

# Higher Education Institutes In Albania and Their Role *Vis a Vis* Sustainable Development

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## ABSTRACT

The ongoing progress within the field of higher education in Albania- the harsh debate on the High Education Law- the gradual re-shaping of the Higher Education Institutes (HEI) offer considering the job market needs- underlines the importance this sector has for the evolution of our society. It is indispensable the fact that higher education institutes have a crucial role vis a vis sustainable development. The initiatives undertaken shows the clear tendency of this, namely:

1. Ministry of Education and Sports and the Institute of Developing Education (IDE) in cooperation with UNESCO and UNICEF has presented the objective Nr. 4 on sustainable development and Education 2030. This documents aims to promote and support the objectives for Sustainable Development of the Agenda 2030 for Sustainable Development, that is “warrants quality education and consolidate opportunities for lifelong learning”

As such, sustainable development does not comprises only environment issues but also issues related to economy and socio- cultural issues as well. The pressure on our society from factors like: emigration, urbanization etc.,- just remember our city ten years ago – makes it obvious that Higher Education Institutes have an important role to play on sustainable development.

Because the primary role of Higher Education Institutes is “producing knowledge”, they can be a powerful tool for developing a critical thinking towards sustainable development.

Thus, the concept of “higher education for sustainable development” has become a crucial element in the education initiatives not only in the region but globally.

In a more academic level, the importance of this article springs from the fact that this kind of literature in our country is absent. In practical level, this article aims in constructing a positive model on link between Higher Education Institutes and sustainable development.

**Keywords:** *Higher Education Institutes, sustainable development, major catalyst*

## Introduction

Higher Education brings about a change in the individual approach which promotes greater productivity and work efficiency. It remains a major component in the development of human resources and it accounts for much improvements in population quality and environmental resource management; hence, sustainable development. Improvement of human resources is not

limited to the inculcation of skills and knowledge, but includes having values, positive attitudes and motives consistent with the goals and methods of sustainable development plan that will benefit the future generations.

This paper argues in favor of Higher Education Institutions (HEI) role in the enhancement of sustainable development in Albania. It adopts a qualitative approach/paradigm and it specifically uses case study in its design. The sample size of the study consists of 20 respondents; 10 graduating students and 5 administrative and 5 academic staff, from the CU Wisdom, which is also the limitation of this paper. Unstructured interview and document analysis guides consisting of two main research questions are used for data collection. The result of the study reveals that private HEI's in Albania over the years are turning in a major catalyst that educates its students to be agents of liberation, transformation and development. However, it is faced by the obstacles to offering its contribution to sustainable development programs, mainly because of financial constraint and lack of intra-institutional cooperation.

This implies that HEI's needs to mobilize its own recourses to tackle this deficit. In conclusion, the study recommends that HEI's should act toward a more intense and significant inter-institutional cooperation.

### **Literature Review**

The Institutes of Higher Education are a critical tool for the transformation of the individual and the society and the role of Institutions of Higher Education in re-orienting the curricula for sustainable development that aims at preparing a holistic and value-oriented individual for useful living within the society cannot be over-emphasized. The idea of sustainable development is conceived to help create healthy societies that can sustain the present generation as well as those that follow through the adequate use of economic, environmental and cultural resources. It emphasizes the ideas of directing, maintaining, and defining a suitable framework for a desired development that will involve the least risk for the next generation (Bruntland Report, 1995). The concepts of education and development have taken on a normative dimension starting from the 1990s, into nowadays. Development is no longer conceived in descriptive terms, but as a global process of social change that should be understood in purely human terms. The relationship between education and sustainable development within this normative dimension should then be to make aware governments, policy makers, institutions of higher education and individuals to adopt a human centered approach to sustainable development planning. In support of this creative

