

ROLE OF CORPORATE STRATEGY IN GLOBAL SUSTAINABILITY OF HIGHER EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS

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Abstract: Higher education is a strategically important part of the education system in every country making a direct impact on the political, economic, social and cultural life. During the past decade, many countries in the world have made massive efforts to assure the quality in higher education striving for meaningful contribution to sustainability. Global tendency of higher education development is its change from elite to mass education when efforts to pursue quality in order to respond to the challenges of the knowledge-based society are shown up. In general there is a felt need for Higher Education and many people opt for it. Higher Education is not only considered in terms of better employment opportunities and better salary prospective. But it also means enhancement of contemporary knowledge of professionals enabling the sustainability of the society as a whole. Thus, sustainability challenges the current paradigms, structures as well as predominant practices in higher education, it also changes the roles of students and their teachers. The growing requirement for quality, internationalization and interdisciplinary requirements forces Higher Education to development and constant change.

Keywords: Sustainability, Higher Education, Internationalisation, Sustainability challenges

I. Introduction

The situation of Higher Education today is warring. Consumption that is a dominating force in the global societies penetrated into the system of higher education and transformed it according to the laws of business world. And what happened? Global tendency of higher education development is its change from elite to mass education when efforts to pursue quality in order to respond to the challenges of the knowledge-based society are shown up. Mass education that is led by intensive marketing, trying to attract potential students, growing competition between universities and colleges, also serving for disciplines not for the society are the common tendencies overall. Thus, significant changes of HE does not imply the rejection of learning or knowledge, but it does challenge to rethink the role of HE in the modern societies (Johnston, 2013).

The **aim** of this paper is to highlight the changes and problems that HE system is facing in the context of sustainable development.

Sustainable development is a complex process, which aims to ensure the well-being of the present and future generations that meets the needs of present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs (UN, 1989). Summarizing it can be defined as progress, modernization and development of a continuous growth and qualitative changes in the context of social and economic progress. It is also a political process that forces the society to unify and stimulates

discussion on such fundamental concepts as “democracy”, “social justice”, “solidarity”, “freedom”, and “well-being”. However, various economic and ecological challenges complicate the process. Moreover, the limited resources hinder the use of ordinary ways to ensure the welfare (Jackson, 2009).

Still economic growth does not always bear the long-term sustainable change and stability. In terms of prosperity for future generations, the ecological, cultural and social dimensions of sustainable development are more highlighted during the last years. The social dimension of sustainable development includes people, social cohesion, culture, values, health, education and so on (Pivoriene, 2014). However, currently a number of challenges, such as growing consumption, aging, social isolation, marginalization, migration etc., affect the harmonious development of global societies.

II. Global changes in Higher Education

Sustainable development requires constant training and education that are directed to learn how to live according to what we need most and what we most appreciate. Educational institutions are also constantly influenced by the society and strive to integrate interdisciplinary approach, develop creativity, and encourage critical thinking and maintaining a harmonious society. It is emphasized that education in the context of sustainable development is an active, learner-oriented, partnership-based, reflective learning process that fosters justice, tolerance, solidarity, equality and responsibility.

Higher education for sustainable development is an emerging imperative, representing a major shift in the way students are taught and learn within the higher education system. In the context of sustainable development it requires a broader and flexible approach to the development and teaching of academic disciplines Dawe et al (2005).

In order to implement sustainable development in HE, the focus can be given also to responsibility and cooperation which are linked to foreign language learning, effective career planning and other institutional, social, economic and environmental solutions at universities and colleges. HE institutions have to deal with many of the key issues that are related to the environment, energy, raw materials, waste, construction, regional policy, material goods consumption, student learning and working conditions for better health, quality and competitiveness of education etc. (Balciunaitiene, Petkeviciute, 2011).

According to Hans van Weenen (2010), to analyze the own involvement in the sustainable development in higher education, each university has to raise important goals for a sustainable society, sustainable university, sustainable development of human resources and prepare a plan for sustainable development (indicating the mission and the vision). It is also important to identify strategies for management of academic studies and research activities, analyze the possible restrictions of dependence on natural resources, and strive for employee equality (justice) and responsibilities. Recently the biggest challenge for universities is the responsibility to ensure the quality of studies, internationality, multidisciplinary approach, leadership and the more successful graduates' employability.

