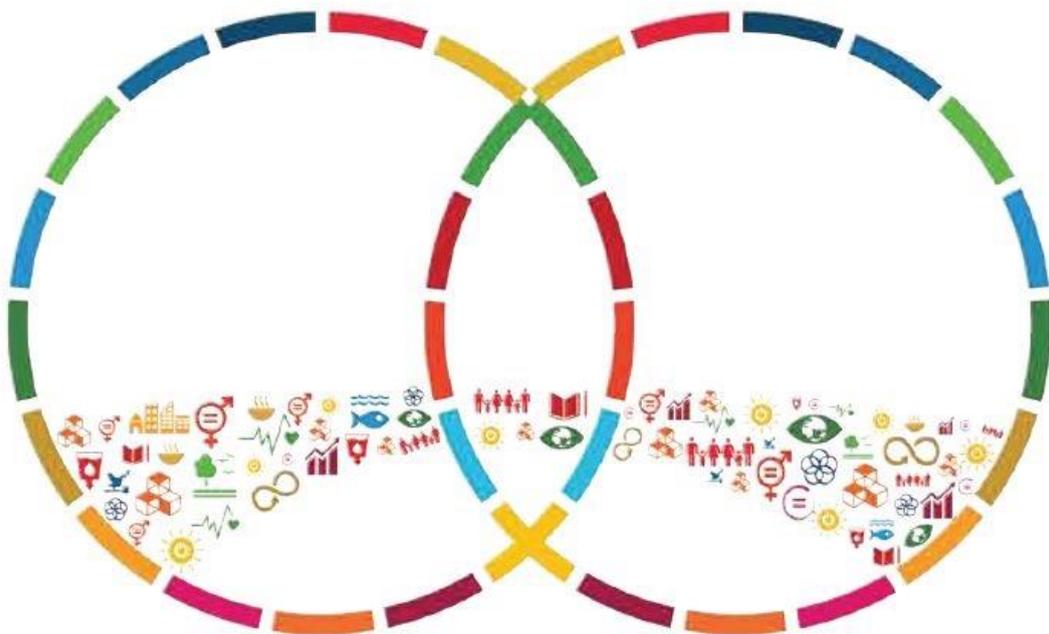




Sustainability Literacy and Perspectives:

A survey of Get Involved and UN SDSN Youth Greece



Written by:
Panteleimon K. Karamalis
Efstathiadis Anthony

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The 17 Sustainable Development Goals [SDGs]

Executive Summary

The Sustainable Development Goals [SDGs], adopted by 193 countries, both developed and developing, in September 2015, impact heavily governments, organizations, and some of the biggest companies worldwide. The global acceptance by many nations, firms and people was a necessary step to achieve these goals and have a more sustainable future, both in terms of economy and society. However, many other steps are still needed, such as a general agreement on the need to change the way our societies and economies operate. To fulfill these goals, sustainable awareness must be promoted.

Considering this inference, Get Involved and UN SDSN Youth Greece cooperated to examine whether an increase in sustainable awareness affects people's perspectives and beliefs on sustainability issues. Thus, the survey "Sustainability Literacy and Perspectives" was conducted online from April to June 2020. The respondents were young Greek university students and graduates, aged from 18 to 29, and of various academic backgrounds. The aim of this research is also to examine the extent to which the variables of age, gender and academic background affect the sample's perspectives and beliefs.

The review of respondents' answers led to some interesting conclusions. Among the demographic variables described above, only age seems to have a broad impact on the sample's perspectives and beliefs, stemming from the noteworthy divergence across all ages on their perspectives about communication and interrelation of the Sustainable Development Goals. This fact stands as a strong indicator of the University's poor performance in spreading the message of SDG's. There is a general cognitive deficiency, across all ages, genders and academic backgrounds on modern world issues as well as, more alarmingly, a mismatch of our sample awareness on the current social and economic dynamics.

