



Article

The Use of Media in the Field of Individual Responsibility for Sustainable Development in Schools: A Proposal for an Approach to Learning about Sustainable Development

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Abstract: Emphasis on the balance between human needs and the carrying capacity of these needs in the context of sustainable development (SD) is present in interdisciplinary study programs and the content of higher education in Slovakia. In the theoretical part of this paper, we present the media as a tool that expands the possibilities of schools in the field of education about SD. It is proven to help school activities draw attention to the situation and problems of SD and to spread the reported problems outside the school space. We examine the practical dimension of the issue of individual responsibility for the world and SD through our own research. The aim is to analyze the individual tasks of sustainable human behavior from the perspective of university students. The research findings provide the current view of young respondents on the roles and individual responsibilities that exist for SD. They also answered in which of the four dimensions defined by the “National strategy for SD of the Slovak republic” the researched students see the greatest need for individual responsibility.

Keywords: awareness; education; individual responsibility; media; sustainable development; research



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1. Introduction

Environmental protection, economic prosperity, and social equity are closely linked. They are united by the need for human responsibility.

The concept of sustainable development (SD) began to be used in the early 1970s, when it was associated with the recognition that uncontrollable growth in any area (such as production, consumption, population, pollution, etc.) is unsustainable in an environment limited by finite resources. There was a discussion at the time on raw materials and energy resources, which limit the development of society to unlimited largeness. Gradually, however, topics related to growing demographic development, richer lifestyles, and climate change, which are a threat to life on earth, were added to the concept of sustainable development (SD). In the context of the Slovak Republic, the concept of SD is regulated by Act no. 17/1992 Coll. on the environment, which in paragraph 6 defines SD as “development that preserves the ability of current and future generations to meet their basic living needs without reducing the diversity of nature” [1].

At present, the issue of human responsibility emerges more and more frequently through the concept of sustainable development; we can even talk about a new development paradigm. The postmodern era (1950–1980) seems to promote the awareness of an individual's moral responsibility, and in the words of Gilles Lipovetsky, a French

philosopher and prominent intellectual from the late 20th century, it “brought to society a general subordination to efficiency, consumer economy, mass communication and consumption” [2] (p. 65). The co-creators of that idea are the current mass media, which plays a very important role in organizing public opinion, because it was specifically designed to reach a large audience. Unfortunately, media messages have managed to place humans on one hand in all its exclusivity, sovereignty, uniqueness, and centrality and the world (and its resources) on the other hand as something that is fully and freely available to humans. The role of the media, as “opinion leaders”, is therefore in realizing pursuits of social and human development and in assuming a prominent role in shaping the future we want. Therefore, we can agree with Králik and Máhrik that “in a time of information and prevalent influence of digital media the moral formation is gaining growing importance” [3] (p. 8896). In short, human responsibility in SD is proving to be a real challenge in the 21st century. In Matúšová’s words, it is already connected with the “program of dignified survival of human civilization” [4] (p. 48).

The main components of this paper consist of an introduction to the term responsibility and a clarification of the term responsibility, based on relevant literature and research. Next, we present an implementation of education and awareness-raising for sustainable development in the context of the Slovak Republic with a short introduction on using media in the school environment and on expansion of school functions as a consequence of media interaction in education. To support education in the school environment and awareness in the school and out-of-school environments, schools have several methods at their disposal through the media in which they can approach the topic of sustainable development. In addition, with the use of media methods, schools can also involve the public. In this article, we talk about the positive expansion of school functions, which is a consequence of the use of the media in education; in relation to the public, the school acquires, in addition to its informative and ethical–moral function, educational, motivational, and preventive functions. We present the participation of the media in the school environment as a positive solution leading to achievement of the goals of SD, i.e., the media becomes a method for collective participation and collective responsibility in sustainability. In the practical part of this paper, we then focus on the concept of SD as an issue of human individual responsibility; therefore, the theoretical basis of the issue is seamlessly followed by our own research. Its main objective is to identify and describe the individual responsibilities for sustainable behavior of humans from the perspective of university students. The findings of this research provide answers to two research questions. The first examines the respondents’ view of the tasks (i.e., individual responsibilities) that a person has for SD. The second research question answers in which of the four dimensions of SD the researched students see the need for individual responsibility.

To support education in the school environment and awareness in the school and out-of-school environments, schools have several methods at their disposal through the media in which they can approach the topic of sustainable development. With the use of media methods, the school also involves the public, and thus, media becomes a means for collective participation and collective responsibility on sustainability in the school environment. When looking for an answer to the research questions about what are the individual tasks for sustainable behavior of humans, the research showed that respondents perceive at least 15 areas that relate to the current individual responsibilities to the world and its sustainable development. The students also answered in which of the four dimensions of SD they see the greatest need for individual responsibility. The research results can be summarized as follows: students have relatively good knowledge and orientation in the field of sustainable development, perception of individual responsibility for the resilience and sustainability of the world, and efforts in considering remedying the existing situation; students are also able to think about individual tasks and support for an ecological approach in the context of social, environmental, and economic progress.

2. Term Responsibility and Its Clarification

The issue of individual humans responsibilities encounters the problem of a lack of a complex theory on responsibility in social contexts. Additionally, the literature on responsibility in general is very extensive. However, we can see the concept of responsibility in the context of suitable development by distinguishing a couple of main definitions of responsibility. We attempt to cite the related literature and research results. Some authors see responsibility as a “cause” (i.e., as a cause of poverty, environmental problems, debt etc.). This part of the issue questions to what extent past activities cause a particular problem and lead to greater present responsibilities and is a recurrent theme [5–8]. Young (2006), for example, sees the importance of distinguishing the degrees of responsibility of different agents [6].

Other authors see the necessity for a responsible approach to accountability (for example, the responsibility of employees towards their employers). They understand responsibility as a retrospective mechanism that involves a presumption of monitoring and sanctioning instruments [9–11].

From another perspective, the concept of responsibility starts with the well-known rule that highlighted objective standards of care and competence. Honoré (1999) pointed out that a person must have “besides a general capacity for decision and action, the ability to succeed most of the time in doing the sort of thing that would on this occasion have averted the harm” [12] (pp. 14–15). Willingness to care seems to be an important part of acts of responsibility. It reminds us that this involves especially important social practices in our society, such as readiness to take on responsibilities for carrying out important family and community activities or an understanding of and capacity for reciprocity.

