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Tackling SDGs in higher education: the case of Ca' Foscari University

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“Leggete, studiate, e lavorate sempre con etica e con passione; ragionate con la vostra testa e imparate a dire di no; siate ribelli per giusta causa, difendete sempre la natura e i più deboli; non siate conformisti e non accodatevi al carro del vincitore; siate forti e siate liberi, altrimenti quando sarete vecchi e deboli rimpiangerete le montagne che non avete salito e le battaglie che non avete combattuto”.

Mario Rigoni Stern

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Introduction

The achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) requires the contribution of a wide range of actors capable of addressing the complex environmental, social, and economic challenges that characterize contemporary society. In response to these global issues, the United Nations adopted the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, a comprehensive framework composed of 17 Sustainable Development Goals and 169 related targets aimed at promoting sustainable and inclusive development worldwide (UNRIC, 2026; Mio, Panfilo, & Blundo, 2020).

Within this framework, Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) have progressively been recognized as key contributors to sustainable development. As highlighted by Sachs (2015), President of the UN Sustainable Development Solutions Network, universities can contribute to sustainable development, by facilitating collaboration among governments, businesses, and civil society organizations, while also promoting the development and dissemination of innovative and sustainable technologies.

Traditionally, universities have been associated with two primary missions: teaching and research. However, over the last decades, their role has progressively expanded beyond knowledge creation to include a broader societal function commonly referred to as the “Third Mission” (Compagnucci & Spigarelli, 2020). This evolution reflects the increasing expectation that universities contribute to economic, social, and cultural development through engagement with external stakeholders, knowledge transfer, and innovation (Laredo, 2007; Jäger & Kopper, 2014).

Within this context, Business Schools play a relevant role due to their responsibility in educating future managers, entrepreneurs, and decision-makers. As a result, they are increasingly expected to integrate sustainability and responsible

leadership into management education, a process supported by international initiatives such as the Principles for Responsible Management Education (PRME, 2026).

Despite the growing attention devoted to the integration of sustainability in higher education, limited research has examined how stakeholders perceive universities' contribution to the Sustainable Development Goals and how these perceptions evolve over time. This issue is particularly relevant from a stakeholder theory perspective. According to Freeman (1984), organisations create value by recognising and responding to the expectations of those groups that can affect or are affected by their activities. Therefore, understanding stakeholder perceptions is essential for ensuring legitimacy and effectiveness of universities' sustainability efforts.

To address this gap, this thesis investigates stakeholder perceptions of university engagement with the SDGs through a case study of Ca' Foscari University of Venice, also focusing on its Business School that is the Venice School of Management. By examining different stakeholder groups and comparing perceptions over time, the study aims to investigate how sustainability commitments are understood and evaluated within a higher education context, contributing to the growing literature on sustainability and stakeholder engagement in universities.

The remainder of this thesis is structured as follows. Chapter 1 presents the theoretical framework, introducing the SDGs and the 2030 Agenda, the evolution of universities' societal role through the Third Mission, the contribution of Business Schools to sustainable development, and the stakeholder theory lens adopted in this study. Chapter 2 describes the research methodology, including the case study design, data collection procedure, and the survey instrument. Chapter 3 presents the empirical results at both university and VSM level, comparing responses across stakeholder groups and time periods. Chapter 4 discusses the findings in relation to the theoretical framework and existing literature. Finally, the conclusion summarises the main contributions, acknowledges limitations, and suggests directions for future research.

Chapter 1: Literature review and Theoretical framework

1.1 Introduction

Global challenges like climate change, social inequalities and health emergencies have highlighted the fragilities and vulnerabilities of contemporary economic and social systems (Panfilo & Mio, 2025). These concrete challenges have increasingly raised concerns about identifying new avenues towards building a more sustainable future for all.

Based on this scenario, the United Nations introduced in 2015 a plan “to build a better world for people and the planet by 2030”, namely the 2030 Agenda (UNRIC, 2026). More in detail, this framework is made up of 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and 169 related targets, which represent a set of integrated and measurable goals striving for a global sustainable development (Mio, Panfilo, & Blundo, 2020). Particularly, this initiative speaks to all actors in society, constituting a clear call to action for governments, business, organizations, and Higher Education Institutions (HEIs).

Within this context, businesses are increasingly recognized as key actors contributing to sustainable development, due to the breadth of their impact and the multiplicity of resources they own. Particularly, thanks to their financial capabilities, expertise, and managerial skills, they can provide a significant contribution to achieving a better world (Berrone, et al., 2019). Nevertheless, the United Nations and the literature also highlight the strategic role played by universities and scholars in delivering the objectives of the 2030 Agenda.

Even if historically those institutions have focused on teaching and research activities, HEIs have progressively expanded their role embracing a wider societal function, the so-called “Third Mission”. This activity relies on the universities’ contribution to society through various activities encompassing stakeholder engagement, innovation, and social impact. In particular, Business Schools occupy a central position within this transformation, because of their specific role in educating future managers, policymakers, and future leaders, thus responding to the call raised by the United Nations and the society overall.

However, despite this growing attention to sustainability in higher education, the literature highlights some ambiguities regarding the concrete contribution of HEIs to the achievement of the SDGs. In fact, some studies underline that sustainability integration within academia often remains fragmented or symbolic, without generating a deeper and transformative institutional change (Panfilo, Zarzycka, & Mio, 2026). Furthermore, recent literature argues that organizations should move beyond “symbolic commitment” and adopt practices and activities capable of generating shared value for the society and environment (Panfilo & Mio, 2025).

Based on these considerations, this thesis seeks to investigate the role of Higher Education Institutions in contributing to the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals. Specifically, the research addresses the following question:

“How do Higher Education Institutions contribute to tackling the Sustainable Development Goals of the 2030 Agenda?”

To address this overarching question, the study pursues several specific objectives:

First, it aims to assess the stakeholders’ degree of sensitivity towards the SDGs and analyze their awareness regarding current academic initiatives.

Second, it maps stakeholders’ expectations to identify potential gaps between these demands and the actual actions implemented by the institution.

Third, it seeks to examine the level of commitment and active participation of the stakeholders in tackling the goals.

Finally, the research focuses on a specific institutional context to understand the role of the Venice School of Management in comparison to other departments of Ca' Foscari University.

To answer the research question, the study adopts Stakeholder Theory as its theoretical framework. This perspective is particularly relevant as it allows understanding how universities balance multiple stakeholders' expectations while pursuing their traditional functions and responding to the United Nations' call to act as agents of sustainable change.

1.2 Literature review

1.2.1 The role of universities: from teaching to the “Third Mission”

Historically, universities and higher education institutions (HEIs) have played a key role in shaping the environment in which they operated (Montesinos, Carot, Martinez, & Mora, 2008). However, the contribution through which this has been possible varies across time, leading to the identification of three main missions fostered by those institutions (Compagnucci & Spigarelli, 2020). Notably, the evolution of the role of such agents is still ongoing.

Above all, the university's first mission is associated with its teaching function. This feature traces back so far in the past, with Aristotle in 335 B.C.E. and his Lyceum, with the primary goal of educating the elite members of his community (Natali, 1991; Roper & Hirth, 2005; Berti, 2012). A similar role is also recognized in the Middle Ages, when teaching and the transmission of knowledge were still the main outcomes provided by HEIs (Montesinos, Carot, Martinez, & Mora, 2008; Compagnucci & Spigarelli, 2020).

The second function associated with the university is the research activity. This was initially introduced in the 19th century, and it represented the first departure from the university's traditional mission. This happened when, after the Humboldtian reforms (Rüegg, 2004), the University of Berlin started to introduce scientific research into its program (Urdari, Farcas, & Tiron Tudor, 2017) alongside the teaching activity, and soon, almost all the other universities began to introduce it as well (Rolfo & Finardi, 2014; Rinaldi, Cavicchi, Spigarelli, Lacchè, & Rubens, 2018; Sá, Dias, & Sá, 2018; Compagnucci & Spigarelli, 2020).

Finally, the last and most divergent role played by the university is the so-called “Third Mission” (TM), an ambiguous (Laredo, 2007) and nebulous (Gulddahl Rasmussen, Tved Linde, & Gregersen, 2009) term often used to identify a wide range of “contributions to society” (Compagnucci & Spigarelli, 2020).

This activity emerged in the last decades of the 20th century, as a response to external pressures of different natures, such as the sharp evolution of technology, the advent of globalization and crises – both financial and environmental ones. All those factors heavily hit society, which claimed an intervention on a large scale from a wide range of institutions, among them, the universities. For this reason, the TM can be perceived as the result of an “isomorphic development path”¹, even if there are many ways in which universities put into practice this function (Salamzadeh, Kawamorita, & Salamzadeh, 2016; Compagnucci & Spigarelli, 2020).

However, from a general point of view, there is an ongoing debate among the academics on a unique and shared definition of this activity. What is clear, is that it is a multidisciplinary and complex phenomenon linked to the social and economic mission of the universities, which varies according to the following factors (Compagnucci & Spigarelli, 2020): the nature of the activities carried out by the institutions; the degree of territorial integration, and, lastly, the institutional framework in which they operate (Laredo, 2007; Jäger & Kopper, 2014). The institutions that embrace this logic are places in which, while their traditional functions are carried out, there is a simultaneous commercialization of the knowledge produced. In other words, the focus is on the exploitation of the knowledge in practical terms. In this category, patents, licenses and spin-offs issued by the HEIs can be included (Audretsch, 2014).

From this perspective, some academics argue that some universities adopted quasi-firms’ structures to govern such activities. Specifically, inside the institutions, specific actors charged with managing those functions have been created, namely the “Knowledge Transfer Offices” (KTOs) (Compagnucci & Spigarelli, 2020).

Furthermore, to respond to the increasing developments that occurred in the 21st century, universities had to rethink their TM in an even wider perspective (Goethner & Wyrwich, 2020). In those years, society claimed even more applied

¹ In organizational theory, this “isomorphic path” refers to institutional isomorphism (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983), which describes the process where organizations within the same environment tend to become similar to one another to face the same external conditions. In the case of HEIs, this framework explains how different universities gradually adopt similar structures and activities, such as the Third Mission, to gain support and legitimacy, even if their practical implementations vary.

research with a commercial potential and, for this reason, the term “Entrepreneurial University” was first coined by Etzkowitz (Etzkowitz, 1983) and later put into practice by Clark (Clark, 1998) to define an HEI that is deeply interconnected with the territory in which it operates. Specifically, while it contributes to the cultural and economic growth, it also creates an engagement in society (Etzkowitz, 2013). A participatory approach from both internal and external stakeholders is indeed required (Disterheft, Caeiro, Azeiteiro, & Leal Filho, 2015). In other terms, entrepreneurial education, while fostering the development of human capital through the transfer of knowledge, basic research, and practical application, acts in interaction with the local community (Pineiro, Langa, & Pausits, 2015). Particularly, Business Schools contribute to this model in two ways: firstly, by offering courses in financial planning, accounting, business plans, and marketing; and secondly, by involving faculty in new entrepreneurial ideas that foster the economic development of their host region (Compagnucci & Spigarelli, 2020).

This phenomenon has primarily been observed in the USA, where universities are mainly financed by private actors that promote the commercialization of knowledge, for instance at MIT (Etzkowitz, 2000). Consequently, the evolution of the TM in the USA followed a bottom-up approach, while, in contrast, in Europe, it was driven by a top-down logic, as here universities are mainly publicly funded (Etzkowitz, 2004). Some academics highlight that this places increasing pressure on European universities, which, on one hand, must focus on the efficient use of the resources to conduct the TM-related activities (due to the budget cuts) and, on the other hand, must meet transparency and accountability requests held by external stakeholders (Paoloni, Cesarini, & Demartini, 2019). Regarding this last point, the literature underlines the difficulties encountered by the universities in reporting their activities with effective indicators, as almost all of them provide a narrow view of the outcomes provided, such as the number of spin-offs activated and so on, which fails to provide a comprehensive overview of all the work done (Vargiu, 2014; Compagnucci & Spigarelli, 2020).

Ultimately, recent debates underline how HEIs should move beyond this approach to knowledge transfer and community integration, where universities create standard solutions to “single commercial problems”. To tackle current and complex

challenges a transformative approach is required (Pflitsch & Menzel, 2026). This transformative perspective is coherent with recent sustainability literature, which argues that organizations should move beyond symbolic sustainability practices and become active agents of change capable of generating shared value for society and the environment (Panfilo & Mio, 2025). As argued by Pflitsch and Menzel, “transformative universities” should provide solutions by managing divergent values, such as profit and sustainability. In this way, HEIs, by “addressing dissonance”, can find transformative innovations to lead society to sustainability-driven models. However, this is possible only if the Third Mission is carried out by academia and society, as a multitude of actors that co-create while evaluating a plurality of values (Pflitsch & Menzel, 2026).

1.2.2 Business schools, principles for responsible management education (PRME) and the SDGs

Institutional framework and the seven principles of PRME

Focusing the analysis on the role of Business Schools, and how those actors can contribute to the Third Mission of the organization of which they are part, it is relevant to consider the Principles for Responsible Management Education (PRME). Those “guidelines” are the result of a United Nations Global Compact initiative, launched in 2007, to raise the profile of sustainability in business and management education (PRME, 2026).

The PRME were promoted to overcome the organization-centered view that was traditionally adopted when teaching business and management, which led to the logic of the maximization of shareholders’ interests above other values (Kurucz, Colbert, & Marcus, 2014). The urgency of a more responsible management education was developed based on the assumption that students who attend management, economics, and law studies will become the leaders of the future. For this reason, those people need to be educated and prepared to deal with all stakeholders’ expectations, taking into account a broader range of values related to society and the environment. As shown on the UNPRME official website, they seek to educate people who will help their organizations to create inclusive prosperity, while promoting freedom, justice, and peace within regenerative natural ecosystems.

In other words, this initiative aims to provide ongoing guidance to Business Schools, offering support for continuous improvement in business practice and education, while drawing attention to sustainable and ethical conduct.

More in detail, it is built up around six plus one principles, namely “*Purpose, Values, Teach, Research, Partner, Practice, and Share*” to put into the spotlight the importance of educating responsible decision-makers.

The first two principles focus on the goal of the initiative:

- *Purpose:* “We advance responsible management education to foster inclusive prosperity in a world of thriving ecosystems.”
- *Values:* “We place organizational responsibility and accountability to society and the planet at the core of what we do.”

Principles number 3 and 4 focus on the pedagogical aspects of education and research, while creating a bridge between the academic and the business worlds:

- *Teach:* “We transform our learning environments by integrating responsible management concepts and practices into our curriculum and pedagogy.”
- *Research:* “We study people, organizations, institutions, and the state of the world to inspire responsible management and education practice.”

The list concludes by stressing the importance of relationships between Business Schools – responsible for educating future leaders – and the actors who are already leading companies:

- *Partner:* “We engage people from business, government, civil society, and academia to advance responsible and accountable management education and practice.”
- *Practice:* “We adopt responsible and accountable management principles in our own governance and operations.”
- *Share:* “We share our successes and failures with each other to enable our collective learning and best live our common values and purpose.”

The goal is to train people able to look forward, towards future generations and to the planet of tomorrow, and backward, being accountable for decisions taken and avoided (PRME, 2026).

Critical perspectives and the synergy with the SDGs

However, there are contrasting opinions in the literature about the effectiveness of this UN initiative (Snelson-Powell, Grosvold, & Millington, 2020). While some scholars viewed it as an opportunity to change management education (Fougère, Solitander, & Young, 2014), others claimed its inefficacy in reimagining the pedagogical approach (Burchell, Kennedy, & Murray, 2015). These critiques arise because some Business Schools embraced the initiative only to legitimize themselves in the society, without being truly engaged (Bell & Bridgman, 2017).

However, with the introduction of the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs in 2015, academics agree on the opinion that the latter strengthened the application of the former (Azmat, Jain, & Sridharan, 2023). Together, they promoted a transformation of the role of Business Schools, “from training centers for specialists to catalysts for societal change” (Reficco & Jaén, 2015). Nevertheless, recent literature highlights that the integration of SDGs within management education may sometimes remain rhetorical or symbolic, rather than fully transformative, especially when sustainability principles are not embedded into organizational governance, research strategies, and operational activities (Panfilo, Zarzycka, & Mio, 2026). However, as mentioned above, the PRME came to challenge the mainstream approach that led to consider profit above all other values, fostering the creation of curricula that promote more balanced and ethical prioritization of interests (Azmat, Jain, & Sridharan, 2023). As the SDGs broadly promote actions to support ethics and sustainability, they are perceived as a pathway towards a responsible management education that supports the goals promoted by the PRME (UN PRME Secretariat, 2020).

Curricular implementation strategies: the four approaches

Furthermore, the literature explores how SDGs are adopted in the curricula, in research, and in operations within Business Schools. As presented by Godemann et al. (2011), there are four main approaches that Business Schools adopt in re-organizing their courses:

- Piggy-backing approach – a cosmetic attempt that consists of adding extra case studies or slides to existing courses, without truly changing their structure;
- Digging deep approach – a deeper pathway that introduces new stand-alone modules;
- Mainstreaming approach – it consists of a systematic integration of sustainability in all courses offered by the Business School, embedding SDGs transversally;
- Focusing approach – it promotes the creation of new specialized and interdisciplinary training offers, fully dedicated to sustainability and the SDGs.

