



Ecology Awareness of Sustainable Green Development: Collaboration of  
Universities and Local Actors

2023-1-SK01-KA220-HED-000161639

FOCUS GROUP INTERVIEW REPORT

POLAND



Co-funded by  
the European Union



UNIRI



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## FOCUS GROUP INTERVIEW OBJECTIVES

The data collection and content development processes for ECOUNTRY GUIDE AND ACTION PLAN include three focus group interviews and a comparative analysis based on the country-based legal practices regarding environmental protection and SGD.

The first leg of the data collection process comprises Focus Group Interviews with:

- University employees who work with external stakeholders (NGOs, local authorities) daily in researching and disseminating knowledge on environmental issues
- External stakeholders who cooperate with project team members
- Undergraduate students to identify areas where the cooperation between universities and external stakeholders, including NGOs and local authorities, can be improved and to determine the expectations from universities about the forms and content

Focusing on organising 3 focus group interviews with HEI employees, NGO and local authority representatives and students the data will be collected regarding the inquiry about what should universities do and how should they take action to contribute to more interactions with other local actors to ensure sustainable green development.



# WORKSHOP PROGRAMME

## Focus Group Interviews:

- **Welcome and introductions:** Focus Group Moderators briefly introduce the project, focus group interview objectives, and participants.
- **Presentations:** FGI moderators deliver brief presentations on relevant topics as follows:
  - o A better understanding of the expectations of stakeholders in relation to universities' collaborations with local actors.
  - o Insight into the motivations and barriers to university local actor collaborations in environmental protection and sustainability activities, and the potential strategies for increasing cooperation.
  - o University student engagement in local actors' SGD activities.
- **Brainstorming and group discussions:** Participants encourage participants for focused discussions based on prepared questions.
- **Data provision:** Participants capture key insights and ideas from discussions using designated note-takers, voice recorders, or collaborative online tools.
- **Wrap-up and feedback:** Participants summarize key points and answer questions.

## Post-FGI:

- **Data analysis and report writing:** Each partner institution uses the pre-defined templates to prepare a FGI report summarizing discussions, findings, and insights.
- **Dissemination**
- Share FGI reports internally and externally through project website, publications.

# EXPECTED FGI OUTCOMES

## **Process-Oriented Outcomes:**

Focus on the workshop experience itself and how it facilitates interaction and learning:

- Facilitating the dynamics of discussions within groups
- Creating a safe space for open communication
- Highlighting successful initiatives and approaches already implemented by different stakeholders
- Revealing barriers to university local actor collaborations and students' engagement within the scope of SGD.

## **Results-Oriented Outcomes:**

Focus on the tangible outputs and impacts of the workshop:

- Generating 3 detailed FGI reports containing data analysis, key findings, and actionable recommendations for university and local actors' collaborations in each partner country
- Fostering ongoing communication and exchange of best practices between stakeholder groups through networking platforms or joint projects
- Influencing local policies or university regulations to incorporate collaborations
- Encouraging broader community participation in sustainable green development efforts
- Contributing to the literature to provide scientific data and inspire further research.



# WORKSHOP QUESTIONS

## Discussion threads with Local Actors (Including NGOs, municipalities, city councils, business communities)

1. What is your organisation's experience to date in working with universities?
  - *Do you cooperate with the university?*
  - *Since when has there been cooperation? Who initiated it?*
  - *What are the thematic areas of cooperation? Did it concern climate and environmental policy?*
  - *What were the forms of this cooperation?*
  - *Is cooperation formalised?*
2. Identified benefits and added value from this collaboration:
  - *Does such cooperation produce results / is it effective?*
  - *What are the key benefits of such cooperation?*
  - *Could these benefits be greater? How do you assess this?*
  - *What are the biggest costs (problems) of the cooperation undertaken?*
3. Barriers identified:
  - *What are the most important barriers to cooperation? What are these barriers (legal, organisational, administrative, mental)?*
  - *How do you manage to overcome these barriers?*
  - *Do the barriers motivate you to improve it, or to stop cooperation?*
  - *How do you avoid these barriers? Can you share your experiences in this regard?*
4. Desired future directions:
  - *If your cooperation with the university has not taken place so far, what are your expectations regarding the scope and forms of cooperation?*
  - *Which of the following areas of cooperation will be most important in the future (ask participants to rank and justify their prioritisation):*
    - o *smart cities*
    - o *sustainable finance*
    - o *green economy*
    - o *green agriculture*
    - o *healthy cities*
    - o *other*
5. Closing the discussion – *ask two questions to wrap up the discussion:*
  - *Are universities still needed for environmental protection? To what extent and in what area?*
  - *What knowledge and competences can modern universities teach?*

