

Vectors of Interdisciplinary Agenda for Sustainable Development in Russian Universities: New Meanings and Pedagogical Forms

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ABSTRACT

The present article studies the introduction of sustainable development goals (SDG) into the activity of Russian universities. The objectives of the research are to study different areas of universities' activity in sustainable development, analyze pedagogical approaches (forms and methods) to working with sustainable development goals; draw the attention of university authorities and student organizations to possible implementation of activities of various forms associated with sustainable development goals. The methodology of the research includes the analysis and generalization of international experience in terms of the methods of information dissemination on SDG; creation of new content for Russian universities aimed at attracting publicity and shaping public opinion; and pedagogical methods of the implementation of the third mission of universities. The results are reflected in the activity of student organizations, non-profit organizations and local authorities on understanding new meanings. Academic outcome implies shaping and promoting the national agenda of SDG in universities, updating national development goals and objectives and their coordination with the global agenda.

Keywords: *sustainable development goals in universities, the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in universities, youth projects on sustainable development, interdisciplinary youth agenda of sustainable development, modelling of sustainable development goals by the youth, project laboratories of sustainable development, sustainable development goals business games*

I. INTRODUCTION

The global practice of university management and modernization of educational programs has consolidated the understanding of the need to rely on the agenda of sustainable development [1]. All countries of the world, public and private universities realize that the existence of universities that do not understand the importance of social responsibility, do not benefit local communities and the state in general and do not contribute to the overall harmonious development of the society will be impossible. In this regard, universities are increasing their capacities in the following areas [2], [3]:

- the educational process and updating educational programmes and individual academic disciplines;
- scientific research, increasing knowledge, developing new social and engineering technologies, developing new strategies, and analytics on topical issues;
- improving management culture within the university, which includes a responsible personnel policy, responsible procurement, a complex of additional services provided by the university, responsible funding, and consistent work with students;

- new meanings in performing the third mission of universities: interaction with the society aimed at identifying the most relevant areas of cooperation; cooperating across sectors to update the agenda of sustainable development; and influencing local authorities to improve the quality of life in the regions.

The present research attempts to consider the directions in which Russian universities already follow the socially responsible agenda. However, in the national practice, the work with the SDG agenda has not yet become comprehensive. Therefore, it is necessary to analyse the directions at the national level in which this work corresponds to the global agenda. In addition, the authors have studied the methods that allow updating the approaches to the implementation of the goals of sustainable development on the agenda.

The research hypothesis suggests that the actions and measures taken in Russian universities largely correspond to the world's best practices [4], but the language of their presentation and ways of introducing the results are very different.

II. MAIN VECTORS OF PROMOTING THE GOALS OF SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT ON THE AGENDA AMONG YOUNG ADULTS IN RUSSIA

Traditionally, the system work of governments on the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development involves several channels for disseminating information and creating new content:

- Channel 1: Public education and/or youth policy of the country.

The authors have analysed the available information on the activity of the Department of State Policy in the field of Higher Education in Russia. However, having directly addressed the Head of the Department, the authors received a reply that there is no state policy in the area of education for sustainable development and working with the SDG agenda at Russian universities. Therefore, conducting further research within Channel 1 was no longer relevant. The analysis of another direction - youth policy in Russia – has shown that there exists the “SDG Youth Ambassadors in Russia” Programme, which was launched in 2018 and is the project of the National Youth Council of Russia¹. As stated on the organization's website, the project is implemented with the support of the Ministry of Science and Higher Education of the Russian Federation (which contradicts the information received from the Head of the Ministry's Department), the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, the Federal Agency for Youth Affairs, the United

¹ Youth Ambassador of the SDG in Russia. Available at: <http://youthrussia.ru/sustainabledevelopment>

Nations Information Centre in Moscow, and the United Nations Association of Russia. Presumably, the Ministry of Science and Higher Education provides information support on the project, but it does not work with universities in this direction. The third All-Russian competition for the selection of Youth Ambassadors of the SDGs has recently taken place. According to selection procedure, young people from different regions of Russia provide concept notes on their activity in the field of one of the SDGs. Expert Committee nominates 17 SDG Youth Ambassadors – 1 person for each Goal. Thus, there are 17 Youth Ambassadors of SDGs, living in different regions of Russia.

- Channel 2: The work of university authorities together with student scientific societies.