Due to the huge competition on a global scale, it is particularly important to raise the quality of this kind of services, regularly updating curriculum, including innovative teaching and learning methods and developing professional skills. Thus, the novelty of study programs and demonstrated interest in research and in collaboration with colleagues from other universities in the world as well as other educational organizations increase university's competitiveness and prestige among other universities.

According to Dawe et al (2005), there are three prevailing orientations in the teaching of sustainable development in higher education:

1. **The changed role of educators and learners.** This orientation places emphasis on how the tutor can act as a role model for students in order to offer a credible and authoritative perspective on the realities of putting sustainability principles into practice;
2. **Experiential learning by reconnecting to real-life situations.** This orientation focuses on real and practical life issues and actual experiences as learning situations;
3. **Holistic thinking.** This approach encompasses a more open-ended exploration of interdependency and transdisciplinary connections between subjects and theory and practice as well as including approaches to developing critical thinking.

It can also be stressed that different ways of learning and its combinations require new ways of management. Growing diversity of learners concerning their age, gender, social class and cultural backgrounds etc. demands application of variety of teaching and learning styles, for instance, problem-based learning, self-directed learning, digital learning or participatory learning that is activated by using various educational technologies (United Nations, 2012). Lifelong learning in HE remain to be an important criteria for sustainable development. Summarizing the main political documents issued by European Union and United Nations the emphasis is placed on the fundamental values and principles, i. e. humanity, intercultural communication, multilingualism, respect and tolerance for differences and diversity.

However, authors revealed also four major barriers to the successful implementation of sustainable development into many of the subject disciplines at the universities and colleges:

1. Overcrowded curriculum that can be solved by creating space through a rigorous review of existing curricula;
2. Perceived irrelevance by academic staff, which is suggested to improve by development of credible teaching materials which are fully contextualised and relevant to each subject area;
3. Limited staff awareness and expertise, where solution could be significant investment in staff development and capacity building;
4. Limited institutional drive and commitment, which is proposed to solve by review and amend of the institutional mission and policy statements, also developing credible business cases for universities and colleges.

Tendencies in European HE in the light of Bologna process

Nowadays, discussions about the sustainable development in higher education system in European countries cannot be separated from the Bologna process. Launched in 1999 by the Ministers of Education and university leaders of 29 countries, the Bologna process aimed to create a European Higher Education Area (EHEA). There is a common misconception that the Bologna process is a European Union initiative. In fact, the Bologna process is currently involved in 47 countries of which only 27 are Member States of the EU. While implemented in a decentralized way by national institutions, the

Bologna process is closely monitored on the European level. By conducting various projects and programs (for example, unified ECTS credit system, multiple student mobility programs and university evaluation scale), the European Commission expands its influence on national education systems (Keeling, 2006).

The main idea of the Bologna Reform is the standardization or unification of the higher education system in European countries in order to increase competitiveness of Europe in the globalized world, since the reform orientation towards marketization can actually have negative effect on certain specializations that are seemingly unrequired in the market and are allegedly of no use to innovative technology creation (Ball, 1998). The Bologna process does not aim to harmonize national educational systems but rather to provide tools to connect them. The intention is to allow the diversity of national systems and universities to be maintained while the European Higher Education Area improves transparency between higher education systems, as well as implements tools to facilitate recognition of degrees and academic qualifications, mobility, and exchanges between institutions. Most importantly, all participating countries have agreed on a comparable three cycle degree system for undergraduates (Bachelor degrees) and graduates (Master and PhD degrees).

Since education can be considered as an active participant of the market, the quality becomes important. The quality and the academic value of education is important by itself; however, in terms of sustainable development agenda it becomes a necessity, since logically only the high quality education can create a high quality product, whether it is a material or intellectual commodity. In order to create this “culture of quality”, competition between the universities is invoked by the process of standardization, i.e. making them more accountable and comparable. The already presented challenges and changes in HE, aside from quality competition and collaboration between universities, includes collaboration between industrial partners and different Technology Platforms (Keeling, 2006).

Diversification of higher education, changes in universities and colleges, search for new ways to develop study programs, implementation of the learning paradigm in the study process, ensuring competencies necessary for the modern society, pursuit of quality of studies and internationality are the issues that require many efforts from the researchers and educational policy makers (Juodaityte, Kazlauskienė, 2010). Integration of study results into study programs is closely related to the changing mission of universities and changed principles of society functioning. Integration of these results creates prerequisites for improvement of study programs and quality of the study process.

