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**Competence for Sustainability: Prevention of Dis-Balance  
in Higher Education: The Case of Cooperation While Educating  
Future Law Enforcement Officers**

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**ABSTRACT**

In the twenty-first century, social, environmental and technological challenges demand new knowledge and educational innovations. University has become an organization which has an objective to operate more efficiently in relation to transformations to sustainability. Businesses (in a wider sense: employers) and universities should take specific steps in order to intensify the cooperation in producing sustainability informed professional who will be able to engage with the economic and social dimensions of sustainability. The *purpose* of this paper is to conceptualize competence for sustainability as the prevention of disbalance in higher education. The case of cooperation while educating future law enforcement officers is at the focus of analysis. The methodology of this study relies on two baselines. Our first baseline for further analysis is the statement that sustainability informed professionals may only be educated if a sustainable education in higher education is an overarching reality. Firstly, the concept of sustainability is explored using descriptive methodology. Secondly, the forms of manifestation of sustainability will be presented through the lens of examples: the case study of Lithuania, illustrated by experiences of two Lithuanian universities. The conclusions reached are as following: only the balanced education of all the enumerated (and may be even more) sub competencies may lead to a sustainability – informed professional. It is important not to emphasize instrumental sub competence at the expense of personal or social development of a student/future professional. Secondly some forms of university-business/employer collaboration are more productive for educating certain sub competen-

cies (e.g., participation of employers seems to strengthen the instrumental sub competence to a significant degree), while other forms of collaboration may be very productive for holistic education for sustainability. Among such forms lifelong learning and entrepreneurship and governance were identified.

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## INTRODUCTION

Learning and knowledge in present times are essential for the dynamics of any organization both as organisational resources also as central practices. All developed countries have as their aim to head towards a knowledge society, for which it is necessary to have an effective system of higher education (Šafránková, Šikýř, 2016). In a globalised world, where citizens of almost all the states enjoy the right and possibility to study in a university, which best meets the expectations of a student and his or her significant others, institutions of higher education (further on – HEI) face a reality to act as any market-orientated entity. Lithuania is no exception, here any HEI is obliged to build up its profile, to secure a reputation and a high position in rankings, to employ other strategies of marketing, thus ensuring its attractiveness to students. Universities therefore employ the same (or at least very similar) methods, which other entities in the competitive and dynamic market have been using for decades (Weymans, 2010). As Bauk and Jusufrić (2014) rightly state, HEIs are *“becoming increasingly competitive in terms of students, staff and resources. In the area of economic development, higher education increases productivity and competitiveness, particularly through the growth of the human capital and the creation of a better educated, more qualified and more skilled work force”*.

The *purpose* of this paper is to conceptualise competence for sustainability as the prevention of dis-balance in higher education, with the case of cooperation while educating future law enforcement officers being at focus. This paper is comprised of two main chapters. The first chapter is dedicated to analysis of the concept of sustainability, and the competence for sustainability. The second chapter mainly focuses on educational opportunities to educate the competence for sustainability while cooperating with employers, with the special emphasis on the education of future law-enforcement officers.

The methodology of this study relies on two baselines. Our first baseline for further analysis is the statement that sustainability informed professionals may only be educated if a sustainable education in higher education is an overarching reality. Therefore firstly, the concept of sustainability will be discussed. Secondly, the forms of manifestation of sustainability will be presented through the lens of examples: the case study of Lithuania, illustrated by experiences of two Lithuanian universities. One of the universities is situated in the capital city of Lithuania (University 1; appr. 9 000 students, focus on studies in social sciences), and the other is situated in the second largest city of Lithuania (University 2; appr. 17 000 students, focus on studies in engineering).

## 1. THE CONCEPT OF SUSTAINABILITY

The context of the study. Lithuania is a Member State of the European Union, its membership started in May, 2004. Lithuania is an independent state since 1990, with the territory of a bit more than 65 km<sup>2</sup>. The number of population was 2.86 million in 2016 (Department of Statistics, <http://osp.stat.gov.lt/>, accessed on 24 March, 2017). At the moment 14 state universities operate in Lithuania, however, at the moment of developing this paper (Spring 2017), a reform to consolidate universities and to have 4 or 5 universities operating by 2020 has started. Though the reform itself is a major signal of market-orientated strategies that even a state implements, this paper is more focused to the processes that have led to the reform.

