

Public administration education - building a sustainable future: an analysis of Romanian students' perspectives.

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This research focuses on the importance of public administration education in promoting a sustainable future. The aim of this research is to analyze the perspective of Romanian students regarding the importance of public administration education in building a sustainable future. The research aims to identify the skills development priorities needed to meet current challenges and help promote sustainable development and innovation in the public sector.

The methodology used in this research consisted of an online survey, in which students from different specialized faculties in Romania participated. The results were analyzed using a combination of statistical and analytical methods. The main findings of the research show that Romanian students believe that public administration education is important in promoting a sustainable future. They believe that public administration education should focus more on developing skills such as resource management, sustainable development, crisis management and community development. Also, most respondents believe that it would be beneficial to have more opportunities for practice and internships in the public sector.

Limitations of the research include the fact that the survey was conducted only among students in Romania and cannot be generalized globally. The research also did not include an analysis of the perspective of employers and public sector professionals.

This research contributes to the development of knowledge about the importance of public administration education in promoting a sustainable future. Also, the results of this study can be useful for educational institutions and public sector decision makers in developing educational and training programs suitable for current market needs.

Keyword: public administration education, sustainable development, skills, public sector, students.

Introduction

Education in public administration is a critical factor in shaping the future of societies, especially in terms of developing and maintaining sustainable governance systems (Radulescu et al., 2020). The importance of education in public administration is particularly relevant in emerging economies (Burlacu, Angheluta et al., 2021), where governments strive to establish effective and

efficient public institutions that can address pressing societal challenges (Angheluta et al. 2021). Romania is a prime example of such an emerging economy, where there is a growing need for well-trained public administration personnel who can manage complex public issues, implement reforms, and promote sustainable development (Burlacu et al., 2018; Burlacu, Pargaru et al., 2022).

This research paper examines Romanian students' perspectives on public administration education and its role in building a sustainable future. Through a combination of surveys and interviews, we seek to gain a deeper understanding of how students perceive the relevance and effectiveness of their public administration education in preparing them for future careers in the field. By shedding light on these perspectives, we aim to provide insights that can inform the development of effective public administration educational policies and programs that are geared towards creating a more sustainable future.

Literature review

An in-depth and varied perspective on education for sustainable development (ESD) in various contexts, with a focus on higher education, is provided by the literature review from the perspective of education in public administration for building a sustainable future. The significance of ESD in preparing students for a sustainable future and the role played by higher education institutions in promoting sustainability through their policies and practices are two major themes that come to light.

With an emphasis on Romanian students in economics and business, Badea et al. (2020) and Piroasca et al. (2020) investigate the effect of ESD on student attitudes and behavior towards sustainability. Their research indicates that exposure to ESD can have a large impact on how students perceive sustainability and behave. This finding highlights how crucial it is to incorporate sustainability ideas into the curriculum of various subjects to encourage sustainable behavior.

According to Păvăloaia et al. (2019), public administration is essential for promoting sustainability and ESD would be a major challenge for imagining the future of our societies. The authors emphasize the importance of including education for sustainable development in professional training in public administration to ensure that they are provided with the necessary knowledge and skills to support sustainable development.

A bibliometric analysis of ESD research is presented by Novo-Corti et al. (2018) and Grossek et al. (2019). While Grossek et al. (2019) review research on education for sustainable development

from 1992 to 2018, Novo-Corti et al. (2018) focuses on a pilot study on ESD in Romanian economic higher education. Both studies highlight the multidisciplinary nature, development and perspectives of ESD, as well as the demand for a comprehensive strategy to promote sustainability in higher education.

To assess stakeholder perceptions of sustainable development in higher education institutions, Pedro et al. (2020) take an intellectual capital approach. In higher education institutions, the study argues that intellectual capital – including human, structural and relational capital – plays a critical role in promoting sustainable development.

Manasia et al. (2019) investigate the degree of preparation of Romanian teachers to support ESD in their future courses. The study highlights the need for pre-service teacher education programs to incorporate ESD concepts into their curricula and identifies key elements of teacher preparation for ESD.

Santinha et al. (2021) investigate the motivational factors that influence the career decisions of public sector employees based on their previous entry-level perceptions. The study argues that personal values and social responsibility are important factors in attracting people to careers in the public sector, highlighting the importance of encouraging sustainability and social responsibility in public sector organisations.

Overall, the literature review from these sources highlights the multidisciplinary nature of ESD, the importance of encouraging sustainable behavior and the need for a comprehensive strategy to encourage sustainability in higher education institutions and elsewhere.

