

Sustainable Development Aims for HE

What goals do they have to reach and where are they now?¹

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ABSTRACT

Resources of our planet are limited. If humanity would like to protect it and leave behind a better place for the next generations than we got from our parents, a sustainable way of thinking must be involved in the everyday life. Currently, the goal is to influence as many individuals as possible and teach them to make sustainable choices. The solution can be in our educational system. The main goal of this paper is to collect and systematize current programs, their content in connection with HE sustainable development and introduce the associations, which support these changes. The paper will contain a SWOT assessment of Budapest Business School's sustainability strategy, and hopefully, it could be a guidance for other HEIs where to start their changes.

Keywords: sustainability, sustainable development, higher education, SWOT

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1. Introduction

Sustainability became a more and more important topic over the years. Many programs and conferences were created and held all over the world in connection with it. The latest – and apparently the largest – program was created in 2015, and this is the AGENDA 2030 by United Nations

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Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (henceforth UNESCO). This is an action plan created for people to submit the 17 sustainability development goals (henceforth SDGs) and 169 targets until 2030. These achievements could help to balance the three dimensions of sustainable development: economic, social, and environmental (United Nations, 2015). However, the number of goals and targets seems very high, the period of this program is 15 years, so this has to be enough to fulfil the requirements and so prepare the institutions and people to do their business in a sustainable way.

The role of education in achieving sustainable goals was noticed many years ago. Report of the United Nations Conference on the Human Environment in Stockholm, 1972 still contained recommendations in connection with educational aspects of environmental issues. Furthermore, the United Nations Environment Programme (henceforth UNEP) was founded there (United Nations, 1972). One of the UNEP's topics is education and environment, and they are still participating actively in developing the strategy of education in a sustainable way (United Nations Environmental Programme, n.d.). Additionally, by Annex V. of International Association of Universities 2nd Global Survey Report on Higher Education and Research for Sustainable Development, without higher education and research none of the 17 SDGs can be achieved (Mallow, Toman, & Van't Land, 2020). Through higher education, which is an essential part of a strong and sustainable education system, a direct impact can be made on every country, and this is why it has a very important role in the process (United Nations, n.d.).

First of all, the most important documents and associations, which can help to achieve sustainability goals will be introduced. After that, skills and personal traits, which are essential for a sustainable future, will be collected and the sustainability strategy of Budapest Business School and its SWOT assessment through interviews will be discussed in the paper. As a result of the paper, connections between official reports and BBS' strategy will be analysed, and it could function as an example for other institutions for realizing sustainability aims.

2. Most important official documents about sustainability goals and actions of higher education

Several documents were issued in the past few years in connection with sustainably developing education. It could be confusing for a university and may give up their goals because of the lack of systemization of the content of these documents. The goal of this chapter is to introduce shortly the most important documents and their relevant parts for higher education, which hopefully could help to find out where and how to start the integration of sustainability methods into the universities processes.

Final Report of Tbilisi Intergovernmental Conference on Environmental Education

The conference was organized by UNESCO in cooperation with UNEP, in 1977. This is the first official report, which has been raised attention to the connection between education and achieving sustainability goals. The main topics of the conference cover, for example, the role of education in facing environmental problems, strategies for environmental education development, and cooperation for the development of environmental education. This conference is special not only because of the educational part, but because of the realization, that the sources of environmental problems should not be investigated only from physical and biological aspects, social, economic, and technological

environment must also be considered. One of the main messages of the conference is environmental education must be a lifelong learning process, which should not be limited to the formal system by their recommendation (UNESCO, 1978)

AGENDA 21

AGENDA 21 was created at the United Nations Conference on Environment & Development in Rio de Janeiro, 1992. This is an action plan to achieve sustainable development goals. The areas of this program are not limited only to higher education, but all areas, which help to improve living standards, fulfil basic needs, protect more the ecosystem, and lead to a safer future. This program supports the collaboration of members, as these targets could not be achieved by any country on its own (United Nations, 1992)

Aims in connection with education can be found in Section IV. chapter 36 promoting education, public awareness, and training. There are 3 main program areas: reorienting education towards sustainable development, increasing public awareness, and promoting training (United Nations, 1992).

