

Awareness of Individuals and Businesses in Albania for Sustainable Development

Irma SHYLE

Department of Production and Management, Polytechnic University of Tirana, Albania

Abstract

The concept of sustainable development is being used and is often heard every day. Sustainable development is not a problem only for developed countries, but to the entire world. This concept, among others, is linked with the term sustainable business. Sustainable business is considered a business which operates in the market taking into account and respecting the interests of all stakeholders, in order to ensure a healthy long term business. So this concept is direct connected to the system: economic, social and environmental. With the growth of international trade is increased the number of industrialized nations and as a result is increased the amount of pollution. Many issues that significantly influence the sustainable development are neglecting national and international boundaries. Pollution, inflation, exchange rates, unemployment, macroeconomic policies, conflicts and health issues that occur anywhere in the world can cause problems for business sustainability. Awareness of individuals and businesses worldwide, about the impact they have on the environment is growing. The aim of this work is to highlight the level of knowledge and awareness that people and businesses have about sustainable business and its implementation Paper treats specifically the case of Albania on sustainable development based on a questionnaire respectively directed the students of the Polytechnic University of Tirana and in a questionnaire addressed some businesses in Tirana. The achieved results are important because they show low levels of knowledge by students and businesses to the concepts of sustainable development and the need for measures to improve this situation in the future.

Keywords: sustainable development, awareness, companies, students, Albania, implementation

Introduction

Sustainable development is defined differently by various thinkers. Definition of recognized and accepted so far is: "Development that meets the needs of the present without impairing the ability of future generations to meet their own needs" (WCED, 1987). So sustainable development is not only environmental protection, but also a new concept of economic growth, to ensure fairness and opportunity for all, without destroying the planet's natural resources and its capacity. It is a process in which different policy areas such as economic, trade, energy, agriculture, industry, etc., are made in order to create a development that is economically, socially and environmentally sustainable. The term 'sustainable development' was first defined in the 1980s in the Brundtland report (Hunter, 1997; Mowforth and Munt, 2008). Brundtland's report was revolutionary in that it introduced, in connection with growth environment, but the idea of sustainable development has evolved from a strictly environmental concept to a concept that includes the issue of equality for access to the natural resources. Equality of access creates human welfare and distributes benefits and costs (social, economic and environmental). Based on the Brundtland definition Landrum and Edwards (2009: 4) define a sustainable business as 'one that operates in the interest of all current and future stakeholders in a manner that ensures the long-term health and survival of the business and its associated economic, social, and environmental systems'. Businesses solely focusing on reducing their environmental impact are referred to as 'green businesses' whereas a sustainable business would focus on all three dimensions of sustainability, which have often been referred to as 'triple bottom line'.

Hobson and Essex (2001) point out that the general attitude towards environment and the implementation of sustainable business practices is most important. However, several authors highlight that agreement with broad statements representing the idea of sustainability is easy. But more specific statements and actions taken are more difficult to agree with and a certain gap between attitudinal statements and actual initiatives becomes apparent (Dewhurst and Thomas, 2003).

Sustainability is a system concept that recognizes the relationship of an entity with the system in which it exists – the firm within society and the ecology of the planet. Discussions of sustainability include economic, social, institutional, and environmental processes and effects. We loosely define sustainable business as operating in a way that could be maintained indefinitely without degrading the larger system. Specific criteria would be economic viability; fairness to the firm's stakeholders; and maintenance of the environment. Hargroves and Smith (Hargroves, 2005) identified some common principles of sustainability such as: dealing cautiously with risk, especially with perceived irreversibility; appreciation and value for nature; integration of environmental, social, and economic goals in planning ("triple bottom line"); community participation in planning; conservation of biodiversity; concern for the equity of future generations; sensitivity to global effects; commitment to best practices; no net loss of human or natural assets; continuous improvement; good governance.

Sustainable business practices, therefore, include but are not limited to making products from recycled materials or making them recyclable, using processes that do not degrade the environment, designing facilities to avoid permanent change to local eco-systems, and inclusion of communities, employees, suppliers, and resellers as partners in strategic planning.

