

RELATIONS OF THE UNIVERSITY AND THE COMMUNITY

Laszlo VASS

Laszlo VASS

Dr. Habil., CSc., Professor, Rector Emeritus,
Budapest Metropolitan University of Applied Sciences,
Institute of Social and International Studies, Budapest,
Hungary
E-mail: lvass@metropolitan.hu

Abstract

The generally accepted requirement of CSR is further concretized at universities, and—similarly to companies—it is fulfilled in the Environmental–Social–Governance (ESG) system: specific, verifiable and measurable tasks are formulated in the areas of environmental sustainability, social relations and organizational management systems.

In the practice of Budapest Metropolitan University, practical, methodological solutions are applied in the educational process that incorporate ESG elements into the process of education and learning. The most comprehensive innovation is the 'myBrand' program, in which lecturers and students place educational, learning and research tasks in the process of jointly building their own professional brand, while continuously performing practical tasks in projects taking place in the university environment.

Keywords: ESG, green campus, social responsibility, team-teaching, 'myBrand'.

1. Introduction

It is generally accepted that the university is built on three main functional pillars. Education, the transfer of scientific knowledge and skills to students, includes undergraduate, master's, doctoral programs and other forms of training that help students develop personally and professionally. Scientific research at universities serves to create knowledge that serves social development and to improve the knowledge taught. Today, the role of universities in serving their social environment, their contribution to the development of their social community, for example, through various practical projects, consulting, training, further education and expert opinions, is visibly increasing. Universities also help in the social application of scientific results.

In the last decade, there has been an increasing expectation in the economic, but in fact in the entire institutional sphere, for organizations to assume increased social responsibility, which ranges from environmental protection to the elimination of adverse social discrimination. The application and consideration of ESG principles (Environmental, Social, Governance) has emerged as an international requirement among quality indicators, as it contributes to social sustainability, responsibility and good management.

2. Application of ESG principles in universities

The relevance of ESG is also reflected in universities in several ways:

- Environmental aspects—universities increasingly play a role in promoting sustainability. This includes: measures to increase energy efficiency (e.g., green buildings, use of renewable energy sources); waste management and recycling; promoting environmentally conscious research and sustainable solutions; green campuses and environmentally friendly transport options.
- Social aspects—the social responsibility of universities is closely linked to the promotion of social equality, inclusion and community engagement: equal opportunities and diversity among students and faculty; professional practice programs and research that contribute to solving social problems; promoting social responsibility through collaboration with local communities; ensuring ethical workplaces and student well-being.
- Governance aspects—transparency and ethical operation of universities are key: transparent and accountable leadership; adherence to ethical guidelines, including research integrity and financial transparency; participatory and inclusive decision-making, ensuring that all stakeholders, including students, faculty and employees, can contribute to decisions.

The integration of ESG dimensions is also gaining increasing importance in university education, as universities not only impart academic and professional skills, but also shape the social and economic professionals and leaders of the future. It provides an opportunity for students to prepare for sustainability, social equality and ethical leadership. By adhering to these guidelines, universities can set an example for future generations in terms of sustainable development and ethical operation.

In university education, environmental aspects primarily focus on sustainability, environmental responsibility and the management of ecological problems. It is important for students to understand how they can contribute to solving environmental problems, for example:

- Teaching sustainable economics and green technologies in different disciplines (e.g., economics, law, public administration, politics);
- Teaching environmental impact assessment and sustainable decision-making;
- Putting climate change, natural resource management and green innovation at the center of different majors.

Incorporating social dimensions into university education encourages students to address social equality, inclusion and solving social problems. This can be reflected in education in a number of ways:

- Diversity, equality and inclusion: it is important for students to understand issues of social equality and how to integrate people from different backgrounds into the labor market and society;
- Social responsibility: education can help students to recognize their own role in society and to actively contribute to the development of their communities.

In university education, the governance dimensions focus on ethical decision-making, leadership, transparency and the development of responsible governance structures:

- Implementing and teaching ethical and transparent leadership that helps students make responsible decisions in their workplaces later on;
- Corporate governance and management training that integrates ESG considerations into business and the operations of companies;
- Legal and political knowledge: universities can help to understand the ethical legal frameworks that enable transparency, accountability and the fight against corruption.

3. The importance of university social relations

Among the dimensions of ESG at the university, the area of social relations stands out, which not only supports the personal and professional development of students, but also contributes to strengthening the connection between the academic community and society. University-society relations take many forms and can support education in the following ways:

3.1. Networking and professional relations

Social relations can help students and faculty develop professional networks that can support their careers in the long term. These relations can contribute to education in the following ways:

- Mentoring and professional support: universities often collaborate with industry, non-profit organizations or government institutions that support students with professional mentoring, internship opportunities and advice;

- Collaborative projects: collaborations with industry partners and local communities allow students to work on real-world projects and apply the theoretical knowledge they have learned in practice;
- Career opportunities: through social connections, students can more easily access job postings, internships and applications that help them find a job in the labor market.

3.2. Scientific collaborations and research

Social connections directly influence collaborations between the scientific community and industry, which provide new research opportunities, resources and funding sources. This is especially important in interdisciplinary research:

- Academic and professional partnerships: universities often work with companies, research institutes or other higher education institutions to jointly conduct research that can lead to new scientific results;
- Social impact research: social connections can help researchers work on projects that have a direct benefit to society, such as in the fields of public health, education, poverty reduction, or environmental protection;
- External grants and research funding: building relationships with the government and civil society sectors provides opportunities for new research applications and grants.

