



Ecology Awareness of Sustainable Green Development: Collaboration of
Universities and Local Actors
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UNIVERSITY REPRESENTATIVES
FOCUS GROUP INTERVIEW REPORT

TÜRKIYE



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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:** Partners encourage participants for focused discussions based on prepared questions.
- **Data collection:** Partners capture key insights and ideas from discussions using designated note-takers, voice recorders, or collaborative online tools.
- **Wrap-up and feedback:** Partners 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 University Staff on capacity building

1. Experience of working with external parties
 - *With which entities does your university collaborate?*
 - *Since when has there been cooperation? Who initiated it?*
 - *What are the thematic areas of cooperation? Did they concern climate and environmental policy?*
 - *What were the forms of this cooperation?*
 - *Is cooperation formalised?*
 - *Does the university make any form of selection of partner choices? What are the criteria of such selection?*
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 area?*
4. Desired future directions:
 - *If cooperation has not taken place to date, what are the expectations regarding the scope and forms of cooperation?*
 - *What current partners should change to make cooperation work better?*
 - *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 University Representatives

FGI Date:(17.01.2025)

Venue: at Çanakkale Onsekiz Mart University Biga Faculty of Economy and Administrative Sciences / Online

Online/Face to Face/Hybrid: Online, Face to Face and written reply

Number of Participants: Female (15) Male (5) Total (20)

Participants Experience Year: 1-5 (4) 6 -10 (1) 11 and above (15)

Administrative Position: Rectorate () Coordinator (1) Dean (2) Vice-dean () Department Head () Administrative staff (17)

Findings:

The focus group discussions were conducted as part of the Ecommunity project, funded by the European Union Erasmus+ program, at Çanakkale Onsekiz Mart University (ÇOMÜ). The discussions involved 20 academics across four sessions, addressing three main questions about university-student collaboration with local stakeholders. The sessions explored mechanisms to encourage such collaborations, the benefits derived, challenges faced, and criteria for selecting civil society organizations (NGOs) as partners.

Key Topics Highlighted by Participants:

Mechanisms to Encourage Collaboration: Student clubs, volunteering courses, internships, and university coordinator units (e.g., Sustainability Coordination, Green Transformation Coordination) were frequently cited as mechanisms for collaboration.

Benefits of Collaboration: Collaborations were noted for providing employment opportunities, contributing to the local economy, enhancing university-community ties, and fostering a sense of belonging among students.

Challenges and Barriers: Financial constraints, bureaucratic obstacles, operational mismatches, legal uncertainties, and a lack of civil society awareness were highlighted as key challenges.

NGO Selection Criteria: Transparency, accountability, past projects, and alignment of mission and vision were deemed important, but participants noted a lack of clear procedures for NGO selection.

Most Frequently Used Terms:

Collaboration: Used to describe partnerships with local stakeholders, NGOs, and the private sector.

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Student Clubs and Volunteering Activities: Identified as primary mechanisms for collaboration.

Local Stakeholders: A central term for collaboration partners.

Financial Challenges: Frequently cited as a major barrier.

Transparency and Accountability: Key criteria for selecting NGOs.

Bureaucratic Obstacles: Highlighted as a significant hindrance.

1. Experience of working with external parties

Participants shared diverse experiences of collaborating with external parties, including local businesses, CSOs, municipalities, and public institutions. These collaborations were primarily facilitated through student-centered activities, such as projects, events, and internships, often coordinated via student clubs, volunteering courses, and university units. The experiences can be categorized into three sub-themes: *student-driven initiatives*, *institutional mechanisms*, and *ad hoc collaborations*.

Student-Driven Initiatives: Many participants emphasized the role of student clubs and volunteering courses in fostering collaborations. For example, Participant K1 noted, “We do this primarily through student clubs, through coordinator units such as the Social Responsibility Project Coordination and Green Transformation Coordination, and through courses. For instance, in the volunteering course, we completed 11 projects last semester.” Similarly, Participant K16 described a project where students worked with a local school on autism awareness: “Our students worked on a project related to autism. They visited schools in Biga with autistic students, identified challenges, and distributed brochures at a shopping mall to raise awareness.”

Institutional Mechanisms: Some participants highlighted formal mechanisms like internships and university-industry protocols. Participant K4 stated, “There are protocols established under university-industry collaboration. For example, there are significant companies in Çanakkale, and the process progresses with them. Internship programs also allow students to engage with local stakeholders.” Participant K6 added, “We use the internship mechanism. Students from applied sciences go to municipalities, private companies, or CSOs for internships, which strengthens these relationships.”

