



EMBEDDING SUSTAINABILITY INTO JOURNALISM AND TOURISM CURRICULA: A CROSS-COUNTRY ANALYSIS FROM EUROPE AND UZBEKISTAN

Adam Jagiello

Rusilowski, PhD, Politechnika Koszalin, PL



Abstract

Sustainability is becoming an increasingly essential consideration in higher education, particularly in fields such as journalism and tourism. Media professionals influence public discourse on sustainability, while tourism has a significant impact on the environment and local communities. This study examines how sustainability principles are integrated into journalism education in Europe and tourism programs in Uzbekistan, drawing insights from the SUMED project, research findings from Poland, Malta, Finland, and Spain, as well as sustainability initiatives in Uzbek universities. The findings reveal that effective integration of sustainability into curricula requires comprehensive curriculum redesign, faculty training, collaboration with industry stakeholders, and the active engagement of students. The study further identifies best practices and challenges in sustainability education and offers recommendations for its enhancement.

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INTRODUCTION

Sustainability has become a defining issue in the 21st century, influencing various sectors, including media and tourism. Journalism has the power to shape public opinion on sustainability, but journalists often lack the necessary training to report on environmental and social issues effectively. Meanwhile, the tourism industry, particularly in developing economies such as Uzbekistan, must balance economic growth with environmental conservation and community well-being.

This study investigates the ways in which sustainability is embedded into journalism and tourism education. It analyzes the SUMED project's efforts in European journalism programs, explores sustainability integration in tourism curricula in Uzbekistan, and examines the approaches adopted in four European countries—Poland, Malta, Finland, and Spain. The goal of this research is to identify best practices, challenges, and potential pathways for strengthening sustainability education in these fields.

METHODOLOGY

This study draws on a variety of sources to assess the integration of sustainability in media and tourism programs at universities in the four selected European countries and in Uzbekistan. The research process involved the following steps:

- 1 **Identifying Universities:** To identify universities offering media and tourism programs, we utilized online databases such as MastersPortal and Educations.com, along with individual university websites. These sources provided comprehensive lists of universities and their program offerings.
- 2 **Examining Program Details:** We examined program details on university websites and program brochures to identify how sustainability is embedded in the curriculum. This involved analyzing course descriptions, learning outcomes, and program objectives.
- 3 **Reviewing Research Papers:** We reviewed research papers and articles on sustainability in media and tourism education in the four countries using academic databases such as JSTOR, Google Scholar, and ResearchGate. These sources provided insights into the current state of sustainability in these sectors and the challenges and opportunities related to its integration in education.
- 4 **Identifying Organizations:** We identified initiatives and organizations promoting sustainability in media and tourism education through online searches and by exploring the websites of relevant organizations. This included governmental agencies, non-profit organizations, and industry associations.
- 5 **Analyzing Examples:** We analyzed examples of how sustainability is being taught in media and tourism programs by reviewing university websites, course materials, and case studies. This provided insights into the specific approaches and methods used to incorporate sustainability into education.
- 6 **Assessing Impact:** We gathered information on the impact of sustainability education on media and tourism students by reviewing research papers, student testimonials, and reports from organizations promoting sustainability. This helped us understand how sustainability education is influencing students' attitudes, behaviors, and career choices.
The data collected included information from university websites, academic publications, reports from organizations promoting sustainability, articles on sustainable tourism practices as well as my own research within the aforementioned SUMED project.



SUSTAINABILITY IN JOURNALISM EDUCATION:

Insights from the SUMED Project

The SUMED (Sustainable Multidimensional Media Contents) project¹⁶, which involves European universities from Poland, Spain, Malta, and Finland, seeks to integrate sustainability into journalism and media education. Recognizing the role of journalists in shaping public attitudes toward environmental and social issues, the project highlights the need for training programs that equip future media professionals with sustainability literacy.

2.1 Approaches to Integrating Sustainability in Journalism Programs

One of the key strategies promoted by SUMED is the redesign of curricula to incorporate sustainability-focused courses within journalism programs. Universities involved in the project have introduced new courses specifically dedicated to environmental journalism, while also embedding sustainability principles into existing courses on media ethics, investigative journalism, and digital storytelling.

Faculty training and professional development have also emerged as critical components of sustainability integration. Several universities have implemented training sessions and workshops to familiarize educators with sustainability issues, enabling them to effectively convey these concepts to students. Moreover, partnerships between academia and industry have been established to ensure that students gain hands-on experience in sustainability reporting. Media organizations that specialize in climate and environmental journalism have collaborated with universities to provide real-world case studies and internship opportunities for students.

