



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

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FOCUS GROUP INTERVIEW REPORT

ROMANIA



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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 External Stakeholders

FGI Date: 30.04.2025 (Date of completion of focus group discussions with NGO)

2 Meetings: 28.04.2025 and 30.04.2025

Venue: at the National University of Science and Technology Politehnica Bucharest, Faculty of Entrepreneurship, Business Engineering and Management

Online/Face to Face/Hybrid: Face to Face

Number of Participants: 23

Findings:

Prominent Themes:

- **Willingness for Collaboration**

Most external stakeholders (NGOs, local companies, and public authorities) expressed openness and interest in structured collaboration with universities, particularly in areas related to sustainable development, circular economy, environmental awareness, and urban health.

- **Need for Formalized Partnerships**

Participants emphasized the importance of formal agreements (protocols, MoUs) to ensure continuity, transparency, and accountability in collaboration.

- **Practical and Applied Projects**

Stakeholders are interested in applied, real-world projects (waste management, circular economy pilots, green urban initiatives) rather than purely theoretical collaboration.

- **Legislative and Policy Dimension**

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There is strong interest in cooperation related to environmental legislation, compliance, and policy development at local and national levels.

- **Communication and Coordination Gaps**

Lack of a clear contact point within universities and insufficient communication were identified as key barriers.

- **Private Sector Engagement**

Companies see potential in collaboration for CSR projects, sustainability strategy development, student internships, and innovation pilots.

Frequently Used Phrases:

- **Collaboration:**

“parteneriat formal,” “protocol,” “strategie comună,” “actor local,” “platformă de cooperare.”

- **Sustainability:**

“dezvoltare sustenabilă,” “economie circulară,” “oraș sănătos,” “politici publice,” “legislație de mediu.”

- **Benefits:**

“expertiză academică,” “vizibilitate,” “responsabilitate socială,” “inovare,” “reputație.”

- **Barriers:**

“birocrație,” “lipsa unui punct de contact,” “lipsa transparenței,” “procese administrative lente.”

- **Future Directions:**

“hub de colaborare,” “grup de lucru,” “proiecte pilot,” “strategie locală de sustenabilitate.”

1. Organisations’ experience in working with universities?

Summary: Most stakeholders reported limited or sporadic collaboration with universities. While some joint events, conferences, or CSR initiatives have taken place, cooperation is often informal and lacks long-term structure.

There is a shared perception that collaboration should move from ad-hoc events to strategic partnerships.

Analysis:

Existing Collaboration

Some stakeholders mentioned:

- Participation in conferences or roundtables on sustainable development.
- Occasional involvement in student projects.
- Invitations to serve as jury members in competitions or innovation challenges.
- Limited sponsorship of events.

However, these collaborations are not institutionalized.

One participant noted:

“Colaborarea există, dar este punctuală, nu strategică.”

Another mentioned:

“Suntem invitați la evenimente, dar nu există o continuitate.”

Areas of Interest

Stakeholders showed interest in:

- Circular economy initiatives (recycling, waste valorization, aluminum and packaging management).
- Urban sustainability and “healthy city” concepts.
- Environmental impact assessments.
- Policy development aligned with EU Green Deal objectives.
- Digital tools for environmental monitoring.
- Student internships in sustainability departments.

Companies emphasized the importance of:

- Aligning collaboration with corporate sustainability strategies.
- Clear objectives and measurable impact.

2. Identified benefits and added value from this collaboration

Summary:

Stakeholders see significant added value in collaborating with universities through access to academic expertise, research-based solutions, student innovation, and increased credibility.

Analysis:

Academic Expertise

Universities are viewed as:

- Sources of scientific validation.
- Providers of research for environmental compliance.
- Contributors to legislative and regulatory interpretation.

One stakeholder mentioned:

“Universitatea poate oferi fundament științific pentru inițiativele noastre.”

Innovation and Youth Engagement

Companies and NGOs appreciate:

- Students’ fresh perspectives.
- Innovation potential.
- Digital competencies.
- Research-based project development.

Internships and applied projects were seen as mutually beneficial.

Reputation and Visibility

Collaboration with universities:

- Enhances corporate social responsibility profiles.
- Improves public image.
- Increases trust among local communities.

Stakeholders noted that:

- Transparent partnerships build credibility.
- Joint initiatives attract media attention and community support.

Strategic Alignment with EU Policies

Participants highlighted alignment with:

- European Green Deal
- ESG frameworks
- Sustainable finance regulations
- National environmental legislation

Universities can support organizations in navigating complex regulatory environments.

3. Barriers identified

Summary: Key barriers include bureaucracy, lack of institutional clarity, slow administrative processes, limited communication channels, and unclear expectations.

Analysis:

Bureaucracy

Stakeholders mentioned:

- Delays in signing agreements.
- Multiple approval layers.
- Complex procedures for student involvement.

One participant stated:

“Procesul administrativ descurajează inițiativele rapide.”

Communication Gaps

- No clear sustainability office or liaison person.
- Unclear procedures for initiating collaboration.
- Limited feedback mechanisms.

Misaligned Expectations

Some companies noted:

- Different timelines between academia and business.
- Academic focus on theory vs. business need for practical solutions.
- Lack of measurable KPIs in joint projects.

Limited Institutional Strategy

Stakeholders felt that:

- Sustainability is not always embedded in the university’s long-term strategy.
- Collaboration depends on individual initiative rather than institutional policy.

4. Desired future directions on cooperation with University

Summary:

Stakeholders envision structured, long-term, transparent collaboration focused on practical sustainability projects, policy development, and innovation.

Analysis:

Creation of a University–Local Actors Hub

Participants proposed:

- A dedicated sustainability office.
- A university–NGO–business platform.
- Regular networking meetings.
- Annual sustainability forum.

Formalized Partnerships

Recommendations include:

- Clear MoUs.
- Defined roles and responsibilities.
- Measurable impact indicators.
- Long-term cooperation frameworks.

Practical Sustainability Projects

Suggested initiatives:

- Circular economy pilot projects.
- Waste reduction programs.
- Renewable energy initiatives on campus.
- Urban green space projects.
- ESG reporting workshops.
- Environmental compliance training.

Policy and Legislative Collaboration

Stakeholders see universities as:

- Contributors to local environmental policy drafting.
- Partners in public consultations.
- Advisors in regulatory compliance.

Student Integration

Companies are open to:

- Internships in sustainability departments.
- Applied research projects.
- Innovation challenges.

- Joint CSR campaigns.

Confidential Annexes (Uploaded to the Archive Folder)

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