ORANGE

a European Youth Press magazine

7 #ARC

The 7th ASEF Rectors' Conference & Students' Forum

Higher Education Taking Action Towards the Sustainable Development Goals: Perspectives from Asia and Europe

The ARC7 Media Team
Photo by: Sean Lee for ASEF

Dear Reader,

The 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are a universal call for action intending to leave no one behind and shape a better future for all. Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) play a key role in achieving the SDGs, not only with regard to university governance but also with regard to having a societal impact and within the field of internationalization.

The Education Department of the Asia Europe Foundation (ASEF) organized for the 7th time the ASEF Rectors' Conference and Students' Forum (ARC), a multi-stakeholder dialogue platform bringing together university leaders, policy makers, education practitioners and students to discuss higher education issues and shape the education landscape. Representatives from the 51 Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM) countries participated at the conference in May 2019 in Bucharest, Romania.

ARC is recognized as the Official Dialogue Partner of the ASEM Education Ministers' Meeting (ASEM ME). Both university rectors and students simultaneously worked on policy recommendations addressing the ASEM Education Ministers. The participants explored how higher education can take action towards achieving the sustainable development goals in separate working groups on 3 different levels:

1) Theme 1 I Taking Action at Home
SDGs as Core Pillars of University Governance

2) Theme 2 I Taking Action at Community Level
SDGs as Drivers of University Societal Impact

3) Theme 3 I Taking Action at International Level
SDGs as Catalysts to Reorient Internationalization

Photo by: Sean Lee for ASEF

ASIA-EUROPE FOUNDATION

Orange Magazine followed the conference and talked to various participants about their experience in the field of higher education and sustainability. This magazine aims to summarize important topics, which were discussed during the ARC7 and provides an overview of the overall output of the conference.

Lastly, the Orange Magazine team would like to thank the ASEF organizing team for inviting us to Romania and therewith providing us as young journalists the opportunity to practice journalism.

Learn more about ARC7 in this edition of Orange Magazine!

-ARC7 Young Journalists

THE 7TH ASEF RECTORS' CONFERENCE AND STUDENTS' FORUM

Photos by: Sean Lee for ASEF

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ARC7 Rectors' Conference Policy Recommendations for the 7th ASEM Education Ministers' Meeting (ASEM ME7)

Having a look at the ASEM Education Process

Education Representatives from 51 ASEM partner countries met during the ASEM

Photo by: Sean Lee for ASEF

The Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM) was established as an inter-regional forum in 1996 and now provides a platform for informal dialogue and exchange of views between 52 Asian and European States as well as the ASEAN and EU Secretary. Over the years ASEM has developed into a central forum for cooperation between the two continents. ASEM activities and initiatives cover a broad range of issues, including but not limited to climate change and security issues. One important area of work is the field of education.

The ASEM Education Process (AEP) can be considered a success story due to its contribution to foster multilateral cooperation through concrete education projects and initiatives. An important achievement of ASEM was the establishment of the Asia-Europe Foundation (ASEF) with its Education Department (ASEFEdu). ASEFEdu has also the great merit of having initiated the ASEF Rectors' Conference and Students' Forum happening simultaneously to the ASEM Education Ministers meeting (ASEM ME) and serving as an official dialogue partner to it. This year the ARC took place for the 7th time and is therefore known as ARC7.

The topic of ARC7 was "Higher Education Taking Action Towards the Sustainable Development Goals: Perspectives from Asia and Europe". Both students and rectors were tasked to draft policy recommendations with regard to the topic. The recommendationswere presented to H.E. Ecaterina Andronescu, Minister of National Education of Romania during the ARC7 and are available for all Education Ministers and representatives during the summit.

The recommendations by both students and rectors were openly welcomed and well perceived by the ministers. Both groups were represented during the meetings through the Erasmus Student Network (ESN), the European Students' Union (ESU), the European University Association (EUA) and the International Association of Universities (IAU).

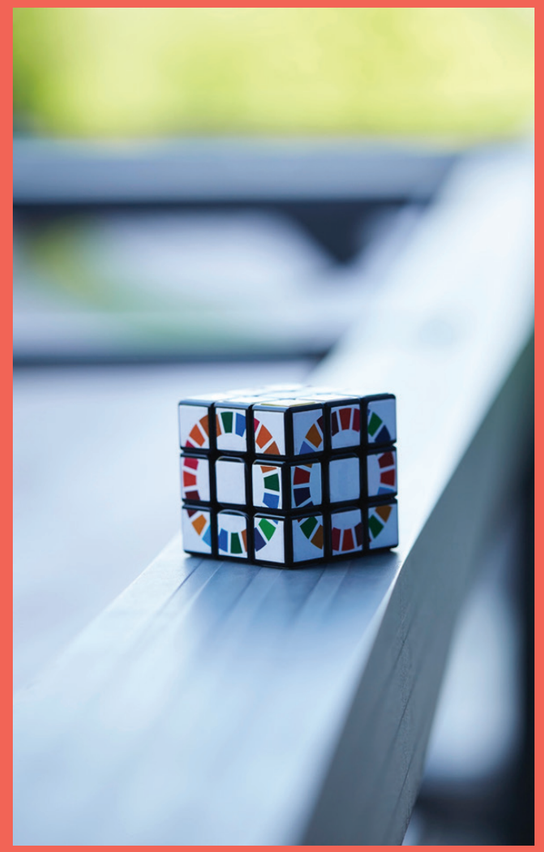

Photo by: Sean Lee for ASEF

How It All Began:
Intergenerational Dialogue on Sustainable Development

Sunday, May 12, 2019, 9am. A room full of international students from 51 different countries have all come together for the Opening Panel Discussion of ARC7. After Ms Leonie Nagarajan, Director of Education Department at ASEF, had introduced the panelists, all Romanian nationals, the audience was curious to see what the intergenerational dialogue would bring.

Her first question addressed the participants' upbringing with sustainable development and how they had experienced the changing narrative of the SDGs. Mr Valentin Florea, a former student of political science at Romania's National University of Political Studies and Public Administration (SNSPA) and Secretary-General of the Romanian UN Youth Association, explained how to him, the SDGs used to be only about climate change. His perspective had changed with the adoption of Agenda 2030 by the UN, leading him to realize that the UN could no longer be declared an obsolete international organization, but started to have a concrete impact on people's lives.

Indeed, Prof Birzea, part of SNSPA's International Relations and European Integration Department, agreed that sustainable development has evolved from tackling global warming to gender equality, poverty and employability – issues that are still profoundly difficult to tackle, and yet made more attainable with concrete action that can be taken to resolve them. Prof Birzea deeply believes in common action, emphasizing that what we need today 'is not only a dialogue, but that we need to work together, much more than we have before.'

Ms Nagarajan held the ARC7 Rubik cube in her hands while she emphasized how complex the field of sustainable development is. The strong interplay of partners and actors, on different levels, in different regions means that solutions can only be creative and strategic, just like solving a Rubik's cube.

An interesting aspect was brought forward by Dr. Catalina Goanta, Assistant Professor of Law at Maastricht University, asserting the influence of law on SDGs. She claimed that important contribution from an institutional aspect is new research into global citizenship and its link to sustainable development, something that undoubtedly broadens the agenda for the implementation of the SDGs. Ms Laura Alčiauskaite, a PhD candidate Psychology at Vytautas Magnus University in Kaunas, Lithuania asked the participants on their views about structural and systematical changes needed in society in order to put SDGs at the forefront of political and cultural agendas.

As a last question, Ms Hina Nasir, a recent medical graduate from Pakistan, reflected upon the UN's activities, talks and dialogues it conducts and holds. However, she had a very concrete question for the panel, "How are the developed countries helping the developing countries to achieve the SDGs?"

Dr. Goanta relied on legal obligations, and correct enforcement of policies, which Prof Birzea agreed with, stating that the policy-practice gap can be bridged by autonomous universities exercising their independence and power of influence onto governments. Rector of SNSPA, Prof Remus Pricopie, who has been involved with the Romanian Ministry of Education since 1996, outlined that implementation of any policy can only be achieved if various actors work together, from both public and private sector.

Prof Pricopie's answer pointed out that developed countries have no longer excuses: 'Resources are almost everywhere by now, and no one can say they have no personnel!' Prof Goanta closed the panel by stating, 'The impossible has become possible. Today, the world is a better place than 100 years ago, even with all the faulty processes we have seen.' Mr Florea joined her, slightly optimistically, and stated, 'Are we effective? Not as much as we could be. But slow progress is still progress!'

During the panel, both participants and students have touched the surface of what was to become a fruitful session of debates about SDGs and our plans to implement them and make the world a better place. It kick-started a thought process in all participants of ARC7 that ultimately resulted in policy recommendations, personal growth of students, inter-sectional exchange of best practices as well as the sharing of knowledge.

Nicole Pop

Different generations discussed Sustainable Development during the Intergenerational Dialogue

Photos by: Sean Lee for ASEF

Searching for a Common Definition of Sustainability

A Discussion between a Ministry Official, a Rector and a Student

Mr Cristophides during the ARC7

Photo by: Sean Lee for ASEF

The students have been addressing the national education ministries with their policy recommendations.
A prerequisite when discussing sustainability within higher education (HE) institutions and when drafting the policy recommendations is understanding what one is talking about when addressing "Sustainability".
During my conversation with **Mr Stelios Christophides, Senior Educaiton Officer at the Ministry of Education and Culture in Cyprus** I stepped into the role of a student and we compared our views on the matter.

Patricia:
Mr Christophides, as a representative of a ministry, what should the recommendation drafted by the students contain so that the ministries will be able to use them?

Mr Christophides:
Most importantly, students have to keep in mind, that policies on HE governance should not be made behind desks. It is important that people involved in making such policies go out and talk and hear the ideas of those most involved and most affected by the policies. Regarding HE it is not a secret that it is a "business" made for students. However, it is not a business that produces a product, which can be sold on the market. It is a "business" that educates and trains students, giving them relevant experiences as to how to become successful and useful scientists. Such "businesses" do not" sell their products in the market", therefore you cannot, directly, see the profit. However,"their product" is the most valuable product that can be produced in the world: New successful and useful employees.

In our efforts to develop policies in HE at the ministries level, sometimes we forget to hear the student voices – to see how students think about each one of the issues. This is what we are expecting to receive from the ARC7 student participants.The representatives of the student community of the whole ASEM area should therefore answer to the following questions in their recommendations: How do they see the university governance and policies from their own perspective? And how do they want future universities to develop? What have we forgotten to include and what do we need to improve?

We are sure that the students, who are at the university every day, have a lot of things to say to us and a lot of things to put down, so that we can keep that in mind when shaping the policies.

Patricia:
Touching on the topic of sustainability – What do you define as "sustainable"within higher education institutions?

Mr Christophides:
Sustainability is a very wide issue. It can mean almost everything. Many people from the government side of view consider that the most important part of sustainability is that HE goals should contribute to the welfare of the country, by focusing on the labour market and to the satisfaction of the needs and requirements of the labour market - not only in numbers but especially in skills.

To elaborate on this, from the governments' point of view, we may define the HE system as unsustainable when "it produces" graduates that are unable to find a job, and therefore the aim of a sustainable system is to prevent it, by "producing" employees that are employed straight after graduation. But there is more. Quite often the study programs students have studied, are those that the labour market wants, but the skills that students'obtainare not matching the needs of the industries. The skill content, therefore, has also a sustainability dimension.

To improve the sustainability dimension, we not only have to make sure that all our graduates will find the right place in the job market, but also that their skills match those needed within the market. We need to make sure, that the moment a student graduates, he or she can immediately integrate into the job market. From the governments perspective this is the sustainability goal within a sustainable higher education system.

Patricia:
Here is where students would disagree. We quite often don't know yet what industry we want to find our work place in. When deciding what to study we might know a field that I would like to work in, but in most cases, we are undecided on the concrete job. Therefore, we, to a certain extent, need broader, interdisciplinary and most importantly flexible study programs. I personally, like that I do not have to decide from the beginning onwards on the one career that I will pursue. It is therefore not sustainable from the student perspective to create a "perfect program" for a specific job in which students are unable to explore different fields and can thereby discover their career path while studying.

