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General Guidelines on Collaborative Sustainable Innovation



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**Social Sciences and Humanities
for Sustainable Innovation**

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SHOUT

Introduction

SHOUT is aiming to strengthen the innovation capacity and transformational role of Higher Education institutions (HEI), SMEs, and NGOs when dealing with complex problems presented in the SDGs and developing innovative sustainable solutions. SHOUT utilizes an inter-sectoral cooperation model and enhanced sharing of knowledge between the different stakeholders in eight European countries participating in the project consortium – Croatia, Cyprus, Germany, Greece, Italy, Lithuania, Portugal, Slovenia.

Cooperation between different actors and the creation of strategic networks is crucial for the promotion of Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) and active citizenship. Education is one of the most important pillars in tackling the social, economic, and environmental challenges of our global society and represents a crucial strategy in the pursuit of the SDGs.

SHOUT aims to identify and bridge the gaps by educating Social Sciences and Humanities (SSH) students, graduates, and professionals to get them ready for a job market that promotes sustainable development. The project, through desk research, interviews, and surveys, has established that the SSH competences that SSH students, graduates, and researchers possess, are essential for achieving the SDGs. The production of these general guidelines and the specific ones elaborated from the HEIs, SMEs, and NGOs point of view would like to:

- **emphasize the importance of sustainable competences of SSH students, graduates, and professionals**
- **identify gaps and offer practical solutions**
- **promote the benefits of collaboration on this ambitious project**

Which are the gaps highlighted from SHOUT’s research and why is collaboration needed?

The research *State-of-the-art report and good practices on Social Science and Humanities students and graduate innovativeness potential* conducted by SHOUT have identified various gaps concerning the challenges and needs of the different actors involved in the project.

Some of the main gaps identified by SHOUT are:

- An insufficient collaboration between the main actors (NGOs, Governments, HEIs, and SMEs) could strengthen the efforts to develop strategies to implement the SDGs
- A scarce collaboration between HEIs, NGOs, and SMEs could allow a greater impact on decision-makers and the improvement of the political agendas of our governments
- The lack of different expertise and approaches that could lead to innovation and offer alternative solutions to complex issues
- An education (offered to SSH students) that is very often too theoretical, students are not introduced to practical methods, research projects and other collaborative learning methods which would allow them to better develop key skills and competences that the current job market looks for



The practical experience, knowledge, and expertise of the different sectors involved in the project can actively contribute to filling in the gaps that are preventing a more tolerant and sustainable society. However, it is only when they actively collaborate that solutions to complex problems could be found.

According to the results of our surveys and interviews, SSH Students can play a crucial role in the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals. In particular, SSH students, graduates, and researchers hone the skills to bring much-needed sustainable changes in their societies. What is missing is the inter-sectoral cooperation between the main actors: HEIs, NGOs, and SMEs that can help students gain practical experience and the skills expected by the industry to access current and futuristic jobs.

Guidelines of how collaboration can be achieved in practice

For traineeship program development → This is an opportunity for NGOs, SMEs, and HEIs to offer practical knowledge and expertise to SSH students through traineeships and internships at NGOs and SMEs dealing with innovation projects. Also, this collaboration can potentially equip SSH students with the necessary competences related to social, economic, and environmental sustainability that will be required for their future employment.

For academic curriculum/program development → NGOs with the collaboration with academics, could offer new methodologies and methods of learning, e.g. non-formal learning, interventions, open discussions, and other tools based on the needs that exist in our societies as per their research and practical work. Moreover, the collaboration between SMEs and HEIs could create Academic Programs that are aligned much closer to the sustainability competences requirements of the industry. SMEs can also make a valuable contribution to program development by provisioning real-based challenges, case studies for students and researchers to address/solve.

For research and partnerships in projects related to the SDG competences and SSH → New synergies could enhance research and the development of innovative projects between HEIs and NGOs to include students and graduates in their implementation and enhance their employability and use their competences to create new innovative projects to fill in the gaps that exist in our societies. Moreover, by collaborating with a Network of Businesses, HEIs can derive support to create new projects for Students who can analyze how SDGs can be applied in real-life business scenarios.

For policy-making → NGOs could benefit from the fresh ideas of SSH students by writing research papers and policy recommendations to address the challenges of the SDGs on a political and governmental level and promote initiatives and policies that could tackle them.



Which are the benefits of collaboration between the main actors?