On the topic of sustainable development in public administration, especially in higher education, other sources provide a varied and multidisciplinary perspective. Thus, sustainable development in public administration and its practical applications are the main themes of Leuenberger's (2015; 2006) works. They argue that public officials must play a significant role in promoting sustainability through legislation and day-to-day operations. Implementing sustainable development in public administration, according to Bartle and Leuenberger (2006), requires a change in the way public administration workers think and behave.

In their 1999 article, Hopkins and McKeown emphasize the value of education for sustainable development, particularly in higher education institutions. They argue that by encouraging critical thinking and creative problem-solving skills, education is an important factor in promoting sustainable development.

In their 2012 study, Glemarec and Puppim de Oliveira examined how public institutions can support sustainable development. They argue that through effective governance, public institutions can play a special role in influencing the political environment and stimulating sustainable development.

The relationship between neoliberalism, new public management and the sustainable development agenda in higher education is examined by Bessant, Robinson and Ormerod (2015). They argue that although these three ideas are often at odds with each other, there are cases where they can work together to promote sustainable development.

Burlacu et al. (2021) discuss how digital public administration can help promote sustainable development. They argue that promoting sustainable development can be helped by using digital technologies to encourage accountability, transparency, and citizen participation in decision-making.

"Green jobs" are a measure of public management and sustainable development, according to Sulich and Zema (2018). They argue that green jobs can be used to promote sustainable growth, reduce environmental damage, and promote social inclusion, in addition to encouraging economic expansion.

An in-depth overview of higher education for sustainable development is provided by Barth, Michelsen, Rieckmann and Thomas (2015). They analyze the main ideas, rules, and strategies for promoting sustainable development in academic environments.

In his 2017 article, McDonald explores the challenges and recent developments in engaging citizens for sustainable development in public administration. They argue that citizen participation is essential to promoting sustainable development and that creative methods of participation can enhance the effectiveness of sustainability initiatives.

In their 2019 study, Volchik, Zhuk, Oganessian, and Abrham examine the institutional development and long-term growth of higher education in transition economies. They argue that while higher education institutions in these economies face special opportunities and challenges in promoting sustainable development, there are lessons to be learned from effective programs in other contexts. Taken together, these sources provide a varied and interdisciplinary perspective on sustainable development in public administration, particularly in the context of higher education. In promoting sustainable development, they emphasize the critical roles played by public administrators, education, governance, citizen engagement and digital technologies. In addition, they emphasize

the need for creative and cooperative strategies to promote sustainability, as well as the importance of considering the specific opportunities and challenges of different contexts.

All the sources mentioned refer to the idea of sustainable development in higher education or public administration, and they all cover how the idea of sustainable development can be applied in real-world settings. Neoliberalism and public management in the context of the sustainable development agenda are discussed, as well as the effects of digital technologies on public administration and sustainable development. Other topics covered include the role of public institutions in promoting sustainable development and education for sustainable development.

Overall, these sources suggest that public institutions, education and lifelong learning, innovation, and technology can help achieve sustainable development in public administration and higher education. However, it is also emphasized that sustainable development cannot be achieved solely through public policies and instead calls for the proactive and responsible participation of all relevant parties, including the public and the business community.

Methodology

This research article aims to explore Romanian students' perspectives on public administration education and its role in building a sustainable future. To achieve this objective, a mixed research methodology was used. The quantitative research was based on the opinion poll based on an online questionnaire addressed to students in Romania. This was doubled by qualitative research that consisted of focus group discussions with students enrolled in public administration programs at Romanian universities.

The sample for this study was made up of bachelor's and master's students from different specializations of the Bucharest University of Economic Studies selected by purposive sampling. The participants were chosen based on their enrollment in public administration programs and their willingness to participate in the study.

Data were collected through two focus-group discussions (one for undergraduate and one for master's students), each lasting approximately 45 minutes, conducted in person or online, depending on the participants' preferences.

The data analysis involved a thematic analysis approach, where the transcribed data were organized and analyzed to identify recurring themes and patterns in the participants' responses. The analysis involved several steps, including familiarization with the data, coding, and theme development.

The coding process involved identifying units of meaning in the data and assigning descriptive labels to them. These codes were then grouped into broader themes based on their similarity and relevance to the research questions. The themes were further refined and defined through an iterative process of comparison and discussion among the research team.

The final stage of the analysis involved interpreting the themes in relation to the research questions and the existing literature on public administration education. The findings were presented in a narrative format, using quotes from the participants to illustrate the themes and their meanings.

Overall, the use of a qualitative methodology and focus group discussions enabled us to explore Romanian students' perspectives on public administration education and gain an in-depth understanding of their experiences and perceptions. The thematic analysis approach allowed us to identify key themes and patterns in the data, providing insights into the effectiveness of public administration education in preparing students for a career in the field and building a sustainable future.