Scholars have also proposed various curricular strategies to address the challenges of effectively embedding SDGs in higher education (Azmat, Jain, & Sridharan, 2023).

Empirical evidence: barriers and gaps in reporting and operations

Moreover, what emerges from another study that analyzes 100 Sharing Information on Progress (SIP) Reports² is that there are some areas of improvement among those adoptions. The results suggest that Business Schools mainly concentrate their efforts on teaching, while research and campus management activities remain in the background.

Furthermore, there is a significant gap between bachelor's and master's degrees, as a common trend is the integration of SDGs-related themes mainly in post-graduate courses rather than at lower levels.

Finally, as regards the methods used for that integration, faculty members mainly adopt traditional approaches, such as inviting specialized guest speakers during lessons or through case-studies analysis (Godemann, Herzig, Moon, & Snelson-Powell, 2012).

² SIP Report is a mandatory report about activities done that signatory Business Schools issue to the PRME Secretariat to avoid being excluded from the partnership.

Another more recent research highlights also barriers that challenge the full adoption of this innovative approach. These are mainly linked with the still predominant focus on the profit-maximization or resistance from teaching communities that encounter difficulties in changing the traditional pedagogical approach. Nevertheless, there is a shared consensus that there are far more attempts to embed SDGs into courses, than to address research and operational activities with the same degree of effort.

For what concerns research activities, the study underlines that it is mainly due to a lack of a coherent SDGs-focused research-strategy and of a formal approach that embeds SDGs in research. Namely, there is a common trend towards retrofitting the 2030 Agenda's objectives within research by aligning results with them, instead of using a customized approach for this topic.

Meanwhile, concerning the management of operational activities, there are differences among Business Schools hosted in developed countries and those hosted in less-developed ones.

The results underline how, the former use a more formalized and structured approach, by deeply integrating SDGs into their operational strategic plans, while the latter adopt more organic and informal strategies.

In conclusion, the study seeks to explain why it is less complicated to integrate the SDGs instead of the PRME. It explains that this is mainly because the SDGs are more specific, have clear deadlines, and explicitly indicate the objectives to strive for. In contrast, while PRME principles are highly valuable on paper, they remain less concrete and harder to implement in practice (Azmat, Jain, & Sridharan, 2023).

1.3 Theoretical framework: Stakeholders Theory

1.3.1 Theoretical foundations: Freeman vs. Friedman

To better understand why Business Schools decide to adopt the PRME, and broadly, why HEIs undertake “Third Mission” and SDGs-directed activities, it is useful to analyze those behaviors through the lens of the Stakeholders Theory (Freeman R. E., 1984).

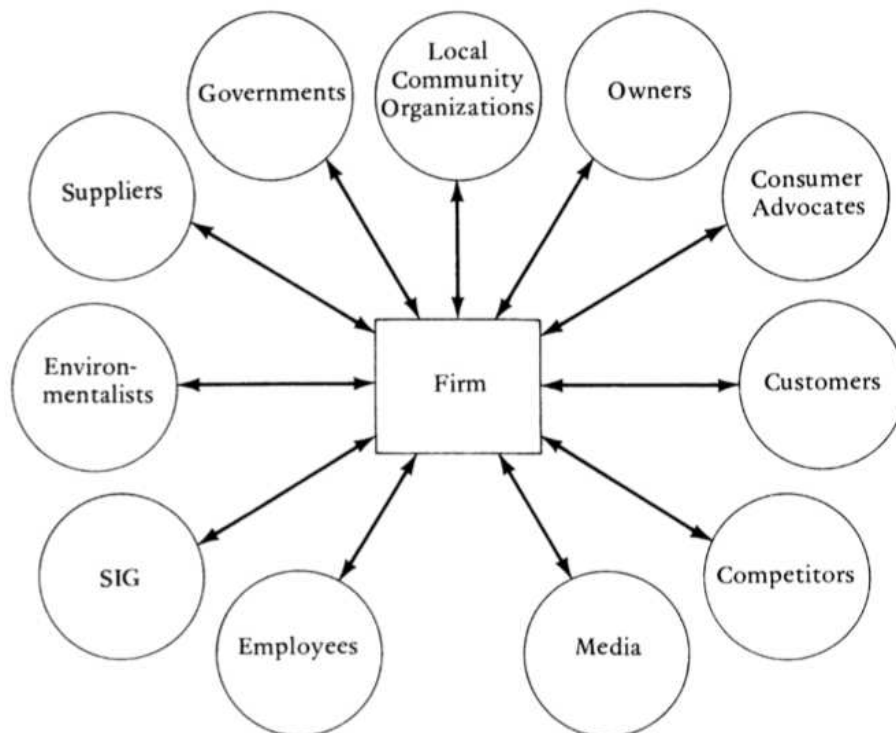
According to this framework, organizations must consider the expectations of all those groups of actors that have influence, or are influenced by, the organization, to create value and prosperity in the long run.

This theory was primarily developed by Freeman, R. E (1984) to give an answer to managers’ concerns in an increasingly turbulent environment in the last decades of the 20th century. More in detail, the theory argues that managers must go beyond the Shareholder Theory developed by Friedman (1970), according to which they must maximize only the interests of one group of stakeholders, namely shareholders. Particularly, organizations need to satisfy the expectations of all groups of stakeholders, to gain support and legitimacy. Their support is a necessary condition to guarantee organizational long-term success and survival. Basically, improving relationship between HEIs and their stakeholders, increases value creation (De Freitas Langrafe, Barakat, Stocker, & Boaventura, 2020).

1.3.2 The evolution of the "Stakeholder" concept

To further analyze this concept, it is important to identify who those actors are, and to do so, the literature helps in answering this question. The term “stakeholder” was first used in the literature by the Stanford Research Institute (1963), defining them as “those groups without whose support the organization would cease to exist”. It originally included shareholders, employees, customers, suppliers, lenders, and society.

Figure 1.1: A typical stakeholder map



Source: Freeman R. E., 1984

As said before, the Stanford Research Institute argued that “without understanding the needs of all those groups, the firm won’t count on their support, essential for its survival in the long run”.

After that first definition in 1963, there followed in the literature further classifications for these actors, showing an increasingly broader concept, shifting from the idea of considering them necessary for the organization’s survival towards a more relational and ethical-based approach.

Firstly, definitions focused on them as vital groups for the business, but later in the 80s other concepts that included interdependencies, expectations, stakes, rights and contracts were introduced. Namely, Freeman and Reed (1983) affirmed that, broadly speaking, “they can affect the achievement of an organization’s goals, or, those who are affected by the achievement of an organization’s goals”; in a narrow sense “those on whom the organization depends for its survival”. Moreover, Cornell and Shapiro (1987) argued “those who have expectations; who have contracts” and Evan and Freeman (1988) declared “the stakeholder has a stake or expectation towards the company; the

one who has an advantage or damage, and whose rights are violated or respected, by the actions of the company”.

Later, during the 90s the focus shifted to the legitimacy of the relationship, on the exchange of critical resources and on the management of the invested risk. Indeed, Hill and Jones (1992) defined them as “constituents who have a legitimate expectation towards the company... defined by the existence of an exchange relationship”; “those who provide the company with critical resources (contributions), and in exchange, each expects their interests to be satisfied (by persuasion)”, while Langtry (1994) wrote “the company is significantly responsible for their well-being or they have a moral or legal expectation about the company”. Finally, Clarkson (1994) argued “they run a certain risk for having invested a certain capital, human or financial, something of value, in a company” or “they run a risk for the company's activities”.

This evolution highlights a shift from considering the relationship between the organization and those groups of actors focused on their essential support towards a more reciprocal engagement.

1.3.3 Key features of the theory

Moreover, Freeman (1984) identified several features that characterize the theory. First, this framework was developed to provide “a single strategic framework, flexible enough to deal with environmental shifts”. This represents a break with the traditional approach, under which, following an environmental change, firms seek a feasible solution to adapt to the new circumstances and then reproduce the same mechanism at the next occurrence.

Second, it is structured as a “strategic management process”, wherein the reciprocal process of influence that the organization and the environment exert on each other is actively considered. This also represent a significant shift compared to the “strategic planning process” of Ansoff (1965) which was limited in the prediction of the future, and separately, developing an isolated plan aimed at exploiting the firm’s position.

Further, the focal point of the theory is the “survival” of the organization. In Freeman’s opinion, this depends on “the achievement of an organization’s objectives”.

To do so, an organization needs the support of all those who can affect it, while also understanding how it will affect them. In other words, managing these various relationships is a pathway to achieving organizational goals, which translates into the business's long-term survival. For sure, considering a wide range of expectations from different groups of actors requires an approach that balances and trades off all these various interests.

Moreover, the theory stresses the fact that an organization must invest in all those relationships that will support its growth in the long term. Indeed, in this process it is essential that the organization rely heavily on some core values, to make consistent decisions and actions when balancing different requests and implementing the business strategy.

Furthermore, the theory is both a descriptive and a prescriptive approach. This is because it is based on concrete analysis, and is, indeed, descriptive. However, its purpose is to plan the future direction of a firm, and this is possible from the analysis of the different relationships. Those relationships are not just given, but they can be modified according to the firm's actions; thus, they can be perceived as prescriptive, in imagining and projecting the consequences of their behaviors.

Still, this approach goes deeply into the analysis of the profiles of the different categories of actors, and it is not based on a generic categorization of the different roles. It requires the identification of the firm-specific groups of people that interact with the organization, as it is the real context that counts. Only with this deep understanding of the details that describe the stakeholders can management build a tailored approach that guarantees a long-term survival.

Finally, the organization must adopt an integrated approach that balances all different stakeholders' perspective. Even if a win-win result is not guaranteed, the strategy ought to equally distribute advantages and disadvantages to maintain the support in the long run (Freeman & McVea, 2001).

1.3.4 Classification models and contextualization in higher education

In the literature, different schemes were adopted to categorize stakeholders, based on the assumption that different constituents have different weight in supporting the organization's ability in reaching its objectives.

For instance, adopting a distinction originally conceptualized by Clarkson (1995), Carroll (1996) defined stakeholders according to the criteria of power and legitimacy. This scheme – further analyzed by Mitchell, Agle, and Wood, (1997) through the inclusion of the urgency criterion – differentiates stakeholders into “primary” versus “secondary”, and “market” versus “non-market” groups.

The “primary” have a direct and vital interest in the firm's survival as a going concern (such as shareholders, investors, employees, customers, suppliers, and public stakeholder groups), whereas “secondary” stakeholders exercise an indirect influence on the organization (such as mass media, community...). Moreover, “market” (or economic) stakeholders are engaged in direct economic transactions with the firm, while those “non-market” (or social/institutional) stakeholders just influence it or are affected by its operations, including, for instance, the government and environmental associations.

The two criteria are essential to distinguish among these different categorizations. Indeed, “power” expresses the group's ability to influence organizational decisions, while “legitimacy” represents the perception that the claim of such group are socially acceptable and desirable.

Contextualizing the Stakeholders Theory in this thesis, it is indeed useful to highlights how are the different groups of actors that have a stake towards the university. Tetřevová and Sabolová (2010) identify a specific set of relevant actors. In the case of a university, these stakeholders encompass students, graduates, course applicants, employees, the Ministry of Education, grant agencies, sponsors, other educational institutions (acting as both partners and competitors), businesses (as sources of both monetary and non-monetary benefits resulting from university-industry partnerships), suppliers, public authorities, and the general public. Furthermore, in the case of private universities, they also include owners and other investors (Tetřevová & Sabolová, 2010).

However, this thesis focuses on the specific actors within the university's internal environment. To get an insight into the different roles within Ca' Foscari, the surveys were administered to: students, PhD students, research fellows, faculty and research staff, language lecturers, and technical and administrative staff. This approach ensured an integrated perspective on the views of the stakeholders involved.

Concluding this comprehensive view of the role of higher education in tackling the SDGs, stakeholder theory offers a framework to categorize its behavior in balancing the different demands of the various groups of actors. Since the entrepreneurial university relies on a participatory approach, analyzing the sentiment of the stakeholders becomes essential to monitor the state of art of the relationships between Ca' Foscari and its constituents.

Specifically, the theory explains to whom the university and business schools (in this case) are accountable and why it is important to benefit from their support. Even though traditional management education focused on the maximization of the shareholders' interests (Kurucz, Colbert, & Marcus, 2014), the shift towards the PRME and SDGs indirectly forces Business Schools to evaluate a much wider network of actors. This broad view is linked to the "Third Mission" of universities, which requires the creation of social, economic, and cultural value for the wider society. As mentioned in previous paragraphs, by engaging with these diverse groups, Business Schools transform their role from isolated training centers into "catalysts for societal change" (Reficco & Jaén, 2015), creating value for all stakeholders rather than for just a few.

Ultimately, adopting a stakeholder-oriented perspective shows that integrating the SDGs is a strategic response to global expectations, allowing business schools and HEIS to maintain their societal legitimacy and securing their long-term survival.

Chapter 2: Research methodology and data

2.1 Research design: a longitudinal case-study approach

As introduced in the previous chapter, this thesis aims to investigate the role of higher education institutions in contributing to the Sustainable Development Goals, with particular attention to the contribution that Management departments can provide to a more sustainable-oriented governance. To address these objectives, the thesis adopts a longitudinal case-study approach.

According to Yin (1984), the case study method allows researchers to investigate a phenomenon within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between the phenomenon and its context are not clearly defined. For this reason, the present research focuses on Ca' Foscari University of Venice and its Department of Management (VSM) as a case study.

The choice of the University of Venice is particularly relevant for the objectives of this thesis.

Since the launch of its sustainability programme in 2010, the university has implemented numerous activities aimed at reducing environmental impacts, promoting social equity and well-being, and fostering a sustainable development. Sustainability objectives are also embedded in the university's governance system and are monitored through a performance management process. Furthermore, the university contributes to sustainability not only through Third Mission activities but also through the integration of sustainability into its traditional functions, namely teaching and research. In particular, it promotes interdisciplinary teaching activities, and research projects addressing global challenges.

Moreover, Ca' Foscari is also present in several international sustainability networks, including the Principle for Responsible Management Education (PRME), the Global Compact Network, the Italian University Network for Sustainable Development (RUS), the Sustainable Development Solutions Network (SDSN), and the Global Universities Partnership on Environment for Sustainability (GUPES). The university also publishes an annual Sustainability Report aligned with the Global Reporting Initiative (GRI) Standards and explicitly links its activities to the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals of the 2030 Agenda.

Furthermore, the presence of the Venice School of Management (VSM) enables a more detailed analysis of the role played by a management department, compared with other departments within the same institution, in embracing the Principles for Responsible Management Education (PRME) promoted by the United Nations.

This approach allows for the examination of stakeholders' perceptions within a specific institutional environment. Furthermore, it enables the comparison between the university as a whole and one of its departments, providing insights into possible differences in awareness, expectations or engagement.

The research analyzes how internal stakeholders perceive the university's commitment to sustainability and how these perceptions have evolved over time. To gather this information, the analysis is based on survey data collected in two different periods, 2021 and 2025. Comparing the two waves allows the identification of shifts in perceptions and provides insights into the progress made within the institution.

The longitudinal perspective is particularly valuable because it captures two different stages in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda. While the 2021 survey reflects perceptions of the post-pandemic context and was conducted when nine years remained until the 2030 deadline, the 2025 edition represents a moment of policy consolidation, as the timeframe has narrowed to five years. This temporal comparison provides useful insights into how stakeholders perceive the university's commitment to the SDGs over time.

To gather data, structured surveys were administered in both years to the members of the Ca' Foscari community including students, teaching and research staff, technical and administrative personnel, PhD students, research fellows and language

lecturers. Data were collected through a mail survey managed by the university office responsible for institutional surveys, namely Ca'Foscari Rilevazioni Office. In the first edition, respondents could participate between 28 April and 15 May, while the second edition took place between 13 and 31 October. In both cases, a reminder was sent to encourage participation. This methodology offers the possibility to reach a large number of respondents, while ensuring standardized responses that facilitate comparisons across different stakeholder groups and periods.

2.2 Analysis of the survey questions

The research is based on a structured questionnaire administered in 2021 and repeated in 2025. Particularly, it included mainly closed-ended questions, allowing respondents to express their opinion through multiple choice answers and rankings. This approach facilitated the comparison across different years and stakeholder groups between the two survey waves.

The survey explored five main domains. First, it collected information on respondent's profiles and departmental affiliation, enabling the categorization of respondents among stakeholders' categories and organizational units. Second, it investigates stakeholders' awareness of sustainability issues, asking participants to rank global challenges according to their perceived urgency and the importance of an institutional commitment in addressing them. Third, it examines perceptions regarding Ca' Foscari's contribution to sustainable initiatives. Fourth, it explores which actions participants consider most relevant in order to meet the SDGs, from both the university as a whole and at departmental level. Finally, it explores the level of individual engagement, assessing whether the community felt able to contribute to a sustainability-driven change.

Overall, this instrument was designed to provide a comprehensive understanding of stakeholders' priorities, perceptions and expectations regarding sustainability within the university context.