The benefit of collaboration between NGOs and HEIs

- Internships and courses organized/managed by NGOs in collaboration with HEIs can also help SSH students gaining missing skills such as process management, technical know-how, practical application, and moving from idea to action that is appreciated by the no-profit sector
- New networking opportunities to enhance future collaboration on projects and reach a greater impact at the local and national level
- The opportunity for NGOs to highlight societal challenges in the national and European contexts through research and collaboration with other actors in society and to integrate solutions in their agenda through policy and advocacy
- The NGOs can offer specific courses on education for sustainable development and apprenticeships to SSH students who can then contribute to sustainable innovations
- The active role of NGOs in promoting the competences and knowledge on the SDGs in students and the wider public by raising awareness through non-formal education, and education for global citizenship training programs, etc

The benefit of collaboration between NGOs and SSH students, professionals

- The research has proved that skills possessed by SSH students such as critical analysis, problem-solving, negotiation and communication, teaching and listening, and speaking foreign languages are useful to achieve the SDGs goals
- Gaining new fresh ideas from SSH students, graduates, or professionals. While providing in-depth knowledge about societal issues about the political, economic, and social environments, these actors can come up with the design of innovative solutions for civil society engagement and social change (e.g. producing reports, analysis, and recommendations)
- SSH students can support the Monitoring and Evaluation of Learnings from programs and projects implemented by NGOs understanding of the needs and profile of beneficiaries while assessing the social impact of the strategies implemented for future improvements
- SSH students can support NGOs delivering face to face programs with beneficiaries such as social operators, intercultural mediators, and youth workers

The benefit of collaboration between NGOs, other CSOs and SMEs

- New networking opportunities to enhance future collaboration on projects and reach a greater impact at the local and national level
- The opportunity for NGOs to highlight societal challenges in the national and European contexts through research and collaboration with other actors in society and to integrate solutions in their agenda through policy and advocacy
- Internships offered via SHOUT can lead to the practical implementation of competences to highlight societal challenges and opportunities in national contexts through research and collaboration with other actors in society and to integrate solutions in their agenda and course of work through policy recommendations, reports, etc



The benefit of collaboration between NGOs, other CSOs and SMEs

- Traineeship Program: Benefits the students immensely by providing a practical-oriented perspective. SMEs can become an extended arm of HEIs and function as finishing schools by providing the Students real-life exposure to what they are/have studied. The SMEs, in turn, will benefit only in the long term but getting a steady stream of qualified graduates, over some time
- Academic Program: Future Educational Programs having a better alignment of concepts with the SDGs. Since this is first-hand knowledge directly resulting from interaction with the industry, the Programs will not only provide the academic foundation but also the learnings from real-life practice and implementation. Better alignment of current and desired Sustainability competences' results in better productivity of students in organizations by shortening the learning curve at work

The benefit of collaboration between Network of businesses and HEIs

- Projects and Research: Benefit the students and HEIs immensely by providing a practical-oriented perspective. Through short-term projects and long-term research projects, the HEIs benefit by adding to their research base and knowledge base. The Network of Businesses may not directly or immediately benefit from the collaboration. However, it serves their larger objective of truly serving the long-term needs of students, graduates, professionals, researchers, HEIs, and SMEs
- Academic Program: Educational Programs, besides having better alignment of concepts with SDGs and providing insights on how it is implemented, will also provide the broader agenda of country-specific priorities and how the network of businesses with the Government to drive those priorities

How can SHOUT bridge the gap and support collaboration?

SHOUT consortium aims to bring all the actors together and bridge the gap between research and practice.

- SHOUT is the place to go to find the perfect internship – we put in contact SSH students interested in an internship with NGOs and SMEs who are looking for an intern willing to work in research areas and projects related to the SDGs
- SHOUT, through the creation of an online HUB, can support cross-sectoral collaboration between HEIs, SMEs, NGOs, and Civil Society Organisations at the national and European levels. The HUB is the place to go to connect with actors from different sectors, exchange ideas, and find new ways to collaborate to shape the agenda of national and European institutions
- The HUB will enable the opportunity to strengthen further the collaboration between HEIs, NGOs, and SMEs by offering the opportunity to carry on innovative projects for a more holistic and bottom-up approach.