Findings

To begin with, I launched an online questionnaire at <https://forms.gle/TQ5yyiXRC9KtY3kh7> It was available approx. 2 weeks in which answers were recorded from 104 respondents. Over 60% of them were from the Public Administration specialization.

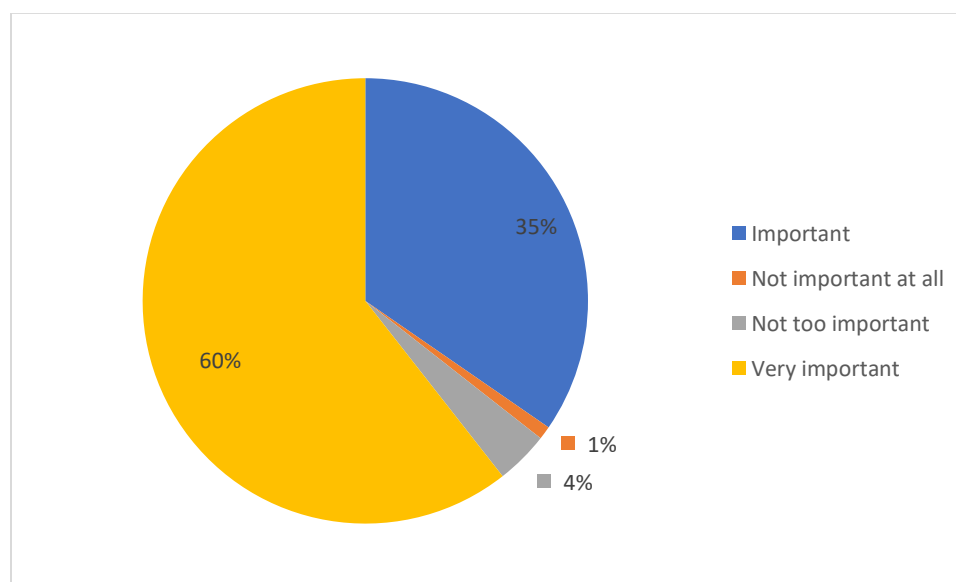


Figure 1. Students' views on public administration education's role in sustainable development

Based on Figure 1, it appears that the majority of respondents believe that education in public administration is very important in promoting sustainable development. Only a small percentage of respondents consider it not very important or not at all important. There are several reasons why some may think that public administration education is not very important in promoting sustainable development.

One reason could be that there is a concern that the sustainable development approach might be too expensive or negatively affect the economy. These people may believe that public administration should focus on economic growth and job creation rather than sustainable development.

Another reason could be that some people believe that sustainable development is more of an environmental problem than a public administration one, and that solutions should be developed and implemented by environmental specialists.

In addition, some people may consider that there are other areas of public administration that are more important than sustainable development, such as public services or tax administration.

In any case, it is important to recognize that education in public administration plays an important role in promoting sustainable development and that addressing sustainable development is a multidisciplinary matter involving collaboration between different areas of expertise, including public administration.