As it was emphasised earlier and in the title of the paper, educating the sustainability informed professionals is of utmost importance for this study. In recent decades concept of sustainability received a deserved attention (due to necessity to preserve natural resources, including intellectual potential of any human being and communities). As Amaral and others (2013) note, universities can and should “*play a key role in turning society sustainable through their power to teach and generate world leaders and their capability to perform research activities to enable a sustainable future*” (Amaral, Martins, Gouveia, 2015). At the same time, issues of educating a sustainability orientated (or at least informed) professional also were raised by the researchers and policy makers, also practitioners at higher education. Though there are several interpretations of a sustainable university and its mission to implement ideas of sustainable development, seemingly, a mutual consensus about the following three principles has been achieved: ensuring of equality and fairness for everyone (faculty and students); faculty’s and students’ empowerment and belief in their competence and the right to make positive changes; faculty’s and students’ personal commitment and competencies to take part in positive social changes (Dawe, Jucker & Martin, 2005; Rowe & Frewer, 2005; Rowe & Gammack, 2005; Forrest & Wiek, 2014; Wiek, Withycombe & Redman, 2011). Balčiūnaitienė (2016; p. 16) claims that competence of sustainable development is related to “*personal (internal and external), methodological – instrumental (professional), social (education and leadership), transformative (demonstrating ability to positive change), communicative (demonstrating foreign language knowledge and skills), cross – cultural sub-competences*”.

The scope of this study does not allow analysis of prerequisites for development of all the 6 sub-competencies to a greater depth; however, the authors believe these sub-competencies being of an integral nature. That is, they should be reflected in many aspects of university studies, though, surely, in some aspects there are more opportunities to emphasise one sub-competence, and some other aspect of studies, may be more productive to emphasise another sub-competence.

As M. Littledyke et al. (2013) state, universities are “*important sites of education for the next generation of professionals who will have potentially significant influence on sustainability through roles in various professional contexts and as individuals with influence within communities*”. What is of utmost importance, that is the fact that in the contemporary higher education (or university – the term are used as synonyms here) some of the sub competencies remain at the margin of education (e.g., transformative), with some of the other sub competencies deserving an overemphasis (e.g., methodological-instrumental), and therefore the dis-balance may not lead to educating a sustainability informed professional, because only the system of sub competencies results in a productive and viable competence of sustainability (Balčiūnaitienė, 2016). That is the *first* statement we will provide arguments for. Also, educating certain sub competencies in the intersection of university-business collaboration may provide very productive opportunities, though even in those cases one should be cautious about and overemphasis; this is the *second* main statement of this paper. In the analysis further on, we will provide references to the sub-competencies (as comprising a competence of a sustainability of a future professional) in discussing the possible educative impact of university-employer cooperation.

## **2. FORMS OF UNIVERSITY-EMPLOYER COLLABORATION AND EDUCATING SUSTAINABILITY-INFORMED PROFESSIONALS**

At the threshold of 21<sup>st</sup> c. (Manicas, 2000) the fact that university education became almost universal was evident. The associated phenomenon - diversification also became obvious. Diversification means that not only different functional institutions appear (universities, institutes of areal scientific research), but also institutions of different organizational forms – apart from traditional state and private universities, corporative and virtual universities are being created. The education they provide responds to the needs of society, it is accredited and recognized and also creates new

realities in a knowledge society. Nowadays universities are of several types. Traditional universities; at least in Lithuanian context this type sometimes is referred to as the classical one. Traditional expanded universities are trying to respond to the market needs, are more accessible, their mission is described as providing not only academic education but also qualifications required in the job world. Profit universities are easily accessible; their mission is defined as provision of qualifications required in the job world. The distinctive feature of open university is that it does not exist in the material/building sense; this is the modern communication network based educational institution. University/business alliance (corporate universities) describes cooperation of social partners enabling the acquisition of modern and marketable competencies. University, validating the qualifications and providing certificates, is a model of organization that enables the preparation and passing the exams necessary to get the recognized qualification by individualized programmes.

