

KNOWLEDGE OF SDGs AMONG STUDENTS AND DETERMINATION OF THEIR INTEREST IN BUILDING A CAREER IN THE FIELD OF SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

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Abstract: *Sustainable development represents the optimal development option which proposes a harmonization of goals covering economic, social and environmental aspects. The research aims at identifying students' level of knowledge of the concept of sustainable development, of the 17 goals as part of this type of development, and their interest in building a career in the field of sustainable development. The results of the research show that students are familiar with the 17 goals of sustainable development, the main sources of information about sustainable development and SDGs as subjects studied at the University and on the Internet; moreover, many of them want to build a career in the field of sustainable development.*

Key words: *sustainable development, sustainable development goals - SDGs, strategy, sustainable development expert.*

1. Introduction

Sustainable development continues to be a priority on the international agenda even though very serious problems have appeared in the last three years that have affected a large number of people. The Covid-19 pandemic has killed over 6 million people (<https://www.trt.net.tr/romana/covid19>) and fundamentally changed the landmarks of the world we live in today. Also, for the whole of Europe, the war in Ukraine shook the Europeans' desire for security to its foundations and raised new challenges in a world already affected by a multitude of crises (sanitary, economic, energy etc.).

On September 25, 2015, the UN General Assembly adopted the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development was developed following an analysis initiative started at the international level, which tried to solve the global problems that affect humanity (<http://dezvoltaredurabila.gov.ro/web/dd-onu/>).

17 goals of sustainable development were proposed within the 2030 Agenda and, as of 2018, Romania has had a new National strategy for sustainable development based on these goals.

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Before the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, our country recorded more economic progress rather than in the social and environmental fields, and the pandemic has slowed down the implementation of the SDGs, in some cases even regressions being noticed. The crisis touched all segments of the population, all sectors of the economy and all areas of the country, and affected vulnerable groups the most, it exposed inequalities in our society and further expanded the existing gaps (http://romania-durabila.gov.ro/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/Brosura_indicatori-de-dezvoltare-durabila-2020.pdf).

An aspect that it is worth mentioning is the fact that in Romania, as a result of the initiative of the Department for Sustainable Development, the occupation of sustainable development expert has been registered. In the medium and long term, the sustainable development expert will act as an agent of paradigm shift in the process of building projects, public policies, programs and strategies related to the specific activity of the central and local public administration. In this sense, the expert will develop, implement, verify and promote the sustainable development goals covered in the 2030 Strategy at the level of each authority where he/she will carry out his/her activity, adapted to those specific competences of the respective authority (<https://gov.ro/ro/media/comunicate/romania-prima-tara-ue-care-a-dezvoltat-standardul-ocupational-expert-in-dezvoltare-durabila&page=2>).

In the current international context, we believe that resilience, solidarity and the need to leave no one behind are more present than ever and the enhancement of educational processes aimed at increasing the degree of knowledge and understanding of the SDGs at all levels of society can create the premises for the effective implementation of a sustainable development strategy.

Several studies based on the analysis of university websites show that, although there is a wide and noticeable interest in this field and some universities have taken measures to reduce the effects of their actions on society and the environment, there is a lack of clarity and understanding of the possibilities of implementing SD principles in such organizations (Popescu and Beleaua, 2014).

In this study, our aim was to identify the level of knowledge of the SDGs, how they are perceived by the SEAA students from Transilvania University of Brasov, and their interest in building a career in the field of sustainable development.

2. Literature Review

The reference literature includes an important number of research aimed at identifying the level of knowledge of the SDGs.

The work of Yuta, Baars and Asari (2019) identifies the level of knowledge of the SDGs among the Kyoto University students. According to the results obtained, more than 70% of the respondents know the 17 goals.

Omisore et al. (2017) studied how the entire academic community and all individuals and groups in developing countries from Osun State University Nigeria relate to the SDGs.

Bain (Bain et al, 2019) identified public understandings of SDGs through mind maps of how people relate the SDGs to environmental, social and economic sustainability. Some people's mind maps identified tension between achieving environmental versus social sustainability, whereas for others, the tension was between economic sustainability and the other two sustainability elements.

Using a questionnaire survey, Yuan et al. (Yuan et al., 2021) investigated the cognition, learning situation, personal concerns and social adaptation regarding the SDGs among senior high school students in one school in Beijing, China. Based on this research, guidance and suggestions are provided to enhance students' awareness, knowledge and competencies in relation to sustainability and to encourage student engagement in global sustainable development.

