

# Opening Remarks/ Introductory Statement

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Dear Prof. Lenzen,  
dear Dr. Huthmacher,  
dear ladies and gentlemen:

- Welcome to Hamburg. I am very happy to welcome you as a representative of the Senate in our city. Thank you for coming, and thank you for talking about such an important topic that affects us all: sustainability. Some may think the term has somewhat worn out with too much room for interpretation. But we can turn it around and say: Sustainability has established itself as a well-known concept in society. How well it is understood, is what we should build on.
- The fact that, supposedly, sustainable thinking emerged from German forestry, has become commonplace. Yet: It was in fact a Bavarian forester and author, Georg Sperber, who explained the dimension of sustainability in a nutshell: Following the decisions made at the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development 1992 in Rio de Janeiro, he said:

“I believe that our society is not aware of the magnitude of commitment they have signed for in Rio to ensure sustainable development whatsoever. If this industrial society of depredation, exploitation and despoliation would suddenly make a true effort in sustainable economics, then they would have to turn the nature of this industrial society upside down from its very heart. A

full-on *re-volution*. (ZEIT online, 7 Feb. 2012 *translated from German*)

- And how is this supposed to work? How else can we make real changes happen, if not via education, science and research? Where else should we plant seeds for sustainable thinking in society, if not in kindergarten, schools, continuing education, colleges and universities?

Dear ladies and gentlemen:

- It is an idea I would like to reiterate, also since every big idea needs people to implement it and to move on through uncomfortable and tedious zones like the German poet and playwright Bertolt Brecht describes the “troubles of the plains”. In other words: In the best case scenario, a great idea will lead to decisions, laws, print media, regulations, or in short: administrative action. The original and bold nature of the very idea could become blurred by, admittedly tedious, bureaucracy. That’s why I will repeat it again. This is about no less than a hundred and eighty degree change in society. And it must begin in schools, vocational training facilities and universities. These are the places that can accompany students in this process.
- The Sustainability Development Goals of the United Nations aim to establish the principle of sustainability in all areas of society. One might wish to call it sustainability mainstreaming, just like the analog gender equality strategy of gender mainstreaming. After all, this has resulted in each department having to consistently take gender equality into consideration as a cross-sectional task. At the end of every print document, the predicted effects on gender equality must be stated. I am positively optimistic: Such a change in attitude can also be achieved in the case of sustainability.
- With such fundamental change in attitude we have achieved that cars come equipped with catalytic converters, that the ozone hole is becoming smaller, that women may vote, work, and live on their own accord, that lesbian and gay people may get married and so much more.
- A changing attitude about sustainability has already initiated many changes, especially here in Hamburg: To mention only a few, we have done research on renewable energies and started using them, public transport operators now only buy electrical buses, we are turning Hamburg into a bike city, our

new tendering regulation for public purchasing now contains criteria for fair trade, sustainability has become a part of the curricula of our schools and in many degree programs of our universities. The list goes on:

- Recently, the Hamburg Senate has informed the parliament what we were doing to reach the Sustainability Development Goals of the UN. The education and training of future change agents will assume a key function in this process. For more than a decade, Hamburg has supported “Education for Sustainable Development (ESD): for example, with the initiative “Hamburg is Learning Sustainability”. It is an association of Hamburg’s government agencies, institutions, associations, networks and persons that are working in education for sustainable development. Four times in row, Hamburg won the “City of the UN-Decade ESD” and, in 2015, was also key partner for the world action program ESD 2015-2019.
- Currently, we are working across agencies on a “Masterplan ESD”. Its aim is to include areas for action, targets and measures until 2030 and for all levels of education: kindergarten, schools, colleges and universities, vocational training and education as well as informal education.
- Recently, the Federal Government has presented the “National Action Plan ESD” and emphasized that federal states and communities play a vital role in the implementation of Germany’s sustainability targets.
- In the area of science and research we ensure that all those interested in studying may have equal opportunities to do so, following suit of the United Nations’ principle of not leaving anyone behind. For example, all public universities in Hamburg are certified family-friendly. One of our teaching goals is to open doors for students to move within the educational system in order to increase their success rate. To achieve this, teachers have thought of a magnitude of innovative teaching and learning methods. They are also continuously working on optimizing the entry phase for students. The Hamburg Open Online University (HOOU) may also contribute to reach new target groups, also outside the academic world. Traditional classroom teaching is expanded with digital technology and made accessible to the general public.
- Also in research, we are trying to extend the reach of knowledge, again using

digital technology: In cooperation with the universities, we are pushing the topic of open access strategies, that is free access to research results.

Several specialized program lines with various projects are in the pipeline.

- All universities have sustainability concepts. Your host, the University of Hamburg [Universität Hamburg], has incorporated sustainability in their mission statement. Prof. Lenzen has just given us a detailed outline. The initiative “Hamburg University Alliance for Sustainability” has emerged from the long-term cooperation of three universities: Universität Hamburg, Hamburg University of Applied Sciences and Hamburg University of Technology are discussing, developing and implementing cross-university projects for sustainable development. An example is the climate savings account for students.
- Within the university network’s HOCH-N project, Universität Hamburg is playing a national leadership role with its Centre for a Sustainable University. A highlight is the development of a protocol for sustainability reporting. As we all know, meaning well does not always mean doing well. Therefore, it is important to continuously and critically question sustainability targets and evaluate sustainability projects.
- You see: “Sustainability mainstreaming” is fully underway, especially at universities.

Dear ladies and gentlemen:

- The next four days, you will discuss in detail how sustainability may become reality at such complex institutions as universities: in teaching and research, governance, operation and outreach. You will exchange ideas on best practice and how one can evaluate or measure sustainability, and to what extent sustainability can and should be implemented at universities. For people who are not directly involved, this may sound complicated. Tedious and time-consuming. Well, it is. But this is what shapes changes in society. At least, if they are supposed to be sustainable...
- Thank you for your work. Enjoy your stay in our city.