Sustainability remains a key strategic priority for many organizations despite challenging economic times (Bilodeau, Podger, Abd-El-Aziz, 2014), therefore the cooperation between the market entities and HEIs is important in order to educate persons capable of integrating sustainability principles into action in different fields of activity. Sustainability is seen as *“driver for innovation that can result in more efficient operations and business processes, reduced costs and environmental impacts”* (Bilodeau, Podger, Abd-El-Aziz, 2014).

Eight forms that describe alliances and collaboration between university and market entities are identified. They are: Curriculum development and delivery, Lifelong learning, Student mobility, Academic mobility, Commercialisation of R&D, collaboration in R&D, Entrepreneurship and Governance. Due to the limited scope of the paper, only three of the forms (Curriculum development and delivery, Lifelong learning; Entrepreneurship and Governance) will be analysed to a greater depth further on; short insights into manifestations of those forms in realities of Lithuanian universities will be provided together with the examples of experiences in either University 1 or University 2, or both.

The necessity and social responsibility of universities to align study outcomes to the expectations of employers and the tendencies in professional field is emphasised in strategic and even legal documents of the Republic of Lithuania. Namely, An Act of Research and Education (29 June, 2016, No.XII-2534 - <https://www.e-tar.lt/portal/lt/legalAct/1a9058e049b311e6b5d09300a16a686c>; Article 10 stipulates the necessity for a university to cooperate in a responsible and reciprocal way with the state and employers; this stipulation is further elaborated in consequent documents, such as the Order of the Director of Centre for Quality Assessment in Higher Education on Methodology for Drafting the Description of a New Study Programme, Its External Review and Accreditation. In this document the necessity to consult on a permanent basis with employers is indicated in a straightforward way (<https://www.e-tar.lt/portal/lt/legalAct/TAR.39B6CF57EB18>). Article 5 of the Order clearly stipulates the obligation to provide market research data on the perspective of employers about the necessity for graduates from a specific study programme, while registering the programme.

However, as researchers, the authors here feel obliged to indicate a potential (actually, very realistic) danger, when university studies are orientated exceptionally only towards the immediate goals. As Dima et al. rightly stated: *„Education in general, and higher education in particular enables people to better respond to the postmodern society challenges implied by legal constraints and ethical principles, to accomplish tasks for the good of society and to be responsible global citizens“* (Dima, Vasilache, Ghinea, Agoston, 2013, p. 24). Also a number of strategic documents reminds about the necessity for the proactive, future-orientated studies and approaches, which provide a solid foundation for innovations and positive changes<sup>1</sup>. It can be stated that the influ-

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<sup>1</sup> To name a few: Bologna Process. The European Area for Higher Education 1999-2010; [Online] at [http://www.enic-naric.net/index.asp?display=Bologna\\_process](http://www.enic-naric.net/index.asp?display=Bologna_process), accessed July 1st, 2014. Budapest - Vienna Declaration on the European Higher Education Area March 12, 2010, [Online] at [http://www.ehea.info/Uploads/news/Budapest-Vienna\\_Declaration.pdf](http://www.ehea.info/Uploads/news/Budapest-Vienna_Declaration.pdf), accessed July 2nd, 2014. Communiqué of the Conference of European Ministers Responsible for Higher Education, Leuven and Louvain-la-Neuve, 28-29 April 2009, [Online] at [http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release\\_IP-09-124](http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_IP-09-124)

ence of higher education institutions in the achievement of sustainability goals and their contribution to the sustainable education of students, staff and communities are well recognized by international policies (Vagnoni, Cavicchi, 2015; Barth, 2013).

