



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

2023-1-SK01-KA220-HED-000161639

FOCUS GROUP INTERVIEW REPORT

ROMANIA



Co-funded by  
the European Union



UNIRI



# FOCUS GROUP INTERVIEW REPORT



## 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 collection:** 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 Students (Including NGOs, municipalities, city councils, business communities)

1. Identification of the university's cooperation with the environment and its awareness among students?
  - *Do you identify the entities with which the university collaborates? What are they?*
  - *What are the thematic areas of cooperation? Did they concern climate and environmental policy?*
  - *What are the forms of this cooperation?*
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?*
  - *Does this collaboration enhance your knowledge and competence? How does such education differ from classes in the university halls?*
3. Barriers identified:
  - *What are the most important barriers to cooperation?*
  - *Does anything hinder such cooperation?*
4. Desired future directions:
  - *If the cooperation of universities with various organisations and companies has not taken place so far, with whom do you think universities should cooperate to make the courses you study more attractive?*
  - *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 Students*

FGI Date: 24.04.2025 (Date of completion of focus group discussions with Student)

Meetings on: 15.04.2025, 16.04.2025 and 24.04.2025

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: Female (23) Male (4) Total (27)

### Findings:

#### Summary Analysis

##### Key Themes Addressed:

- **University–NGO Collaboration and Environmental Awareness:**

Participants indicated that cooperation between the university and environmental NGOs exists but is fragmented, sporadic, and insufficiently promoted. While some environmental campaigns (e.g., tree planting, clean-up actions, recycling drives) take place, students reported low awareness of institutional partnerships and limited visibility of structured collaboration.

- **Benefits and Added Value:**

Students recognized that involvement in NGO-led environmental activities enhances soft skills (teamwork, leadership, communication), environmental responsibility, and civic engagement. However, participation levels remain low due to limited promotion and lack of systematic integration into university life.

- **Barriers Identified:**

Major barriers include poor communication, lack of institutional support, limited practical engagement opportunities, low student motivation due to academic workload, and insufficient incentives (credits, certifications).

- **Future Directions:**

Participants expressed interest in stronger collaboration with local and national environmental NGOs, more practical sustainability projects, integration of environmental topics into curricula, and the university taking a more visible role in shaping local environmental policies.

**Frequently Used Phrases:**

- **Environment:** “selective waste collection,” “recycling,” “plastic pollution,” “deforestation,” “air pollution,” “climate change,” “Green Deal,” “urban cleanliness,” “Bucharest pollution,” “illegal waste dumping.”
- **Collaboration:** “partnerships,” “NGO involvement,” “local authorities,” “Ministry of Environment,” “Garda de Mediu,” “student associations.”
- **Benefits:** “experience,” “volunteering,” “CV improvement,” “social responsibility,” “teamwork,” “leadership skills.”
- **Barriers:** “lack of information,” “poor communication,” “low visibility,” “no incentives,” “bureaucracy.”
- **Future:** “sustainability policies,” “green campus,” “awareness campaigns,” “recycling infrastructure,” “eco-workshops,” “community projects.”

## 1. Identification of the university's cooperation with the environment and its awareness among students?

**Summary:** Participants reported that cooperation between UPB and environmental NGOs in Romania is limited and not sufficiently visible. Although some initiatives such as clean-up campaigns (e.g., Let's Do It, Romania!), tree-planting events, or recycling awareness days are occasionally organized, these are not perceived as part of a long-term strategic partnership.

Student awareness regarding NGO activities and environmental policies remains moderate to low.

### **Analysis:**

### **Cooperation Status**

Students mentioned that:

- Environmental activities are usually organized by student associations rather than through formal university-NGO agreements.
- National campaigns like **Let's Do It, Romania!** or tree-planting actions sometimes involve students, but participation is voluntary and not institutionally embedded.
- There is limited collaboration with well-known NGOs such as **MaiMultVerde**, **Greenpeace România**, or **Viitor Plus**, despite their national presence.

Some participants stated that:

- "We hear about clean-up events, but they are not promoted widely."
- "The university talks about sustainability, but we don't see consistent partnerships."

Students also mentioned visible environmental problems in Romania such as:

- Illegal waste dumping in rural areas
- Urban air pollution (especially in large cities)
- Plastic overuse
- Poor selective waste collection infrastructure

However, they felt that universities are not sufficiently active in addressing these issues at a local level.

### **Student Awareness**

Students highlighted that:

- Many colleagues are unaware of existing environmental NGOs in Romania.
- Environmental education is not systematically integrated into most study programs.
- Participation often depends on individual interest rather than institutional encouragement.

Some participants estimated that:

- "At least 25–30% of students don't know what environmental NGOs actually do."

