UNIVERSITIES AND THE SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS

Drawing on a diverse array of case studies from universities around the world, this comprehensive book tackles the key challenges to progressing the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) within higher education institutions.
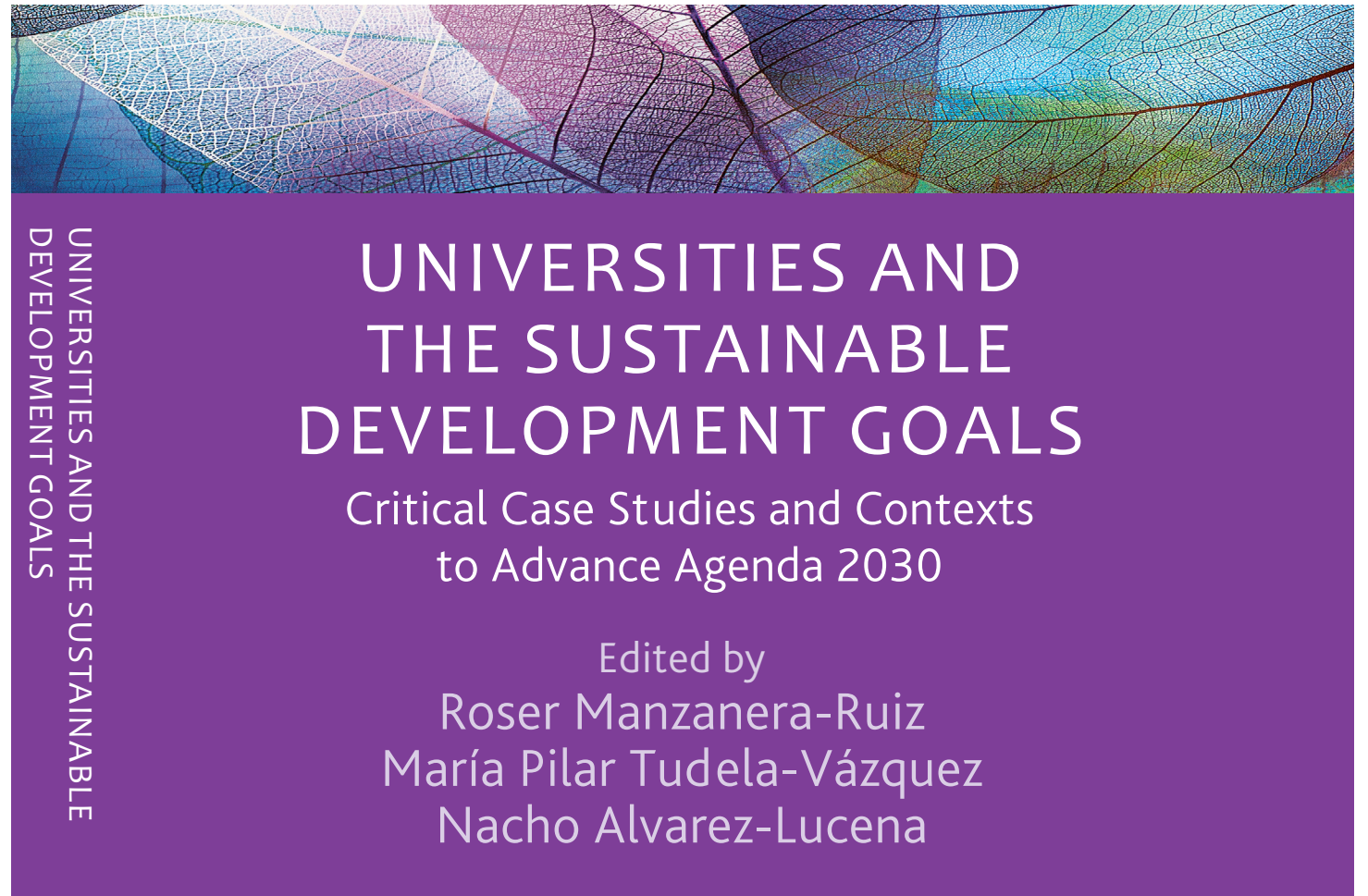
Expert authors provide an in-depth analysis of how universities in the Global North and South are engaging with and contributing to the SDGs, highlighting a wide range of approaches and experiences in different socio-economic and cultural contexts. This book examines the goal of the SDGs to expand on traditional ideas of development by emphasising broader, more inclusive and interconnected actions, as well as common difficulties faced by educational institutions attempting to achieve these aims. Chapters cover issues such as varying starting points for different countries, the involvement of civil society, the use of contextualised methods, and adaptability to changing global agendas.