Mr Christophides:
This is indeed another very important perspective. For sure a program is more sustainable when it is more flexible. I personally believe, that in the rapidly changing labour market of the 21st century a study program, which is not flexible cannot lead to sustainability. Flexibility in a study program leads to sustainability for the future of the students.

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Patricia:
I think flexibility goes even beyond studying. We, as students, also hope to be flexible during our career. When choosing the first job after graduating, many of us already know, that this might not be the job that we stay in forever. We continue changing, exploring and discovering our path – I believe that this is also made possible through a flexible, interdisciplinary program.

Mr Christophides:
I strongly support this. I could say that this statement may be used as one part of the definition of sustainability from the students' point of view.

Patricia:
But all this is only made possible, when we have some sort of guarantee and safety, that we are actually able to find and change our jobs, after having received our university certificates. This is where your definition of sustainability from the ministry perspective comes in – students need to be able to find their place within the job market.

Mr Christophides:
Exactly! It is absolutely essential for students to feel safe by knowing, that their degree gives them knowledge, skills and competences, which give them the flexibility to easily and safely change jobs.

There is only one way to satisfy both the definition of sustainability of students and of the ministries: The study program should be based on national policies (and in the case of EU countries also on European policies) and should be designed collaboration these three actors. First, the academics, who know the topics and areas which students will study. Second, the work market, that knows the skills that are currently required.

And third, the students, who are going to receive the knowledge and skills and know best about their needs and wishes when studying at university level.

Patricia:
Do you think including industries and students into designing study programs at university level is something feasible and universities would be willing to do?

Mr Christophides:
The EU has already funded the so-called "liaison officers". In each university in the EU there is one office that was developed by EU funding, with the responsibility to bring together academia and the work market. These officers are always outside talking to people in the industries.

This collaboration brings people from the businesses in the university and in the classrooms. It also takes students in the businesses for practical training. Additionally, when new study programs are developed, or existing programs are updated, this collaboration brings the liaison people in to hear their advice and ideas of what skills are needed.

Different countries are on different levels when it comes to business involvement. Also, to be honest, it is not a common practice to have students involved in shaping study programs.
Yet, the students' way of thinking and their ideas are important and need to have a higher impact on the design of these study programs in order to talk about sustainability from the whole spectrum of the meaning of the word.

Dr. Zeps during the ARC7 Photo by: Sean Lee for ASEF

To complete the picture, I additionally asked **Artūrs Zeps, Vice-Rector for Strategic Development at the Riga Technical University in Latvia** on the university perspective on the interpretation of sustainability:

Dr. Zeps:
There is not one simple interpretation of sustainability in university's case. Sustainable development as a concept consists of many elements. We, at the Riga Technical University, are indeed primarily thinking of how to make our university sustainable in the long run. It goes a bit hand in hand with the definition of Mr Christophides. Yet, there are two additional issues for us. The first would be – more environmentally friendly thinking – that can be implemented through development of the university's infrastructure. The second issue is thinking about the curriculum of the university. Research and content of the study process can play a significant role in promoting the way of how university and students think along the SDGs. For example, through the implementation of the course "sustainable building" within a construction study program universities could introduce students to the SDG concepts.

In our university, we do not have a specific written-out and long-term sustainable strategy that would include the goals outlined by Mr Christophides at the moment. There are some sustainability elements within our strategy and certain SDGs selected that our university tends to work on, but there is no separate sustainability strategy — it is all included in one joint document.

> You can try to reach the highest impact by participating and provoking sustainability discussions within university leadership. Real change comes when university's community and management understand the meaningfulness of the concept and start to believe in it. This cannot be implemented through simple regulations and instructions issued by national ministries.
>
> **-Dr. Arfūrs Zeps**

Patricia Senge

Student Organisations Taking Action Towards the SDGs

We spoke with the members of the ARC7 Students' Forum Organising Committee about themselves, their organisations, and the SDGs. The ARC Students' Forum Organising Committee team:

Katrina Koppel, Vice-President of the European Students' Union (ESU)

João Pinto, President of the Erasmus Student Network (ESN)

Lucia Loposova, Vice-President of the Erasmus Mundus Student and Alumni Association (EMA)

Katrina Koppel, Vice-President of the European Students' Union (ESU)

What kind of work does your organization conduct on the topic of sustainable development and which ones of the 17 SDGs is your priority?

Ms Katrina:
ESU has been working on sustainable development quite extensively in the more recent years.
We established our own internal network members, which are the national units of students.
The majority of our work is related to Quality Education (SDG 4), but Reduced Inequalities (SDG 10), Partnerships (SDG 17) and everything else that comes from different disciplines of education (including life on earth, sustainable communities, reducing world hunger and reducing poverty) ties into our work as well.

Students have been working for years for sustainable funding and accessibility to education without necessarily acknowledging that this is considered work on SDGs. When we started focusing on SDGs it wasn't such a big leap, but more a change of discourse. We have also joined an SDG Accord, an international network of NGOs, universities and individuals who are working on advancing the SDGs across Europe in education.

João Pinto, President of the Erasmus Student Network (ESN)

Mr João:
ESN's contribution to the SDGs happens through several programmes and six selected "causes" such as Social Inclusion and Skills and Employability. The goal of these causes is to create a link between our organisations' activities and the several societal goals from large organisations. This also includes the SDGs.

Our core focus is on SDG 4. Nevertheless, through our activities we aim at contributing to other goals as well. This includes SDG 3, 5, 8, 13, and 17. To give an example: We have a programme on responsible alcohol consumption, thus supporting Goal 3 (good health and well-being). As this programme is run in collaboration with a company, it also contributes to goal 17 (partnerships for the goals).

Lucia Loposova, Vice-President of the Erasmus Mundus Student and Alumni Association (EMA)

Ms Lucia:
EMA's priorities among the SDGs definitely revolve around Quality Education (Goal 4). We contribute actively to this goal through our research on quality of Erasmus Mundus courses, working closely with the European Commission to collect, analyse and implement student feedback.

We recently founded the EMA-bility Network. Here we are trying to also tackle issues related to access to the international higher education for differently abled people. Moreover, together with our passionate members, we help run various youth empowerment projects across the globe, the biggest one being WeAfriHUG working with young people in Africa to improve their soft skills and enable their access to quality higher education.

We are also currently involved in an EU funded project focusing on gender issues and female empowerment (SDG 5) through our EMA Women Network.

Finally, environmental sustainability is another of our core focuses as we recognise that without the planet there is no life or future. Our Sust-EMA-bility Network was founded to advise us on measures we can take in order to make EMA more aligned with Goal 13 on Climate Action.

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How can the global goals be translated to local and university strategies? Is there any good practice that you have observed, which you would recommend others to explore?

Ms Katrina:
One example of a good practice is universities putting their commitment to the SDGs in their long-term policies. A group of rectors for example signed the before-mentioned SDG Accord and pledged that their universities will work to advance the SDGs. Once this goal is written down, people focus on it more mindfully. If we include sustainability globally through agreements, it will ultimately have to be implemented locally into for instance university strategies.

There is an increasing push from students as well as academics to engage with SDGs. This includes younger students, giving us hope that the future generations will be more demanding. It forces both governments and universities to be more mindful towards sustainability. Many universities also have students included in their highest bodies of decision-making. When students are present and engaged in the decision-making process, universities will move closer to sustainability. This is due to students being more demanding in this regard.

Mr João:
As very important actors of any society, universities should base part of their strategies in the accomplishment of the SDGs. This practice would be well-perceived by other organisations and might lead to a spill-over effect. Universities should definitely collaborate with civil society organisations as many of the goals can only be accomplished through Partnerships (SDG 17). Universities should actively promote the SDGs on campus through a dedicated day, posters, and constant connection to other activities. Additionally, universities could engage in research projects aimed at contributing to the SDGs or provide workshops on SDGs to students (or from students to professors!).

I would recommend HEIs to show their contributions to the SDGs clearly on their websites, which indicates their efforts of becoming active promoters of the cause in their local contexts. Ultimately, I believe that this type of initiatives can help HEIs bridging the gap with their local communities, a common challenge in many cities.

Ms Lucia:
I think the best way is to build university courses around the SDGs We need more issue-based education that will contribute to the wellbeing of all. I would say that most of the Erasmus Mundus courses focus on sustainability and that, in my opinion, this should be good practice for all higher education institutions. In addition, the existing courses could refocus and see how they can contribute to the SDGs from their own perspective.

What are the challenges of implementing sustainability strategies in higher education and how can success be measured when there are no "one-size-fits-all" indicators?

Ms Katrina:
Measurements are always rather tricky. Personally, I am not a big fan of quantifying goals and then trying to measure them. This is how a lot of education is funded in Europe—based on measures of quality. One of the challenges is the lack of incentives to include sustainability high on the agenda.

I don't think that a one-size-fits-all indicator is a good idea. When you have an indicator, people tend to work towards that one indicator and not towards the wider goal. To give an example: such indicators would often leave students with disabilities behind.
When universities try to reach a high percentage of students gathering international experience, this incentivizes sending more students abroad and not focusing on the ones that need more attention.

Mr João:
Adequate follow-up systems should be implemented, and reporting should be more constant and made public to inspire others in the general population. The challenges faced by universities are probably related to financial restrictions. Implementing the SDGs is costly and that is also why it can only work with synergies. I assume that the lack of awareness on how to better contribute can be seen as another challenge faced by universities.

Ms Lucia:
From my professional experience in higher education, I do not think students who want to study business for instance, would choose a program based on the SDGs. The only way forward is to recognize that SDGs are cross-industry weaving in all disciplines of education, and universities need to provide inspiration and direction on how each and every employee in any field can contribute to the Goals. The success is another question, but in my opinion involving industry into shaping programmes is one of the key elements of success.

How can internationalization of higher education contribute to reduce inequalities within and in-between Asia and Europe?

Ms Katrina:
One of the major benefits of internationalization is sharing best-practices. Especially between Asia and Europe, this exchange and the informal connection is the most powerful tool for reducing inequalities. Also, because internationalisation is not an end goal in itself, but a way of bettering education overall. Statistically proven, people who have more international experience are more aware of the differences between and within groups, which leads to higher awareness and lower discrimination.
More practically, and within the context of the ARC7 in Bucharest: When students, rectors and ministers talk to each other, they are trying to show the good work they have done. Having these meetings and allowing for such exchange is a very powerful tool to motivate improving the education system.

Mr João:
Internationalisation can offer more opportunities for students, helping them succeed in life through skills acquired, as shown in the Erasmus Impact Study. A personal network element, which plays an essential role is the opportunity of going abroad. By meeting people from other countries students may create a network of contacts that will be useful for their future careers.

Finally, it is important to underline the "peace aspect" of international mobility. The more people know about each other, the least they will fear foreigners leading to lower resistance to multiculturality. Down the line, this does contribute to a more peaceful global society.

Ms Lucia:
With a great number of our members coming from Asia, we consider this region crucial to EMA and have been working very actively on building bridges and partnerships. We have launched our project called Campus Erasmus Mundus, which is being piloted in the Philippines where we partner with local universities and EU institutions to create collaboration hubs to promote educational opportunities for Asian citizens in Europe and uplift local students through capacity building projects. These activities directly contribute to Quality Education (SDG 4) but also to other goals such as Reduced Inequalities (SDG 10).
We have also partnered with ASEF for this reason as we would like to increase the involvement of members from Asia who were educated in Europe to contribute with their knowledge and skills to closer collaboration between the two regions.

Patricia Senge

SDGs as a beacon of hope

How can Sustainable Development Instill Hope about a Brighter Future

Mr Damodaran discussed Sustainable Development with the Student representatives

Photo by: Sean Lee for ASEF

Mr. Ramu Damodaran, Chief of the United Nations Academic Impact delivered a passionate speech during the opening ceremony of ASEF ARC7 in Romania, where he listed three steps to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) - building understanding, creating hope and realizing enduring sustainable transformation. What made his speech unique was its gist revolved around instilling hope.
The fact that representatives from both Asia and Europe were present during the conference made the message all the more important, given the reality that most Asian countries lag behind European ones, when it comes to levels of development. So how exactly can one remain hopeful, despite the negative conditions faced and how can this hope be generated among those who desperately need it?
Orange Magazine spoke with Mr. Damodaran to discuss this and more.