2.3 Data analysis methods: comparison of the 2021 and 2025 cohorts and the University vs Venice School of Management

The analysis is based on two complementary comparisons. The first is a longitudinal comparison between the 2021 and the 2025 survey results. This allows for the identification of changes in stakeholder's perception, priorities, expectations regarding sustainability and the SDGs. Comparing the data collected at these different points in time also provides insights into how awareness has evolved and perceptions of sustainability-related issues have changed over time. Moreover, the progressively shorter timeframe may also be reflected in respondents' answers.

The second is a comparison between the overall university community and the Venice School of Management (VSM). This analysis aims to identify potential differences in perceptions and priorities between the institution as a whole and a department whose educational and research activities are connect to management and sustainability-related topics.

Combining these two perspectives makes it possible to assess both temporal developments and organizational differences, providing a deeper understanding of sustainability perceptions within Ca' Foscari University.

Chapter 3: Analysis of results

3.1 University-level results by disciplinary areas and survey year

The results of the two surveys offer a comprehensive view of the perceptions within the Ca' Foscari community, including students, faculty and research staff, and technical-administrative personnel. By comparing the data collected in 2021 and 2025, it is possible to trace the evolution of the stakeholders' sensitivity towards SDGs-related issues and their awareness of the University's initiatives and identify also trends between the different roles and Departments.

Before starting the analysis of the responses, it is essential to focus on the composition of the samples. As can be seen below, to ensure data reliability, the surveys were sent to a wide range of potential respondents. Despite a slight contraction in the overall number of submissions compared to 2021, in 2025 the survey involved a very large base of nearly 14.000 individuals. The achievement of 1.145 complete responses at the last session constitutes a solid information base, that mirrors the contribution of every sector of the university community. Furthermore, the response rate is also quite in line with that one recorded at the first edition, despite a slight decrease.

Table 3.1: Comparison of invitations sent and response rates for survey session

Invitations	No. of Respondents (2021)	No. of Respondents (2025)	% Change
Total invitations sent	14.992	13.903	-7,26%
No. of complete responses	1.699	1.145	-32,61%
Response rate	11,33%	8,24%	-27,33%

Source: Author's elaboration based on data from:
Evaluation Office, Ca' Foscari University (2021 - 2025).
Agenda 2030 Questionnaire. The perception of the Ca' Foscari community.

The members of the Ca' Foscari community invited to complete the 2030 Agenda surveys were from all the Departments and sectors of the institution, specifically:

- the Department of Asian and North African Studies;
- the Department of Economics;
- the Department of Environmental Sciences, Informatics and Statistics;
- the Department of Humanities;
- the Department of Linguistics and Comparative Cultural Studies;
- the Department of Molecular Sciences and Nanosystems;
- the Department of Philosophy and Cultural Heritage;
- the Venice School of Management;
- and others, such as the Central Administration, the Challenge School and the University Library System (SBA).

Furthermore, to obtain a cross-sectional insight into the various roles within the institution, the surveys were administrated to any category of the University community. This approach ensured a complete perspective of the views of all the stakeholders involved. More in detail, the surveys were sent to:

- Students;
- PhD Students;
- Research Fellows;
- Faculty and Research Staff;
- Language Lecturers;
- Technical and Administrative Staff.

A closer look to the 2025 sample shows the precise composition of the invited actors in that session. Most of the invitations were directed towards the Department of Philosophy and the economic area, followed by the linguistic and humanities fields, concluding with the scientific Departments. The precise figures are summarized in the table that follows.

The distribution of responses does not mirror the number of invitations sent to each department. Although stakeholders from the scientific area represented the smallest share of invitees, the Department of Environmental Sciences, Informatics and Statistics recorded the highest number of responses, both in absolute terms (181 responses) and in percentage terms (13.53%).

Alongside this, the Department of Humanities and the Department of Molecular Sciences and Nanosystems rank second and third in terms of response rate, with 12.00% and 11.66%, respectively, the latter standing out despite accounting for the lowest number of invitations sent.

Continuing the analysis, the linguistic field follows with a response rate of around 8%, while the economic area shows a slightly lower level of participation (around 7%).

Finally, the Department of Philosophy and Cultural Heritage records the lowest response rate (5.69%), a result that may be partially due to the large number of invitees.

Overall, these data suggest that smaller departments tend to be more responsive, while larger ones show lower levels of participation in terms of responsiveness to this initiative.

Table 3.2: Distribution of survey invitation by Departments (2025)

Department	No. of invitees	No. of respondents	Response rate
Environmental Sciences, Informatics and Statistics	1.338	181	13,53%
Economics	2.429	177	7,29%
Humanities	1.342	161	12,00%
Linguistics and Comparative Cultural Studies	1.735	146	8,41%
Asian and North African Studies	1.973	145	7,35%
Philosophy and Cultural Heritage	2.531	144	5,69%
Venice School of Management	2.109	139	6,59%
Molecular Sciences and Nanosystems	446	52	11,66%
Total	13.903	1.145	8,24%

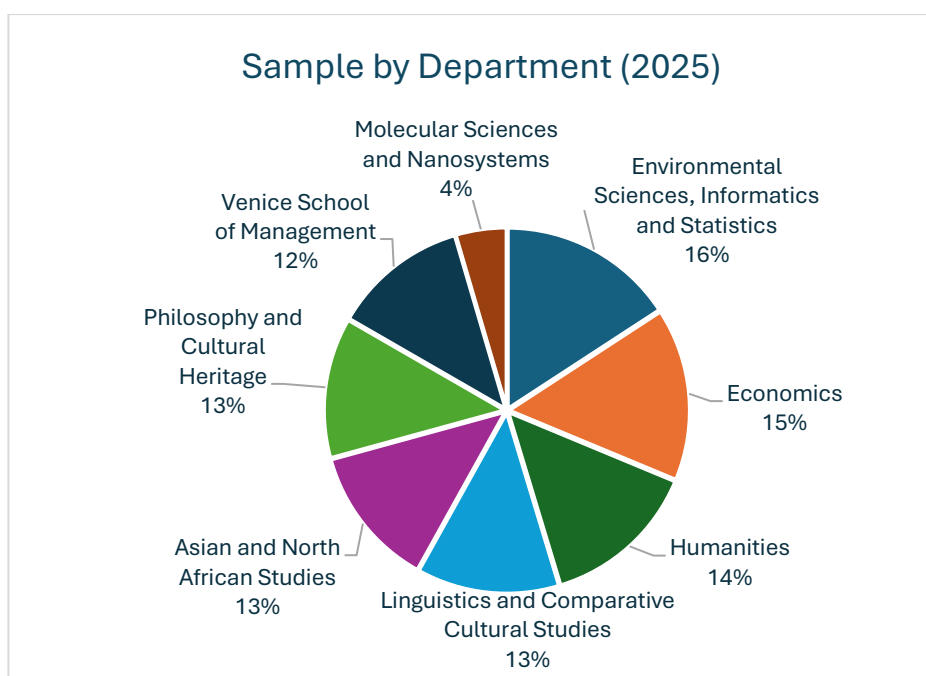
Source: Author's elaboration based on data from:
Evaluation Office, Ca' Foscari University (2021 - 2025).
Agenda 2030 Questionnaire. The perception of the Ca' Foscari community.

The final sample is characterized by a heterogeneous distribution of stakeholders among the various departments. As shown in figure 3.1, the greatest share of respondents is affiliated with the Department of Environmental Sciences, Informatics and Statistics (16%), followed by the Department of Economics at 15%; together, they account for nearly one-third of the group.

The other two-thirds of the sample are relatively well-balanced among the remaining departments, with values ranging between 12% and 14%. The Department of Molecular Sciences and Nanosystems, which accounts for only 4% of the total, is the sole exception.

Of particular interest is the fact that the final representation in the sample is not always proportional to the registered response rate. For instance, the Department of Economics, despite a modest response rate, represents one of the most represented areas. Conversely, the Department of Molecular Sciences and Nanosystems, with one of the highest response rate, remains one of the least represented. These observations highlight that the final composition of the sample was heavily influenced by the initial size of the departmental populations.

Figure 3.1: Respondents by Departments (2025) - Percentage values



Source: Author's elaboration based on data from:
Evaluation Office, Ca' Foscari University (2021 - 2025).
Agenda 2030 Questionnaire. The perception of the Ca' Foscari community.

To ensure a more effective communication of the data, some category of respondents will be grouped into wider categories based on the role they play inside the organization: the heading “Faculty and Research Staff” will also include the answers of Language Lecturers, while the label “Early Career Researchers” will represent both PhD students and Research fellows.

In this chapter respondents will be grouped also into broader disciplinary areas, based on the department they are affiliated with.

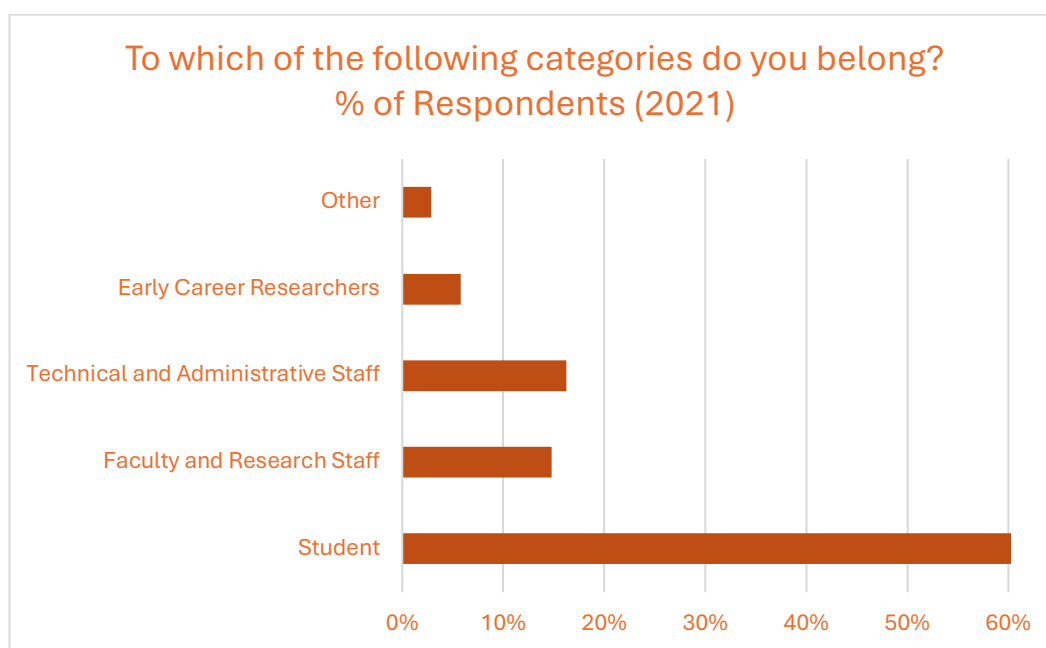
Those from the Department of Economics and Management will be grouped under the label “Economics”; those from the Department of Environmental Sciences, Informatics and Statistics and from the Department of Molecular Sciences and Nanosystems will appear under the heading “Sciences”; The category “Languages” will represent respondents from the Department of Linguistics and Comparative Cultural Studies and from the Department of Asian and North African Studies and finally “Humanities” will include those from the Department of Philosophy and Cultural Heritage and the Department of Humanities.

To begin the analysis of the answers, the initial section of the survey aims to understand the profile of the respondents, the role they play within the institution and the departments they belong to.

More precisely, the information collected in the first question was related to the category of the respondents.

As far as the 2021 sample is concerned, the largest group is represented by students, who account for 60% of the total respondents (1.025 respondents). The second-largest portions are constituted by the technical and administrative staff, which makes up 16% of the sample, and the Faculty and Research Staff, which is 15% of the overall group (276 and 251 respondents, respectively). Early career researchers make up 6% of the total respondents (with 98 answers), while the last 5% is represented by other stakeholders within the Ca' Foscari University.

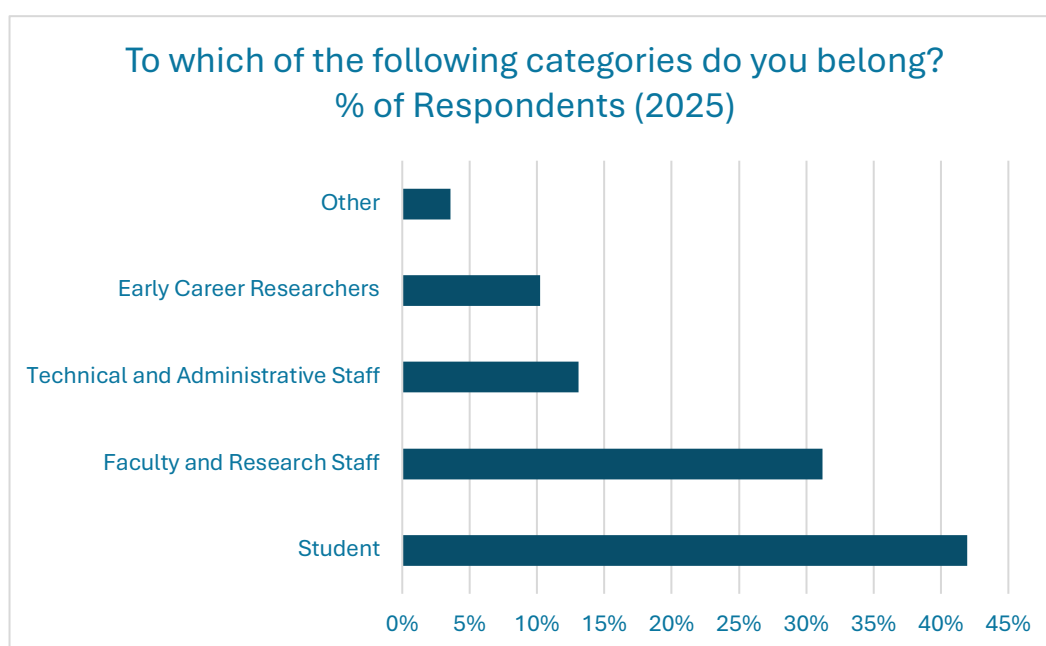
Figure 3.2: Distribution of respondents by category (2021) - Percentage values



Source: Author's elaboration based on data from:
Evaluation Office, Ca' Foscari University (2021 - 2025).
Agenda 2030 Questionnaire. The perception of the Ca' Foscari community.

Regarding the 2025 sample, students remain the largest group even if they show a decline, representing 42% of the total respondents (480 respondents). Responses from faculty and research staff reach 31% of the sample (357 respondents), while technical and administrative staff decrease to 13% of the group (150 respondents). Early career researchers account for 10% (117 respondents) of the sample, completing with 4% of other stakeholders (41 respondents).

Figure 3.3: Distribution of respondents by category (2025) - Percentage values



Source: Author's elaboration based on data from:
Evaluation Office, Ca' Foscari University (2021 - 2025).
Agenda 2030 Questionnaire. The perception of the Ca' Foscari community.

Comparing the two samples, it's possible to observe how the composition of respondents to the surveys varied. There is a drastic contraction in the student component, with a decline of approximately 30%. In stark contrast, an exponential growth in faculty and research staff is registered, which represents the highest percentage growth ever. Even early career researchers are directing a sharp surge, that has more than doubled.

On the other hand, the technical and administrative staff is contracting with a significant decrease of approximately 20%.

In conclusion, the respondent profile has shifted from a clear student majority to a more balanced composition oriented towards research and academic staff and students.

Table 3.3: Comparison of respondents by category (2021 - 2025) – Percentage values

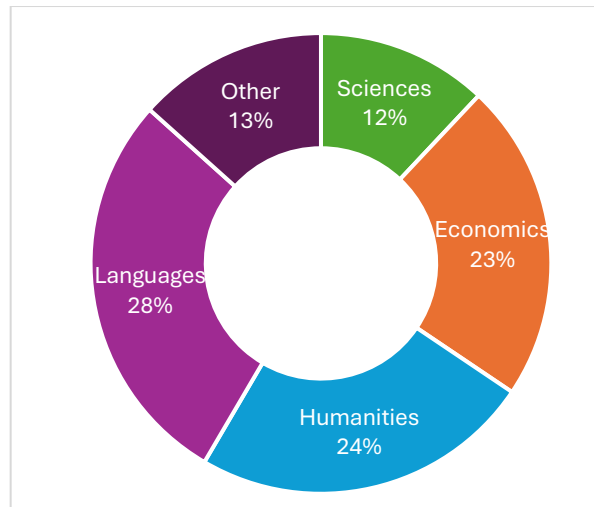
Category	% of Respondents (2021)	% of Respondents (2025)	% Change
Student	60,33%	41,92%	-30,51%
Faculty and Research Staff	14,77%	31,18%	111,05%
Early Career Researchers	5,77%	10,22%	77,15%
Technical and Administrative Staff	16,24%	13,10%	-19,36%
Other	2,88%	3,58%	24,16%
Total	100,00%	100,00%	0,00%

Source: Author's elaboration based on data from:
 Evaluation Office, Ca' Foscari University (2021 - 2025).
 Agenda 2030 Questionnaire. The perception of the Ca' Foscari community.

Moreover, the surveys investigate the affiliation of the stakeholders, to determine the contribution of the different University departments.

