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**Higher Education Taking Action Towards the Sustainable Development Goals:
Perspectives from Asia and Europe**

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## Internationalization Helps Universities Work Towards SDGs

Universities play an important role in helping the world reach the Sustainable Development Goals (hereinafter SDG),[1] which were presented by the United Nations (hereinafter UN) in 2015. The SDGs are 17 goals on sustainability that the UN aims for the world to reach by 2030.[2]

The internationalization, which we experience in the world today, should be able to help universities work towards the SDGs in my opinion. Of course, the internationalization can help universities to teach and do research on all of the SDGs so they can help make the entire world a better place through this aspect. However, in this article, I will only argue on five SDGs, which I see that the internationalization could directly help universities to achieve. These are SDG 4 (Quality Education), 5 (Gender Equality), 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth), 10 (Reduced Inequality), and 17 (Partnerships for the Goals).[3]

I would like to argue why SDG 5 (Gender Equality) and 10 (Reduced inequality) are important to universities, as well as how internationalization makes reaching the goals easier. I have gathered these two SDGs to create a unified understanding of equality in gender, race, nationality, financial means, family background, etc. By working with SDG 5 and 10, universities can also make an impact on SDG 4 (Quality Education) and 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth). Surely, all universities are interested in providing quality education, as this is one of the core tasks of universities. I am also confident, that universities are interested in providing decent work to its staff as well as contributing to economic growth by both employment and research.

To provide the best service and performance of core tasks, universities should have diversity and equality in their staff. This will ensure a good and safe environment for

[1] Svindborg, Carina Lykke (2019). Interview with Aalborg University Pro-Rector Inger Askhave on April 12, 2019. Available at: https://arc7studentsforum.slack.com/files/UG6SH5DUJ/FHZ2QRKGX/sdgs_aau.pdf (Last accessed 16.04.2019).

[2] Sustainable Development Goals Knowledge Platform (n.d.). Sustainable Development Goals. Available at: https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/?menu=1300 (Last accessed 16.04.2019).

[3] Ibid.

everyone, as well as it will ensure that universities have all of the facilities that their students and researchers may need. In order to ensure equality, the universities should make sure to have equal pay for men and women, as well as equal opportunities for paternity leave. Further, universities should be front-runners for the market, by ensuring a good work environment and pay, which will also contribute to an overall economic growth.

In terms of education, universities must ensure that everyone has equal opportunities to receive quality education. Of course, there should be no discrimination based on gender, race and the like. There should be room for a diverse and international student body. This is one of the points where internationalization can really make a difference in universities. Having an international student body creates cultural awareness and adaptability, give different perspectives, bring new research, etc.[4] According to my own experience as a Danish student in Malaysia, it can also inspire students to work with sustainable development in mind themselves later on in the workplace, as they get to experience the issue from a new perspective. On the point of equality in quality education, making education affordable and accessible is also an important task. I do understand that not all countries are willing to implement the same system as we have in Denmark, where education is paid by taxes and students get paid by the government while studying, but making education affordable is important as it contributes to social development in any country.[5] One way that internationalization and technological development can contribute to making education affordable and accessible is through the use of online university courses. Some universities such as Stanford, Harvard, UC Berkeley, and MIT are already doing this.[6] These programs are a way that makes affordable quality education available to anyone with an internet connection, which requires little effort from the universities. In this way, internationalizing the university experience could help top universities create development all over the world, as the online-students can go out and implement what they learned into society, no matter where in the world they are.

Also, in research, equality is important to universities, as the research body sets the standard for what is being researched and developed. It shows, that often researchers will develop solutions that they need themselves and that fits to themselves.[7] An example of this can be seen in A.I. and face recognition, which for white men is correct 99% of the time, while the same only goes for 65% of women with darker skintones.[8] So in order to have solutions to fit the entire world, the research body must represent the entire world. For universities, internationalization could serve as a solution to this issue by ensuring diversity

4 INOMICS Team (2014). The Benefits of International Students for Universities. Available at: https://inomics.com/insight/the-benefits-of-international-students-for-universities-282052 (Last accessed 16.04.2019).
5 King, Elizabeth (2011). Education is Fundamental to Development and Growth. Available at: http://blogs.worldbank.org/education/energy/education-is-fundamental-to-development-and-growth (Last Accessed 16.04.2019).
6 Weedmark, David (2018). Universities with Great Open-Courseware Online Programs. Available at: https://www.thebalancecareers.com/open-courseware-tech-programs-2071386 (Last Accessed 16.04.2019).
7 Svindborg. Op. Cit.
8 Lohr, Steve (2018). Facial Recognition is Accurate, if You're a White Guy. Available at: https://www.nytimes.com/2018/02/09/technology/facial-recognition-race-artificial-intelligence.html (Last Accessed 16.04.2019).

and partnerships in research.

The inclusion of SDG 17 (Partnerships for the Goals), seems to be quite simple. Internationalization as well as technological development has made it easier for universities from all over the world to create partnerships and stay in touch. I am aware that universities are already in partnership though university networks, exchange agreements, research collaborations, etc. However, I do believe that universities should explore the options in online communication to inspire each other, and share inputs and knowledge about working towards sustainability. I see this as an important initiative to make as (1) it will save time for university staff, (2) it will be better for the environment as networks will not have to be transported to one location in order to work together, and (3) this new and easier accessibility to partners will make universities more likely to actively work together on reaching the SDGs.

Of course, working with sustainable development will be an expense for universities, no matter if they work towards the five goals mentioned in this article, or any other SDG. However, I believe that sustainable development should be seen as a necessary investment, because not only will it provide universities with a way to improve the world, but it can even prove to be a solid business case. Sustainable development has become a hot topic, which also means that more students have demands for sustainability in their education, and later on in their work life.[9] This means that universities will be more attractive to potential students as well as employees by proving themselves as an institution ready to take action on the issue of sustainability.

This article only presents one argument and example about how universities can work towards the SDGs, but there are many other examples to be found. The SDGs are completely intertwined, and for this reason, it is not possible to only work isolated on one or a few SDGs as they all affect each other or even facilitate each other in one way or another. It is important too that universities take the SDGs into account both in teaching, research, daily operations and partnerships, and work actively towards reaching them as the universities have the knowledge and capability to work with the goals, which also leaves them with a responsibility to do so.[10]

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9  The Alliance for Sustainability Leadership in Education. (2013). Students want more on sustainable development from their higher education careers. Available at: https://www.eauc.org.uk/students_want_more_on_sustainable_development_f (Last accessed on 16.04.2019).

10 Svindborg. Op. Cit.

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