Regarding our sample's perspectives, most responses are concentrated on certain answers, but when it comes to their beliefs, this phenomenon fades away. This is not the case when the respondents are asked about their beliefs on the progress of the SDGs and the possibility of fulfilling them by 2030. Most of survey participants are pessimistic regarding the attainment of these goals within the timeframe of the blueprint. To conclude, the analysis of our data shows that awareness on matters of sustainability does not heavily affect our perspectives but impact our beliefs.

This research was conducted to promote the awareness of sustainability and find ways to promote its issues more efficiently. Therefore, Get Involved and UN SDSN Youth Greece is more than happy to forward the report's data to third parties and individuals sharing the same goal. To apply for the data please follow the steps specified in this [form](#).

Vasilis Angelopoulos, President of Get Involved

Lydia Lekka, Network Coordinator of UN SDSN Youth Greece

1. Introduction

Sustainability has become one of the grand challenges of our time. The most recognized definition of sustainable development comes from United Nations [UN] and “Our Common Future”, written in 1987 by the World Commission on Environment and Development. According to UN “Sustainable Development is development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs”. In 2015, the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development was adopted by all United Nations Member States. This agenda includes 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) aiming at peace and prosperity for people and the planet, now and in the future.

This agreement is considered a milestone in the pursuit of a more sustainable economy and future. Major political and economic organizations have adopted vision, goals and most importantly policies to achieve a more sustainable setting, socially, economically, and environmentally. Some of the noteworthy milestones for the promotion of sustainability was the foundation of the U.S. House of Representatives Sustainable Energy & Environment Coalition (SEEC) in 2009, to advocate for policies that address climate change, ensure clean air and water, protect natural resources, and promote environmental justice. In Europe, the European Commission published the Reflection Paper: Towards a Sustainable Europe by 2030 and the European Central Bank issued the report “Environmental protection at the ECB” in 2019. The majority of listed, and not only, firms have adopted some of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals to their Corporate Social Responsibility programs having invested millions of euros to promote these goals as well as to emphasize the need of big firms to be socially sensitive and active.

The current report on Sustainable Literacy and Perspective concerns a survey conducted by both Get Involved and UN SDSN Youth Greece ([to see more](#)). The main aim of this research is to examine the perceptions and the beliefs of youth in Greece on issues regarding the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), and the degree that they are affected by their actual knowledge, age, gender, and academic background. It is important to highlight that through the term “perceptions” we mean our sample’s general ideas and views, whereas the term “beliefs” refers to our sample’s more specific views. When the perceptions of our sample are examined, the possible answers are of linear scale from 0 to 5, but when it comes to their beliefs the answers are more specific and in multiple choice format. The research was carried out through an online questionnaire which was to address youth across Greece. The questionnaire has 17 questions, three of which are of general information (gender, age, and academic background), while the next five questions refer to actual knowledge to examine our sample’s knowledge on sustainability issues.

It is worth mentioning that even the knowledge questions incorporate, to a great extent, survey respondents’ perceptions, except for the question about the blueprint

of the Sustainable Development Goals, which requires basic knowledge of sustainability. Finally, the last nine questions explore our participants' perceptions regarding the Sustainable Development Goals. The questionnaire was answered by 442 young Greeks between April 12 and June 11, 2020. The analysis was performed by an internal statistical model of Get Involved.

2. Survey demographics

The age groups which the participants have been allocated to are 18-20, 21-23, 24-25, and 26 and above. Most of the survey respondents, namely 49.3%, are between 21 and 23 years old, while only 13.3% of them belong to the 26+ age group. The most aware participants of the importance of the Sustainable Development Goals are those aged from 24 to 25, followed by those aged 26 and above, and those between 21 and 23. The participants are considered to be aware in case they answer 4 or 5 questions correctly, adequately aware if they answer 2-3 questions correctly and inadequately aware with 0 or 1 correct answers. Survey's average was 1.4, indicating a strong problem of knowledge for the participants.

