

**THE IMPORTANCE OF UNIVERSITIES  
FOR SOCIETY AND ECONOMY  
THE EXPERIENCE OF RESEARCHERS  
FROM THE VISEGRÁD GROUP**

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## CHAPTER 1

# The Culture of Responsibility of a University as the Factor Stimulating Implementation of the Principles of Sustainable Development by Entrepreneurs and Consumers

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**Abstract:** The aim of this section was to present the role of universities in shaping a responsible society, and extend the scope of the implementation of sustainable development principles by entrepreneurs and consumers. Particular attention was paid to a university's responsibility culture, a factor which conditions the implementation of the sustainable development concept not only in the university itself but also by its stakeholders. This requires including the category of sustainable development in many areas related to the university's functioning, including scientific research, commercialisation of its results, educational concepts and programmes, and also managing the university itself. The considerations presented in this chapter centred on the evolution of functions and tasks performed by universities, as well as indicated in what way they can participate in the realisation of the aims of sustainable development, and stimulate entrepreneurs and consumers to behaviour based on the model of the economics of moderation. The study was based on an extended literature review and analysis of practices developed in WUEB, where the strategic approach to shaping the culture of responsibility is applied.

**Keywords:** sustainable development, universities, culture of responsibility, green competencies

## 1.1. Introduction

In the face of growing climate change and the related threats to civilisation, particular importance has been attached to concepts such as sustainable development and economics of moderation. This also indicates directions of activities undertaken by universities.

The essence of sustainable development is a reduction in the scale of poverty and social exclusion, and providing future generations with conditions for their development, analogous to the contemporary, as well as maintaining cultural diversity. The characteristics of this long-term process include sustainability, durability and self-sustaining development (Borys, 2005, p. 30). Sustainability involves maintaining the correct balance between developmental requirements and the need for environmental protection. Durability requires ensuring the availability of natural resources, whilst self-sustaining development refers to the existing co-dependencies between economic, ecological and social factors in the stimulation of long-term economic growth.

In its turn, the economics of moderation postulates lowering the level of the exploitation of natural resources from the viewpoint of the satisfaction of human needs. In particular this applies to economies and entities whose level of well-being is not below the subsistence level. Due to the deteriorating condition of the natural environment, this economic theory is also distinguished by indicating the necessity of state intervention not only at the level of individual states but also on the international scale. One should also add that ideas contrary to the concept of economic moderation include excessive consumption and consumerism. In practical terms, the implementation of the principles of the economics of moderation also means the selective financing of science, which should apply especially to various types of 'green' research. Moreover, in the context of the climate crisis it is of great importance to move away from purely immediate, *ad hoc* thinking under pressure, governed merely by solving current problems. Among the archetypes of such categories are the concepts of common good and global rationality (Gorynia, 2023, pp. 147-154).

In this context there arises a research question about the possibilities and role of universities in shaping a responsible society and in increasing the scope of implementation, by both companies and consumers, of the principles of sustainable development as well as the economics of moderation. Educational aims have been defined in, among others, UNESCO documents. In light of their analysis, attention should be drawn to the need and importance of education about peace and human rights, also pointing out the significant role of developmental and environmental education (Czaplińska, 2010). The tasks facing educators involve increasing

awareness, knowledge and sensitivity of individuals regarding global problems and contributing to solving them. Analysis of the subject literature revealed that the challenge facing the tertiary education system concerns creating and developing such competences which would allow individuals to understand multidimensional processes and foresee their consequences, as well as make decisions which take into consideration their global context, social and economic outcomes, and also the impact on the natural environment.

While aiming to answer the formulated research question, the study described the evolution of the functions performed by universities, along with the concept of sustainable development within the context of tasks realised by them. Particular attention was placed on the culture of responsibility in universities, treating it as a factor conditioning the implementation of the principles of sustainable development not just in the university itself but also by entities in its environment.