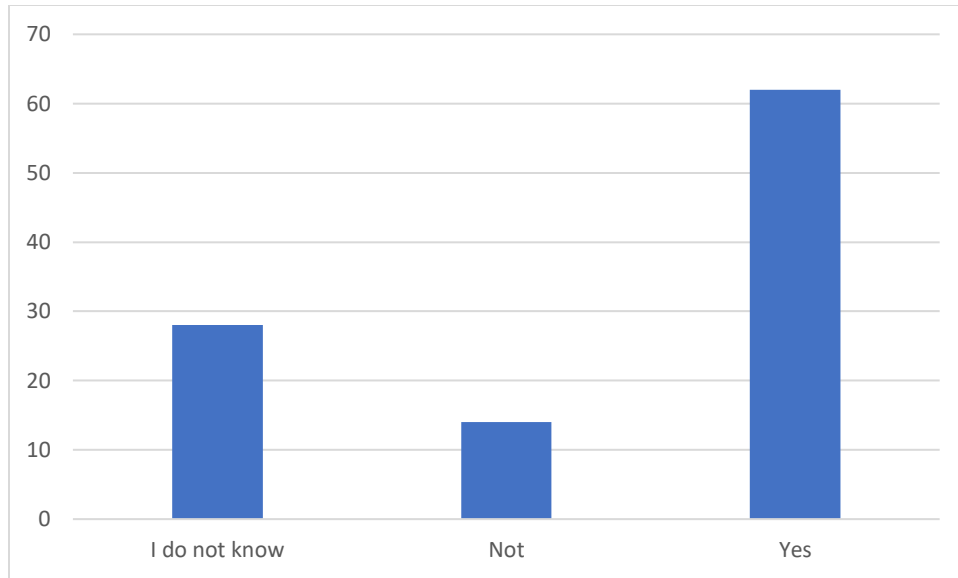


Figure 2. Intention to Pursue a Career in the Public Sector

After analyzing the answers highlighted in figure 2, we can see that 67% of the respondents want to work in the public sector, which shows the desire of young people to serve the community and develop society. It is encouraging that a significant part of the response considered that education in public administration is important or very important for promoting sustainable development, demonstrating the importance of the sustainable approach in public administration.

Although a significant percentage of respondents answered "Don't know" about pursuing a career in the public sector, this could indicate an openness to exploring other career options or a need for more information to make a better decision. The small percentage of respondents who answered negatively about pursuing a profession in the public sector may be due to individual career preferences rather than a lack of interest in community development.

The increase that the vast majority of respondents are employed and aware of the need for a career in the public sector and education in public administration for sustainable development.

The findings of this study indicate that Romanian students in public administration programs hold diverse perspectives on the role of public administration education in building a sustainable future. Regarding the degree of trust that the respondents have in the public authorities in Romania regarding the management of social and economic issues, it was found that many people have a moderate level of trust in these authorities, but there is also a significant number of people who have a level of confidence. In addition, there are some respondents who have a high level of confidence. It is important to note that these opinions are subjective and may not reflect the general sentiment of the entire population of Romania. It is also worth noting that trust in public authorities

can be influenced by various factors, such as previous experiences, political affiliations, media coverage and personal beliefs.

An analysis of the answers to the open questions, we can say that, from the perspective of the respondents, public authorities should undertake various actions to encourage the involvement of young people in building a sustainable future. Some suggestions include removing the seniority required for public sector employment, being more communicative, creating more interesting opportunities, presenting the consequences of inaction, holding workshops and meetings, offering internships, providing more information and opportunities for advancement, and partnership with students to educate them.

Other ideas presented by respondents include promoting the importance of politics in public administration, reducing bureaucracy, digitizing public services, motivating young people, creating compulsory activities, offering better-paid jobs and implementing programs in education. In general, respondents believe that public authorities need to show more interest and involvement in addressing social and environmental issues, as well as invest more in education and provide resources for young people to become more involved in building a sustainable future.

From the answers received, it can be observed, however, that the respondents indicate several important social and economic problems that Romania is currently facing. These include high inflation, corruption, bureaucracy, lack of investment in education, declining birth rates, rural-urban disparities, lack of young staff, school dropouts, lack of financial literacy, discrimination, poor infrastructure and labor exploitation. These problems can have a negative impact on the country's sustainable development and undermine social stability.

To clarify the students' opinions regarding public administration education to build a sustainable future, we resorted to two focus groups. The questions addressed to the students in the focus groups were the following:

1. What is your opinion on the relevance of the curriculum in public administration education for building a sustainable future?
2. Do you think the education plan adequately prepares you for a career in public administration?
3. What do you think about the importance of practical experience in public administration education for building a sustainable future?
4. Do you think you had enough opportunities for internships, volunteering, and practical projects during your studies?

5. Do you think the development of practical skills such as resource management, sustainable development and crisis management is important for public administration education?
6. What do you think about the development of soft skills such as communication, teamwork and problem solving in public administration education?
7. How do you evaluate the quality of teaching in public administration education?
8. Do you think the teachers are sufficiently trained to adequately prepare you for a career in public administration?
9. Do you think there are enough professional development opportunities for public administration education students?
10. Do you think more training, workshops and networking opportunities are needed to prepare you for the changing market demands in public administration?

From the discussions held within them, we were able to delineate several themes that shed light on their experiences and perceptions:

1. *Curriculum*: Participants expressed mixed views on the relevance of the curriculum in public administration education to building a sustainable future. Some felt that the curriculum was outdated and lacked focus on emerging issues such as climate change, while others believed that it adequately prepared them for their future careers.
2. *Practical Experience*: Participants highlighted the importance of practical experience in public administration education to build a sustainable future. They emphasized the need for more opportunities for internships, volunteering, and practical projects, which would allow them to apply their theoretical knowledge to real-world situations.
3. *Soft Skills*: Participants acknowledged the importance of developing soft skills, such as communication, teamwork, and problem-solving, in public administration education to be effective in building a sustainable future.
4. *Faculty*: Participants expressed mixed views on the quality of teaching in public administration education. While some praised their professors' expertise and commitment, others criticized the lack of practical experience and teaching methods.
5. *Professional Development*: Participants highlighted the importance of continuous professional development in public administration education to build a sustainable future. They emphasized the need for more training, workshops, and networking opportunities to keep up with the changing demands of the field.