UNECE Strategy for Education for Sustainable Development

This strategy was created by the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (henceforth UNECE) in 2005. By this document, education is a human right, and it is a prerequisite for achieving sustainable development. Greater awareness and critical reflection can be provided with the help of education for sustainable development (henceforth ESD). The strategy aims to encourage members of UNECE to integrate ESD goals into the formal education system. As a result, people will be more competent and will have the necessary skills and knowledge for a sustainable future. furthermore, they will be able to live in harmony with nature, and with concern for social values (United Nations, 2005)

AGENDA 2030 – Goal 4.7

AGENDA 2030 was issued by UNESCO in 2015. The main goal of it is to realize the human rights of all, ensure gender equality and empowerment of all women and girls. It pictures a very ambitious future, where there is no poverty, hunger, disease, and want (UNESCO, 2015)

The role of education appears in goal 4, which is "ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning". It aims at the transformation of lives through education. Goal 4.7 is the only one, which is relevant for a Central European university as this involves teaching knowledge and skills regarding sustainability. Education must provide skillset and knowledge for learners to be able to promote sustainable development and sustainable lifestyles. Implementation of it is the main task of higher education for the next years (UNESCO et al., 2015)

3. Implementation of SDG 4.7 – Future skills and transformative learning

Luckily, in Central Europe, only SDG 4.7 could be relevant, as the other goals in connection with education was already applied many years or decades ago (just like gender equality, the teaching of children, etc.). However, implementing only one goal does not seem challenging at first glance, it is a very complex task. On the one hand, the skills, which will be useful in the future must be determined. This requires research on the topic of sustainable skills and future skills. On the other hand, universities must assess their curricula and find a way to implement skill development and sustainability topics into it. Additionally, new teaching methods would be required in the future In this session most important future skills will be collected.

There are some core competencies, which will be extremely important in the future. GCED aims to equip students with them. First of all, students must have deep knowledge of global issues, values, just like justice, equality, dignity, and respect. Next to this, they will need cognitive skills (critical thinking, systematic, creative, multi-perspective approach) in order to recognize different angles of issues. Additionally, non-cognitive skills, like social skills (empathy, conflict resolution, and communicative skills, networking, and interacting with people from different cultures) will also be needed in the future. Last, but not least learners must behave collaboratively and responsibly for the collective good. (UNESCO, 2013.)

Results about skills are nearly the same as the research of Laininen (2019). Knowledge about the economy, society, humans, and nature are important to have to understand real-life problems and sustainability issues. Next to the mentioned skills, there are innovation skills, scientific, environmental, societal, and cultural literacy marked as important from a sustainable future point of view. Important to discover and keep in mind the intuition and emotions of a learner, as intentional intuition, creativity, unlearning and emotional intelligence are equally important in the future. Change agents will have a big responsibility in changing the ecosystem, so mindfulness, courage, resilience, curiosity, ethics, sufficiency, planetary responsibility, and leadership should be encouraged and foster by the education system. The effects of influencing students can be huge. As the levels of learning and change show, the process always starts at an individual level. After that, individuals can influence the organization, and finally, organizations could change the whole ecosystem (Laininen, 2018).

The teaching of these skills requires new teaching methods. Next to problem-based and contextual learning, the definition of transformative learning also appears. The main point of transformative learning is not to focus on subjects or sciences during the teaching process, instead, the center of knowledge is the wholeness of the world and lives. It can transform the understanding of humanity, wellbeing, and the role of the economy in our world and daily lives. This method questions the currently existing curricula's role, as it is collecting usually outdated knowledge, instead of organizing learning opportunities (like the latest scientific results). In order to achieve sustainability goals in the future, implementing transformative learning should be the core mission of universities (Laininen, 2018).

The exact role of universities is still not clear, but their part in achieving sustainability goals is unquestionable. Maybe the key is not in future skills teaching and transformative learning, but regardless of the educational system must show the core values of a sustainable future for their students (Laininen, 2018).

The main goal of SDGs is not a simple implementation of these skills into the curricula or changing education as the way they determine. It is to encourage universities to come up with new ideas by themselves and help universities to find their own way to a sustainable future.