We also find the results of some research interesting. One such research reminds us, for example, of the need for considerations for society as a whole, on the basis of which certain types of events can be considered “desirable” (actions against poverty) and others can be considered “undesirable” (pollution). This procedure we can call “assigning to each his responsibility to society” [13] (p. 208). Wakkee et al. asked important questions that focused on a university’s responsible role in sustainable development through activating teachers and scholars as agents of change. The research findings demonstrate how local campus leadership (based on holistic teaching and student involvement) can have significant local effects over the short term. The research confirmed that leadership and collective action form important means through which an entrepreneurial university achieves sustainable development. The research also proves that students can play a significant role in driving sustainable regional development [14]. Other authors also emphasized the important interconnectedness between responsibility and equality and identified general principles that inspire many people to be responsible: Fluerbaey sees the importance of natural reward and compensation [15], Brandy speaks about the importance of ethics that are based on rules [16], Ditlev–Simonsen stress the need to move away from social responsibility awareness to action [17], Suki studied the importance of the relationship between concern for the environment and the behavior of consumers [18], etc.

We can see that, although we have various meanings of responsibility and meanings ascribed to responsibility or terms related to responsibility (among other things, for example, willingness to care, effort to performed “desirable” acts, obligation to be responsible, and many other terms such as duty or freedom, which were not even mentioned), this does not replace a comprehensive theory of responsibility in a philosophical context. The problem with the term is related to the fact that responsibility did not begin to be discussed in philosophy until the end of the nineteenth century; in Rojka’s words, the term “responsibility” then became the terminus technicus, especially in matters of ethics, politics, and law. “As an adjective (i.e., ‘responsible’), the term has been used for a long time, but without a deeper philosophical meaning”, adds Rojka [19] (p. 142). In addition, many important meanings of the terms as well as the terms related to responsibility themselves developed further (to a large extent, even independently of each other), which again made it difficult to establish a well-established definition or uniform interpretation of the term

responsibility. To this day, therefore, it represents a fragmented phenomenon that acquires various meanings not only in the past but also in today's society.

We consider as important the fact that the responsibility of the whole human community is naturally followed by the individual responsibilities of each person. It is the personal responsibilities of each person, who respects others and their well-being and takes responsibility not only for themselves but also for the world and its sustainable development. Therefore, one of the main goals of the concept of SD is to preserve the environment for future generations as much as possible. In this role, the concept of responsibility forces us to think about and learn about the responsibility of prevention. Public policy and media ought to guide us to the same concept. Reminding us of the need for individual as well as collective responsibility for SD has its own goal in this article. We think that an adequate theory of responsibility that not only takes into account individual responsibility but also collective responsibility and is capable of taking into consideration society and its problems is needed.

A responsible strategy that satisfies the biological, material, spiritual, and social needs and interests of people, both qualitatively and quantitatively, with an emphasis on limiting interventions, threatening, damaging, or destroying living conditions and existing life forms, is now referred to in this case as "sustainable development" (SD). We understand it as a concept that emphasizes the needs and interests of the people and nevertheless emphasizes that the same needs and interests should not burden the country beyond tolerable levels but takes into account the prudent use of resources in order to protect cultural and natural heritage. It is a balance between human needs and the carrying capacity of those needs in the context of the environment; in a broader sense, we can speak not only of endurance but also of the responsibility of the whole human community. That is why the concept of sustainable development is based on the premise that development must meet today's needs without jeopardizing the potential for continued growth for future generations (for example, depleting non-renewable resources without finding alternatives, destroying the ecosystems necessary for life, triggering changes in natural conditions that significantly complicate the chances of human survival as a biological species, etc.). SD is thus a kind of "setting" of the current and future developments of human society that reconciles economic and social progress with full preservation of the environment.

3. Education and Awareness-Raising for Sustainable Development in the Context of the Slovak Republic

Thinking about SD is proving to be an urgent need. This is one of the reasons why one can find an answer in university studies at various universities in Slovakia. It is natural that a broad-spectrum understanding of SD affects study programs in different ways; student education differs within different fields of study and individual approbations. Due to this, the focus of study programs on SD and the subsequent level of education of students in the field of sustainable development goals in Slovakia is also different, especially in terms of the scope and content of teaching.

According to experts, the issue of SD at Slovak universities is sufficiently represented, especially in interdisciplinary study programs, i.e., in the compulsory and elective study subjects of the curricula in question on the coverage of themes of SD [20–23]. However, other experts point out shortcomings and highlight that, in the school environment in Slovakia, competences for SD are generally overlooked [24] and the education of teachers and lecturers is not systematic, systemic, or nationally coordinated [25,26]. Educators lack interest and motivation [27,28] in addition how problematic the practical professional preparation of future teachers is towards sustainability or the quality of their preparation for the practice and implementation of education on SD [24] or insufficient practical implementation of the principles of SD in the management of Slovak universities and student dormitories [29]. In short, on a nationwide scale, it is possible to talk more about a small compulsory implementation of environmental education in the school environment, which is predetermined by the state, i.e., the Slovak educational program [30]; despite

the fact that of the worldwide existence and awareness of SD and literacy in the school environment [31–33].

The implementation of SD in education in Slovakia is part of “The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development” (Agenda), adopted by the Member States of the European Union in September 2015. At the core of the program are 17 goals of sustainable development, including the “Sustainable Development Goals in education” (SDGs). In short, they focus on ensuring “inclusive, equitable and quality education” and “promoting lifelong learning opportunities for all”. The program also mentions the need to strengthen the area of sustainable development, together with strengthening the quality of education, lifelong learning, regional and global cooperation, etc. [34–37]. The agenda offers a starting point for educators to begin to collaborate with youth, schools, and communities and to initiate a research agenda that should extend well beyond 2030 to ensure that progress is made towards addressing and achieving appropriate development. According to experts, the agenda calls for, among other things, the transformation of education so that young people, schools, and the wider community can be actively involved in the goals of SD [3,36,38–45].

