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“Food” to REASOn and REASOn about food: creating education for a sustainable future

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Abstract

The agro-food and forestry world brings with it systemic and long-term challenges that require conceptual approaches that are not always consensual *vis-a-vis* the sustainability of social and environmental processes (Steffen et al., 2011). There are serious controversies regarding agro-food challenges and their interaction with the social system. Besides, there is also an evolving controversy with the required intensity of sustainability and natural capital intended for society lifestyles (Dobbs et al., 2011). A few examples may be highlighted; Is there a shortage of resources or just inequities and wastage? How to deal with new food value chains in a fast-urbanized world? Are food lifestyles and community aims incompatible with environmental sustainability? How to align social and environmental aims with food security policies?

The sustainability science deals with the understanding of the dynamics of natural systems and society that can foster a dialogue under these multiple challenges (Ashford, 2004). It does so because it focuses on large-scale problems, with ill-defined borders; Places in dialogue disciplines of multiple epistemologies; Emphasizes the solution of a real socio-environmental problem; Uses interdisciplinary approach and transdisciplinary methods; and Confronts the different proposals for solving the problem, i.e., calls for the management of the controversy and consensus building. However, such an approach is

only effective if stakeholders and academia are aware of the challenges, understand sustainability concepts and are prepared for engagements. Therefore, an education for sustainability has been considered as a path that favours transformative training capable of promoting innovative dialogues.

This article aims to reflect overall on a doctoral (PhD) course proposal of the University of Lisbon in the framework of the College Food, Farming and Forestry (College F3), a multidisciplinary platform, with inter and transdisciplinary objectives. The prospective is to build competencies to respond to the creation of collective skills and to the challenges referred above. The PhD Program was designed according to a sustainability science model and envisages new learning paradigms. The approach aims at combining environmental and economic aspects with social-ecological learning, blending learning methods from technology and social sciences. In this regard, we use the approach proposed by Wiek et al. (2011) that reflects on the sustainability competencies on - systems-thinking, anticipatory, normative, strategic and interpersonal – to present and support the model of the doctoral program plan.

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