Within this direction, the authors of the article have studied the period from 2016 to 2019 and have found out that targeted work in higher education institutions is carried out, but is not regular. In 2016 and 2017, on the recommendation of the United Nations Association of Russia, the Oeconomicus Economic Club (MGIMO University) developed and implemented the initiative of student forums organized and held in several universities of the country, including MGIMO University². It was expected that with such strong methodological and information support, universities would be able to continue these activities on their own. Nowadays, two or three student forums are known to take place, for example the one at the North-Eastern Federal University³. There is also the VUZECOFEST⁴ project, within which the youth festival in the field of sustainable development has been held six times so far [5].

- Channel 3: Initiatives of local non-profit organizations interested in promoting the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development to improve socio-economic conditions in the region.

An interesting initiative was a seminar on SDG and non-profit organizations held by the Centre for Development of Non-Profit Organizations and its partners⁵.

² Oeconomicus Economic Club. Available at: <https://mgimo.ru/about/structure/student-org/ec-oeconomicus/>

³ North-Eastern Federal University. All-Russian Conference Sustainable North: Society, Economy, Ecology, Policy. Available at: <https://www.s-vfu.ru/universitet/rukovodstvo-i-struktura/instituty/niires/npk/>.

⁴ VUZECOFEST Project. Available at: <http://vuzecofest.ru/>

⁵ <http://cmo.ru/news/seminar-po-czelyam-ustojchivogo-razvitiya-v-deyatelnosti-nko>.

The study has shown that there is a large agenda for the joint project⁶ “Global Goals in the Local Agenda: Sustainable Development Principles in the activities of non-profit organisations in the EU and Russia”⁷. Next, Stepik online platform has published a course called “SDG for non-profit organizations”, which is created with the participation of the Open School for Sustainable Development. The course contains 18 lessons⁷.

The Guild of Sustainable Development, Corporate Social Responsibility and Social Entrepreneurship was created within the structure of the Moscow Chamber of Commerce and Industry. It developed the mechanism of implementation developed, which is as follows: “Creation of a segment of the non-profit sector development policy in Moscow in the area of non-commercial partnership – Business – Power”. Its goal is to analyse practices and develop an interaction model that would allow business interests to be taken into account when working on social projects⁸.

- Channel 4: Social initiatives by local authorities in enlightenment and education.

The most interesting example is the organization of the new for Russia “Baikal International Environmental Water Forum”⁹. This initiative has been implemented twice. Unfortunately, this year the forum did not take place due to the epidemiological situation.

- Channel 5: Initiatives by businesses aimed at promoting the agenda of SDG in industrial and social work.

They can analyse the current situation and create scenarios for possible process optimization to achieve SDG objectives in selected areas of business interest. The all-Russia Campus program (2013) by Tetra Pak Company, implemented with the information support of the World Wildlife Fund, was established. Its goals are to disseminate environmental knowledge among students and support environmental initiatives. The first university to join this program was MGIMO University, where it was considered as “an imperative, as one of the strategic priorities in education and professional training in the country”¹⁰.

⁶ Finnish and Russian Civil Society Actors Working Towards Common Global Goals – In search of sustainable practices of collaboration. P. 142. Available at: https://ngokitchen.ru/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/READY_RUSSIAN_Handbook-on-European-and-Russian-good-practises-promoting-sustainable-development-HYPERLINKIT.pdf.

⁷ <https://stepik.org/course/54049/promo#/>

⁸ http://presscentr.rbc.ru/mtp_newguild

⁹ <http://baikal-forum.com/>

¹⁰ MGIMO became the first “green” university on the Campus ecologization program. RIA Novosti. October 17, 2013. Available at: <https://ria.ru/earth/20131017/970790083.html>

Additionally, there can be other channels for the promotion of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

III. TECHNICAL ASPECTS OF IMPLEMENTING THE AGENDA OF THE SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENTS GOALS IN UNIVERSITIES

The Commission on Sustainable Development and Environment has been established within the United Nations Association of Russia and has already been working for over 5 years. The Commission also carries out research; thus, since 2016, it has analysed the websites of 10 federal universities and 15 flagship universities in Russia. The research has covered publicly available website pages devoted to the work of student clubs, university news, department reports on the work done, etc. The result of the analysis has shown that only youth forums are systematically held, however, the agenda of the SDG is only represented there by the work of one of the sections or a model business game.

However, the Commission instructed the Department of Integrated International Ecological Problems and Wildlife Management of MGIMO University to develop a methodology for youth modelling and business games on the subject of the SDGs. This work has been carried out since 2017.