## 1.2. Evolution of the Functions Performed by Universities

The realisation of the aim of this research required showing the way in which the thinking about universities, their perceived mission and their tasks, has changed over time. A university, with its institutional origins set in the Middle Ages, has been evolving, accompanied by the changing perception of its roles. Teaching was the essence of the medieval university model (the period 1100-1500), conducted in Latin within a master-student relation, while serving society was not part of the university mission, whereas in the following stages of the development of universities' services to the state and society grew in importance. In the period 1500-1800, scientific research and response to societal needs became much more relevant than in the earlier centuries. An additional feature distinguishing this model from the medieval one was targeting education towards professional preparation, the national and lay character of universities, their dependence on public funding and the simultaneous autonomy in nominating their lecturers. In showing the evolution and changing role of universities, one should also touch upon the stage of founding state universities (in the USA, 1776), focused on democratising education, providing services and obtaining finance from private individuals. On the other hand, characteristic of Humboldt University established in Berlin in 1809, was to prioritise research activity (both fundamental and applied), as well as aiming to engage the most prominent scholars and guarantee freedom in their research activity, along with ensuring unity of research and teaching, and equalising the status of all fields of science. Such aims of universities' existence as public service and transmission of knowledge to the environment are associated with American universities in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. Among the features of this model of university education, one can indicate striving

to ensure that the created and transmitted knowledge was useful. Moreover, at this stage of universities' development, first academic organisations have emerged, an increasing number of scientific conferences takes place, accompanied by scholarly publications, while universities play also cultural role. Along with the transfer of knowledge to their environment, also some criticism appears concerning the growing dependence of universities on the business sector, and thus the need to maintain equilibrium between their autonomy and dependence towards the authorities and companies. The analysis of the development stages of universities indicates that currently their mission is the creation, transformation and propagation of knowledge in their environment, as well as their contribution to developing knowledge-based society. There is also a growing international cooperation, where internationalisation concerns education, research and collaboration with their environment. One can also observe the greater relevance of social responsibility of universities, and the co-creation of added value by both the internal and external stakeholders of the university (Leja, 2013, pp. 34, 35, 185-187; Scott, 2006).

In consequence, this means that the scope of the roles played by universities is extending. Whereas in the Middle Ages serving the state and society by universities was not an important part of their mission, at the later stages in their development this purpose has grown in importance, together with their growing participation in solving the problems existing in the modern world.

This is clearly expressed in the concept of the University of the Third Generation, whose role is not limited to conducting scientific research and education, but is also closely linked with the practical application of the created knowledge. The core activity of the Third Generation Universities is carrying out fundamental research, as well as interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary studies. Moreover, the tasks of modern universities include the creation of networks, within which they cooperate with businesses, private research and development entities, financial institutions, professional services providers, and with other universities. Their consequence is, among others, the fact of being financed both by the state and by the private sector. Such universities are active in the international market and compete for the best scientists and students, as well as research commissioned by businesses, and thus provide a special range of opportunities for the most promising students and the best staff. Managing the Third Gen University put special emphasis on stimulating creativity in scientific research and attracting students and employees from diverse countries. Bearing in mind the conditions for developing creativity, it should be stressed that these organisations are of multicultural nature. They play the part of incubators of new creativity because apart from conducting research and educating, their aim is also to encourage the use of know-how (Wissema, 2009, pp. 11, 12).

The described changes in the functioning of universities and the roles they play, are also immanently linked with seeking innovative approaches to the creation and

distribution of knowledge, being oriented towards its applicability, transdisciplinary nature and open access to data. This is well encapsulated in the so-called 'living labs' which are supposed to become an answer to the changing role of their users – from passive consumers to active prosumers – or by shortening the length of time between creating an innovation to its commercialisation. The living lab model of functioning combines the logic of the project realisation with such methods of co-creation as Design Thinking and Human-Centred Service. The first living labs were established in the 1990s in the USA, and one of those was MIT Media Lab. Going beyond the technological character of this method of innovation, and using it as a tool of societal innovation and was linked in Europe with its very intense promotion in EU programmes. The European Network of Living Labs indicates the following six key elements which clearly express the concept of living labs:

- active involvement of users which means that feedback from stakeholders is recorded and implemented during the entire cycle of creating innovation,
- participation of numerous stakeholders representing universities, the public and business sectors, and society in general,
- co-creating value bottom-up by the interested stakeholders, which should translate into the increased acceptance of the generated solution and its implementation,
- setting in the actual users' environment, and not in an artificially created test space,
- multiple-method approach, which means that the actions and methods applied aim at resolving the specific problem,
- functioning as a particular 'orchestrator', animating the eco-system and bringing together appropriate stakeholders (Jałocha, 2023).