SHOUT

Guidelines for Academia on Collaborative Sustainable Innovation

Summary

Emerging global issues require an urgent shift in people's lifestyles and a transformation of the way they think and act as a global community. To address the global challenges most efficiently, there is a need for new skills, competences, and values that will lead to more sustainability-oriented societies. The Global Education 2030 Agenda emphasizes education as essential to achieving all of the 17 Sustainable Development goals. "Education is both a goal in itself and a means for attaining all the other SDGs. It is not only an integral part of sustainable development but also a key enabler for it. That is why education represents an essential strategy in the pursuit of the SDGs". Education for Sustainable Development (ESD), which is promoted by UNESCO's Global Education 2030 agenda, acknowledges that the education systems must respond to this pressing need by defining relevant learning objectives and learning contents, introducing pedagogies that empower learners, and urging their institutions to include sustainability principles in their management structures.

SHOUT project aims to identify and fulfil the gaps by educating a specific target group, i.e. Social Sciences and Humanities (SSH) students, graduates, and professionals to get them ready for futuristic decisions aimed at promoting sustainable development. Hence, these set of guidelines are elaborated from the HEIs point of view to emphasize the importance of the role and value of competences of SSH students, graduates, and professionals in achieving SDGs.

These guidelines are based on the results of the desk research and surveys implemented across various partner countries of the SHOUT consortium. This international research not only emphasized the importance of SSH competences in the industry and social sector but also identified the gaps existing between the current competencies and expected competences of SSH students, graduates, and professionals. These guidelines will hopefully help to bridge this gap and to allow us to better showcase the role and possibilities of SSH students for achieving SDGs.

Education on SDGs can be implemented both through formal and structured programs such as courses at Educational Institutions and through non-formal approaches like training, internships, peer learning, project development, and new businesses. Hence, HEIs are powerful actors and ambassadors of changes necessary for society through development and implementation of such educational programs.

Why collaboration is needed

Employers and the public opinion, politicians, and policymakers declare the acknowledgement of the importance of the SSH in the contemporary increasingly complex society in general and in the rapidly changing labour market in particular. Flexible/adaptable skills taught and promoted by the Social Sciences and Humanities (SSH), such as critical thinking, creativity, coordinating with others, teamwork, emotional intelligence, negotiation skills, communicability, knowledge of foreign languages, are increasingly required.

These skills and competences are of great importance not only for personal career developments but also for the efforts aimed at the well-being of the whole planet, as they are outlined in the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Therefore, educating and fostering these skills and competences, as part of the Higher Education institutions' curricula might also be beneficial for the implementation of the SDGs. However, closer research suggests that on the level of implementation of the SDGs in various European countries the collaboration between the governments and the HEIs is not sufficient.

The main problems lie precisely not on the level of theoretical education, but on the level of the building of practical competencies. Too theoretical/expository driven education, prevailing in the SSH leads to the situation in which students are not introduced to practical methods, research projects, and other collaborative learning methods which would allow them to better develop key skills and competences that the current job market looks for. This surely implies that also much work still has to be done in what concerns the integration of most of the SDGs in HEIs curriculums.



These guidelines might be considered applicable for the whole academia, however, they are aimed at the SSH disciplines in particular. Despite the challenges and apparent public mistrust, SSHs is a popular field of studies – their students outnumber their STEM or Biomedical science colleagues. The quantity we, believe, should turn into quality - the SSH teachers and students should increase the public awareness of their importance.

Therefore, we suggest that bringing the SDGs and the SSH together might be mutually beneficial and the involvement of the SSH in the realization of the SDG might bring a positive impetus.

What is the purpose of the collaboration?

SDGs provide the basis to reframe the SSH discourse. The focus on the SDGs offers an alternative to the dominant emphasis on economic growth and preparation for the labor market. SDGs in their turn emphasizes the responsible life, shared not only with other people and cultures but also with other beings, the importance of dealing with social and environmental challenges our planet faces. These emphases do not contradict the self-perception of the SSH, quite the opposite, they correspond not only to the traditional humanist perspective in the SSH, they also correspond to the theoretical turns in contemporary SSH towards environmental issues and the considerations on nonhuman forms of life. Hence, HEIs can play a crucial role in developing and disseminating competencies to live a sustainable life among SSH students and the whole society:

- ➔ to provide students with the knowledge, skills, and motivation to understand and address the challenges of the SDGs;
- ➔ to empower and mobilize young people, to increase the public awareness concerning the SSH;
- ➔ to provide in-depth academic or vocational training to implement SDG solutions;
- ➔ to enhance opportunities for capacity building of students and professionals from developing countries to address challenges relating to the SDGs.

It is important to emphasize that the HEIs should be aimed not only at the implementation of SDG no. 4 “Quality education”, but at the increase of the participation in the implementation of all the SDGs.

