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Why Sustainable Development Has Become a Priority Scientific Topic of Doctoral Studies?

Why sustainable development is so important?

We live in a world full of challenges that have become even more intense in the last years. In 2019 when COVID-19 struck us out of nowhere, we saw that everything we believed firm had melted down. It has become of crucial importance to be able to adapt, to evolve and to modify. We had to change our daily routine, our habits, our usual perspective and even our paradigm of the world and of life itself. And this is not the first warning that we got. Water shortages, drought, hunger, extreme weather, wars, floods and wildfires kept reminding us that action needed to be done. All of these climate changes and other consequences of irrational human behavior that have been affecting all continents and all the living things and nature in the previous decade, have made (some of the) humans stop and think: Where is this leading us? What is the world going to look like if

we continue with the same pace? All too often, development is driven by one particular need, without fully considering wider future impacts. We are already seeing the damage this kind of approach can cause, from large-scale financial crises caused by irresponsible banking, to changes in global climate resulting from our dependence on fossil fuel-based energy sources. The human population continues to grow and is expected to reach 10 billion by 2100. Such an increase entails an increase in needs and, as a result, more individual consumption. A need for a long-term solution was desperately necessary. The concept of sustainable development arose as an urgent necessity.

Sustainable development can be defined as development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. In other words, it is about exploiting the planet's resources in moderation, without exceeding its

capacity for natural renewal. The focus of sustainable development is far broader than just the environment. It's also about ensuring a strong, healthy and just society. This means meeting the diverse needs of all people in existing and future communities, promoting personal well-being, social cohesion and inclusion, and creating equal opportunity.

In 2015, the United Nations set out the Sustainable Development Goals, a series of common goals to protect the planet and guarantee social well-being. By adopting this new strategy, the states committed themselves, over the next fifteen years, to mobilize all the necessary means for its implementation.

The Sustainable Development Goals [1], also known as the Global Goals, seek to reconcile economic growth, environmental balance and social progress, ensuring that all people have the same opportunities and can lead a better life without compromising the planet.

The goals are:

- › End poverty
- › Zero hunger
- › Good health and well-being
- › Quality education
- › Gender equality

- › Clean water and sanitation
- › Affordable and clean energy
- › Decent work and economic growth
- › Industry, innovation and infrastructure
- › Reduced inequalities
- › Sustainable cities and communities
- › Responsible consumption and production
- › Climate action
- › Life below water
- › Life on land
- › Peace, justice and strong institutions
- › Partnerships for the goals

Sustainable development goals are to ensure a commitment and balance between economic growth, preservation of the environment and social well-being.

Doctoral education and sustainable development

With more attention to growing problems of sustainability, more awareness began to rise. Since the originality of the research and new solutions are at the heart of doctoral education, sustainable development became an interesting and attractive topic for PhD studies. The degree PhD (Doctor of Philosophy) is awarded to someone

who has subject-matter mastery and has made a unique contribution to their field of knowledge. Its aim needs to be to prepare young scientists for their role in the rapidly changing knowledge society. Sustainable development program offers an interdisciplinary approach involving the social, natural, engineering, and health sciences. The PhD in Sustainable Development includes a set of rigorous core requirements in the social and natural sciences designed to provide a deep understanding of the interaction between natural and social systems, and provides students with the flexibility to pursue in-depth research in a broad variety of critical policy areas. It's due to the unique combination of diverse skills and deep insight into the most challenging problems of future human welfare that more and more students choose this field for their doctoral programs.

After having obtained a PhD in Sustainable development, graduates are able to pursue academic careers in interdisciplinary graduate and undergraduate programs with a focus on policy and the environment as well as in the more traditional social science disciplines. This degree is also ideal for students interested in a variety of non-academic career paths, including leadership roles in government ministries throughout the world, creating environmental and susta-

inable development policy for NGOs, in international institutions such as the IMF and the World Bank, or in private firms engaged in environmental and development projects.

Sustainable Development courses focus on the global goals and long-term actions that can be taken to protect nature against harmful, unsustainable activities. As a sustainability consultant, one can assess projects and offer improvement suggestions and recommendations for limiting any damaging impact on the environment. Additionally, sustainability experts also analyse aspects related to economic growth, as this is the main factor behind unsustainable practices. It gives an opportunity for brilliant minds to come up with revolutionary solutions to environmental problems.

