

# The Role and Importance of Universities in the Development of Students' Social Responsibility

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## INTRODUCTION

Sustainable development is now a necessity of the time, and as such it is required to be at the centre of each country's development policies. Social responsibility is a broader and more comprehensive concept, which contributes to the solution of economic, social, and environmental problems for sustainable development. Social responsibility is a task of every person to maintain a balance between the economy and ecosystems. The university is considered an essential pillar of society in achieving sustainable development. Given that university students will be the most qualified professionals of tomorrow and their actions throughout their careers will be critical for the future of environmental, social, and economic systems, the university must foster training of them with social responsibility for sustainable development. Universities, with their primary role as "producers of knowledge", can serve as a powerful tool to create an open mindset towards sustainable development. In this perspective, the university can contribute to raising awareness and commitment to social responsibility among students. In public universities, social responsibility should be part of the strategic policy philosophy in their development.

Sustainable development in Albania is accepted as a strategic priority of any development policy of the country. But, as a developing country, social responsibility is a new concept in Albania and the integration of socially responsible practices can be a complex and difficult process. The purpose of this study is to investigate the role and opportunities of universities in Albania to the development of the social responsibility of students for the sustainable development of their country. There is no literature or study in Albania on this subject. The main research questions are: What are the most important factors that push students to commit to social responsibility? Do universities play a key role in developing students' social responsibility for sustainable development? In which topics of education for sustainable development are students most interested? What are the best methods that universities can use to teach and encourage students about social responsibility?

## MATERIALS AND METHODS

A vast amount of literature was used to support research in this field of study. As a research tool for securing primary data, a structured questionnaire was developed with closed-ended questions. The target group for this study was students in the last year of study programmes offered by the Economic Faculty of the University of Shkodra in Albania. To collect data, a link to the use of the Qualtrics survey and a brief description of the survey were e-mailed to students by each of the study programme coordinators. Likert scales with five levels and bi-polar questions were used. Data analysis was carried out using descriptive statistical methods.

## RESULTS

The results of the study reveal that students generally share a genuine interest in social responsibility. Students consider universities as their main places of learning, with knowledge of social responsibilities and their ability to practice the concepts of social responsibility within their chosen profession and in their everyday life. Students consider social responsibility an "important tool" to build a successful career. There is a need for change, both in the minds of students as well as in university practices to develop student social responsibility in Albania.

## DISCUSSION

In the study, theoretical and practical implications are discussed, highlighting what still needs to be done to further improve the practice of universities to cultivate and encourage students' social responsibility to contribute to sustainable development in Albania and beyond.

**KEYWORDS:** Social responsibility, University, Students, Sustainable development