According to the agenda, youth are not mere beneficiaries of the 2030 Agenda; rather, they have a critical role in the implementation of the SDGs. The active engagement of youth in SD efforts will be imperative in achieving the goals of the 2030 Agenda. Today’s youth will face several challenges in 2050. According to the agenda, the issues in the deteriorating environment, climate change and biodiversity, health care and nutrition delivery, poverty and hunger alleviation solutions, investment in education and literacy, reducing unemployment, and increasing the production of food will have to be addressed [35,37].

In support of the agenda for SD as well as in support of the principles of SD, in recent years, measures as well as the implementation of conceptual and legislative steps, projects, and programs have been introduced. In Slovakia, the Ministry of the Environment and its professional organizations contribute to SD, including environmentally focused non-profit organizations and initiatives, environmental non-governmental organizations, state professional organizations, and research institutes or interest associations and organizations. The evaluation of their measures remains an issue.

3.1. Sustainable Development and Use of the Media in the School Environment

The Global Education Monitoring Report team prepared an independent annual publication, called “Beyond commitments: How countries implement SDGs in the field of education” in 2019. Slovakia is listed in the publication as one of 26% of countries in the world that have adapted curricula in specific areas in relation to SDGs in the field of education. Slovakia was positively evaluated in the publication “in the context of education on SD and global citizenship” [46] (p. 29). Much earlier, schools in Slovakia spoke about the good learning results when using “traditional media” such as newspapers or television [47,48]. Relevant topics were stated, for example, in the subject “Arts and Culture” in which students tried practical work with media or production of advertisements [49] (p. 157). We can see that the good learning results when using “traditional media” is evidenced by the fact that, every day, a number of these types of media content is created and still touch on various parts of Slovaks’ lives. Similarly, the number of virtual learning environments in which new media and new communication technologies are used is increasing in schools in Slovakia [49] (p. 157) [50]. Effective use of media and new communication technologies in school environment has risen because it has been observed that there is more to them than accuracy and the amount of information exchanged (it comprises a founding rationale for the field of media studies and was basically characterized by Marshall McLuhan with his thesis “the medium is the message”). Teachers and students realize that today’s search for content (apart from context which is seen in “traditional media” such as newspapers or television) is not enough anymore. “New media” are more efficient than their predecessors as means of communication. Typical of the online environment is an active duplex communication involving the transfer of information from the author to the recipients and back as well as between recipients who choose between particular media and, thus, decide

on what will be read and watched [51]. In addition, the cyberspace formed by new media allows people to generate virtual experiences and reality. New media as a part of the online environment have completely different characteristics and, therefore, possibilities as well include the impact on human communication, thinking, behavior, actions, etc.

Some of the main characteristics of “new media” are described by experts. Lister et al. speaks about six main characteristics that comprise the term “new media”, i.e., digitalism, interactivity, hypertextuality, virtuality, networks, and sometimes simulation [52]. Other experts speak about digitality, convergency, interactivity, hypertextuality, and virtuality in the context of “new media” [53] (p. 2), [54]. We do not delve into this topic because it could be clearly stated that what makes “new media” different from traditional media is simply their speed and their availability—much of that is brought about due to digital tools. Then, we could call “new media” “digital media” as well. The reachability of digital media is significant, extending to all people instead of a limited audience; without the confinement of time and space, the control of message production is no longer a privilege possessed (for example, by a political party or government) but, instead, equally shared by all individuals.

It should be clearly emphasized that, in this article, attention is focused on the concept of SD as an issue of human individual responsibility that is followed by the introduction of collective participation and collective responsibility on sustainability in a school environment that we see through the (traditional) media and especially the new media. We see the new media as a means for promoting collective responsibility for SD and a great partner for the propagation of individual tasks in the context of individual responsibilities. The media is partners in initiatives that develop civic or communication skills and that, through published journalism (articles, videos, photographs, documents, etc.), inform local audiences in Slovakia about sustainable development; this occurs likewise in traditional and new media. Additionally, traditional media and new media, from positions as “opinion leaders”, are also tools that involve their audiences in solving the reported problems. This is also understood by schools, which the media—as information and motivation mechanisms—effectively involves in their school projects.

Accessibility to this context is undoubtedly possible through media education. It is media education that can be used appropriately in favor of SD in the school environment [55–57]. In this context, we understand the term “media education” as a conscious time for active and responsible use of media (also) as a tool for the benefit of SD activities. Media education in this article is understood as (1) education on active media creation. We believe that the dramatic growth of social media creates new opportunities for engaging students. We also believe that involving students in creating media encourages collaboration, creativity, accountability, and mastery of ideas and concepts [58–60] wherein the conscious use of media enables students to learn more [61–64]. We therefore avoid other meanings of the concept of media education, such as (2) education (knowledge transfer) through the media [65–70] or (3) media education as education for critical perception and conscious media perception [71] (p. 176) [72–75].

We are thinking of several forms of media involvement in favor of SD in schools, for example, in the following forms:

- school courses and seminars: journalism, photography, film, environmental, etc.;
- the school radio, school internet television, school newspapers, etc.;
- school exhibitions of photographs, performances of eco-movies, etc.;
- a documentary of the school;
- public notice boards in the school environment or on the school premises; and
- Public relation activities of the school, i.e., targeted involvement of regional media in school activities (e.g., school social projects).

By using these methods, the school becomes a place that involves the public. Using media methods, the school engages the public through the following:

- school media outputs (school radio programs, school internet television programs, articles in school newspapers, creative work within the seminar activities, etc.);

- information stands and posters at school (e.g., during activities aimed at the presentation of professions or the future employment of students, etc.);
- regional and national school competitions;
- school conferences, seminars, discussions, academies, memorial celebrations, cultural zones, etc.;
- social media, especially social networks (which contribute to the greater visibility of school activities); and
- others (the media is secondarily usable in several other school activities: music evenings, theatre performances, art programs and events, etc.).