The SUMED project has further emphasized the importance of student engagement in sustainability education. Journalism students are increasingly encouraged to undertake investigative projects that explore environmental and social justice issues. By applying multimedia storytelling techniques, students are able to convey complex sustainability topics to broader audiences, making their work both educational and impactful.

2.2 Challenges in Implementing Sustainability in Journalism Education

Despite the promising initiatives introduced through SUMED, several challenges hinder the full integration of sustainability into journalism curricula. Many journalism educators lack specialized knowledge in sustainability topics, making faculty training an ongoing necessity. Additionally, the fast-evolving nature of media technology and industry practices poses difficulties in continuously updating course content. Institutional barriers also persist, as universities often require extensive administrative approval processes before introducing new courses or modifying existing ones.

Nevertheless, the SUMED project demonstrates that integrating sustainability into journalism education is both necessary and feasible. With the right combination of curriculum innovation, faculty development, and industry collaboration, future journalists can be better equipped to report on sustainability issues with accuracy and depth.

SUSTAINABILITY IN TOURISM EDUCATION:

The Case of Uzbekistan Tourism plays a crucial role in Uzbekistan's economic development, yet rapid expansion in this sector raises concerns regarding its environmental and social impact. In response, several Uzbek universities have taken significant steps toward embedding sustainability principles into tourism curricula, ensuring that future professionals are trained to manage the industry responsibly.

¹⁶ <https://sumed-project.eu/>



3.1 Approaches to Integrating Sustainability in Tourism Education

Higher education institutions in Uzbekistan have introduced specialized tourism programs that emphasize sustainability. The Silk Road International University of Tourism and Kokand University, for example, offer degrees that incorporate courses on environmental conservation, sustainable destination management, and eco-tourism. These programs seek to instill a strong awareness of sustainability challenges and equip students with the skills needed to implement sustainable tourism strategies.

Research efforts have also contributed to sustainability integration in Uzbek tourism education. Studies on eco-accommodation practices, carbon-conscious tourism, and heritage conservation along the Silk Road have provided valuable insights for academia and industry. These research initiatives not only enhance academic knowledge but also serve as a foundation for policymaking in sustainable tourism development. Beyond curriculum and research, several universities in Uzbekistan have engaged in collaborative projects aimed at promoting sustainable tourism practices. The European Union-funded MOST Project, for instance, focuses on implementing green certification standards and eco-labeling to encourage environmentally responsible tourism businesses. Additionally, Uzbek universities have launched online ecotourism courses for professionals in the tourism sector, ensuring that sustainability knowledge extends beyond academic institutions.

To enhance sustainability education further, many tourism programs in Uzbekistan emphasize experiential learning. Universities have partnered with local communities to develop sustainable tourism initiatives, allowing students to gain first-hand experience in eco-friendly tourism planning and management. These collaborations foster a sense of responsibility among students while providing practical solutions for sustainability challenges in the tourism industry.

3.2 Challenges in Implementing Sustainability in Tourism Education

Despite these positive developments, Uzbek universities still face challenges in fully integrating sustainability into tourism education. Limited financial and infrastructural resources make it difficult for institutions to expand sustainability-focused programs. Faculty members often require additional training to stay informed about the latest developments in sustainable tourism. Moreover, existing tourism policies and industry practices do not always align with sustainability goals, creating further obstacles for the effective implementation of sustainable tourism education.

Nevertheless, the increasing emphasis on sustainability in tourism curricula, coupled with growing industry collaborations, signals a positive trajectory for the future of sustainable tourism education in Uzbekistan.

4. Sustainability Education in Poland, Malta, Finland, and Spain

To provide a broader perspective on sustainability education, this study also examines the approaches taken by universities in Poland, Malta, Finland, and Spain.