IV. STRATEGIES FOR IMPLEMENTING SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS AND AREAS OF WORK ON THE SGD AGENDA IN RUSSIAN UNIVERSITIES

The most significant activities and events have been organized and carried out at the regional, thematic and federal levels [6]. These activities are encouraged by:

- The need to develop approaches and criteria for national and regional adaptation of the SDGs in Russia;
- The need to train quality specialists to achieve SDGs in Russia;
- Low level of awareness of the SDGs among local communities and the youth;
- The importance of the work with young people aimed at engaging them into practical and scientific activities in order to achieve the SDG of the UN.

The goal of the project is to engage the youth into practical and scientific activities in order to achieve the SDG of the UN. The objectives of the project include:

- Raising awareness in young people and students, local communities, raising the level of environmental education and environmental

culture of the population by informing them about the SDG, their content, tasks and targets.

- Unveiling the opportunities for targeted work of selected target groups on rapid achievement of the SDG.
- Involving the population in achieving the SDG.
- Developing the vision of the youth of the organization and actions for achieving the SDGs of the United Nations in each region.

The developed methodology provides methodological recommendations covering the following blocks: research topics review, relevance of the proposed issues, successful implementation practices (Russian and foreign), setting research and project tasks, organizational forms of project teams' work, forms and methods of communication with the research advisers, and recommended literature. The events can be classified into three groups by organization forms [7], [8], [9]:

- **Youth modelling**, which implies modelling the work of major national or international social or political events, where participants have to strictly adhere to the established rules and procedure of the event and fully model the content and the agenda of the upcoming event. For example, the "Baikal towards the World Water Forum" fully modelled the agenda of the upcoming 8th World Water Forum, all sessions of which were organized in accordance with the directions of certain SDGs, and the programme of the upcoming event was announced on the event website.
- **Business games**, which recreate the given situation, the initial conditions and the expected result to be achieved by the project teams.
- **Project laboratories**, which present short project works, the topics of which address a number of environmental, economic and social topics and fit into the learning process. The expected result is not necessarily set to allow project teams to demonstrate their creative potential.

Following this methodology, 19 major youth events have been implemented, some of them involving project teams from different regions of Russia:

1) "Baikal towards the World Water Forum: the Regional Interpretation of SDG". The event was initiated by the Government and the Governor of Irkutsk Oblast. Over 200 people from three regions of the Russian Federation took part in the event.

- 6 groups worked on problem areas of the region;

- The youth government made recommendations to the government of Irkutsk Oblast.
- The mechanism for constructive dialogue on SDG between decision-makers of the region and the youth was established.

V.V. Kuznetsov, the Director of the United Nations Information Centre in Moscow, chaired the panel of judges.

2) "United Nations Sustainable Development Goals: The Federal Dimension". The event was initiated by the "Rosmolodezh" Federal Agency and involved leaders of youth governments from 76 regions of Russia. Over 160 people from regional governments participated in the event, all working for their federal districts.

The participants modelled the work of youth governments in eight constituent entities of the Russian Federation to create a roadmap for achieving the SDGs for the regions.

A Memorandum for SDGs Promotion in the regions of the Russian Federation was signed.

3) "Opportunities and Perspectives of Science for the United Nations Sustainable Development: Interpretation of SDG". The event was initiated by the Ministry of Science and Higher Education of the Russian Federation (Department of Competition Procedures).

Teams of 11 student scientific societies of federal higher education institutions took part in the event; the general number of participants was over 250 people.

- Declaration on Supporting Sustainable Development Goals in the Russian Federation by Young Scientists and Researchers;
- Scientific achievements and projects of Russian universities for Russia reaching the SDGs were identified;
- The mechanism for cooperation between student scientific societies of Russian universities to achieve the SDGs at national and regional levels was proposed.

V.V. Kuznetsov, the Director of the United Nations Information Centre in Moscow, and A.N. Borisov, the Head of the World Federation of United Nations Associations chaired the panel of judges.

The Declaration on promoting the SDGs through scientific activity of the system of student scientific societies in the Russian Federation was signed.

4) Project Laboratory "Global Water Safety: Policy, Law, Ecology, Emergency Situations". The event was initiated by the Academy of Civil Protection of the Ministry of Emergency Situations.

The objective of the event was to identify complex problems related to water consumption in the regions (by given cases), and develop a roadmap to overcome them. Four teams from federal universities were involved, the general number of participants - 40 people.

5) Project Laboratory “Thematic Interpretation of the United Nations Cenospheres: Sustainable Use of Bioresources”. The event was initiated by the Russian State Social University.

The participants of the event were to identify complex problems related to the rational use of bioresources, problems of agriculture and food supplies in the regions, and develop a roadmap to help overcoming the problems. Five federal higher education institutions were involved; 50 people were the participants of the game. The head of the jury was E.V. Serova, the Director of the Food and Agriculture Organization in Russia.