One should underline the functions of universities, expressed in the development of advanced science, stimulating enterprise and passion for the life-long gathering of knowledge, as well as shaping the pro-innovation orientation within the educational process, to enable taking advantage of opportunities offered by modern civilisation. This is linked with transforming the educational mission of teaching into the mission of providing individual learning methods (Bielecki, 2001), and arriving at the point where education will be treated as one of the elements in the lifestyle concept (Jankowski et al., 2003, p. 52). This requires including diverse paradigms in the educational concept, not only the traditional imitation-transmission approach, but also creative teaching of an exploratory nature, and developing didactics with the humanities perspective, whose results will translate into benefitting from opportunities for the development and increase of human wellbeing (Rutkowiak, 2009, pp. 27, 28). This also requires including the concept of sustainable development in both the strategies and activities realised by universities.

### 1.3. The Concept of Sustainable Development in the Context of Tasks Performed by Universities

The active role played by universities in addressing the problems and challenges faced by modern society means including in their activity the concept of sustainable development, an innovative model of socio-economic development. This is the type of development realised by humans and for humans, characterised by the ongoing integration of human activities undertaken in many areas – environmental, economic, technological, and socio-cultural. From the viewpoint of the framework and operating principles of universities, it should be emphasised that a very significant condition of the implementation of the sustainable development concept is the responsible society (Pezzey & Toman, 2002).

In the context of the origin and principles of sustainable development, one should draw attention to the mega-economic character of this concept, also adding that the macroeconomic scale of its realisation produces many implications at regional and local levels. The category of sustainable development constitutes an element of the sustainable development strategy itself, ecological policy as well as socio-economic policy, but is also a part of numerous socio-economic strategies realised by a variety of entities on international, national, regional and local levels (Jeżowski, 2007, p. 11).

The role of universities in the context of sustainable development is expressed, in particular, in forming 'green competencies' which allow for the transformation of the existing economic model into an ecological, low-emissions and favouring social inclusion. Such a transformation changes the entire economy, as well as the functioning of its individual sectors, and prompts changes in the labour market, on the one hand creating new jobs, and on the other replacing and redefining, or even making obsolete, some professions which do not enter into the green economy model. It should be noted that green competencies involve knowledge of technology, experience and skills allowing for the effective use of green technologies and processes in a professional setting. It is important that they are based on a wide spectrum of knowledge, values and attitudes, facilitating making ecologically-balanced decisions at work and in consumer choices (Ziółkowska, 2024). Hence, this means that green competencies comprise: green knowledge, green skills, green awareness, green attitudes, green abilities and green behaviour (Cabral & Dhar Lochan, 2019).

From the viewpoint of functions and tasks of universities in the process of building a new model of economy based on sustainable development, it should be stressed that the growing demand for green competencies has exceeded the increase in supply observed since 2022. Based on the LinkedIn study conducted in 48 countries, in 2023 the increase in the share of green competencies of employees amounted to 12.3%, with the accompanying growth of job adverts requesting at least one green skill rose by 22.4% (LinkedIn's Economic Graph, 2023).



It should also be noted that there is a diversity between countries, which is expressed in the percentage of enterprises undertaking efforts in terms of effective management of resources linked with the protection of the environment, or the number of company employees with a green occupation, and the level of knowledge regarding protection of the environment. Poland and Czechia showed, to a higher degree, gaps in the specialist knowledge of environmental protection, similarly to the employment, just as in Slovakia there was the largest percentage of companies with at least one employee representing green professions. However, in terms of activities undertaken in the area of effective management of resources linked with protection of the environment in companies, the highest number was noted in Czechia, see Table 1.1.