The analysis of the development of environment and the development of political, social and economic situation worldwide shows that it is necessary to solve the cases and actions that by their intensity induce the critical situations leading to relevant crises of the type denoted as a humanitarian catastrophe or social crisis. Business awareness of the impact that they have on the environment is growing. But many are the challenges faced by businesses to implement strategies related to sustainability. Greater difficulty in achieving environmental sustainability has medium business and small business.

The most common obstacle mentioned by the executive directors of companies linked to the cost of implementation of practices for a sustainable business. This finding is consistent with previous research on the barriers faced by businesses (Revell et al, 2009; Taylor et al, 2003). Participants numbered variety of financial concerns. Businesses have had a variety of opinions regarding customer satisfaction and how to improve it. Some companies have shown skepticism towards the implementation of this strategy because didn't see an opportunity for a competitive advantage. But other companies reported having a competitive advantage by implementing measures (Taylor, 2003). Studies have found that businesses do not face pressure from customers, suppliers, and stakeholders to implement environmental practices (Revell et al. 2009).

According to Prochazkova (2007), the basic tools of state for management directed to sustainability are:

management (strategic, tactical, operational) based on qualified data, knowledge, professional assessments, qualified decision-making methods, land-use planning, correct siting, designing, building, operation, maintenance, reparation and renovation of buildings, technologies and infrastructures, citizen's education, schooling and training, specific education of technical and management workers, technical, health, ecological, cyber and other standards, norms and rules including the best practice procedures, i.e. tools for control/regulation of processes that may or might lead to disaster occurrence or to the increase of its impact, inspections and audits, executive security forces for qualified response to emergency and critical situations, systems for critical situations defeating, security (land-use and spatial), emergency, continuity, crisis and contingency planning, specific system for defeating the critical situations - safety, emergency, continuity and crisis management.

Awareness about environmental issues are coming more and more increasing although the challenges facing human society on this issue are numerous. One of these challenges is the education of generations. Relying on the principle of "Education for sustainable development is the engine for change", in December 2002, the General Assembly of the United Nations, through Resolution 57/254 declared "Decade of Education for Sustainable Development", for the period 2005-2014.

The concept of sustainable development is becoming increasingly well known in Albania. This concept is now part of the Constitution of the Republic of Albania under a special Article.

Methodology

The purpose of this paper is to highlight the level of knowledge and awareness of youth and the organisations for sustainable development.

The primary data was collected through questionnaire. The questionnaire is considered as the most appropriate instrument for collecting research data. The main objects of this study are:

Organizations that have voluntarily integrate social and environmental policies in their business model, which represent a distinct type of completely modern corporation, characterized by a structure of governance in which besides financial performance, calculates the environmental impact and social impact of the company. For this study was selected a sample of 50 businesses in Tirana. The questionnaire contains questions about: the knowledge that companies have regarding sustainable development, the importance that it has to be implemented in the future, the level of implementation of strategies for sustainable development, challenges and obstacles to implementation, benefits which they believe may have on the implementation of strategies for sustainable development, etc.

Youth, specially students from 18 years old or more. The selected sample was 162 students, mainly from Polytechnic University of Tirana, in both levels of study, Bachelor and Master. The questionnaire was distributed via the internet to the young people selected through non-probability sampling.

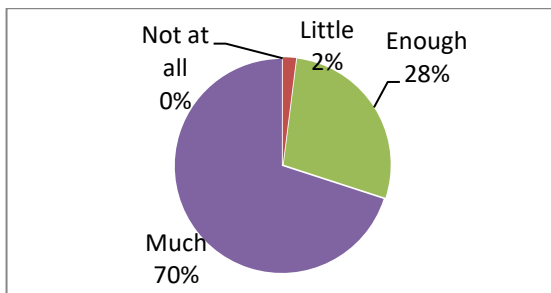
The first part of the questionnaire has questions about age, gender, level of study and field of study for students. In the second part of the questionnaire, there are questions about their knowledge and level of knowledge for sustainable development if they are faced with these terms in their program of study, if they have information about the importance of sustainable development, if we know companies that have implemented sustainable development strategy. In the third part of the questionnaire has questions about young people's awareness of the importance of sustainable development. Students were asked to give their opinion, if they deem important that in their program of study to have specific subjects related to sustainable development, or which is the best way to get information about the development of stable, or where should rely more sustainable development practices in Albania?

