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PRESENTATION

Silvana Longueira Matos[1, a, *]
[1]Universidade de Santiago de Compostela, Spain

[a]silvana.longueira@usc.es

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* Director, Revista Internacional de Comunicación y Desarrollo (RICD), Spain.

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The ecosocial emergency we are facing requires a rethinking of all levels of the educational system. In this context, international organisations have developed various frameworks in support of sustainability competences in education (UNESCO, 2017[1]; OECD, 2018[2]; EU, 2022[3]). Recent legislation directly calls upon universities to activate educational processes that contribute to raising awareness and developing a critical citizenry that understands the causes and effects of the current situation, while promoting the inclusion of sustainability implications in professional profiles.

In Spain, this moment is particularly significant following the approval of Royal Decree 822/2021, which establishes the organisation of university education and the procedure for ensuring its quality[4]. This decree makes it mandatory for all degrees to be based on democratic principles and values and on the Sustainable Development Goals (Article 4). Earlier, the Conference of Rectors of Spanish Universities (CRUE, 2012[5]) had already committed to embedding sustainability competences within degree programmes.

For all these reasons, this issue of the *International Journal of Communication and Development (RICD)* questions the capacity of universities to generate the opportunities and transformations required to build a more sustainable, fair, and hopeful world.

Universities are strategic actors in providing solutions to major global challenges. Their contribution relates to the various functions that underpin their daily activities: teaching, research, social engagement, and the management of their own internal ecosystem. In the field of education, their main contributions are linked to the inclusion of sustainability competences in degree curricula and the provision of lifelong learning across different areas of knowledge. In this sphere, the fundamental goal associated with sustainability is to train professionals capable of integrating sustainability into their professional decision-making. Without a doubt, such training also contributes to the development of citizens committed to environmental and social justice.

With regard to knowledge generation, research and innovation activities make universities key reference points for providing solutions to major global challenges and new applications for established developments. Contributions in this area not only generate technological, social, and political solutions for the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) but also influence public policy and civil society through the transfer, dissemination, and communication of research results.

Social engagement — the so-called third mission or university outreach — has become one of the main drivers of the implementation of the 2030 Agenda within universities, through collaboration with the social fabric and the Third Sector. This dimension has an endogenous component, influencing the university's internal structures and encouraging new

1 UNESCO (2017). Educación para los Objetivos de Desarrollo Sostenible: objetivos de aprendizaje. https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000252423

2 OCDE (2018). Marco de Competencia Global. Estudio PISA. Preparar a nuestros jóvenes para un mundo inclusivo y sostenible. PISA 2018. https://sede.educacion.gob.es/publiventa/d/22445/19/01

3 UE (2022). GreenComp. El marco europeo de competencias sobre sostenibilidad. https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/bc83061d-74ec-11ec-9136-01aa75ed71a1/language-es

4 Real Decreto 822/2021, de 28 de septiembre, por el que se establece la organización de las enseñanzas universitarias y del procedimiento de aseguramiento de su calidad. BOE Núm. 233 de 29 de septiembre de 2021. https://www.boe.es/boe/dias/2021/09/29/pdfs/BOE-A-2021-15781.pdf

5 Crue (2012). Directrices para la introducción de la Sostenibilidad en el Curriculum. https://www.crue.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/Directrices_Sosteniblidad_Crue2012.pdf

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forms of teaching, partnerships, and shared decision-making in institutional management. Its exogenous dimension projects outward, involving engagement with the surrounding community or communities, as well as others with which the university cooperates and collaborates.

In terms of governance, universities are large institutions with complex ecosystems that are often difficult to manage. Despite generally enjoying a high degree of autonomy, they tend to operate at a slow administrative pace. Each university is a small city (or several, depending on its campus distribution) embedded within larger urban environments, where it generates daily impacts. Sustainability in this area involves diverse issues such as energy efficiency, water and mobility management, the maintenance of green spaces and biodiversity, ethical public procurement, staff training in sustainability, diversity policies, equal opportunities, and gender equality, among others.

Moreover, universities are key agents in the creation of networks and alliances at multiple levels. They can act as laboratories for social and scientific innovation, for instance by developing their campuses as testing and demonstration grounds. They serve as driving and central actors in collaborations with other universities and institutions, as well as powerful amplifiers of needs, expectations, and viable solutions.

This issue includes six articles and one project produced by eighteen authors (seven women and eleven men) from ten different universities (five Spanish, two Mexican, two Chilean, and one Ecuadorian) and a Chilean network.

In the first article, Dr Gómez Torres presents a highly relevant institutional and governance-based initiative focused on the experience of the *Universitat Politècnica de València* (UPV) in integrating the 2030 Agenda into education, research, and institutional governance through various programmes promoted by the *Centre for Development Cooperation* (CCD).

In the article by Professors Mercado, Urquiza, and Morales, the authors analyse the progress made by Chilean higher education institutions towards the SDGs, using data from the *Sustainability Reporting and Evaluation Tool for Higher Education Institutions* (RESIES), developed by the *Sustainable Campus Network of Chile*. This represents an example of standardisation, evaluation, and monitoring that may be considered good practice, as it brings together a significant number of universities in the country and fosters the systematisation of practices.

In the third article, Professors Fontalvo-Buelvas, de la Cruz-Elizondo, Escalona-Aguilar, and Eugenio-Gozalbo explore communication through social media and Education for Sustainable Development, analysing the impact on Facebook of the *Agroecological Garden* experience of the *Faculty of Biology at the Universidad Veracruzana* (Mexico). This relevant initiative engages a broad online community, emphasising the importance of communication and dissemination in generating knowledge on sustainability within universities.

In the fourth paper, Professors Juaneda-Ayensa, Rodríguez, and Moreira-Arboleda present research that analyses sustainability competences among university students from two different contexts — Ecuador and Spain — focusing on attitudes towards sustainability from the perspective of each cultural environment. Using a questionnaire, the study identifies cultural differences in attitudes towards sustainability among students at the *Escuela Superior Politécnica del Litoral* (ESPOL) and the *University of La Rioja* (UR), as well as potential sustainability profiles. The paper provides valuable insights into how university students integrate sustainability into their perspectives.

In the fifth paper, Professors Caballero and Parra, together with Professor Martín, present the *HecoUSAL Community School Gardens Network*, a Service-Learning (ApS) programme of

the University of Salamanca (USAL) involving university students and educational centres. The gardens serve as multisensory spaces that foster the holistic development of pupils. The article presents an experience of great relevance due to its scope and impact across the educational system.

The sixth article describes a teaching innovation experience in a subject of the Economics degree at the University of Santiago de Compostela. Professor Sánchez-Carreira and Professors Blanco-Varela and Vecino present a Service-Learning (ApS) project focused on examining the status of the SDGs in the city of Santiago de Compostela within the framework of its *Urban Agenda* 2030. This initiative fully integrates sustainability into the curriculum — including competences, content, methodology, and assessment — in coherence with the holistic approach of Education for Sustainable Development.

The final contribution focuses on the *InMedia* project, a partnership among several European organisations funded under the Erasmus+ programme, which works towards a more participatory and inclusive audiovisual sector.

We acknowledge the delay in publishing this issue and sincerely thank all those who have expressed their support to keep RICD alive. Our gratitude also goes to all the authors for their valuable work. RICD is back!

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