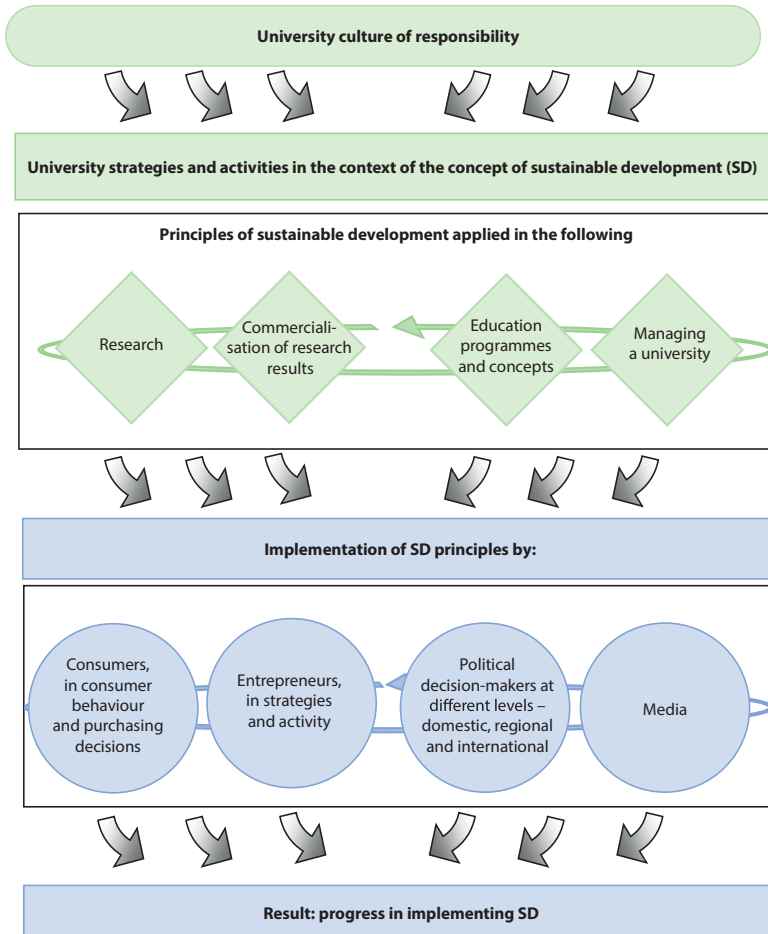
**Table 1.1.** Knowledge activities undertaken in effective management of resources related to environmental protection and number of employees of green professions

Country	Lack of specialist knowledge regarding environmental protection (in %)	Activities undertaken by companies in effective management of resources related to environmental protection (in %)				Number of employees of green professions in companies (in %)		
		many	few	not many	none	0	1-5	6+
Czechia	21.8	30.5	34.7	21.2	13.5	77.2	18.7	4.1
Poland	27.7	24.3	31.8	27.3	16.7	58.5	34.7	6.8
Slovakia	7.9	21.8	27.7	36.8	13.6	38.8	52.6	8.6

Source: (Bassi & Guidolin, 2021).

An important factor conditioning the incorporation of universities into the process of implementing the principles of sustainable development is the creation in the institutions themselves, as well as in the entities from their environment, the culture of responsibility. This requires a distinction of the categories of responsibility 'before' and 'after' (Ingarden, 2017, pp. 73-150). Although responsibility prior to the act is described as a certain kind of disposition and readiness to take on responsibility and also predict its consequences, the actual responsibility appears after the occurrence of a certain event and/or behaviour (Bogunia-Borowska, 2021). Moreover, responsibility means a justified prediction of the effects of one's conduct on others, and taking action only when these results are suitable not only for the given individual, but also for others. Responsibility is also linked with abandoning egoistic attitudes in favour of pro-societal orientation and concern for other people and the natural environment (Sztompka, 2021, pp. 13, 32). Bearing in mind the crisis of sustainability and the need to reduce the negative impact of humanity on the natural environment, one can indicate that the culture of responsibility in universities is demonstrated through including the principles of sustainable development in their scientific research,

the commercialisation of its results, in the educational concepts and programmes, as well as in the process of managing these institutions. Thus, all this should translate into the implementation of the principles of sustainable development among university stockholders, and in particular entrepreneurs and consumers, see Fig. 1.1.



**Fig. 1.1.** University as a subject in implementing SD

Source: own study.

This is even more important, as facing contemporary challenges requires profound changes in the model of consumption, not only in terms of quality but also quantity in respect of the use of resources, which will allow for an actual reduction of their dwindling reserves. Sustainable consumption has a significant role to play in this

aspect, being in opposition to consumerist attitudes and behaviour. Its essence is the self-limitation of individuals within the applied consumption models.

Another aspect is the ecologisation of consumer behaviour, manifested by purchasing and consuming ecological products, as well as in the prudent, rational use of consumer goods and moving away from 'ego-rationality' towards 'eco-rationality' (Black, 2010, pp. 407, 408; Mazurek-Łopacińska & Sobocińska, 2018, pp. 409-420; Sowa, 2010, p. 188).