Regarding the role of SDGs in creating hope, Mr. Damodaran says,

"Sustainable development is not only a laudable goal in itself, but a metaphor for trying to resolve issues that create feelings of hopelessness. We will be able to create hope through the SDGs because they point towards the direction the society has to take in order to achieve sustainable transformation. The reality is that there is so much happening in the world, that makes people hopeless, and so much of this can be traced to the lack of sustainable development. You cannot externalize things by saying that people are feeling hopeless because of violence, wars and conflict or natural disaster etc. The way to prevent such situations is by achieving sustainable development."

"There is no geographical unit of population that is too small for the SDGs", continues Mr. Damodaran, "Poor people face a host of uncertainties and this is where one should implement actions to build hope, by removing one uncertainty after the other. For a poor farmer, who worries about making the ends meet and providing for his family, what would this look like? It is the small actions that one takes at the local level, that will catalyze this process. For example, at the village level, if you are able to build a primary health care center, then the farmer will be assured of medical care for his family and if there is a primary school, then he would know his children can get education and thus, he is filled with hope about a brighter future for his family."

Certain projects are already under way and Mr. Damodaran cites the example of "EDAM", an initiative of the Government of the Indian state of Kerala, in partnership with TKM college of Engineering, Kollam, as a member of the United Nations Academic Impact. One of the aims of this largely student-led project is to provide sustainable and affordable housing units for those who need it urgently. The project is generally considered as a success story and an example for the need of implementing SDGs at the local level.

The effect of achieving a sustainable development goal should not be minimized or compartmentalized, he suggests. "The work done to achieve any SDG is going to achieve more than just that. For example, primary health will help with not only ensuring health, but also with eliminating poverty, gender issues and more. When looking at sanitation, it can assist with more than just health. The trigger effect of the SDGs is so vivid, making the results so profound".

Photo by: Sean Lee for ASEF

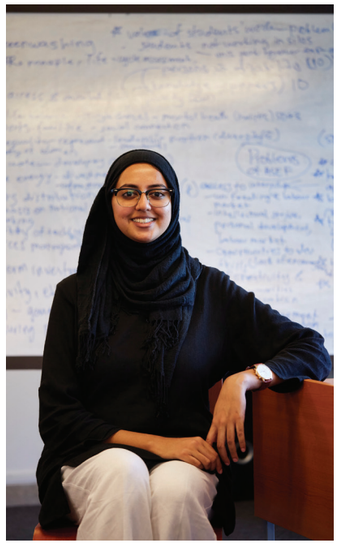
Mr. Damodaran adds, **"Human ingenuity is limitless and the biggest responsibility of human intelligence is to give hope, precisely to the people who need it desperately. During the pursuit of SDGs, when we work to achieve a common goal, we think beyond ourselves and when we think beyond ourselves, we create hope."**

Caroline Paul Kanjookaran

Intercultural Management Lessons from ARC7
A glimpse into the strategies adopted by moderators to facilitate the working groups

Dr. Georgiana Mihut

Ms Jungyoon Han



Ms Nur Syanhirah Khanum

Photos by: Sean Lee for ASEF

The convergence of students from 51 different countries from Asia and Europe during the ARC7 presented not only opportunities to learn and grow from each other, but also hinted at challenges in terms of language barriers, different styles of communication etc. Regardless, all participants worked towards achieving a common goal, namely, to draft policy recommendations in their respective working group that were to be in a tangible form, within just three days. The moderators of the three working groups played a phenomenal role in making sure that the goals of the event were met. So how did they navigate the different challenges and what can multicultural, multinational events like ARC7 learn from their experiences?

Working Group 1 focused on the strategies that institutions of higher education can adopt to make SDGs a core part of their every day practice. Together with Mr Robert Napier, Ms Nur Syahirah Khanum, student of the International islamic University of Malaysia moderated working group 1. Ms Khanum has a background in intercultural communications and is also an active debater and this equipped her with the necessary knowledge and skills to manage the differences among students participating in the policy drafting process.

She says, “One of the first things I did while moderating the group was to establish house rules that everyone agreed upon and I believe this is crucial in any multicultural setting. Since I have facilitated groups in the past, I am aware of how people can get up in the heat of the moment. Therefore, we decided to be kind to each other and that is a personal rule I implement in all life situations. Being kind acknowledges that everyone is an expert in his or her own field and therefore, will have strong ideas about the topic. It is also important to remember that due to the differences in the countries one comes from and the experiences one has in the country, they will have developed a point of view that is different from the other. By being kind to each other, we express our views, while also allowing the other to express theirs. This also helps to navigate the issues that rise from misreading body language or communication cues.”

Dr. Georgiana Mihut, Board Member, Erasmus Mundus Student and Alumni Association was a participant herself in an ARC Conference two years ago. This helped her gain an ‘insiders view’ of what to expect during the conference and gave her strategic advantage while moderating the Working Group 2 that focused on taking action at community level and SDGs as drivers of university social impact. She says, “One of the first things I did was to create a sense of harmony and camaraderie in the group, through ice breakers. This helped the participants get a better idea about their peers and helped to create a healthy team atmosphere. I had encouraged participants to start thinking about a problem they wished to solve, so that there is a clear structure already in place. When the group is trying to solve a common problem, the communication becomes more focused and more solutions oriented, than debate oriented. Also, the bigger group was broken down into mini working groups and I made sure there was a mix of participants with diverse backgrounds in each group so as to get a balanced view. Also, people felt ownership towards their group and were also able to communicate freely.”

“People tend to focus on their differences, when they pursue a common goal”, says Ms Jungyoon Han, President, Organisation for the Cooperation, Exchange and Networking among Students and Alumni (OCEANS), who facilitated the third working group on ‘Taking action at international level - SDGs as a catalyst to reorient internationalisation’. She adds, “The participants in my working group came from different countries and since each country faces a situation that is different from the other, this also influences the way these participants think and act. Ultimately, this affects their policy recommendations.
Each of the participants were chosen because they were experts in their field and therefore, were passionate about the work they do.
Also, some of the students did not have English as their native language and therefore, felt inhibited, while trying to express themselves.
And some others had ideas but were not comfortable speaking in front of a big group.
There were unique challenges that we had to overcome. To navigate all these, I focused on giving everyone the chance to speak up and to have their voice heard. Ultimately, we all had the same end goal, which was to draft policy recommendations and I guided the group towards this. In the end, we were able to draft a successful policy recommendation.
I am quite pleased about the result.”

Caroline Paul Kanjookaran

‘The Change Is In Your Hands!’

How to Feel Empowered Through the Responsibility of Knowing How To Tackle The Sustainable Development Goals

An interview with Dr. Catalina Goanta

Dr. Catalina Goanta

Located in what many call the ‘heart of Europe’, Maastricht’s university is among the youngest in the Netherlands. Maastricht University (UM) has been ranked 5th in the Young University Rankings in 2018 and has incorporated sustainability in different pillars: most importantly, UM focuses on education, research and operations and, like many other universities in Europe and Asia, aims to become a sustainable university by 2030. The biggest emphasis within the three pillars lay on good health and well-being (SDG 3), quality education (SDG 4), climate action (SDG 13) and peace, justice and strong institutions (SDG 16). To aid the practical implementation of SDGs, UM has participated in a projected called ‘Green Impact’, originally initiated by the National Union of Students (NUS) in the United Kingdom.

During ARC7 in Bucharest, Orange Magazine interviewed Dr. Catalina Goanta, an UM alumna, and current Assistant Professor of Private Law at UM’s Faculty of Law. She presented insights that go beyond the Green Impact, and further demonstrated possibilities of how students, professors, and every-day people can contribute to sustainable development in her opinion.

When asked how Dr. Goanta perceives UM’s contribution to sustainable development, she elaborated that being a young university comes as an advantage for UM. She added that therefore UM is very connected to the desires of its community. Sustainability has been quite a topic on the university agenda for the past decades. There has been a Green Office that has been incredibly well involved in organizing a lot of events, raising awareness about sustainability from an institutional perspective and if my recollection serves me well, the Green Office was also pivotal in stopping even the building of a new campus that may not have been very sustainably oriented.’

> **This really shows the fact that the SDGs are at the core of education.**

With over 16,000 international students, UM’s community is as diverse as can be, but on May 11th, 2019, over 11,000 participants gathered to march for the climate. Dr. Goanta feels as if ‘the student community has been very actively engaged in the topic of sustainability. And the Executive Board of our University has listened to that.’ She believes that UM’s Green Office, heading the project Green Impact has been pivotal in the university’s formal commitment to become a fully self-sustained university by 2030.

Given UM’s active engagement towards sustainability, the question remains which concrete steps the institution is taking.
In this sense, Dr. Goanta emphasizes two key components: education and research. ‘When it comes to research, we have seen how important evidence is, how important it is to look at statistics, to develop indicators – which does not happen over night or by itself. There is a need for a specific research agenda, which at UM has existed for decades, and is now spreading from the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences to the Health and Medicine Faculty. In a more general sense, we have the idea of social responsibility. And we have seen, even at the Law Faculty, which is traditionally a very inwards-looking faculty, that courses such as *Corporate Social Responsibility* and the *Idea of Business and Human Rights* are emerging and have been a very popular research thread. More fundamental changes are also something we are dealing with, my colleague and Professor of Law Dr. Akkermans looking into the topic of sustainable property law, for example.’

Maastricht University is famous for its problem based learning (PBL) approach, a practice that is meant to engage students in solving issues from a different perspective. In its essence, PBL aims to be constructive, self-directed, collective and relevant. Based on the fact that the approach is very student-oriented, we asked Dr. Goanta what exactly it is that gives students at UM the chance to participate and contribute towards the SDGs. She explained: ‘When it comes to education, the idea is that education is the panacea for everything. You have a problem? You try to educate the students, everyone, because the SDGs are about everyone doing everything at the same time and leaving no one behind; only this way they can actually be achieved! Dr. Kawakami, another colleague and Assistant Professor of Private Law, and I have set up a Mediation Clinic, and we try to do mediation weeks where we take cases that are fundamentally problematic for society and we watch students solve them. One case was on the Catalonian independence question and students got to do a deep dive into a topic of international and European affairs that is very, very actual and hands on, and in this particular case, something that might affect peace in this region. We believe it’s important for students not just to take exams, to take a test, but to actually engage and get motivated and to think ‘okay, I need to solve this problem, because it is not just an exam, it is something that reflects what is happening around us in the world’. This is how we try to connect problem based learning also to the SDGs’.

Looking ahead, UM’s goal to become a self-sustained university by 2030 is not easily achieved. We wondered what exactly it is that makes this goal more attainable, and what concrete projects UM has started to aid its process towards self-sustainability. Dr. Goanta gave us some insights, stating that:

> **We can’t think locally, regionally, we need to think globally; big, right?**

‘One of the projects in this regard that has my absolute support, and that I would like to see spread all over various faculties, is something Herco Fonteijn, Associate Professor at UM’s Faculty of Psychology and Neuroscience, has been working on, the idea of global citizenship, with a strong emphasis on the fact that every single aspect of students’ education needs to be put into context from the perspective of what role that particular aspect plays on a global scale.’

In a wider global context, Orange Magazine did not want to leave unmentioned current developments, such as the withdrawal from the Paris Agreement on Climate Change Mitigation by the United States.

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Photo by: Sean Lee for ASEF

Dr. Catalina Goanta during the Intergenerational Dialogue

Such incidents might make younger generations doubt the political commitment towards sustainable development of their countries, but Dr. Goanta's message for the freshly starting university students was an encouraging one, despite on-going threats to combating climate change, and by extension, not fulfilling Agenda 2030. 'Change is in your hands', she said, and continued,

If we wait around and say 'well, one plastic cup is not going to hurt, and no one else around me cares about using plastic cups, what change am I going to make if I care?'

True. If there are 7 billion of us thinking the same, there will not be any change.