As the survey focuses on the young people's knowledge and perception on Sustainability, age affects the level of actual knowledge about sustainability, whereas gender and academic background do not impact to the same extent. More specifically, 10.3% of the 24-25 age group are aware of issues related to sustainability and the importance of Sustainable Development Goals, while 35.4% of the same group are adequately aware. The corresponding percentages for the age groups 26+ and 21-23 are 5% and 35.6%, and 3.6% and 36.7%, respectively. On the contrary, the age group with the most inadequate awareness of these topics is that of 18-20 (67.7%), followed by the 21-23 age group (59.6%). This evidence supports the claim that young students with little work experience tend to perform better than younger students with no other background.

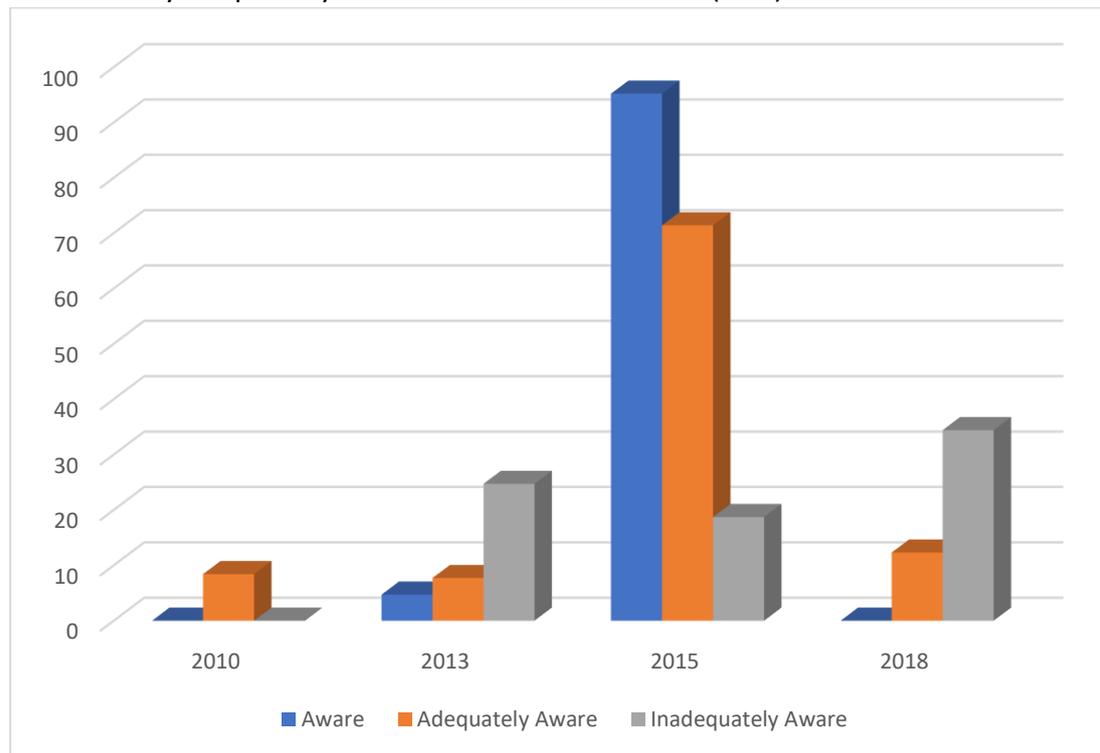
Of survey respondents, 57% are female and 43% are male. In the age groups 18-20 and 21-23 women predominate, while in the age groups 24-25 and 26 and above men are predominant. The academic background of the participants varies heavily, including economic science, law, medicine, biology, polytechnic and information technology, among others, with most answers coming from students of economics, polytechnic and law schools, and universities. It is common ground throughout the answers on the survey that the Education System in Greece does little to inform the youth on Sustainability. The people with higher levels of knowledge and understanding on sustainability issues are amongst the sample's two oldest age groups, namely 24-25 and 26+, which indicates that their research and interest as individuals, rather their prior education, led them to having that knowledge.