At the basis of sustainable consumption, corresponding to the model of the culture of responsibility, there is ecological awareness, and also the practical implementation of the principle of justice, both intra and intergenerational, which means that the increased well-being of some consumers should not restrict the possibilities of the improvement of the well-being of other consumers and future generations (Harrison et al., 2005, p. 3).

It should be noted that although consumers often support the principles of sustainable development, and perceive the necessity of reducing the negative impact of humanity on the natural environment, yet this has frequently only a declarative nature, and does not translate into actual behaviour following the model of sustainable consumption. The mere interest in products with the characteristics compatible with the principles of sustainable consumption is not enough for the actual realisation of the sustainable consumption model (McNeill & Moore, 2015; Morwitz et al., 2007). This phenomenon is defined as the gap between attitudes and behaviour (Burgiel, 2020, p. 238; Park & Lin, 2020; Terlau & Hirsch, 2015), manifested by the fact that despite the awareness regarding the need to implement the principles of sustainable development and its positive perception on the part of consumers, as well as their declared interest in purchasing goods produced by companies following these principles (Luchs et al., 2015), the actual market share of these products remains relatively small (Bray et al., 2011). This means that consumers' awareness and their positive attitude concerning sustainable development constitute a factor which is indispensable, yet also insufficient, to actually implement consumer behaviour following the model of sustainable consumption.

This demonstrates the multidimensional nature of the analysed problem and the scale of the challenges facing universities. In this context, a major role has to be played by business schools, which – through their research and educational programmes followed at various levels of education – can contribute to the implementation of the sustainable development concept in business activity by their graduates. This is of particular importance since building a company which remains in harmony with its environment provides an opportunity to increase innovativeness and create competitive advantage. The aim of maintaining ecological balance becomes a factor in company development in the passage of the company through the following stages:

- accepting these requirements as an opportunity, and convincing company's partners to implement ecological technologies, materials, procedures and processes by referring to the necessity of meeting legal requirements,
- imparting sustainable character onto the value chain,
- designing ecological goods and services,
- creating a new business model,
- building a platform for the development of new generation practices which change the existing paradigms (Nidumolu et al., 2010).

In aiming to provide an example of the culture of responsibility and its importance for the functioning of universities, it is worth demonstrating the approach elaborated in this scope by Wrocław University of Economics and Business (WUEB).

#### 1.4. Culture of Responsibility Within a University – the Example of WUEB

The strategic approach to shaping the culture of responsibility by WUEB is reflected in the references made in the University mission to open debate and human community, and also – with a particular importance in the context of the discussed category – to the development in harmony with the environment and creation of a better world. Moreover, among the seven key values accepted by WUEB and shared by its academic community, there is also responsibility, along with community, truth, freedom, modernity, perfection and enterprise (Uniwersytet Ekonomiczny we Wrocławiu [UEW], n.d.). This is important, both due to the character of the contemporary socio-economic problems, as well as the role of the organisational culture in managing the organisation, described as its autonomous nervous system (Kilman et al., 1985), made up of by the principles, norms, values, and models of behaviour shared by its members (Dessler & Turner, 1992).

The systemically conducted activities targeting the culture of responsibility and social responsibility commenced in the then University of Economics in Wrocław (now WUEB) in 2008 (see Table 1.2), with the appointment of a Deputy Rector for Persons with Disabilities, followed by signing the Declaration of Social Responsibility of the University (2017). In 2019 the University joined the PRME (Principles for Responsible Management Education) initiative supported by the UN, a platform raising the importance of sustainable development in universities all over the world, and its large reach is confirmed by over 730 fellow signatories. Among the organisational solutions aimed at supporting the implementation of the principles of sustainable development at WUEB, one should indicate the existence of the Rector's Commission for Social Impact and the Sustainable Development Office, incorporating initiatives in the area of environmental protection, corporate social responsibility