The most important aspect is to feel empowered and the role universities can play in that is laying out a map towards letting people know what can empower them as individuals, what they can do, what their individual actions are and if it can further help the SDGs. Gender equality is something you can apply in your daily life! As an example, I love the Romanian society, and at the same time, having lived abroad as well. When you look at some of the stereotypes, such as a woman having to cook, it is something people could change in their immediate environment, which pushes gender equality and therewith SDGs towards achieving them. It's something you have in your hands, and it is about having the responsibility of knowing how to feel empowered by that!'

Nicole Pop

Photo by: Sean Lee for ASEF

Prof Dr. Stephan Gerhard Huber during ARC7

"In many countries during recent years, the trend was to put the emphasis on developing and implementing evaluation and assessment systems of personal, organizational, regional and national level. Now, the emphasis should be more on allocating resources for strategic purposes, besides formulating aims, to implement the means to reach these aims. That is a shift from assessing and evaluating qualities to actually developing the qualities. There needs to be a strategic shift to allocate resources to enhance quality" says Prof Dr. Stephan Gerhard Huber, Head of the Institute for the Management and Economics of the University of Teacher Education Zug, Switzerland.

Education as a tool for achieving the SDGs

Interview with Prof Dr. Stephan Gerhard Huber

According to Prof Dr. Huber, there should be more investment in the human capital to assure and improve the quality of education. Quality needs innovation (establishing new practices), improvement (modifying established practices) and sustainability (maintaining achievements). This also holds true for working with the SDGs. All institutions of education can contribute to raise awareness and develop competences for the SDGs. Universities, for example, could do both, conduct research around the SDGs and create learning environments to develop awareness and competences needed to contribute to achieve the SDGs. It is imperative to invest in teacher education, says Prof Dr. Huber, "as investing in education is akin to investing in our future".

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The mere purpose of education for a student is not to learn facts, but to understand the conditions in which these facts interact. Hence, a conditionalized or contextualized learning is preferred. It is equally important to engage the students' creativity, to practice complex problem solving, to develop skills to discern false information and also to understand how knowledge is generated, maintained, managed and disseminated.

Education is closely interlinked with achieving the SDGs, as ensuring education also encompasses other goals such as increased quality of life and well being (Goal 3), decent work and economic growth (Goal 8), which is also interlinked with Goals 1 and 2, which is alleviating poverty and ensuring zero hunger, respectively. All this would lead to Goal 16, which is to promote peaceful and inclusive societies.

Prof Dr. Huber acknowledges that there is a divide in the distribution of capital among people, be it intellectual capital or monetary or social capital. However, he also believes education plays a key role but not the only one, "for (increasing) social justice and making the world more fair".

To achieve this vision, there needs to be a special focus. He says, "The focus of education systems has to be on improving it and acknowledge the important role in society. It is important to measure the quality, decide on goals (as a step in the process of achieving best practice) and to take action to increase the quality in the priority areas. In terms of achieving the SDGs, it is not enough to set easy, measurable academic outcomes in terms of factual competences on academic subjects, but also on social nourishment, creativity, critical thinking and problem solving".

About Prof Dr. Huber

Prof Dr. Stephan Huber is Head of Research and Development, Member of the University Leadership, and Head of the Institute for the Management and Economics of Education (IBB) of the University of Teacher Education (PH) Zug (Switzerland). He also is a member of the School of Education (ESE) at the University of Erfurt, Senior Research Fellow at the Hong Kong Institute of Education, Adjunct Professor at the Institute for Education Research Griffith University Brisbane. He held guest professorships at Universities of India, Austria, Switzerland and Cyprus, is member of the academic advisory boards of different national and international associations and institutions, is Editor-in-Chief of the International Research Journal 'Evaluation Assessment and Accountability' by Springer and member of the editorial board of several journals. He is also head of the national interdisciplinary research consortium of the Young Adult Survey of Switzerland of the Swiss Federal Surveys of Adolescents. His areas of interest are organisation and system change, education management, school effectiveness, school improvement, professionalisation of teachers and school leaders. He conducts qualitative, quantitative, mixed-method, international comparative research. For more than 10 years, he has hosted and chaired the World Education Leadership Symposium (WELS.EduLead.net).

Caroline Paul Kanjookaran

Different Approaches to the SDGs Comparing Asia and Europe

In dialogue with Prof Anne Pakir & Dhruti Chakravarthi

Prof Anne Pakir during the Rectors' Conference — Photo by: Sean Lee for ASEF

While we globally aim to reach the SDGs and conduct work on achieving sustainability together, actions and the dialogue around the topic might vary. This depends not only on who is participating in the discussion but even more so on where in the world the person has gained work experience on sustainability.

ARC7 not only aimed at bringing together actors involved on different ends in higher education but also paid great attention on securing the exchange between representatives from all 51 ASEM countries.This is of great relevance, as these intercultural interactions revealed new questions. One started wondering whether stating that there is a single dominant line of reasoning, along which all actors world-wide approach the SDGs, is far too simplistic. What are the differences in the work on sustainability in Asian and European countries? Are there different visible approaches these continents might take towards achieving them? And lastly, are these differences hindering the possibility of working on the SDGs together?

These are questions, that Associate Vice President (University and Global Relations) at the National university of Singapore (NUS) Prof Anne Pakir started asking herself. She observed that Asians and Europeans are somehow approaching the same goals but in different manners. She continued by explaining that universities on the Asian continent are already working on the SDGs

but almost invisible and unarticulated. On the contrary, when European researchers talk about funding and research, they are referring precisely to the 17 SDGs and how their campuses are oriented towards them. Yet, Asian universities might have similarly great ideas about how to help the planet, without referencing to the SDGs as much.

Ms Dhruti Chakravarthi currently pursues her undergraduate degree in sustainable development in Edinburgh. Originally coming from India, she brought a cross-cultural perspective on sustainability to the conference. She agreed with Prof Pakir's observation and added that even within Asia itself, different cultures view sustainability differently.
Ms Chakravarthi explained:

"I think Europe has an advantage. They don't face the same problems as less developed countries in for instance South or East Asia. The kind of measures they have to take are different. Many European countries might have almost achieved the ambitious goals in terms of development or are somewhere high up in the process of reaching them. In countries in South Asia for instance, most people don't even have the skills to facilitate, understand or comprehend the technicalities within the goals. This could be due to for instance the lack of literacy. Still they are quite often striving for sustainability, yet, without marking it in the way most Europeans would. This has one negative side to it, marking action to the goals provides a method of measurement and shows, how far a country has come in achieving the SDGs."

Prof Pakir continued by explaining that labelling and naming are very strong traditions in the West, especially when it comes to modern scientific language. She transferred Ms Chakravarthi's remarks to the university level. With differences in development stages of universities come differences in the SDG implementation. Both Prof Pakir and Ms Chakravarthi exemplified this idea. In both Asian and European countries students might strive for SDG3 (Good health and well-being). While Europeans might assist in already fully developed hospitals, students in for instance India teach girls from slums how to handle menstruation or talk about malaria and other issues. In the latter case students quite often don't realize that they are assisting to achieve SDG3, however, both actions help in advancing the SDGs.

> Sustainability has been ingrained within cultures of India for a very large time, it is just not labeled as such. For instance, while cooking we are using every part of our food and try not to waste anything. This is considered a sustainable action.
>
> **-Ms Dhruti Chakravarthi**

Ms Chakravarthi explained these differences between Asia and Europe through looking at early industrialization in Europe. Europe, compared to Asia, hit the industrialization much earlier on. Once they industrially advanced, they almost lost their empathy and connection with nature. Communities in Asia see a much stronger connection. In many villages in India everything is done with a much greater respect to nature compared to Europe. It was a surprise for her to come to Europe and see that one can buy goods that are labelled as ecofriendly and sustainable, but which could easily be made by oneself and For instance, a coconut shell, which is sometimes sold for 20 pounds, whereas one could just take them off the tree in India.

Photo by: Sean Lee for ASEF

Ms Dhruti Chakravarthi was the rapporteur of the Working Group 3 during the ARC7 Students' Forum

Historically it has often been that one culture group tries to change the other to improve sustainability. Is this really necessary? Or is it ok to have these differences?

The dialogue with Ms Dhruti and Prof Pakir taught me that it is absolutely fine to have these differences. What matters is being aware of it and being able to accept them. What is essential is that we remain constantly open-minded in the dialogue between Asia and Europe and understand where the other is coming from. Ultimately, the approach by both Asian and European countries contains theoretical understandings and practical solutions that can constructively contribute to improving the management of societal challenges related to sustainability.

Using multiple perspectives and approaches to sustainability can offer a complementary, and potentially more complete view. It is therefore inevitable to look at a state's effort to achieve the SDGs with direct link to the situatedness of the country in power structures and development status.

It is of utmost importance that all actors, whether from Asia or Europe, acknowledge the different levels of development and realize that only through doing so, we can achieve social change. It is thereby important to understand what type of social change a country is referring to and how this may be achieved societally and politically by taking the specific situation of the country into account.

By looking at every country individually, one realizes that even the most developed countries have just as much responsibility and tasks to improve sustainability as the least-developed ones.

> **The good thing within Asia and Europe compared to for instance the USA is, that we are used to differences and learnt to live with them. Both continents are multicultural, multilateral and multilingual – this is our major common trait. We have a higher threshold for difference. That's why it should be easier for our two continents to work together.**
>
> **-Prof Pakir**

Yet, it is our responsibility as mindful citizens to assist each other in the process through, for instance, the exchange of best practices and ideas. The ARC7 gave the participants another platform to do so.

Patricia Senge

What Do Rankings Have To Do with Sustainable Development Goals?

Insights from Times Higher Education, the leading ranking agency for universities Hope about a Brighter Future

Photo by: Sean Lee for ASEF

Mr Justin Tay

Mr Michael Lubacz

When it comes to ranking universities in terms of their academic and research performance, Times Higher Education (THE) is the leading ranking agency in the world. They collect and analyze data about universities' excellence, research output and teaching capabilities and rank them accordingly. During ARC7, Orange Magazine talked to Mr Justin Tay, THE Regional Director and General Manager for Asia, and Mr Michael Lubacz, Brand Director about the link between rankings and the achievement of SDGs. Is there even a link? What are trends that can be observed in universities' policies regarding sustainable development? Let us start at the beginning and explore a different institutional perspective towards the SDGs.

They have been invited by ASEF to join ARC7 to give their perspective as a ranking agency and how they incorporate SDGs into their matrix. "We are the only ranking agency that is currently doing this, and it is not an easy role. It is rather challenging because of its high subjectivity as every country and every university has its own intricacies and its own systems. There is no perfect ranking, but we try very hard. This is also one of the reasons why we are here: To hear back from universities because they are the ones on the ground. So, if they feel that any matrix needs to be more balanced, we are here to listen to them and to hear their feedback and advice", Mr Tay added.

In April 2019, THE released its most innovative ranking yet, the University Impact Ranking, assessing universities' performance against the SDGs. In comparison to other THE rankings, the Impact Ranking does not solely focus on the three levels of higher learning "research, teaching and social impact", according to Mr Tay. He explains, "There are many rankings that are measuring research because it's easiest, it's something quantifiable." Mr Lubacz explains furthermore, "It is important to know what these rankings are measuring: the World Ranking is very much focused on research output. What the Impact Ranking looks at is different: there is no barriers for universities to enter, even the ones that publish a small amount of papers can get included and it gives various universities the opportunity to shine for things outside the research space – so how they are working towards gender equality, climate change, reducing inequalities in general."

The project started over two years ago, Mr Tay remembers spending "more than a year in consultations with governments, universities, various stakeholders" before anything was launched. An important guiding force for THE is the belief that rankings mold universities to a certain extent. Mr Tay and Mr Lubacz agree that the Impact Ranking is on the right track, firstly, because it "does not just tell universities about their research and teaching, but more importantly, how their outputs as a university impacts society", Mr Tay says, and secondly, because according to Mr Lubacz,

"It is a win-win for everyone, the ranking. It promotes healthy competition, it promotes activities that are going to benefit the world. Universities that have these policies in place are going to be doing much better work for the overall global economy, and for society and humans. If a ranking can encourage that, there are no losers!"