3.2. Expansion of School Functions as a Consequence of Media Interaction in Education

The abovementioned forms of media involvement in favor of SD in the school environment extend the social significance of school activities and the educational process beyond the school space. The school, which uses the media to raise awareness and to support the message of individual responsibility for sustainable development, adds other functions to its educational and upbringing functions. These functions not only are applicable in the school environment but also are welcome and necessary in the wider society:

- informative function of the school—school activities are the bearer of messages even in out-of-school environments; they also inform, for example, about the current needs for civic intervention in relation to sustainable development;
- ethical and moral function of the school—the school draws attention to moral rules, norms, and evaluations of people’s behaviors from the point of view of ethics and morality. The aim of school activities is to have a positive effect on the character traits of people and, in parallel, on their behavior;
- awareness function of the school—awareness is a basic component of education and acts to shape the needs, interests, and ways of life of students. It is based on the participation of individuals in social life. Through activities aimed at sustainable development, the school also becomes an instrument of awareness in the wider society (an elementary example is a school paper collection competition, through which the school addresses its students and they in turn involve their families and the wider community);
- motivational function of the school—through its activities, the school also has a motivational function and applies the principles of voluntariness, interaction, diversity, activity, and others in its activities; and
- preventive function of the school—the school becomes a place that creates space for the emergence of forms and methods through which one can change not only the educational level of citizens but also their behavior and social activities; a practical example is the involvement of parents and friends of the school in school activities.

In the next section, we recall that the expansion of school functions is not only a consequence of media interaction in education but also

- (1) a consequence of media influence and media effectiveness, and
- (2) raising awareness through media; the media promotes awareness and motivation to achieve goals (for example, in support of active citizenship).

When thinking about media influence, above all, we must examine the theory of George Gerbner (cultivation theory), McComb’s and Shaw’s theory (agenda-setting theory), and L. Festinger’s theory of cognitive dissonance. “Cultivation sociocultural theory” focuses on the role of television in shaping viewers’ perceptions, beliefs, attitudes, and values.

“Cultivation theory” holds that the storytelling function of television (i.e., media) is extremely powerful and gives to this type of traditional media the power to shape both individual and societal values (for example, perception of wealth and affluence or general levels of materialism). The findings show that viewing cultivates perceptions of social reality through television (as a tool of “cultivating the common consciousness”) consistent with the world portrayed on television; it shows how exposure to media messages influences recipients’ conceptions of the real world [76] (p. 174). Thus, the presentation of certain

people and their activities, beliefs, or values has a significant impact on society [77,78]. Support cultivation theory is also interesting for many experts who studied the relationship between television and violence [79,80], perceptions of health [81], perceptions of human relationships [82,83], perceptions of gender and sexist attitudes [84,85], levels of certainty attached to confusion [86], or bigger interpersonal mistrust [87,88]. In all these cases, the frequency of television viewing is positively correlated with raising awareness in the study subjects. Despite critics of this theory (for example, statistical criticisms of hypothesis testing are pointed out by Hirsch [89], Tyler [90], etc.), we can state that, by extending the conclusions of these findings to other media and new social media, we clearly see a correlation between media content and human perception, which can be positively assessed in the context of SD and achieving its goals.

All media influences are the subject of the so-called “agenda-setting theory” that is a “theory of strong media effects which suggests that with the passage of time the media agenda becomes the public agenda” [91] (p. 2070). The authors of the notion that the news influences “what to think about” were two researchers at the beginning of the 1970s. Maxwell McCombs and Donald Shaw from the University of North Carolina explained that agenda-setting theory claims that audiences obtain this salience of the issues from the news, incorporating similar sets of priorities into their own agendas [92]. According to McCombs, the media influences the public’s perceptions of their own focus on what are the most important issues of the day. They do it through the framing of their news stories. This function of the media is called the agenda-setting function of media [93]. Basically, in the context of SD, it is good to remember, that, most of our perceptions about the world are a second-hand reality created by traditional and “new” social media, and thus, “agenda-setting” gives both groups of media an important and responsible role in the society. At the same time, the media can also be an “extended hand” of school educational projects aimed at raising awareness in SD and the overall improvement of the environment.

After “cultivation theory” and “agenda-setting theory”, we should not avoid theories from the field of psychology that also have an impact on the consequence of media influence and media effectiveness as well as on raising awareness (in our case, about SD) through media, specifically, “the theory of cognitive dissonance” by L. Festinger. In 1957, Festinger called dissonance a human response to unpleasant newly acquired information or experiences that contradict a previous idea or knowledge. This discrepancy caused unpleasant tension and consequently a desire to reduce or even eliminate it. Rather than enduring the aversive experience of believing one thing but saying another, a person changes their opinion and convinces themselves that the opinion is not correct and that it is necessary to change it. We can say that it is a subconscious reaction of the mind to the discrepancies between attitudes (knowledge, behavior, and faith) and the real state of affairs. In other words, a person’s attitude is shaped by their behavior. A person’s decision about something “uncomfortable” takes place when they are influenced by an external force that pushes the individual to make a decision, to change [94]. In this context, the effects of the media are important, influence attitudes and behaviour, and disrupt human comfort or provoke affective reactions. Dissonance (when seeing terminally ill children, global catastrophes, violence, etc.) can be reduced by changing the belief, attitude, or behavior that the media effects can thus cause a positive change in thinking and acting; perceived choice is an important variable based on blending cognition with motivation. This is why “dissonance theory” is interesting for education, media, and SD.

The theories presented above suggest that there are some observed events that are misunderstood or distorted, that others are ignored, yet that others are viewed as centrally important in the media. All communication through the media has a purpose, and whether this goal has been achieved through the media is known as “media effectiveness” [95] (p. 470). Media effects represent the potential of the media to have an intended impact on recipients. Additionally, the forms of new media are more efficient than the forms of their predecessors. The Internet brings interactivity, digitalization, and an online world that is cheap and available without interruption; online means available anywhere and at anytime.

Thus, the impact of the existence of new media can be summarized into several views, namely, that the boundaries of human societies in terms of space, time, scope, structure, geography, value, and beliefs are swiftly changing and transforming into a new pattern of similarities and interconnectedness [96]. Therefore, the development of new media and its content and forms is accompanied by an observation that any form of presented reality has its own impact on individuals and an influence on the whole of society [97–99].