As far as the 2021 sample is concerned, the largest group consists by respondents with a major in Languages, accounting for 28% of the total (479 respondents). The next largest shares are represented by those from Humanities (24% or 408 respondents) and Economics (23% or 381 respondents). The Sciences account for 12% (204 respondents), while the remaining 13% (227 respondents) belongs to other departments within Ca' Foscari University (such as the Central Administration, the Challenge School and the University Library System (SBA)).

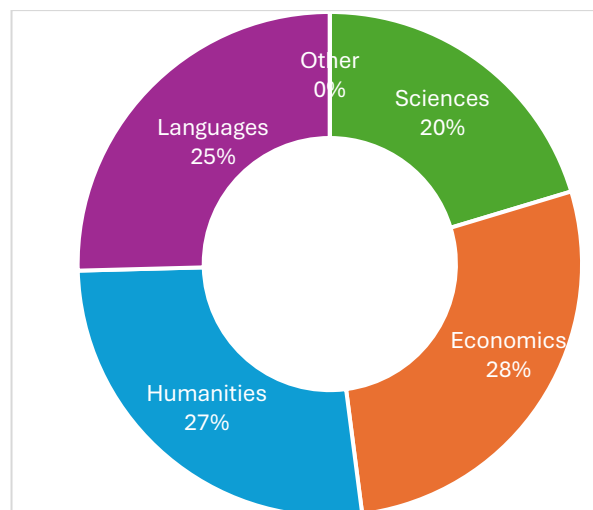
Figure 3.4: Distribution of respondents by Department (2021) - Percentage values



Source: Author's elaboration based on data from:
Evaluation Office, Ca' Foscari University (2021 - 2025).
Agenda 2030 Questionnaire. The perception of the Ca' Foscari community.

Regarding the 2025 sample, it is possible to see from the data how the number of respondents belonging to the economic area increased to 28%, followed by those belonging to the Humanities at 27%. Participants belonging to linguistic departments represent a quarter of the sample, while those from the scientific area correspond to 20% of the total.

Figure 3.5: Distribution of respondents by Department (2025) - Percentage values



Source: Author's elaboration based on data from:
Evaluation Office, Ca' Foscari University (2021 - 2025).
Agenda 2030 Questionnaire. The perception of the Ca' Foscari community.

From the examination of the data collected, some significant trends emerge regarding the sentiment of Ca' Foscari's stakeholders toward the 2030 Agenda.

Sciences increased in both absolute and percentage terms, (from 12% up to 20%, +69,48%), highlighting a growing interest among the scientific stakeholders in the institutional activities.

Economics lost respondents in absolute numbers (from 381 to 316), but increased in percentage terms, becoming the largest share of respondents in the 2025 edition of the survey, indicating an increased awareness among those actors.

Humanities also declined in absolute terms, but, similar to Economics, saw a higher participation percentage (from 24% to 27%), suggesting relatively stable engagement among humanistic stakeholders.

Languages showed a reduction both in total numbers (from 479 to 291) and in percentage (from 28% to 25%), indicating a decrease in interest or participation on this topic.

The Other category, which had 227 respondents in 2021, is no longer available as a separate entry in 2025; its participants were reallocated to other categories. This means that the percentage increase in some areas (such as Sciences, Economics, and Humanities) may be partly due to this change.

Overall, this analysis highlights a more relevant role played by Economics and Sciences, relatively stable engagement for Humanities and a slight decline by Languages, while accounting for differences caused by the redistribution of the Other category. The general decrease in the number of respondents requires caution when interpreting percentages, as differences may be influenced by changes in sample size rather than genuine interest in SDG-related activities.

Table 3.4: Comparison in respondents' affiliation (2021 - 2025) – Absolute and percentage values

Field of Study	No. of Respondents (2021)	No. of Respondents (2025)	% of Respondents (2021)	% of Respondents (2025)	% Change
Sciences	204	233	12%	20%	69,48%
Economics	381	316	22%	28%	23,07%
Humanities	408	305	24%	27%	10,92%
Languages	479	291	28%	25%	-9,85%
Other	227	0	13%	0%	-100,00%
Total	1.699	1.145	100%	100%	-32,61%

Source: Author's elaboration based on data from:
Evaluation Office, Ca' Foscari University (2021 - 2025).
Agenda 2030 Questionnaire. The perception of the Ca' Foscari community

Concluding the description of the two samples, the table that follows offers a more integrated insight on the respondents' profile, on their role and departmental affiliation. This allows for a deeper interpretation on the structural changes that occurred in the composition of the sample shifting from the 2021 to the 2025.

In fact, the results of the 2025 survey reveal a significant change in the structure of participation, moving from a mainly student-based participation to a more diversified structure where faculty and research staff and technical-administrative personnel have a more relevant role in all fields of study. Overall, this table shows how the evolution from 2021 to 2025 is not only quantitative, but also structural, reflecting a more balanced perspective across the stakeholders 'groups. This fact is particularly relevant also for the interpretation of the SDGs-related questions, making the 2025 findings more representative of all the different parties within the organization.

Table 3.5: Integrated overview of respondent's composition (2021 – 2025)

Field of Study /Categories	No. of Respondents (2021)	No. of Respondents (2025)	% of Total Sample (2021)	% of Total Sample (2025)	% within Department (2021)	% within Department (2025)
Economics	381	316	22%	28%	100%	100%
Other	8	5	0%	0%	2%	2%
Early Career Researchers	32	21	2%	2%	8%	7%
Faculty and Research Staff	79	110	5%	10%	21%	35%
Technical and Administrative Staff	21	42	1%	4%	6%	13%
Student	241	138	14%	12%	63%	44%
Humanities	408	305	24%	27%	100%	100%
Other	20	14	1%	1%	5%	5%
Early Career Researchers	20	32	1%	3%	5%	10%
Faculty and Research Staff	53	78	3%	7%	13%	26%
Technical and Administrative Staff	13	39	1%	3%	3%	13%
Student	302	142	18%	12%	74%	47%
Sciences	204	233	12%	20%	100%	100%
Other	12	10	1%	1%	6%	4%
Early Career Researchers	28	47	2%	4%	14%	20%
Faculty and Research Staff	38	68	2%	6%	19%	29%
Technical and Administrative Staff	26	44	2%	4%	13%	19%
Student	100	64	6%	6%	49%	27%
Languages	479	291	28%	25%	100%	100%
Other	6	12	0%	1%	1%	4%
Early Career Researchers	16	17	1%	1%	3%	6%
Faculty and Research Staff	75	101	4%	9%	16%	35%
Technical and Administrative Staff	16	25	1%	2%	3%	9%
Student	366	136	22%	12%	76%	47%
Other	227	0	13%	0%	100%	0%
Other	3	0	0%	0%	1%	0%
Early Career Researchers	2	0	0%	0%	1%	0%
Faculty and Research Staff	6	0	0%	0%	3%	0%
Technical and Administrative Staff	200	0	12%	0%	88%	0%
Student	16	0	1%	0%	7%	0%
Total	1.699	1.145	100%	100%		

Source: Author's elaboration based on data from:
Evaluation Office, Ca' Foscari University (2021 - 2025).
Agenda 2030 Questionnaire. The perception of the Ca' Foscari community.

3.1.1 Analysis of disciplinary area responses

Moving on to the second section of the survey, titled “Global Challenges and Priorities”, this part aims to investigate stakeholders’ sensitivity towards the SDGs. More specifically, participants were asked to rank nine global challenges according to their personal views.

What immediately stands out when looking at the table is that, across every field of study, priorities changed between the two years. From 2021 to 2025, the focus shifted from environmental issues, like climate change, to more social and geopolitical concerns, such as hunger, poverty, and peace. The category “Development of efficient infrastructure and sustainable urban centers” stayed at the very bottom of the ranking in both editions. This shows a certain consistency in the stakeholders’ perspective, as they clearly consider it a lower priority compared to other items. By 2025, new objectives emerged at the top, particularly global peace and the improvement of justice systems, which weren't as prominent in 2021.

Regarding the economic area, in 2021 climate change was seen as the most urgent matter, while in the second edition it dropped to third place. This indicates that while participants still see it as a key issue, it’s now felt as relatively less urgent compared to other emerging crises. In 2025, concerns related to hunger, poverty, and global peace dominated the ranking, while "Education, innovation and sustainable economic growth" fell out of the top positions.

Moving to the Humanities, a similar pattern can be observed. Climate change ranked first in 2021 but was replaced by global peace and justice systems in 2025, dropping out of the top three entirely. Interestingly, this is the only field that puts peace and justice at the very top of the list. This suggests a higher degree of sensitivity among these stakeholders toward social and geopolitical problems. Moreover, the other two top priorities maintained the same level of importance in both years, showing strong thematic continuity: “Reduction of hunger and poverty” remained in second place, while “Reduction of inequalities” stayed in third. Overall, the data paints a picture of a humanities community deeply committed to social justice.

In the Sciences, the 2021 results showed a strong interest in environmental concerns, specifically climate change and the restoration of ecosystems, alongside the reduction of hunger and poverty. By 2025, however, scientific respondents expressed preferences that aligned almost perfectly with those in Economics. This shift toward social issues represents a clear break from the first edition, suggesting that even scientific stakeholders are becoming more sensitive to broader societal challenges. Consequently, the objective related to biodiversity disappeared from the top of the ranking.

As for Languages, the 2021 results were surprisingly similar to those in the Sciences, despite the two fields being so different. Like most other areas, the first edition was dominated by a mix of environmental and social issues. In 2025, however, the priority given to climate change declined significantly, following a trend more similar to the Humanities. The theme of inequalities moved into third position in 2025, confirming that linguistic stakeholders are feeling a growing sense of urgency regarding social disparities.

In conclusion, the comparison suggests an overall transition towards socio-political priorities. All academic fields showed much more similar ranking structures in 2025 than they did in 2021, reducing disciplinary differences among them. While in 2021 there was a clear consensus that climate change and poverty were the most urgent threats, by 2025 the focus had shifted toward global stability and the reduction of wealth disparities. Climate change remains a real threat, but it has had to make room for these more immediate social necessities.

Table 3.6: Global challenges ranking by discipline (2021–2025)

Rank	Category 2021	Category 2025
Economics		Economics
1	Mitigation and adaptation to climate change	Reduction of hunger and poverty
2	Reduction of hunger and poverty	Global peace and improvement of justice systems
3	Education, innovation, and sustainable economic growth	Mitigation and adaptation to climate change
9	Development of efficient infrastructure and sustainable urban centers	Development of efficient infrastructure and sustainable urban centers
Humanities		Humanities
1	Mitigation and adaptation to climate change	Global peace and improvement of justice systems
2	Reduction of hunger and poverty	Reduction of hunger and poverty
3	Reduction of inequalities among individuals and between nations	Reduction of inequalities among individuals and between nations
9	Development of efficient infrastructure and sustainable urban centers	Development of efficient infrastructure and sustainable urban centers
Sciences		Sciences
1	Mitigation and adaptation to climate change	Reduction of hunger and poverty
2	Reduction of hunger and poverty	Global peace and improvement of justice systems
3	Restoration of terrestrial and marine environments and protection of biodiversity	Mitigation and adaptation to climate change
9	Development of efficient infrastructure and sustainable urban centers	Development of efficient infrastructure and sustainable urban centers
Languages		Languages
1	Mitigation and adaptation to climate change	Reduction of hunger and poverty
2	Reduction of hunger and poverty	Global peace and improvement of justice systems
3	Restoration of terrestrial and marine environments and protection of biodiversity	Reduction of inequalities among individuals and between nations
9	Development of efficient infrastructure and sustainable urban centers	Development of efficient infrastructure and sustainable urban centers

Source: Author's elaboration based on data from:
Evaluation Office, Ca' Foscari University (2021 - 2025).
Agenda 2030 Questionnaire. The perception of the Ca' Foscari community

The table 3.7 presents the overall ranking of preferences expressed by stakeholders in 2025. It shows the summarized choices made at the university level.

As discussed in the previous table, the top of the ranking is occupied by basic human needs and geopolitical stability, indicating that these themes are perceived as highly urgent to address.

In third position, one finds climate change mitigation actions, signaling its continued prominence, but also pointing out that the focus has shifted to other concerns. Furthermore, measures that support the redistribution of wealth follow.

In the middle positions appear education and economic growth, as well as health-related matters, suggesting that they are perceived as slightly less urgent compared to other global threats.

Lower positions in the ranking are occupied by issues linked to gender equality and biodiversity, concluding with measures that support more efficient communities.

Table 3.7: SDGs Priority Ranking – Ca' Foscari University (2025)

Rank	Global challenges	Percentage
1	Reduction of hunger and poverty	14%
2	Global peace and improvement of justice systems	14%
3	Mitigation and adaptation to climate change	12%
4	Reduction of inequalities among individuals and between nations	12%
5	Education, innovation, and sustainable economic growth	11%
6	Improvement of health and well-being	11%
7	Achievement of gender equality	10%
8	Restoration of terrestrial and marine environments and protection of biodiversity	10%
9	Development of efficient infrastructure and sustainable urban centers	8%
Total		100%

Source: Author's elaboration based on data from:
Evaluation Office, Ca' Foscari University (2021 - 2025).
Agenda 2030 Questionnaire. The perception of the Ca' Foscari community

Furthermore, surveys sought to highlight the importance that participants attach to the university's commitment to implementing initiatives that support the achievement of the SDGs.

What emerges is a clear call to action from participants, urging the institution to carry out supportive measures in this direction.

In both years, the dominant perception is that the university plays a key role in achieving the SDGs and is therefore recognized as a significant agent of change. However, there is a slight increase in the share of respondents who consider its contribution less strategic. Nevertheless, this proportion remains marginal when compared with those who regard the university as a decisive actor in this process.

Table 3.8: University role in achieving SDGs: perceived importance (2021 – 2025)

Field of study	Not at all important		Not very important		Quite important		Very important		I don't know	
	2021	2025	2021	2025	2021	2025	2021	2025	2021	2025
Other	1%		2%		20%		77%		0%	
Economics	1%	2%	3%	5%	18%	22%	77%	70%	1%	1%
Humanities	1%	2%	3%	2%	18%	22%	78%	72%	1%	2%
Sciences	0%	2%	3%	3%	15%	20%	80%	74%	1%	2%
Languages	1%	1%	2%	6%	18%	26%	78%	66%	1%	2%
Total	0,94%	1,00%	2,65%	4,03%	17,83%	22,67%	77,81%	70,44%	0,77%	1,48%
Change	6,19%		51,98%		27,11%		-9,47%		93,82%	

Source: Author's elaboration based on data from:
Evaluation Office, Ca' Foscari University (2021 - 2025).
Agenda 2030 Questionnaire. The perception of the Ca' Foscari community

The following section of the survey, titled “Challenges and contributions”, aims to analyze what stakeholders believe the university can contribute to achieving the SDGs. Participants were asked to select a maximum of four domains.

The analysis clearly shows that, in both years considered and across all subject areas, there is a convergence in considering the university one of the most strategic actors in pursuing the objectives related to education, innovation, and sustainable economic growth. Similarly, the perception of the institution's key role in promoting gender equality is also consolidated.

Analyzing the economic area in detail, a substantial consistency emerges between the two years in the top-ranked positions, confirming a shared view according to which the university represents a strategic player in supporting initiatives related to education, innovation and gender equality. The idea, that also persists, is that the university can contribute at the environmental level, although a shift is observed in the

type of impact considered most effective. Indeed, in 2021, data suggest that this contribution was primarily associated with the development of efficient infrastructure; in 2025, however, a broader scope of action has emerged, with the university increasingly capable of exerting a more direct and wide-ranging impact on climate change mitigation.

A similar pattern is observed in the humanities, where responses remain largely consistent over time, suggesting a clear stakeholders' perception of the university's role in tackling the SDGs. Indeed, it emerges how it is considered an actor capable of influencing multiple dimensions of sustainability — social, environmental and economic — confirming a broad view of its potential impact.

The linguistic area also aligns with previous findings regarding the centrality of education and gender equality. However, there is a growing recognition of the university's potential economic impact, an aspect that did not emerge as prominently in 2021. The data from the first survey highlighted a perception of the university that is predominantly oriented towards social and environmental issues, while in 2025 this vision appears more transversal, also including the economic dimension.

The only notable exception is represented by the Sciences, which highlight a greater specificity in the topics assigned. The information collected portrays an institution with strong potential to support environmental sustainability, not only in terms of climate change mitigation, but also in protecting biodiversity and ecosystems. Anyway, even within these departments, the centrality attributed to the university in relation to education and gender equality remains consistent with what was observed in the other disciplinary areas.

Overall, the comparison between the two surveys suggests that the general opinion has evolved towards viewing the university as an institution increasingly capable of influencing multiple dimensions of the SDGs, outlining a profile less constrained by individual disciplinary fields and progressively more transversal and integrated.

