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Hope, Despair and Personal Agency – The Affective Dimension of Sustainability

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Workshop

Abstract

Sustainability teaching in HE can be challenging. As the current development is not in line with science, there is an emotional dimension of the topic, causing climate anxiety (Schwartz et al. 2023). Sustainability issues are also transdisciplinary, characterized by wicked problems (Ramaley, 2014), and there is an imperative to transform knowledge into changed behavior – to take action (UN SDG 13). All these aspects deviate from traditional teaching in HE. There is a call for more interactive and collaborative teaching (e.g. Lansbury et al. 2023). One way to address this is by “connective aesthetics” (Gallagher & Balt, 2025 p. 9). The purpose of this workshop is to provide a space for students to acknowledge, share and discuss ways to deal with feelings related to sustainability challenges, help students develop their own personal strategies in understanding these challenges, and develop agency. Concepts like ‘Cathedral thinking’ and ‘stages of radical climate acceptance’ (Kimberly 2021) are included in the students readings and referred to during the workshop. The workshop, so far tried out by 360 students, is an outcome of an international project based on Applied Drama (Wall et al. 2025). Participants will get a first-hand experience of this interactive teaching practice.