

# EDUCATION FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT IN TOURISM EMPOWERING FUTURE GENERATIONS

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## ABSTRACT

Political and economic transformation and the policies of the often changing governments of the Central and Eastern European countries coupled with the general deception of the reforms have resulted in the erosion of the formerly existing social ties, thus weakening the social capital of these nations. Subjective well-being is at the lowest level in Hungary where a series of measures and phenomena led to the general feeling of being excluded from policy-making is reflected in the hopelessness and depression of the population. It would be of utmost importance to encourage future generations to become active and take the reins of future in their own hands. This can be done by the general introduction of Education for Sustainability (EfS) the concept of which can reinforce faith and hope in a sustainable future. This paper attempts to demonstrate how Education for Sustainability can positively influence future expectations of tourism and hospitality students.

**Keywords:** Subjective Well-Being, Future Expectations of Tourism Students, Societal Consequences of EfS, Empowerment

## INTRODUCTION

Sustainable development is a concept that focuses the attention of human beings on the conditions of continuity of life. Even a utilitarian view of the environment requires that we should understand the principles of sustainable development, the interdependence of environment, economy and social systems, so that we could use natural resources and the environment efficiently, while preserving the homeostasis of the Earth. The society, based on a sustainable form of development, is a dynamic and a permanently changing one. While utilizing natural resources, investments, technological improvements and institutional systems in the process of permanent changes in conformity with the demands of the present and the near future sustainable development is a way to satisfying the demands and hopes of the present generation without hazarding similar aspirations for future generations. Literature on the topic has been focusing on the ecological and economic aspects of sustainability although the societal considerations are equally important (Blij 2011).

Life satisfaction measures how people evaluate their life as a whole rather than their current feelings. It

captures a reflective assessment of which life circumstances and conditions are important for subjective well-being. According to the OECD Factbook (2010), when asked about their life, nearly **59% of people in the OECD say they are satisfied with their life at present and 68% believe that their life will be satisfying five years later**. The Netherlands, Denmark and Finland all have the highest amount of people satisfied with their life (85% or more); in Hungary, Estonia, the Slovak Republic, and Turkey, less than 35% of people are satisfied with their life at present.

Happiness, or subjective well-being, is defined as the presence of positive experiences and feelings, and/or the absence of negative experiences and feelings. Across the OECD, **72% of survey respondents reported having more positive experiences in an average day** (feelings of rest, pride in accomplishment, enjoyment, etc) than negative experiences (pain, worry, sadness, boredom, etc).

Life satisfaction is quite heterogeneously distributed across countries of the enlarged European Union. Previous research (Böhnke 2008) has shown how living conditions within individual countries, such as access to material and emotional resources, are important for personal well-being, but it has been less successful in explaining differences between countries. People are well aware that the institutional and cultural settings in which their lives are embedded create opportunities and limitations: within individual countries, perceptions of society influence life satisfaction outcomes irrespective of access to resources. However, their importance for well-being differs across Europe: perceptions of societies are highly decisive in countries that provide only a minimum of social security and in which the reliability of political institutions is poor. In rich and stable countries, the impact is weaker and private social support becomes more important. In addition to these country-specific weights of life satisfaction determinants, life satisfaction variations between countries can be explained to a large extent by taking into consideration the economic performance, the social security level, and the political culture in a country— all in all, general conditions that enable people to live a respectable life.

	People reporting high evaluation of their life as a whole	People reporting having experienced the feeling of		
	At Present	In 5 years	Sadness	Depression
HUN	22,7	35,6	23,3	26,8
OECD average	63,4	70,8	18,9	9,9

*Table 1: Subjective well-being characteristics of Hungarian population*

Source: OECD Factbook 2010

The above table points out some of the main characteristics of the subjective well-being of the Hungarian population. On the positive side, 22,7 % of the sample reported satisfaction, which is still 40,7 points less

than the OECD average and the future expectations result (5 years forecast) proved to be slightly better, that is, 35,2 points less than the OECD average. On the negative side, experiencing sadness was reported 4,4 points; and depression 16,9 points more frequently than OECD average. The two characteristics combined demonstrate a generalized feeling of disappointment and discomfort in the population the victims of which are clearly the future generations that do not have a secure emotional background to rely on when planning the future. The next paragraph will explain some of the reasons why.

Following the political changes the rapidly growing prosperity of the higher ranking, financially better equipped social strata and the tendency for individualization together with the desire to get rich inevitably led to a loosening of relations considered 'uneconomic' and also to the upgrading of financially valuable relations. The new emphasis on democracy, freedom and individual choice was reflected in the growing significance of values such as autonomy, independence and respect for others' individuality. Whereas the importance of respect for differences and the appreciation of individual performance was on the rise, there was a corresponding ebb of solidarity towards people lagging behind in this new wealth-oriented society. The nuclearization of families signals the decline of socially integrative strong relationships. In the new democratic political system criticism against the 'regime', the government and state representatives is no longer prosecuted. Fear of retaliation and its companion servile attitude towards power has declined. As a side-effect of this process the prestige of state authorities and loyalty to them had eroded. The majority of Hungarians lost trust in their government and the Parliament.