Table 3.9: Contributions ranking by discipline (2021–2025)

Rank	Category 2021	Category 2025
Economics		Economics
1	Education, innovation, and sustainable economic growth	Education, innovation, and sustainable economic growth
2	Achievement of gender equality	Achievement of gender equality
3	Development of efficient infrastructure and sustainable urban centers	Mitigation and adaptation to climate change
4	Reduction of inequalities among individuals and between nations	Reduction of inequalities among individuals and between nations
Humanities		Humanities
1	Education, innovation, and sustainable economic growth	Education, innovation, and sustainable economic growth
2	Achievement of gender equality	Achievement of gender equality
3	Development of efficient infrastructure and sustainable urban centers	Development of efficient infrastructure and sustainable urban centers
4	Reduction of inequalities among individuals and between nations	Reduction of inequalities among individuals and between nations
Sciences		Sciences
1	Education, innovation, and sustainable economic growth	Education, innovation, and sustainable economic growth
2	Mitigation and adaptation to climate change	Mitigation and adaptation to climate change
3	Restoration of terrestrial and marine environments and protection of biodiversity	Restoration of terrestrial and marine environments and protection of biodiversity
4	Achievement of gender equality	Achievement of gender equality
Languages		Languages
1	Education, innovation, and sustainable economic growth	Education, innovation, and sustainable economic growth
2	Achievement of gender equality	Achievement of gender equality
3	Development of efficient infrastructure and sustainable urban centers	Reduction of inequalities among individuals and between nations
4	Mitigation and adaptation to climate change	Development of efficient infrastructure and sustainable urban centers

Source: Author's elaboration based on data from:
Evaluation Office, Ca' Foscari University (2021 - 2025).
Agenda 2030 Questionnaire. The perception of the Ca' Foscari community

The following table shows the complete ranking for the 2025 edition of the survey, classifying the SDGs by the degree of contribution the university can make.

What emerges is that stakeholders believe the university is an actor able to contribute mainly to social and economic dimensions, with 42% of the total preferences assigned to "Education, innovation, and sustainable economic growth" (25%) and the "Achievement of gender equality" (17%). Another considerable portion of the votes, accounting for 33% of the preferences, assigns the institution a key role in sustaining environmental measures, specifically regarding climate change mitigation (12%), the development of sustainable infrastructure (11%), and the protection of biodiversity and ecosystems (10%).

The remaining shares of votes are distributed among other dimensions, including the improvement of health and well-being (9%) and the reduction of inequalities (10%).

Global peace and the reduction of hunger and poverty conclude the list, with 4% and 2% of the votes respectively.

Table 3.10: Ranking of SDGs by perceived university contribution – Ca' Foscari University (2025)

Rank	Global challenges	Percentage
1	Education, innovation, and sustainable economic growth	25%
2	Achievement of gender equality	17%
3	Mitigation and adaptation to climate change	12%
4	Development of efficient infrastructure and sustainable urban centers	11%
5	Restoration of terrestrial and marine environments and protection of biodiversity	10%
6	Reduction of inequalities among individuals and between nations	10%
7	Improvement of health and well-being	9%
8	Global peace and improvement of justice systems	4%
9	Reduction of hunger and poverty	2%
10	None of the above	1%
Total		100%

Source: Author's elaboration based on data from:
Evaluation Office, Ca' Foscari University (2021 - 2025).
Agenda 2030 Questionnaire. The perception of the Ca' Foscari community

After an analysis of stakeholders' sensitivity on the SDGs and the contribution the university can bring to their achievement, the surveys investigate participants' expectations. More precisely, this part of the analysis, titled "Objectives," highlights the goals the university should strive for in order to answer such challenges.

What emerges are results in line with prior sections. In fact, the answers given are functional to the achievement of the global challenges selected in previous paragraphs.

Looking at the economic area, in both years, suggestions related to the environmental and social spheres emerge. For these actors, indeed, the university could undertake measures that promote: the development of buildings with a lower impact on the environment, actions against any type of inequality and, moreover, research that supports solutions to global concerns. Of particular interest is that, in 2025, a new category was selected by participants, related to the promotion of the well-being and health of students and staff, highlighting a new kind of expectation felt by stakeholders.

In the Humanities, a similar pattern can be observed: measures that act on multiple levels of sustainability have been selected. These actions are linked, once again, to the climate and social fields. In 2025, as for Economics, a new claim is advanced. This claim refers to the improvement of the quality of services offered to students and the right to study.

The centrality of building improvements, equality among individuals, and an innovative study offer are confirmed also in the linguistic area. Similar to Economics, in the second survey wave, the request for greater attention to the well-being of students and staff emerges.

Looking at 2021, the Sciences again distinguish themselves for the direction their answers take, with a focus directed mainly toward measures in support of the environmental field. In contrast, in 2025, this difference decreases in favor of responses more aligned with the other fields of study, namely actions towards multiple trajectories of development.

Overall, shifting from 2021 to 2025, stakeholders' expectations of the university have moved towards more societal requests, in order to elevate their condition inside and outside the institution. Alongside this, a constant effort in the environmental and educational fields is demanded

Table 3.11: Future directions and SDGs: stakeholder perspectives (2021 – 2025)

Rank	Category 2021	Category 2025
Economics		Economics
1	Making buildings more sustainable and reducing consumption	Promoting the health and well-being of students and staff
2	Develop research that offers solutions/perspectives to global social and environmental problems	Making buildings more sustainable and reducing consumption
3	Improving gender equality and work-life balance	Improving gender equality and work-life balance
4	Taking action against inequalities both internally and externally at the university.	Develop research that offers solutions/perspectives to global social and environmental problems
Humanities		Humanities
1	Making buildings more sustainable and reducing consumption	Improving gender equality and work-life balance
2	Taking action against inequalities both internally and externally at the university.	Taking action against inequalities both internally and externally at the university.
3	Improving gender equality and work-life balance	Making buildings more sustainable and reducing consumption
4	Develop research that offers solutions/perspectives to global social and environmental problems	Enhancing student services and rights to study
Sciences		Sciences
1	Develop research that offers solutions/perspectives to global social and environmental problems	Making buildings more sustainable and reducing consumption
2	Making buildings more sustainable and reducing consumption	Develop research that offers solutions/perspectives to global social and environmental problems
3	Increase green purchasing and improve separate waste collection	Improving gender equality and work-life balance
4	Increase training activities on sustainable development issues	Promoting the health and well-being of students and staff
Languages		Languages
1	Making buildings more sustainable and reducing consumption	Promoting the health and well-being of students and staff
2	Taking action against inequalities both internally and externally at the university.	Improving gender equality and work-life balance
3	Develop research that offers solutions/perspectives to global social and environmental problems	Making buildings more sustainable and reducing consumption
4	Improving gender equality and work-life balance	Taking action against inequalities both internally and externally at the university.

Source: Author's elaboration based on data from:
 Evaluation Office, Ca' Foscari University (2021 - 2025).
 Agenda 2030 Questionnaire. The perception of the Ca' Foscari community

Table 3.12 presents the overall ranking of preferences expressed by stakeholders in 2025. It shows the summarized choices made at the university level.

From the actors' perspective, in order to meet the 2030 Agenda's challenges, the university should act primarily on initiatives with an ecological impact, followed by measures with a social resonance.

The contributions found in the top positions of the list are indeed related to the construction of more efficient buildings (13%) and measures to counter inequalities between women and men while improving their work-life balance (13%). These are closely followed by measures dealing with the health and well-being of people within the organization (12%), initiatives aimed at reducing disparities inside and outside the institution (12%), and innovative research capable of finding solutions to global concerns (12%).

In a middle position, one finds measures to improve students' quality of life (10%), other types of initiatives with a focus on the local territory (9%), and a call for an increase in green purchases (6%).

Concluding the list are similar initiatives with a wider scope of action (5%) and training activities on SDGs (5%). Finally, a wider dissemination and adoption of the University's Code of Ethics and Behavior closes the ranking (2%).

Table 3.12: Strategic action areas ranked by stakeholder preference level – Ca' Foscari University (2025)

Rank	Proposed measures	Percentage
1	Making buildings more sustainable and reducing consumption	13%
2	Improving gender equality and work-life balance	13%
3	Promoting the health and well-being of students and staff	12%
4	Taking action against inequalities both internally and externally at the university	12%
5	Develop research that offers solutions/perspectives to global social and environmental problems	12%
6	Enhancing student services and rights to study	10%
7	Undertake multiple initiatives (e.g. applied research, knowledge transfer, events, concrete projects) with a positive impact on the territory	9%
8	Increase green purchasing and improve separate waste collection	6%
9	Undertake multiple initiatives of the same type, but with a positive impact that also goes beyond the territory	5%
10	Increase training activities on sustainable development issues	5%
11	To foster a deeper understanding and application of the University's Code of Ethics and Behavior.	2%
Total		100%

Source: Author's elaboration based on data from:
Evaluation Office, Ca' Foscari University (2021 - 2025).
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Furthermore, surveys highlight the extent to which stakeholders perceive their behaviors as helpful in order to enhance Ca' Foscari's commitment to the SDGs.

What emerges is a consolidation in the participants' opinion about their role; indeed, almost half of them consider their contribution moderately useful. Alongside, a modest portion (around 23%) of the participants consider their action very important, in particular those from Languages, whose percentage increased in 2025. Furthermore, a small decrease is recorded among the participants that perceive their impact as slightly important. Also decreased are those that state they do not know whether their behaviors can bring a contribution in supporting the university's commitment. Conversely, a small increase in the category "Not at all important" is registered. Overall, a shared opinion of almost 70% of the total respondents in both years declare to be aware of their potential in supporting institutional activities in achieving the 2030 Agenda.

Table 3.13: Perceived role in supporting the University's sustainability goals (2021-2025)

Field of study	Not at all important		Slightly		Moderately		Very important		I don't know	
	2021	2025	2021	2025	2021	2025	2021	2025	2021	2025
Other	1%		21%		50%		24%		5%	
Economics	2%	2%	19%	18%	48%	53%	23%	20%	8%	6%
Humanities	1%	2%	18%	18%	49%	49%	24%	23%	8%	8%
Sciences	1%	2%	15%	16%	51%	54%	25%	21%	7%	7%
Languages	1%	1%	16%	16%	49%	50%	22%	26%	11%	7%
Total	1,53%	1,85%	17,72%	17,34%	48,97%	51,33%	23,25%	22,54%	8,53%	6,94%
<i>Change</i>	<i>20,87%</i>		<i>-2,12%</i>		<i>4,82%</i>		<i>-3,04%</i>		<i>-18,72%</i>	

Source: Author's elaboration based on data from:
Evaluation Office, Ca' Foscari University (2021 - 2025).
Agenda 2030 Questionnaire. The perception of the Ca' Foscari community

In order to better understand respondents' involvement in supporting Ca' Foscari in dealing with global challenges, the surveys also investigate how stakeholders contribute in practice.

Looking at the table, it is possible to observe in both survey waves that participants clearly understand that sustainability is a matter of daily activities.

Across all departments and in both years, participants have indeed declared that the primary way they contribute is by "changing the way they carry out their work tasks." This is followed by contributions through initiatives proposed by Ca' Foscari in almost all areas. Respondents state that it is more unusual to contribute through the content of their work—except for those in the Sciences—and personal proposals remain stable at the bottom of the list. This may suggest that people prefer to act individually rather than being pioneers of new initiatives.

The only notable change in the responses is in the field of Economics, where in 2025 contributing through "the content of my work" ranked second. This change is of particular interest, as it signals that in this area, sustainability is perhaps starting to be viewed as a subject of study and research. This shift is also reflected in table 3.14, which shows this kind of contribution in the second position.

Overall, the two tables depict a community that is more aware of its role in supporting the achievement of global challenges and, moreover, sees sustainability increasingly as a professionalized and institutionalized engagement.

Table 3.14: Stakeholders' engagement modalities in sustainability initiatives – Ca' Foscari University (2025)

Rank	Category	Percentage
1	By changing the way I carry out my work tasks	41%
2	Directly through the content of my work (e.g. conducting research on these topics, promoting organizational innovations)	26%
3	By participating in initiatives proposed by the Ca' Foscari community on these issues	24%
4	By personally proposing initiatives on these topics	9%
Total		100%

Source: Author's elaboration based on data from:
Evaluation Office, Ca' Foscari University (2021 - 2025).
Agenda 2030 Questionnaire. The perception of the Ca' Foscari community

Table 3.15: Types of engagement in sustainability initiatives by field of study (2021 – 2025)

Rank	Ranking 2021	Ranking 2025
Economics		Economics
1	By changing the way I carry out my work tasks	By changing the way I carry out my work tasks
2	By participating in initiatives proposed by the Ca' Foscari community on these issues	Directly through the content of my work (e.g. conducting research on these topics, promoting organizational innovations)
3	Directly through the content of my work (e.g. conducting research on these topics, promoting organizational innovations)	By participating in initiatives proposed by the Ca' Foscari community on these issues
4	By personally proposing initiatives on these topics	By personally proposing initiatives on these topics
Humanities		Humanities
1	By changing the way I carry out my work tasks	By changing the way I carry out my work tasks
2	By participating in initiatives proposed by the Ca' Foscari community on these issues	By participating in initiatives proposed by the Ca' Foscari community on these issues
3	Directly through the content of my work (e.g. conducting research on these topics, promoting organizational innovations)	Directly through the content of my work (e.g. conducting research on these topics, promoting organizational innovations)
4	By personally proposing initiatives on these topics	By personally proposing initiatives on these topics
Sciences		Sciences
1	By changing the way I carry out my work tasks	By changing the way I carry out my work tasks
2	Directly through the content of my work (e.g. conducting research on these topics, promoting organizational innovations)	Directly through the content of my work (e.g. conducting research on these topics, promoting organizational innovations)
3	By participating in initiatives proposed by the Ca' Foscari community on these issues	By participating in initiatives proposed by the Ca' Foscari community on these issues
4	By personally proposing initiatives on these topics	By personally proposing initiatives on these topics
Languages		Languages
1	By changing the way I carry out my work tasks	By changing the way I carry out my work tasks
2	By participating in initiatives proposed by the Ca' Foscari community on these issues	By participating in initiatives proposed by the Ca' Foscari community on these issues
3	Directly through the content of my work (e.g. conducting research on these topics, promoting organizational innovations)	Directly through the content of my work (e.g. conducting research on these topics, promoting organizational innovations)
4	By personally proposing initiatives on these topics	By personally proposing initiatives on these topics

Source: Author's elaboration based on data from:
Evaluation Office, Ca' Foscari University (2021 - 2025).
Agenda 2030 Questionnaire. The perception of the Ca' Foscari community

3.2 Venice School of Management results by survey year

While in prior paragraphs the analysis was conducted on the university as a whole, this section focuses on the Department of Management, also known as the Venice School of Management. The aim is to identify whether there are divergences or convergences compared to the institution as a whole. The underlying assumption is that those with a managerial background view the objectives of the 2030 Agenda through a managerial lens, perceiving the SDGs as a set of strategic indicators.

Regarding the sample of the 2025 Edition, the survey was sent mainly to students (90%), followed by faculty and research staff (9%) and concluding with technical and administrative staff (1%), for a total of 2.109 invitations sent. As presented in the table, the registered response rate is around 7%, slightly below the response rate registered for the entire university, which was 8.24%. This figure is powered by the varying responsiveness of the three categories of stakeholders that were invited to the initiative. For complete transparency, the heading “Faculty and Research staff” also encompasses language lecturers and early career researchers, specifically PhD students and research fellows. Additionally, respondents who selected the “Other” option are included in the label “Technical and Administrative Staff”.

An interesting feature of the table is the concentration of the data around two opposite extremes. While the technical and administrative staff reach a 91.67% response rate – a fact that may suggest a high degree of availability from them in taking part in these initiatives – students register 2.16% – a signal that the survey could have failed in capturing their attention. The low engagement could be partially due to the name of the email’s sender – Ca’ Foscari Rilevazioni – which may have been perceived as too generic or administrative.

In a middle position, one finds Faculty and Research Staff with a response rate of 40%, which indicates a significant interest from the scientific community in SDG-related themes.

Overall, the table depicts a community that is particularly heterogeneous in terms of responsiveness and engagement.

Table 3.16: Distribution of survey invitation in VSM (2025)

Category	No. of invitees	No. of respondents	Response rate
Technical and Administrative Staff	24	22	91,67%
Faculty and Research Staff	190	76	40,00%
Student	1.895	41	2,16%
Total	2.109	139	6,59%

Source: Author's elaboration based on data from:
 Evaluation Office, Ca' Foscari University (2021 - 2025).
 Agenda 2030 Questionnaire. The perception of the Ca' Foscari community

Focusing the analysis on the composition of the samples of 2021 and 2025, some trends emerge.

Firstly, the most significant growth relates to the Technical and Administrative Staff category, which saw an increase of 31% between 2021 and 2025. This highlights improved operational engagement among these actors.

Secondly, a consolidation within the academic and research staff is recorded (+1%). This suggests that themes related to SDGs and sustainability are nowadays core topics of the Managerial curricula and have become part of the departmental identity, as professors increasingly incorporate these topics when developing study programs.

In contrast, student participation is heavily reduced, dropping from a majority of 120 in the 2021 sample to 41 in 2025. This decrease could be linked to the timing of the surveys. In fact, the first edition was conducted in spring during the teaching period (28/04/2021 – 15/05/2021), while the second was sent in autumn, in the period between lessons and exams (13/10/2025 – 31/10/2025), when students could have paid less attention to non-academic communications. Both survey waves included anyway a reminder email.

As a result, the total decrease in sample size (34%) in 2025 is largely due to the decline in the student component. This is an isolated trend compared to the other two main categories, which saw a consolidation of their participation levels.