Other research studies related to the knowledge of sustainable development goals are the studies of Ang (2021), Crespo et al. (2017), Zamora-Polo et al. (2019), Ian et al (2019), Garcia et al. (2017), Jati et al. (2019) and Guan et al (Guan et al., 2019).

According to a sociological research carried out by the Department for Sustainable Development, 46% of the adult population of Romania has heard of the concept of sustainable development (<http://dezvoltaredurabila.gov.ro/web/2020/07/29/concluziile-primelor-doua-cercetari-sociologice-realizate-in-cadrul-proiectului-sipoca-613-romania-durabila/>).

3. Research Methodology

Through this study, we aimed at identifying the way Transilvania University students know the concept of sustainable development, the sustainable development goals (SDGs), how their lives are influenced by the achievement of these goals and their interest in building a career in the field of sustainable development.

The objectives of the subject research were the following:

1. *To determine students' opinions on the most important problems that humanity faces today (O1).*
2. *To identify the level of knowledge of the concept of sustainable development and the 17 sustainable development goals (SDGs) among undergraduate students and Master's degree students of the Faculty of Economic Sciences and Business Administration, Transilvania University of Brasov (O2);*
3. *To determine the general perception of the influence that the SDGs exert on the lives of the respondents (O3);*
4. *To identify students' perception of organizations that should promote the 17 sustainable development goals (O4);*
5. *To determine the opinions of the subjects regarding the future interest in building a career in the field of sustainable development. (O5)*

The qualitative research was performed on a sample of 46 subjects. In the research, we used the purposive sampling, "one of the most common sampling strategies, groups participants according to preselected criteria relevant to a particular research question"

(<https://course.ccs.neu.edu/is4800sp12/resources/qualmethods.pdf>), aiming at including in the sample individuals who meet the requirement of being students of Transilvania University.

Based on the analysis of the research sample, the ratio of female respondents was 60%, while the one of male respondents was 40%. With respect to the level of education, 35% of the subjects attended university studies, 2% postgraduate studies and 63% secondary studies. The age range of respondents was between 19 and 42 years old. One of the limits of the research is that the results cannot be extrapolated to the entire organization. Under such circumstances, we intend to perform in the future a quantitative research on the same topic.

4. Research Results

According to the results presented in figure no. 1, in line with the surveyed subjects, the most important problems that humanity faces today are *pollution, poverty and wars (Objective I)*. We mention the fact that the question did not include certain problems for the subjects to prioritize, but it gave them the freedom to choose the mentioned problems.

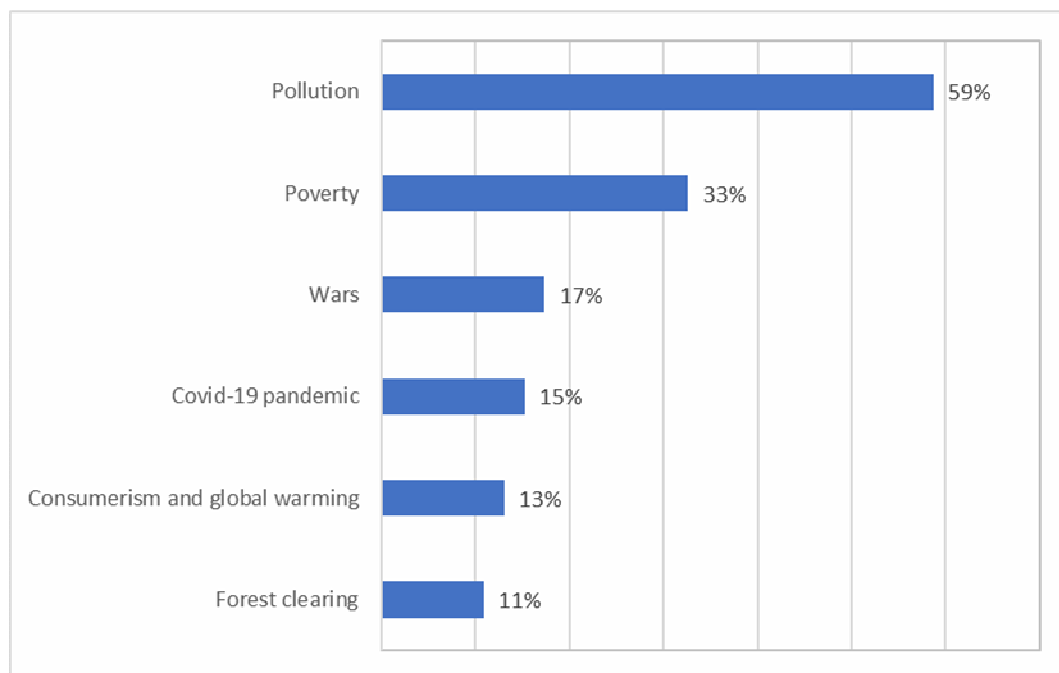


Fig. 1. List three important problems that humanity faces today (Q1)