dimension, Babawale (2007) asserts that development implies creative responses to social, political and economic affairs. His assertion really calls for sustainable development that is mainly about preservation and adequacy. Sustainable development is defined as the development, which meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs (United Nations, 2010). Various authors in terms of vision expression, value change, moral development, social reorganization or transformation and process towards a desired future or better world (Gladwin, Kennelly & Tara-Shelomith, 1995; Okah & Wali, 2014) have conceived it. Adekeye (2013) on his part, views it as an ethical framework for using the nation's resources efficiently, creating effective infrastructures and relationships, protecting and enhancing the quality of lives, and creating new business channels to strengthen the economy. Sustainable development is also referred to as the state of maintaining and ensuring constant development of the people, or the socio-economic, political, and cultural survival of a nation from one generation to the other. Everything about sustainable development is geared towards the future generation.

### **Obstruction Statement**

Environmental degradation, social breakdown, psychological turmoil, cultural dislocation, insecurity and economic depression are some of the problems that threaten human existence today. Non-reviewed curricula, insensitivity to the environment, economic decline, high rate of unemployment among the youth, youth radicalization, corruption, political patronage, just to mention a few has made its print to our society – with gruesome effect- within this situation are also (some) Institutions of Higher Education in Albania that do not to play an effective role in national sustainable development. It is high time these institutions re-orient their curricula and redefines their mission; for without a clear definition of their roles and functions, they are in danger of not making a positive impact on economic, social and cultural development; hence, sustainable development.

There have been many researches done –globally- on education for sustainable development which focused more on Education for All (EFA) and the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), sustainable development in higher education which focused on competence development in higher education, teaching and learning for sustainable development that focused on technology education, sustainability in management and business education, just to mention a few. However, very few studies are undertaken in national level vis vis curriculum review of Institutions of Higher Education, inter-institutional cooperation between HIE in promoting sustainable development.

## **Methodology**

The purpose of this study was to ascertain the role of Higher Educational Institutes in the enhancement of sustainable development in Albania.

## **Research Questions**

This paper is built around two research questions as follows:

1. What are some of the challenges Higher Education Institutes encounters in enhancing Sustainable Development in Albania?
2. What are some plausible solutions to these challenges?

This paper adopted a qualitative approach/paradigm and it specifically made use of case study in its design.

Case study helps the researcher to develop an in-depth analysis of a case. A case study consists of the intensive observation of a single unit and this may be an individual person, school, and district, just to mention a few. The researchers chose this design because they were conducting an in-depth study to produce a conclusive finding on the role of Higher Educational Institutes in the enhancement of sustainable development in Albania.

The target population of the study comprised staff (both academic and administrative) and students of the Wisdom University College. These individuals were relevant to the study because they are the ones fully involved in the implementation and consumption of the curricula of the College.

The study made use of non-probability sampling technique in its sampling and the researcher purposively

sampled 20 respondents: 10 graduating students and 5 administrative and 5 academic staff members –from U.C Wisdom. The instruments for data collection were an in-depth interview guide followed by a questionnaire consisting of three major questions. The reasons for these instruments were to have an in depth data collection involving multiple sources of information to ensure that data collected are rich, robust, comprehensive and well developed.

The data of the study were analyzed quantitatively, the interviews were transcribed, and all the data were grouped according the interview guide, then the assembled data were analyzed using Stat Pack for Windows and descriptive coding techniques. The analyses were presented in narrative and diagrammatical forms.

## Results and Discussion

In many studies about the link between sustainable development and higher education, the main question that arises is what can the academic community- hence HEI – students, etc. do about implementing sustainable development goals into their institutional vision, their strategic development plans, and their organization culture. In our country, the strategy for sustainable development is not -yet- legally approved, that is from the Parliament.

However in many countries, - mainly European Union member countries-exist a clear legal mandate for the sustainable development strategy<sup>1</sup>

The institutional framework for implementing the sustainable development strategy is different in different countries, nonetheless the government agencies' are having a primary role and the later continuously expands. In spite of this, the government agencies do not have the “monopoly” over sustainable development, after all the future of humanity is in stake, and to achieve the Sustainable Development objectives every actor of society must commit.

