Urgent Measures for Sustainability at TUM

Introduction

The year 2030 is less than 8 years away. One year ago, we published our Vision 2030, which summarizes our picture of a sustainable university. Now, TUM has nearly finished its Sustainable Futures Strategy 2030, which is hoped to speed up the sustainable transformation of our university. However, having been part of the development of this strategy, we feel the urge to emphasize: For the strategy to reach its full power in fostering real, fast, and sustainable change, the structural entrenchment of sustainability is inevitable. Especially considering the relatively short time frame that is left for the implementation of ambitious goals, we want to stress the importance of sufficient budget and employees – otherwise, the strategy will just remain effectless.

Based on our Vision 2030, we summarize here the most important points concerning structural improvements in order to make TUM fit for the challenges to come.

1. Sustainability Sounding Board

The most essential thing about implementing sustainability at a university is giving everyone the possibility to be informed about or even participate in the actions concerning sustainability at their educational institution. Our idea of the ‘Sustainability Sounding Board’ lays the foundation for this: an advisory body on the university’s sustainability transformation, engaging the entire university family in the process. It is composed of all status groups of the university: professors, students, mid-level faculty, administrative staff, and doctoral representatives to facilitate a holistic approach. The schools, departments, and campuses should also delegate sustainability representatives to this body.

The scope of the Sustainability Sounding Board is to advise the executive bodies and to help shape the sustainability vision and strategy. It is to be involved in the further development of the strategy and reporting processes, as well as in decisions that set the direction of sustainability actions at TUM. However, the development and implementation of the sustainability strategy clearly lie with the permanent positions of the Vice President for Sustainability, the Sustainability Office, and the Green Offices.

We demand

● Implementation of the Sustainability Sounding Board with sufficient resources
2. Strengthening of the Sustainability Office

The Sustainability Office takes a key role in the sustainable transformation of our university. As such, it is involved in all related processes. To ensure the office can tackle sustainability holistically and consider environmental, economic, and social dimensions equally, it is crucial to increase its capacity. More people with different backgrounds are needed to build up a comprehensive understanding of sustainability and solve the challenges related to our university.

TUM stands for excellent research and teaching. For these areas, distinct positions at the sustainability office are required to meet our standards in the long run and guide TUM to a leading university in sustainability. One of the most discussed fields in our society is future mobility. Also, our university needs to deal with it, from a scientific point of view but also internally. With its nearly 50,000 students and over 10,000 employees, TUM is bigger than many companies. Hence, a distinct position is necessary for improving sustainable mobility within TUM. A core element within each sustainability strategy is an annual report to measure progress and identify hurdles. For this, a further position is necessary due to the high workload related to this task, as we have already seen in the past. The Green Offices are a big step towards a participatory transformation. In the future, additional offices should be implemented at the campus in Garching and at the main campus in the heart of Munich. This process can be sped up if we vacate a position, especially for Green Offices which can also manage these in the future. As the complexity of the Sustainability Office and the transformation increases, a central communication department is necessary, which connects all other positions within the office and channels information for public communication.
We demand:
we call for a capacity build-up of the Sustainability Office with the following positions:
- a Green Office manager,
- a central communication manager,
- a teaching manager,
- a research manager,
- a mobility manager,
- and a reporting officer.

3. Green Offices
Green Offices are well-known institutions that provide a first contact point for students and university staff regarding sustainability. They are crucial for a whole institution approach by enabling student participation. Furthermore, they are experts on their respective campuses and are able to take action on a local level, for example by supporting or launching projects. Gathered knowledge and perspectives can be forwarded directly to the Sustainability Office or administration.

As the success of the existing Green Offices in Straubing and Weihenstephan shows, this concept can live up to its name. Therefore, we demand the installation of Green Offices also in the two biggest campuses, Garching and Munich, with appropriate staffing and budget. However, as already mentioned, the most important prerequisite is a Green Office manager at the Sustainability Office – a lack of this position will make it impossible to manage two new Green Offices.

We demand:
- Green Offices on the two biggest campuses, Garching and Munich
- Green Office manager as staff of the Sustainability Office

4. Executive Vice President Sustainability
In order to represent the importance of the topic of sustainability to the outside world, we are calling for a Vice-President for Sustainability. Besides the external representation, it is even more important to have a responsible person for the topic of sustainability in the presidium. Without a person specifically responsible for this area, no rapid progress in the orientation of the entire university towards sustainability is possible.
We demand:

- Installation of an Executive Vice President for Sustainability

5. Sustainability representatives for each school

The Sustainability Representatives are strongly connected to the concept of the Sustainability Sounding Board, as explained in the first section. They should be part of every meeting of the advisory board, gathering information about sustainability actions or practices at the university from the reports of other participants and informing them in turn about the happenings at their own school. In addition, they act as a representative of their unit in discussing future activities and decisions toward sustainability at TUM. In their school, the representative should share the information gained at the board meetings, and thereby amplify the knowledge about the sustainability actions at TUM. Concurrently, it is their task to be the contact point concerning sustainability for students and staff and gather information about sustainability activities at their school. Especially at such a large university like TUM, it is important to establish various points of contact for a topic of this relevance. The Sustainability Office alone cannot ensure awareness about sustainability action of all students and staff, which is needed to incorporate all the TUM community and ultimately foster participation.

We demand:

- Installation of Sustainability Representatives for each school with enough resources, e.g., exemption or additional pay

6. Strategy to reach CO2 neutrality until 2028

It is of great importance that TUM, as a leading university, also leads the way in the topic of reaching climate neutrality. This also includes developing a strategy to achieve climate neutrality by 2028. Other universities, such as the FU Berlin, have already shown what such a strategy can look like and how it can be implemented. GHG emissions can be drastically reduced through various approaches, such as improving efficiency through premium systems, greater use, and expansion of renewable energies, incentives for sustainable mobility, and conversion to electric mobility. The goal of the strategy should be an elaboration of measures to achieve climate neutrality. Furthermore, directly responsible persons for the implementation as well as a control authority should be defined.

We demand:

- Recruitment or creation of personnel capacities for the development and implementation of a carbon-neutrality strategy.
7. Capacity increase of building management

A sustainable campus should involve all three dimensions of sustainability. Especially, it should take into account the ecosystem it is embedded in, allow for participation in its design and invite everyone to stay. Hence, the campus needs to be climate-neutral and offer a habitat for domestic species, but also allow everyone in an uncomplicated way to contribute to its design. In this context, the building management of TUM bears a special responsibility. It is well known that more staff is necessary to tackle current and future challenges of campus design, e.g., climate neutrality and thinking along sustainability in all processes.

We demand:
- capacity increase of building management,
- ecologically designed inner yard at the main campus reducing the heat island effect, offering space for people and nature.

8. Sustainable Living Labs

Sustainable Living Labs can be defined as the opportunity for faculty, staff, students, and researchers to address sustainability challenges through research on their own campuses on a local level while trying to solve them on a global scale. TUM has already benefited a lot from the last three semesters of financing the sustainable living lab modules with outcomes like the ‘Intervention Arcisstraße’ or the ‘TUM Catalyst’ discussing the subject of the future campus. But being compared to the actions at other high-ranking universities, it is apparent that there is still a big potential to be used. For example, MIT has set up a platform for organizing all of their modules about campus-based sustainability research, TU Delft has built ‘The Green Village’, an ‘innovation site’ for ‘new technologies in the field of sustainable energy provision, water, and waste systems’ and Harvard University has set up a ‘$700,000 fund to support student research projects [on sustainability strategies] that tackle challenges faced directly on campus’.

We demand:
- Expansion of the Sustainable Living Labs with resources also for the management of the program