

# SUSTAINABLE ORGANISATIONS TO IMPLEMENT THE STRATEGIC CONCEPT OF SUSTAINABILITY

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**Abstract** Achieving the goals of sustainable development is only possible by representing the interests of all the organization's stakeholders. The purpose of the article is to show that for the competitive flourishing of the economy and the achievement of a just society, we must direct socio-economic trends to the concept of equal fulfilment of the interests of organizations and the economy, people and society, and nature and the natural environment. Using a qualitative methodological approach and limitation to a case study of a public organization, our research results showed that to implement such a concept of sustainability, we need sustainable organizations that are committed to sustainable development with a sustainable vision, mission, purpose, (fundamental) goals, strategic directions, and strategies.

**Keywords:**

sustainability,  
sustainable  
development,  
strategic  
management,  
organisation,  
social  
responsibility

**JEL:**

L21, L30, M14

## 1 Introduction

The global environment and industry bring many opportunities to organisations. To take advantage of business opportunities, an organisation must consider different aspects of sustainable development and include them in its development guidelines. If the organisation's development is intended for sustainable development, the organisation's business operations will also be sustainable (Štrukelj et al., 2020; Wheelen et al., 2018).

In this research, we, therefore, started with the following research questions (RQs):  
(RQ1): *What kind of organisation do we need to introduce a strategic concept of organisational sustainability?*

(RQ2): *Do we need sustainable governance of the organisation to introduce a strategic concept of organisational sustainability?*

From the knowledge of integral management (Belak et al., 2014; Belak and Duh, 2012; Štrukelj et al., 2017), it is clear that the governance and management process is superior to the business process, and therefore, we set the following research thesis (T):

(T1): *Responsible organisation governance is a key starting point for the organisation's sustainable development and, therefore, to establish justification for a strategic concept of organisational sustainability.*

The article is structured following the IMRaD structure, so the next section is dedicated to the theoretical background/literature review (section 2), followed by the methodology (section 3), then we present the research results from findings (section 4), and the article ends with a presentation of the discussion and conclusions (section 5).

## 2 Theoretical Background

Sustainable development is “*the ability to make development sustainable to ensure that it meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs*” (World Commission on Environment and Development, 1987).

The model of the UN (United Nations) SDGs (Sustainable Development Goals) (UN, 2015) tries to create social equality and economic certainty and equality for humans. These goals are part of the UN 2030 Agenda, which aims to ensure prosperity, end poverty and protect the planet by 2030.

We emphasise that the organisation is the key to achieving sustainability and the key link between both personal and social responsibility. We suggest setting up responsible management and the assimilation of sustainable development and social responsibility into the strategic development orientations of organisations, and, consequently, into their operations.

When working at the attainment of sustainable development within an organisation, it is, for that reason, required to begin from the micro aspect (personal), which by the mezzo aspect (organisation) affects the macro aspect (social, environmental and economic) (Štrukelj et al., 2020; 2022).

Reaching out towards sustainable development is more straightforward with partnerships, which is the 17th SDG of the UN. Three key forms of partnerships are (Dodds, 2016): (1) Multi-stakeholder partnerships – remarkable transformations, contributions and dedications to sustainable development; (2) Voluntary initiatives – individual non-compulsory commitments that to reach selected, well-defined outcomes for sustainable development; (3) Public-private partnerships – contractual arrangements between private and public sector agencies. They join forces and share knowledge and resources.

Organisations play an important part in guaranteeing sustainability, as shown in Chapter 4 (research) – the selected public and non-profit university is introduced. Universities are important partners in reaching the UN SDGs because they have a powerful, visible role among their stakeholders and are crucial partners in multi-stakeholder memberships. An important part of the longer-term, strategic directions of public and private universities is “reaching the strategic goals of sustainability”.

### **3 Methodology**

Various data collection methods were employed in the examination's conceptual part. The research and analysis of the fundamental studied literature were employed as a fundament in the empirical section.

In the conceptual part, descriptive methods. i.e. the comparative method, classification method, method of abstraction, method of induction and deduction were used (Ambrož et al., 2015; Ivanko, 2007). The Dialectical Theory of Systems (DTS) was also used, with interdependence and synergy of all necessary aspects taken into deliberation (Mulej et al., 2013).

In the practical part of the examination, the procedure of the case study technique (Dingsøyr et al., 2023) was used to help understand diverse circumstances and situations. For examining and explaining the case, publicly accessible data were used.

### **4 Research Results**

In this chapter, sustainable management of universities is presented first to understand better a case study presented secondly.