How collaboration can look like in practice

There is a discrepancy in the approaches in regards to the teaching methods used to acquire sustainable competences:

Sustainability competences	Level of discrepancy
Strategic action	High
Interdisciplinary work	High
Anticipatory thinking	High
Tolerance for ambiguity and uncertainty	Medium
Interpersonal relations and collaboration	Medium
Empathy and change of perspective	Medium



Personal involvement	Medium
Systems Thinking	Medium
Communication and use of media	Medium
Critical thinking and analysis	Medium
Assessment and evaluation	Medium
Justice, responsibility and ethics	Low

While SSH students demand a Real-world learning approach that could help them to gain competences that are also useful for their professional careers, HEI teachers claim that the synergy and balance between different teaching methods is the best way to teach sustainability competences, and it helps to implement innovative problem-solving approaches. However, according to NGOs and SMEs, students are unable to acquire sustainability competences in the classroom as theoretical knowledge learned at a university does not match the skills and competencies valued in practice.

Universities, however, can play a key role in contributing to the achievement of the SDGs through core functions of university activity: learning and teaching; research; governance, culture and organizational operations; and external leadership. While learning and teaching, research, governance, and organizational operations, and external leadership are often approached separately, they are closely intertwined. The SDGs present great opportunities to create, strengthen, and communicate the links between these areas, and therefore a university approach to engagement with the SDGs is best.

Synergy and balance between different teaching methods is the best way to teach sustainability competences, and it helps to implement innovative problem-solving approaches. Such methods as the virtual learning environment and real-world learning could be employed to strengthen professional competences of SSHs, encourage their engagement in the study process, and bring major changes to the labour market by working independently or creating new jobs.

Finally, the role of the HEIs in the implementation of the SDGs might be summarized as follows:

Research on the SDGs → interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary research innovations and solutions national & local implementation; focus not only on the STEM and other hard sciences but also on the involvement of the SSH and their contribution.

Education for sustainable development → promotion and advocacy of the jobs, which aim at the implementation of the SDGs; mobilizing and increasing students' awareness of the SDGs; building skills and competences necessary for that purpose.

Policy concerning the SDGs → alignment of the management and administration of the HEIs with SDGs; fostering the implementation of the SDGs on campus; development of the policy proposals, based on the research concerning the SDGs.

Public engagement → fostering of the cross-sectoral dialogue and action; social advocacy of the SDGs; the increase of the HEIs' participation and visibility in the public efforts concerning the SDGs.

Which are the benefits of collaboration between the main actors?



The positive impacts that HEIs could detect are mainly linked to several aspects:

- the competitive advantage of differentiation on the market compared to other institutions
- the ability to capture the attention of students who are more motivated and inclined to sustainability issues
- catalyzation of economic resources available in community programs dedicated to the development of this type of activity
- meeting the discrepancies between existing SSHs related education programs and NGOs and SMEs needs and opportunities

One of the examples of the suggested collaboration will be SSH research and innovation HUB created during the time of the project. The HUB will support cross-sectoral cooperation between SSH teachers, students and researchers, and SME and NGO representatives on the national and international levels. It will also serve as a platform for connection with stakeholders from different sectors, sharing ideas, and finding new meaningful ways of collaboration.

The key features of the HUB include:

Learning area → this area will allow all users to access learning materials of their interest and to foster SSH research and innovation projects.

Traineeship area → this area will complement the real face-to-face traineeships and enable preparatory activities (such as the concrete definition of the research project and the performance of some desk research), support to the traineeship period, and allow the continuation of the research and innovation projects after the traineeship. It will be used mostly by SSH students participating in the mobilities and hosting SMEs and NGOs.

Project-oriented area → similar to the traineeship area, this area will be devoted to the development of research services, where SSH graduates, researchers, and teachers can offer their services, competences, and industry and 3rd sector players can share their needs/challenges. A match-making platform between the demand and supply side for innovation and research projects performed by SSH graduates, researchers, and teachers.

The SSH research and innovation HUB will be designed not only to foster and nurture the relations between academia and industry and 3rd sector representatives but also to create and stimulate real and meaningful learning-teaching opportunities, supported by innovative educational programs and working areas, enabling the development of research-based projects. Further, the HUB will create an area for the sustainability of the relations between HEIs, SMEs, and NGOs, and for the stimulation of more interactions between SSH graduates and researchers and industry that will enable the match of competences/knowledge and needs/challenges.