One recent, underpinning example demonstrates Vietnam, where none of the universities have ever been ranked in the teaching ranking, due to THE's very stringent criteria. However, for the first time, the private university Ton Duc Thang is featured in the Impact Ranking, situated in the range 101-200 out of a total of 450 universities. Mr Tay explained that "there was a lot of buzz about this in Viet Nam. Two days after, we saw the university of Ho Chi Minh prohibiting the usage of plastic straws!" Does he believe there is direct causation? "I'd like to see there is some causation, yes!", he said. In addition to that, Mr Lubacz would like to see rankings becoming a driving force: "Certain policies will allow universities to quite immediately impact on their score in the ranking. If a university does not have a policy about equality, or accessibility for students from under-privileged backgrounds, all they can do is create such a policy, make it visible, enforce it – and at that point, the university's score performs significantly better!"

Generally, there is wide agreement that universities are becoming more self-aware and self-reflective of their policies and actions. In that regard, Mr Tay would like to see rankings as a carrot-and-stick approach: "You are measured against and compared to other universities. I see the benefits behind this approach as it is helping universities to become more self-aware of their policies". However, there is room for improvement, and so we wondered what the way forward is. Mr Tay strongly emphasizes the direct causation aspect:

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"Because of this certain policy, they cut down less trees, as a result there is less carbon footprint, as a result people are taking things more seriously. Usually, if it starts at university, it trickles down into society, with graduates coming out and having a sense of awareness."

Is it all about self-awareness and self-reflection? Mr Lubacz believes so, "I think universities are always at the forefront of change in their economies and in their societies. Universities that are performing well in particular with the SDGs – this trend will spread out and create a halo effect into a countries' local as well as national economies, on how people live and on how happy they are."

And yet, there are challenges ahead. At ARC7, the exchange of best practices between universities from both Asia and Europe was at the center of debates. However, we asked our interviewees what some of the biggest challenges were that they had noticed within the conference. "You don't have to reinvent the wheel!", Mr Tay emphasized, "But I do think the biggest problem is the fact that there has not been given enough emphasis from a top-down approach. And I understand that senior officials and presidents of universities have a lot on their plates.

If the leaders are not convinced, even if the people on the ground are, it is very difficult to start something substantial. A lot of the things we could do are easily duplicated, it is about sharing best-practices, also on a local level within the sphere of their own universities. What is needed are two things: One, you need more conviction at the top, and two, you need more sessions like these where people share their insights and what has actually worked for them."

Lastly, both interviewees agreed that looking ahead, universities are the "pioneers of change" within their societies, according to Mr Lubacz, and that the biggest impact they can have is in helping societies become more balanced.

> Narrowing the gap between those who are doing really well, and those in poverty – that is the greatest impact that universities can make, that they should make!
>
> **-Mr Justin Tay**

How does then a ranking bridge the gap between universities' policies and SDGs? "I think every human is a stakeholder, right? So we all have a part to play in some way. The SDGs provide us with a template, a foundation of the most important key factors that we should be looking at.", Mr Lubacz added.

"People in previous decades were considering environmental impact and recycling but now we have a proper framework that we can work towards, and also something that we can measure and quantify within those various rankings. I think we are moving towards a better humanity, a better world for everyone which is where we should be going!" , Mr Lubacz concluded.

Nicole Pop

Inclusion and Integration for Sustainable Development

How can society ensure sustainable development in an inclusive manner?

Ms Laura Alčiauskaite during ARC7

Ms Ruta Kavaliauskaite during the ARC7

Photo by: Sean Lee for ASEF

Disability is touched upon in various parts of the SDGs and specifically in areas related to education, growth and employment, inequality, accessibility of human settlements, as well as data collection and monitoring of the SDGs. For example, Goal 4 on inclusive and equitable quality education and promotion of life-long learning opportunities and Goal 8 on promoting sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all also covers people with disabilities.

Ms Laura Alčiauskaite, representing Lithuania at the ARC7 Students' Forum and doctoral student of Psychology says:

"Mental and physical health and social well being are covered in the SDGs, which is a sign that the society is progressing in the right direction, when it comes to including people with different needs. However, this should be the norm, rather than the exception to ensure sustainable development. The society cannot move forward by excluding the differently abled people, be it mental or physical differences in their ability, as every person has unique strengths and capabilities that can be used

to achieving the universal goals of SDGs. Therefore, for a meaningful, sustainable development, the society should progress by also ensuring inclusion of differently abled people. This can be done by bringing about changes at the grassroots level to ensure inclusion into the mainstream society. By this, I mean not just organizing a one off event which is inclusive or accessible, but covering the entire spectrum, from education to health care system to policy making."

"In some ways, people who are physically challenged have better chances at getting the help they need, as the society can see and acknowledge their difference and accommodate it", says, Ms Ruta Kavaliauskaite, doctoral student of Psychology. She adds, "As opposed to physical health, when it comes to mental issues, it is still a taboo topic".

Mental health and psychosocial wellbeing were considered an integral part of health by the WHO in 1978 and was given due importance in many UN resolutions as well. However, it is only recently that mental health has been included on the unified global agenda. When the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) were formulated in 2015, the world leaders also committed to prioritizing the prevention and treatment of non-communicable diseases, including behavioral development and neurological disorders, which constitute a major challenge to sustainable development. More specifically, Goal 3 focuses on ensuring healthy lives and promoting well-being for everyone at all ages.

"Indeed, mental health plays a major role in ensuring health and well being for everyone. It should be a priority not only at universities, where they have provisions to care for their students and faculty, but also in the mainstream society", continues Ms Kavaliauskaite.

> Mental health does not simply mean the absence of illnesses. It should instead be seen as having a good state of mind with which you can realize your true potential. For this, it is important to have a mental health strategy in the universities, to support its students and faculty. Unfortunately, nowadays, it is seen as more of an add-on feature, but it should be available just as easily and freely as other support mechanisms lent by the university.
>
> **-Ms Ruta Kavaliauskaite**

This is particularly true for international students, Ms Kavaliauskaite says, who might be suffering from adaptation difficulties, after having left their home country to start their life in a new country with an unfamiliar culture. For this, she recommends that the global strategies related to mental health, such as the SDGs, should be implemented on a local level by the universities, keeping in mind the unique need of their academic community.

Caroline Paul Kanjookaran

Human Rights, Inclusiveness and Sustainability

The Story of Mr Parkhat Yussupjanov

Photo by: Sean Lee for ASEF

Mr Parkhat Yussupjanov during ARC7

Mr Yussupjanov was representing Kazakhstan during the ARC7 Students' Forum. He has fourteen years of experience in the nonprofit sector and has earned an Executive Master's degree in Development Policies & Practices from the Graduate Institute of Geneva, as well as a Master's degree of Public Affairs from Indiana University.

Since 2011, Parkhat has served as President of Zhiger, a youth organization of persons with disabilities that he co-founded in Kazakhstan. Under Parkhat's leadership, Zhiger established the first disability support centers for students in the country and successfully lobbied for policy changes at the national level to ensure educational environments support people with disabilities. He has extensive experience consulting for state and local governments, primarily specializing in disability access in education.

In the following lines Mr Yussupjanov tells Orange Magazine his story:

Being part of the Chinese Uygur minority, Parkhat has found himself facing ethnic-based discrimination. For Orange Magazine he described his story as a Human Rights activist with a disability and outlined his work in the field of sustainability and higher education.

I was born with a visual disability and attended a specialized school for the blind. This school was completely accessible for visually impaired kids in terms of barrier free infrastructure, braille, large print books, educational material and specialized equipment. However, when I finished school and entered University, I found myself in an absolutely disability unfriendly environment. That's the reason for which I am very involved in activities to make advancements to a more inclusive higher education system.

I've been facing a double discrimination through almost my whole life. First, as my disability is very distinct, I had to cope with barriers imposed by the society for disabled persons in Kazakhstan and abroad. Secondly, I had to struggle with an ethnic-based discrimination. I'm an ethnic Uygur and Uygur people are very often denied opportunities to get a good education, develop a good career in the government and promote their fellow Uygurs. My parents and grandparents

were born in Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region of PRC and moved to what is now Kazakhstan (USSR at that times) in 1960 with a big wave of Uygur migrants and refugees. During Soviet times Uygurs had a lot of opportunities to contribute to the development of the society and the country. A lot of prominent Uygur persons occupied decision-making positions, achieved a lot in education, culture and science. I myself was born in Kazakhstan, not in PRC, but, because my ethnicity is Uygur, I'm constantly facing either verbal hints and jokes, related to my ethnicity, or experience indirect refuses to hire me when I apply for a job/position in some government agencies.

Today, after years of struggling with unfair situations, it is fair to say that people and the government consider me as an expert in areas including disability, higher education, accessibility, project management and youth development. Now, it is easier for me to apply for a job in a government agency and considering my education, knowledge and experience, finding a job should be easier. Regardless, I do not aim to work for the government at the moment, as I still feel that I am not well-known enough to bypass disability-based and ethnic-based discrimination within such a job. For this reason I have decided to contribute with my experience, knowledge and skills to the society and country through different way.

After years of double-discrimination I am much stronger than I think I would be without having faced those challenges. I have a vast experience in solving/minimizing social issues in Kazakhstan and abroad. I became a human rights activist, gathered a group of motivated young individuals to establish a youth organization of persons with disabilities, which then became one of the strongest human rights youth organizations working on the national and international levels.

Currently, I am the president of "Zhiger" – the Youth Organization of Persons with Disabilities. Our organization is a civil society organization, founded and managed by young persons with different types of disabilities. One of the major goals of our organization is to ensure equal rights on higher education for students and enrollees with disabilities in Kazakhstan. As I myself have a visual disability, I faced and struggled with multiple barriers during my bachelor's degree in Kazakhstan. Later, when I did my master's degrees in the United States and Switzerland, I felt how much do these countries do to ensure inclusive and equitable quality education by providing me with reasonable accommodations during my studies. This further motivated me to continue fighting to reduce inequalities in higher education.

For 11 consecutive years Zhiger has been working to lobby and promote rights for disabled persons within higher education by producing accessible material in DAISY, Braille and large print; conducting monitoring studies on access to higher education for disabled students; by lobbying for urgent legislation changes to guarantee disabled students' rights on the legislative level. Furthermore, we established the first disability support center in Kazakhstan, located in one of the universities in Almaty. The center has been providing services for 37 students with disabilities. This center became a model center for other universities to provide disability services for students and to upgrade skills of disability coordinators all over Kazakhstan. Nowadays, we are coordinating a network of disability support centers, which unites such centers in different parts of the country.

The mission of Zhiger is to integrate young persons with disabilities, regardless of the type of their disability, in all areas of social, economic and cultural life of the country. Under this mission, we work not only in the area of inclusive higher education, but also work in other directions linked to for instance the information gap between persons with print disabilities and non-disabled persons. We also participate in disability movements and organize seminars and public awareness campaigns for young persons with disabilities.

During the 11 years of its existence, our organization achieved a lot of its goals and tasks. Furthermore, we became members of the Coordination Council on the disabled persons' affairs under the Almaty city government; the commission on assistive devices for visually impaired persons in Almaty; we established strategic partnerships both with public, private and non-profit sectors of the country.

I personally graduated from the "New generation of Kazakhstan's human rights activists" course, organized by the Soros Foundation in Kazakhstan. Under this course I conducted comprehensive monitoring research on the right of persons with disabilities within higher education. My activities in the area of human rights are closely linked to sustainability. A developed social welfare system is one of the constituent parts of sustainability. Our activities in the field of human rights are very often aimed at improving people's standards of living, access to basic necessities, as well as to education, adequate healthcare and employment. When human rights activists do their job, it adds value to sustainability in a particular city, area, country and internationally.

It is easy to link SDG implementation with human rights activities. Many of the SDGs reflect human rights. For instance, one can easily link Article 24 of the UN convention on the rights of persons with disabilities with SDG 4. This is due to the fact that inclusive education and quality education are interrelated in many aspects. The same goes for Article 5 "Equality and non-discrimination" of the UN CRPD and SDG 10 – "Reduced inequalities". In Article 25 "Health" of the UN CRPD and in SDG 3 – "Good health and wellbeing" we can also find a lot of common actions, which should be taken in order to improve life of people. That is why human rights activities are important to improve quality of life for people both on local, national, sub-regional, regional and international level. Linking human rights activities and SDG implementation adds value to both of these complexes.