To show an example of how to achieve sustainability goals in practice and how to perform changes in connection with sustainability, Budapest Business School's sustainability strategy and its SWOT assessment will be introduced in the next session.

4. Sustainability at Budapest Business School

Sustainability was always important for Budapest Business School (henceforth BBS), but since 2016 it plays a key role in University life. The first strategy was created in 2017, and since then many changes for sustainability was performed. The goal of it is to make an impact on the community of the University and operate in a more sustainable manner. Students' understanding of the importance of organizational sustainability and responsibility is indispensable. With the help of gained knowledge, they can become more responsible citizens, employees, and leaders of the future. Additionally, building a sustainability-related social network can ensure the flow of knowledge about sustainability. The long-term objective of the University is to become a regional leader in sustainability. This is how BBS act for a Better Future. (BBS, n.d.-a). BBS's goal is to operate as a socially responsible and sustainable university. In the introduction of University is also appears sustainability as a traditional value (BBS, n.d.-b)

Sustainability Strategy

The period of the strategy was between 2017 and 2020, which is identical to the period of the Institutional Development Plan. This is the most important plan of University; all strategies must follow this. As this is the first sustainability strategy of BBS, they mark these first three years as a period of learning. The long-term goal of it is to set up a new organizational culture and became a regional leader in sustainability (BBS, 2017).

There are 4 focus areas included in the strategy:

- responsible education and responsible research,
- develop internal community,
- relations with external stakeholders,
- responsibility for the natural environment (BBS, 2017).

Responsible education and responsible research focus are in connection with BBS' core business, which is education and research. The main task of this area is to integrate sustainable and responsible behaviour in the curricula, individual subjects, and research programs. Thanks to this, students will be able to solve responsibility-related problems and implement sustainability principles (BBS, 2017). Main results of responsible education in the last three year were the upgrade of curricula and the integration of a mandatory subject about sustainability (University Sustainability Centre (USC), 2020). In connection with research, the ISSUE (Innovative Solutions for Sustainability in Education) project was the biggest event of the period. This project started on 1st November 2018 and will end on 30th

April 2021. Participants of this project came from both the academic and non-academic sectors. Universities are from a very wide range, as next to BBS, universities joined from UK, Slovenia, Germany, and Finland. The aim of this project is the development of educational tools, which are based on principles and goals of sustainable development (BBS, n.d.-c). Adapting these tools in higher education institutions is also part of the main objective (BBS, 2017).

Developing an internal community affects the whole community, including students, instructors, managers, and associates working in the functional and servicing organizational units. To achieving this goal, active participation of members is required, in order to make a cooperative, supportive, and creative atmosphere at the institution. New joiners (both students and associates) must be informed about sustainability initiatives as soon as possible. There are six parts of this area: health, security and welfare; strengthen the BBS community; supportive organizational culture; performance review; develop individual skills and abilities; preparation and update of institutional supporting documents (BBS, 2017). There were many events organized and actions performed to develop internal community and raise the awareness of the members of the organization, e.g., voluntary day, recyclable cups on bigger events organized by BBS to reduce waste and creation of PRME report. Additionally, the Code of Ethics was also made and promoted (USC, 2020).

Relations with external stakeholders mean network building with external stakeholder groups based on the principle of sustainability. This is an option for sharing experience and knowledge about sustainability and a chance for learning from other institutions (BBS, 2017). Membership in PRME and participation in CEE chapters in Slovenia and Budapest and participating in a conference about sustainability organized by NIBS (Network of International Business Schools) were some of the activities from the past three years in connection with this focus area (USC, 2020).

Responsibility for the natural environment is also important for BBS, as daily activities could be harmful to the environment. The goal of this area is to reduce the negative effects of the activities on the natural environment (BBS, 2017). In order to achieve this goal environmental investments, waste management, caring for green areas, and promoting conscious lifestyles are in focus. The main activities in connection with this focus area are solar panel investments, placing bird feeders, and join to Greenmetric international measuring system, which is for universities (USC, 2020).

