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SHiFT

*Support Systems for Sustainable
Entrepreneurship and Transformation*

Good practice collection University support for sustainable entrepreneurship

*Carl von Ossietzky
University of Oldenburg
Germany*



Good practice collection

SHIFT (“Support Systems for Sustainable Entrepreneurship and Transformation”) is a unique research project and is funded through the EU programme ECO-INNOVERA: www.eco-innova.eu. SHIFT’s main goal is to enable universities, incubators, business development organizations, financial institutions and other relevant actors to support eco-innovation and sustainable entrepreneurship more effectively. On the basis of thorough empirical analysis of the status quo and the identification of good practices world-wide, concrete and realistic recommendations have been developed for policy makers and actors of the support systems: www.shift-project.eu

The Carl von Ossietzky University of Oldenburg is part of a selection of good practice examples the Borderstep Institute has collated in the context of the SHIFT project to highlight exemplary activities of higher education institutions (HEIs) in Finland, Germany, Sweden, the United Kingdom and the USA that have successfully integrated sustainability in their respective entrepreneurship support system.

Carl von Ossietzky University of Oldenburg – Germany

Characterization: *Entrepreneurial university with sustainable entrepreneurship as a focal point*



Good practice highlights

“**Sustainable Entrepreneurship**” is a focal point in the university’s strategy as an entrepreneurial university.

The university offers a **sustainability master cluster** with 9 master programmes in sustainability, energy and environmental sciences.

Professorship for Innovation Management & Sustainability: responsible for the “Eco-Entrepreneurship” major study programme for master students and research in the field of sustainable entrepreneurship and innovation.

Master’s programme in “Sustainability Economics and Management”: includes the award-winning module “Eco-Venturing”. Eco-Venturing was the first course world-wide with students developing sustainability-orientated business concepts in co-operation with business partners aiming at the promotion of tangible green business start-ups.

Sustainable development is a major research field of the university and is being coordinated through the interdisciplinary **Centre for Environmental and Sustainability Research (COAST)**, which comprises five specialized sub-centres. One of them is the **Oldenburg Centre for Sustainability Economics and Management (CENTOS)** with more than 50 professors and researchers from social sciences.

Sustainable Entrepreneurship is a major research field of CENTOS. It includes areas such as the generation and diffusion of sustainable innovation, the creation of green future markets, green start-ups and eco-venturing strategies.



Key data

Location: Oldenburg, Lower Saxony, Germany

Founded: 1973

Number of students: 13,700

Profile: The University of Oldenburg’s goal is to find answers to the major challenges society faces in the 21st century – through interdisciplinary, cutting edge research. Its research in sustainable development, encompassing several academic disciplines, is especially renowned. The University of Oldenburg has been honoured by the German Federal Ministry of Economics and Energy (BMWi) as one of the best entrepreneurial universities in Germany.

Interview with Prof. Dr. Klaus Fichter

*Adjunct Professor for Innovation Management & Sustainability
Head of Eco-Entrepreneurship major study programme
University of Oldenburg*



Why did your university/business school start to support sustainable entrepreneurship and/or eco-innovation endeavours?

The University of Oldenburg has a long tradition in sustainability-related teaching and research. E.g. our three-term non-consecutive master's programme in "Renewable Energy" started already in 1987. More than ten years ago the university decided to further strengthen its applied focus. In addition to the traditional roles of research and teaching, the provision of practical solutions to societal challenges has grown in importance and the university as a whole decided to become more entrepreneurial. This endeavour has been successful. Only recently we have been honoured as one of the best entrepreneurial universities in Germany by the German Federal Ministry of Economics and Energy. The University of Oldenburg and the regional innovation system, with its appreciation for sustainability as a guiding principle for regional development, provide a very good ecosystem for sustainable innovation and entrepreneurship.

Who initiated your programmes, what were the milestones of their evolution?

Based on its tradition and specific competencies in sustainability-related teaching and research, the Department of Economics, Business and Law decided to expand the sustainability master cluster and introduce a new master's programme in "Sustainability Economics and Management (SEM)" which started in 2005. During a 2-month research visit to the Bren School of Environmental Science and Management at the University of California, Santa Barbara, in 2008, I had the opportunity to learn more about their focal study programme in "Eco-Entrepreneurship", which was introduced only a year prior to my arrival. It was the nation's first programme on this topic. I liked the approach and suggested to our Department to introduce an "Eco-Entrepreneurship" major study course as a specialization in the SEM master's programme. Core of the specialization in Eco-Entrepreneurship is the award-winning master project module in "Eco-Venturing" which we have been offering every winter semester since 2008.

What can other universities learn from it?

There is an explicit demand for sustainable entrepreneurship! Students love the idea of turning challenges into opportunities and combining entrepreneurial spirit with practical solutions for sustainability. Building an effective university support system for sustainable entrepreneurship and eco-innovation requires a systemic approach and takes time but it is definitely rewarding.

What are your next steps/future plans?

In order to support sustainability-orientated business model development, we are going to introduce the concept of a "Sustainable Business Canvas". Soon we will provide an online tool to assist students, academic entrepreneurs and green start-ups outside of the university to take sustainability success factors into account when developing their business model or business plan.

What has been the impact of your sustainable entrepreneurship support?

More than 50% of all students in the master's programme "Sustainability Economics and Management" participate in the "Eco-Entrepreneurship" major study course and develop competencies in eco-venturing and in starting green businesses. The entrepreneurial support system of the University of Oldenburg and the sustainability-specific support activities facilitate and accelerate academic entrepreneurship in the fields of cleantech, renewable energies and sustainability. This leads to 10 to 20 green start-up projects and spin-offs by students and researchers from the university every year.



Additional Information

University of Oldenburg:
<http://www.uni-oldenburg.de/en>

Professorship for Innovation Management and Sustainability:
<http://www.uni-oldenburg.de/innovation/en>

Booklet "Starting up a business that's sustainable!":
<http://www.uni-oldenburg.de/en/wire/innovation/teaching-winter-semester-20142015/all-courses/eco-venturing-module/>

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For citation please use:
Fichter, K., Geier, J. & Tiemann, I. (2015). Good practice collection university support for sustainable entrepreneurship: Carl von Ossietzky University of Oldenburg. Borderstep: Berlin.

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Funded by:



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The Swedish Research Council for Environment,
Agricultural Sciences and Spatial Planning