The Hungary 2025 research findings (Hungary 2025) show that university students' subjective well-being is largely influenced by the actual political scene, the constantly changing legislation and the general deception of the population. Excluded from participation in the democratic institutions, policy-making, students feel that their life does not depend on their own intentions, but on how the politics of the frequently changing governments will lead them. They perceive unemployment as the first challenge of their future, followed by poor financial situation. (Hungary 2025, p. 45.)

## **THEORETICAL AND CONCEPTUAL CONSIDERATIONS**

It has been argued that higher education providers have a significant responsibility for promoting sustainability (International Association of Universities 2006; Reid and Petocz 2006; Sibbel 2009). The Association of University Leaders for a Sustainable Future (1994) outlined the major role universities have in achieving the outcomes identified in their 10 Point Action Plan (the Talloires Declaration). This Action Plan identified the urgent need to address problems in order to create 'an equitable and sustainable future for all humankind' (p. 1). Universities that are signatories agree to 'create programs to develop the capability of university faculty to teach environmental literacy to all undergraduate, graduate, and professional students' (p. 1). Issues related to education for sustainability were given prominence at the UN Conference on Environment and Development in Rio de Janeiro in 1992 where Agenda 21 was endorsed. This document identified a reorientation of education towards sustainable development, increased public awareness of environmental issues and promoted environmental training as being critical to address environmental and development issues (Holdsworth et al. 2008 ; Reid and Petocz 2006). More recently, the

call for management education to include business sustainability was articulated in the United Nations' (2008) Principles for Responsible Management Education initiative. The first principle requires management educators to 'develop the capabilities of students to be future generators of sustainable value for business and society at large and to work for an inclusive and sustainable global economy' (p. 2). Realizing the key role of learning, the necessity of harmonization, the UN has dedicated the decade between 2005 and 2014 as the Decade of Education for Sustainable Development, and this is also why the Kiev meeting of environmental ministers commissioned the UNECE, to elaborate the Strategy for Education for Sustainable Development (ESD).

Similarly, an exposure to contemporary tourism scholarship on various conceptions of social justice (e.g., McCabe, 2009) and environmental sustainability (e.g., Wheeller, 2003) would allow tourism students to debate and critique different perspectives on these issues to forge their own understandings and moral commitments. There is, for example, a growing body of literature that critiques contemporary financial systems, arguing that the global market economy functions to intensify ecological crises, widen social gaps, and stimulate terrorism and fanaticism (e.g., Stiglitz, 2002). Thus, rather than take the present state of modern global capitalism for granted, students could be encouraged to analyze how the current system enables or constrains particular outcomes, and they could also consider potential alternatives.

Higher education is generally organized into highly specialized areas of knowledge and traditional disciplines. Designing a sustainable human future requires a paradigm shift toward a systemic perspective emphasizing collaboration and cooperation. Much of higher education stresses individual learning and competition, resulting in professionals who are ill prepared for cooperative efforts. Learning is fragmented, and faculty, responding to long-established incentives (e.g., tenure, research) and professional practices, are often discouraged from extending their work into other disciplines or inviting interdisciplinary collaboration.

The university is a microcosm of the larger community. Therefore, the manner in which it carries out its daily activities is an important demonstration of ways to achieve environmentally responsible living and to reinforce desired values and behaviors in the whole community. These activities provide unparalleled opportunities for teaching, research, and learning. By focusing on itself, the university can engage students in understanding the "institutional metabolism" of materials, goods, services, and transportation and the ecological and social footprint of all these activities. Students can be made aware of their "ecological address," and they can and would be actively engaged in the practice of environmentally sustainable living. Moreover, this is one of the most effective strategies to build a strong sense of collaboration and community throughout the institution—a long-standing central goal for college and university administrators and trustees.

Finally, the learning and benefit to society of higher education forming partnerships with local and regional communities to help make them socially vibrant, economically secure, and environmentally sustainable will be a crucial part of successful higher education. Colleges and universities have an obligation to support local and regional communities, making every action lead to community improvement. Higher education institutions are anchor institutions for economic development in most of their communities,

especially now that the private sector moves facilities, capital, and jobs frequently as mergers, acquisitions, and globalization become the norm for corporations. Imagine the economic leverage if universities were modeling sustainability by purchasing sustainably preferable products and services and how much greater the benefit could be if they were doing joint purchasing with local communities. Utilizing faculty and students to conduct the research as an integral part of the learning experience would greatly enhance their education and promote a strong sense of connection to and caring for the local communities and to the ecosystems of which they are a part.

