

Sustainability Beyond the Campus: Engaging High Schools in University-Led SDG Initiatives

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Abstract

Achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) requires instilling the values of sustainability among younger generations, ensuring a long-term commitment to a more equitable, inclusive and prosperous future. While universities play a critical role in promoting sustainable development, their impact can be significantly amplified by engaging high school students, the prospective university population and the future advocates for sustainability. In 2019, a European university initiated a multi-stakeholder project with the goal of increasing SDG awareness. University students were targeted and both external and internal partners joined the initiative. In 2023, the project garnered national recognition and expanded to encompass all public universities in the country. In 2024, the expansion continued so that high school students were included. This wider scope is rooted in the need to feed sustainability awareness at an earlier stage, fostering a culture of responsibility prior to students' transition to higher education. The initiative aspires to inculcate the principles of sustainability thinking at an early age. The project's initial phase involved university professors training high school teachers in education for sustainability and requesting the design of a sustainability project for their school. This pioneering effort aligns with SDG 17 by strengthening collaboration between universities and high schools, fostering interdisciplinary partnerships. At the European level, the authors are currently engaged in a project with five additional partners. This project aims to design a mapping tool that links courses and SDGs in higher education. A pre-awareness survey is being conducted to assess knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors related to sustainability.

Keywords: educational partnerships; Higher Education Institutions; holistic approach; multi-stakeholder project; 2030 Agenda