Finally, discussing the meanings of “new media” in the context of media influence and awareness, we are reminded that new media are associated with digital media that bring much more understanding about what happens and how it happens (than merely ascertaining the level of accuracy and the amount of data the exchange involves as is seen in “traditional media”). Thus, “new media” contributes to raising awareness (e.g., informing and developing knowledge about climate change and poverty issues, raising awareness of vulnerable groups, etc.) and promotes awareness and motivation to achieve goals (e.g., in support of the ecological approach, communication, active citizenship, etc.). To put it simply, we can see that media in general (i.e., traditional media and, especially, “new media”) are heavily involved in achieving suitable development goals in the field of education. Many studies therefore confirm that the media is a powerful tool that contributes to raising awareness in school environments [8,100,101].

4. Materials and Methods

The state, non-profit organizations, as well as experts and volunteers agree that the most effective tool for evaluating SD (and, at the same time, a tool common to all involved) is the so-called indicators of sustainable development. These are measurable quantities, the task of which is to comprehensively and objectively reflect the state of the set strategic goals while providing us with information on the state, development, and processes in their quantitative and qualitative expression. As they are common to all actors involved in the context of sustainable development, they are an appropriate and uniform key in the evaluation of these activities and in the evaluation of the fulfilment of the objectives [102].

The strategic document entitled “National strategy for sustainable development of the Slovak republic”, a key document in Slovakia’s responsibilities in sustainable development, includes four main dimensions that address the issue of sustainable development. Within the four dimensions, the document distinguishes between several indicators that interested us in connection to our own survey:

1. The environmental dimension addresses indicators such as air protection and the fight against global environmental problems; protection of soil, water, and forests and their rational use; protection of biodiversity; preparedness and response to natural disasters; urbanization; etc.
2. The social dimension monitors the health status of the population and factors influencing the health status of the population, demographic development, urbanization trends, transport, etc.
3. The economic dimension addresses issues of economic performance and assumptions about its further development, rational use of natural resources, energy use, waste production and management, environmental transport of persons and goods, etc.
4. The institutional dimension focuses on the implementation of environmental management systems, the issue of global responsibility and care for the environment, etc. [103,104].

The four dimensions above fall within the competence of individual human responsibility as well. Therefore, we were interested in the individual tasks of a person for SD from the point of view of the examined students and in which of those areas considered by the researched university students is the most important for SD of the world today and in the future. Based on the findings of the individual responsibilities of the respondents, our next goal was to consider the possibilities of the media as a tool that can support collective responsibility for sustainable development in the school environment and in the wider society. The advantage is that participants do not need a large budget, fancy

studio, or advanced degree to create original media that is informative, entertaining, and educational [105,106]. In addition, teachers do not need to be media savvy. The students, in general, have grown up in the digital age, and they are comfortable with digital media.

Main research objective: to identify and describe the individual responsibilities for the sustainable behavior of humans from the perspective of university students.

1. *Partial objective: Identification and description of the individual tasks of a person for SD.*
2. *Partial objective: Determination of the order of the four main dimensions that address the issue of SD based on the perception of individual human responsibilities among students.*

Based on the sub-objectives, we formulated two research questions. The research questions are shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Research questions.

Research Questions	
1st research question:	<i>What are the individual tasks of a person for suitable development (SD) from the point of view of the examined students? (Q1)</i>
2nd research question:	<i>Which of the four dimensions that address the issue of SD are considered by the researched university students to be the most important for SD of the world today and in the future? (Q2)</i>

Source: own research.

We conducted the survey through a questionnaire, which consisted of open qualitative questions. The research sample consisted of 48 university students (24 men and 24 women) from several Slovak universities. The selection of the research sample was made based on the so-called criteria selection. Based on this, the students were divided into four research groups. The criteria for selecting the research sample are shown in Table 2.

Table 2. Research sample selection criteria.

Research Method		
Questionnaire	Through the questionnaire, 48 students of the last year of full-time study at the university were addressed	
Criteria		
Criterion 1	<i>Gender</i>	Men Women
Criterion 2	<i>Age</i>	24–26 years (i.e., students of the last year of university studies)
Criterion 3	<i>Field of study</i>	Humanities students Students of technical fields

Source: own research.

In the research, we considered three criteria: gender, age, and study orientation of the respondents. The gender census in Slovakia repeatedly confirms the equal representation of men and women in our territory. The difference between the number of men and women is not statistically significant [107]; we addressed the same number of men and women for research purposes.

The starting point for the selection criterion based on age is the belief in the existence of generational experiences and value orientations that are common and co-determining for the same age groups of people (i.e., peers). Our goal was to create a sample of respondents that would represent students in the last year of second-level university studies. The research group was deliberately composed of this year's graduates, as they will become active members of society—as employees and creators of gross domestic product (i.e., as participants in the economic benefits of society) and users of resources (with a specific preference for activities and values). This is not negligible in our topic, given the current

assumption that people in the same age category will have similar views on individual responsibility and participation in sustainable development.

The criterion selection based on the study focus of the respondents represents an independent evaluation of students from the humanities and students from the technical fields. The generational identity of the research sample also plays an important role in this criterion. This is certainly influenced by the chosen study focus, as the students of humanities share the same experience in the school environment, but these differ from the experiences of students in technical fields. This affects, among other things, the boundaries of the market segment (i.e., the preference for certain needs and services), which also has a direct impact on the perception of an individual's participation in the sustainability of the world.

5. Results

The findings of the survey provide answers to the two research questions. The first examines the respondents' view of the tasks (i.e., individual responsibilities) that a person has for SD (Q1). The second research question answers in which of the four dimensions of SD do the researched students see the need for individual responsibility? (Q2).

5.1. Individual Tasks of a Person for Sustainable Development from the Point of View of the Examined Students (Q1)

5.1.1. Research Group No. 1.—Students of Humanities

The areas that are considered by twelve humanities students to be the most important individual tasks of a person for SD are shown in Table 3.

Table 3. Competences of individual human responsibility for SD from the point of view of students of humanities.

Reducing each person's individual waste (10 answers)
Reducing car traffic in favor of alternative modes of transport (9 replies)
Carpool: a ride shared between people and things (9 replies)
Positive response to demographic change (specially to declining birth rates) (7 replies)

Source: authors' own data for sample.