Best practices are very important to help students with disabilities to get a quality higher education with all necessary accommodations this or that student requires. Here I would recommend establishing disability support centers and adaptive technology and accessibility centers within universities.

Many students with disabilities are left behind even if they are present in the class. This is due to the lack of sufficient experience, skills and sometimes even desire and commitment to meet the needs of students with disabilities on side of the faculty members of universities. Hence, developing capacity of faculty, staff and university leaders in the field of inclusive education is a very important step to make higher education more accessible and more inclusive.

Parkhat Yussupjanov

Knowledge Transfer and Exchange of Best Practices to Achieve the SDGs

A Quest to Catalyze Change through Knowledge

Ms Kawthar Karout during ARC7

ARC7 brought together 51 different students from countries across Asia and Europe. One of the main objectives of doing so was to brainstorm together for solutions to common problems and to facilitate knowledge transfer between these different regions. There are best practices across each of these continents, that can be adopted by the other and learning from each other is a key component to ensure the vision of achieving the SDGs.

Ms Kawthar Karout, born in Lebanon and currently living in Sweden, is in a strategic position to put this vision into practice. Her multinational and multicultural background gives her the advantage of experiencing firsthand the life in both Lebanon and Sweden. She aims to use this unique position to ensure knowledge transfer between the countries, so as to better the lives of people in both. Orange Magazine speaks to Ms Karout to learn more about her background and how she plans to fulfill her vision of achieving sustainable development by addressing economic, environmental and social sustainability.

"I feel privileged to get the opportunity to study in Sweden, one of the most advanced countries in the world and I am particularly interested in the sustainability practices prevailing in the country. Having been born and having lived in Lebanon changed my opinion about the way people treat the environment, because it is not a priority area in the country. However, after I moved to Sweden, I experienced firsthand how the environment is valued and protected here.

Photos by: Sean Lee for ASEF

Ms Kawthar Karout represented Sweden during the ARC7

This, combined with my interest in math, took me along a slightly less treaded path of pursuing Environmental and Energy Engineering at KTH Royal Institute of Technology in Stockholm, Sweden," she says.

She recollects her first brush with sustainability, "I took a gap year before starting university, where I worked with refugees in Sweden with the Red Cross, by teaching them Swedish and helping them integrate into the mainstream society. I was also involved in the UN Association of Sweden and was one of the Ambassadors for SDGs. This gave me insights into sustainability and soon, I realized that sustainability is not just about the environment, but also about economic and social aspects. This made me explore ways to combine sustainable development with technology and that is why I chose my current study program. I have always been passionate about helping people and this was further reinforced when I saw the plight of refugees in Lebanon.

The refugees had to face harsh winter conditions in just a tent and this made me realize that much more can be done for them by using technology, such as installing solar panels to provide them much needed heat etc."

Ms Karout realized she was on the right track when she participated in a Oxford self-leadership course. Through self-reflection and introspection, she found that she could not tolerate social injustice, be it in the social or environmental realm. As a hijab wearing Muslim woman in Sweden, she is now active against social injustice and it has fuelled her crusade to ensuring justice to everyone.

"I visit Lebanon every summer and during my visit, I try to lecture about the SDGs to enhance the development there. It is a challenge since most of the people are not aware about the sustainable development goals. However, living in Sweden gives me the unique opportunity to explore solutions and best practices and I try to facilitate an exchange of ideas to ensure development for all," she concludes.

Caroline Paul Kanjookaran

Interview with Mr Evarist Bartolo
Minister for Education and Employment of Malta

Photo by: Sean Lee for ASEF

Minister Bartolo, Education and Employment Minister in dialogue with the Student representatives during the ARC7

Minister Bartolo serves as the Education and Employment Minister since March 2013. In 1975 Bartolo graduated from the University of Malta with a B.A. (Hons) degree in English Literature and continued his studies in journalism at Stanford University. He also read for a Master's in Education at the University of Cardiff. He spent three years teaching at De La Salle College as well as working with the national broadcasting station and editor of numerous media organisations. A Member of Parliament since 1992, he worked mostly in Education, European affairs and Tourism as well as serving as Minister of Education and National Culture under a Labour government between 1996 and 1998.

On the last day of the Students' Forum, Minister Bartolo took his time to discuss the policy recommendations and sustainability within higher education institutions with the student participants. In the interview below, he expresses his view on the role of universities within societies as well as the role of students in shaping more sustainable policies for universities.

Patricia:
You have already read through the policy recommendations both from our student participants and from the rectors. What has been your impression and what is Malta planning on doing with the recommendations?

Minister Bartolo:
I honestly have to say, that I found the students' recommendations much more dynamic that those of the rectors. This is perhaps understandable, because the rectors become institutionalized and for them to promote change takes more time than for the students. Universities are always an interesting mix of continuity and change. It is important that students are part of the change that they want to bring about. I think that talking about the SDGs should be at the core mission of universities today, because first of all there will not be another planet on which to live. Having sustainable development across all faculties is absolutely essential. If there is a place where we should reflect about what is happening on our planet, it is at universities. The SDGs should therefore be across universities and across faculties.

We should also increasingly go away from the traditional fragmentation of knowledge and bring different subjects, such as law or humanities together. It shows the complexity of reality.

Higher education is just a small phase in lifelong education.

The biggest challenge is also, what do we mean by inclusion? How inclusive do we want to be? We are the ones setting the limits on what we mean by inclusion. What I liked in the student approach was, that they have a very wide definition of inclusion. It should include sexual orientation, gender, religion and all political beliefs. I would go for exactly that approach as well. We must do all we can to make universities inclusive. To be able to do that we need more linkage between what happens in HE institutions and at the earlier stages of education. Today we should be talking about lifelong education – not as a slogan but as a reality. To be able to do that we know that higher education is just a small phase in lifelong education. We need to already start at childcare centers, primary and secondary education, but higher education institutions' relevance is within lifelong learning. There should be places that make sure that you can even after having started your work, you can return to take courses to expand your knowledge and competences.

Patricia:
What should the role of students be within the policy shaping in the field of higher education?

Minister Bartolo:
It is always possible to learn from each other. You cannot simply import policies from other realities. It is important that you grow your policies from the bottom up and not simply import them from outside. I am happy to see that both students and rectors saw during the conference that they have an important role to play. There is still the need to do more, especially when it comes to European universities. Asian universities and more so American universities are ahead of us here.

The role universities have, is not solely providing for content and information. Even more important: It should be teaching us the competence to continue to learn. There is so much change, stress and uncertainty in the world that the best way to prepare for the future and the present is actually the ability to continue to learn – this is the biggest contribution. To be able to do that, you must be provided with the tools to work together, outside and inside the university. This has to be incorporated for instance in teaching and in projects. There are attitudes and competences that you cannot learn in a classroom, including critical thinking, creativity and working together, these are all important skills and attitudes and values that only to a certain extent we can learn within formal education. We need to contaminate it.

As you can see, I am very much in favor with what I call reality-based learning. As the minister of employment, it is in my interest to have as many people as possible ready for employment. But we shouldn't make the mistake of thinking only in economic terms – its much more than only employability. It is also about the ability to

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Photo by: Sean Lee for ASEF

live together, solve problems and make decisions together. These skills need a wider context than only formal education.

Patricia:
As a follow-up question, what do you think is the role of universities with regard to societal impact?

Minister Bartolo:
Firstly, universities need to admit that they are not the center of the universe. They are part of the world and need to work together with others. I find quite a lot of irony in this. We need to understand that life is so complex, and challenges are so big, that we can only face them together. To be able to do that, people in academia must have the humility to understand that things change, things are very dynamic, and they need to be part of that change. There is research to show that the rate of change within and outside of universities is 1 to 5. That if universities change at 1 km/h, what happens outside, especially with regard to employment, travels at 5 km/h. The world outside changes much quicker than inside the university. Today work places are also places of learning and research, because for them to remain relevant and dynamic, they need to carry out research. They need to get their people to learn. The boundaries between learning and working disappear. We talk about rescaling and upscaling – that has to happen throughout one's entire life. Universities must wake up to this change.

> Universities must realize that they are a living part of life – it is messy and not full of security, but after they need to learn how to swim in the rough see of life and not in the swimming pool of academia.
>
> **-Minister Evarist Bartolo**

Patricia:
Do you believe that Malta or maybe even the EU as a whole will manage to achieve the 17 SDGs by 2030 – especially SDG4? What goal is Malta and the EU struggling with the most?

Minister Bartolo:
It is important to understand that what we are talking about is quite a complex process and you cannot simply switch it on and say that we can get there in that exact time. It is a voyage, I see education always as a voyage and never as a destination. Our work is never done. Education is ongoing work. We need to focus on the goals, because increasingly the world is demographically changing, and Europe is becoming a minority on the planet. But more so, if we are not dynamic ourselves. The creation of knowledge will take place in Asia or other continents and we must not take for granted that we are the center of the world and everything evolves around us. We need to be part of the change that is taking place. Europe tends to bring together human rights, environmental concern, justice and inclusion – not just economic growth. Quality of life is a good contribution to make. When I say let's look at what is happening at the other continents it is not to imitate what they are doing, but to bring in these ambitious other aspects contrasting the focus on solely growth. We should continue to do that – this is as contribution as Europe. Still, we must understand that we are just a small part of the planet and work hard to be part of the change that is taking place. If you are not part of the change, change will work against you and make you an irrelevant actor.

Patricia:
On the topic of internationalization, how is cooperation between Asia and Europe essential to achieving the SDGs?

Minister Bartolo:
We already find it difficult to cooperate within Europe, recognize each other's programs and make it possible to work together. We need to do the same with Asia. We have things to teach them, that they can also learn from us. But then again, we must be ready to sit down together with them and say: Let's create a kind of common framework where we recognize and facilitate what we do with each other.

> **Again, we need to get out of the feeling of self-importance. This concerns every single education institution, which needs to be ready to work together with others without feeling threatened. It is isolation that remains the threat, and not working together.**
>
> **Patricia Senge**

Working Group 1 – Students' Forum
Taking Action at Home: SDGs as Core Pillars of University Governance

Photos by: Sean Lee for ASEF

Mr Davis Freidenfelds represented Latvia during the ARC7 Students' Forum

Ms Živa Jakšić Ivačič (right) represented Slovenia, and Ms Phoebe Macintosh-Evans (left) Australia

Mr Robert Napier was one of two moderators of working group 1 during the ARC7 Students' Forum.

What visions and strategies work in promoting sustainable development at universities? How can internal and national quality assurance systems serve and enhance SDGs in university governance?

These questions and many more were addressed by both the students and rectors who discussed theme 1 on addressing the SDGs as Core Pillars of University Governance during the ARC7. Especially during the Students' Forum, the participants were tackling issues that are important especially for students. Yet, they remained unsure on which particular issues to prioritize. Through a brainstorming activity using the SDGs as guidelines, different issues were acknowledged and written on a large board. Despite its immense size, it appeared as difficult to fit the wide range of recommendations from the 18 student representatives from both Asian and European countries on it.

The working group was chaired by Ms Nur Syahirah Khanum, who is currently in her final year of her Bachelor's degree in International Communication at the International Islamic University in Malaysia. The group and Ms Khanum decided to really take their time to dissect the levels of university governance first.

After the brainstorming and clustering of ideas for the recommendations, the students decided to split into five smaller groups to discuss the different areas more in detail. Finally, they concluded with five policy recommendations that shall assist ministers in achieving the SDGs in the long term.

"It is important to note that they are system-based, which will allow for continuous improvement towards achieving sustainability", emphasized Mr Davis Freidenfelds, the student representative from

Ms Khanum agreed: **"It is almost impossible to choose an issue by any standard, especially from the perspective of the majority. A sustainable solution should be wholesome, and rather than addressing the symptoms, we should go to the root cause. With this consideration in mind, I told them to create a narrative surrounding this issue where you will realise that it could be a cyclical or linear pattern and you have to come up with a solution that breaks the pattern. Something has to change when you want to solve a problem."**

Mr Freidenfelds continued by explaining that the students did indeed overcome a struggling period after the brainstorming activity during which they were unsure on how to continue their work to find consensus.