European countries are actively involved in one of the priority activities of the Bologna process, i.e. a united degree of quality assurance issue. There is an existing and implemented national system of quality assurance: internal (self-assessment) and external evaluation, public announcement of conclusions, implementation of recommendations, international participation and membership in international organizations. This system focuses on the improvement of studies and accountability, the increase of efficiency and transparency in higher education services at all levels, promoting mutual trust, recognition and mobility both within the country and between countries (Urbonienė 2015).

Thus, quality assurance in higher education in the light of the Bologna process covers a range of activities and is not limited to improvement of the quality of the studies. This is a much broader concept that includes institutional reorganization, communal responsibility for the quality assessment, strategic improvement and development of research and teaching staff, development of financial and material resources, and involvement of stakeholders in the process of assessment of studies.

Another important aspect in higher education is striving to assure lifelong learning, which is one of the central themes of the Bologna process. In the absence of an exhaustive understanding of the common concept, the provision most strongly associated with lifelong learning includes either non-formal courses offered by higher education institutions alongside their formal degree programs, or degree programs provided under various arrangements different from traditional full-time schemes (European Commission, Education, Audiovisual and Culture Executive Agency, 2012).

Still, the lack of resources makes many universities look not so attractive for both the academic staff as well as students. Another problem for many of the 'newer' European Union member states is the decreasing number of students as well as the 'brain drain'. Thus, both the mobility of potential students and academic staff causes a lack of human resources to assure the high quality and overcome challenges.

A sustainability institutional management of higher education is economically most affordable. It contributes to an efficient resource management as well as to the transformation of sustainable higher education institutions in Europe. The principles of action listed below are to be followed (Sustainable Bologna, 2017):

1. Institutional commitment

Universities shall demonstrate real commitment to the principle and practice of environmental protection and sustainable development within the academic milieu.

2. Environmental ethics

Universities shall promote among teaching staff, students and the public at large sustainable consumption patterns and an ecological lifestyle, while fostering programmes to develop the capacities of the academic staff to teach environmental literacy.

3. Education of university employees

Universities shall provide education, training and encouragement to their employees on environmental issues, so that they can pursue their work in an environmentally responsible manner.

4. Programmes in environmental education

Universities shall incorporate an environmental perspective in all their work and set up environmental education programmes involving both teachers and researchers as well as students - all of whom should be exposed to the global challenges of environment and development, irrespective of their field of study.

5. Interdisciplinarity

Universities shall encourage interdisciplinary and collaborative education and research programmes related to sustainable development as part of the institution's central mission. Universities shall also seek to overcome competitive instincts between disciplines and departments.

6. Dissemination of knowledge

Universities shall support efforts to fill in the gaps in the present literature available for students, professionals, decision-makers and the general public by preparing information

and didactic material, organizing public lectures, and establishing training programmes. They should also be prepared to participate in environmental audits.

7. Networking

Universities shall promote interdisciplinary networks of environmental experts at the local, national, regional and international levels, with the aim of collaborating on common environmental projects in both research and education. For this, the mobility of students and scholars should be encouraged.

8. Partnerships

Universities shall take the initiative in forging partnerships with other concerned sectors of society, in order to design and implement coordinated approaches, strategies and action plans.

9. Continuing education programmes

Universities shall devise environmental educational programmes on these issues for different target groups: e.g. business, governmental agencies, non-governmental organizations, the media.

10. Technology transfer

Universities shall contribute to educational programmes designed to transfer educationally sound and innovative technologies and advanced management methods.

III. Conclusion

The challenges with respect to sustainability has been clearly discussed above and it is clearly evident that the Higher educational institutions undoubtedly are facing tremendous challenges in the context of sustainability. However, The merit of the situation is that the challenging situation has already been made note of, and steps are being taken at their possible ends with the means they have by the higher educational institutions. Governments are tremendously spending on Research and Innovation these days, and moreover significance of research and innovation has become a major part of discussion these days when the growth of an economy is discussed. If a country has to excel in Research and Innovation it cannot happen within short span of time. It has to happen from the primary education and extend upto Higher Education. So sustainability cannot be made the responsibility of Higher education over a period of time. Therefore, the major challenge of sustainability lies within the scope of educational system in an all pervasive manner rather than in higher education alone. However, Higher educational institutions play a major role in execution of developing a country from all fronts.

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