6) Youth Model of the Project Office “Sustainable Development Goals of the United Nations: the Volga Dimension”. “Volga-2030” Youth Strategy. The event was held within the framework of the 20th International Congress “Great Rivers-2018” by the invitation of the Nizhny Novgorod branch of the Russian Geographical Society. The objective of the Project Office is to identify the focus of the complex problems related to environmental management in the regions and develop a roadmap to overcome them for each of the selected Project regions to achieve the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals. The head of the jury was S.A. Sotkina, the Chair of the Nizhny Novgorod office of the Russian Geographical Society.

7) Youth Sustainable Energy Model in the Federal Districts of the Russian Federation “New Energy-2030”. It involved two universities within the MGIMO Summer School and the Gubkin Oil and Gas University. During a week, 50 people studied the application of information about the SDGs to energy topics. As a result, a draft document on the model was created.

8) MGIMO Field Scientific and Practical School “Ecological Tourism for Sustainable Development of Omsk Oblast”. The school was organized jointly by MGIMO, the Omsk branch of the Russian Geographical Society and Omsk Quantorium. The School was attended by 50 participants (students, high school students); 7 days of work (2 lecture days, 2 field days, 2 days of case studies, project presentation day); 4 work groups.

The expert jury was chaired by the Deputy Minister of Culture of Omsk Oblast for Tourism and the Deputy Head of the Omsk Regional Department of the Russian Geographical Society.

9) Public Diplomacy to Disseminate the International Agenda in the Regions of the Russian Federation: Floating SDG University “Sustainable Development Goals of the United Nations: Russian Interpretation”. The event was held in St. Petersburg, Veliky Novgorod, Moscow and Astrakhan. In 2018, the project got its new brand name - ECOVOLNA 2018.

10) Youth Model of the Arctic Council “Arctic Interpretation of SDGs”.

The model took place in St. Petersburg State University. More than 100 people from five universities were involved in the project. The work of all six working groups of the Arctic Council was modelled; global and national SDG indicators were applied for their rapid implementation in the documents of state planning and achievement of sustainable development in the Arctic region.

11) Youth Model of the Project Office “Sustainable Development of the Russian Arctic”.

The event took place within the International Forum “Days of the Arctic in Moscow”.

Over 100 students from six universities were involved in the model. Nine teams were created, each representing one of the selected Arctic regions of Russia. The teams performed full strategic analysis of the current situation, created the development strategy and a roadmap for its implementation. The Youth Declaration on Sustainable Development of the Russian Arctic was signed.

S.A. Khrushchev, the Director of the Department of State Policy and Regulation in the field of hydrometeorology, study of the Arctic, Antarctic and World Ocean, became the jury chair.

12) Platform for Pedagogical and Administrative Staff of Universities “Workshop: Practices of Sustainable Development for Higher Education”.

The event took place in April 2019, within the framework of the All-Russian meeting of the Association of “Green” universities “Development of Student Environmental Movement in Russia”. The workshop was designed for university employees and was tested on 30 employees.

13) Youth Model “Global Energy Sustainability of BRICS Countries”. Five universities took part in the model. The total number of participants was over 50 people. The jury consisted of nine experts from Russian energy companies and agencies. The event was held as part of the Russian Energy Week 2019 in Manezh (Moscow) at the invitation of the BRICS Youth Energy Agency. The teams were invited to choose one of the BRICS countries and model drivers and challenges that the country may face in the following years.

V. CONCLUSION

The article has outlined the methods of organizing and conducting research and youth models on the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in the youth environment and in Russian universities. It has described the developed methods of youth modelling, organising business games and project laboratories. The mentioned forms of work have the features of social and educational activities and public diplomacy. The analysed activity can be characterised as the implementation of the third mission of a university as it provides methodological and practical support to students and universities in different regions of the country. Meanwhile, the United Nations Association of Russia faces a more complex task: future studies will focus on the educational agenda of universities within their main activity - the educational process. In general, the university community is genuinely interested in conducting activities of different formats; however, they are separate and have not been held in the same city more than twice so far. Implementation of this professional activity is recognized in Russia and has received supports:

- Since 2017 - Information support from the United Nations Information Centre in Moscow.
- 2017 - Vernadsky National Ecological Award
- 2018 - 1st Prize and the Gold medal in the All-Russian contest "My country Russia" in the category "Implemented project".
- 2018 - Sakharov National Environmental Award, the Gold medal.
- 2018 - Vernadsky National Environmental Award.
- 2018 – "Leaders of Climate Development" Award of the Moscow Government.

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