



7th ASEF Rectors' Conference and Students' Forum (ARC7)

Students' Forum: 11–14 May 2019 | Rectors' Conference: 12–14 May 2019
Bucharest, Romania

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



Interview | Conducted by Dāvis Freidenfelds Promotion of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) In Higher Education Institutions

Interviewer – Dāvis Freidenfelds. Student at Riga Technical University (RTU). Passionate about sustainability and corporate social responsibility.

Interviewee – Artūrs Zeps. Vice-Rector for Strategic Development. He is the one responsible for corporate responsibility, sustainable planning and public support activities at RTU.

Why? As the topic chosen was governance of higher education institutions in context of sustainability, it made sense to interview person who is responsible for development and sustainability at the same time. Also, Artūrs is quite responsive person, who has been before student representative.



Artūrs Zeps

Riga Technical University (RTU) Vice-Rector for Strategic Development

What is “corporate social responsibility”?

It's the ability to think not only about the primary thing of an organization, but also integration of stakeholder interests, environmental interests.

RTU recently organized a conference about “changes for sustainable higher education”. What is sustainable higher education and is it connected to CSR?

There are common things. Sustainable education has several dimensions. RTU looks towards study content, ways of learning and teaching, research and other projects which promote sustainability. In Latvia sustainability is understood sometimes as a long-term run. There is synergy between these terms, but sometimes it's more from economic perspective. It's important how you manage to combine sustainable development and being on top. You have to ensure that all these aspects are incorporated into strategy.

Keep on working without reducing output. The fact that even if the organization is not changing the environment around is. First step of strategy creation is environmental analysis. This is not a question about recycling, but about whole environment - all the factors that affects. Have to take into account when creating goals.

How does CSR is included in the RTU daily activities?

I have a feeling that rather strongly. RTU has their own goals and activities. We do see ourselves as partners for organizations in Latvian level. We create eco-system with other organizations who care as well, therefore RTU becomes part of their strategy regarding CSR that ensure achieving more. There is a wide range of activities. Alumni association has different activities as well. Teaching staff regularly participate in projects or activities where they give their knowledge and experience to the society - starting with startups and ending with Riga's territorial urban planning. Giving back to society probably is the biggest return.

From all the different examples in RTU regarding CSR is there an example that makes you proud?

Two projects from RTU Development Fund. Summer internships for those students who before didn't have the opportunity to. And social scholarships. This year scholarships were targeted to first year students as this was a section which was less supported. Therefore these scholarships helped mostly newcomers from regions.

You are responsible for corporate responsibility, sustainable planning and public support activities. What does it include?

I'm the one responsible for strategy and part of the activities are included in strategy which means that I'm the one who is coordinating events in university. Such as Green Kīpsala (RTU campus). Benchmarking and bringing ideas to RTU for further consideration and potential implementation.

CSR is not regulated in Latvia. Should it be regulated and why?

You can't push a person to love Raini (famous Latvian poet). I would say that creating regulation would be a stick. Carrot or motivation would work better. RTU has acquired e-auto in state funded financial instrument for climate change.

This would be some sort of culture change inside the organization?

For sure. People follow good examples.

What part of CSR implementation in HEi is hard and easy?

Hard - lack of understanding and initiatives might require extra funding. Also the fact that it's hard to see added benefit from these activities straight away. These things are done for greater good. Easy - informing on individual level. It's not possible to change this at a glance on institutional level, but this knowledge is with employees that produce added value.

How the process of implementation could be improved?

Good practice examples would work. Participation in sustainability index helps to evaluate performance. CSR would be at the top of the Maslow pyramid, therefore lack of higher education funding interferes.

RTU is a state HEI. Should there be mechanisms from state side to promote CSR?

Job number 1 would be for ministry to follow CSR principles as they could be a role model. There should be examples of good things that show that state care as well.

Sustainable development is related to CSR. RTU has joined UN SDGs. How would you evaluate achievement of these goals in a scale from 1 to 10?

You should look at each of the SDGs individually. They are divided into levels - institutional (research, education) and study direction (urban architecture and planning, water etc). Every goal is not closely linked to the SDGs, but thanks to SDGs we have acknowledged another way to look at this question. Overall the grade would be between 6 and 8 depending on each of the goals.

Are there any negative aspects from SDG achievement?

If the achievement is connected to costs, then you have to discuss and prove that e.g. one state budget funded place or scholarship is more important than SDG achievement. Therefore, prioritization and justification.

What is your behest to students?

Understand what is CSR and understand that it does not begin with institution, but with every individual.