Universities and the Sustainable Development Goals is an invaluable resource for university policymakers and those working in higher education institutions, as well as researchers and graduate students in fields such as gender studies, social work, sociology, anthropology and development. It will also be of interest to non–profit and third-sector organisations in international cooperation and development and government development agencies.

Roser Manzanera-Ruiz is in the Department of Sociology, **María Pilar Tudela-Vázquez** is in the Department of Social Work and Social Services and **Nacho Alvarez-Lucena** is in the Centre for Cooperation and Development Initiatives (CICODE), at the University of Granada, Spain.

UNIVERSITIES AND THE SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS

Critical Case Studies and Contexts to Advance Agenda 2030

Edited by
Roser Manzanera-Ruiz
María Pilar Tudela-Vázquez
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Universities and the Sustainable Development Goals

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PROGRESSING THE SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS SERIES

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Introduction to *Universities and the Sustainable Development Goals: critical case studies and contexts to advance Agenda 2030*

Roser Manzanera-Ruíz, María Pilar Tudela-Vázquez and Nacho Álvarez Lucena

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), launched by the United Nations in 2015, represent an ambitious and multifaceted agenda to address the world's most pressing challenges, from eradicating poverty to mitigating climate change. These goals replaced the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), which were in place from 2000 to 2015, and expanded both their scope and depth. The SDGs, as a benchmark for global development adopted by the United Nations in 2015, contain an ambitious global agenda that seeks to overcome and expand the traditional visions of development, through a broader and more complex agenda for action. This poses questions concerning the SDGs' different starting contexts and their complexities, the participation of different types of civil society organisations in the implementation of these actions, the universality of the methodologies to be used, and the capacity of the different stakeholders to adapt to changing international and global agendas.

Universities are positioned as key actors in promoting and achieving the SDGs. Through research, teaching and community collaboration, higher education institutions have the capacity to significantly influence the implementation of sustainable practices and the formation of a globally conscious and committed citizenry. This book is born out of a desire to shed light on some of these questions by placing the university at the centre as a main actor, based on experiences in different geographical, social, political and cultural spaces. In recent years, the alarm has been increasingly sounded about the negative impact of neoliberal management strategies on the university. Universities as higher education institutions are committed to the values of inclusion, equal opportunities, respect for people's diversity and sustainable development, which seem to be in opposition to neoliberal values. In this sense, we want to

identify and discuss the role and work being done in the context of universities located in diverse contexts in Europe, Latin America and Africa.

Currently, debates on the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in the university context are diverse and address multiple dimensions. Among the primary topics is the integration of the SDGs into academic programmes. There is an ongoing discussion on the best strategies to incorporate the SDGs into curricula, ensuring that students acquire knowledge and skills related to sustainability. Additionally, there is a focus on interdisciplinary education, emphasising the need for approaches that allow students to understand the complexity and interconnectedness of global issues.

In terms of research and development, debates centre on aligning research agendas with the SDGs and securing funding for projects that address global sustainable development issues. This also includes promoting the transfer of sustainable knowledge and technologies to the general society. Sustainable institutional management is another critical area, with discussions on implementing sustainable practices within university campuses, such as waste management, energy efficiency and sustainable mobility. There is also an emphasis on governance, highlighting the importance of committed leadership that promotes sustainability in all university operations.

Engagement with society and international collaboration is another significant topic. Universities are encouraged to collaborate with governments, NGOs, the private sector and other academic institutions to effectively implement the SDGs. This includes focusing on local communities, working together to address specific challenges, and promoting sustainable development at the local level.

Challenges and barriers are also a major point of discussion, particularly regarding the availability of the financial and human resources necessary to implement the SDGs in the university context. Methods to measure and evaluate the impact of university initiatives related to the SDGs are also being debated.

From a critical and reflective perspective, some academics question how neoliberal practices and structures within universities may conflict with sustainability goals. These reflections lead to discussions on rethinking the role of universities and how they can reinvent themselves to be more effective agents of change in promoting sustainable development.

These critical perspectives on this relationship reveal several inherent tensions and contradictions. Analytical concerns arise about the different starting contexts in which to pursue the SDGs, the feasibility of a universal methodology, the possibilities of the 2030 agenda to address the goals in a more transformative way, contributing to the re-politicisation of the development question among others, but also the need to identify and understand good practices that can drive forward a transformative university model. Additionally,

there is the issue of inequality in the ability of universities to contribute to the SDGs. Institutions in developed countries have resources and governmental support that facilitate research and sustainability initiatives, while many universities in the developing world face significant limitations in terms of funding, infrastructure and autonomy. This disparity calls into question the equity and effectiveness of a uniform global approach to SDG implementation.

