



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

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FOCUS GROUP INTERVIEW REPORT

CROATIA



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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 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: 19.11. i 22.11.2024.

Venue: 18h i 12.15h

Online/Face to Face/Hybrid: 10 + 10

Number of Participants: Female (17) Male (3) Total (20)

### Findings:

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

The discussions suggest that the university's cooperation with the environment and sustainability initiatives is present, but there seems to be limited awareness and involvement among students. Several students acknowledged that the university participates in environmental activities, such as waste management and recycling. However, they felt that these actions are not consistently communicated to students or integrated into their academic experience. The awareness of sustainability initiatives was mainly based on individual experiences, such as students personally engaging in eco-friendly practices like composting or using public transportation. The university's role in fostering a broader, institutional commitment to ecological sustainability was seen as underdeveloped, with students expressing that the sustainability agenda could be embedded more deeply into the academic programs, projects, and day-to-day operations of the university. While students acknowledge that the university is involved in environmental activities, there is a consensus that the institution could enhance its visibility and involvement in sustainability at the institutional level.

2. Identified benefits and added value from this collaboration

The collaboration between the university and external local actors, such as non-governmental organizations (NGOs), was considered valuable by students. They highlighted the educational benefits that come from these collaborations, where they gain insights and hands-on experience with real-world environmental and social issues. For example, students acknowledged the potential for these collaborations to bring students closer to understanding the practical application of their studies through internships, project work, and participation in community-based initiatives. One key benefit discussed was the opportunity for students to engage with NGOs, which can help bridge the gap between academic knowledge and real-world impact. Students saw this as an opportunity to become more socially and environmentally responsible while developing important skills in communication, problem-solving, and teamwork. Moreover, these collaborations can create a stronger sense of social responsibility, not only

for students but also for the wider community. In sum, students valued the practical experience and the alignment between university education and local sustainability initiatives that NGOs provide.

### 3. Barriers identified

Several barriers to effective collaboration between the university, NGOs, and the local community were identified. One significant barrier is the lack of systematic integration of sustainability into university curricula. Students expressed that sustainability is often treated as an isolated topic rather than being woven throughout their academic studies. For example, although sustainability might be covered in certain courses, it is not consistently incorporated into various subjects across different fields of study. This lack of integration makes it harder for students to fully engage with environmental topics and understand the broader implications of sustainability in their respective disciplines. Another barrier mentioned was the lack of funding and resources for NGOs to fully engage with universities, which limits the scope of their collaboration. NGOs may also struggle to align their agendas with those of academic institutions due to differences in objectives or limitations in capacity. Lastly, students noted practical barriers such as the high cost of sustainable products, which makes it difficult for individuals, especially students, to engage in eco-friendly practices consistently. These factors contribute to a gap between the intentions of students and their actual ability to make sustainable choices.

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

Students expressed a desire for universities to take a more active role in shaping environmental policies, particularly through collaboration with NGOs and local actors. They suggested that universities should not only focus on academic knowledge but also on creating practical opportunities for students to contribute to environmental sustainability. For instance, universities could support the creation of dedicated programs that link students directly with environmental NGOs, facilitating project-based learning, internships, and collaborations that align with the students' academic goals. Another suggestion was that universities integrate sustainability into their core values and operations, influencing policies around waste management, energy use, and campus sustainability initiatives. Students also proposed that universities play a leadership role in advocating for green practices, both within academic settings and in broader community partnerships. Furthermore, they emphasized that universities could provide a platform for students to engage in environmental advocacy and shape public policies related to sustainability. Students believe that universities, by leveraging their resources and student involvement, could significantly contribute to the advancement of environmental policies, both locally and globally.

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

- 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) mail Elif