Results

Through the analysis of quantitative data were observed in a number of outcomes. Based on the results, we manage to give valuable recommendations for companies, higher education institutions or other government institutions.

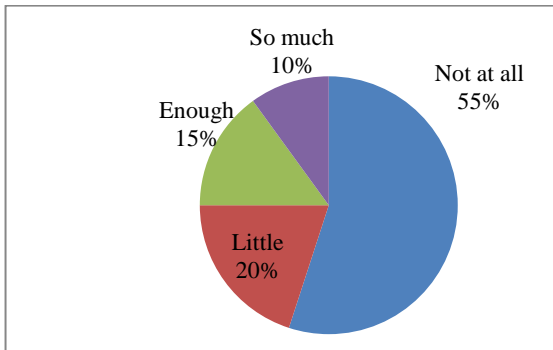
Results from companies:

How much companies that know the concepts of sustainable business are oriented towards sustainable?



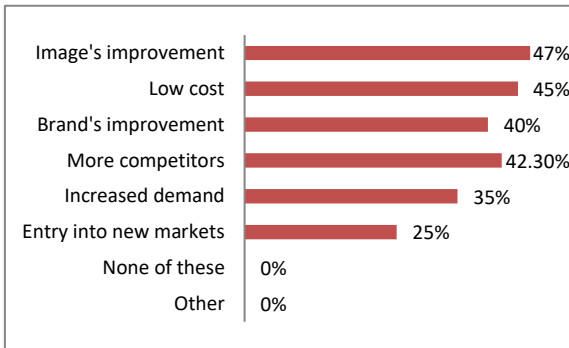
Graf.1. Businesses that have currently an initiative towards sustainability

According to Hobson and Essex (2001), the general attitude towards environment and the implementation of sustainable business practices is most important. But more specific statements and actions taken are more difficult to agree with and a certain gap between attitudinal statements and actual initiatives becomes apparent (Dewhurst and Thomas, 2003). How much companies (that recognize sustainable business concepts but have not implemented currently in their companies) consider important in the future orientation towards sustainable business?



Graf. 2. Businesses that currently dont have any initiative towards sustainability

What companies can benefit from the implementation of sustainable business?



Graf.3. Benefits from the implementation of sustainability in business

As it is mentioned by Taylor, 2003, companies reported having a competitive advantage 42.3% by implementing sustainable business.

65% of companies consider the expenses for the implementation of sustainability as a cost and only 35% of them as an investment, this finding is consistent with previous research on the barriers faced by businesses (Revell et al, 2009; Taylor et al, 2003). 20% of companies currently undertake a lot of initiatives to sustainability, 55% any initiative to sustainability but 20% of them have failed, and 25% of companies never try to have any initiative to sustainability.

62% of companies considered that having a green business or sustainable has higher costs, 33% answered that have same costs and only 5% think that have smaller cost in having green business.

Most of companies (65%) answered that the barriers for implementing sustainability strategy are hight cost of implementation, the government does not offer stimuli (45%), lack of interest by the customer (40%), investors did not estimate these initiatives (38%).

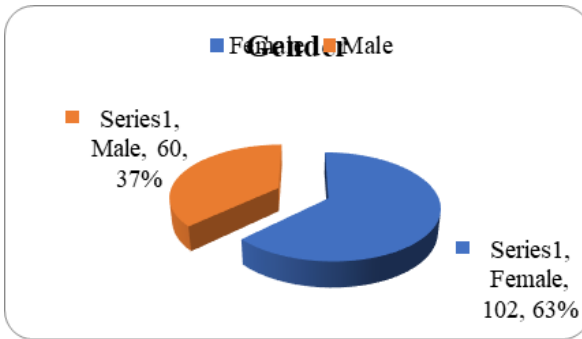
Even that barriers for implementing sustainability strategy, 65% of companies think that business sustainability initiatives, in general, are on the right track.