Important to introduce the three units, which were founded in connection with the Strategy. University Sustainability Centre's main goal is to manage tasks in connection with sustainability goals and connect the other two units. University Sustainability Council's task is to monitor the achievements of sustainability activities. University Sustainability Network's (henceforth USN) task is to track projects and share best organizational practices (BBS, 2017). As the University Sustainability Centre is in the middle of the process, its tasks and function will be introduced in more detail below.

University Sustainability Centre introduction

University Sustainability Centre (henceforth USC) was founded in BBS' first sustainability strategy in 2017. The existence of this independent unit is unique in the region. The main task of it is to support and help to implement into practice the goals of sustainability strategy (BBS, n.d.-d). Furthermore, it is functioning as a "secretariat" of the University Sustainability Council, and University Sustainability Network. USC's responsibility to organize and support continuous internal education, seeking funding

sources, maintaining relevant regulations, setting up budgets, and preparing reports to the University's decision-makers and their forums (BBS, 2017). The current leader of the office is Andrea Nagy (BBS, n.d.-e).

As can be seen in connection with the examples of strategic focus areas, many programs and actions were organized and performed through USC in the past three years. These actions were only a few examples from the long list of USC's full activities, much more was performed (USC, 2020). To sum up, USC is a useful unit of the University, it can support achieving goals of the sustainability strategy.

Interview Results

To obtain information about the current state of BBS sustainability strategy, interviews with experts were conducted. The interviewees were Balázs Heidrich, Rector of Budapest Business School, Sára Csillag, Dean of Faculty of Finance and Accounting, and Andrea Nagy, Leader of University Sustainability Centre. The elements of the SWOT matrix are based on their answers, and so the results of the interviews will be introduced in the logic of the matrix itself.

5. SWOT analysis of BBS's sustainability initiatives

Strengths

In BBS there is a strong focus on sustainability. Since 2016 sustainability development became one of the most important areas in the University. BBS has separated budget for implementing sustainability projects, which is very rare in the region. The goals of the Institutional Development Plan can also be connected to BBS's sustainable development strategy. Furthermore, management supports achieving sustainability aims, and they are committed to supporting the integration of a sustainable way of thinking into the University's everyday life.

USC is also unique in the region, as this works as an independent unit in the University. Through the office, many programs and actions were performed, which helped the University improving sustainably. Unfortunately, there were many other events, programs, and other kinds of activities, which could not be finished because of different reasons. However, it does not seem positive at first glance, but it makes visible, that the USC made much more effort than the successfully managed programs required.

The role of colleagues is very high in achieving sustainability aims. First of all, the creating process of the strategy was opened for everyone to reveal as many viewpoints as possible. The success of the strategy is based on the voluntary involvement of members of BBS, as they could manage their own projects and implement their own ideas. There are no pressure and orders from the management, everyone should take the first step by themselves. This is the way strategy would like to improve sustainability thinking in the organization. Additionally, the performance assessment of colleagues contains aspects, which are about the connection between their work and sustainability goals. The stronger the connection, the better the performance is rated by University management.

The curriculum was reformed in 2017, and during this process sustainability aspects were in focus. Thanks to this, a new subject was added to each program's curricula, in which students can learn about

how to manage and what a responsible and sustainable company looks like. The number of subjects, which include sustainability in its syllabus was also increased in the past 3 years.

International connections are also important for BBS to learn from other universities about sustainability and share their experience with other members. Therefore, BBS is a member of several international networks (e.g., PRIME, NIBS), and participated in several conferences in the past few years. Participation in the ISSUE project is also a great chance to develop BBS sustainability strategy, strengthen the connection with other universities, and get recognized by other actors of higher education in the area of sustainability.

Weaknesses

Sustainability thinking is not yet built into the everyday life of University. Most of the colleagues still do not handle it as a 'must-have' thing, they still consider it as an option. This could be because of the lack of activities, which had to raise their awareness. When the University Sustainability Centre started in 2017, there was no campaign, only high-level units were informed about the foundation. Most of the faculties and departments (and so the colleagues there) did not know about the role of it. The fact, that faculties are working and thinking completely separated from each other makes the work of USC harder, as organizing a program for the whole community is almost impossible. Each faculty requires individual programs in their own campus in order to bring closer sustainability to students, as they are not willing to travel to another campus because of an event.