For the second objective of the research, to identify the level of knowledge of the concept of sustainable development and the 17 sustainable development goals (SDGs), upon analysing the answers, we could find that 96% of the respondents know the concept

of sustainable development and 96% have heard of the 17 goals of sustainable development.

The most important sources from which they learned about the 17 SDGs are the subjects studied at the University and the Internet (figure 2). When asked to give an example of a sustainable development goal, 50% of the subjects mentioned goals 11, 4, 8, 2, 1, 5, 13, 16, 7, 12, 3. Most subjects mentioned goals 4, 2 and 5 (Zero hunger, Quality education and Gender equality).

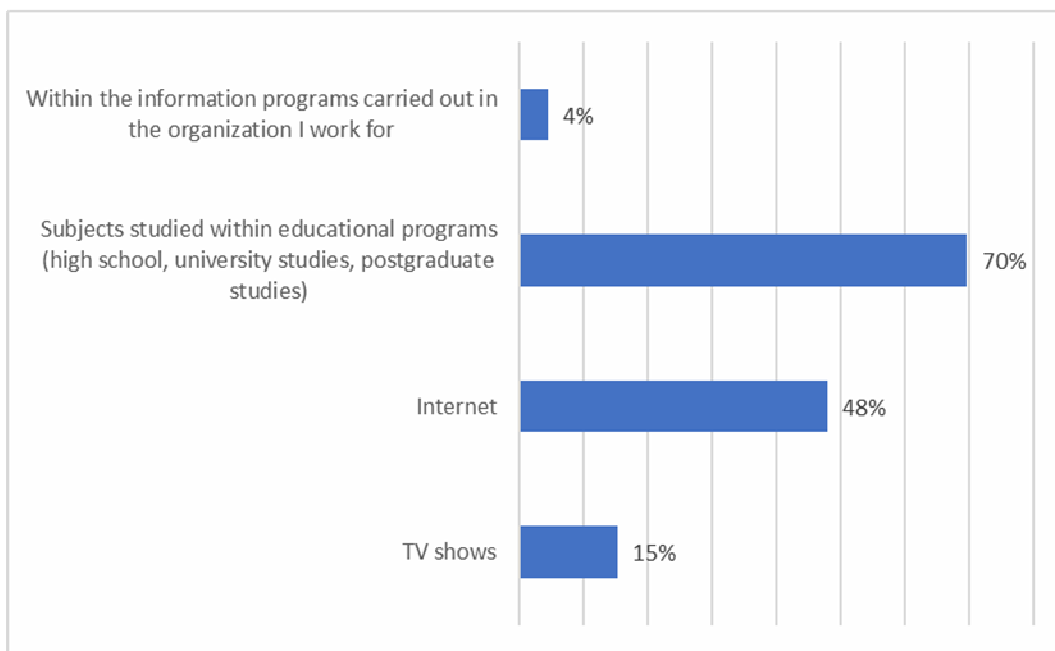


Fig. 2. *From what sources did you learn about the sustainable development goals (Q4)?*

For the third objective of the research, i.e. "to determine the general perception of the influence that the SDGs exert on the lives of the respondents", in figure number 3 we can see that the goals which, according to the respondents, have a great influence on their lives are *Good health and well-being (G3)*, *Quality education (G4)* and *Decent work and economic growth (G8)*.

The goals of *Affordable and clean energy (G7)*, *Climate action (G13)*, *Peace, justice and strong institutions (G16)* and *Life on land (G15)* also have an important influence for the respondents.