Table 3.17: Comparison of invitations sent and response rates of the VSM (2025)

Category	No. of Respondents (2021)	No. of Respondents (2025)	Change
Faculty and Research Staff	76	77	1%
Technical and Administrative Staff	16	21	31%
Student	120	41	-66%
Venice School of Management	212	139	-34%

Source: Author's elaboration based on data from:
Evaluation Office, Ca' Foscari University (2021 - 2025).
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Consequently, when analyzing the responses, it's relevant to take into account the composition of the two groups of respondents. In 2021, the results were mostly influenced by students, since they represented the largest share of participants, followed by faculty and technical and administrative staff. Conversely, in 2025, professors and researchers mostly drove the final outcomes, followed by students and technicians.

3.2.1 Analysis of the Venice School of Management responses by year and respondent category

With regards to the section “Global Challenges and Priorities”, participants ranked nine global challenges according to their personal views. This section analyzes the three SDGs that received the most votes and the last one.

In 2021, the results at the departmental level show consistency with those at the institutional level, confirming the perceived urgency for environmental concerns and issues related to basic human needs. In fact, in the first row of the table appears the goal “Mitigation and adaptation to climate change”, followed in second position by “Reduction of hunger and poverty”. Interestingly, the third top priority voted in this department is “Education, innovation, and sustainable economic growth”.

The university ranking also saw “Mitigation and adaptation to climate change” in first position, followed by “Reduction of hunger and poverty”. Conversely, the third place was held by “Reduction of inequalities among individuals”. Even if the ranking of the VSM does not perfectly mirror the aggregated results of the university, the environmental and social sentiment is strongly felt in this department as well.

Also in 2025 the table shows data aligned with those seen in the previous paragraphs. The shift to more socio-political concerns that was observed at university level is registered also in the Department of Management. One finds, indeed, at the top of the list SDGs related to basic human needs, global stability and, with less perceived urgency but still relevant, measures against climate change.

The measure that deals with the construction of more efficient buildings remains stable in both years.

Table 3.18: Ranking of the main Global Challenges for the VSM community (2021-2025)

Rank	Ranking VSM (2021)	Ranking VSM (2025)
1	Mitigation and adaptation to climate change	Reduction of hunger and poverty
2	Reduction of hunger and poverty	Global peace and improvement of justice systems
3	Education, innovation, and sustainable economic growth	Mitigation and adaptation to climate change
9	Development of efficient infrastructure and sustainable urban centers	Development of efficient infrastructure and sustainable urban centers

Source: Author's elaboration based on data from:
Evaluation Office, Ca' Foscari University (2021 - 2025).
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The outcomes obtained in 2021 were mainly driven by the opinions of students and faculty. This is confirmed by Table 3.19, which highlights a perfect match in the preferences expressed between these two groups.

Technical and administrative staff, however, were less aligned with the aggregated results. Indeed, they were the only group to highlight gender-related issues, showing a greater sensitivity and a stronger sense of urgency regarding this priority by ranking it third. Nevertheless, for these stakeholders as well, environmental and social issues remain the most relevant. In conclusion, the mitigation of climate change represents a clear common denominator across all groups.

Table 3.19: Ranking of SDGs by stakeholder category within VSM (2021)

Ranking by category within VSM (2021)			
Rank	Faculty and Research Staff	Technical and Administrative Staff	Student
1	Mitigation and adaptation to climate change	Mitigation and adaptation to climate change	Mitigation and adaptation to climate change
2	Reduction of hunger and poverty	Reduction of hunger and poverty	Reduction of hunger and poverty
3	Education, innovation, and sustainable economic growth	Achievement of gender equality	Education, innovation, and sustainable economic growth
9	Development of efficient infrastructure and sustainable urban centers	Development of efficient infrastructure and sustainable urban centers	Development of efficient infrastructure and sustainable urban centers

Source: Author's elaboration based on data from:
Evaluation Office, Ca' Foscari University (2021 - 2025).
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With regard to the 2025 results, as already mentioned, the faculty was the group with the most weight in terms of sample size. In any case, the table depicts a community that is even more fragmented in terms of perceived priorities and urgency. While in 2021 climate change was a shared threat that seemed to be paramount, in the second wave of the survey there is less consistency among the preferences expressed by the actors.

The Faculty and Researchers maintain the same top-two priorities voted in the first survey wave, namely “Mitigation of climate change” and “Reduction of hunger and poverty” respectively. Interestingly, the issue related to global stability appears in the third position. This represents the only element of discontinuity compared to 2021.

Taken together this data show strong coherence between the two years regarding the topics perceived as more overriding. This could suggest that the scientific community is deeply involved in global themes that may derive from research at an international level.

The Technical and Administrative staff replace the urgency of environmental issues with political ones, showing increasing concerns for conflicts that are ongoing around the world. Also among these stakeholders, a strong coherence with the past is detected, as they maintain the same SDGs seen in 2021. Precisely, “Reduction of Hunger and Poverty” at the second place and “Achievement of gender equality” at the third. Notably, this group is still the only one that points out the gender-gap concern.

Students are the group with the most unexpected findings. According to their view, “Education, innovation, and sustainable economic growth” is the global challenge that most needs to be improved, while gender-related concerns drop to the last place in the ranking. Another point of interest is the introduction in the list of the SDG “Improvement of health and well-being”, which didn’t appear in other categories and also in the past. These outcomes suggest that new generations seem to be more worried about their future and more focused on their living conditions. This may be a reflection of current global instability.

Table 3.20: Ranking of SDGs by stakeholder category within VSM (2025)

Ranking by category within VSM (2025)			
Rank	Faculty and Research Staff	Technical and Administrative Staff	Student
1	Mitigation and adaptation to climate change	Global peace and improvement of justice systems	Education, innovation, and sustainable economic growth
2	Reduction of hunger and poverty	Reduction of hunger and poverty	Improvement of health and well-being
3	Global peace and improvement of justice systems	Achievement of gender equality	Reduction of hunger and poverty
9	Development of efficient infrastructure and sustainable urban centers	Development of efficient infrastructure and sustainable urban centers	Achievement of gender equality

Source: Author's elaboration based on data from:
Evaluation Office, Ca' Foscari University (2021 - 2025).
Agenda 2030 Questionnaire. The perception of the Ca' Foscari community

Analyzing the complete ranking of the 2025 edition voted by management stakeholders, it is possible to observe a high degree of convergence regarding the top priorities with the results recorded at the university level. Both identify poverty reduction, global peace, and the mitigation of climate change as the most urgent challenges.

However, a different sensibility is recorded in the middle of the ranking. Specifically, the fourth place in the university ranking is held by “Reduction of inequalities among individuals and between nations” (12%), while at the same level, the VSM list records “Improvement of health and well-being” (12%) and “Education, innovation and sustainable economic growth” (also 12%). This indicates that within the department, sustainability is more likely associated with the promotion of welfare systems and economic stability, which are probably perceived as key drivers for global progress.

Table 3.21: SDGs Priority Ranking – VSM (2025)

Rank	Global challenges	Percentages
1	Reduction of hunger and poverty	14%
2	Global peace and improvement of justice systems	13%
3	Mitigation and adaptation to climate change	13%
4	Improvement of health and well-being	12%
5	Education, innovation, and sustainable economic growth	12%
6	Reduction of inequalities among individuals and between nations	11%
7	Achievement of gender equality	9%
8	Restoration of terrestrial and marine environments and protection of biodiversity	9%
9	Development of efficient infrastructure and sustainable urban centers	8%
Total		100%

Source: Author's elaboration based on data from:
 Evaluation Office, Ca' Foscari University (2021 - 2025).
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The section closes asking participants' views on the importance of institutional commitment in addressing global challenges. The collected data mirror those at the university level. There is a shared opinion that the university is a key driver in achieving the 2030 Agenda's objectives.

Indeed, more than half of the respondents think that the university's contribution is very important in fostering the SDGs, with 78.77% in 2021 and 70.83% in 2025. Additionally, 16.04% and 20.83% (in 2021 and 2025 respectively) believe its actions are quite important. Taken together, these outcomes reflect a positive vision of the institution within the Department of Management.

However, it must be underlined that, moving forward through the years, this enthusiasm decreases. Hence, the slight trend toward a less impactful vision of the institution suggests that among managerial actors there may be increased awareness of Ca' Foscari's limited ability to make a difference at a global level.

Table 3.22: University role in achieving SDGs: perceived importance (2021 – 2025)

Category	Not at all important		Not very important		Quite important		Very important		I don't know	
	2021	2025	2021	2025	2021	2025	2021	2025	2021	2025
Faculty and Research Staff	2,63%	4,29%	3,95%	2,86%	9,21%	15,71%	84,21%	75,71%	0,00%	1,43%
Technical and Administrative Staff	0,00%	0,00%	0,00%	0,00%	6,25%	11,11%	93,75%	88,89%	0,00%	0,00%
Student	0,00%	0,00%	3,33%	9,38%	21,67%	37,50%	73,33%	50,00%	1,67%	3,13%
Total	0,94%	2,50%	3,30%	4,17%	16,04%	20,83%	78,77%	70,83%	0,94%	1,67%
<i>Change</i>	165,00%		26,19%		29,90%		-10,08%		76,67%	

Source: Author's elaboration based on data from:
 Evaluation Office, Ca' Foscari University (2021 - 2025).
 Agenda 2030 Questionnaire. The perception of the Ca' Foscari community

In the following section “Challenges and contributions,” the surveys asked stakeholders how the university can contribute to achieving the SDGs. Participants could select a maximum of four topics.

The table depicts a clear portrait of what participants believe the university can achieve. In both years, and in line with the results at the university level, the first goal the institution can address matches its mission, namely “Education, innovation, and sustainable economic growth.” This communicates a pragmatic view that participants have with regard to the university. Also confirmed is the opinion that Ca' Foscari is able to foster the SDGs through measures that support gender equality, which remains in second place.

Interesting is the inversion of the third and fourth positions registered between the two editions of the survey. While in 2021 stakeholders believed the university had a greater ability to foster sustainability through the development of efficient infrastructure, in 2025 they perceived it as more effective in addressing climate change.

Once again, these results are influenced by the composition of the sample: in 2021, the majority was made up of students, who may be more focused on practical actions – like the construction of more efficient buildings – while in 2025, the majority of faculty and researchers could have led to a wider vision of the institution's potential

impact. Again, this could be linked to the fact that these actors are involved in a global-scale research network.

Table 3.23: Contributions ranking by stakeholder category within VSM (2021–2025)

Rank	Ranking VSM (2021)	Ranking VSM (2025)
1	Education, innovation, and sustainable economic growth	Education, innovation, and sustainable economic growth
2	Achievement of gender equality	Achievement of gender equality
3	Development of efficient infrastructure and sustainable urban centers	Mitigation and adaptation to climate change
4	Mitigation and adaptation to climate change	Development of efficient infrastructure and sustainable urban centers

Source: Author's elaboration based on data from:
 Evaluation Office, Ca' Foscari University (2021 - 2025).
 Agenda 2030 Questionnaire. The perception of the Ca' Foscari community

The overall findings of 2021 disclose a shared sentiment among the different categories of stakeholders; namely, all of them ranked in the first place the impact of Ca' Foscari on education and innovation, while there are some differences on the other areas of support it can provide.

Looking at the second level of the ranking, one finds a common perspective between faculty and students, who think that the undertaking of the university is relevant also in the achievement of gender equality. Also, technicians believe the institution is able to make a difference on the equity level, but from a wealth outlook. This suggests that the from the participants' point of view, the university as a whole is able not only to transfer knowledge, but it is also a driver of cultural change and a means of social elevation.

At the third and fourth place of the students and faculty columns respectively, there is another analogy in the preferences, as they believe the university can help by building efficient infrastructures – confirming the fact that students, living every day the university, notice more the tangible aspects of sustainability. The administratives express again a favor for a “greener” involvement. The last measure of the VSM ranking was mainly determined by the view driven by the faculty, who state again the notion that the university can be an agent of change also for the control of climate change.

Table 3.24: Contribution ranking by stakeholder category within VSM (2021)

Ranking per Category within VSM (2021)			
Rank	Faculty and Research Staff	Technical and Administrative Staff	Student
1	Education, innovation, and sustainable economic growth	Education, innovation, and sustainable economic growth	Education, innovation, and sustainable economic growth
2	Achievement of gender equality	Reduction of inequalities among individuals and between nations	Achievement of gender equality
3	Mitigation and adaptation to climate change	Restoration of terrestrial and marine environments and protection of biodiversity	Development of efficient infrastructure and sustainable urban centers
4	Development of efficient infrastructure and sustainable urban centers	Achievement of gender equality	Reduction of inequalities among individuals and between nations

Source: Author's elaboration based on data from:
 Evaluation Office, Ca' Foscari University (2021 - 2025).
 Agenda 2030 Questionnaire. The perception of the Ca' Foscari community

The 2025 breakdown confirms a high degree of synergy regarding the university's core impact. In fact, all categories of actors ranked "Education" in first place and "Achievement of gender equality" in second. This suggests that in 2025, faculty, students, and technicians of the Department of Management see the institution unanimously as a player of academic excellence and social progress, as it simultaneously spreads knowledge in society and breaks down gender inequalities.

However, at the third and fourth level of the table, the different natures of the actors emerge once again: the faculty confirms the opinion that the institution can address climate change, while the technicians introduce a new kind of impact, namely the "Improvement of health and well-being."

Students, consistently with the 2021 findings, continue to highlight the efforts of Ca'Foscari in developing more efficient infrastructures. Interestingly, they also pointed out the responsibility of the university in improving health and well-being, which enters the ranking at the fourth place; this suggests a shift among this category of stakeholders toward investing the entity with this responsibility.

Table 3.25: Contribution ranking by stakeholder category within VSM (2025)

Ranking per Category within VSM (2025)			
Rank	Faculty and Research Staff	Technical and Administrative Staff	Student
1	Education, innovation, and sustainable economic growth	Education, innovation, and sustainable economic growth	Education, innovation, and sustainable economic growth
2	Achievement of gender equality	Achievement of gender equality	Achievement of gender equality
3	Mitigation and adaptation to climate change	Improvement of health and well-being	Development of efficient infrastructure and sustainable urban centers
4	Reduction of inequalities among individuals and between nations	Restoration of terrestrial and marine environments and protection of biodiversity	Improvement of health and well-being

Source: Author's elaboration based on data from:
 Evaluation Office, Ca' Foscari University (2021 - 2025).
 Agenda 2030 Questionnaire. The perception of the Ca' Foscari community

The following table shows the complete ranking for the VSM from the 2025 survey edition. Comparing the data on the University's perceived contribution, it is evident that the VSM community holds an even more focused view of the institution's primary academic role. The fact that "Education, innovation, and sustainable economic growth" reaches 27% – a higher rate than the one recorded at the university level – confirms that managerial stakeholders see the Department's impact as deeply focused on the creation of sustainable economic value and the development of professional expertise.

A slight divergence is also visible regarding social and environmental priorities. While the aggregated data at the institutional level places more weight on the restoration of biodiversity and marine environments, those within the VSM prioritize "Health and well-being". This aligns with the data seen in previous paragraphs, where Management actors tend to associate the University's impact with the efficiency of welfare systems. Despite these specificities, there is a shared consensus on the importance of gender equality and sustainable infrastructure.

Table 3.26: Ranking of SDGs by perceived university contribution – VSM (2025)

Rank	Global Challenges	Percentage
1	Education, innovation, and sustainable economic growth	27%
2	Achievement of gender equality	16%
3	Mitigation and adaptation to climate change	11%
4	Development of efficient infrastructure and sustainable urban centers	11%
5	Improvement of health and well-being	10%
6	Reduction of inequalities among individuals and between nations	10%
7	Restoration of terrestrial and marine environments and protection of biodiversity	9%
8	Global peace and improvement of justice systems	4%
9	Reduction of hunger and poverty	2%
10	None of the above	1%
Total		100%

Source: Author's elaboration based on data from:
Evaluation Office, Ca' Foscari University (2021 - 2025).
Agenda 2030 Questionnaire. The perception of the Ca' Foscari community

The next section, titled “Objectives,” highlights the measures the university should implement to address such challenges. The results obtained reveal an evolving trend between 2021 and 2025.

In 2021, a total alignment between the results of the Department and those of the university as a whole took place. For both entities, the top priorities to be managed were related to the construction of more energy-efficient buildings and research that offers new ways to handle global concerns. These were followed by undertakings that reduce both gender discrimination and inequalities inside and outside the university.

In contrast, in 2025, a deep disalignment takes place: while the university as a whole reaffirms interventions on building efficiency as the first step, the VSM moves towards a different perspective. For this department, the priority should be the promotion of “Health and well-being” inside the organization. In continuity with the 2021 remains the development of research that offers solutions to global problems, which consistently ranks second for both years within the VSM. Furthermore, the

management of inequalities gains importance in the VSM ranking, placing third on the list. Conversely, gender equality and work-life balance drops slightly below.

Taken together, these data suggest a progressive acceleration by the department towards a vision of the university's potential that is more decisive in the social sphere.