Overall, these findings suggest that public administration education in Romania has the potential to build a sustainable future by preparing students with the necessary knowledge, skills, and practical experience. However, there is a need to update the curriculum and provide more opportunities for practical experience, soft skills development, and professional development to meet the changing demands of the field.

According to the findings of our research, the public sector needs to focus on developing the following skills to meet current challenges and support sustainable development and innovation:

- *Resource management*: includes the knowledge and skills needed to sustainably manage human, financial and natural resources.
- *Sustainable development*: actions on how to promote sustainability, reduce negative environmental impacts and guarantee social and economic equity.
- *Emergency and disaster management*, such as pandemics or natural disasters: falls under the category of crisis management and case studies from this field can be used.
- *Community development*: the skills to engage with communities, form alliances and build trust to address public concerns.
- *Soft skills*: In the modern world, effective public administration requires the ability to communicate, collaborate, solve problems and exercise critical thinking.
- *Technical expertise*: This includes knowledge of how to use data management and technology to improve the effectiveness and efficiency of public administration.

Conclusion

Before drawing a conclusion, we reiterate the fact that most respondents agree that education in public administration is important for promoting sustainable development. Public administration workers would be responsible for developing and implementing policies and programs aimed at achieving sustainable development goals. A solid foundation in public administration education can help individuals understand the complexity of sustainable development issues and develop effective strategies to address them.

Sustainable development requires a multidisciplinary approach, and education in public administration can provide individuals with a broad perspective that incorporates diverse disciplines such as economics, sociology, and environmental science. This knowledge can help

individuals make informed decisions and collaborate with stakeholders to develop sustainable solutions.

Our research identified five themes that emerged from the focus group discussions: curriculum, practical experience, soft skills, faculty and professional development.

The participants had different views on the relevance of the curriculum in public administration education for building a sustainable future. Some felt that the current curriculum did not adequately address emerging issues such as climate change, while others felt that it was comprehensive and relevant. This suggests that the curriculum may need to be updated to better reflect current and emerging issues in public administration.

Students emphasized the need for more opportunities for internships, volunteering, and hands-on projects that would allow them to apply their theoretical knowledge to real-world situations. This finding suggests that there may be a need to increase the availability of practical experience opportunities for students in public administration programs to better prepare them for their future careers.

The importance of developing soft skills such as communication, teamwork and problem solving has also been highlighted as essential in public administration education to be effective in building a sustainable future. Teachers should focus not only on teaching technical skills but also on developing the soft skills of students to prepare them for the demands of the field.

The participants expressed contradictory opinions regarding the quality of teaching in public administration education. Some praised the expertise and commitment of their teachers, while others criticized the lack of practical experience and teaching methods. This finding suggests that there may be a need to provide professional development opportunities for teachers to improve their teaching skills and keep pace with the changing demands of the field.

Students highlighted the importance of continuous professional development in public administration education to build a sustainable future. They emphasized the need for more training, workshops, and networking opportunities to keep up with the changing demands of the field. Universities should provide opportunities for students to continue to learn and develop their skills beyond their formal education.

In conclusion, the study suggests that public administration education in Romania has the potential to build a sustainable future. However, curriculum updates, opportunities for more hands-on experience, soft skills development, professional development for faculty, and continuing learning opportunities for students are needed to meet the changing demands of the field. Future research

could investigate the perspectives of public administration educators and decision makers on the role of public administration education in building a sustainable future and explore innovative approaches to teaching public administration.

Limitations and risk

Like any study, there are limitations and potential risks associated with this research. Some of the limitations of this study include the relatively small sample size and the fact that the participants were all from one country. This limits the generalizability of the findings to other contexts and populations. Additionally, the study focused on students' perspectives and did not include the perspectives of public administration educators or policymakers, which could provide a more comprehensive understanding of the challenges and opportunities in public administration education.

There are also potential risks associated with the publication of this study. For example, the study's findings may be misinterpreted or misused by individuals or organizations with vested interests in public administration education. Additionally, the publication of this study could lead to increased scrutiny of public administration education in Romania and potentially negative consequences for the institutions and individuals involved.

It is important to acknowledge these limitations and potential risks and to use the findings of this study in an appropriate and responsible manner. Future research should strive to address these limitations and provide a more comprehensive understanding of the challenges and opportunities in public administration education.

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