Ad Hoc Collaborations: Several participants described collaborations that were more spontaneous and driven by individual initiatives rather than systematic frameworks. Participant K17 shared, “We invited the Provincial Labor Agency to our department last month. They informed students about their institution and offered part-time job opportunities in schools, connecting students with local opportunities.” Participant K18 also mentioned an ad hoc event: “We collaborated with a KPSS training institution in Biga. They provided training on post-graduation exams and distributed books, creating a connection with the institution.”

The experiences reflect a reliance on student-driven initiatives, such as volunteering projects and club activities, to engage with external parties. While institutional mechanisms like internships exist, they are often underutilized or lack systematic coordination. Ad hoc collaborations, while effective in specific instances, indicate a lack of a structured approach, leading to inconsistencies in engagement with external stakeholders.

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

Participants identified a wide range of benefits and added value from collaborations, which can be grouped into four sub-themes: *student development*, *local economic impact*, *university-community relations*, and *institutional growth*. These benefits were seen as both immediate (e.g., employment opportunities) and long-term (e.g., strengthened community ties).

Student Development: Many participants highlighted how collaborations enhance students' skills, employability, and awareness. Participant K2 noted, "Students gain knowledge and skills through internships. For example, many of our graduates are employed at local companies like Doğtaş and Dardanel, increasing their employability." Participant K16 echoed this: "During a career event, professionals indicated that four or five students could intern with them, providing a direct benefit to students." Participant K19 added, "We prioritize certifications for events. These certificates provide added value in the job market, and we also consider social transcripts to support students' career development."

Local Economic Impact: Collaborations were seen as contributing to the local economy by leveraging university expertise. Participant K2 stated, "There is potential to contribute to the local economy. The university's knowledge and technological expertise can enhance the R&D capacity of local businesses, leading to more efficient and innovative outcomes." Participant K13 elaborated, "Collaborations with local businesses and public institutions can increase the university's financial resources, which can be used for scholarships, research funds, and infrastructure investments."

University-Community Relations: Strengthening ties between the university and the community was a recurring theme. Participant K2 emphasized, "It strengthens the bond between the university and the community. The university becomes more accessible, and locals feel they can approach us for projects or advice." Participant K3 shared a specific example: "We placed a student in the Local Governments Department with a local muhtar (village head). The muhtar was very satisfied and said, 'Why didn't we do this before?' This collaboration also benefited the student, who provided positive feedback."

Institutional Growth: Some participants noted benefits for the university's institutional development, such as improved accreditation processes and visibility. Participant K1 mentioned, "University-community collaboration can increase our scores in accreditation and quality processes, providing a concrete benefit." Participant K14 added, "Collaborations enhance the university's research and innovation capacity, contribute to regional development, and strengthen academic programs."

The benefits of collaboration are multifaceted, impacting students, the local economy, university-community relations, and institutional growth. Students gain practical skills and employment opportunities, while the university enhances its reputation and community ties. However, the benefits are often perceived as more immediate for students (e.g., internships) and less tangible for the university in the short term, with long-term gains like accreditation improvements requiring sustained efforts.

3. *Barriers identified*

Participants identified numerous barriers to collaboration, which can be categorized into five sub-themes: *financial constraints, bureaucratic and legal obstacles, operational challenges, cultural barriers, and responsibility and risk concerns*. These barriers often intersect, creating complex challenges for effective collaboration.

Financial Constraints: Lack of financial resources was a dominant barrier. Participant K1 stated, “There’s a risk of students being perceived as constantly asking for money. For instance, we went to a village school using three personal cars from the Biga campus. Even small-scale transportation support would be crucial, but we don’t receive much institutional support.” Participant K5 added, “Public and private funding faces resource constraints, which directly impacts the effectiveness of these initiatives, as most rely on private sector financing.”

Bureaucratic and Legal Obstacles: Bureaucratic processes and legal uncertainties were frequently cited. Participant K2 explained, “Due to the university’s status as a public institution, legal regulations and bureaucratic hurdles, such as tender and contract processes, can be very challenging and exhausting, slowing down collaboration.” Participant K17 noted a positive aspect of bureaucracy: “Writing petitions via the university system (ÜBYS) makes things easier, and the rectorate responds quickly, usually within one to two days.” However, Participant K1 highlighted legal ambiguities: “In volunteering projects, we need clarity on whether we need documentation for students over 18 traveling outside campus. These legal aspects need to be clearly defined.”