However, both the authors of this paper, and, surely, readers, are witnessing distancing from future-orientated goals as opposed to equalling higher education to immediate benefits, at least by higher education policy makers and administrators. These tendencies started to dominate the public discourse in recent decade. Though the direction that university and market alliances should be encouraged, because they provide foundations for competitive, more effective, safer practices in market is not negated *per se*, however, this direction should not be over-emphasised at the expense of another fundamental dimension of university studies. That is a dimension of educating a responsible, self-fulfilling, culturally respectful, globally and future-orientated person. If sub competencies of sustainability are referred to, we may clearly see the emphasis on methodological-instrumental sub competence of future professionals, while other sub competencies remain at the margin of the activities if this specific form of university-business (employers) collaboration is analysed.

With the reference to case-studies of University 1 and University 2 it should be stated that, once the requirement to align studies with the requirements of employers is embedded into national legislation and translated into legal framework of the universities, the process of market research for evidence-based arguments for viability of study programmes is a reality. The issue is not whether to implement or not to implement this stipulation; it is rather about the degree and the level of implementation.

For example, University 1 delivers several programmes, where the number of enrolled students is directly agreed upon with the employers (though this is an exceptional case, because an employer is a law enforcement agency that has very precise data on the prospective need of staff) (Handbook: Developing employability and entrepreneurship in higher education, 2017). A Faculty at University 1 organizes studies for the very specific employer that needs graduates (future law-enforcement officers): that is an example of very specific and evidence based decision. Administrations of the Faculty and the Personnel Board at the Police Department each year very carefully monitor the necessary number of students, in order to cover the natural changes in the system. As there were 9000 officers several years ago, with the decrease in the number of population in Lithuanian (now below 2.9 million), the need is to have just a bit above 8000 officers. Therefore, not all the police officers who become retired should be changed by the new generation. While approximately 700 officers left the force, only approx. 200 graduates from University 1 and another establishment joined the force. This careful monitoring is reflected in the number of the students that the Ministry of Interior asks the Ministry of Education and Science (and then - University 1), to admit the students. The contract between the University and the Police Department is signed. Also, each student at the beginning of studies signs the Tripartite contract (student - university - the system), where responsibilities, expectations and the conditions are clearly stated (e.g., a student is expected later to work at least 5 years in the force). This careful planning - of course - is only possible in this specific public sector, however, even in other public sectors (education; medical services) it is rarely implemented, though such practice would provide much more clarity for the candidates for studies. On the other hand, surely, it also has its disadvantages, and namely - very little flexibility and the opportunities for young people to change their focus on their careers in later years.

University 2 also has several study programmes provided in direct collaboration with employers, though in that case a private sector serves as a direct beneficiary and partner in the process

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675\_en.htm, accessed July 1st, 2014. Communiqué of the Conference of Ministers responsible for Higher Education "Realising the European Higher Education Area", [Online] at [http://www.ehea.info/Uploads/about/Berlin\\_Communique1.pdf](http://www.ehea.info/Uploads/about/Berlin_Communique1.pdf), accessed July 1st, 2014, and other

(<http://ktu.edu/lt/mechanikos-inzinerijos-ir-dizaino-fakultetas/studijos>); construction engineering, aviation being some of the examples.

With regards to this form of cooperation between higher education and employers, it is important to note that according to Lithuanian legislation, professional practice has been a necessary part of the study programmes for several years; and remains one of the significant parts of a curriculum under new regulations (Requirements for first cycle study programmes (adopted on 30 December, 2016, No.V-1168); article 9; 9.1; <https://www.e-tar.lt/portal/lt/legalAct/739065a0ce9911e69e09f35d37acd719>). Legal acts regulating this sort of studies require to provide students with at least 15 ECTS (1 ECTS equals to 25 – 30 hours of student's work) for practice placements. It is evident that this particular stipulation makes it necessary for universities and employers to cooperate. The issue is about the quality and the degree of cooperation, rather than about the fact itself. With the competence for sustainability constantly being at the focus in this paper, we may state with a significant degree of confidence that this particular form may provide either an excellent opportunity for developing almost all sub competencies needed; or, on the other hand, provide an example of poor cooperation and, therefore, result in missed educational opportunities.

If it is poorly organised, or organised without a responsible involvement and self-involvement of employers, a practice placement may not be productive even for developing a methodological-instrumental sub competence (which, obviously, has to be at the core of educational experiences during practice, in a system with the other sub competencies).