In Poland, sustainability is progressively being integrated into tourism and media programs. Institutions such as the University of Wroclaw and Vistula University have developed courses focusing on sustainable tourism and media ethics. Research has shown that environmental sustainability in media messages influences public trust in tourism businesses, demonstrating the need for responsible media reporting on sustainability. INNOCAMP.PL, as a key partner in the SUMED project, is actively contributing to the integration of sustainability into journalism education in Poland. Its primary role involves designing innovative educational approaches that embed sustainability principles into media curricula, ensuring that future journalists are equipped to address environmental and social challenges in their reporting. INNOCAMP.PL working under the umbrella of ASHOKA¹⁷ facilitates faculty training sessions, providing journalism educators with the knowledge and pedagogical tools to incorporate sustainability into their courses. Additionally, the organization fosters collaborations between universities, media companies, and sustainability-driven initiatives, allowing students to gain hands-on experience in environmentally

¹⁷ www.ashoka.org - the 5th most impactful NGO in the world

responsible journalism. By promoting interdisciplinary learning, INNOCAMP.PL encourages journalism students to engage with topics such as climate change, corporate social responsibility, and ethical media practices. The impact of these efforts is evident in the growing emphasis on sustainability literacy within Polish journalism education, equipping graduates with the skills to produce media content that fosters awareness and positive social change.

Malta has also taken steps toward integrating sustainability into higher education. The University of Malta has hosted intensive programs on tourism sustainability, mostly as part of SUMED project. Through specialized training sessions, educators are equipped with the tools to incorporate sustainability topics into journalism and digital media courses. The University of Malta also fosters practical learning by engaging with media organizations and sustainability-focused enterprises, offering students internships and project-based (service) learning opportunities. Research initiatives at the university examine how media can be leveraged to promote environmental awareness and responsible reporting. By emphasizing sustainability literacy and ethical media practices, the University of Malta is preparing future media professionals to contribute to a more sustainable and socially responsible media landscape. Middlesex University Malta includes sustainability education in its tourism and events management curriculum. Despite these efforts, Malta still faces challenges in fully embedding sustainability across all institutions.

Finland is widely regarded as a leader in sustainability education. Finnish universities have integrated sustainability into all degree programs, and sustainability literacy has become a key educational priority. Tourism students in Finland receive training in sustainable destination management and low-carbon travel, while media students explore sustainability through digital media courses. Finland has emerged as a leader in sustainable tourism, and this commitment is reflected in its higher education institutions. Universities in Finland have integrated sustainability into their curriculum, research initiatives, and campus practices. The University of Helsinki has a strong focus on sustainability, incorporating it into its content and highlighting sustainable travel tips and responsible businesses ¹⁷. The university also promotes ecological sustainability by reducing its carbon footprint and promoting sustainable water use ¹⁸.

Furthermore, the concept of sustainability literacy is gaining traction in Finland. Sustainability literacy refers to the knowledge, skills, and attitudes necessary to understand and address sustainability challenges ³. This concept emphasizes the need for individuals to be able to critically analyze information, make informed decisions, and take action to promote sustainability. The University of Jyväskylä is committed to promoting sustainable development and moving towards a sustainable future ¹⁹. The university has a roadmap to planetary well-being that guides its operations and has been awarded the WWF Green Office Certificate.

Tampere University aims to become carbon neutral by 2030 and has integrated sustainable development into all its degree programs ²⁰. The university also conducts research on sustainable tourism mobility, cooperating with tourism attractions and companies to develop low-carbon mobility options for visitors. LUT University is committed to the UN Sustainable Development Goals and promotes sustainability through campus life, research, education, and stakeholder work ²². The university aims to become carbon neutral and actively participates in international campus networks that promote sustainable development. Overall, Finnish universities demonstrate a strong commitment to sustainability in their media and tourism programs, incorporating it into their curriculum, research, and campus practices.

In Spain, sustainability is increasingly incorporated into university curricula. CEU Cardenal Herrera University integrates sustainability into journalism education, while tourism programs emphasize responsible tourism practices and eco-certifications. The Universitat Politècnica de València (UPV) plays a key role in the SUMED (Sustainable Multidimensional Media Contents) project, integrating sustainability into media education through curriculum development, faculty training, and industry collaboration. UPV has revised existing courses and introduced new modules focusing on sustainable media practices while equipping educators with the necessary pedagogical tools. The university also emphasizes sustainability in media production, advocating for carbon-conscious practices and responsible digital consumption.

Through partnerships with industry stakeholders, UPV provides students with real-world experience in sustainable media, offering internships and research opportunities. Additionally, the university actively explores how media influences sustainability discourse, aiming to enhance responsible journalism and ethical reporting on environmental issues, counter-acting the prevailing green washing. While technological advancements pose challenges for curriculum adaptation, SUMED enables UPV to foster a new generation of media professionals who are both technically proficient and environmentally aware, contributing to a more sustainable media landscape. Spain's national policies on sustainability further support the education sector in embedding sustainability into academic programs.