Lastly, it should be taken into account that the relationship between the SDGs and universities needs to be analysed from the perspective of the co-optation of academia by corporate interests. The growing reliance of universities on private funding can influence research and teaching agendas, steering them away from a genuinely sustainable and public-oriented focus. This dynamic suggests the need for critical reflection on how universities can reconcile their commitment to the SDGs with their academic autonomy and public service mission.

The innovative feature of this book lies in its presentation of case analyses from countries spanning three continents. This approach accommodates a wide array of contexts and variations in university institutions, as well as social, economic and geographical settings. These diverse factors undoubtedly shape the methods used, the outcomes achieved and the challenges encountered in pursuit of the SDGs. The different roles of the university institution in diverse contexts are emphasised, not only based on its educational potential to empower individuals, students and university staff to address the sustainable development challenges set out in the 2030 Agenda, but also to transform society through the transfer of research results, discoveries, scientific findings, intellectual property (IP), technology, data or knowledge flowing between different stakeholders. Integrating the principles and goals of the 2030 Agenda in universities involves fostering an understanding of global challenges and promoting problem-solving skills related to sustainability.

In summary, while universities have a potentially crucial role in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals, it is imperative to address the criticisms and challenges associated with this relationship. Only through an honest and critical evaluation of these aspects can higher education advance towards a future that is truly just and sustainable. The university, as an institution of higher education, must critically and resolutely address both local and global problems, and its interaction is simultaneously a product of these issues. Additionally, it inherits the practices and knowledge from its various historical stages, cultures and natural environments. One of the emerging questions in this context is that while the university has been a strategic and central place for understanding and generating knowledge, and for studying and researching the major events that have marked human history, it has also provided viable and inclusive solutions to the problems arising from various crises.

In this book, we start from the conviction that any institution of higher education must be deeply committed to the needs of its social, cultural, economic and ecological environment, in collaboration with the involved actors. Therefore, the university, understood as a unified entity, can be considered an heir to universal knowledge, not just that classified as scientific. We hope that this book will contribute to an analysis of the SDGs, the role of universities in this regard, and good practices developed that can be applied in different contexts with significant social and cultural diversities and characteristics and implemented in the global context.

To achieve this, the book presents case studies from universities in both the Global North and Global South, explaining initiatives, experiences and results towards the implementation of the SDGs. In addition, with the aim of mobilising similar initiatives in other university contexts, this book sets out similar axes of development based on a critical analysis of these initiatives. Experiences from Europe, Latin America and Africa south of the Sahara, with cases from universities in Spain, Belgium, Italy and Bosnia, Chile, Brazil and Argentina, and from Tanzania and Mozambique, show the diverse and critical ways of improving progress towards achieving the SDGs.

This book contains a total of ten chapters, whose authors come from different countries and institutions of higher education. The voices included in the chapters represent a wide range of academic disciplines, such as development studies, social work, sociology, history, education and urban studies, among others. The contributions collected in this book have been organised in three parts.

The first part is titled 'Transforming the Vision of Committed Universities into Reality: The 2030 Global Agenda as a Window of Opportunity' and includes works aimed at providing a critical reflection on the role of universities in the realisation and development of the 2030 Agenda. In Chapter 1, 'An Agenda of Failures: A Critical Look at the 2030 Agenda from the Perspective of Social Movements', authors Pablo Saravia Ramos and Lía Pinheiro Barbosa discuss the 2030 Agenda as an international public policy instrument that appeals to traditional and well-known approaches to try to improve deep-rooted and structural global problems. In relation to SDG2 and SDG5, the figures released by the United Nations show the complete failure of the 2030 Agenda. The authors highlight how social movements analyse these failures, warning about the need for a structural and radical change in the food system in all its stages, and where agroecology is seen as the only viable alternative to advance full access to quality food and as an efficient tool in the control of the climate crisis. Chapter 2, 'Promoting Sustainable Development and Global Equality: Active and Participatory Contributions from Universities', written by Ana Merino Teruel and Piet Wostyn, emphasises the responsibility and capacity of the universities to contribute to the

achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Based on political, technical and scientific references, the authors propose participatory and action-oriented activities to promote critical thinking and social mobilisation as especially relevant for the promotion of the SDG target 4.7 in the academic community. In this chapter, they describe several inspirational examples from Andalusia (Spain) and Flanders (Belgium) of how universities are becoming allies to implement the 2030 Agenda. Chapter 3, 'The Modern Slavery-Free University: Lines of Action for a University Committed to the 2030 Agenda', discusses how to support the development of an ethically responsible university in the face of the current dynamics of modern slavery. The author Xènia Domínguez Font points out that the 2030 Agenda, in its SDG 8: Decent work and economic growth, specifically calls in target 8.7 for immediate and effective action to eradicate forced labour and end contemporary forms of slavery and human trafficking. This represents an opportunity for governments and their public administrations, including universities, to address, from a policy coherence approach, the nature of modern-day slavery, and where responsibility for its perpetuation lies. Finally, this first part closes with Chapter 4, 'Envisioning a University in Tanzania: How the University of Dar Es Salaam has Metamorphosed Amidst a Changing World', written by Samwel Mhajida, who traces the history of the emergence, independence and reforms of the University in Tanzania with the aim of showing how the vision and objectives of this institution connect with those of the 2030 Agenda.

