

mobility activities) and states that sustainability in learning mobility is anchored at the procedural level: learning mobility is sustainable if providers of learning mobility base their actions on sustainable practices (both internal processes and the learning mobility implementation principles). Two further levels of sustainability in learning mobility have been identified, however: content and activism.

The content level describes any internal and external activities in which sustainability is tackled on the topical level. This may consist of various capacity-building activities for personnel within and outside the organisation and, of course, of learning mobility activities in which sustainability is tackled as a topic. Furthermore, organisations can become activist bodies that aim to influence the sustainability agenda beyond the scope of their own activities and focus on community or societal levels in their actions.

As much as both the content and activism levels are important when considering sustainability in the wider societal context, they are not considered a condition for sustainability in learning mobility: that is, dependent purely on the procedural level. This approach allows the learning mobility field to become as sustainable as possible without jeopardising the treasured wide topical focus of this field. By adjusting internal procedures and principles for learning mobility implementation, the learning mobility field can stay diverse in topics it covers, while becoming sustainable in doing so. Finally, by building on sustainable processes, learning mobility organisations can avoid being accused of greenwashing or green hypocrisy when engaging in sustainability-related content or activism.

The mapping of actors and practices builds on the conceptual framework described above and was presented in the third chapter of this study. Apart from presenting interesting actors, the mapping brings forward some important lessons for future exploration of sustainability in the learning mobility field.

First and foremost, information on the procedural level is not readily available for most learning mobility organisations. This can be due to the fact that these are often internal documents, but also due to other terminology the organisations are using when describing sustainability in practical terms. Despite sounding trivial, this is an important finding for at least two reasons. First, as mentioned at length in the second chapter, a sustainability strategy should not be an internal document and results the organisation has achieved should not be hidden, either. The fact that these documents are rather hard to find suggests that transparency is low in this context and that leads to (a) increasing possibility of greenwashing and green hypocrisy claims and (b) decreasing support for sustainability in the learning mobility field by providing only a few good practice examples. Second, this absence of procedural-level information has direct implications for future research. It is necessary to utilise other methods of data collection apart from desk research, such as interviews, focus groups or questionnaires. Utilising various research methods may lead not only to better data saturation for future research but may also (in line with the action research tradition) positively influence the learning mobility field by increasing awareness of the importance that transparency in presenting sustainability strategies and internal processes holds for the whole field.

Second, it must be noted that distinguishing between learning mobility organisations that provide sustainability-related content and those that focus on sustainability activism as such is not straightforward. This finding leads to a recommendation that the content-activism relationship should be further explored in future studies. This should ideally be done using qualitative research methods, as it seems exploring meanings behind concrete actions of learning mobility organisations may hold the key to either distinguishing these two categories, or realising that they are indistinguishable and constitute, in principle, one level with no clear lines between content provision and activism.

Third, an operational definition of “learning mobility organisation” should be compiled. Despite the fact that this, too, may sound trivial, it influences any future research and evaluation efforts. Research and evaluation in the sustainability domain is, as in all other spheres, dependent on a firm definition of the basic population. A basic population is a set of units that are considered eligible when the evaluation takes place and largely influences the results of any given research and evaluation efforts. For example, conducting research on all organisations that held at least one learning mobility activity in the past ten years will yield vastly different results than only evaluating organisations that hold learning mobility activities regularly, at least once every two months in the past ten years. While in the first example, the basic population subjected to the research and evaluation efforts is large and brings together diverse organisations, in the second example the basic population will likely be extremely small and homogeneous. Apparently, the question of defining learning mobility organisations (providers) is far from trivial and should be tackled before further research into sustainability in learning mobility is conducted.

Finally, the mapping results show that more insight is needed into the three sustainability dimensions in learning mobility: environmental, social and economic. It remains unclear as to what extent the three dimensions of sustainability are present on various levels (procedural, content and activism) in learning mobility. This relates to (a) the shortcomings of the desk research approach debated above (namely, lack of internal data), and to (b) the absence of clear and universal definitions of the sustainability dimensions themselves. While the first shortcoming may be mitigated by using appropriate qualitative research methods, the second may need to be tackled through further work on a common framework which would define all three dimensions within the context of learning mobility. Such a common framework should focus on the community of practice within the learning mobility field, to which it might bring clarity in debating sustainability in the future.

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