However, the general principles for HEI engagement *vis a vis* the sustainable development challenge, are as follows:

- ✓ Integrated management is the principle that foresees an holistic approach in the optimization of processes for a efficacy usability of the resources;
- ✓ Intra- generation equality is a “sine qua non” precondition for sustainable development;
- ✓ Life cycle approach of services, having a consideration on the environment consequences of the economic effects of such services;
- ✓ Good Governance principle on HEI;
- ✓ Public-Private partnerships based on direct inter-institutional cooperation of relevant actors;

Based on the points elaborated above, the Higher Education Institutes may develop a successful sustainable development strategy, taking in consideration the 4C approach by T. Ellis<sup>2</sup>

The strategy for sustainable development in HEI must have a clear objective.

HEI must have an adaptive to change approach; this means that changes must be made in structure, processes, performance with final end – sustainability.

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<sup>1</sup> Article 6 of EU Treaty and the Decisions of EU presidency at the Cardif Summit. Press Statement available here: [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/summits/car1\\_en.htm](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/summits/car1_en.htm)

<sup>2</sup> 4C-approach on, The New Pioneers: Sustainable Business Success through Social Innovation and Social Entrepreneurship. John Wiley & Sons; 2010

The third element of a sustainable development strategy is innovation (creation). Sustainable innovation encompasses close cooperation with partners and stakeholders- having them on board of innovation processes. Finally, communication, transparency both for successes and for failures, building trust and mutual understanding is considered crucial in adopting a sustainable development strategy among HEI. A sustainable university must be interactive in its effort to withdraw new ideas or feedback in order to adapt a strategy that is in line with the student community; hence to guarantee the longevity of own strategy on sustainable development.

A strategic element in the road to sustainability is innovation.<sup>3</sup> It is obvious that this element is on its best represented by HEI, because both the didactic dimension and research activities are crucial for continuous innovation. The innovation in HEI is interconnected to several issues but the main challenge is associated with the existence of innovative tools for swift transfer of knowledge to students and/or innovative didactic methodologies to advance or up-date the level of knowledge/skills to students and alumni, a step that would raise the competitive level of the university offer.

### **Entrepreneurial Education vs entrepreneurial HEI**

The European Commission, on its November 2012 statement issued the Declaration called “Re-dimensioning of education: investment on skills for a productive and effective socio-economic results”<sup>4</sup>. This initiative underlines the fact that “21 Century competencies’ requires transversal abilities, just like entrepreneurship itself and underlines abilities for critical thinking, taking initiative, problem solving and cooperation “.This “entrepreneurial abilities” must take the importance in curricula cause they not only contribute vis a vis entrepreneurial activities but also raises significantly the employability of youngsters<sup>5</sup>.

Entrepreneurial abilities presupposes active methods that allow students to take their time to elaborate creativity and develop the spirit of innovation. The skills and abilities required for entrepreneurship can be developed only through practical experiences –adapting the concept “learning by doing”.

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<sup>3</sup> HU (2014), Heliopolis University for Sustainable Development HU. Web: <http://www.hu.edu.eg/>: Access: February, 2020.

<sup>4</sup> See the Rama Government initiative to promote professional education: <https://ata.gov.al/2018/03/28/rama-arsimi-profesional-investim-dhe-garanci-per-zhvillim-ekonomik/>

<sup>5</sup> See the new module of executive education launched by C. U. Wisdom, namely “Legal Assistant, Immoveable Property Agent, etc.

There are a lot reasons why HEI are lacking behind in implementing general principals for sustainable development, to name some of them:

- Lack of able personnel, that will be engaged with this particular task, and that can introduce initiative or issues to decision making bodies at HEI;
- Lack of strategic objectives or action-planes which can bring some sense of orienting as to reason and purpose;
- Lack of will to face the necessary change in structure and/or proper investments to put sustainability at the center of university;
- Lack of inter-institutional cooperation with a mutual engagement means.