# DATA ANALYSIS & FINDINGS

## FGI Process and the Data Collected

### *FGI with Local Actors*

FGI Date: **16.01.2025**

Venue: **Lodz City Hall**

Online/Face to Face/Hybrid: **Face to Face**

Number of Participants: **20**

Type of Organisation: Environmental Agency (2) City Council Member (1) Municipality Officers (7) Regional Public Administrators (4) NGO's (5), Cultural Institution (1)

The FGI was attended by representatives of various entities shaping development processes on a local, regional and supra-regional scale, i.e.:

Lodz City Hall – 7 Municipality Officers (City Activity Office 4 persons, Revitalization Office 2 persons, Culture Department 1),

Lodzkie Region Spatial Planning Office – 3 persons,

Regional Environmental Protection and Water Management Fund in Lodz –2 persons,

City Council of Lodz Member – 1 person

City Social Welfare Centre in Lodz – 1 person

Representatives of non-governmental organizations – 5 people

Museum of Science and Technology EC1 in Lodz – 1 person

### *Findings:*

#### **1. Organisations' experience in working with universities?**

All participants are involved in cooperation with the University of Lodz. However, their experiences in this respect vary, both in terms of the form of cooperation and its substantive scope. The cooperation covers a wide range of initiatives and activities. Common areas of cooperation include:

- apprenticeships and internships for students and PhD students,
- teaching activities co-taught by representatives of the socio-economic environment,
- guest lectures and debates,
- co-organization and implementation of scientific and popular science events,
- providing source materials, information, reports and reports for the purposes of research and work carried out by students and academics,

- implementation of scientific and practice-oriented projects.

An important area of cooperation is the participation of representatives of the socio-economic environment in teams, commissions, opinion and advisory boards in the improvement and development of study curriculum.

The motives for cooperation, as well as the initiative for its implementation, depend on the specific activity of the entity the interviewees represented. Among the main motives for cooperation, the following are indicated: seeking staff support in the implementation of current tasks, the desire to acquire new knowledge, a real impact on shaping the competences of a potential employee and checking his/her qualifications in each area of activity (use of modern IT tools and software) and image creation.

In general, the cooperation of entities from the socio-economic environment with the University of Lodz and its Faculties is realized through two paths: formal and informal. Formal cooperation is based on contracts, agreements, or letters of intent on cooperation. In the case of apprenticeships, internships, the provisions are detailed and very precise. Informal cooperation is based on internal agreements between persons representing the cooperating entities. Such cooperation is complementary to formal one and concerns areas not covered by a formal agreement. For some persons, only informal cooperation is also identified, consisting of e.g.: study visits, lectures, workshops, sharing information and materials.

The cooperation takes place on a continuous, periodic or cyclical basis. It also includes individual activities of universities or external stakeholders. The duration of cooperation depends on the scope and topic of the cooperation. In continuous mode, cooperation is most often carried out within the framework of apprenticeships and internships. In addition, representatives of socio-economic entities are members of Curriculum Councils for individual fields of study, Business Councils, University/Department Advisory Councils (Table 1).