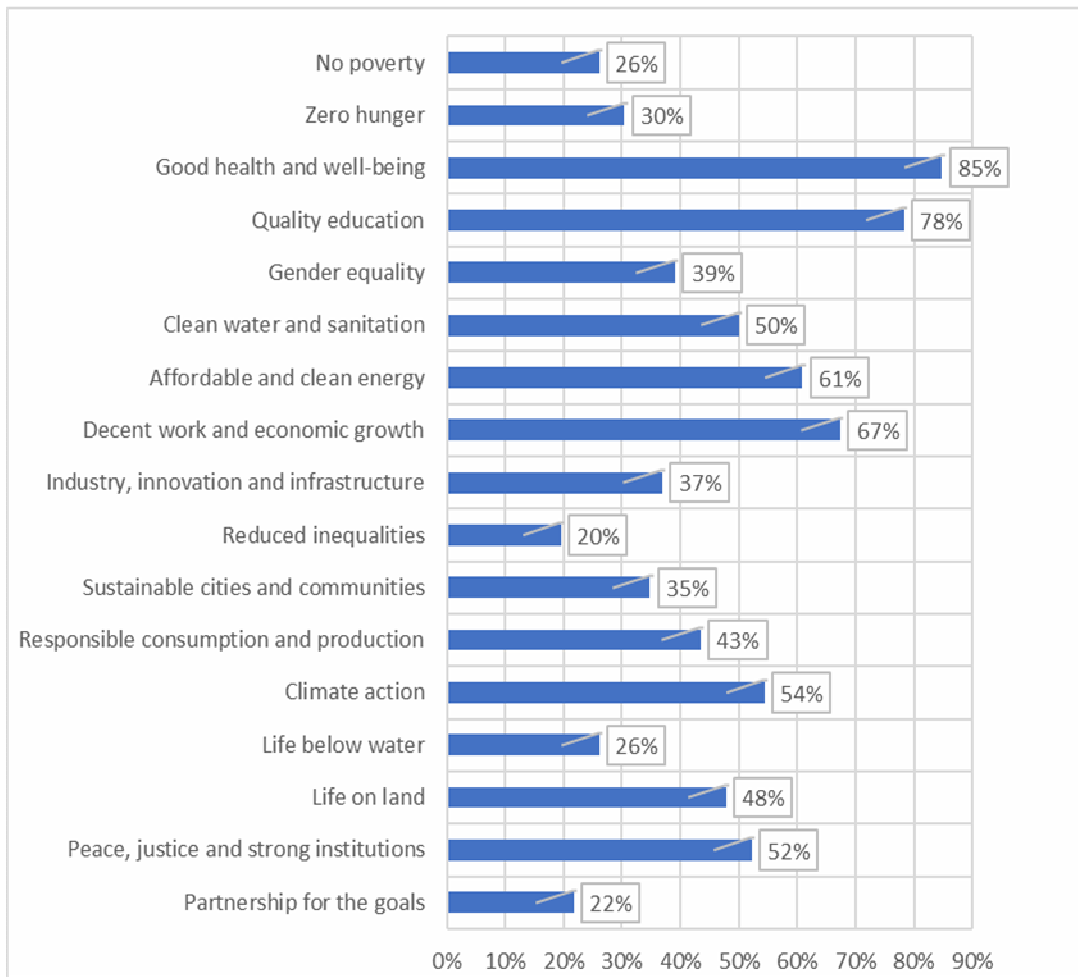


Fig. 3. Which of the 17 sustainable development goals directly influences you (Q6)?

On the first three positions for question number 7, “Which of the following organizations should get involved in promoting the 17 sustainable development goals”, the respondents indicated the Ministry of the Environment, the school and local authorities (objective 4).

