oikos
An overview of 20 years of promoting sustainable development in higher education

www.oikos-international.org
www.oikos-stgallen.org

the oikos network worldwide

1987 oikos St. Gallen
1998 oikos International
2007 20 local chapters
The oikos Approach

What is oikos?
- A student organization with over 400 members in 20 cities worldwide
- A project platform for activities connected with sustainable development (more than 120 projects per year)

What does oikos do?
- Offers management and logistical support to the teams executing the projects
  - Ex.: oikos board of executive advisors
  - Ex.: Project development fund
- Each local “chapter” has a board of students leading the local organization (1 year term)
- There are different projects per “chapter” and per year
  - Entirely depends on the students

oikos International projects

Empowering projects
- Winter School
- Project Leadership Programme
- Project Development Fund
- Student Award

Strengthening research
- Case Writing Competition
- PhD Fellowship Programme
- PhD Summer Academy

Advancing the oikos network
- Spring Meeting
- Autumn Meeting
- Advisors Retreat
Examples of oikos St. Gallen projects

**oikos Conference**
- Annual two day conference on any subject connected to sustainability
- The oikos-Conference 2008 is on the 23rd and 24th of October, and is titled “Core or Elective? Social Responsibility in Higher Education” (www.oikos-conference.org)

**oikos ModelWTO**
- Annual 5 day event where 60 students from over the world come to St. Gallen for a simulation of the WTO negotiations

**oikos Sustainability Award**
- A price of CHF 3000 for the best Master thesis in the field of sustainability

**oikos & Pizza**
- At least once per month oikos invites a speaker to give a short presentation on some topic related to sustainability, which is followed by a discussion round. All happens in an informal atmosphere with pizza and drinks available. oikos members and non-members are welcomed and present.

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**oikos Objectives**

**oikos Mission**
- To strengthen action competence for sustainable development among tomorrow’s decision makers.

**oikos Target Group**
- Tomorrow’s decision makers (= today’s students)
  - oikos tries to influence the target group directly through projects and indirectly by changing the university
**oikos Principles of Approach**

**Projects**
- Nearly all influence oikos has on its target group, comes through projects
- The diverse field of projects reaches a very broad audience
- The creativity of oikos members is well expressed in the variety of projects undertaken

**Support and continuity**
- By offering managerial and logistical support, the oikos organization guarantees high quality projects
- The organization of each local chapter guarantees a certain continuity of oikos’ activities

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**Getting Started and Steps to Implement**

**Two-way approach**
- Motivated students and oikos members start their own projects
- The oikos board recruits and selects members/students to execute their projects

**Project is implemented by a “team”, which is responsible for its success**
- A “team” carries out and is responsible for an entire project
- oikos provides support, generally on demand from the “team”
Risks and Success Factors

Success Factors
• Identify and cooperate with interested and motivated persons in the university (Professors, PHD-Fellows and administrators)
• Achieve change through dialogue, not activism
• Reach the mainstream students through interesting and high profile events
• Find the win-win situations for university as well as oikos. Focus on how universities can achieve a competitive advantage.

Risks
• When projects are not enough diversified, only one type of student is reached (the “anyway interested one”)
• It is difficult to have a continuous organization, when it is only run by students. They rarely spend a long period of time at one university. In some years it is difficult to find successors
• One lesson that oikos has learned is not to focus on what the university doesn’t do and does wrong

Conclusions

Achievements
• The Institute for Economy and the Environment (IWOe-HSG) at the University of St. Gallen was founded after years of oikos’ activities
• The growth of oikos from St. Gallen to an international organization
• Numerous classes on sustainable development (all are electives) are offered at the University of St. Gallen (and other universities)
• Over the years, thousands of students have been reached by the oikos message
• There are three permanent oikos PHD positions at the University of St. Gallen

Challenges
• Make sustainable development an integrative and obligatory part of mainstream business education
• Reach those professors and students who are not interested in sustainability and “get the message across”