As a case of University 1 shows, the planning carried out is careful and responsible, however, such planning is time-consuming and expensive. The discussions and iterative nature of the process, may, however, yield good results in an educational setting, may be productive for development of several sub competencies; namely: methodological-instrumental, surely communicative, social and personal sub competences. As future law-enforcement officers have to participate in preliminary investigation of incidents, crimes, communicate with communities for prevention of offences and crimes, and also with victims of a crime or suspects of an offence or a crime, the enumerated earlier sub competencies are of crucial importance. We will go further on with this, and namely we state that for a future law-enforcement officer personal and social sub competences comprise an essential part of their methodological-instrumental sub competence. A police officer who is not able to demonstrate empathy for a victim or a witness, and assertion towards a suspect, will simply be unable to ever perform tasks ascribed to a contemporary police officer.

Moreover, the in the light of globalisation and the also the very fact that crime gains an international dimension in some instances faster than other fields of human activities do (Bilevičiūtė et al, 2016), it is also evident that cross-cultural sub competence should be at the focus. Future police officers should be able to communicate in a foreign language (or foreign languages) in a respectful and culturally sensitive manner. These skills, however, are not gained easily. In addition, the authors of this paper will note that Lithuania for the moment is still quite homogeneous: the majority of Lithuanian citizens attribute themselves being Lithuanians (more than 84,2% - The Census in Lithuania <https://www.google.com/search?q=Lietuvos+gyventoj%C5%B3+sura%C5%A1ymas&ie=utf-8&oe=utf-8> [accessed on 23 June, 2017]). Therefore some voices argue that cross-cultural sub competence should not be emphasised while educating future law-enforcement officer. And that is exactly the argument we will oppose to as to the argument that resulted by only immediate goals orientation. If future orientation is incorporated into the discourse on curriculum development, immediately it becomes evident that the changes in social fabric will change soon, and the cross-cultural sub competence should not be overlooked if a competent and confident law –enforcement officer is to be educated.

It is important to note that this particular example of how intrinsically the sub competencies of the competence for sustainability are related: the above mentioned link illustrates that in some particular cases, for some particular professions, certain sub competencies may simply not be separated. Therefore one of our main claims and namely, the assertion is that overemphasis of

some sub competencies and overemphasis of immediate goals as opposed to a systemic approach and both wider and future orientated goals is of utmost importance, and it should be stated that the latter goals should prevail.

In the light of arguments above it is obvious why practice placements for future law-enforcement officers are planned already for the first year of studies; the purpose is to provide students with opportunities to test themselves in this profession and enable them to make an informed decision on whether they will be able to further follow the path.

However, if cooperation between university and an employer is analysed, it is important to note that the curriculum and tasks for students for practice are being planned at the highest level of cooperation. For this particular part of curriculum, community of higher education does not rely on merely consultations with the Police Department, but rather on a joint decision making process. On the one hand, again, it should be emphasised that this careful planning has its downturns, and namely, the process is expensive, requires additional time and intellectual resources, also, the plan for practice does not allow for much flexibility (if, for example, one particular police station does not have particular community problems, if those are identified in a practice plan, these still have to be covered).

Another form of collaboration between university and the market entities - lifelong learning – on the other hand, provides some opportunities for flexibility and the changes in a person's professional life. As it was stated above, the tendency was evident even 20 years ago (Manicas, 2000). The fact that universities serve not only the people in the age of traditional age group (18 - 22/24), but also more mature people, provides a convincing argument that universities are acting as full-fledged agents of lifelong learning landscape. Both University 1, and University 2 offer a variety of opportunities for more mature students: part time studies; in-service training courses, collaboration with the Third Age University. Approximately 1/5 of students at both universities study at part-time studies, which enables them to reconcile studies and careers. With the ever increasing pace of technological changes in market and in the landscape of professions, professionals' performance integrally includes lifelong learning activities. The learning society and rapid technological changes are inseparable. Increasing competencies form the prerequisites for active scientific and technological creativity, because learning is what makes people contribute to the socio-economic development of their society, though not always in a way originally intended (Merrics, 2001; Jaaskela, 2007; Jonson, 2008). Referring to the sub competencies of sustainability, we may state that this form of collaboration between the market and universities provides an array of opportunities to educate students in almost all the sub competencies of sustainability: transformative, communicative, cross-cultural. Because the diversity of services is provided for students, and therefore, a diversity of opportunities to educate for sustainability is created.