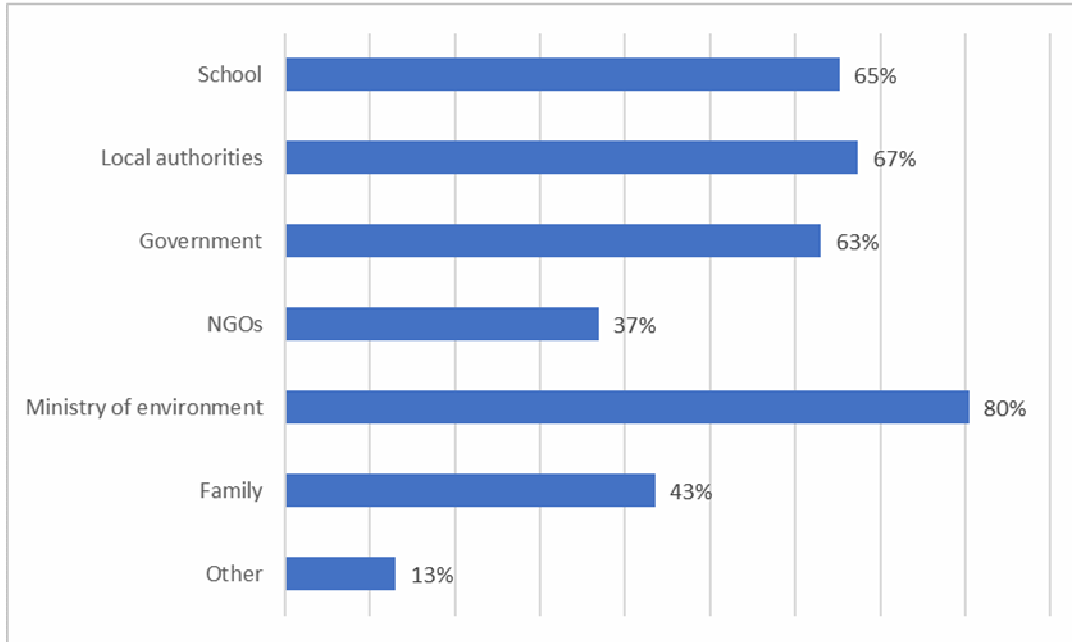


Fig. 4. Which of the following organizations should get involved in promoting the 17 sustainable development goals (Q7)?

The last objective of the research (O5) aimed at identifying the interest of the surveyed subjects to build a professional career in the field of sustainable development. Almost half of the surveyed subjects show interest in such a career (Figure 5).

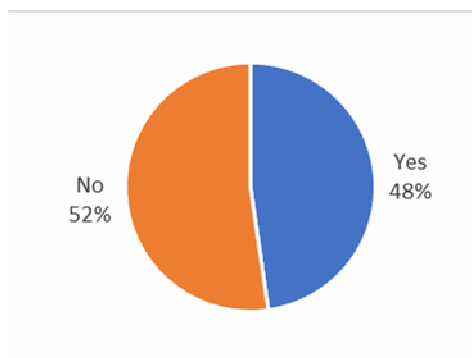


Fig. 5. In Romania, the occupation of "sustainable development expert" has been registered. Would you be interested in such a position in the future? (Q9)

We also find it interesting the level of knowledge regarding Romania's new sustainable development strategy (Figure 6), with only 41% of respondents stating that they learned about this adaptation of the strategy in accordance with the 17 SDGs. We believe that an important role currently belongs to the organizations whose mission is to promote both the SDGs and the new SDS of Romania more effectively.

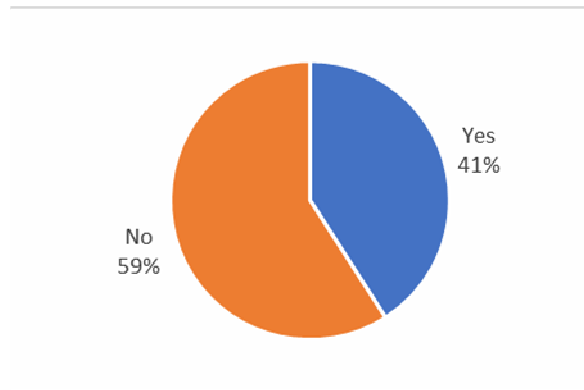


Fig. 6. Do you know that Romania has a new sustainable development strategy based on the 17 sustainable development goals? (Q8)

6. Conclusions

According to the surveyed subjects, the most important problems that humanity faces today are pollution, poverty and wars. Taking into account the current period in which several types of crises affect the entire world, the students included in the sample mentioned the most important problems faced by people. The answers of the respondents led to the idea that they know the concept of sustainable development and a percentage of 96% has heard of the 17 goals of sustainable development, the most important sources from which they learned about the 17 SDGs being the subjects studied at the University and the Internet. The subjects mentioned the goals *Zero hunger, Quality education and Gender equality* as the ones with the greatest influence on them. In relation to the identification of the surveyed subjects' desire to develop a professional career in the field of sustainable development, half of the surveyed subjects showed interest in such a career.

We believe that the training of future economists based on the principles of sustainable development is an essential requirement for adapting education to current conditions. As Rashid (Rashid, 2019) also believes, education in the economic field, especially the entrepreneurial one, requires permanent adaptation in order to support sustainable development.

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