Results from students

65% of students who participated in this study were aged between 22-25 years (105 students)

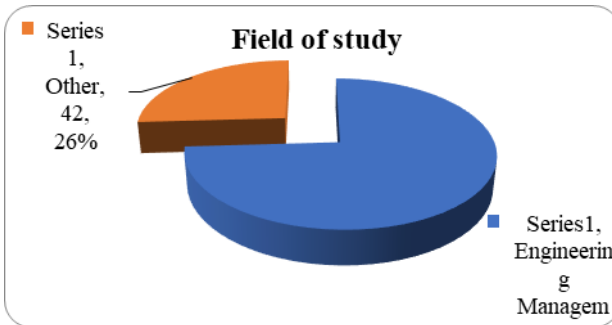
26% were aged between 18-21, and only 9% belonged to the age over 25 years old.

Most of them were females (63% or 102 students) and 37% (or 60 students) of them was males.



Graf.4. Gender

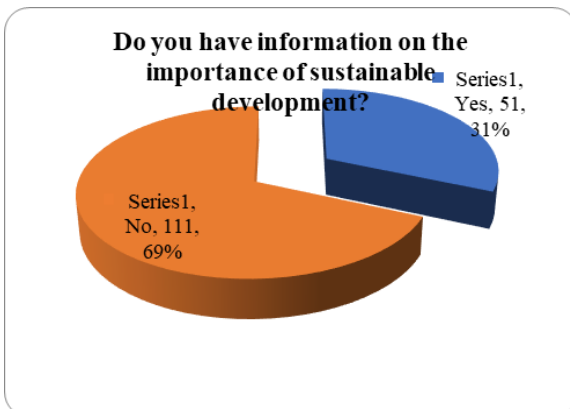
96 Students or 59% are in the Master Program and 41% in Bachelor program study. Most of them (74%) are student at the Engineering Management Program.



Graf.5. Field of study

For 72% of them, it is known concept of "sustainable development" and 28% don't know about this concept. Only 43% of them say that in their study program they was faced with these terms.

And because they don't know so much about concept of "sustainable development", and most of all they didn't faced with these terms in their study program, only 31% of them have information on the importance of sustainable development



Graf.6. Information on the importance of sustainable development

The students that has information on the importance of sustainable development, was asked :

If you have information on the importance of sustainable development can you give some reasons of this importance? The summary of their answers was:

The triangle of sustainability includes social, economic, ecosystem sustainability.

Sustainable development enables equal distribution of resources between generations

To be with ecological and environmentally friendly

Cooperation wide level

Consisting of business development aiming at closing the cycle of the Enterprise, to reduce waste and environmental externalities.

Environmental protection, poverty alleviation, organic agriculture

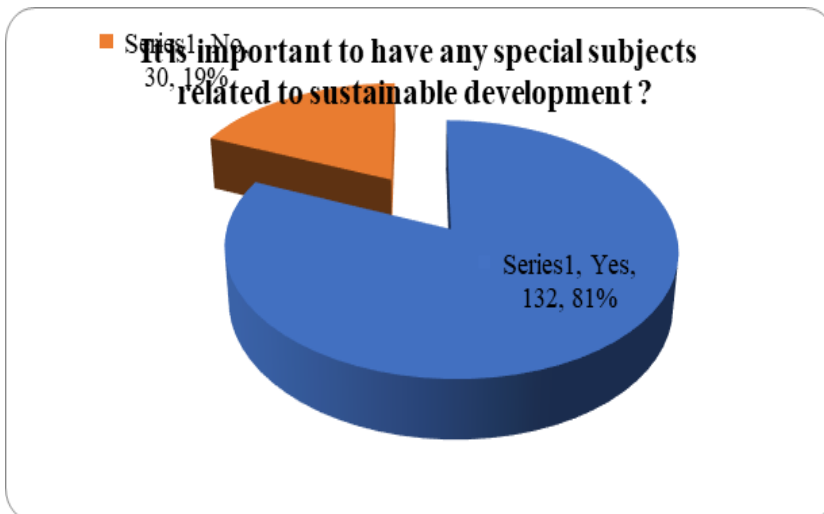
Sustainable development has to do with the performance of the economic activity of companies respecting, protecting and improving the environmental aspects, facing its activity. To preserve the values for future generations