3. Respondents' awareness of sustainability and its goals

As mentioned above, there are five knowledge questions in the questionnaire examining the actual knowledge of participants on specific issues of sustainability and its importance. These questions cover all three pillars of sustainability, namely economic development, environmental protection and social development, as well as the main issues that interest Western civilization such as gender equality, unemployment and environmental rules, among others.

The survey brings to the foreground the fact that there is cognitive deficiency about important issues of the modern world, as well as a mismatch in the beliefs of our sample on the current social and economic dynamics. Only 13.3% of all respondents know that 27% of women of the global workforce hold managerial positions. Surprisingly, even the female respondents are not aware of the percentage of women in managerial positions, as only 13.5% gave the right answer. On December 12, a new global agreement on climate change was reached, the Paris Agreement, aiming at keeping a global temperature rise this century well below 2°C, with only 19.2% of the participants knowing that this agreement was signed by 186 countries. Furthermore, 40.7% of the sample is aware of the blueprint which put forward the Sustainable Development Goals and was unanimously adopted by the members of the United Nations (UN) in 2015. The corresponding percentage between the aware participants is 95.2%, when the percentage of inadequately aware respondents is 18.7% (Figure 1). This huge discrepancy among the different groups of awareness shows the gap in basic knowledge, since this question could be considered one of the most fundamental questions on sustainability and almost the only one in this survey that examines exclusively the awareness of the respondents. In the member countries of OECD on average in 2018, 15.6% of the young women, aged between 15 and 29, were with no education, employment, or training (NEET), with almost one in three (31.9%) respondents being aware that the corresponding percentage for young men with NEET is 10.5%. Finally, concerning the knowledge questions, 35.3% of the participants know that the number of illiterate adults globally is 750 million, with those in medicine and political science giving the more correct answers.

Figure 1. Number of people who know that the blueprint with the 17 SDGs was unanimously adopted by the members of UN in 2015 (in %)



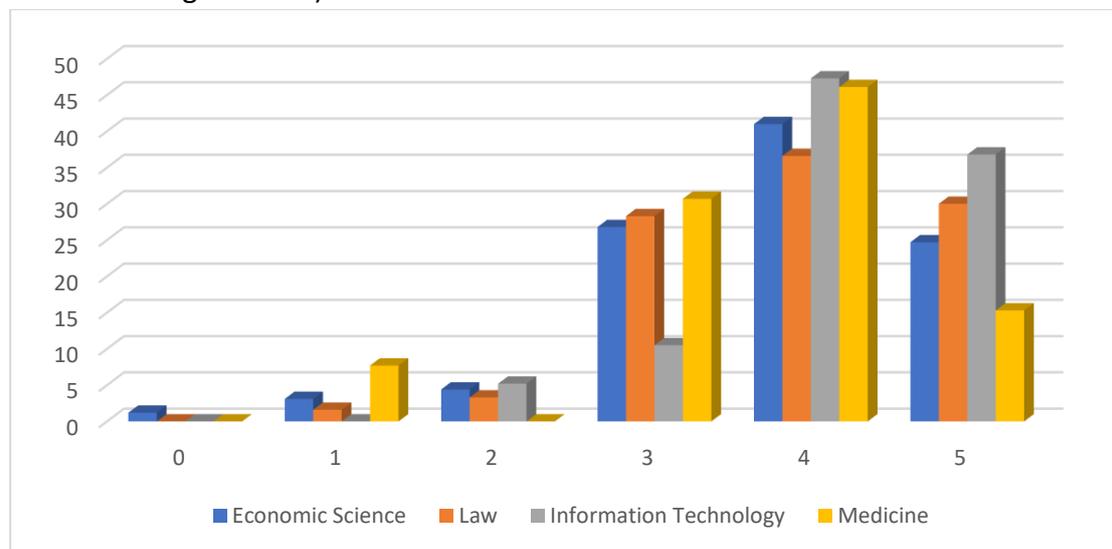
The above five knowledge questions show that young people in Greece are not so aware of issues related to sustainability and its importance. Overall, participants with academic background in Economic Science, Information Technology and Law are the most aware of the Sustainable Development Goals, according to their responses, while those with studies in Biology, Science, and Medicine are less aware.