**Table 1.2.** Stages of institutionalisation of sustainable development at Wroclaw University of Economics and Business

Stage	Year	Event
I	2008	Appointment of a Deputy Rector for Persons with Disabilities
II	2017	HR Excellence in Research
		Appointment of the Rector's Commission Green Team
		Signing the Declaration of Social Responsibility of the University
III	2018	Signing of the Declaration Climate Reality Project
IV	2019	The University joining the PRME initiative
V	2020	Appointment of the Service Section for Persons with Disabilities
		The Green Team Rector's Commission transformed into the Green Team Centre for Competences
VI	2021	Preparing and introducing the Rulebook for Sustainable Public Orders
VI	2022	Appointment of a Manager for Social Impact
		Establishment of the Rector's Commission for Social Impact
		Signing of the Diversity Chart
		Appointment of a Spokesperson for Counteracting Discrimination
		Appointment of a Spokesperson for Equal Rights
		Appointment of the Team for Equal Rights and Anti-Discrimination
VII	2023	Implementing the Gender Equality Plan in WUEB
		WUEB joining the campaign 'Universities Fair-Trade Friendly'
		Acceptance of the University's amended internal anti-mobbing and anti-discrimination policy
		Appointment of a Deputy Rector for Cultural Activity
VIII	2023	Founding of the Sustainable Development Bureau

Source: (UEW, in press).

and economic growth, as well as the appointment of a Deputy Rector for Cultural Activity. An important role is also played by the Green Team, which operates as the centre of competences directed at the propagation of knowledge on the subject of economic, social and environmental challenges, participation in building strategies and policies enabling the management of the University in line with sustainable development, as well as the green transformation of the campus, and supporting social responsibility of science. International cooperation is a significant area which should be developed in accordance with the goals of sustainable development, as reflected in the *International Development Plan* (Wroclaw University of Economics and Business [WUEB], 2022) and the functioning of the International Accreditation Council at WUEB, as well as membership of prestigious accreditation institutions, e.g. the Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business (AACSB). The idea

and the principles of sustainable development are also popularised and promoted at the cyclically-organised conferences, such as 'Forum Green Region' (UEW, 2024). Moreover, work is ongoing in the University on the creation of the Strategic Plans of Sustainable Development.

One should also note that the problems related to responsibility, including social responsibility, and of sustainable development, feature largely in the scientific research conducted in the University, as well as in the educational content realised within various forms and courses of studies, programmes and conference debates, and the variety of scientific events popularising science with the participation of WUEB stakeholders. An important confirmation of the culture of responsibility are also international distinctions and accreditations awarded to the University, among which: CEEMAN IQA, EUA IEP, HR Excellence in Research, AMBA, EFMD, CIMA (WUEB, 2023). In presenting the wide range of implementation of solutions serving to shape the culture of responsibility, it is worth pointing out investment in renewable sources of energy and the installation of photovoltaic panels. A good example demonstrating the way of creating the culture of responsibility in the University is voluntary activity, supporting the civic behaviour of the academic community. One should stress that the process of institutionalisation of sustainable development has been frequently initiated by the University staff themselves, however fully accompanied by the understanding, commitment and support of the WUEB management.



## 1.5. Conclusions

In arriving at the conclusions, it should be underlined that universities have an important role in shaping the responsible society and increasing the scope of the implementation of sustainable development by entrepreneurs and consumers alike. Its principles mean moving away from the classical economy in which Nature is treated as a source of usefulness, and the way of resolving the problem of limited resources was technological progress increasing effectiveness in obtaining raw materials, in favour of the thinking characterised by limiting the pace of economic growth and changing the approach to the management of natural resources (Jager et al., 2000; Zrałek, 2020).

All this requires developing the culture of responsibility, based on innovative scientific research, modern educational methods, and the promotion of the concept of sustainable development, and their application is aimed at stimulating both the development of business models respecting the environmental and social consequences of the conducted activities, as well as sustainable consumption by implementing it in the current lifestyle of consumers.

This is even more important as the degradation of the natural environment is perpetuated not just by various enterprises but also by consumers. Another factor contributing to the ongoing crisis of sustainability is the chase after constantly emerging new models of consumption, caused by, among others, shortening the life cycle of products, leading to the development of consumerism, understood as the excessive consumption of goods and services, not justified by actual human needs and ignoring social, ecological and individual costs (Mróz, 2013, pp. 51-65). One should also add that the process of modernising consumption is linked with its humanisation and the satisfaction of constructive, not destructive, needs which damage people's sensitivity (Bogunia-Borowska & Śleboda, 2003, p. 265). In consequence, this sets a new framework for the functioning of universities, which through the conducted scientific research and commercialisation of its results, programmes and forms of education, can significantly contribute to the practical implementation of the principles of sustainable development and building the economy of moderation. However, this does not mean that such issues should not be considered more widely in the earlier stages of education.

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