USC is currently operating with only one member instead of two. This causes human resources problems, e.g., the manager of USC is the same person as the president of USN. These roles should be separated. This could be the reason why the website of USC is not recently updated. There are many impulsions, events, and upgrades in connection with sustainability, but these are not communicated as a part of a huge process.

As sustainability strategy is marked as a bottom-up process, its implementation is highly dependent on the staff. They are affected by different factors, just like too much administrative burden on them and rigid methods and processes, which slower implementing their ideas. These pose significant risks, as the first one could cause fluctuation in their motivation depending on their current tasks, in the second case there is a chance to lose their interest about changes because they have not enough energy to bring through their idea with so many steps. These two could be the reason why there is a low interest in the topic on the lower level of the organization.

Opportunities

As of 2021, a new strategy will be implemented, current experiences must be considered before planning. One of them is the idea of hybrid strategy planning. This means a mixture of bottom-up and top-down planning. Bottom-up is important because of improving the interest of lower levels in the topic, and because to show the members of the organization, sustainability is always important for BBS. Top-down is necessary, because there must be some bigger goals, which must be implemented, and managed from higher levels to implement high-volume sustainability projects, which require more resources, time, and energy from the organization. After creating a new strategy, it must be promoted

to a wider public than the first strategy was. A successful campaign could serve as a basis for the success of the next period. Furthermore, a new website with much information about sustainability will be launched soon.

Network building still has high importance, as sharing knowledge and experiences could be a huge help in improving sustainability development. As online teaching is becoming more and more accepted, collaborations with companies, which were not successful before because of the physical limits, can be made now, as the guest lecturers could give their lecture from anywhere. Additionally, networking could be a great chance for BBS to get a leading role in sustainability in the region (e.g., became the most developed University in terms of sustainability issues in Central and Eastern Europe).

As for curriculum design, the current initiatives are quite promising, but further improvements must be continued in the future. The appearance of the sustainability topic in relevant classes' syllabus at BBS is about 5%, but it can and should be expanded in the next few years. Implementation of transformative learning elements into the BBS's programs curriculum could improve students' knowledge about sustainability, and additionally, they can master skills, which will be important in the future.

Reducing administrative burdens of colleagues could create enough free time, which they could use for achieving sustainability aims. Process assessment and improvement can be a solution. This means interviews would be performed with workers, who can provide information about the exact processes and applied methods by their department, and then these processes would be assessed by experts and suggestions would be made for an effective way to do their jobs. With the help of it, processes would be faster, teachers would have less administrative tasks, so they could save some time. Additionally, there will be training for colleagues about the importance of sustainability, and their attitude could be completely different if they would have the energy and motivation for this and it would not be another mandatory task.

Threats

One of the biggest threats to achieving sustainability targets is obviously COVID-19. It influenced the strategy from many sides, e.g., there were no resources, place, time, and energy for sustainability idea implementations, as the adaptation of new teaching methods steered away from the necessary resources from it. Teaching in virtual platforms can solve the problem of teaching during the pandemic, but unfortunately, programs in connection with sustainability require personal attendance. Without personal contacts, promoting sustainability is hard, this is why there were no events organized by USC in the last 8 months.

The passive attitude of colleagues for sustainability was typical before Covid-19 and remained the same during the pandemic. It means, they are not willing to come up with their own ideas, they just want to do their jobs and not doing extra tasks. This means a very big risk for sustainability strategy, as a relevant part of it depends on the actions of members of the organization. Additionally, people cannot believe, their idea will be supported by the management, so they are afraid of making their suggestions, and do not know how to do it. This method is not usual, therefore it requires more time than the top-down version, but once it starts working, people would feel this topic as their own. This result cannot be reached by force, this one requires time and patience with the organization.

The success of the strategy is exposed to the members of USN is also high, as they are operating voluntarily. They do their tasks when they have time and they do not get a salary because of it. However, they can include this activity into their performance assessment, their motivation is fluctuating.