Balancing the needs of economic, social and environmental to ensure welfare for the current generation and for future generations.- So it is important for economic prosperity, social, and environmental

Development that does not lose the previous levels and progressing towards the development of the future, that creates a durability and consistency

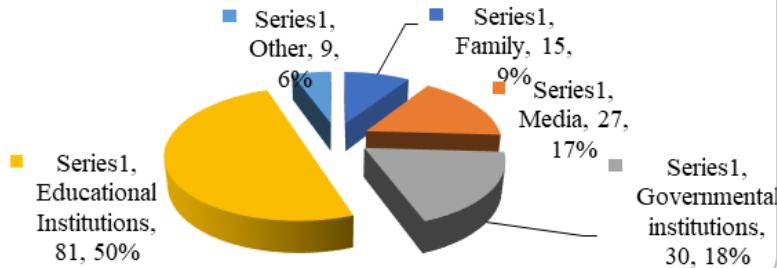
Renewable Energy, Carbon footprint, passive systems of heating / cooling, etc

According to Prochazkova (2007), one of the basic tools of state for management directed to sustainability is citizen's education, schooling and training. The results show that students are interested to have the special subject related to sustainable development in the course that they follow (Graphic 7). 81% of them think that is so important to have one subject like that. This is also connected with other question about information relating to sustainable development can be better achieved through: family, media, governmental institutions, educational Institutions, others (Graphic 8).



Graphic 7. Importance to have any special subjects related to sustainable development

Information relating to sustainable development can be better achieved through:

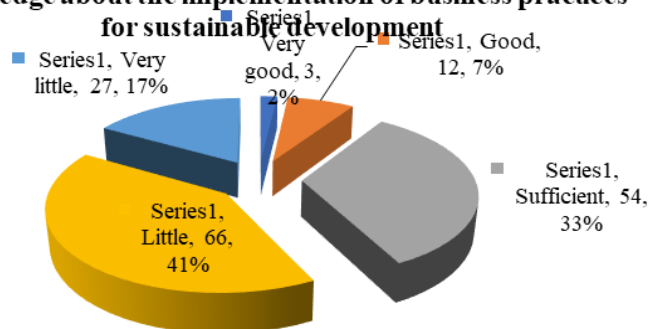


Graphic 8. Information resource about sustainable development

As it is showed in the graphic 8, 50% of students think that the Educational Institutions can be the most important source of information about sustainable development.

Because of not having special subject in their course about sustainable development, or even in their family don't get such information, they think that their knowledge about the implementation of business practices for sustainable development is sufficient (33%), little (41%), and very little (17%)

Knowledge about the implementation of business practices for sustainable development

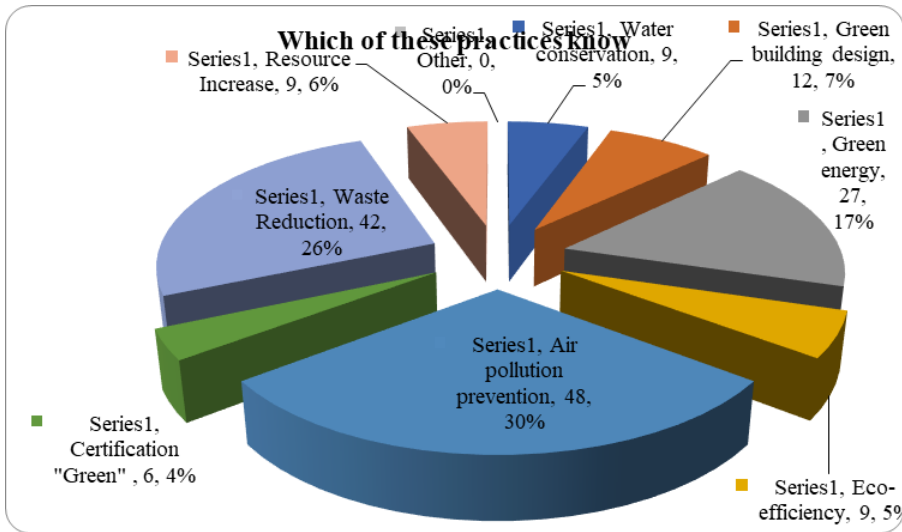


Graphic 9. The knowledge about the implementation of business practices

They think that sustainable development practices are more related to the environment: economic (48%), social (28%), environmental (17%), institutional (7%).