"We were quite open to different ideas and tried not to judge each other. I do not believe that nationality could be the reason why certain groups succeed and some do not. I loved the fact that we as a group rotated people that spoke and encouraged others to succeed to

to come up with a solution that breaks the pattern. Something has to change when you want to solve a problem."

H.E. Ecaterina Andronescu during the ARC7
Photo by: Sean Lee for ASEF

Both Mr Freidenfelds and Ms Khanum aim to engage further at their university at home. **"I wish to engage with the higher level of my university. I will be engaging with the Students' Affairs Department, my Rectors' office, and perhaps the committee of the student union", states Khanum. I definitely have seen how the SDGs can be beneficial to the development of society. We, as students, are also responsible to create a better world."**

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The following recommendations were forwarded to the education ministers by working group 1.

As students, we call upon the ASEM Governments to:

Photo by: Sean Lee for ASEF

Mr Brandon Fireman Cahyadi and Mr Teerayut Dowruang during the discussions in working group 1

1. Ensure that HEIs are aligned with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by creating a specific office permeating every decision-making level that works towards implementing and achieving SDGs;

2. Establish an institution-wide digital centralised system ensuring transparent and inclusive communication by gathering and disseminating information from and to students, academic, and non-academic staff and other stakeholders;

3. Invest in teachers' trainings which support student centred learning and equip educators with tangible skills in addressing different learning needs;

4. Ensure student representation at all levels of higher education governance, including representation on internal and external auditing committees;

5. Take responsibility to educate and promote positive health behaviours by students and employees by:

- Promoting health as equal pillars between mental, sexual, physical health, and social well-being;

- Forming a confidential, accessible, and innovative mental health support system;

- Easing access to sexual and reproductive healthcare services.

Patricia Senge

Working Group 2 – SDGs as Drivers of University Societal Impact

Photo by: Sean Lee for ASEF

Ms Hina Nasir and Mr Marin Hammerbauer during the presentation of the Students' policy recommendations

How can universities ensure holistic sustainability, by achieving not only economic and environmental sustainability, but also social sustainability? How can universities engage in joint knowledge production and dissemination and research, beyond its campus? How can this be achieved across two different continents - Asia and Europe?

ARC7 brought together students and rectors from 51 different countries across Asia and Europe to reflect upon these issues in depth. Through debates and discussions, the students came up with policy recommendations, making sure that these can be applied both in the Asian and European context. This was done first, by underlining the role that higher education institutions play in the society, where they "serve as a driving catalyst for civic engagement, social diversity and sustainable development on a local, regional, national and international level". They also highlighted the role played by universities in community engagement, by "responding to community needs and promoting diversity, providing practical education and locally relevant research". They further underlined the necessity of universities to "ensure accessibility and inclusiveness" and also acknowledged the role of government to "support higher education institutions by allocating appropriate funding".

Within their final policy recommendations, the students touch upon themes focusing on ensuring diversity of communities, both at access and completion levels and among students, staff and faculty, encouraging universities to promote experiential and practical education, ensuring sufficiency in research capacity, opening communication between community members and university researchers to gather research ideas and also to disseminate research findings, involving community representatives in funding processes and also by ensuring that due credit is earned by students for societal impacting SDG activities.

"The policy recommendations were drafted after days of discussions and debates. We found that on a macro level, the higher education sector in both Asia and Europe have a lot in common and this definitely helped. However, when we delved into a micro level, we also found several differences. For example, we have more developed countries in Europe, while most of the Asian countries are developing and this poses unique challenges. In most developing countries, students are not considered major stakeholders in the education sector and they do not have much say in higher education policies and processes, which they are subject to. What we learned was how to ensure more student participation, so that they can contribute meaningfully to their own future,"

says Hina Nasir, a medical student from Pakistan, who also co-presented the recommendations of the student working group in front of the Romanian Education minister, H.E. Ecaterina Andronescu.

Ms Nasir's co-presenter, Mr Martin Hammerbauer, who is part of the national representation of students in the Czech Republic, adds, "We had productive days that translated into concrete steps that can be applied across a wide range of educational institutions across both Asia and Europe. We have ensured that there is something for every country involved. We have easy and specific goals as well as directional goals towards achieving the SDGs. Therefore, no matter the current state of the university, they can always adopt a policy or two from our recommendations."

While these students come from two different sides of the world, they have one goal in common - to discuss and disseminate the ideas and policies formulated in Bucharest after returning to their home countries. And thus, they set a precedent for how higher education institutions can achieve the SDGs, by learning from each other and by working towards common goals.

The following recommendations were forwarded to the ASEM Education Ministers by the students' Working Group 2.

As students, we call upon the ASEM Governments to:

1. Ensure that HEIs and student organizations represent the diversity of their communities, at both access and completion levels, among students, staff, and faculty. Aspects including race, religion, ethnicity, sexual-orientation, gender, socio-economic background, and access needs shall be considered;

2. Encourage HEIs to promote experiential and practical education in order to prepare students for their careers and social life, i.e. field studies, applied problems during courses, professional skills, paid internships, volunteering, community engagement, summer schools, short courses, and entrepreneurship. These should include a strong focus on SDGs;

3. Ensure that all HEIs have sufficient research capacity by allocating funds and encouraging institutional partnerships;

4. Incentivise and facilitate meetings between community members, and HEI researchers to gather research ideas and to disseminate research findings to non-academic stakeholders;

5. Funding bodies shall involve community group representatives in research funding allocation processes;

6. Ensure that degree requirements in HEIs should include completing a minimum of 3 ECTS credits or equivalent of tailor-made, societal impacting SDG activities. Appropriate training in SDG awareness and implementation should be provided.

Caroline Paul Kanjookaran

Working Group 3
"We are as strong as our weakest person!" The Students' Perspective of Internationalization of Higher Education

Photo by: Sean Lee for ASEF

Ms Patricia Gonçalves was one of the two moderators of working group 3

In the ever-changing world we live in, a local, regional or even national approach to problem-solving is no longer the most effective one. Instead, there is an increasing need for an international perspective, both from individuals as well as institutions of higher education.

During the Students' Forum of the ARC7, a group of 17 students from both Asian and European ASEF member states discussed the topic of internationalization and identified policy recommendations addressed to the ASEM Ministers of Education. All in all, according to Patrícia Gonçalves, External Representative of the Erasmus Student Network, who also moderated the students' working group on university internationalization, gathering consensus between such a diverse group of students was not an easy task. 'The group was very productive, but it was also very difficult to incorporate both Asian and European perspectives into the policy recommendations. I found it very enriching to moderate such a varied group, to deal with their energy and strike a balance'.

The first topic students addressed was the benefits of international cooperation to the implementation of SDGs. They identified that an important aspect was quality education and knowledge sharing and agreed that similar education levels should be more easily accessible for everyone. This was also reflected in the students' first policy recommendation:

"We as students call upon higher education institutions to be involved in international exchange programs interconnected amongst students, researchers, and staff and implement best environmental practices and more inclusive and streamlined processes."

Students believed a stronger national understanding of SDGs could contribute to governments' decision-making at an international level, and that universities can provide the link to reaching inclusive solutions internationally. Their ideas were incorporated into the 7th policy recommendation, stating that there should be 'respective governmental actors to support national strategies for internationalization of higher education institutions'. However, some of the issues that could arise are linked to the lack of funding and potential political developments limiting students' mobility.

The working group further acknowledged that, at least in terms of funding, international students need to be stopped discriminated against with regards to tuition fees: it is not unusual that foreign students pay up to 3-4 times more than a national student is charged.

Florian Schanznig, an Austrian student at the University of Life Sciences in Vienna, affirmed to the group, 'We are only as strong as our weakest person! Internationalization must include every student!' Obstacles to mobility, and internationalization by extension, is for governments to remove, something that students strongly recommended in their 4th recommendation, reading:

"Provide multilateral support for mobilising students, including financial, administrative or technological and e-learning resources in order to guarantee equal access to international higher education, especially for students in need"

Overall, the group identified relevant issues such as the lack of cooperation between governments and a funding difficulty. In order to avoid negative side effects of the lack of internationalization of higher education, such as the brain drain phenomenon, lack of diversity or unsustainable mobility for students, the consensus was to urge governments to take more action towards a sustainable future.

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The following recommendations were forwarded to the ASEM Education Ministers by the students' Working Group 3:

1. Introduce a standardized and internationally recognized Academic Credit System and the issuing and recognition of transcripts in agreed upon languages;

2. Encourage leaders in higher education to promote virtual collaboration through an international online platform in order to facilitate cooperation between higher education institutions and the online application process for international mobility;

3. Ensure quality and diversity in higher education by providing language courses for students, researchers and staff to enhance knowledge and mobility;

4. Encourage and support a launch of an International Students at Risk Network of higher education institutions that gives students, who face difficulties at their higher education institution due to their advocacy for human rights, as well as stateless persons, a chance for an education abroad.

Nicole Pop

ARC7 Students' Forum Policy Recommendations for the 7th ASEM Education Ministers' Meeting (ASEM ME7)

15-16 May 2019, Bucharest, Romania

The ASEF Rectors' Conference and Students' Forum (ARC) is the Official Dialogue Partner of the ASEM Education Ministers' Meetings (ASEM MEs). Since 2010, ARC has been contributing through Policy Recommendations to the deliberations of the Ministers and the ASEM Education Process.

The United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are a universal call for action to shape a better future for all. The SDGs are transformative and rights-based, and explicitly refer to higher education and research.

At the 7th ASEF Students' Forum, 51 student leaders from Asia and Europe discussed the role of higher education in driving the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, with attention to three core areas of institutional activity: **1) institutional governance; 2) societal impact; and 3) international partnerships.**

1. Taking Action at Home: SDGs as Core Pillars of University Governance

Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) should ensure a sustainable future by creating an inclusive and diverse society, for which HEI governance is key to providing transparent communication, access for everyone, and empowering students to enhance knowledge and obtain their full potential.

As students, we call upon the ASEM Governments to:

1. Ensure that HEIs are aligned with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by creating a specific office permeating every decision-making level that works towards implementing and achieving SDGs;

2. Establish an institution-wide digital centralised system ensuring transparent and inclusive communication by gathering and disseminating information from and to students, academic, and non-academic staff and other stakeholders;

3. Invest in teachers' trainings which support student centred learning and equip educators with tangible skills in addressing different learning needs;

4. Ensure student representation at all levels of higher education governance, including representation on internal and external auditing committees;

5. Take responsibility to educate and promote positive health behaviours by students and employees by:

• Promoting health as equal pillars between mental, sexual, physical health, and social well-being;

• Forming a confidential, accessible, and innovative mental health support system;

• Easing access to sexual and reproductive healthcare services.

2. Taking Action at Community Level – SDGs as Drivers of University Social Impact

Higher Education serves as a driving catalyst for civil engagement, social diversity and sustainable advancement on a local, regional, national, and international level. HEIs shall respond to community needs and promote diversity, practical education, and locally relevant research. It is crucial for HEIs to ensure accessibility and inclusiveness. Governments should support HEIs by allocating appropriate funding.

As students, we call upon the ASEM Governments to:

1. Ensure that HEIs and student organizations represent the diversity of their communities, at both access and completion levels, among students, staff, and faculty. Aspects including race, religion, ethnicity, sexual-orientation, gender, socio-economic background, and access needs shall be considered;

2. Encourage HEIs to promote experiential and practical education in order to prepare students for their careers and social life, i.e. field studies, applied problems during courses, professional skills, paid internships, volunteering, community engagement, summer schools, short courses, and entrepreneurship. These should include a strong focus on SDGs;

3. Ensure that all HEIs have sufficient research capacity by allocating funds and encouraging institutional partnerships;

4. Incentivise and facilitate meetings between community members, and HEI researchers to gather research ideas and to disseminate research findings to non-academic stakeholders;

5. Funding bodies shall involve community group representatives in research funding allocation processes;

6. Ensure that degree requirements in HEIs should include completing a minimum of 3 ECTS credits or equivalent of tailor-made, societal impacting SDG activities. Appropriate training in SDG awareness and implementation should be provided.

