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

#ARC7



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Student Sustainable Entrepreneurship

Sustainable development is a concept that first appeared in 1987 as the Brundtland report "Our common Future" came out. Since then many definitions have been given to sum up this concept. The most common definition used today is "Sustainable development is development that meets the needs of the present generation without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs." (International Institute for Sustainable Development, u.k.). Sustainability in the three dimensions- economic, social and environmental- is the foundation for Agenda 2030 and its seventeen sustainable development goals (SDGs). A crucial way to reach the SDGs by 2030 is innovation in all three dimensions of sustainability. That is where the concept of "Sustainable Entrepreneurship" comes into the picture and tries to create the foundation for reaching the global goals by 2030.

Entrepreneurship can be defined as the act of satisfying the unfulfilled needs of the people or society, or the act of improving the way that these needs are currently being met. Entrepreneurship has, traditionally and strongly, been directly related to economic growth and therefore both environmental damage and negative social impact. (Greco and de Jong, 2017). That is the main difference between entrepreneurship and sustainable entrepreneurship. Sustainable entrepreneurship has not yet been defined, but in a report of Thomas J. Dean and Jeffery S. McMullen they explain it as the combination of two different entrepreneurship branches: social and environmental entrepreneurship. Furthermore, economic profit is not the drive for these entrepreneurs (Dean and McMullen, 2007).

I don't agree with this definition where sustainable development is based on all three dimensions and thus economic profit should be a part of these entrepreneurial ideas in order for them to be self-financing and sustainable. Being profit-driven should not make an entrepreneurial idea any less sustainable, on the contrary, it makes it even more sustainable as economic profit creates jobs and growth; therefore, creating a future for the coming generations as well. In other words, the balance between economic health as in the profit of the entrepreneurial idea, social equity as in the people having the need and environmental resilience as in not taking too much of the planet in order to fulfill a need is the definition of sustainable entrepreneurship (Hockerts and Wüstenhagen, 2010).

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Sustainable development ranks high on the political agenda of many countries worldwide, but many barriers appear still too intricate to address the solutions solidly as political decisions don't really address the core problems, unlike sustainable entrepreneurship which targets them from their base. It goes through and tackles the problem through innovative ways that changes people's perspective and behavior. The society, including people responsible for the higher educational system, has realized that technical innovations alone are not sufficient to address the pressing challenges of today. New measures should be taken to address climate change, resource depletion, economic deprivation, poverty alleviation, increased migration and improved life quality; nonetheless more new ideas that tackle these problems with social innovative thinking through the creation of new products, services, markets, processes, etc. that meets the social need as well as the economic and environmental for a balanced sustainable development. Many initiatives have been taken to address these issues and encourage students to get involved with innovative ideas and start companies or projects that helps the development in the right direction.

I would like to focus on initiatives in Stockholm, Sweden and more specifically in my university, Royal Institute of Technology (KTH) which is one of the top universities within engineering and science in Europe. Being just focused on engineering, KTH has also identified the importance of combining the technical innovation with the social impact. Several projects and organizations that encourage students to become more innovative and come up with new sustainable business ideas. One of the most inspiring projects is "Innovation Week", which aims to fill the gap between students and businesses within the field of innovation, through giving students the opportunity to connect with companies and follow their paths through both intrapreneurship and entrepreneurship. (THS Future 1a, u.k.) Another project organized by THS future is "Entrepreneurial Days" which aims to inspire KTH students to think entrepreneurially, inform them about entrepreneurship and connect them with companies from the entrepreneurship world that can help them in starting their own sustainable companies. (THS Future 1b, u.k.).

The last project that I would like to highlight is "Green Week" which aims to create a better future by connecting young talents with the leading actors within sustainability by inspiring students through networking and interaction with professionals working within different fields with sustainable development. (THS Future 1c, u.k.) Another organization, outside of KTH, that I would like to highlight is ASAP 2030 (A Sustainability Acceleration Project 2030) which is a project accelerator, helping and training students with entrepreneurial ideas that helps in reaching the global goals. (ASAP2030, u.k.)

Being part of such an environment and hearing inspiring speakers often has led me to forget about the importance of these initiatives and that is why I chose to highlight them here where other students can be inspired and maybe start something similar in their own universities or cities. Innovative ideas as these are usually considered to be social entrepreneurial ideas but I would say that these

ideas are sustainable entrepreneurial innovative ideas that encourage and inspire others to come up with their own sustainable ideas as well.

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