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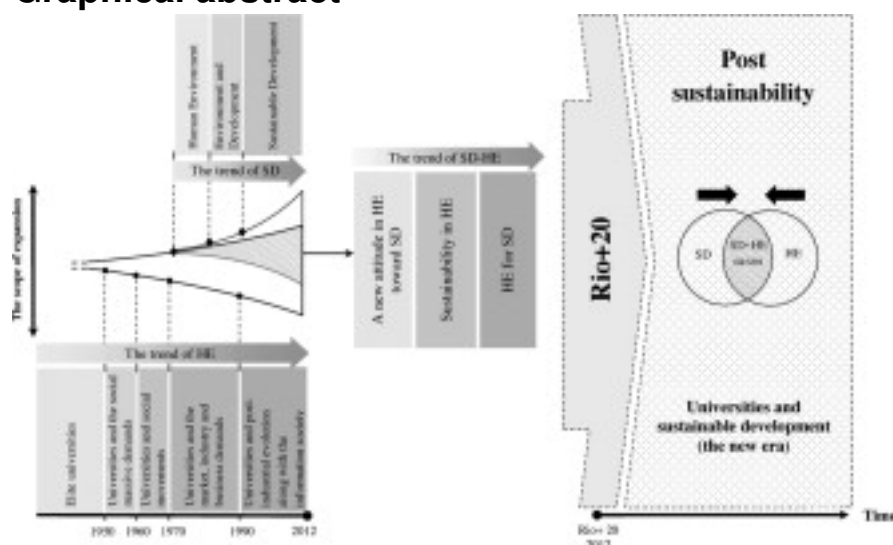
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The purpose of this paper is to identify and assess the implications of sustainable development for the future orientation of higher education, especially after the 2012 United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development (Rio+20). A qualitative trend analysis is being used for this purpose, in the context of which three macro trends are combined: 1) higher education that has been developed via five periods; 2) sustainable development that has evolved through three stages; and 3) the nexus between sustainable development and higher education which has strengthened through three phases. The simultaneous analysis of the macro trends regarding their possible interactive effects (through an expert panel discussion) demonstrates that higher education and universities under the influence of sustainable development elements are entering into a new era in which the function of “higher education for sustainable development” could be interpreted as the seeds of a newly emerging mission for universities. In this regard, it is expected that the concept of “sustainable university” is likely to become more common to meet the emerging mission. Consistent with the Rio+20 outcomes, the authors analyzed the concept of “sustainable university” and identified the fact that it is practically divided into three interrelated and complementary categories, namely social-, environmental-, and economic-oriented university in pursuit of actualizing sustainable development.

Graphical abstract



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