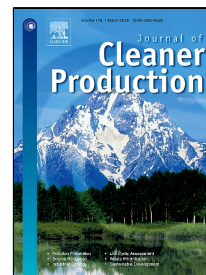


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Sustainability at Universities: Students' Perceptions from Green and Non-Green Universities

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Abstract

As institutions of higher education, universities have a significant impact on society and can play a key role in sustainability provision. Particularly, it is expected that green universities, because they are becoming more widespread, would contribute to the sustainability performance the most. However, none of the case studies have analysed the differences in sustainability performance between the “green” and the “non-green” universities from the perspective of the students. Therefore, the objective of this study was to contribute to this topic and compare students' attitudes towards sustainability in Vytautas Magnus University (a non-green university) and Kaunas University of Technology (a green university). According to a survey conducted in 2015, the differences in campus sustainability, environmental information, the university's role in sustainable development, students' attitudes to the university's self-presentation as green, and students' involvement in sustainability in these two universities were analysed. Results indicate that there were no significant differences regarding sustainability aspects in general, but green university students more often agree that their university presents itself as environmentally friendly. They get more environmental information and more often participate in sustainability activities compared with students from the non-green university. After applying the regression analysis, it was found that only campus sustainability and environmental information determined students' involvement in sustainability significantly. This suggests that official declarations and commitments should be realised in particular activities on campus and via information campaigns to contribute to sustainability provisions in a more holistic manner. Otherwise, commitments will remain as statements only.

Keywords: *Sustainable development, green university, higher education, attitudes of students, participation.*

1. Introduction

The specific (educational) mission of universities in society implies a very important role for them in the provision of sustainability (Yuan et al., 2013). Universities contribute to sustainability by internal (i.e., sustainability policy, campus sustainability, environmental initiatives, curricula, and research) and external (i.e., universities' role in the region) performances (Dagiliūtė, Liobikienė, 2015). Therefore, universities are expected to engage in sustainability both internally (i.e., as an organization) and externally (i.e., as an agent in the region). As organizations, universities contribute most to the student's personal identity, worldview, and values. By compiling and formulating appropriate curricula and course plans, the university can shape student personality with certain provisions, in this case, sustainability, and be an example to other institutions. Thus, the importance of universities as such and their future transformations for the creation of sustainable society are acknowledged and envisioned (Bejnaghi et al., 2016).

The vast number of international declarations (Lozano et al., 2013, 2015) and initiatives (e.g., Higher Education Sustainability Initiative, Principles for Responsible Management Education) regarding sustainability and higher education were launched since sustainable development became part of the agenda. The role of universities in sustainability performance was especially emphasized during the decade of UNESCO Education for Sustainable Development (2005-2014). Sustainability aspects became important determinants even for university rankings (e.g., UO green metric). Particularly, it is expected that the green universities, as institutions, will contribute to the sustainability the most (Yuan et al., 2013). Lozano et al. (2015) indicated that committed (e.g., signed charters, initiatives, declarations) universities tend to engage more in the implementation of sustainable development in

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