The second part, 'Revisiting the 2030 Agenda: Civil Society and Alliances' Perspectives on Sustainable Development, consists of three chapters. In Chapter 5, 'Energy Colonialism and Climate Justice: Territorial Conflicts and Sustainable Development Goals in the Global South and North', Josefa Sánchez Contreras and Alberto Matarán Ruiz analyse the limits and scope of the Sustainable Development Goals (7, 10 and 13) through the study of the deployment of renewable energy megaprojects in the indigenous territories of the Isthmus of Tehuantepec, Oaxaca (Mexico), and the rural territories of the province of Granada (Spain). With this empirical analysis, the authors debate the subject of energy colonialism and its relationship with the capitalist economic system in a context of deep energy crises and climate emergency. Chapter 6, 'Violence and the Economy: Alternatives for Meeting the Needs of all People and Achieving the SDGs' by Jorge Guardiola Wanden-Berghe and Nazaret Ibáñez, reflects on the similarities between the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), scientific models that analyse the satisfaction of human needs, as well as on Mahatma Gandhi's concept of sarvodaya (welfare for all); and Chapter 7, 'Gender Equality in Argentine Public Universities: From the Streets to the Classrooms and from the Classrooms to University Policies (2015–2023)' by Paloma Dulbecco and Ana Laura Azparren, focuses on a multilevel analysis of several organisational initiatives and experiences

around the fifth SDG, gender equality, that have taken place in the Argentine public universities since 2015. From a critical perspective, the authors provide three examples to show the implications of the institutionalisation of many of the demands raised in the streets by the feminist movement.

The last part, titled 'Case Studies and Good Practices Towards Building a University Committed to a Transformative 2030 Agenda', includes three chapters and is dedicated to presenting concrete proposals on how the contents of the 2030 Agenda are being implemented. Chapter 8, 'The University and the Challenge of Refugee Inclusion in the Framework of the 2030 Agenda', written by Nacho Álvarez Lucena and María Virtudes Martín Fernández, identifies the potentialities of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development to recognise the positive contribution of migrants to transit and host societies, and addresses through its objectives the relationship between human mobility, inclusive growth and sustainable development. In this chapter, in addition to reflecting on the relationship between the SDGs, migration and the right to asylum, the authors explore the role that universities can play in favour of the reception and effective inclusion of refugees, by taking ownership of the 2030 Agenda and assuming the commitments made. Chapter 9, 'Tackling Racism in Europe from the University: The Experience of the European Project FORUM', written by María Pilar Tudela-Vázquez and Nacho Álvarez Lucena, examines the problem of racism in the European Union and highlights the importance of universities leading initiatives for its elimination. The authors draw on the experience gained through the European project FORUM: Intercultural Dialogue and Citizen Participation against the Stigmatization of Migrants and Refugees, which is aligned with the United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the SDGs directly and indirectly related to combating racism or ethnic-racial discrimination and to the rights of migrants and refugees. Chapter 10, 'Informal Learning as a Tool for Architecture Education from Parameters of Sustainability and Social Responsibility' by Fco. Javier Castellano-Pulido, Emina Zejnilovic, Erna Husukic and Lorenzo, presents a series of educational strategies implemented in recent years at some architecture schools in Spain, Italy, and Bosnia and Herzegovina. These institutions have turned to non-formal learning techniques to overcome certain limitations that university structures face when promoting architecture education from a perspective of social and environmental responsibility. This text aims to reveal different methodologies for successful case development through educational innovation, which have transcended the boundaries of traditional teaching, sometimes through experiences outside the classroom, allowing for a more effective understanding of the social and environmental dynamics of local and global spaces.

This book was conceived as part of a broad reflection on the global challenges for the achievement of the 2030 Agenda in university contexts on the

part of the university community, but also on how the SDGs are an opportunity to promote university ideals. In this sense it is aimed primarily at educational agents in higher education, designers of educational, social and development policies, and development technicians in public institutions and civil society and third sector organisations.