The universities can help to reach the SDGs. They must go along with time, continuously change, meet up with local and global environment expectations and flexibly reply to the various stakeholder's demands. They impact the identification and visibility of necessary changes. With innovative, recently developed new understanding and knowledge as well as recent initiatives, universities help to solve problems and transform practice. They are initiators of future leaders (Hanieh et al., 2015; Knez-Riedl, 2006).

To fulfil the SDGs (UN, 2015), humanity must reach a sufficient amount of innovation, and this is why it is important to develop our values and foster needed competencies (UNESCO, 2020). To the universities, it is given the responsibility for a fundamental part in this development. Through their activities, universities impact the development of the community and national economy, society, and the global economy. Universities are an important link between crucial sustainable development areas, as they educate a profile of various stakeholders that will

stimulate their innovativeness and make communities stronger by adaptation, to support changes in contemporary and future development. Consequently, they have to be sustainable and need sustainable strategic management. From the aforementioned role of the university comes the significance of its integral management and the importance of establishing a strategic concept of sustainability. Universities must take knowledge of integral management into account in their (long-term, medium-term and short-term) development as well as operations (Belak et al., 2014; Štrukelj et al., 2017; 2020).

Today, a socially responsible and sustainable university is understood as an organisation that puts in use the concept of social responsibility and sustainable development in its education system, project activities, research activities, and development and operation (Glavič et al., 2012; Knez-Riedl, 2006), as is in the case of the university under study.

The initiatives for the sustainability of the University of Maribor started before nearly 20 years. In the beginning (Hrast, 2022), in the year 2005, they included sustainable concepts into the project of Glavič et al. (2012). The concept of social responsibility and sustainable development Council and Commission was presented in the year 2013. This content (University of Maribor, 2021) is also prominently included in the Strategy of the University of Maribor 2021–2030. They are developing innovative and interdependent university that practice responsible, critical and active students, guarantee high standards of education, research and projects, academic honesty work, and protect society. Especially they raise awareness towards upgrading communication among its stakeholders, to inform them regarding its different and numerous activities towards sustainability, as well as raise awareness among stakeholders about sustainable development and social responsibility. Of Slovenian universities (Hrast, 2022), only the University of Maribor was ranked in the Times Impact Ranking in 2021; it has been included yearly since then. In the QS Sustainable Universities 2023 ranking (QS, 2023), it was also acknowledged as a sustainable university. This year, for the first time, QS measured an aspect of sustainability: the institution's capability to tackle the most prominent social, environmental and governance challenges we are confronted with.

In the absence of internalising socially responsible and sustainable development, our society will not prosper, which became aware of by the University of Maribor management. They understand the importance of developing the strategic concept of sustainability realisation: to advance in a high-quality, responsible and successful manner. The university should be an organisation that includes socially responsible and sustainable activities in all aspects and for all stakeholders.

## 5 Discussion and Conclusion

Reaching the SDGs is nowadays very significant. Nowadays, society faces many challenges. Therefore, our civilisation must strengthen diversity with sustainability and (social, environmental, and economic) responsibility. Organisations like universities will play a crucial part in this because they significantly impact our society. Therefore, their development should be oriented towards sustainability, and our values should be accordingly changed.

Conducted examination confirmed the research questions “*What kind of organisation do we need to introduce a strategic concept of organisational sustainability?*” and “*Do we need sustainable governance of the organisation to introduce a strategic concept of organisational sustainability?*” positively. Introducing organisational sustainability through a strategic concept requires an organisation oriented towards sustainability and the SDGs (UN, 2015). A sustainable organisation takes into consideration the characteristics of a single human being, of the organisation and the society and economy. It should be aware of the characteristic of sustainability (Štrukelj et al., 2020; 2022; UN, 2015).

Different structures of partnerships applied by sustainable organisations’ strategic concepts can notably contribute to SDGs achievement (Dodds, 2016). This is why organisations require sustainable governance (Belak et al., 2014; Štrukelj and Gajšt, 2019; Štrukelj et al., 2020; 2022; Wheelen et al., 2018). This research has confirmed the thesis set. We found that the responsible governance of the organisation is a key starting point for the organisation’s sustainable development and, therefore, for a strategic concept of organisational sustainability. The integral management models (Belak & Duh, 2012) instruct that governance is higher-level than management. In order to perform the concept of sustainability, we require sustainable-oriented organisations. To attain this, we need partnerships to achieve the SDGs – the 17th UN SDG (UN, 2015).

For further research, we propose exploring other organisations and their significance in partnerships for achieving the SDGs. It is meaningful to research the micro, i. e. personal sustainability; mezzo, i. e. organisational sustainability; and macro, i. e. economic sustainability.

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