83% of them don't know any company in Albania (in the city where they live) businesses that are focused on sustainable development. Only 17% of students know about it. And they give the name of company that implemented any practices for sustainable development such as: Vodafone Albania, Telecommunications companies, Eco-Volis.

They was asked about which one from the practices they know better: Water conservation, green building design, green energy, eco-efficiency, air pollution prevention, Certification "Green", Waste Reduction, Resource Increase (graphic 10).



Graphic 10. Some practices about sustainable development

The student was asked, to give their opinion about what they think is the most important to practice in Albania from the practices mentioned before. They emphasized:

Prevention of air pollution, especially in the Capital city (Tirana)

No waste reduction but their transformation into energy.

Reducing the use of fossil fuels by implementing green energy systems. Recycling of waste widely, managing waste deposited in the environment.

Should rely on natural resources and more efficient utilization of these resources, should be based on policies undertaken by state institutions on sustainable development

Conclusion and Recommendations

The company that tries or wants to become a sustainable business should understand that the concept of sustainability should be implemented in each objective of each of its departments. In other words, sustainability requires to think that everything is connected to something else and nothing exists isolated. Everything, every department, every business, every industry and every society are interrelated. So it is understandable that every part of the company contributes for creating a sustainable business. Starting from daily operations, research development, management information system, technology, human resources, finance and marketing department are related to sustainability in different ways. Sustainability should be the philosophy and vision of the whole company and society.

The Educational Institutions must to play important role in education and awareness about sustainability for the youth.

Albania is still in its early stages to the implementation of practices for a sustainable business. For this reason, due to the importance of implementation despite the difficulties towards implementation we recommend:

Implementing sustainability sooner, especially in small businesses.

Creating a legal draft where each business will be forced to implement at least the initial initiatives towards sustainability. For example: To use the idea of recycling.

The government should provide grants to businesses that show interest for the implementation of sustainability.

Educational Institutions to be focused and to have special subject about sustainable development.

References

- [1] Gabriel Eweje, Martin Perry 2011, Business and Sustainability: Concepts, Strategies and Changes.
- [2] Guler Aras, David Crowther 2012, Business Strategy and Sustainability.
- [3] Hargroves, K. and Smith, M. (Eds.), The Natural Advantage of Nations: Business Opportunities, Innovation and Governance in the 21st Century. Earthscan/James & James, USA, 2005.
- [4] Hobson, K. and Essex, S. (2001) 'Sustainable Tourism: A View from Accommodation Businesses', The Service Industries Journal, vol. 21, no. 4, October, pp. 133-146.
- [5] Hunter, C. (1997) 'Sustainable Tourism as an adaptive paradigm', Annals of Tourism Research, vol. 24, no. 4, pp. 850-867.
- [6] Landrum, N.E. and Edwards, S. (2009) Sustainable Business: An Executive's Primer, New York: Business Expert Press.
- [7] Marsha Willard, Darcy Hitchcock 2012, The Business Guide to Sustainability: Practical Strategies and Tools for Organizations.
- [8] Mowforth, M. and Munt, I. (2009) Tourism and Sustainability: New Tourism in the Third World, 3rd edition, London: Routledge.
- [9] John Wiley & Sons 2011, The Green to Gold Business Playbook: How to Implement Sustainability Practices for Bottom-Line Results in Every Business Function.
- [10] PROCHÁZKOVÁ, D. Strategy of Management of Safety and Sustainable Development of Territory. Praha: PA ČR, 2007, 203p. [In Czech]. ISBN 978-80-7251-243-0
- [11] A new path for the sustainable development: a green economy for Albania. Stock taking Albanian Rio + 20 Report
- [12] WCED, Our common future, 1987 Oxford , Oxford University Press

Zollinger, 2007, The Effects of Globalisation on Sustainable Development and the Challenges to Global Governance