Among the competencies of individual human responsibilities, students of the humanities most often recommended the role of humans in reducing "everyday waste as a result of their activities". The first group of respondents also pointed towards the need to commit to greater human movement at the expense of car traffic. The examined students mentioned their positive experiences with alternative modes of transport (scooters, bicycles, electric bicycles, etc.), including so-called carpool transport, i.e., a ride shared by several people and things. Third, humanitarian students were concerned about negative demographic developments with declining birth rates "due to the decision of many young people to build a career and not have children". Several other participants assessed demographic developments in Europe as unfavorable and related them to third-world countries. In the context of other qualitative findings, Martin (24 years old) recalled that responsibility for SD "does not appear out of nowhere in the 21st century". That is why they point to the responsibility of the entire human society in terms of history. Humanitarian students emphasized the need for greater awareness of the issue of SD throughout society, which could be the responsibility of the media, for example.

5.1.2. Research Group No. 2.—Students of Technical Fields

Table 4 shows the areas that twelve students of technical fields consider as the most important individual tasks of a person for sustainable development.

Table 4. Competences of individual human responsibilities for SD from the point of view of students of technical fields.

Deciding on alternative energy sources (e.g., heat pumps, solar collectors, wind energy, etc.) (7 answers)
Stopping plundering forests and flooding nature with garbage (5 replies)
Noise reduction due to human activity and industrial production (5 replies)

Source: authors' own data for sample.

The examined technical students emphasized the choice of alternative energy sources; halting changes in the use of land for the benefit of humans, such as plundering forests and flooding nature with waste; and “the need to urgently reduce the noise produced by human activity and production” (Tomáš, 23 years old). The questionnaire for this group of young people also reflects whether it is a real change in one's overall life attitude (i.e., one's own restraint of one's needs) or whether one is an “alibi alleviating the ecological footprint it leaves behind” (Matej, 24 years old). The idea of the unequal intervention of different countries to create problems related to climate change is repeated several times in the questionnaire.

5.1.3. Research Group No. 3.—Female Students of Humanities

The areas that twelve humanities female students consider as the most important individual tasks of a person for SD are shown in Table 5.

Table 5. Competences of individual human responsibilities for SD from the point of view of female students of humanities.

Waste recycling (9 answers)
Reducing each person's individual waste (9 answers)
Global responsibility in the context of securing peace and the rights of others (7 answers)
Respect for the rights and needs of future generations (6 answers)

Source: authors' own data for sample.

Female humanities students placed particular emphasis on waste recycling. Eva (24) was convinced that “only sorted waste is subject to control and does not go directly to a landfill or incinerator” and that it can thus be usable again. Equally common was the need to reduce each person's individual waste. The questionnaire further formulated the requirement for “the role of each person to contribute to peace and tranquillity”, i.e., responsibility for a “warless state”. Female students also advised on the task of eliminating illegal actions and socially dangerous manifestations; most mentioned “social threats and violations of other people's rights”. Finally, in the context of qualitative findings, several other participants also mentioned the quality of life of women and children who suffer because of violent manifestations, i.e., psychological or physical violence. The third largest part of the answers was with reference to individual responsibility, which has a direct impact on the environment that we, as a community, pass on to future generations. The questionnaire also mentioned several times the positive experience of students with so-called recycled fashion, i.e., clothing that has more than one user. Let us add that female humanities students in this research repeatedly stated that activities aimed at SD should be “not a random but targeted process of changes in the behaviour of the entire human society, starting with individuals”.

5.1.4. Research Group No. 4.—Female Students of Technical Fields

The areas that twelve female students of technical fields consider as the most important individual tasks of a person for SD are shown in Table 6.

Table 6. Competences of individual human responsibilities for SD from the point of view of female students of technical fields.

Elimination of disposable products in favor of organic products (10 replies)
Ethical and moral impact of oil company leaders' decisions in oil-producing countries (8 replies)
Global responsibility (8 replies)
Activities aimed at improving the quality of life without negatively impacting our surroundings (e.g., social events in nature, etc.) (7 answers)

Source: authors' own data for sample.

Female students in technical fields emphasized ecological alternatives to the products we commonly buy. They therefore suggested investing more in campaigns aimed at eliminating disposable products; “these are to be replaced by recycled materials or products that can be reused” (Martina, 25 years old). The examined students were aware that climate change also has an ethical and moral framework. In the questionnaires, they drew particular attention to the consequences of the practices of oil companies in oil-producing countries, which result in permanent environmental pollution and the death of animals. Equally common was the awareness of global responsibility: “We need to be aware that the actions of each of us affect not only our surroundings, but the entire planet for decades to come” (Lucia, 25 years old). Female students perceived little support for education, information sharing, and best practices in relation to SD in society. Several participants referred to the media as partners in this role, as the media influences opinions in society and is therefore an appropriate tool to support citizens' motivation for sustainability. The third largest part of the answers to the question of individual responsibility for human beings in this group was “organizing activities that would increase the quality of life of a person without endangering their surroundings”. Among several examples from the questionnaires, we cite the example of the organization of summer festivals, which should place “greater emphasis on waste separation, recyclable paper advertising materials or, of course, cleaning up the environment after the event” (Barbora, 24 years old).

We consider it positive that the respondents of our research in their answers perceive the need for their own individual responsibility for SD. That is also why we are convinced that education, including media awareness projects, is a great way to highlight the need for individual participation and responsibility for SD and to spread it into society. The important thing is to provide key prevention information to your target audience (it can be youth, adults, companies, or governments) and to encourage them to take action in preventing or reducing actual issues in the context of sustainability.

In this context, we understand the necessity of participation in media education in school environments, as actively and responsibly using media by students as explained above. Thus, in the school environment, it is possible to see media education as a conscious time for actively and responsibly using media as a tool for the benefit of SD activities. In favor of involving students into SD issues discussions, the dramatic growth of social media also creates new opportunities for engaging students; these especially include social networking sites, blogs, and wikis.

