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Manifesto for Paris climate conference 23 November 2015

We, academics from all parts of the world, invite all state leaders to stimulate and support their universities to address the severe challenge of increasing unsustainability of living conditions on our planet.

Considering that:

- The World Bank concludes in its report of 8 November 2015 that climate change could (under current circumstances) push more than 100 million additional people back into poverty by 2030;
- As Gro Harlem Brundtland has recently remarked, one-dimensional solutions cannot address multidimensional problems like those we currently face. The 2014-15 joint statements between the USA and China about decrease of carbon emissions, for example, are a major but one-dimensional step. The mitigation of carbon emissions is essential for the sustainability of humankind on earth, but we have to go much further than this;
- Many current authoritative reports clarify that the world needs extra and orchestrated efforts from universities in order to fill gaps in past and current approaches. They demonstrate that many gaps lead to fragmentation and stagnation in our development toward sustainability;
- The ISSC's (with UNESCO and OECD) 2013 World Social Science Report ('Changing global environments') shows that these gaps arise because environmental change is still viewed primarily in physical science terms, whereby the (interrelationships of) socio-environmental, socio-economic, socio-political and socio-cultural dimensions of sustainability receive insufficient attention. It shows too the regional divides in social sciences (including economics and law) are as strong as the divides between social sciences themselves and between these and natural sciences. We lack a comprehensive approach that links all relevant dimensions of human existence with the challenges posed by climate change. This inhibits the creation of knowledge about interrelated processes in these dimensions. For these reasons, the ISSC has called for the promotion of interdisciplinary and cross-disciplinary science to fill the gaps in our understanding of overall sustainability;

- UN-Habitat and UNDP (e.g. UNDP-China in 2013) warn that management of the current growth of cities to become mega-cities remains insufficiently connected with the sustainability challenge. The Sustainable Development Goals miss a systematic approach concerning (mega) cities;
- The manifestations of climate change in many parts of the world, not least in parts of Africa, South-East Asia and the Pacific, are already dramatic. The international response to recent climate change-related disasters further illustrates the gap in our understanding of the interrelationships of dimensions of sustainability, and the way in which these dimensions influence the effectiveness of responses.

We declare that:

- Part of the core business of universities should be to contribute to a sound understanding of all dimensions of sustainable development, including the role of all these dimensions in the prevention of and response to climate change;
- To enable universities and academics to cross disciplinary, bureaucratic and other conventional boundaries, the world needs orchestrated common academic efforts to invent new conceptual and methodological frameworks that draw connections between the huge diversity of studies related to sustainability. Such efforts should be aimed at creating a comprehensive understanding of sustainability suitable for addressing multidimensional problems, thus offering alternatives to overly top-down approaches promoted by many governments and business-players;
- Herewith the academic world should make a contribution to policies oriented towards sustainable development that strengthens social justice, human dignity, solidarity within and across societies and equal opportunities for all peoples of the world;
- The results of these efforts should be made accessible so as to stimulate and mobilize individuals, communities and policy-makers at all levels to act as positive forces in the diverse processes towards sustainable development.
- For the proposed orchestration of academic institutes and academics from across the world, we need 'academic change-agents' in order to promote the work at conceptual and methodological levels and to communicate about the outcomes, especially to and from 'grassroots-levels'.

Therefore the undersigned propose that:

- Supporters of this manifesto take steps towards the realization of a comprehensive approach to the study of sustainability, in collaboration with the ISSC and other appropriate agencies, thereby stimulating the academic world to contribute proactively to the achievement of sustainable development;
- Academic 'change-agent' centres will be created for coordination of these efforts in cooperation with associated university departments, which will agree on a common work plan and start with the implementation of this plan during the coming five years;
- Governments all over the world will support the establishment of these centres by providing financial resources and supporting the creation of channels of interaction.