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**Article**

## Sustainable university: Concept and conception

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# THE SUSTAINABLE UNIVERSITY – CONCEPT AND CONCEPTION –

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“*Sustainable University*” is a kind of phrase to emanate a semantic scent with connotations – traced back to an ages-old polarity, yet always at great fashion in social affairs – seemingly both *conservative* and *progressive*. Really? Can we so frivolously mix polarities, opposites, antinomies? Well, let’s see. We are talking about conservatism because university and sustainability are involved in activating if not an “instinct”, at least a “rationale” for preserving/perpetuating the *knowledge* within people and the *resources* needed to make it work. As we are also talking about progressivism because both try to do it not in ankylosis, but in *advancing* such knowledge (i.e., in economics, on the allocation of scarce resources) *across generations*, and the society learns to evolve through each and every member, who is educated to evaluate. Conservation and progress can work together.

Before we return to this polarity that grinds, for an enduring while, both the profound and profane spirits, we can gloss over a *double duality*. The “sustainable university” is a concept that can be conceived in a “double-crossing” manner (here not used in a duplicitous sense, but reading the syntagma starting from each of the two ends of that pair of terms), whilst “there are as many opinions as there are heads” (“*Quot capita tot sententiae/sensus*” – as in the human head even the most objective representations can be moulded upon the utmost subjectivity with which people picture things *in foro interno*: “one way or another”). Hence, for the reader who has not yet lost patience with this exercise of terminological forensics (yet specific to the university world), let us “break the concept down to (doubly dual) pieces”.

(1 & 2) As for the “double-crossing”, things can stay this way. If we glue the *sustainable* adjective to the *university* noun, we speak about this particular educational institution that seeks to impregnate itself with one attribute at great value today, the one speaking of “intergenerational responsibility”, understood in terms of “rationalizing”, “relating” and “reproducing” the ultimately scarce (environmental) resources. If we glue the two words vice versa, we suggest that the university assumes the didactics/pedagogy of and the advanced research in sustainability, beyond the power of its own example – an exercise in civic education and culture, in a world where ensuring a clean environment, reducing pollution and the excessive use of raw materials, avoiding waste and encouraging responsible consumption are also grounds for keen reflection as are topics to be (re)learned.

(3 & 4) As for the “plural views”, we are living a painted landscape in which we must position ourselves in various and colourful... dualities. We can be either believers or freethinkers (regarding the big questions and small answers of the world and life), either idealistic or realistic (regarding the expectations of human nature), either hedonic or stoic (regarding the joys of existence), whether liberal or statist (regarding the ultimate anchors of the social order); and pairs of this kind are endless. We could as well be conservatives –

but of what kind?: thorough traditionalists or rough reactionaries?, followers of the sanctity of individual rights or preservers of sinful privileges? – or progressives – but of what kind?: enlightened modernists or moral relativists?, real liberators or chimerical equalizers? The sustainable university is *volens nolens* part of this symmetrical world, full of asymmetrical interpretations.

The present issue of the *Amfiteatru Economic* journal rather discusses the idea of the “sustainable university” in its narrow sense (the ecological one), but without eliminating the possibility of leading the discussion towards the broader sense of a “social ecosystem” of which the school that wants to educate for and to display a sustainable behaviour is part and parcel. And the supply (of articles) fully honoured the (editorial) demand.

The opening article proposed such a generalization, somehow “iconoclastic” in relation to the “canon” of the “green”/“eco” understanding of the “sustainable university”. Titling **“Citadel of Science” and “Cathedral of Conscience”: The University, as Institution, Was Born to Be Concerned with Sustainable Knowledge, Long Before Sustainability Became a Universal Concern**, the article discriminates, in an original manner, between the “old sustainability” of the university (the one conferred by the authentic academic tradition) and the “new sustainability” (that of environmental genre). The authors point out that the “new” one, politically fetishized, in a false-progressive, egalitarian, collectivist vein, risks to erode the “old” variety – the profound one, of the scholarly tradition, which engages the individual by cultivating him, and does not enslave him, by inculcation of ideological bias.

In the study **Stakeholders’ Perception Regarding Sustainable Universities**, the authors aim at the determination and confirmation of the main vectors that characterize the concept of “sustainable university” (here in the ecological conventional sense) on the concrete example of a representative academic institution for Romanian economic higher education.