4. Respondents' perceptions on sustainability and its importance

In the first part's questions about survey respondents' perspectives, there is a bigger concentration on certain answers, while when it comes to their beliefs the concentration level drops. The next part of the survey is devoted to the participants' perceptions regarding sustainability and its importance. The questions in this part, following on the knowledge questions, show how important young respondents, even those with inadequate awareness, having already been exposed to the concept of sustainability and its aspects, believe that education for sustainability is for their lives and future. Specifically, nine in ten respondents (90.7%) believe that all educational systems should educate their members on issues regarding sustainability, considering, in this way, sustainability to be a very useful and vital discipline. The Sustainable Development Goals are divided into three categories, social, environmental, and economic, with 61.7% of survey respondents, regardless of academic background, reporting that all three categories are equally important, while with 7% the economic facet is deemed the least important category. Almost half of the respondents (46.1%), of all academic backgrounds and age groups, claim that the Sustainable Development Goals will have the greatest impact on their daily life, while almost one in three

(32.3%) respondents believe that the greatest impact will be on companies. An interesting finding is that, according to the responses, the municipalities will be affected by these goals to a higher degree than the government. Moreover, 67.8% of the respondents' report that their everyday lives will be affected greatly, while only 3.6% believe that their lives will not be influenced at all. Of the aware survey respondents, 80.9% believe that their daily lives will be affected compared to 67.3% of the unaware respondents, while the corresponding percentages of the participants with studies in information technology and those in medicine, law, and economic science are 84.1%, 61.5%, 66.6%, and 68.5% respectively, mirroring the considerable differences among the different academic backgrounds (Figure 2).

Figure 2. To what extent can sustainability influence our everyday lives (in %) (0-Not at all and 5-Agreat deal)