3.3. Social responsibility and community involvement

Universities' social connections affect not only students but also the immediate environment of the institutions. Universities can support the solution of social problems in their social environment in a number of ways:

- Community service and project participation: universities and students often participate in local community projects, such as educational programs, health services, and social assistance activities that promote social integration and improve the common good;
- Welfare programs: universities can launch programs that provide support to local communities, such as through free educational materials, community events, or charitable actions;
- Social enterprises and community initiatives: universities often support social enterprises and other community initiatives that can bring about social change.

3.4. Student community and social cohesion

Social connections can also help to create closer bonds between students, which can contribute to community building and enrich the university experience. Through student communities, voluntary organizations and clubs, students can actively participate in university life and gain practical experience:

- Volunteer work and social programs: students can directly participate in community events, charity programs that help strengthen their social connections;
- Social activities: student communities and events promote intercultural dialogue and a sense of belonging.

Social connections can also help students in university administration management training to better understand the functioning of universities and their impact on society. External professional, political, community and interdisciplinary connections provide opportunities for students to gain practical experience, develop leadership skills and prepare for social responsibility and sustainable management in the university environment.

4. Budapest Metropolitan University's new pedagogical model: 'myBrand'

Hungary's largest private university defines itself as a university of applied sciences, expressing that it places emphasis not on theoretical research but on the practical application of knowledge in both research and education. To successfully implement this mission, the university has built up a broad network of contacts with professional organizations in its fields of study and the employer sector from the very beginning. Professional advisory boards were established for the development of training programs, which were based on the continuous cooperation of the university's lecturers and the actors in their social environment. The university's lecturers are expected to perform practical tasks and provide professional advice in their professional fields. At the same time, there is a continuous effort to ensure that the best practical experts regularly appear in education. Within the organizational framework of 'Team-teaching', academic-business pairs have been established in education, in which the university lecturer and an external practical expert partner jointly develop and teach subjects.

Real-life market case studies from corporate actors are widely used in the educational process. During their internships, students participate in solving real company tasks, and during university subject classes, they often do fieldwork at companies affiliated with the university. Students carry out their internships at organizations that have a contractual relationship with the university, and the university maintains direct contact with the company staff who manage the students' internships. The number of partners that have a contractual relationship with the university and offer internship opportunities is over 400, and these partners also offer real business tasks to students.

There are countless opportunities to develop practical knowledge and skills within the university in specialized workshops, student project groups, and professional competitions (e.g., METU radio, Media Workshop, Marketing Student Team, Metropolitan LAB, etc.). Within the framework of the university's StartUp program application system, students can also implement their own business ideas, which the university supports with up to 1 million forints.

Based on years of experience in practical orientation, the working group consisting of lecturers, trainers, and practical consultants developed the teaching-learning concept called 'myBrand', which formulated the new identity of students and lecturers in the university training process: the lecturer is a mentor, the student is a creator, and it is okay if the student makes mistakes during the completion of the tasks, he learns from them. The student builds his own professional portfolio through practical, project tasks, and he builds his own brand by working together with real labor market players. This is served by the

methodological deepening of professional practice systems, external educational opportunities, and case studies serving to build the brand in the subject curriculum.

An important element of the concept is that in this process the lecturers also build their own professional brand. The system of requirements set for lecturers is built around this, which includes active participation in professional organizations, leading professional trainings, consulting, launching joint corporate-teacher-student professional projects, and relevant international professional collaborations.

An important strategic goal of the university is to have a good professional background and practical field for the expected student and lecturer brand-building. Therefore, it supports the organization of professional events, the maintenance of publications, the acceptance of professional organizations and participation in their management, and continuous presence in professional media. Both lecturers and students participate in these, which is also an important aspect in their performance evaluation.

In the university training process, myBrand projects are also integrated into the subject syllabi. The lecturer plans what kind of external training, processing of case studies, practical projects, professional visits, meetings, etc. will take place, and how successful participation in these will appear in the student's portfolio. At the end of their studies, graduating students present their portfolio in a myBrand final exam, which contains the achievements that serve to build their brand.

The practical tasks of myBrand basically appear in the dimension of the university and its social environment. This means that the educational process itself requires the establishment of the most diverse system of relationships and their mutually beneficial development between the university and the surrounding community.

The most significant programs of recent years, in which lecturers and students worked together, and the results appeared when evaluating the myBrand construction:

- Development of the tourism strategy of the university's headquarters district in a complex project;
- Research on the E and S elements for the development strategy of an agglomeration village municipality;
- Participation in the development of the ESG strategy of small and medium-sized enterprises;
- Participation in professional development programs and national organization of HR management;
- As a strategic partner, supporting the Veszprém-Balaton 2023 European Capital of Culture program by organizing and coordinating cultural events and art exhibitions;
- Development of a university CSR action program proposal within the framework of the Public Affairs course.

References:

1. Budapest Metropolitan University, 'myBRAND – Student Development at the Heart of Budapest Metropolitan University's HR training', undated, [Online] available at <https://>

www.metropolitan.hu/hu/mybrand-a-hallgato-fejlodes-a-budapesti-metropolitan-egyetem-hr-kepzesenek-kozeppontjan, accessed on November 10, 2024.

2. Budapest Metropolitan University, institutional website, [Online] available at <https://mybrand.metropolitan.hu/>, accessed on November 10, 2024.
3. University of Pittsburgh, 'Environmental, Social and Governance (ESG) Investment Considerations at Pitt', 2024, [Online] available at <https://www.cfo.pitt.edu/divisions/investment-office/environmental-social-and-governance-esg-investment-considerations-pitt>, accessed on November 10, 2024.