IARU Students Attend International Sustainable Campus Network Conference in Stockholm, Sweden

As part of the International Alliance for Research Universities’ (IARU) ongoing student education initiatives and exchanges, four students from member universities had the opportunity to attend the International Sustainable Campus Network (ISCN) conference in Stockholm, Sweden from 11-13 June 2018. The students were active participants during the three-day conference and helped to facilitate the joint IARU/ISCN special event on the role of academia in advancing the Sustainable Development Goals. The students are working together to develop a report on this special event but they wanted to share a few of their other noteworthy conference experiences.

Elsie Moore, Yale University

While there were many sessions I greatly enjoyed during the conference, one of my favorites was the dinner and event at the KTH Live-in Lab. Built by of Einar Mattsson Group and designed by Semrén + Månsson Architects, the KTH Live-in Lab is a testbed for sustainable housing. With 305 student apartments, the Live-in Lab provides a residential environment for businesses to test products, for researchers to conduct studies, and for students to learn. Jonas Vogel, director of the KTH Live-In Lab, talked with us on the first evening of the conference about the journey to create the Live-in
Lab, its aims and capabilities, and some of the ongoing challenges. Photos from this event are available here.

To me, part of what makes the Live-in Lab so noteworthy is its data collection. Detailed data is collected on a multitude of sustainability metrics – such as heating, cooling, water use, electricity, as well as CO₂, light, and air supply. As an early career researcher, I frequently find myself interested in exploring a question but unable to do so because of data limitations. The Live-in Lab is an innovative way to collect data that can be used by multiple sectors. For example, it provides a space for businesses to test sustainable design and adapt it before going to market but also for university researchers. This type of multi-sectoral collaboration provides a platform for innovative partnerships that I think are key in addressing global sustainability challenges.

By 2050, over two-thirds of the world population will live in cities. With this rapid urbanization, I think it is essential to develop sustainable housing that has low to no impact on natural systems, but also is inviting and enjoyable for people to reside in. As a recent public health graduate, I am interested in how the built environment can promote co-benefits for sustainability and human health. The KTH Live-in Lab apartments appear to do this. They have everything one could need – a bathroom, kitchen, sleeping and living space – all designed with impeccable Swedish taste.

A few participants had the opportunity to stay at the KTH Live-in Lab while attending the conference. During the final awards ceremony, they shared their thoughts and commented that staying there had made them hyper aware of their personal sustainability choices, such as the length of their shower and energy use. It was a pleasure to get to experience the KTH Live-in Lab and I look forward to continuing to follow and learn from it.

Whitney Pailman, University of Cape Town

The 2018 ISCN conference was a dynamic showcase of the integration of the sustainable development goals in teaching, research and campus practices. It brought together innovative case studies from universities across the globe, through robust dialogue, enthusiasm and commitment to advancing solutions to pressing global challenges.

Being hosted at KTH provided an amazing opportunity to experience the campus and culture, also reflected in its architecture – a rich blend of history and modernity. An example of a recently completed green building with a modern touch and an intriguing brick facade in the shape of a beaver’s tail, is the Undervisningshuset, or “Teaching House”, where the conference lunches, poster presentations and breakaway sessions were held. This building, designed by Christensen & Co Architects in collaboration with the KTH Building Department, students and teaching staff, is a demonstration of a flexible and functional work and teaching space which optimises natural light. It
illustrates how teaching and learning environments interface with the built environment and the importance of incorporating functionality, practicality and purpose into green and sustainable building design.

Looking beyond the walls of university campuses, the various conference sessions highlighted that universities are indeed microcosms of society and are thus poised to be at the forefront of solutions to sustainable development challenges. From the many insightful presentations, Professor Khatharya Um’s plenary address titled, *Global Refugees: Critical Issues and Relevance to Sustainable Development Goals*, really caught my attention. She highlighted the role universities can play in serving society and the need to incorporate community service into a university’s core curriculum. She also acknowledged the importance of addressing the systemic issues that lie at the root of many sustainable development challenges, including a lack of access to opportunities, inequality and poverty. This was also echoed in the closing address of Professor Sigbritt Karlsson, President of KTH.

I also found the *Next Generation Innovation* breakout session, during the IARU/ISCN event, particularly interesting, as it illustrated how universities can harness innovation and entrepreneurial thinking to develop solutions that are context relevant and responsive to societal challenges. By creating environments that stimulate innovation and collaboration among students and researchers, universities can incubate world changing ideas and invest in the next generation of innovators and entrepreneurs who can take forward this year’s conference theme of *acting with a purpose*.

**Rupert Stuart-Smith, University of Oxford**

I attended this year’s ISCN conference primarily to present my recently published report, *Behaviour Change Interventions for Reduced Energy Use: Best Practice for Universities*, written on behalf of IARU. The report is designed to support university sustainability teams in devising effective initiatives to reduce universities’ contributions to climate change through behavioural changes.