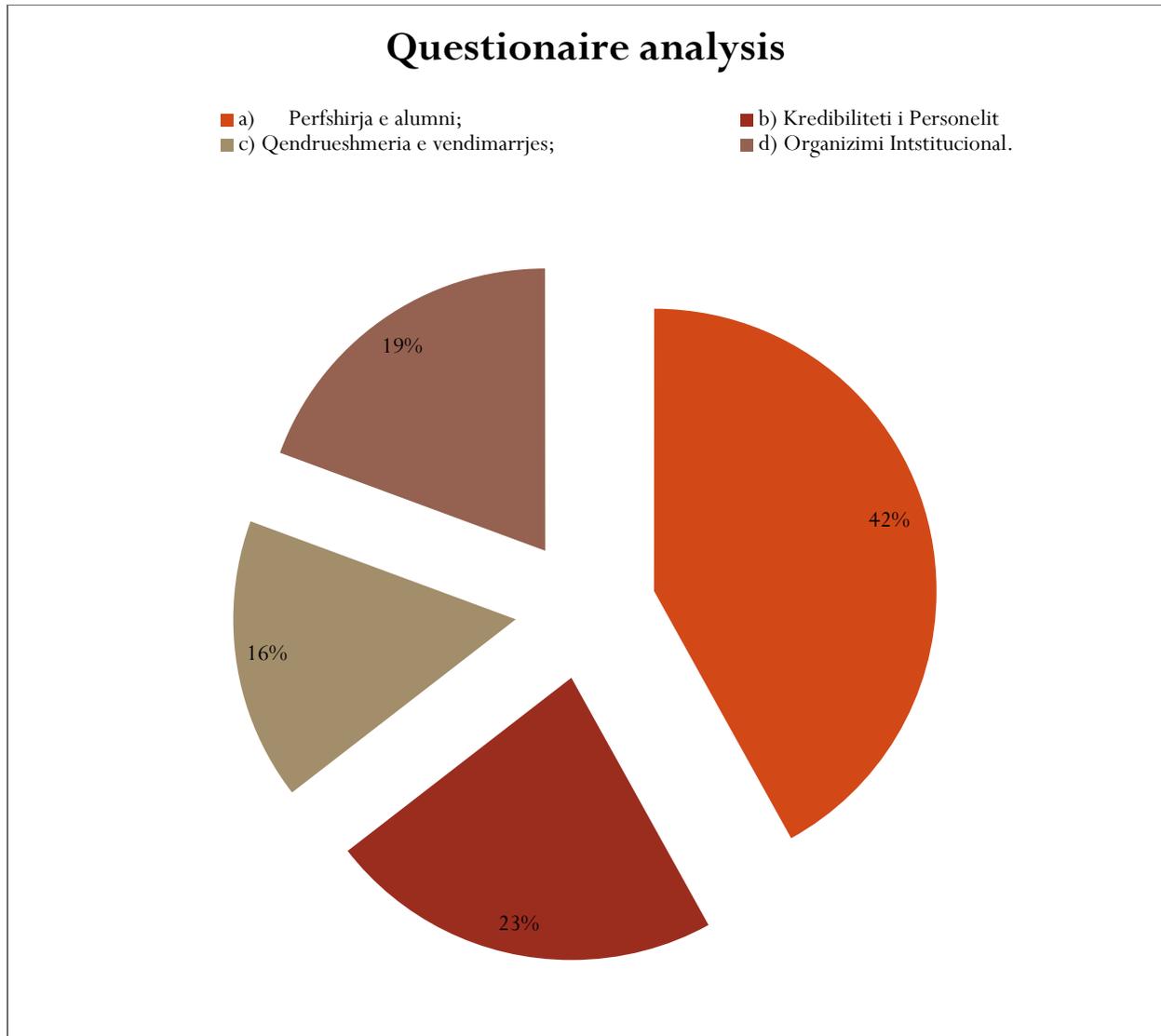
Of course, the above list is not exhaustive but it offers a clear picture of the problems to be addressed. Above all the huge difference how HEI conceptualize the sustainable development in education

Moreover, it constitute a mere fact, that in order to achieve high-end results, education for sustainable development must consist the below mentioned elements:

- (a) inter-disciplined thinking development;
- (b) abilities in integrated planning;
- (c) the development of a joint understanding of the complexities;
- (d) the understanding of the decision making processes.