**Table 1. Selected examples of the substantive and temporal scope of cooperation realized**

Institution	Permanent cooperation (continuous)	Cyclical cooperation	Occasional cooperation
Łódź City Hall, City Activity Office	Internships Participation of municipal representatives in the Faculty Teaching Committee for the EcoCity university programme	Practical activities carried out as part of individual subjects	The 2 <sup>nd</sup> Lodz Citizens' Assembly (2nd ŁCA), titled "How to reduce harmful greenhouse gas emissions in Lodz by 55 per cent by 2030?"  Paid and unpaid traineeships as part of projects  Implementation of urban projects within the UNIC network (European University of Cities in Post-Industrial Transition, UNIC 2.0)
Lodzkie Region Spatial Planning Office	Internships Participation of the Office's representatives in the External Stakeholder Council of the Institute of Spatial Economy at the Faculty of Economics and Sociology of the University of Lodz	Annual event dedicated to students and academic staff as well as primary and secondary school students entitled Landscape Day, GIS Day	Participation in consultations of strategic documents, e.g. Landscape Audit
Museum of Science and Technology EC1 in Lodz	Internships	Annual national conference 'Youth for Climate'	Student volunteering at EC1 events

Source: own elaboration.

The University of Lodz and research staff also support the activities of socio-economic actors. The University of Lodz Foundation together with scientists-experts from UL organized and implemented the 2nd Lodz Citizens' Panel. Currently, academics and students participated in the design and implementation of a new urban climate policy instrument, the **Eco-budget for Lodz**. This is a demonstration task carried out as a pioneer within the UNIC 2.0 network. Members of the academic community, both academics and students, support the activities of non-governmental organizations through substantive engagement as well as voluntary work.

The substantive scope of cooperation is therefore very broad and concerns issues of: environmental protection, fair city development, diagnosis of local needs, financing the development of the city and its functional area, social participation, economic activation, cultural offer of the city, spatial planning, public

spaces, social inclusion, educational policy, implementation of investments in the city, eco-innovation, eco-clusters, energy efficiency and others.

## **2. Identified benefits and added value from this collaboration**

An important aspect of the cooperation is the implementation of joint teaching, research and implementation projects that bring mutual benefits to the university and external stakeholders. Entities from the socio-economic environment indicated among the benefits of cooperation:

1. Acquiring new and expanding existing knowledge:
  - academics and students conducting research for bachelor's and master's theses and credit projects provide knowledge that can be a source of inspiration and an impulse for change
  - cooperation with the academic environment allows for demonstration testing and prototyping of solutions, provides innovative and pioneering solutions that may be a new path for the entity's activities.
  - use of open meetings, invitations to conferences, seminars, workshops and often their co-organization
2. Having a real impact on the future professional credentials – involving students (trainees, apprentices) in specific tasks and processes, allows the formation of staff, potential future employees and the identification of their predispositions and qualifications in each professional area
3. Networking and relationship building for the implementation of current and future projects, activities and initiatives.

Among the benefits indicated were those related to promotion and marketing, which we can consider through the prism of image building, branding, openness and inclusiveness. However, it should be mentioned that these were not indicated as dominant.

The dominant benefit of cooperation indicated by all participants in the study is the building of relational capital, knowledge sharing, dissemination of good practices and integration of activities. As emphasized, it is particularly important to shorten the distance between science and practice and to work together by developing common solutions in practice.

## **3. Barriers identified**

During the FGI, some minor constraints and difficulties of cooperation were identified. However, no critical roadblocks were identified that would prevent cooperation. Among the limitations identified, we can distinguish four groups:

1. organizational and procedural constraints related to institutional conditions, i.e. document circulation, sequence of activities, imprecise and inconsistent legislation
2. Generational gap and passive attitude of modern students. The following were identified as important threats in this group:
  - communication language of the youth,
  - deficit of interpersonal relations,
  - lack of independence in decision-making,
  - lack of critical thinking,
  - following established patterns of action,
  - difficulties in adapting students to the conditions of an internship or placement (hours, duties, work evaluation, implementation of delegated tasks),
3. Development of AI technology, which on the one hand is helpful and useful in many areas of professional work, but on the other hand limits the independence and activity of young people
4. Limited budget or deficit of financial resources for starting paid internships and apprenticeships, developing joint projects.