The community-based tradition implies that sustainability is or can be defined through a negotiation process, which indicates that the limits of growth are socially constructed (Saarinen 2006). As a social construct, sustainability refers to the maximum levels of the known or perceived impacts of tourism that are permissible in a certain time-space context before the negative impacts are considered to be too disturbing from the perspectives of specific social, cultural, political, or economic actors who possess sufficient power over the chosen indicators and criteria. The community-based tradition aims to empower the hosts in development discourses and practices, but in the end the constructive perspective indicates that the limits of tourism are associated ontologically with power relations in a certain context. By empowering the communities, however, the limits of growth in tourism can be defined in a more equal way and one that is more beneficial for the local people (Saarinen 2006).

Education for sustainability (EfS) is emerging as an urgent imperative and challenge for higher education. But what exactly does it mean to put sustainability into higher education? How do we bring sustainability themes into university curriculum, across the enormous diversity of academic disciplines? Hegarty et al. (2011) describe the experience of teaching a large 'stand-alone' EfS subject which sits within the professional contexts of the large first-year cohort undertaking it. The authors' reflections on the student experience and feedback suggest that while academics build towards a deeply embedded sustainability ethic in higher education, specialist parallel courses have a valuable role to play in the transition to sustainable futures. It is vital that students are equipped with the skills and knowledge that will empower them to conceptualize the consequences of change: from the threatening outcome of our prevailing unsustainable mindsets, to the hope of new values and reconnection of individuals with community and nature. Jamal et al. (2011) also underline the necessity of collaborative learning as a progressive, experiential and collaborative approach to sustainable tourism pedagogy (STP). In their article Six core STP literacies (technical, analytical, ecological, multi-cultural, ethical, policy and political) are identified, which guide skill and knowledge development for the sustainability practitioner. These are facilitated through experiential education in the field that facilitates critical thinking, practical knowledge and participatory action. It is argued that a critical reflexive stance combined with a collaborative community service-learning approach in STP enables phronesis (practical wisdom) and praxis (social change). A case example is provided of an academic-community collaboration involving undergraduate students, local public and private sector stakeholders, plus diverse rural residents that came together temporarily to explore a cultural heritage issue and challenge. This collaboration facilitated collaborative learning, diverse community involvement and community service. The case overview illustrates a teaching opportunity that conveys how some of these STP priorities were undertaken, including the need for critical social action (to address not only

environmental issues but also social-cultural sustainability issues related to the well-being of minority, marginalized and diverse populations).

Blij (2011) perceives the defining moment in sustainability the publication of the Brundtland Report Our common future in 1987, with the now well-known definition (and the basis of the present report): ‘sustainable development is development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs’. This definition puts the needs of citizens at the forefront of the discussion, and those needs are not necessarily only material ones. Sustainable development should be seen as a process which does not focus on economic development alone, but which also includes well-balanced ecological and social development. In fact, sustainable development refers to quality of life in the broadest possible sense. The difficult thing about the social aspect of sustainability is that it is layered (it pertains to both an individual and a collective level), and that it is reflexive (there is a continuous exchange between what we observe, how we interpret this, and how we behave). Added to this, in a social respect, too, sustainability is a process in which goals are frequently being adjusted, which makes it difficult to measure it with any precision.

Trust in society, both between individual citizens and between people and government, works in favor of sustainability policy. One of the ways in which the social aspect can contribute to the realization of economic and ecological goals is by creating public support. However, the social aspects of sustainability are not only functional; they are also important in an autonomous sense. A society where trust is inherent, where people feel safe, where social fabric, cohesion and engagement are all strong, and where in addition material security is guaranteed, is an attractive society for people to live in. This situation is beneficial for people’s physical and mental well-being, now and in the future. It also provides ample opportunities for a good start for future generations.

Lakatos (2002) writes that education is the key factor in ensuring sustainable development. It is the process of education and learning that leads to an ever-growing number of people, who are sensitive to environmental issues. Learning, as well as teaching, can be discerned so that learning is not a precondition of life, but can increasingly become one of its concomitants. To view it from a traditional aspect, the idea of “learning through life” means education outside the school system, taking place after the school is finished. It can be stated that learning is actually an endless process, having innumerable forms in human life outside the school system.

## **CONCLUSION**

Sustainable development must incorporate different aspects of human ecology, environment and society. This paper has suggested the inclusion of sustainable development in the curricula of tourism and hospitality students with the intention of (a) widening their horizon in the ethical and sustainable development practices (b) getting to know those principles that guide today’s economic developments and (c) to gain an insight to those principles which may help students to understand that their future can be planned and foreseen. Planning requires active participation and inclusion in shaping tomorrow and empowerment is

what these students need in order to make their voices be heard. The basis and background of empowerment can only be information, knowledge of the sustainability practices, so it is of imperative importance that university students are provided interdisciplinary sustainability courses, because it is only with the help of transformative pedagogies that learners (and therefore classes and learning communities) can turn into inquisitive, reflective, experienced and critical thinking individuals – the basic unit of a sustainable society (Pace 2010)

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