While finalising our analysis, we will re-iterate the claim provided at the beginning of this paper, and namely, the necessity for balanced and systematic approach in educating sustainability informed professionals. There should be a balance in development of the instrumental and cross-cultural, and also transformative, and social, communicative and personal sub competencies. Therefore the last form of collaboration between universities and market (Entrepreneurship and Governance) was chosen for closing arguments. In a sustainable society, all of its agents (the same as the sub competencies in a competence) should comprise a viable system; the agents (in our case: university and employers) should act as sources for each other. Nationally, an example of University-Research-Market Valleys may be provided. 5 Valleys were constructed and established in the period of 2012-2015; the national programme aimed at providing platform for a reflected and reciprocal cooperation between university and employer. Referring to a specific case analysis, an example from University 2 will be analysed further. In 2014 a Centre for a Socially Responsible Research was established at that university (one of the authors of this paper acted both as an initiator and the head of the centre). The Centre was established due to a personal initiative of several members of academia (teachers and students), and this very fact serves as an illustration of a

responsible attitude towards developing collaboration between university and employer in a sustainable way. Among the aims of the centre was establishment of a School of Young Entrepreneur. Its direct objective was to provide a platform for non-formal educational experiences for students, who strive to become socially responsible professionals in their professional field, to become leaders and entrepreneurs, and innovators. The extra-curriculum activities encompassed discussions and structured process towards start-ups (both innovative and socially responsible). The centre also aimed at initiating research on responsible consuming, marketing activities; a number of thesis were completed in the field (both of 1 and 2 cycle students). Centre dedicated its special efforts to regional development, which comprised a direct manifestation of a sustainable development (that is, what are the market development prognosis, which production and/or service lines should be started, also investment guidelines to maintain a balanced enhancement of a state rather than of certain parts of it, with other parts remaining at the margins were discussed extensively). Moreover, responsible attention to regional development serves as a good school for developing competencies of governance for future active members of democracy.

The Centre functions for several years already based on volunteer initiative and personal intellectual investment of academia, which serves as an additional argument for a statement that socially responsible, sustainability orientated activities are regarded highly by members of university. The non-formal activities, including consultations, participation in round tables meetings with distinguished market players, businesspeople (especially young ones), participation in charity activities, provide opportunities for students to become sustainability informed professionals with almost all sub competencies emphasised in the process.

## CONCLUSIONS

In the beginning of the paper the concept of the concept of sustainable development was provided, based on the critical analysis of both Lithuanian and international sources. The concept encompasses several sub competencies (personal, instrumental, transformative, communicative, cross-cultural and social).

With the purpose of this paper being to conceptualise competence for sustainability as the prevention of dis-balance in higher education, it may be concluded that the holistic competence for sustainability should be fostered with care in educational settings at university and in intersection between university and an employer.

Two statements were provided further on. Arguments for defending both of them were provided based on the case study (two of Lithuanian universities). Namely, that only the balanced education of all the enumerated (and may be even more) sub competencies may lead to a sustainability – informed professional. It is important not to emphasise instrumental sub competence at the expense of personal or social development of a student/future professional. Second statement submitted that some forms of university-business/employer collaboration are more productive for educating certain sub competencies (e.g., participation of employers seems to strengthen the instrumental sub competence to a significant degree), while other forms of collaboration may be very productive for holistic education for sustainability. Among such forms lifelong learning and entrepreneurship and governance were identified. The analysis (Lithuanian case, University 1 and University 2) shows that even in a changing landscape of expectations for higher education, when the productivity, immediate gains seem to dominate, there are still opportunities to invite students for a sustainability-orientated education, where the sub competencies in personal, social, transformative, communicative, cross-cultural and instrumental fields are being expanded in synergy with each other as opposed to at the expense of each other.

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