- “If it’s not on social media, students don’t hear about it.”

## **Reporting**

The university’s cooperation with environmental NGOs in Romania is present but inconsistent and insufficiently structured. Activities such as clean-up campaigns or tree planting occur occasionally but lack continuity and strategic integration. Student awareness of NGO activities and environmental policies remains limited due to weak communication channels and insufficient curriculum integration. Strengthening partnerships and improving visibility through digital platforms and official university communication could significantly enhance engagement.

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

**Summary:** Collaboration with environmental NGOs contributes to students’ personal development, professional growth, and environmental awareness. However, these benefits are currently underutilized due to low participation and limited institutional support.

### **Analysis:**

## **Social and Professional Skills**

Participants emphasized that volunteering:

- Improves teamwork and communication
- Develops leadership abilities
- Increases confidence
- Enhances CVs and employability

Students mentioned that companies in Romania increasingly value sustainability awareness, especially in multinational corporations aligned with EU Green Deal objectives.

One participant stated: “Volunteering in environmental projects makes you more attractive to employers.”

## **Environmental Consciousness**

Participants noted that:

- Involvement in recycling campaigns increases awareness of consumption habits.
- Clean-up events help students understand the scale of pollution.
- Tree planting fosters long-term environmental responsibility.

Several students mentioned climate change, air quality in Romanian cities, and plastic waste as issues that affect their daily lives.

### **Community Contribution**

Students expressed satisfaction in contributing to local communities, especially in:

- Rural clean-up initiatives
- Supporting local environmental education programs
- Participating in sustainability workshops

However, they noted that such opportunities are not frequent.

### **Limitations**

- Few structured NGO partnerships
- Limited follow-up after events
- Lack of academic credit for participation
- Minimal institutional recognition

**Reporting:** University–NGO collaboration offers clear added value by enhancing social skills, employability, environmental awareness, and civic responsibility. However, the impact remains limited due to sporadic initiatives and insufficient institutional integration. Expanding partnerships and formalizing student involvement would significantly increase long-term benefits.

## **Barriers identified**

**Summary:** Key barriers include limited promotion, weak institutional support, low student motivation due to academic workload, bureaucratic constraints, and insufficient incentives.

### **Analysis:**

#### **Inadequate Promotion**

Students reported that:

- Environmental events are poorly advertised.
- Information is scattered across different channels.
- Communication relies too heavily on informal networks.

#### **Weak Institutional Support**

Participants perceived that:

- Environmental initiatives are not prioritized at management level.
- Sustainability is not integrated into strategic planning.
- Administrative bureaucracy slows collaboration with NGOs.

#### **Lack of Incentives**

Students noted that:

- Participation is voluntary with no academic credit.
- Certificates are rare.
- No structured recognition system exists.

#### **Limited Infrastructure**

Participants mentioned:

- Insufficient recycling bins on campus.
- Poor waste separation.
- Lack of visible “green campus” initiatives.

**Reporting:** Barriers to effective collaboration include poor communication, limited institutional prioritization, lack of incentives, bureaucratic hurdles, and inadequate campus infrastructure. Addressing these barriers requires structural, administrative, and cultural change within the university environment.

### **Desired future directions on Universities' role in shaping environmental policies**

**Summary:** Participants expect universities in Romania to take a proactive leadership role in environmental sustainability through structured NGO partnerships, green campus policies, practical sustainability projects, and curriculum reform.

**Analysis:**

#### **Stronger NGO Partnerships**

Students suggested:

- Formal agreements with NGOs such as MaiMultVerde, Viitor Plus, Greenpeace România.
- Joint environmental campaigns.
- Annual sustainability action plans.

#### **Green Campus Initiative**

Proposals included:

- Recycling reward systems
- Zero-plastic campus policy
- Solar panels and renewable energy initiatives
- Sustainable procurement policies

#### **Practical Projects**

Students recommended:

- Urban gardening initiatives
- Waste reduction campaigns
- Workshops on sustainable consumption
- Climate awareness seminars

## **Curriculum Integration**

Participants suggested:

- Introducing sustainability modules across faculties
- Offering credit-bearing volunteering courses
- Organizing interdisciplinary environmental workshops

## **Collaboration with Public Authorities**

Students mentioned potential cooperation with:

- Ministry of Environment, Waters and Forests
- Local City Hall
- Environmental Guard (Garda de Mediu)

**Reporting:** Participants envision Romanian universities becoming active contributors to environmental policy development by strengthening NGO partnerships, implementing green campus policies, promoting practical sustainability projects, and integrating environmental education into academic programs. Through institutional leadership and collaboration with public authorities and NGOs, universities can significantly influence both student behavior and local environmental governance.

**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)