Also, following an empirical research, carried out in the Romanian university environment, the authors of the article **Education for Sustainable Development – An Evaluation of Students’ Perceptions within the Bucharest University of Economic Studies** conclude that among the trainee economists, the awareness of this particular matter in their professional becoming is rather in an early stage. In the same spirit, the study **Sustainability Barriers and Motivations in Higher Education – A Students’ Perspective**, realized in the same institutional ambience, argues that the involvement of the teaching staff remains an aspect to be worked on in order to obtain an activation of the students’ sense of sustainability. As well, the survey **Social Responsibility, a Key Dimension in Developing a Sustainable Higher Education Institution: The Case of Students’ Motivation**, whose results encourage the idea of “sustainability through social responsibility” in the university space, has been carried out in the perimeter of the same educational entity.

To evaluate the framing of the university strategies in the sustainability orderliness, the authors of the research **Analysis and Modelling of Influence Factors in the Configuration of a Sustainable University. Case Study: “Ștefan cel Mare” University of Suceava** conducted an exploratory investigation, the results of which were processed through factorial analysis and logistic regression in SPSS v.20. On similar coordinates, the research **Identifying the Promoters of Students’ Sustainable Behaviour: An Empirical Study**, carried out under the auspices of the BBU Cluj-Napoca, used the “theory of planned behaviour”, from the field of social psychology, which links the attitudes of the individuals to their behaviours.

Entitled **Sustainable Universities, from Indifference to Joint Action – A Panel Data Analysis**, the article conducts an investigation of the intensity of the influence that the five

criteria for assessing the degree of sustainability at university level through the Universitas Indonesia GreenMetric system exert on the final score of the ranking, highlighting both good practices and improvement leverages in the field. The authors of the study **How Do Students Assess the Sustainability of Their University? A Comparison between Dutch and Romanian Students from Business Schools** acted in the sense of international and inter-institutional comparisons, noting that the inter-community dialogue on sustainability matters does lead to the increase of the intra-community degree of responsibility.

The authors of the research **Determinants of Economic Sustainability in Higher Education Institutions** deal with the link between the performance of higher education institutions and their economic sustainability, insisting that economic analysis remains the common denominator of any sustainability assessments. The objective of the study **Sustainable University Development through Sustainable Human Resources and Corporate Entrepreneurship: The Role of Sustainable Innovation and Work Environment** is to “x-ray” one of the universities in Poland through the sustainability of the key-factor of production, seen both in the hypostasis of “labour force” and in the one of “entrepreneurial spirit”. As for the article **Students’ Perceptions of Sustainable Universities in Hungary: An Importance-Performance Analysis**, it advocates the transformation of traditional universities into sustainable higher education institutions of the “fourth generation”.

Starting from the University Impact Rankings surveying the “sustainable development goals”, the authors of the study **The Efficiency of Universities in Achieving Sustainable Development Goals** analyse the institutions that obtained high scores, noting that they distinguished themselves by the fact that they make two categories of activities co-potentiating: on the one hand, scientific research, and, on the other, the elements that are supposed to fertilize the scientific environment, by cultivating gender equality, access to quality education, awareness of climate change, good coexistence and prosperity.

Last but not least, the research **The Importance of Academic New Ventures for Sustainable Regional Development** shows that sustainable measures, especially start-up and spin-off academic companies, are an important driver of innovation, essential in the sustainable development of the university, thus having a major role in sustainable economic growth (be it local, national or regional).

What is remarkable about the aforementioned contributions is the fact that they problematize a concept, that of the “sustainable university”, which before being enthusiastically adopted, must be accepted with discernment. Only in this way will the reality inspired by that generous concept be able to aspire to sustainability. Be it only for the mere bringing under the same editorial envelope, of a periodical-pennant of the Romanian economic literature, *Amfiteatru Economic*, published under the dome of the **Bucharest University of Economic Studies**, we witness a living proof of the concern of this university for (self-)knowledge. Responsible, (self-)knowledge remains the basis of sustainability, inside and outside the “school”. Regardless of whether we consider ourselves “reflective” or are categorized as “refractory”, the need to always be critical and creative in our thinking is vital to our sustainability and to the one of the university we serve, whatever its name, space and time out of which it draws its legacy and its educational-cultural matrix.

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