In the avoidance and reduction of institutional barriers, an important role is played by the UŁ units, at different organizational levels of the University, which support and monitor the process of cooperation. They include:

- at the level of the Rector's Office of the University – the Centre for Education and Student Affairs – the Career and Student Activity Office Team,
- at Faculty level - there is a Training and Placement Centre at the Faculty of Economics and Sociology at the University of Lodz, which coordinates cooperation with entities from the business and institutional environment to support practical training and career development of students,
- at the level of the Institutes which are responsible for didactics at individual faculties – the External Stakeholder Council at the Professional practice, Participation of the Bureau's representatives in the External Stakeholder Council of the Institute of Spatial Economy at the Faculty of Economics and Sociology of the University of Lodz,

Projects financed by the European Union, Norwegian funds or national funds (e.g. the Regional Environmental Protection and Water Management Fund in Lodz) play an important role in reducing barriers and stimulating cooperation.

In conclusion, it can be said that the identified threats are mainly of a technical nature and can be reduced. A difficult problem that requires attention from external stakeholders and universities is the adaptation of education to the needs of the modern student. In an era of information noise, fake news, cyber threats and

new challenges of the modern world (war, migration, climate crisis), it is crucial to reorient education and to direct particular attention to social competences.

Raising students' environmental and civic awareness is a key prerequisite for building social competences.

### **3. Desired future directions on cooperation with university**

The previous experience of cooperation between the entities surveyed and its organizational and substantive scope varies. These different perspectives made it possible to outline areas for developing and strengthening cooperation, but also for establishing new cooperation. The initiation of cooperation with entities from the socio-economic environment in the field of knowledge dissemination of good practices was indicated as very important. In addition, attention was drawn to the need to reorient the educational process in terms of content and organization in the face of the confessions of the modern world, identified threats and risks. Cooperation around education is necessary. Extensive cooperation with external entities and active forms of classes are important for students, as they enable them to shape their ability to perceive and analyze cause-and-effect relationships and the complexity of phenomena. Classes conducted with the participation of practitioners should be interactive and project-based; this means that selected subjects/modules should be implemented in teams – academic staff and practitioner. The practicum enables you to acquire the skills to organize and design your work, master the techniques and tools of work. From the perspective of student education, it is important to emphasize the development of the ability to search for, segregate and use and synthesize information from a variety of validated sources. In addition, it is worth emphasizing the importance of being able to improve oneself, to be open-minded and to respond flexibly to change. Students should become more aware of their value by realizing that the knowledge they are supplied with during their studies is also of a purely utilitarian nature and allows them to deepen their professional specialization immediately after their studies.

According to the respondents, it is necessary to pay attention to the issues of professional ethics, responsibility for actions taken, and the code of conduct while studies. Graduates should:

- be creative, willing to expand their knowledge, and at the same time flexible in their behavior and thinking, adapting solutions to individual situations
- be able to form their own opinions based on critical analysis of acquired data and objectively assess the effectiveness of proposed solutions
- have the ability to perceive and analyze social processes
- have the ability to present and defend their own views
- have the ability to gain allies, to organize and lead teams.

- be sensitive to social exclusion and the problems identified in the near and distant environment.

In parallel to cooperation in improving the quality of education, cooperation around implementation is important. To this end, it is important to identify the needs of representatives of the socio-economic environment as regards leading areas that can be the subject of scientific research, application studies, sectoral plans and strategies, student projects, field workshops. NGOs reported the need to create a platform for developing various forms of volunteering among the academic community.

## **Confidential Annexes (Uploaded to the Archive Folder)**

- 1- Participant List**
- 2- Presentation/s**
- 3- If possible, video records, **Foto**
- 4- Screenshots (showing the number of participants)
- 5- Efficient practices that the participants offered**
- 6- Transcription records (in English)