Table 3.27: Contributions ranking by stakeholder category within VSM (2021–2025)

Rank	Ranking VSM (2021)	Ranking VSM (2025)
1	Making buildings more sustainable and reducing consumption	Promoting the health and well-being of students and staff
2	Develop research that offers solutions/perspectives to global social and environmental problems	Develop research that offers solutions/perspectives to global social and environmental problems
3	Improving gender equality and work-life balance	Taking action against inequalities both internally and externally at the university
4	Taking action against inequalities both internally and externally at the university.	Improving gender equality and work-life balance

Source: Author's elaboration based on data from:
Evaluation Office, Ca' Foscari University (2021 - 2025).
Agenda 2030 Questionnaire. The perception of the Ca' Foscari community

The decomposition of the 2021 findings reveals that even if the aggregated results of the department were in line with those of the university, the three categories of respondents already had in mind different trajectories.

As already seen in previous rankings, the first place for the measure “More sustainable buildings” was due to the student component. Surprisingly, the faculty already chose the contribution on “Improving gender equality” as the first step to implement. This demonstrates that the social sensibility was already present among those actors, and became predominant in 2025.

The technical and administrative staff proposed first of all interventions against inequalities within the institution, highlighting also in this category a moderate preference for social issues. In any case, all three components agreed on the implementation of research as a tool to foster the SDGs.

Table 3.28: Contributions ranking by stakeholder category within VSM (2021)

Ranking per Category within VSM (2021)			
Rank	Faculty and Research Staff	Technical and Administrative Staff	Student
1	Improving gender equality and work-life balance	Taking action against inequalities both internally and externally at the university.	Making buildings more sustainable and reducing consumption
2	Making buildings more sustainable and reducing consumption	Improving gender equality and work-life balance	Develop research that offers solutions/perspectives to global social and environmental problems
3	Develop research that offers solutions/perspectives to global social and environmental problems	Develop research that offers solutions/perspectives to global social and environmental problems	Enhancing student services and rights to study
4	Taking action against inequalities both internally and externally at the university.	Making buildings more sustainable and reducing consumption	Improving gender equality and work-life balance

Source: Author's elaboration based on data from:
Evaluation Office, Ca' Foscari University (2021 - 2025).
Agenda 2030 Questionnaire. The perception of the Ca' Foscari community

The 2025 breakdown confirms the transition toward a social vision of the university's role.

A shared consensus emerged between faculty and students, who both identified the promotion of health and well-being as the primary step for the future. This priority indicates that from the participants' point of view the contribution of the institution has shifted from the environmental concerns to the quality of life of its members.

In contrast, the technical and administrative staff maintained their focus on the management of inequalities, ranking that measure in first place. However, they also aligned with the other categories by placing health and well-being in the second position, reinforcing the overall departmental trend.

Interestingly, students began to emphasize the importance of having a positive impact on the territory through concrete projects and events.

Taken together, these findings demonstrate that by 2025, the VSM community has consolidated a vision where the university's effectiveness is measured through the welfare it does and its social influence on the surrounding environment.

Table 3.29: Contributions ranking by stakeholder category within VSM (2025)

Ranking per Category within VSM (2025)			
Rank	Faculty and Research Staff	Technical and Administrative Staff	Student
1	Promoting the health and well-being of students and staff	Taking action against inequalities both internally and externally at the university	Promoting the health and well-being of students and staff
2	Develop research that offers solutions/perspectives to global social and environmental problems	Promoting the health and well-being of students and staff	Develop research that offers solutions/perspectives to global social and environmental problems
3	Taking action against inequalities both internally and externally at the university	Improving gender equality and work-life balance	Undertake multiple initiatives (e.g. applied research, knowledge transfer, events, concrete projects) with a positive impact on the territory
4	Improving gender equality and work-life balance	Develop research that offers solutions/perspectives to global social and environmental problems	Enhancing student services and rights to study

Source: Author's elaboration based on data from:
Evaluation Office, Ca' Foscari University (2021 - 2025).
Agenda 2030 Questionnaire. The perception of the Ca' Foscari community

The priorities identified by the VSM community show a clear departure from the general University trend. While Ca' Foscari as a whole focuses on buildings and consumption, the Management Department prioritizes the human and intellectual capital.

As already seen, this is evident at the top of the list, where the promotion of health and well-being, the development of research for global solutions and actions against inequalities led the ranking.

Further down the table, VSM actors also place more importance on territorial impact (11% vs 9% of the University), showing a stronger interest for the territory in which the university operates. Meanwhile, measures like green purchasing have less weight here. Notably, both groups rank further training and ethical codes at the bottom, indicating that the community now seeks concrete action over more awareness-raising.

In conclusion, the VSM sentiment treats sustainability as a strategic commitment to research and social equity.

Table 3.30: Strategic action areas ranked by stakeholder preference level – VSM (2025)

Rank	Proposed measures	Percentage
1	Promoting the health and well-being of students and staff	15%
2	Develop research that offers solutions/perspectives to global social and environmental problems	13%
3	Taking action against inequalities both internally and externally at the university.	13%
4	Improving gender equality and work-life balance	12%
5	Undertake multiple initiatives (e.g. applied research, knowledge transfer, events, concrete projects) with a positive impact on the territory	11%
6	Making buildings more sustainable and reducing consumption	10%
7	Enhancing student services and rights to study	7%
8	Undertake multiple initiatives of the same type, but with a positive impact that also goes beyond the territory	6%
9	Increase green purchasing and improve separate waste collection	5%
10	Increase training activities on sustainable development issues	5%
11	To foster a deeper understanding and application of the University's Code of Ethics and Behavior.	3%
Total		100%

Source: Author's elaboration based on data from:
Evaluation Office, Ca' Foscari University (2021 - 2025).
Agenda 2030 Questionnaire. The perception of the Ca' Foscari community

In this section, the survey investigates also the importance of a departmental commitment. Participants had to express their opinion regarding how important it was that the single department takes concrete action in order to address such challenges.

The recorded results show a shared consensus in considering the VSM an actor inside the organization that has a huge responsibility in tackling the 2030 Agenda's objectives.

In 2021, 95.76% of the respondents declared that the departmental commitment was necessary. This result is confirmed in 2025, with 95.61% in favor of an active role for the Business School. It is interesting to observe that in 2025, no one had doubts on the potential of the department, recording 0 votes on the label "I don't

know”. This is a significant step, as it signals how stakeholders are deeply aware of the role they play inside the organization and of the resonance they can have outside it. Another feature of the table is that, among the technical and administrative staff, in both years only positive preferences were expressed in favor of an active role of the department in addressing global concerns.

Taken together, these findings provide a clear message from the managerial actors to the department, namely a strong call to action in undertaking measures in support of the global challenges.

However, it should be noted that there is a slight increase in the percentage of respondents who believe it is not important for the department to address these challenges. Specifically, this marginal growth in skepticism is primarily observed among the student component. This finding, although limited in absolute terms, suggests that a small portion of the new students may be more critical or less convinced of the impact that a single departmental entity can have on global issues.

Table 3.31: Perceived importance of departmental commitment in addressing global challenges
(2021-2025)

Category	Not at all important		Not very important		Quite important		Very important		I don't know	
	2021	2025	2021	2025	2021	2025	2021	2025	2021	2025
Faculty and Research Staff	0,00%	3,03%	3,95%	1,52%	13,16%	16,67%	80,26%	78,79%	2,63%	0,00%
Technical and Administrative Staff	0,00%	0,00%	0,00%	0,00%	6,25%	5,88%	93,75%	94,12%	0,00%	0,00%
Student	0,00%	0,00%	1,67%	6,45%	18,33%	25,81%	78,33%	67,74%	1,67%	0,00%
Total	0,00%	1,75%	2,36%	2,63%	15,57%	17,54%	80,19%	78,07%	1,89%	0,00%
<i>Change</i>	-		11,58%		12,71%		-2,64%		-100,00%	

Source: Author's elaboration based on data from:
Evaluation Office, Ca' Foscari University (2021 - 2025).
Agenda 2030 Questionnaire. The perception of the Ca' Foscari community

The next question investigates the perception of actual commitment, asking stakeholders to what extent the Venice School of Management is already taking concrete actions.

In both years, most of the interviewees agreed on the “moderate” efforts made by the VSM, followed immediately by those who answered “Slightly” in percentage terms.

A positive outcome is verified in the “Very much” category, which experienced an increase (+106.63%), particularly among the technicians and the faculty. This confirms that those who are involved in everyday institutional activities recognize the steps forward made over the years. Providing an analysis by category, it is interesting to recognize how faculty progressively acknowledge the work done, while the technical and administrative staff claim strongly that the undertaking could be further improved.

Regarding the students, they also mostly agreed in considering the Department moderately active on this level, but there is also an increase within this cohort in the request for an improved commitment in concrete terms.

Table 3.32: Perception of actual departmental commitment in addressing global challenges (2021-2025)

Category	Not at all		Slightly		Moderately		Very much		I don't know	
	2021	2025	2021	2025	2021	2025	2021	2025	2021	2025
Faculty and Research Staff	1,32%	4,55%	40,79%	27,27%	46,05%	51,52%	2,63%	10,61%	9,21%	6,06%
Technical and Administrative Staff	12,50%	5,88%	56,25%	52,94%	25,00%	17,65%	0,00%	11,76%	6,25%	11,76%
Student	0,00%	0,00%	29,17%	32,26%	53,33%	51,61%	5,83%	3,23%	11,67%	12,90%
Total	1,42%	3,51%	35,38%	32,46%	48,58%	46,49%	4,25%	8,77%	10,38%	8,77%
<i>Change</i>	148%		-8,26%		-4,31%		106,63%		-15,47%	

Source: Author's elaboration based on data from:
Evaluation Office, Ca' Foscari University (2021 - 2025).
Agenda 2030 Questionnaire. The perception of the Ca' Foscari community

Overall, there emerges a community that is progressively more aware of its potential, yet simultaneously raises the bar regarding the level of expected outcomes.

The last section of the surveys, titled “Objective and participation” investigates the individual engagement of stakeholders, asking how much they feel they can personally contribute to improving the university’s commitment.

Comparing these findings with the overall university data reveals a distinctive trend within the Department of Management. At the institutional level, a small but growing portion of respondents (1.85% in 2025) still perceives their contribution as “Not at all important.” In contrast, this figure completely disappears within the VSM, where 0% of stakeholders feel powerless.

In line with the findings at the university level, those of the Management Department show a strong consolidation around the “Moderately” category, which accounts for over 51% of responses in 2025. This suggests a widespread and shared awareness among those actors regarding the potential of their behavior. However, it is observed a slight decrease in the category “Very much”. This might reflect a more pragmatic perception of the managerial community of its role. While no one feels irrelevant, there is an increased awareness that individual efforts must be integrated into broader systemic actions to be truly effective.

Table 3.33: Perceived individual contribution in supporting the University’s commitment (2021-2025)

Category	Not at all		Slightly		Moderately		Very much		I don’t know	
	2021	2025	2021	2025	2021	2025	2021	2025	2021	2025
Faculty and Research Staff	2,63%	0,00%	10,53%	20,63%	43,42%	53,97%	32,89%	23,81%	10,53%	1,59%
Technical and Administrative Staff	6,25%	0,00%	18,75%	35,29%	43,75%	29,41%	25,00%	23,53%	6,25%	11,76%
Student	0,83%	0,00%	24,17%	19,35%	44,17%	58,06%	24,17%	16,13%	6,67%	6,45%
Total	1,89%	0,00%	18,87%	22,52%	43,87%	51,35%	27,36%	21,62%	8,02%	4,50%
<i>Change</i>	<i>-100,00%</i>		<i>19,37%</i>		<i>17,06%</i>		<i>-20,97%</i>		<i>-43,83%</i>	

Source: Author's elaboration based on data from:
Evaluation Office, Ca' Foscari University (2021 - 2025).
Agenda 2030 Questionnaire. The perception of the Ca' Foscari community

Moving further on the analysis of how managerial stakeholders contribute to the achievement of the SDGs, the surveys investigated deeper by asking them to choose among four different options.

What emerges within the department is a community that is consistent in its behaviour, even though its awareness has grown, as shown in the previous sections. This is in contrast with the findings recorded at university level: there, in 2021, the first option voted by participants was “changing the way I carry out my work tasks”, while the second-highest rank was “participating in initiatives”. This suggests that stakeholders initially perceived sustainability as an external engagement. Only in 2025 there was a shift to considering it as part of their professional life, ranking second “directly through the content of my work”.

In contrast, since 2021, the principal way through which VSM participants provided their efforts was “changing the way I carry out my work tasks” as for the university as a whole, but this was immediately followed by “directly through the content of my work”. This indicates that for the managerial stakeholders, sustainability was perceived from the beginning as embedded in their professional practice.

These results suggest that the Management Department acted as an anticipator of what occurred later for the overall institution. Specifically, the “professionalization” of the SDGs – and of sustainability more generally – that emerged in the economic area in 2025, was already perceived like that in the VSM back in 2021. This confirms that for the managerial actors these themes were already seen as embedded in the core and strategic output of the Department.

Table 3.34: Stakeholders' contribution to SDGs within the VSM (2021 – 2025)

Rank	Ranking VSM (2021)	Ranking VSM (2025)
1	By changing the way I carry out my work tasks	By changing the way I carry out my work tasks
2	Directly through the content of my work (e.g. conducting research on these topics, promoting organizational innovations)	Directly through the content of my work (e.g. conducting research on these topics, promoting organizational innovations)
3	By participating in initiatives proposed by the Ca' Foscari community on these issues	By participating in initiatives proposed by the Ca' Foscari community on these issues
4	By personally proposing initiatives on these topics	By personally proposing initiatives on these topics

Source: Author's elaboration based on data from:
Evaluation Office, Ca' Foscari University (2021 - 2025).
Agenda 2030 Questionnaire. The perception of the Ca' Foscari community

Moreover, looking at the 2021 sample breakdown, different sentiments emerge among the various categories. The contribution through the content of the work – for example, through research – was primarily driven by the Faculty and the Research Staff, while students and the technical and administrative staff were more aligned with the trend observed for the rest of the university.

For the latter, indeed, the second way they used to contribute was through participation in initiatives proposed by Ca' Foscari. Nevertheless, there was a shared alignment in considering the principal method of contribution to be the everyday conduct of their work tasks. These outcomes indicate that the “professionalization” of sustainability was driven, at least at an initial stage, by the faculty.

Table 3.35: Contribution to SDGs by category of stakeholders within the VSM (2021)

Rank	Ranking per Category within VSM (2021)		
	Faculty and Research Staff	Technical and Administrative Staff	Student
1	By changing the way I carry out my work tasks	By changing the way I carry out my work tasks	By changing the way I carry out my work tasks
2	Directly through the content of my work (e.g. conducting research on these topics, promoting organizational innovations)	By participating in initiatives proposed by the Ca' Foscari community on these issues	By participating in initiatives proposed by the Ca' Foscari community on these issues
3	By participating in initiatives proposed by the Ca' Foscari community on these issues	Directly through the content of my work (e.g. conducting research on these topics, promoting organizational innovations)	Directly through the content of my work (e.g. conducting research on these topics, promoting organizational innovations)
4	By personally proposing initiatives on these topics	By personally proposing initiatives on these topics	By personally proposing initiatives on these topics

Source: Author's elaboration based on data from:
Evaluation Office, Ca' Foscari University (2021 - 2025).
Agenda 2030 Questionnaire. The perception of the Ca' Foscari community

A more detailed look at the 2025 findings reveals other kinds of evolutions inside the Department. While the Faculty confirms itself as the main driver of the integrative approach to the SDGs within the organization, the other two categories vary in the way they engage themselves in this cause.

First of all, the technical and administrative staff ranked second their direct contribution through their work, and third their personal contribution in proposing initiatives, overtaking the faculty and the students on this last point. This may suggest that sustainability has been well integrated into academic and administrative procedures and, overall, this category of stakeholders has become more reactive to such matters.

Furthermore, students' behaviour reveals a divergent trend: while the main contribution through the years, roles and fields of study had always been “by changing the way I carry out my work”, surprisingly, in the last wave of the survey it becomes “by participating in initiatives proposed by Ca’ Foscari”. This could indicate that for the students, the sentiment has moved from a personal commitment to a collective and participative approach.

Table 3.36: Contribution to SDGs by category of stakeholders within the VSM (2025)

Rank	Ranking per Category within VSM (2025)		
	Faculty and Research Staff	Technical and Administrative Staff	Student
1	By changing the way I carry out my work tasks	By changing the way I carry out my work tasks	By participating in initiatives proposed by the Ca’ Foscari community on these issues
2	Directly through the content of my work (e.g. conducting research on these topics, promoting organizational innovations)	Directly through the content of my work (e.g. conducting research on these topics, promoting organizational innovations)	By changing the way I carry out my work tasks
3	By participating in initiatives proposed by the Ca’ Foscari community on these issues	By personally proposing initiatives on these topics	Directly through the content of my work (e.g. conducting research on these topics, promoting organizational innovations)
4	By personally proposing initiatives on these topics	By participating in initiatives proposed by the Ca’ Foscari community on these issues	By personally proposing initiatives on these topics

Source: Author's elaboration based on data from:
Evaluation Office, Ca' Foscari University (2021 - 2025).
Agenda 2030 Questionnaire. The perception of the Ca' Foscari community

Chapter 4: Discussion

This thesis explores the role of Higher Education Institutions and Business Schools in supporting the achievement of the 2030 Agenda's Sustainable Development Goals. More specifically, it focuses on understanding how stakeholders at Ca' Foscari perceive the institution's commitment to sustainability and its contribution in addressing global challenges through SDGs-related initiatives.