SHOUT

Guidelines for NGOs on Collaborative Sustainable Innovation

Summary

It is undeniable that one of the key prerequisites for achieving SDGs is collaboration, especially between NGOs and Civil society organizations (CSO) active in the field of SDGs. In the partner countries participating in the SHOUT project, it has been highlighted that cooperation and strategic networks lead to a better implementation of the 2030 UN Agenda goals. Moreover, as presented by goal number 17: partnerships for the goals, it is demonstrated that public-private and civil society partnerships are needed to encourage and promote sustainability and a more tolerant global society. Hence, NGOs and CSOs have been proven crucial in promoting Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) and active citizenship. Along with goal 17 which enhances the capacity building of institutions for strategic and effective partnerships, goal number 4: quality education, is one of the most important pillars in tackling the social, economic, and environmental challenges of our global society. The Global Education 2030 Agenda emphasizes that “education is both a goal in itself and a means for attaining all the other SDGs. It is not only an integral part of sustainable development but also a key enabler for it. That is why education represents an essential strategy in the pursuit of the SDGs¹.”

SHOUT aims to identify and fulfill the gaps by educating a specific target group, i.e. Social Sciences and Humanities (SSH) students, graduates, and professionals to get them ready for futuristic professions aimed at promoting sustainable development. Through SHOUT, we aspire to establish that the SSH competences are essential for achieving the SDGs. Hence, these specific guidelines are elaborated from the NGOs' point of view to emphasize the importance of the competences of SSH students, graduates, and professionals in achieving SDGs. The guidelines are derived from the desk research, surveys, and tried and tested best practices implemented across various partner countries of the SHOUT consortium. These guidelines help professionals in better showcasing the results and impacts of their research and innovation projects.

NGOs are powerful social actors and ambassadors of change since through their course of work and innovation projects, they promote advocacy, research, and policymaking and contribute towards changing the mentality of our communities and improving the political agendas of our governments.

Why is collaboration needed?

As mentioned above, the hands-on experience, knowledge, and expertise of the no-profit sector can actively contribute to filling in the gaps that exist in reaching a more tolerant and sustainable society as per the SDGs. Through SHOUT's research, various gaps have been identified regarding the challenges and needs of NGOs as presented in the **“State-of-the-art report and good practices on Social Science and Humanities students and graduate innovativeness potential”**.

The main aim of the SHOUT research was to find out the importance and assessment of Social Sciences and Humanities (SSH) students' Sustainability Competencies. These competencies are essential for professionals working at NGOs to implement SDG-related initiatives. 18% of our 483 participants were NGOs and 10 interviews with NGOs were also conducted by the project's partner countries.

Some of the identified gaps concerning NGOs are:

- ➔ An insufficient collaboration between the main actors (NGOs, Governments, HEIs and SMEs) could strengthen the efforts to develop strategies to implement the SDGs.

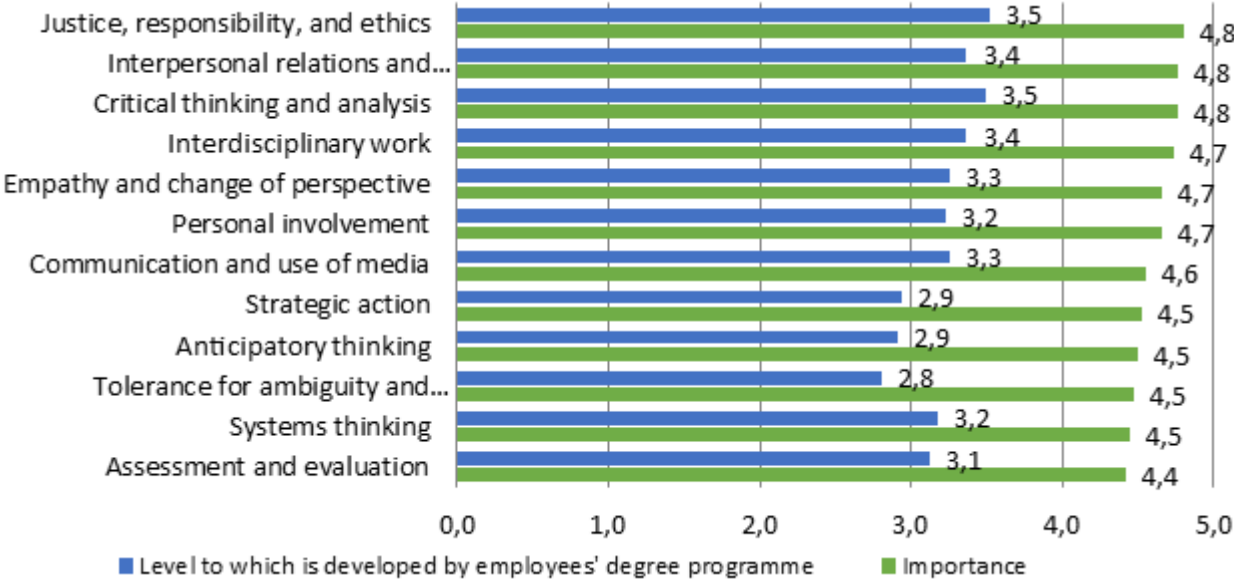
¹ Source: UNESCO - Education for Sustainable Development: Learning Objectives https://www.unesco.de/sites/default/files/2018-08/unesco_education_for_sustainable_development_goals.pdf