Operational Challenges: Operational mismatches between the university and external parties were a significant issue. Participant K3 shared, “There are significant issues with accounting and reporting processes. In a project last year, we waited eight months due to delays in accounting procedures.” They also noted, “Sometimes there’s a lack of institutional memory in partner organizations. If key personnel are absent, planning stalls, causing delays.”

Cultural Barriers: A lack of civil society awareness and differing priorities were identified as cultural barriers. Participant K4 stated, “Turkey’s civil society culture isn’t very developed, and there are issues with participatory culture. Local stakeholders often get tired of repeated requests for support because only a few consistently help.” Participant K5 added, “The university staff and students often lack sufficient awareness of civil society culture, which hinders collaboration.”

Responsibility and Risk Concerns: The burden of responsibility on academics was a recurring concern. Participant K17 expressed, “As a club advisor, I’m responsible for the students, but this responsibility is burdensome. It’s challenging in terms of both time and accountability.” Participant K6 highlighted risks in CSO collaborations: “As a club advisor, I take on the responsibility, but I also bear the potential risks. If something goes wrong, they’ll come to me.”

The barriers to collaboration are complex and interconnected. Financial constraints limit logistical support, while bureaucratic and legal obstacles slow down processes. Operational mismatches, such as delays in accounting, and a lack of civil society awareness further complicate partnerships. The burden of responsibility on academics creates additional risks, deterring some from engaging in such collaborations.

4. *Desired future directions on capacity building*

Participants proposed several strategies to enhance collaboration capacity, which can be grouped into four sub-themes: *institutional support and coordination*, *needs assessment and stakeholder engagement*, *systematic documentation and reporting*, and *NGO selection frameworks*. These suggestions aim to create a more structured and sustainable collaboration framework.

Institutional Support and Coordination: Participants emphasized the need for better institutional support and coordination among departments. Participant K1 suggested, “We should invite stakeholders to the campus and organize a closing event. At this event, we can present certificates to those who have supported us, ensuring the continuity of support for projects.” They also proposed, “We could hold a meeting with faculty members teaching volunteering courses to coordinate efforts and share best practices.” Participant K3 added, “The university could collect data on NGOs, identifying those with budgets and priorities, and share this information on a portal or website, making collaboration easier.”

Needs Assessment and Stakeholder Engagement: Several participants advocated for needs-based approaches to collaboration. Participant K2 proposed, “We could conduct a survey or focus group discussion with stakeholders, asking, ‘What do you want? What do you need?’ Then, projects could be designed based on those needs. This could also lead to academic publications for us.” Participant K11 suggested, “Units like Green Transformation Coordination should organize workshops with NGOs to understand their visions and align collaborations accordingly.”

Systematic Documentation and Reporting: Participants stressed the importance of documenting and reporting collaboration outcomes. Participant K6 emphasized, “Events should be published on the university’s official channels. Post-event result reports should be prepared, detailing how many people benefited, whether it led to further collaborations, and if it can become a regular activity.” They also noted, “Using university channels for visibility, such as the official website, is crucial for metrics like Green Metric and THE rankings, which consider the number and quality of such activities.”

NGO Selection Frameworks: Participants called for clearer criteria and frameworks for selecting NGOs. Participant K2 stated, “The university’s strategic goals should align with the NGO’s goals. Their organizational capacity, transparency, accountability, and past projects are important. A small pilot project could be conducted to assess collaboration potential.” Participant K6 added, “Criteria should focus on the NGO’s mission, vision, past projects, and outputs. The focus should be on public benefit and student outcomes, not just organizing events for the sake of events.” Participant K13 proposed, “NGO applications could be evaluated based on specific criteria, followed by interviews and site visits. A university evaluation committee could review proposals and make decisions.”

Participants envision a more systematic approach to collaboration, with stronger institutional support, coordinated efforts, and needs-based project design. Systematic documentation and reporting are seen as critical for visibility and accountability, while clear, objective criteria for NGO selection would reduce risks and enhance collaboration effectiveness. These directions aim to address current barriers and build sustainable capacity for future partnerships.

Participants’ experiences reveal a reliance on student-driven initiatives and ad hoc collaborations, with limited systematic frameworks for engaging external parties. While collaborations yield significant benefits—such as enhanced student employability, local economic contributions, and stronger community ties—they are constrained by financial, bureaucratic, and cultural barriers. The burden of responsibility on academics further complicates these efforts. Moving forward, participants advocate

for structured institutional support, needs-based project design, systematic reporting, and clear NGO selection criteria to overcome these challenges and build sustainable collaboration capacity. These improvements would not only address current barriers but also enhance the long-term impact of university-stakeholder partnerships.

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)