At the conference, I explained the crucial role that behavioural change interventions hold in efforts to decarbonise our campuses. Changes to building fabric are often seen as the most reliable means of reducing energy use but are expensive and are constrained by the way we use our buildings. The long lifespan of buildings and retrofits also locks in high energy demand far into the future. Well-planned initiatives to change energy use behaviours at our universities, however, can be a highly effective and economical means of quickly reducing the contribution of our operations to climate change and allow energy use reductions from building fabric changes to be realised. Yet far too many universities continue to implement poorly designed initiatives which fail to deliver long-term energy use reductions. This report provides a comprehensive eight-
stage framework for designing enduring, high-impact policies to change social norms around energy use at universities.

If a behavioural change initiative is to be truly successful, it must be holistic. Students and staff must be educated about the importance of reducing energy use, and how to do so, they should be persuaded and incentivized to take action, should be enabled to do so both by the physical environment in which they operate (e.g. giving access to a thermostat) and the rules they have to follow, and energy saving behaviours should be modelled by peers and mentors. An approach which relies on any one of these strategies alone is unlikely to establish new social norms around energy use.

I was delighted with the interest with which the report was received at ISCN. I hope that it will prove a useful tool for universities across the world in their efforts to reduce their contributions to climate change and cut greenhouse gas emissions.

Mikayla Tran, University of California, Berkeley

Among the many engaging sessions of the ISCN Conference, I found myself particularly interested in the student breakout session that took place on the second day, titled: “Student engagement and reinforcing sustainability in HEIs.” Hosted by facilitator Malin Eriksson and chair Veine Haglund as students of KTH Royal Institute of Technology, the student session aimed to both showcase examples of and critically analyze the role of students in decision-making processes for higher education institutions.

The first of three presentations, “Veggie at my place & Student Networks” by Moa Persson illustrated the ability of students to share ideas, generate creative projects, and collaborate to promote a culture of sustainability. As a coordinator at the University of Gothenburg and Chalmers University of Technology, Persson supports students within sustainability by overseeing student networks such as the Gothenburg Students for Sustainability Alliance (GSSA) and Students for Sustainability Sweden. These extended networks thoroughly captured my attention due to the broad range of resources available for students as well as the ease of collaboration between members. As a student myself, I find these organized networks invaluable due to the incredible wealth of knowledge accessible to motivated, passionate students. The students of GSSA created group cooking nights called “Veggie at my place” in order to support sustainable cooking, exemplifying the creative, collaborative projects that can be achieved through these networks.

Supporting student influence in a similar fashion, Alexis Engström acts as a course coordinator at the student-led center for environment and development studies (CEMUS) at Uppsala University. In his presentation on “CEMUS: Education & Societal Change in Troubled Times,” Engström outlined the ways in which CEMUS engages students through festivals, open lectures, and film-screenings on sustainability. As a
student studying the societal implications of climate change, I was particularly intrigued by CEMUS’s commitment to utilizing education as a tool for empowerment, as well as its transdisciplinary approach to sustainability. I believe this humanitarian focus is crucial to combating climate change on a holistic level, as a transdisciplinary education not only stimulates critical thought, but also engages a wider range of students.

University of Toronto students Danielle Pal, Nathan Postma, Emily Shaw, Nicolas Côté, and Rashad Brugmann also highlighted the importance of students’ educational experience in promoting sustainability through their presentation on “Normalizing Sustainability at the University of Toronto: The Expanded Student Engagement Project.” By documenting sustainability-related courses, student groups, and community engaged learning courses, the students aimed to promote sustainability initiatives, enhance networks, and foster a sense of common identity. These inventories are crucial to improving visibility and access to sustainability courses and groups within higher education institutions, creating pathways of opportunities for interested students. I found this final presentation particularly inspiring due to the depth of leadership and innovation displayed by the University of Toronto students. As someone who is only entering her second year of university, I find these inventories to be incredibly useful for students like myself who are eager to get involved in sustainability efforts on campus as much as possible.

While delivering a speech on leadership for sustainable development during the last day of the conference, President of KTH Royal Institute of Technology Sigbritt Karlsson commented, “If the students are coming and saying something, then the school should put effort in continuing their engagement.” The three projects presented during the student breakout session showcased ways to continuously support and cultivate a culture of sustainability amongst the student population at higher education institutions. This work is crucial to successfully empower the next generation of leaders to approach sustainable development from a place of heightened interest and care for the communities around them. It was truly eye-opening to witness the scope of resources and individuals who hope to inspire future students’ work in sustainability, and I am excited to carry this newfound motivation with me as I continue my studies.

We would like to express our sincere gratitude and thanks to IARU for supporting this student exchange and experience.
Elsie Moore, MPH, is a fellow at the Yale Office of Sustainability. For more information about the IARU student exchange or the forthcoming SDG report, please contact her at elizabeth.moore@yale.edu

Whitney Pailman, MPhil, is a PhD candidate in Energy and Development, based at the Energy Research Centre at the University of Cape Town. Her research explores business and regulatory models for energy transitions in Sub-Saharan Africa.

Rupert Stuart-Smith is a student at the School of Geography and the Environment, University of Oxford and was the IARU Sustainability Fellow for 2017. His report for IARU can be found here.

Mikayla Tran is a Society and Environment major at University of California, Berkeley and a Carbon Neutrality Initiative Fellow for the Office of Sustainability.

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