Another purpose of Sustainable development studies is to concretize science and to convert research into tangible work that is of greater use for economy and industry. It focuses on technological and natural sciences but through sustainable approach. The essence and the core lie in continuous progress, smart use of resources, sustainability in thinking, planning and performing, and in perspectives that go beyond man alone and transcend whole generations; intellectual, spiritual and not only material *perpetuum mobile, perpetuum mobile*

of ideas. This idea has also originated from the need to enable researchers to work in the field and in real sector, and to encourage them to give a contribution to both science and the system, to get them prepared for work in companies and more competitive for labor market. Holders of this degree can be expected to be able to promote, within academic and professional contexts, technological, social or cultural advancement in a knowledge-based society.

The way we approach development affects everyone. The impacts of our decisions as a society have very real consequences for people's lives. Poor planning of communities, for example, reduces the quality of life for the people who live in them. Sustainable development provides an approach to making better decisions on the issues that affect all of our lives. For instance, by incorporating health plans into the planning of new communities, we can ensure that residents have easy access to healthcare and leisure facilities. Last time that a hospital was built in Montenegro was 47 years ago. Current pandemic has best shown the importance of strong health system and infrastructure in times of crisis, and all the deficiencies that management and planning without a vision can cause. Montenegro is now experiencing many challenges with the constant price increase of foodstuff, bu-

ilding material and many other products and services, due to trends on the world market. It relies completely on imports, without its own production and industry that were shut down in the last 30 years. By encouraging more sustainable agriculture, food production and supply chains, we can ensure that Montenegro has enough food and other vital supplies for the long-term future.

Financial, health and energetic crisis we are experiencing today are consequences of bad decisions and policies undergone 20, 30 years ago. They indicate the need of wiser management and multidimensional approach. We need to make the right moves now, so that our future and future of our children reflect prudence, humanity and selfless action of our epoch, pro-active vision and smart resources management- whether human, natural and technological.

Also, we mustn't loose track and let machines take over the system, we have to preserve humaneness, and keep Man as the main protagonist, with his brains, emotions and spirit woven in everything he plans, designs and constructs, and leaves as a legacy.

It is of crucial importance to raise awareness about sustainable development, to put this idea into educational system, to teach children from an early age about

the benefits and risks that human actions can bring. They need to think in a sustainable way, a reality like the one we are living requires a change in reasoning, a complete shift of paradigm in order to maintain life on the Earth acceptable and meaningful.

The purpose of all of us, individually and collectively, is to give our contribution, to make a mark, and to leave this world a better place than we found it.

How the MARDS project responds the challenges in doctoral education?

When we started the MARDS project, “Reforming doctoral studies in Montenegro and Albania - good practice paradigm”, 598465-EPP-1-2018-1-ME-EPPKA2-CBHE-SP, in 2018, we had no idea that it would really be, as its name reminds, “an example of good practice” in doctoral education in these two Western Balkan countries [2]. Today, we can say that the visionary ideas of the MARDS project have become a reality. Doctoral education policies have significantly improved in Montenegro. As a one of the outcomes, the doctoral studies with symbolic tuition fees (about 250 Euros/semester) have become available to a large number of students. The first International Doctoral Program in English “Sustainable Development”, hosted at University of Montenegro, has started to operate as a direct outcome of the MARDS project

[3]. Fifteen (15) brilliant students were selected, in high competition, to be the students of the first-generation. Their classes are going according to plan, and they are preparing for doctoral dissertation research work. In Albania, we are on track to introduce a similar program at Shkoder University, the first in Northern Albania, which will be of great importance not only for Albania, but also for cross-border cooperation.

It is certain that these two innovative doctoral programs will change the map of doctoral education in the Western Balkans in fields of multidisciplinary and sustainable development.

Acknowledgment

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References:

- [1] <https://sdgs.un.org/goals>
- [2] Radovan Stojanovic, The problems of doctoral education in Montenegro in light of MARDS project, Reforms Inside, Publication of Higher Education Reform Experts in Montenegro, Issue 1, 2019, pp. 10-13.
- [3] <https://www.mards.ucg.ac.me/PhD/>

Prof. dr Radovan Stojanović is coordinator of MARDS project, member of Montenegrin HERE team and the first academic coordinator of a new PhD Programme in Sustainable Development. He is almost for two decades active in reforming higher education system in line with EU policies. He coordinated or sub-coordinated numerous TEMPUS/ERASMUS+ projects.

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