

ASSESSMENT TOOLS (SATS) AT HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS (HEIS) AS CATALYST OF CHANGE: THE CASE OF INSTITUTE POLYTECHNIQUE OF VIANA DO CASTELO

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Abstract

In Europe, higher education institutions (HEIs) are perceived as significant contributors to the fostering of sustainability (Mapar et al, 2022), by acting as transformative agents (Findler et al. 2018) in society, empowering individuals with skills to solve social and ecological problems using entrepreneurial tools (Hesselbarth and Schaltegger 2014). Evaluation and rating systems for HEIs are still in their early stages (Berzosa et al., 2017). In recent years efforts have been made to find a specific definition of criteria and indicators to assess the progress of a HEI with regard to environmental, social, economic, academic, and institutional dimensions (ex. Findler et al., 2018, Ramos, 2019, Mapar et al, 2020). However, the overall ratings based on various assessment tools are different (Lukman et al. 2010). <https://www.ipvc.pt/>This study aims to highlight the transformative and inspirational role of higher education institutions (HEIs) in relation to the implementation of the sustainable development goals (SDGs) by making their campus more sustainable. It aims to map the sustainability assessment tools applied at the Polytechnic Institute of Viana do Castelo. In addition, it provides policy guidelines and strategies that the HEIs in general, and the IPVC, in particular, can adopt to be more sustainable. Finally, this paper makes a reflection and draws conclusions about the practical contributions of this study, both for managers and for the community in general, about the role of HEIs, what has been done and what is still to be done.

To achieve the proposed objectives, we used a case study of a single HEI. The study methodology is based on content analysis of the information available at the institutional website of IPVC and reports provided by the direction members. To analyse the sustainability assessment tools in the IPVC we used 4 approaches, as in the study by Mapar et al. (2022) (i) structure of the tool, (ii) core elements of sustainability implementation, (iii) dimensions of sustainability and (iv) thematic areas most commonly covered. The selected case is the Polytechnic Institute of Viana do Castelo (IPVC), located in Northern Portugal. It is a public institution, with 5,885 students and 652 employee(s).

IPVC has been developing practices for a more sustainable campus in recent years. Within the scope of the Recognition of Practices in Social Responsibility and Sustainability, it saw the projects "Quality and Social Responsibility as a Pillar of Organizational Sustainability - IPVC Governance Model" and "IPVC Sustainable Campus - Environmental Management" recognized by APEE. They also aligned with Eco-Schools, a program that aims to encourage actions and recognize the quality work developed by schools in the field of Environmental

Education for Sustainability. IPVC has 6 eco-schools with Green Flag. In 2022 it obtained the platinum certification of the Healthy Campus Program of the International University Sports Federation (FISU). In recent years, research projects related to the SDGs have also been promoted. Recently, IPVC was ranked third nationally in the UI GreenMetric. IPVC participated in the U-Multirank which recently developed new guidelines for the development of indicators for social inclusion and education for sustainable development. With a Management System for the Reconciliation of Professional, Family and Personal Life and a certified Social Responsibility Management System. IPVC is a signatory member of the Principles for Responsible Management Education (PRME), an initiative supported by the United Nations and the largest voluntary commitment platform for academic institutions to transform their teaching, research and thought leadership in support of universal values of sustainability, responsibility and ethics.

The tools must consider the university or institution in an integrated way, addressing all relevant areas (education, environment, economic and social dimensions, research, functioning and contact with the community). For the assessment of sustainability tools, the relationship with stakeholders, both internal and external, plays a crucial role in achieving a more sustainable campus. The IPVC, has made its way and revealed a constant interest in adopting more sustainable practices and behaviours, through the various initiatives and achievements, both nationally and internationally. The sustainability is measured through indicators and involve internal and external audits and certification mechanisms. There is still a long way to go, however, there is a collective effort to achieve the same goal. The involvement of the academic community and the community in general has been increasing.

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