Finally, bureaucratic methods could harm the strategy, as these are rigid and slow. There is too much administration, which takes time from other activities, like upscaling sustainability initiatives. The problem is with the obduracy of old organizational practices and methods, as the colleagues are afraid of new solutions, they do not trust the effectiveness of new ways, so they are just doing the old, rigid methods. This could be demotivating for an enthusiastic person too, and there is a risk of not starting a project or closing it without results because of the perceived resistance of the system.

10. Conclusion

Official documents do not include exact rules or instructions about the implementation process of SDG 4 goals. Each university has the right to shape and expand the suggestions as the way they would like to. Creating exact instructions, which must be applied in all universities would be a failure, as sustainability is not something, which could be applied only one way. The goal of the introduced documents is to show the importance of this topic and raise universities' awareness about sustainability and earn achievements at their own pace and in their own way.

However, Adams et al. (2018) created a framework for university culture and sustainability by the case of University of Worcester. Similar to BBS, they also believe, that sustainability goals can be achieved through individuals, who behave sustainably. They also stated, sustainability must be part of the organizational culture. As it can be seen in the article of Adams et al. (2018) and the currently introduced SWOT assessment, changing an existing culture is a very time consuming process, and it cannot be forced. The University of Florence also accepted the sustainability challenge, and they aim to become green university. Fissi et al. (2021) investigated their applied practices, and among other things, they discovered that the support of management is essential. Their rector is strongly supporting this process- just in case of BBS. It seems like there are some obligatory elements of the process, just like enthusiastic individuals and engaged management, which any universities should have if they would like to become sustainable. Discovering further mandatory aspects could be a basis of a future research.

Additionally, it is important to mention, there is a hierarchy between the SDGs, and they cannot handle independently from each other. By Szennay et al. (2019), a target can be linked to several goals. Therefore, focusing on the development of SDG 4 can foster achieving other SDGs

In order to achieve the set sustainability goals, joining organizations could be useful for any higher educational institution, as conferences and projects organized by them could provide useful knowledge and practices about the implementation of sustainability methods. It can be seen from the example of BBS, sharing, and receiving knowledge about sustainability can help in networking, and the University could gain a reputation in the region. Furthermore, not only associations and other universities' actions must take into consideration, but high schools could also show good practices for sustainable development. The article of Gamarra et al. (2019) introduces a high school case study, in which they conclude, that the negative impacts on the environment and costs related to human health, crops,

biodiversity materials and global warming can be decreased through the identification and analysis of key activities.

As the University both tried their own methods and used the suggestions that came through associations, their status of achieving sustainability goals by UNESCO seems outstanding in the region. Internal community development and responsible education goals of BBS' sustainability strategy contain the actions, which can be connected to SDG 4.7, as this contains the development of individual skills and abilities, and curricula upgrade. "Responsible and sustainable company" course is mandatory for each student at the University. With the help of it, students can have basic knowledge about sustainability and skillset for responsible thinking, but with only one subject sustainable behaviour of students could not be completely developed. Further implications of sustainability topics are required to related subjects to shape students' thinking and through it shape the future of our lives. At Tbilisi conference it was also highlighted, that environmental education should not be just a subject, it must be included into each programme. Interviewees claimed BBS' goal is to involve sustainability topics into each relevant subject, this target will be part of the next strategy. Through it, BBS will be in line with the AGENDA 2030 requirements, moreover, it performed and will perform many other changes in the name of sustainability. Thanks to this attitude, it is possible to become a regional leader in sustainability and so reach their long-term goals.

Performed SWOT assessment can confirm this statement, but unfortunately, this method has some disadvantages. For example, the results could be influenced by subjective viewpoints and opinions. Results of the performed interviews contained some contradictions in connection with negative influencing factors of colleagues' voluntary participation in sustainability projects. The reason could be the different positions of interviewees, as members of the organization could see a problem from divergent points of view depending on their place in the organization.

BBS's sustainability strategy and the assessment of its progress can be an example for universities like BBS. They could perform these steps and create self-assessment to clarify for themselves their status if their current actions and processes are heading to a sustainable future or not. After that, they could answer the question: what goals do they have to reach and where are they now?

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