One key insight is that the level of integration of sustainability varies significantly across countries. Finland appears to be a leader in this area, with a strong commitment to sustainability evident in its higher education institutions, tourism organizations, and national policies. In contrast, Poland and Malta are still in the early stages of integrating sustainability, although there are promising initiatives underway. Spain falls somewhere in between, with some universities demonstrating a strong commitment to sustainability while others have yet to fully incorporate it into their programs.

Another key insight is that there is a growing emphasis on sustainability literacy in media and tourism education. This concept highlights the need for students to develop the knowledge, skills, and attitudes necessary to understand and address sustainability challenges. Universities are increasingly incorporating sustainability literacy into their curricula through specialized courses, experiential learning opportunities, and collaborations with industry partners.

The findings, especially from SUMED project analyses, highlight the importance of collaboration and partnerships in promoting sustainability. Universities are working with tourism organizations, governmental agencies, and non-profit organizations to develop and implement sustainable practices. These collaborations provide students with real-world experience and help to ensure that sustainability initiatives are aligned with industry needs and national priorities.

5. Conclusion and Recommendations

The findings from this study illustrate that sustainability education in journalism and tourism varies across regions, with some countries demonstrating more comprehensive integration than others. While Uzbekistan is making progress in embedding sustainability in tourism curricula, European countries such as Finland, Poland and Spain have more advanced sustainability education models. Times Higher Education Impact Rankings¹⁸ clearly demonstrate that universities all over the world play a crucial role in shaping future professionals and leaders who can contribute to a more sustainable future, including the media and tourism industries. By incorporating sustainability into their programs, universities can empower students to become responsible actors who can address the environmental and social challenges facing these sectors. In 2003 University of Gdansk (partner in SUMED project) ranked number one in Europe as the greenest campus but also as the emerging leader of embedding sustainable media content and means of production into curricula. The ranking coincides with UG's pioneering role as the European ASHOKA U changemakers' campus¹⁹ (certificate of JCC) and gender equity. As the Global Officer of THE, Phil Baty argues²⁰ that SDG's-based rankings "shine a light on best practices, give visibility to the many ways universities make a difference in society, provide data-driven insights to support new collaborations around the delivery of the goals and promote a sustainable future for all".

While both journalism and tourism education in Europe and Uzbekistan are integrating sustainability, they differ in several aspects:

¹⁸ <https://www.timeshighereducation.com/impactrankings>

¹⁹ <https://ashokau.org/changemaker-campus-designation>

²⁰ <https://socialinnovationsjournal.com/index.php/sij/article/view/9024>

Aspect	Journalism Education (Europe)	Tourism Education (Uzbekistan)
Focus	Sustainability in media reporting and production	Sustainable tourism development and operations
Key Strategies	Curriculum redesign, faculty training, industry collaboration	Degree specialization, research, industry partnerships
Challenges	Lack of awareness, media industry constraints	Limited resources, capacity-building needs
Success Factors	Interdisciplinary learning, partnerships with media organizations	Government support, international collaborations

The research highlights the potential of ecotourism as a foundation for future tourism growth in Uzbekistan and Central Asia, emphasizing the need for environmentally responsible practices. Moreover, the collaborative efforts between universities and various stakeholders, including government agencies and international organizations, demonstrate a commitment to integrating sustainable practices across urban landscapes and promoting responsible tourism development. By continuing to prioritize sustainable tourism, Uzbek universities can play a crucial role in shaping the future of the tourism sector in the country. They can contribute to creating a tourism industry that not only generates economic benefits but also preserves cultural heritage, protects the environment, and empowers local communities. The recommendations provided in this article offer a roadmap for universities to further enhance their contributions to sustainable tourism and ensure that Uzbekistan remains a vibrant and sustainable tourist destination for years to come.

Both disciplines: journalism and tourism emphasize the importance of curriculum innovation, faculty training, and industry collaboration in integrating sustainability effectively. In order to enhance sustainability integration in both journalism and tourism education, universities must prioritize curriculum development, faculty training, and industry collaboration. Expanding sustainability-focused courses and interdisciplinary programs will ensure that students acquire the necessary knowledge and skills. Universities should also invest in professional development initiatives for educators, enabling them to effectively teach sustainability concepts.

Furthermore, stronger partnerships between academia, industry, and policymakers will be essential in aligning sustainability education with real-world applications. By fostering interdisciplinary learning and promoting sustainability literacy, journalism and tourism graduates will be better prepared to contribute to a more sustainable future in their respective industries.



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