

THE 2030 AGENDA IN HIGHER EDUCATION: EVIDENCE FROM A UNIVERSITY PROJECT

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Abstract

The 2030 Agenda is a universal call for action agreed upon by 193 countries in the United Nations. Divided into 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), the Agenda serves as a blueprint to work for a better world in three dimensions, namely, social, economic and environmental. Actors such as international leaders, private companies, NGOs and citizens are expected to contribute to a more egalitarian, fair, peaceful and prosperous planet. Higher Education Institutions are not an exception and should also strive for the achievement of the goals. Indeed, universities are expected to promote social change so they should assume an active role in the pursuit of sustainability. Additionally, they are in charge of higher education, meaning that they are entrusted to shape future world leaders and professionals. Sustainability has a long tradition in Higher Education Institutions, as universities have acted as signatories of a myriad of agreements and sustainability declarations. Although many attempts have been made at different levels and in different institutions, some authors argue that the initiatives to incorporate sustainability have frequently been limited in scope, involving only specific areas such as re-designing curricula, making the campuses greener, or building local, regional and national networks. Therefore, a more integrative approach to introduce sustainability at universities is needed, leading to what is known as “university sustainability culture”. With that concept in mind, in a mid-size European university, a multi-stakeholder SDG-based project was implemented to deal with the SDGs through a holistic approach monthly. The goal of the project was two-fold: first, it aimed to raise awareness about the global challenges among students and, second, it intended to carry out real interventions to improve the university surroundings. Thus, in this paper we present how the project was developed, with the involvement of professors, students, administrative staff, NGOs, public administration and other partners, and propose a theoretical model to evaluate the project’s impact. Particularly, we analyze the influence of the SDG-based project on students’ responses in terms of satisfaction, sustainable behavior and identification with the university. Preliminary results point to the favorable impact of the project on students’ reactions and seem to confirm that if students are embedded in a sustainability culture, they show a strong tendency to behave more sustainably and to feel closer to the institution offering them the possibility to get in touch with the 2030 Agenda, that is, the university. Interesting implications for higher educations will be discussed.

Keywords: *SDG, 2030 Agenda, students, multi-stakeholder project, satisfaction.*