- ➔ A scarce collaboration with other NGOs and Civil Society Organisations could allow a greater impact on decision-makers.
- ➔ The lack of different expertise and approaches that could lead to innovation and offer alternative solutions to complex issues.

According to the research, NGOs are the actors most familiar with SDGs in contrast with SSH students and academics, and so an improved collaboration between the no-profit sector and academic providers can help students to gain a better understanding of the SDGs. Practical application and experience is the ultimate way to develop sustainability competences, but the students admitted that their studies lacked a practical component and a knowledge of the UN 2030 Agenda. There is an urgent need hence, for the development of training/educational materials to be integrated into the Social Sciences and Humanities (SSH) curriculum.

Moreover, the responses of NGOs who took part to SHOUT questionnaires and interviews also highlighted the discrepancy between the competencies required/appreciated by NGOs and the competence possessed by students (see chart below).



As shown in the chart above, NGOs prefer Justice, responsibility, and ethics; Interpersonal relations and collaboration as sustainability competencies for SSH employees to have. Even though the mentioned competencies are perceived as the most important, however, the most developed competencies slightly differ.

Even if few discrepancies have been identified, the research conducted by the SHOUT Consortium has thus highlighted the crucial role of SSH in the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals. In particular, SSH students, graduates, and researchers have the skills to bring the much-needed sustainable changes in their societies. What is currently missing is the inter-sectoral cooperation between the main actors: HEIs, NGOs, and SMEs. The collaboration among different sectors can lead to the development of innovative sustainable solutions to the complex issues presented in the SDGs.

How collaboration can be achieved in practice

Collaboration between NGOs and HEIs

- For traineeship program development: This is an opportunity for NGOs and HEIs to offer practical knowledge and expertise to SSH students through traineeships and internships at NGOs dealing with innovation projects. Also, this collaboration can potentially equip SSH students with the necessary competences related to social, economic, and environmental sustainability that will be required for their future employment in the NGO sectors to be skilled enough to contribute to innovative projects once they graduate
- For academic curriculum development: NGOs with the collaboration with academics, could offer new methodologies and methods of learning, e.g. non-formal learning, interventions, open discussions, and other tools based on the needs that exist in our societies as per their research and practical work
- For research and partnerships in projects related to the SDG competences and SSH: New synergies could enhance research and the development of innovative projects between HEIs and NGOs to include students and graduates in their implementation and enhance their employability and use their competences to create new innovative projects to fill in the gaps that exist in our societies

Collaboration between NGOs and SMEs/CSOs

- For research (for further research on what has been implemented, what is missing, and ways to fill in the gaps)
- For partnerships and synergies in projects related to the SDGs (collaboration is needed to achieve the SDGs and this could contribute to goal number 17 to build strong institutions that will collaborate on innovative projects and engage SSH professionals in the making to address the challenges of the SDGs, using the competences of SSH)
- For policy-making (by writing research papers and policy recommendations with the help and collaboration of SSH, to address the challenges of the SDGs on a political and governmental level and promote initiatives and policies that could tackle them)

Which are the benefits of collaboration for NGOs?