3. Taking Action at an International Level - SDGs as a catalyst to reorient internationalisation

For internationalisation in higher education to be sustainable and to furthermore play its key role in reaching the SDGs, we believe it must be based on the principles of quality education, cohesion, equal opportunities, solidarity, and mobilising a global knowledge community.

As students, we call upon the ASEM Governments to:

1. Call upon higher education institutions to be involved in international exchange programs interconnected amongst students, researchers, and staff and implement best environmental practices and more inclusive and streamlined processes;

2. Introduce a standardised and internationally recognised Academic Credit System and the issuing and recognition of transcripts in agreed upon languages;

3. Encourage leaders in higher education to promote virtual collaboration through an international online platform in order to facilitate cooperation between higher education institutions and the online application process for international mobility;

4. Provide multilateral support for mobilising students, including financial, administrative or technological and e-learning resources in order to guarantee equal access to international higher education, especially for students in need;

5. Ensure quality and diversity in higher education by providing language courses for students, researchers and staff to enhance knowledge and mobility;

6. Encourage and support a launch of an International Students at Risk Network of higher education institutions that gives students, who face difficulties at their higher education institution due to their advocacy for human rights, as well as stateless persons, a chance for an education abroad;

7. Encourage respective governmental actors to support national strategies for internationalisation of higher education institutions.

Our discussions have been comprehensive and inclusive, and the recommendations that we propose in this document represent all perspectives of SDGs, from nationalities across Asia and Europe. The recommendations of our working groups emerged from deliberate and thoughtful student conversations. This exercise has exemplified that universities are change-engines and students are at its forefront. It is critical that university governance adopts a lens of efficiency and action. It is of the utmost importance that SDGs are embedded into each tier of university structure, that they are present in governance conversations, lecture halls, and student gatherings.

15 May 2019, Bucharest

ARC7 Rectors' Conference Policy Recommendations for the 7th ASEM Education Ministers' Meeting (ASEM ME7)

15-16 May 2019, Bucharest, Romania

The ASEF Rectors' Conference and Students' Forum (ARC) is the Official Dialogue Partner of the ASEM Education Ministers' Meetings (ASEM MEs). Since 2010, ARC has been contributing through Policy Recommendations to the deliberations of the Ministers and the ASEM Education Process.

The United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are a universal call for action to shape a better future for all. The SDGs are transformative and rights-based, and explicitly refer to higher education and research.

At the 7th ASEF Rectors' Conference, higher education institution leaders from Asia and Europe discussed the role of higher education in driving the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, with attention to three core areas of institutional activity:

1) institutional governance; 2) societal impact; and 3) international partnerships.

The Conference resulted in **Commitments** by higher education institutions (HEIs) from both regions, and also proposed **Policy Recommendations** to feed into the deliberations and outcomes of the 7th ASEM Education Ministers Meeting (ASEM ME7).

Commitments by Higher Education Institutions

Higher education institutions contribute to building the environmental, economic, social, cultural and intellectual conditions required for a sustainable future for all through their three institutional missions (education, research and community engagement). Higher education institutions have the capacity to engage with the different SDGs through a whole institution approach, i.e. through actions in the areas of teaching, research, governance, campus resource management and through the values and ethics lived in the academic community and shared with society at large. They are committed to stepping up their actions and allocate the necessary resources.

Building and sharing capacity to contribute to global transformation

Higher education inter and multidisciplinary curriculum, research, knowledge development and dissemination are key to addressing the Goals. Higher education institutions engage in local and international partnerships, involving other education and research organisations, governments, NGOs, businesses and other society actors. These partnerships should be (re) considered in the context of the SDGs, in their ability to transcend disciplinary, political, social and cultural boundaries, and as a contribution to peace, inclusion and solidarity.

Providing lifelong learning for a global community

Higher education contributes through research and education to sustainable societies in the global context of demographic changes, technological developments and evolving societal demands. Higher education institutions from both regions therefore pledge to provide lifelong learning opportunities for the benefit of the global community. Higher education institutions are committed to equip learners from all socio-economic and educational backgrounds with the necessary knowledge and skills to learn and adapt to new tasks and situations.

Embracing internationalisation as part of a global commitment towards sustainable development.

Universities from Asia and Europe pledge to envision internationalisation as part of a more global commitment towards sustainable collaborations, translated into connected institutional strategies with globally sustainable and equitable objectives. The Agenda 2030 provides a key opportunity to reassess the goals, purposes and means of higher education internationalisation, and to address standing issues, such as imbalances in research capacity and mobility exchanges. Achieving the SDGs requires better and more ethical cooperation in research and education, in terms of access, equal opportunities, and geographic balance. A better engagement with the SDGs is necessary in all university endeavours. This should be reflected in research projects and partnerships, curricula reform, informal learning opportunities, as well as international, purpose driven student and staff exchange and inter-university collaboration.

Policy Recommendations

Universities from Asia and Europe recommend the ASEM Education Ministers to:

1. Orient the ASEM Education Process towards the Agenda 2030

Ministers are invited to include the SDGs into the goals, priorities and activities of the ASEM Education Process (AEP). This would enable the Process to play an active role towards the achievement of the Agenda 2030, and also stimulate each individual ASEM Partner country to make the Agenda 2030 part of national education and research strategy.

2. Support higher education institutions to engage with the Agenda 2030

ASEM governments should encourage and support higher education institutions to address SDGs in strategy and actions for education, research and community engagement. Governments should recognise these initiatives, as part of the national contribution to the Agenda 2030. They should ensure that rules and regulations, including funding rules, and national quality assurance and research assessment frameworks support the development of inter- and multidisciplinary research, use of innovative teaching approaches and development of transformative curricula, and the engagement in local and international cooperation. Governments have to ensure that higher education institutions enjoy the necessary autonomy, academic freedom and appropriate accountability as key conditions for the exchange of knowledge and development of competences that our societies require to reach the SDGs.

3. Incentivize and support education and research collaboration among universities and with other societal actors, at national and international levels

ASEM governments should create a positive environment for collaboration, among higher education institutions and with other parts of society, to advance education, knowledge, and innovation, and in line with the higher education third mission. Governments should not only valorise collaboration with enterprises, NGOs, local communities or national authorities, but also community engagement, community-based learning and citizen science.

4. Develop research and knowledge-based policy agendas and informed decision-making in democratic societies

ASEM governments should develop policy agendas informed by internationally reviewed and recognised inter- and multidisciplinary research, and close collaboration with universities and other civil society actors, considering multi-stakeholder perspectives, economic, environmental and social aspects, and the prospective impacts for national, local and global society. This would also be a means to enhance and strengthen democracy, distinguish national interests from nationalistic ones, and counter populism, fake news, alternative truth and conspiracy theories, that seek to undermine and discredit both, international initiatives, such as the Agenda 2030, and research and education.

5. Acknowledge and support the role of higher education in contributing to equity, inclusion and lifelong learning

ASEM governments should develop policies and strategies for social inclusion and lifelong learning, encompassing all education sectors and forms of learning, and all stakeholders, including higher education and research. They should encourage and recognise the contribution of higher education institutions to lifelong learning, through research, education and outreach to society. There is ample evidence that diversity enhances the quality and relevance of research and education. The experience of inclusion and equity as a shared value in education and research, and the ability and opportunities for lifelong learning will also prepare future graduates to contribute to peace and sustainable development, as part of the work force and through active citizenship.

6. Support higher education internationalisation in line with the goals of the Agenda 2030

The 2030 Agenda provides an appropriate framework to rethink internationalisation as a part of a fair and equitable approach to education. ASEM Governments should review their national strategies for internationalisation, including legislative frameworks, enabling institutions to pursue fair and/or equitable and ethical internationalisation that contribute to the achievement of the SDGs. This would require the set-up of appropriate funding schemes, including truly transnational funding schemes. It also requires incentives for more ethical internationalisation, in terms of equal opportunities, learning gains and geographic balance, and incentives for professional development. Likewise, fair and adequate recognition mechanisms of diplomas, period of studies abroad and prior learning need to be established or strengthened.

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ARC7 participants hand over the policy recommendations to H.E. Ecaterina Andronescu, Education Minister of Romania.

Photos by: Sean Lee for ASEF

The leaders of higher education institutions in Asia and Europe and ARC7 participants express their hope and expectation that the above commitments and policy recommendations will enable ASEM governments, institutions and all education stakeholders under the ASEM Education Process to contribute jointly and proactively to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

Using the framework of the SDGs provides an opportunity to relate national priorities and interests to the wider context of a global environment and a global realm of knowledge and research. It enables Asian and European governments and higher education institutions to develop stronger education and research partnerships to generate a better future for all.

The Media Team

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Patricia holds a Bachelor's degree in European Studies from Maastricht University. Thereafter, she interned at the Education Department of ASEF from September to December 2018. Now, she is a political trainee at the German Permanent Mission to the Human Rights Council of the United Nations in Geneva, Switzerland before pursuing her Master's degree in European Politics at the Universtiy of Oxford. Patricia is the project coordinator of Orange Magazine, the magazine of the European Youth Press.

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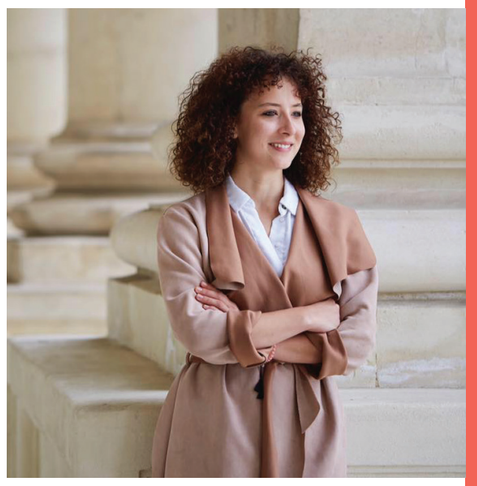

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Nicole is currently a LL.M candidate at Maastricht University's Faculty of Law, with a strong focus on European External Relations Law. During her Bachelor in European Studies in Maastricht, she served as the Secretary-General and Conference Manager of the European Model United Nations 2017, an international conference bringing together over 500 enthusiastic students to debate current global challenges. Her interests lay in the field of external relations law, foreign policy analysis and implementation and evaluation of the EU's Common Foreign and Security Policy.

Mr Sean Lee
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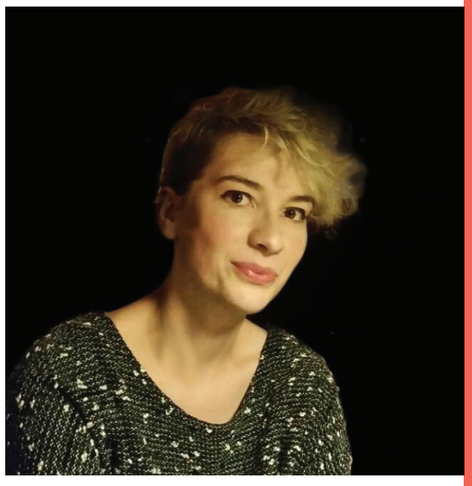
Sean grew up in Singapore. His first body of work was Shauna, made between 2007 and 2009. This work was nominated for the Prix Découverte on the 40th anniversary of Arles Photography Festival. Since then, Sean has gone on to make other stories. His most recent work, Two People, received the 2011 ICON de Martell Cordon Bleu award. Much of Sean's work can be found in the collection of the Singapore Art Museum, as well as in the Sandor Family Collection. Sean's first book, Shauna, was released in September 2014. It was collected by the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) Library.



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Lejla Kratina has Master degree in architecture. After working for three years in the architecture firm, she wanted to broaden her design knowledge working as a freelance graphic designer. Her scope of design is multidisciplinary focusing mostly on interior design, concept design, print media as well as design for online and app wireframes. As a graphic designer for Orange magazine, she hopes to be a motivated and enthusiastic problem solver working on the best possible visual presentation of work done by her journalist colleagues.

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Mujgan Abdulzade is a graphic designer and data storyteller, currently pursuing her Master's degree in Integrated Design in Germany. Her experience in visual design started by working in the field of event management, mainly focusing on social projects since she used to work before with grassroots and social youth initiatives in Azerbaijan. She looks forward to the challenge of design or creating things that can contribute to the improvement of people's lives and she hopes to fulfill this dream in Orange Magazine.

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