5.2. The Order of Importance of the Dimensions of Sustainable Development Based on the Need for Individual Human Responsibility (Q2)

It can be encouraging to find that the respondents of our research in their answers do not omit any of the four dimensions of sustainable development defined by the strategic document called “National strategy for sustainable development of the Slovak republic”. In addition, all four dimensions are more or less assessed by students as part of their own individual responsibility for the SD of the world, both now and in the future.

The respondents primarily acknowledge human responsibility in the environmental dimension, as they most often talk about protecting the environment, mentioning “stopping forest plundering and flooding nature with waste”, “eliminating disposable products in favour of organic products”, or “activities aimed at improving the quality of life without

a negative impact on the surroundings”, etc. This dimension prevails among students of technical disciplines (2nd and 4th research groups).

The economic dimension is close to students of the humanities (1st and 3rd research groups). Young people focus primarily on individual human responsibility for the rational use of natural resources and the production or management of waste. The questionnaires stated “the need for waste recycling” or “the reduction of each person’s individual waste”. Respondents in the 1st research group were familiar with environmental passenger transport, as they proposed “reducing car traffic in favour of alternative modes of transport”, including carpool transport, i.e., the sharing of more people and things.

Individual human responsibility for SD also concerns the institutional dimension, which focuses on the implementation of environmental systems and the issue of global responsibility and care for the environment. Students from technical fields suggested proposals for decisions on alternative energy sources (e.g., heat pumps, solar collectors, wind energy, etc.), i.e., students of the 2nd research group. The same students often commented on the issue of “global responsibility in the context of securing the peace and rights of others” and the emphasis is on “respecting the rights and needs of future generations”. Indicators leading to global responsibility are also present among students of technical fields. Group 4 calls for “the ethical and moral impact of oil company leaders’ decisions in oil-producing countries”.

Finally, the social dimension is also represented in the answers, although it is referred to the least frequent. Respondents had a negative perception of “declining demographic developments” and commented on urbanization trends, reflecting the need to “reduce noise due to human activity and industrial production”. This dimension prevails among students in technical fields in the 1st research group.

According to these results, we also see the suitability of participation of media education in school environments as an active and responsible use of media by students, as was explained above. We and other experts consider the fact that social or digital media can extend to all people instead of a limited audience as significant and that it is possible without the confinement of time and space, so that the message produced can be shared by all individuals [52–54,96]. We positively view that messages about SD presented online with the use of media might also have, in all their contexts (environmental, economic, institutional, or social), their own impact on individuals and influence the whole of society [97–99].

6. Conclusions

The implementation of sustainability issues in education in Slovakia appears to be ambiguous; some experts rate it as sufficient, while others see significant shortcomings. The truth is probably somewhere in the middle. However, the authors are convinced that the essence of the challenges to be overcome requires collective commitment and effort. Achieving the SDGs can be successful or unsuccessful depending on the scope and quality of education. Responsible media, committed to supporting informed and active individuals, can also be partners in this process. The authors point out an attractive possibility, the involvement of “opinion leaders” in school activities. It agrees with the findings of many different researches that proved that suitable development issues can be spread through all kinds of media because, as we mentioned above, all kinds of media are known to widen the range of public topics, events, and issues of which their audience is aware (i.e., agenda setting theory). There are also researches that prove that traditional media and social (digital) media cooperate in agenda-setting or, as Schoenbach pointed out, that “both channels in fact contribute to widening the audience agenda” [108]. To support education in the school environment and awareness in the school and out-of-school environments, schools have several methods at their disposal through the media and social media via which they can approach the topic of sustainable development. In addition, with the use of media methods, the school also involves the public. In this article, we talked about the positive expansion of school functions, which is a consequence of the use of the media in education; in relation to the public, the school also acquires, in addition to

its informative and ethical-moral function, an educational, motivational, and preventive function. We present the participation of the media in the school environment as one of the most positive solutions leading to achievement of the goals of sustainable development. The media becomes a means for collective participation and collective responsibility on sustainability in school environments.

In the practical part of this paper, we then focused on the concept of SD as an issue of individual human responsibility. When looking for an answer to the question of what are the individual tasks for the sustainable behavior of humans, it is necessary to return to the immediate associations of respondents, which are known to us thanks to the qualitative feature of the research. Open questions were answered by the respondents expressing their belief that it is still possible to turn away from plundering nature and overlooking its alarming state and to look at, or at least try to correctly understand, the responsibilities and tasks associated with caring for the world and its sustainable development. The perception of this responsibility (possibly irresponsibility) was the subject of a survey in which we examined the views of university youth on the individual responsibility of humans for sustainable development. The findings of the survey provided a current view of young respondents on the tasks that a person has for SD (Q1). The research showed that respondents perceive at least 15 areas that relate to the current individual responsibilities for the world and its sustainable development. According to the qualitative findings, we see that (1) "willing to care" is directly part of thinking about one's own responsibility in study groups. Based on the theory of responsibility, thinking about one's own responsibility is basic for the (2) "acts of responsibility" that involves especially important social practices in society and, as Honoré pointed out, it must be followed by (3) an "ability to succeed most of the time in doing the sort of thing that would avert the harm" [12] (pp. 14–15). Regardless of how many different meanings of responsibility we have or how many meanings are attributed to responsibilities [5–11,19] or concepts related to responsibility [12–18], the three steps of responsibility are permanent challenges both for the respondents and for the whole of society.

Students also answered in which of the four researched dimensions of SD they see the need for individual responsibility the most (Q2). Young respondents perceive all four dimensions of SD as important, which, including the indicators, were defined by the "National strategy for sustainable development of the Slovak republic". Nevertheless, the environmental dimension is the most represented in the answers from the questionnaire, which addresses the issue of the protection and rational use of the environment, including the fight against global environmental problems. Other dimensions in turn are the economic, institutional, and social dimensions. The reinforcement of the dimensions of SD, including the reinforcement of indicators, can be one of the most important competencies of every school; the positive results also confirmed that leadership and collective action form important means through which a school achieves sustainable development. The research definitely proves that students can play a significant role in driving sustainable regional development [14].

