

A FINNISH CASE:  
**THESES ON SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT  
AND RESPONSIBILITY**  
BY THE FINNISH COUNCIL OF UNIVERSITY RECTORS (UNIFI)

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# This short presentation



- ▶ gives a snapshot of the **Theses on Sustainable Development and Responsibility** presented by Universities Finland UNIFI (i.e. the Finnish Council of University Rectors).
- ▶ All the Finnish universities (14) are members of UNIFI.
- ▶ UNIFI aims to **promote cooperation between universities**.
- ▶ The UNIFI theses were originally presented in 2020.

# Why?



- ▶ The theses (and my brief account of the process behind them) give you an idea of how the university sector in Finland has seen and conceptualized its own sustainability policy and role as a responsible agent of sustainability.
- ▶ The theses represent **voluntary self-regulation** of the university sector – self-regulation that goes **beyond the demands of legislation** and **the steering provided by the Ministry of Education and Culture** in Finland.

# Working group on sustainable development and responsibility



- ▶ In 2019, UNIFI set up a national working group **to enhance the universities' sustainability work.**
- ▶ The group brought together not only universities, but also the National Union of University Students in Finland (SYL).
- ▶ The working group actively discussed **the universities' sustainability objectives and activities.**

# Wide participation



- ▶ The process was inclusive.
- ▶ More than 400 academic and administrative staff members from different universities participated in formulating the theses and commenting on them.

# Division of theses



- ▶ UNIFI's theses on sustainable development and responsibility are **12 in total**.
- ▶ They have been **divided under five themes**:
  1. Research
  2. Teaching
  3. Societal interaction
  4. Campus activities
  5. The preconditions for the universities' operation

# 4. Division of theses



- ▶ Theses 1–11 have been intended to be **drivers of sustainability activities especially for the universities themselves.**
- ▶ The last thesis, 12, focuses on **the partners and stakeholders** (e.g. providers of funding) **influencing universities.** Thesis 12 also focuses on **the national evaluation models.**

# UNIFI's theses on sustainable development and responsibility



- ▶ Web page:

<https://www.unifi.fi/viestit/theses-on-sustainable-development-and-responsibility/>

- ▶ PDF file:

<https://www.unifi.fi/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/Unifi-Theses-on-sustainable-development-and-responsibility.pdf>



# UNIFI's theses on sustainable development and responsibility



# Sustainable and responsible research



1. Research activities are aimed at solving great sustainability challenges.
2. Attention is paid to sustainability and responsibility in the assessment and funding of research projects.
3. Universities support an interdisciplinary approach, the principles of open science and a multifaceted global perspective in finding solutions to sustainability challenges.

# Teaching promoting sustainable development



4. Studies in sustainable development are part of all degrees and the continuous learning offered.
5. Universities promote the accessibility of higher education and a safe research and teaching environment.

# Universities' own functions and administration create a responsible and sustainable world



6. Universities' management, administration and campus activities are **in line with the sustainable development goals.**
7. Universities follow **the principles of a carbon neutral circular economy** in their activities and take concrete measures **to foster biodiversity.**
8. Universities work actively **to promote equality, equity and well-being.**

# Societal impact and cooperation as drivers of change



9. Universities are **bold, committed and responsible partners** that act and exert influence at both national and international levels.
10. Universities **share sustainable and responsible practices** openly and actively and develop them together.

# The preconditions for responsibility and sustainable development are created in cooperation



11. Universities integrate sustainability and responsibility work in their strategy and allocate more resources and monitoring tools to it.
12. Sustainable development and responsibility are strongly visible in the national funding model, evaluation and auditing of universities.

# Examples of measures



- ▶ Examples of **concrete measures** have been compiled **under each thesis**. The lists of examples are not exhaustive. However, they introduce the key measures that universities must take without delay.
- ▶ It is expected that the universities will **implement the measures in a different order**. This makes **different university profiles** in sustainability possible.

# Future steps



- ▶ It is thought that introducing the UNIFI theses into practice requires **cooperation between the entire academic community**.
- ▶ There is a strong consensus in Finland that now is the **time for universities to set their strategic sustainability goals high**. It is also important to **ensure sufficient resources**.
- ▶ Furthermore, it is understood that universities have not only a huge opportunity but also **an obligation to lead the change**.



# Thank you!



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