A deficit is noted because the mechanisms that would evident and promote successful initiatives crucial for boosting the comparative advantages are missing. As well as, the role that students can have in promoting sustainable development is often under-evaluated.

It is of great importance that the role of the graduate community (alumni) to be considered as a value added for HEI, thus forging the link between actual students and alumni is necessary.



- “Thunell” methodology is used here, which coped with unstructured interviews;
- The questionnaires are anonymous;
- The questionnaires aims to measure how the respondents perceive the proposed politics;
- “Likert scale” 1-5 is used to quantify the data;
- The data collected after the quantification are processed with – StatPack for windows.

## Conclusion and Recommendations

The role of Higher Education Institutions in enhancing sustainable development has been recognized worldwide. One only needs to cite the fact that many of our reputable men and women in different walks of life are products of institutions of higher education. Institutions of higher education stand at the apex of the education system as a place for the pursuit and dissemination of knowledge, skills, attitudes and values. However, the continuous market shifts and the corresponding need for flexible curricula development in Albania, for example, has been a key reason for the “fatigue” of these institutions to play a truly effective role in sustainable development.

Higher Education Institutes represents the adequate structure for implementing the basic principles of sustainable development. The decision-makers of the academic community must adapt innovative curricula/syllabuses for any education program; use innovative tools and methodologies in learning process and/or research activities; identify effective solution for the use of natural resources; environment protection; promote and implement the concept of energy save and generate of skills according to the market needs.

The successful combination of the successful Universities is the change management toward new challenges using adequate academic managerial practices.

Universities must educate the future corporate leaders and their employees with the conviction that the adoption of business development strategies incorporating principles of sustainable development is a “win win” situation.

Overall, in the last two decades, universities along the globe are adopting mission statements addressing challenges that springs out of the societal evolution into the future.

Within this framework, there are some tendencies or preferential approaches, which aims to fulfil the objectives and stakeholder expectations that are in line with sustainable development.

Firstly, universities are been seen as a source for creating high tech companies (start-ups). Based in link among science-technology and universities, HEI are crossing over from merely teaching and research activities to a more advanced and active role, developing executive modules and/or short-training aiming at creating –swiftly- the skills market requires. This is the first recommendation of this paper.

A fast and reliable way to foster the links among academic community and business community is academic consulting. Academic consulting offers supervision, expertise and/or professional advice to business/start-ups. Academic consultancy allows HEI to train their students in issues not –closely linked- to curricula in practical issues. This network would contribute to furthering the implementation of new management practices incorporating sustainable development approaches i.e. internships in these consulting firms. This is the second recommendation of this paper.

An additional method, which may be considered as a preferential tendency among the academic community, is the establishment within the HEI of the student entrepreneurial forum. This mechanism is useful for supporting, development and nourishing of the entrepreneurial idea among the student body, especially among students and graduates (alumni). These entities may undertake different activities that aim to stimulate and promote the entrepreneurial idea; organizing trainings, support start-ups, comprehend business plans, etc, the underlining idea: to consider the alumni community a value added, community that always has to offer.

The main recommendation of this paper is the finalization of the inter institutional cooperation among HEI vis a vis the sustainable development. As stated above, the objectives of sustainable development in the education field, thus HEI, are holistic in their approach and inter institutional cooperation is a pre-condition for reaching these objectives. This approach comprises multifarious benefits not only for HEI but also for the establishment of a collective reasoning for sustainable development. The aforementioned cooperation initially is proposed to take the form of a Joint Statement of the HEI community in Albania.

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