The emphasis on the balance between human needs and the carrying capacity of these needs in the context of SD is also present in interdisciplinary study programs at Slovak universities. Our findings testify to this. The research results can be summarized as follows: students have relatively good knowledge and orientation in the field of sustainable development, perception of individual responsibilities for the resilience and sustainability of the world, and efforts in considering remedying the existing situation; students are also able to think about individual tasks and the support for an ecological approach in the context of social, environmental, and economic progress. We also note the appeal of the young generation for the need to raise awareness in society and the need to involve society in "healing" activities related to climate change. The findings of our research follow the opinion of the authors of the Global Communications Development document, who pointed out that actively engaging across multiple communities improves the reach and frequency of core messaging about SD. "If awareness in itself is enough" (and the findings

of our research confirmed this), “the next question is if there is an action that we would like our target audience(s) to take?” [101] (p. 13). Schools must think about their priorities and possibilities. However, the participation of university students should certainly be ensured in achieving the goals of the SD.

We consider the findings as positive, which in the research sample of young university students confirm the perception of their own individual responsibility for the world and its sustainable development:

- It can be stated that the respondents are aware of the responsible role of good care of the world and its sustainable development. We can see in their statements an awareness of their own responsibility for the world and for all areas of human activity.
- The respondents are aware that their daily activities have a negative impact on individual components of the environment, which need to be maintained in their functional form with regard to future generations. It worries them that the problem of a devastated environment is becoming a global problem, as is the fact that efforts to date have failed to mitigate the destructive effects of humans on the environment.
- Young people are particularly bothered by a person’s predatory desire for profit and self-benefit at the expense of the environment. The questionnaires provide credible criticism of contemporary society, in which one “looks only at oneself and perceives oneself as an unlimited ruler” (Zuzana, 25).
- The respondents also appeal for the need to act, as “we no longer have much time to correct” (Pavol, 24).

The present appeal in the answers of the respondents can be perceived as a manifestation of the students’ responsible approach as well as a consequence of media effects. We see many of the answers of students as real mirrors of media effects on the audience. Therefore, we are reminded of the media effects shaping public, culture, and society through “cultivation sociocultural theory” that is visible in shaping viewers’ perceptions, beliefs, attitudes, and values. As this theory functions primarily through media story-telling [76], it has a large impact on perceptions of social reality. Therefore, due to the many SD topics and issues presented through media narratives, the respondents might have the same “view” on SD reality as the media. The fact is that respondents’ views on SD problems refer many times to news in the media, i.e., they seem to be consistent with the world portrayed in the media. Thus, in an SD context, it is possible to see that exposure to media messages influences recipients’ conceptions of the real world in our research [78].

We perceived as positive the presence of the individual responsibility of the respondents, which can, under the influence of the media, grow into active participation of the individual in activities aimed at SD. The media influences “what to think about” (in the context of “agenda setting theory”) [92,93], which can be seen also in the context of SD as a necessary appeal to the deeds “development that preserves the ability of current and future generations to meet their basic living needs without reducing the diversity of nature” [1]. Moreover, “the theory of cognitive dissonance” by L. Festinger is built on the psychological predisposition of media effects that have an impact the consequence of media influence and media effectiveness as well as raising awareness (in our case, about SD) through media; we would rather say change or challenge it, as L. Festinger, the author of this theory would say [94]. In this context, the effects of the media that influence attitudes and behavior and disrupt human comfort are important. According to Festinger, a person’s decision for something “uncomfortable” takes place when he/she is influenced by an external force that pushes him/her to make a decision, to change [94]. Thus, media broadcasting and media effects might be this external force, causing a positive change in thinking and acting; perceived choice is an important variable based on the growth in blending cognition with motivation. This is why “dissonance theory” is interesting for education, media, and SD.

The results of the research produce several other findings:

- The world and the human activity within it are perceived by young people in our research sample as interconnected vessels; therefore, the subject of human interest

must be care for the world to preserve human existence. An intense human interest in the consequences of one's actions is essential.

- They are most skeptical about changing the “set-up” of large multinationals, the roles of which are to generate profit and to grow. The answers to the questionnaire may therefore disappointingly show that human damage has not yet been eliminated, causing frustration among respondents, including a verbalized fear of uncertainty and ambiguity about future issues.
- The students perceived the presence of topics in connection with SD in education. They see little support for education, information sharing, and best practice in relation to SD in other societies as a problem. The authors of the study agree with this conclusion. It is in the context of the wider society that the important position of universities, which are autonomous and independent bearers of socially beneficial thinking and values and, at the same time, implementers of new approaches and good practice, is shown. These spread further from the school environment to other institutional spheres of society (in this article, we talked about the use of the media in school activities and methods focusing on sustainable development).

An important prerequisite of this research is the observation that the individual responsibilities of study respondents might grow with active use of the media into active participation of the individual in activities aimed at SD and may be an impulse to collective acts within the society. We consider schools as suitable environments for shaping this possibility and opportunity. We are certain that the media's influence on “what to think about” [92] can be seen as a necessary appeal to the deeds “development that preserves the ability of current and future generations to meet their basic living needs without reducing the diversity of nature” [1].

- The students proposed several options that would actively contribute to sustainable development, more visible publicity on this issue, or the greater participation of individuals in a responsible approach to the environment. They recall, in particular, the need for greater awareness on the issue of SD throughout society and the need for greater motivation. According to the studied students, these could be the competencies of “opinion leaders”, i.e., the media. This opinion also meets the conclusions of Slovak experts who focus on youth research in Slovakia and repeatedly call for the need for increased attention in the field of sustainability throughout society, the need to strengthen motivational factors in SD, and the need for a society-wide discussion [28,103,108–112].
- Finally, research revealed many other stimuli that already require independent research, for example, the degree of willingness to create ecological solutions in improving the environment, creating alternatives in the field of gentle but effective disinfection (i.e., the respondent's response to COVID 19), or thinking about field learning opportunities.

The media, and especially social media, has the power to spread all of these messages to the world, as we pointed out in the theoretical part of this article, where we discuss how social media creates new opportunities for engaging students, encourages collaboration, creativity, accountability, and mastery of ideas and concepts [58–60], enabling students to learn more [61–64], etc. In this context, we understand the term “media education” in this article, i.e., it is education in the active creation of media [55–57] as a tool for spreading messages about SD in both local and global societies.

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