Benefits for NGOs when collaborating with HEIs

- Internships and courses organized/managed by NGOs in collaboration with HEIs can also help SSH students gaining missing skills such as process management, technical know-how, practical application, and moving from idea to action that is appreciated by the no-profit sector
- New networking opportunities to enhance future collaboration on projects and reach a greater impact at the local and national level
- The opportunity for NGOs to highlight societal challenges in the national and European contexts through research and collaboration with other actors in society and to integrate solutions in their agenda through policy and advocacy
- The NGOs can offer specific courses on education for sustainable development and apprenticeships to SSH students who can then contribute to sustainable innovations
- The active role of NGOs in promoting the competences and knowledge on the SDGs in students and the wider public by raising awareness through non-formal education, and education for global citizenship training programs, etc



Benefits for NGOs when collaborating with SSH professionals/graduates

- The research has proved that skills possessed by SSH students such as critical analysis, problem-solving, negotiation and communication, teaching and listening, and speaking foreign languages are useful to achieve the SDGs goals
- Gaining new fresh ideas from SSH students, graduates, or professionals. While providing in-depth knowledge about societal issues concerning the political, economic, and social environments, these actors can come up with the design of innovative solutions for civil society engagement and social change (e.g. producing reports, analysis, and recommendations)
- SSH students can support the Monitoring and Evaluation of Learnings from programs and projects implemented by NGOs understanding of the needs and profile of beneficiaries while assessing the social impact of the strategies implemented for future improvements
- SSH students can support NGOs delivering face to face programs with beneficiaries such as social operators, intercultural mediators, and youth workers

Benefits for NGOs when collaborating with other CSOs and SMEs

- New networking opportunities to enhance future collaboration on projects and reach a greater impact at the local and national level
- The opportunity for NGOs to highlight societal challenges in the national and European contexts through research and collaboration with other actors in society and to integrate solutions in their agenda through policy and advocacy
- Internships offered via SHOUT can lead to the practical implementation of competences to highlight societal challenges and opportunities in national contexts through research and collaboration with other actors in society and to integrate solutions in their agenda and course of work through policy recommendations, reports, etc





**Guidelines for the Industry on Collaborative Sustainable
Innovation**

Summary

The Global Education 2030 Agenda emphasizes education as essential to achieving all of the 17 Sustainable Development goals. “Education is both a goal in itself and a means for attaining all the other SDGs. It is not only an integral part of sustainable development but also a key enabler for it. That is why education represents an essential strategy in the pursuit of the SDGs².”

Global issues require an urgent shift in our lifestyles and a transformation of the way we think and act. To achieve this change, we need new skills, values, and attitudes that lead to more sustainable societies. Education for Sustainable Development (ESD), which is promoted by UNESCO’s Global Education 2030 agenda, acknowledges that the education systems must respond to this pressing need by defining relevant learning objectives and learning contents, introducing pedagogies that empower learners, and urging their institutions to include sustainability principles in their management structures.

This sets an interesting backdrop for the SHOUT project. SHOUT aspires to identify and fulfil the gaps by educating a specific target group, i.e. Social Sciences and Humanities (SSH) students, graduates, and professionals to get them ready for futuristic professions aimed at promoting sustainable development. Through SHOUT, we aspire to establish that the SSH competencies are essential for achieving SDGs.

Our research and surveys have not just confirmed the critical importance of SSH competences in the industry and social sector, but also have highlighted the gaps existing between the current competencies and expected competences of SSH students, graduates, and professionals. To bridge the gap, it is vital to establish strong collaboration. The type of collaboration we see is broadly between 1. SMEs and HEIs and 2. A network of businesses (a formal consortium of SMEs in every country) and HEIs.

Education on SDGs can always happen through formal and structured programs such as courses at Educational Institutions. Education can also happen through non-formal approaches like training, internships, peer learning, project development, and new businesses.

Why is collaboration needed?

These specific guidelines are elaborated from the SMEs' point of view to emphasize the importance of the competences of SSH students, graduates, and professionals in achieving SDGs. The guidelines are derived from the desk research, surveys, and tried and tested best practices implemented across various partner countries of the SHOUT consortium. These guidelines help the researchers in better showcasing the results and impacts of their research and innovation projects.

Need for effective collaboration between SMEs and the other stakeholders (HEIs, SSH Students/Graduates/Professionals) to achieve SDGs (based on the information gathered during online surveys and semi-structured interviews)

Why is such a collaboration needed at all? It is common knowledge that there is a huge discrepancy between the skills expected by the industry and the skills possessed by the SSH fraternity. The HEIs may not necessarily know the contemporary skills that are demanded in the current and futuristic jobs. Collaboration is an effective and essential way for the HEIs and Industry to work together to create common solutions.

² Source: UNESCO - Education for Sustainable Development: Learning Objectives https://www.unesco.de/sites/default/files/2018-08/unesco_education_for_sustainable_development_goals.pdf



The surveys and interviews conducted across various stakeholders highlighted specific gaps between the expectations on competences that the job market needs or expects to see in the professionals and the ones that the SSH students/graduates/professionals possess.

To align to build competences closer to the expectations of the industry, the following aspects need to be factored in, while creating SSH Educational Programs.