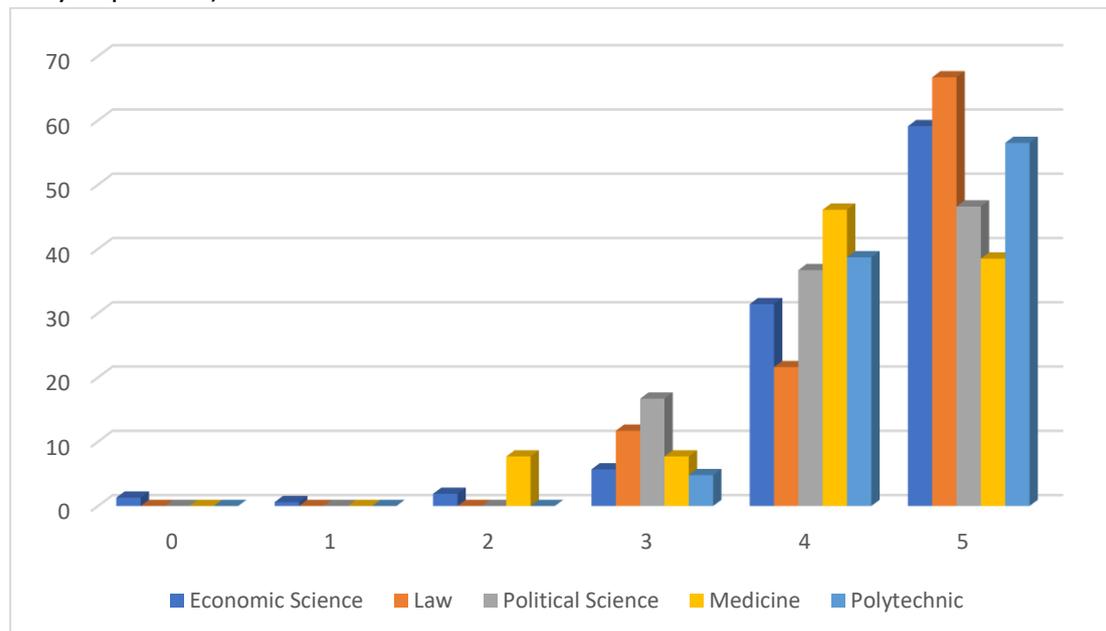


Age is observed to affect to a great extent the perspectives about communication and interrelation of the Sustainable Development Goals. As mentioned above, the Sustainable Development Goals are divided into three categories: social, environmental, and economic. Of survey respondents, 89,1% believe that these categories interact with each other to a great extent, while considerable difference is pinpointed between the different age groups, even though all percentages are quite high. More specifically, the percentage of those aged 26 and above who believe in the interaction between the three categories is 96.6%, while of those aged between 18 and 20 is 80.6%. Furthermore, of survey respondents aged from 18 to 20, 64.5% consider the promotion of the progress of the Sustainable Development Goals from mainstream media to be helpful and imperative, while the corresponding percentage between those in the age group 25-26 is 83.3%. This difference makes clear the gap in perceptions about mainstream media from different age groups and especially the youngest one.

A significant pessimism is observed about the probability of achieving these Goals within the timeframe agreed on the blueprint, whereas there is a strong concentration on the need for “Decent Work and Economic Growth” in modern Greece. Another

useful finding of this survey is the fact that most respondents are not optimistic about the success of the Sustainable Development Goals by 2030. Specifically, only 24.8% believe that most of these goals will have been achieved with older respondents (25 years old and above) to be more optimistic but still with low percentages. Regarding the most important goal for Greece, one in four (25.5%) respondents, regardless of age and gender, report goal 8, “Decent work and economic growth”, as the most important goal for Greece, followed by goal 4, “Quality Education”. Only the aware respondents have a different opinion, reporting goal 3, “Good health and well-being”, as the most important goal for Greece, while only 1.8% of respondents report gender equality (goal 5) as the most important goal. An important factor in these results could be the fact that the research took place during the lockdown due to COVID-19, when the self-survival was playing a vital role in survey respondents’ lives and, by extension, in their responses at the time. Finally, the vast majority of the respondents (91.4%) find the Sustainable Development Goals important enough, both socially and economically, even among the inadequately aware participants (91.3%), which means that although they do not have sound knowledge on sustainability, they want to learn and be educated on this discipline. Figure 3 also shows the importance that the respondents of different academic background attach to sustainability.

Figure 3. The importance of the SDGs socially and economically. (in %) (0-Not at all, 5-Very important)



5. Conclusion

Education in general and Universities are ill preparing future professionals for the existing conditions in terms of Sustainability. The knowledge questions of our survey mirror the lack of knowledge of young people, of all academic backgrounds, on sustainability in Greece. The few correct answers, especially from the age groups 18-20 and 21-23, reflect the educational gap in matters of sustainability and its impact, both in secondary and higher education.

However, the questions on their perceptions about issues related to sustainability indicate that they instinctively admire sustainability for its vital role. They also understand the importance of Sustainability's impact especially in the near future, in their everyday lives and want to acquire more knowledge and education on this discipline.

"Are our views and perspectives about Sustainability intuitive and to what extent?". To conclude, this question should be answered. The importance of sustainability is not questioned by either those that have inadequate knowledge of the SDGs or those knowledgeable enough. However, it is observed that survey participants with more knowledge tend, to a certain extent, to give similar answers. Thus, the answers indicate that our perspective of sustainability is more intuitive than our beliefs on that matter, as our knowledge shapes our views.