- ➔ Focus more on collaborating with SMEs that have an international presence. Such SMEs show a greater interest in implementing practices to promote the SDGs objectives
- ➔ The inference is that organizations with an international presence possess the highest level of SSH competences. This means, they are the best source for developing competences among SSH professionals, through non-formal learning mode (on the job training, internships, projects) International businesses require companies to adopt and implement SDGs principles quicker compared to businesses operating locally or nationally
- ➔ It is further recommended that young SME organizations (1-4 years old) have a greater affinity to involve in SDG areas
- ➔ Older organizations (15+ years old) tend to be more reluctant to engage in open and collaborative partnerships. Therefore, it is suggested to build stronger collaborative partnerships with younger organizations with innovative businesses

Discrepancies identified between the competencies of SSH graduates and competences required for jobs

The industry responses also highlight the competence areas where there is the highest discrepancy between current and expected competences. Based on those inferences, the collaboration should prioritize the intensity of addressing those gaps based on the identified discrepancy. The suggested prioritization is:

Sustainability competences	Level of discrepancy
Tolerance for ambiguity and uncertainty	High
Interpersonal relations and collaboration	High
Strategic action	High
Empathy and change of perspective	Medium
Personal involvement	Medium
Interdisciplinary work	Medium
Anticipatory thinking	Medium
Systems Thinking	Low
Justice, responsibility and ethics	Low
Communication and use of media	Low
Critical thinking and analysis	Low



How collaboration can be achieved in practice

Collaboration between SMEs and HEIs

For Traineeship Program Development → Traineeship/Internship are tools that can contribute to filling the gaps between competencies of SSH graduates and competences required for jobs. The collaboration should aim at working with SME organizations that are operating according to the SDG priorities and willing to help in building competencies of SSH students, graduates, and professionals.

For Academic Program Development → Collaborate with selected SMEs in every partner country to gather specific and real-time needs of the industry, to create Academic Programs that are aligned much closer to the sustainability competences requirements of the industry. SMEs can also make valuable contributions to program development by provisioning real-based challenges, case-studies for students and researchers to address/solve.

Collaboration between Network of businesses and HEIs

Projects and Research → Project work is an effective way of developing a deeper understanding of a subject. Projects also provide the benefits of both internship and research. By collaborating with a Network of Businesses, HEIs can derive support to create new projects for Students who can analyze how SDGs can be applied in real-life business scenarios. However, students who are more academically inclined can take up research work through in-depth studies with the support of a vast network.

Academic Program Development → Collaborate with a Network of businesses to learn from initiatives already implemented, tried, and tested. The collaboration should discuss and examine possibilities to what extent SDGs can be integrated into the businesses and how they can be incorporated in Academic Programs so that future graduates are ready with Sustainability-based competences by the time they finish Higher Education.

Some good examples for possible collaboration with Network of Business:

- **Cyprus:** SDSN Cyprus
- **Germany:** SDGs praxisnah umsetzen" (how to practically implement the SDGs) by UnternehmensGrün
- **Greece:** AIESEC: A network of organizations, in the promotion of SDGs
- **Portugal:** Business Council for Sustainable Development



Which are the benefits of collaboration for NGOs?

Between SMEs and HEIs

- **Traineeship Program:** Benefits the students immensely by providing a practical-oriented perspective. SMEs can become an extended arm of HEIs and function as finishing schools by providing the students with real life exposure to what they are/have studied. The SMEs in turn will benefit only in the long term but getting a steady stream of qualified graduates, over some time
- **Academic Program:** Future Educational Programs having a better alignment of concepts with the SDGs. Since this is firsthand knowledge directly resulting from interaction with the industry, the Programs will not only provide the academic foundation but also the learnings from real-life practice and implementation. Better alignment of current and desired Sustainability competences' results in better productivity of students in organizations by shortening the learning curve at work

Between Network of businesses and HEIs

- **Projects and Research:** Benefit the students and HEIs immensely by providing a practical-oriented perspective. Through short-term projects and long-term research projects, the HEIs benefit by adding to their research base and knowledge base. The Network of Businesses may not directly or immediately benefit from the collaboration. However, it serves their larger objective of truly serving the long-term needs of students, graduates, professionals, researchers, HEIs, and SMEs
- **Academic Program:** Educational Programs, besides having better alignment of concepts with SDGs and providing insights on how it is implemented, will also provide the broader agenda of country-specific priorities and how the network of businesses with the Government to drive those priorities





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