The discussion of the findings is conducted through the lens of the existing literature on universities' Third Mission, the Principles for Responsible Management Education (PRME), and the broader debate on the SDGs in higher education. Furthermore, the analysis adopts Freeman's Stakeholders Theory as theoretical framework for the interpretation of the results.

4.1 Stakeholders' sensitivity towards the SDGs

With regards to the findings related to the analysis of stakeholders' sensitivity towards the SDGs evolving patterns emerge among the community. Specifically, thanks to the longitudinal nature of the study, the outcomes reveal an overall transition in priorities between the two survey waves.

The focus has moved from environmental concerns, such as the climate change in 2021, towards more socio-political priorities in 2025. This shift may be interpreted as a consequence of recent global events, which have increased the perceived urgency of issues such as peace, equality, hunger, and poverty. All academic fields, in fact, show a progressive convergence towards similar issues, reducing the differences traditionally associated with their specific areas of study.

These results are in line with the existing literature on the Third Mission, which states that universities are no longer responsible only for educational activities; rather, they are charged with addressing complex societal challenges. As argued by Etzkowitz (2013) when describing the profile of an Entrepreneurial University, these institutions are no longer viewed solely as a place of teaching and research but contribute to the cultural and economic growth of the society, while engaging with the community. Moreover, the shift toward social and geopolitical priorities suggests that stakeholders increasingly expect university to act as a transformative institution, adopting the transformative approach stated by Pflitsch and Menzel (2026) and generating shared value for the society, as underlined by Panfilo and Mio (2025). Overall, these outcomes are also in line with the wider debate surrounding both the PRME and the SDGs, which consider HEIs key actors in the promotion of a more sustainable future.

Furthermore, as Stakeholder Theory suggests that organizations must meet stakeholders' expectations, this analysis also indicates that these expectations are not stable over time. To preserve legitimacy, it is indeed important to monitor the evolution of such expectations and the state of the relationship in order to continue enjoying stakeholders' support. In the light of these results, universities should continue adapting their priorities in line with stakeholders' requests, and based on these considerations, Stakeholder Theory once again constitutes a suitable framework for addressing multiple expectations.

4.2 The perceived role of the university in achieving the SDGs

A shared consensus emerges among the stakeholders in considering the university a key actor in the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals. In both survey waves, the vast majority of respondents considered in fact the university's contribution either "important" or "very important", highlighting a widespread recognition of its role in supporting sustainable development.

This finding suggests that stakeholders attribute to university responsibilities that go beyond its traditional functions. In particular, participants recognize Ca' Foscari as an actor capable of contributing to educational, economic, social and environmental

objectives. The results show, indeed, the importance that stakeholders attribute to the university especially in promoting education, innovation, sustainable economic growth, and gender equality, identifying those objectives as the ones in which HEIs can make the most significant contribution.

Those findings also align with the underlying principles of the SDGs and PRME's frameworks. The United Nations initiatives underline, indeed, the importance of educating future leaders with a broad range of values that extends from the society to the environment. In particular, the results are coherent with the first two PRME principles, namely the Purpose and the Values. Specifically, the United Nations advance a kind of managerial education that fosters inclusive prosperity, while placing a central role to accountability and responsibility to the overall society and the planet. The high level of importance attributed to the university underlines how those demands are shared also within the Ca' Foscari community. For these reasons, the results suggest that, from stakeholders' perception, HEIs and Business Schools can be "catalyst for societal change" (Reficco & Jean, 2015).

Finally, the literature underlines how academia's contributions towards the integration of sustainability remain sometimes symbolic rather fully engaged (Panfilo, Zarycka, & Mio, 2026). About this trend, the results show high levels of trust from stakeholders towards the university, and high expectations from its operations. Taken together, this combination generates increasing pressures for concrete results and a higher degree of commitment from HEIs.

4.3 Stakeholders' expectations and demand for a more transformative university

Moving the attention to the concrete contribution that the university can provide in meeting stakeholder's expectations, the findings reveal demanding requests toward the institution. In particular, the main expectations are related to the construction of sustainable buildings, the promotion of equality and inclusion, well-being, SDG-oriented research, and student services.

These results reveal once again stakeholders' sensitivity toward sustainable development and suggest a broad understanding of how universities can contribute to the achievement of the SDGs. Specifically, the areas identified by respondents complement the activities traditionally associated with the Third Mission, such as the commercialization of knowledge or the creation of spin-offs, which are highlighted by scholars such as Audretsch (2014) and Compagnucci and Spigarelli (2020) when explaining recurrent Third Mission activities. Alongside such more established contributions, stakeholders identify those new ways through which the university can support sustainable development.

Indeed, this analysis depicts a community that consider the institution capable of organizational changes, social impact and internal well-being. From this perspective, the outcomes are consistent with the literature on transformative approaches to HEIs proposed by Pflitsch and Menzel (2026), according to which universities are increasingly expected to generate value across social, environmental and economic dimensions.

Furthermore, when reading these outcomes through the lens of the Stakeholder Theory, these findings become particularly valuable, as they constitute a direct expression of stakeholders' expectations regarding the university's role in pursuing sustainable development. In particular, since the organization must balance stakeholder's interests in pursuing its missions, these results represent important information for the development of a strategic plan capable of encompassing multiple stakeholders' expectations.

4.4 Stakeholders' engagement and co-creation of sustainability

When the United Nations launched the 2030 Agenda in 2015, it put contemporary global threats in the spotlight, and it constituted an invitation to all actors in the society to put into practice more responsible behaviours to face such challenges. Based on this perspective, this analysis investigated also the degree of engagement that university's stakeholders demonstrate in embracing the UN's initiative.

The collected results depict a community that is highly aware of its potential contribution in tackling the SDGs. Particularly, the vast majority argues that it can bring a “moderate” or “very important” contribution to the society in bringing about a change of direction.

This process through which stakeholders commit themselves is in line with the literature on stakeholder participation and co-creation of value for society within higher education institutions (Disterheft, 2015).

Particularly, the Ca' Foscari's community participation appears to follow a predominantly reactive approach, namely stakeholders' involvement occurs through the modification of their behaviour and participation in university's initiative. Less frequently, stakeholders became promoters of new proposals. This result suggests that the community is widely willing to embrace the UN's call to action, but it rarely demonstrates leadership in driving the process.

Overall, interpreting this phenomenon through Stakeholder Theory, it is possible to analyse the state of the relationship between Ca' Foscari and its community. If the theory assumes a relation in which, on the one hand, the university should meet the stakeholders' expectations, and on the other hand, stakeholders should collaborate with the institution in creating shared value, in this specific scenario an intermediate level can be found. Stakeholders appear willing to support the institution's efforts towards the SDGs, although their involvement remains mainly more collaborative than proactive.

4.5 The Venice School of Management and its contribution to the SDGs

Moving the attention to the Venice School of Management, the comparison between departmental and university-wide results provides interesting insights into the role that Business Schools can play in supporting the achievement of SDGs. As the literature highlights the importance of promoting sustainability in managerial education, this analysis investigates the role of the VSM in driving the overall university towards more sustainable activities and practices.

Overall, the findings reveal a high degree of convergence between the priorities expressed by the stakeholders affiliated with the Venice School of Management and those stated by the wider university community. Similar to the overall results, respondents within the Department of Management recognize the importance of the university's contribution to sustainable development, show significant sensitivity towards social and geopolitical issues, and demonstrate a willingness to contribute to sustainability initiatives through their own actions. At the same time, some differences emerge. Compared to the university-wide findings, the members of the VSM place greater emphasis on the contribution of the university to education, innovation, sustainable economic growth, and research, considering these areas, as those in which Ca' Foscari can make the most significant contribution to the achievement of the SDGs. Furthermore, unlike the overall-university results, SDG-oriented research consistently appears among the most relevant areas through which the university can support sustainable development in both survey waves. From these findings, it emerges that participants from the VSM associate the potential impact of Ca' Foscari on sustainability mainly with measures related to knowledge creation, research, and social equity for the development of a more sustainable future.

Another interesting insight emerging from this analysis concerns the contribution that the VSM itself can provide towards the achievement of the SDGs from stakeholders' perspective. Similar to the results regarding the contribution of the university as a whole, stakeholders also express a generally positive opinion. Specifically, the results reveal a call for further action aimed at strengthening the Department's commitment to sustainability. However, the community mostly assessed the current level of commitment as intermediate, which suggests high expectations from members of the VSM community towards the Business School.

Furthermore, all respondents believe they have the possibility to give a contribution towards the integration of more sustainable practices, and none considers themselves unable to contribute to such objectives. Specifically, unlike the university-wide results, those affiliated with the VSM identify their work as one of the main channels through which they can contribute to the achievement of the SDGs, alongside changes in personal behaviour, already since 2021. These results depict a community

that is aware of both its own potential and those of the Business School, while also expressing increasing expectations.

These findings are in line with the literature on Business Schools and the Principles for Responsible Management Education. As discussed in the literature review, Business Schools are increasingly expected to educate future leaders able to balance economic, social, and environmental objectives. The importance attributed by participants from the VSM to social and environmental objectives reflects this vision and confirms the potential contribution that management education can provide in supporting sustainable development.

However, most of the priorities identified by the respondents of the VSM are also shared by the wider Ca' Foscari community. For this reason, sustainability integration appears more likely to be the result of a shared effort, rather than of the commitment of a single actor, namely the Business School in this case. On the one hand, the VSM appears to be discreetly meeting stakeholders' expectation, in line with Stakeholder Theory. On the other hand, the findings confirm that sustainable development requires the contribution of multiple actors. Therefore, rather than acting as the sole driver of sustainability, the Venice School of Management appears to be one of the key contributors to Ca' Foscari's broader effort towards the achievement of the SDGs.

4.6 Final considerations

Interpreting the findings through this lens reveals that stakeholders attribute to Ca' Foscari responsibilities that extend beyond its traditional functions of teaching and knowledge transmission.

Participants generally recognize the university and the VSM as strategic actors in tackling the SDGs and addressing global challenges highlighted by the 2030 Agenda. At the same time, the results outline growing expectations regarding their role, as stakeholders appear to expect more actions capable of generating social, environmental, and economic impact. Overall, from a Stakeholder Theory perspective, the relationship between the university and the VSM and their respective communities appears dynamic and evolving, with varying levels of stakeholder engagement. Taken together, the results

highlight a general alignment with the SDGs and PRME frameworks, as well as the need for a shared effort between the university and its stakeholders in addressing sustainability challenges.

For these reasons several suggestions for further improvements can be identified.

First, as the community perceive the university a key driver of sustainable development, the institution should undertake concrete actions that strategically embrace this role. The results suggest that stakeholders expect the university not only to continue its environmental commitment through the construction and improvement of sustainable buildings, but also strengthen its contribution in the social sphere. In particular, the increasing importance attributed to health and well-being, equality, inclusion, and student services indicates the need for a strategy that balance actions for both environmental and social dimensions. Therefore, future institutional actions should include initiatives aimed at improving of student's services, promoting inclusive and gender-equality policies, supporting well-being within the university community, and enhancing sustainability of campus infrastructure.

Second, based on the collected data, stakeholders appear willing to take part in the sustainability transition. However, there is still room for further enhancement. While respondents generally recognize the importance of their contribution and support sustainability through changes in their daily activities and participation in university initiatives, they less frequently act as promoters of new projects. From this perspective the university should strengthen collaboration within its community by creating additional opportunity for stakeholders to be co-creators of societal value.

Third, in order to continue enjoying the support of its stakeholders, the institution should further improve the communication regarding the initiatives it undertakes, highlighting the results achieved and strengthening its accountability. The findings reveal high expectations towards the university and its ability to contribute to sustainable development. Consequently, communicating activities should be further improved to demonstrate the impact of the initiatives undertaken.

Furthermore, the continuous monitoring of the relationship between the university and its stakeholders appears essential in order to preserve trust and long-term support. In line with Stakeholder Theory, organizations depend also on the support

of those actors who can influence the achievement of their objectives. Similarly, universities need the support of their communities to pursue their missions.

Finally, in the light of the results, the Venice School of Management should continue strengthening its commitment to SDG-oriented education and research. The findings suggest that managerial stakeholders perceive education, innovation and research as key drivers of societal progress, sustainable economic growth and prosperity. Furthermore, research consistently emerges among the most relevant channels through which the university can contribute to the achievement of the SDGs. For this reason, the Department should further foster interdisciplinary and SDG-oriented research activities, while also increasing the visibility of these initiatives. At the same time, the VSM should continue promoting the integration of sustainability within teaching and organizational practices, consolidating its role as one of the main contributors to Ca' Foscari's broader strategy of sustainable transition towards the achievement of the 2030 Agenda's objectives.

Conclusion

This thesis investigates the role of Higher Education Institutions in tackling the Sustainable Development Goals of the 2030 Agenda and investigates the contribution that Business Schools can provide to guide these organizations towards such objectives. Specifically, the study takes Ca' Foscari University and its Management Department as a case study to analyse the phenomenon. Following the approach proposed by Stakeholder Theory, the research assesses the university's contribution through the analysis of stakeholders' sensitivity towards the SDGs, the evaluation of the university's commitment to the creation of a sustainable future, and the identification of future priorities for institutional action.

The findings confirm that the role of universities goes well beyond their traditional functions of teaching and research. Specifically, the Ca' Foscari community recognizes both the university and the Venice School of Management as strategic players in the construction of a more sustainable future through education and research, policies that reduce economic and gender inequalities, and environmentally friendly interventions. In this regard, the present study supports the growing literature on transformative universities, which attributes to HEIs the ability to generate economic, social, and environmental value for society.

Furthermore, one of the most significant findings is that stakeholders' priorities change over time. For this reason, universities should monitor their relationships with their respective communities in order to be aware of stakeholders' demands. In this specific case, the request to act mainly on an environmental level is progressively accompanied by the request to intervene also through social actions.

Moreover, the results highlight the high level of trust that stakeholders place in the university's potential. At the same time, the findings reveal increasing expectations

regarding the university's role, suggesting that stakeholders demand a stronger commitment and more visible outcomes from sustainability-related initiatives.

From a stakeholder perspective, the analysis reveals a community that is well aware of its potential and sees sustainability mainly as a matter of daily commitment through behavioural changes related to the execution of work activities or participation in institutional initiatives. However, the results suggest that there is still room for improvement in the collaboration between the university and its community in order to promote the creation of shared value for society as a whole.

With regard to the role of Business Schools, the stakeholders of the Venice School of Management show priorities that are largely aligned with those of the rest of the institution, while considering the Department a catalyst for societal change. These results suggest that the sustainability transition can be perceived as the result of a shared effort. Moreover, the managerial community places strong emphasis on the contribution that the Department can provide through education and research, confirming the culture promoted by the United Nations through the Principles for Responsible Management Education.

Overall, from a theoretical perspective, this study contributes to the literature on Stakeholder Theory, the Third Mission of universities, and PRME by providing empirical evidence on how universities are nowadays charged with responsibilities that extend beyond their traditional missions. Furthermore, the results contribute to the growing debate on the transformative role of Higher Education Institutions in addressing complex societal challenges. From a practical perspective, the results suggest that universities are called upon to adopt sustainability integration strategies that include both environmental and social actions.

However, the study presents some limitations. First, the case study approach leads to results that derive from a specific context, and for this reason, the findings cannot be generalized to represent the conduct of all Higher Education Institutions, although they may provide useful evidence for theoretical propositions. Second, the composition of the two surveys was not homogeneous across stakeholder categories between the two survey waves, with the 2021 edition being mainly student-driven, while the 2025 edition offered a more balanced perspective across all categories. Third,

the study relies on stakeholders' opinions rather than on objective measures of sustainability performance.

Further research could extend the study to other universities and Business Schools in order to provide a territorial and organizational comparison of the phenomenon. Furthermore, the survey approach could be complemented by interviews or focus groups to provide a deeper understanding of the motivations underlying stakeholders' expectations. Finally, the analysis could be deepened by comparing relational data gathered through surveys with objective indicators in order to assess the effective contribution of universities to the 2030 Agenda.

In conclusion, universities and Business Schools are expected to act as drivers of social change, operating across multiple dimensions of sustainability and embracing a broader transformative transition. In doing so, HEIs are called not only to educate future generations, but also to actively contribute to the creation of a more sustainable and inclusive society.

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Appendix A – Survey questions

1. To which of the following categories do you belong?
 - a. Faculty and Research Staff
 - b. Language Lecturer
 - c. PhD Student
 - d. Research Fellow
 - e. Student
 - f. Technical and Administrative Staff
 - g. Other
2. To which of the following Department do you belong?
 - a. Department of Asian and North African Studies
 - b. Department of Comparative Linguistics and Cultural Studies
 - c. Department of Economics
 - d. Department of Environmental Sciences, Informatics and Statistics
 - e. Department of Humanities
 - f. Department of Molecular Sciences and Nanosystems
 - g. Department of Philosophy and Cultural Heritage
 - h. Venice School of Management
 - i. Other
3. Rank the following global challenges in order of priority
 - a. Achievement of gender equality
 - b. Development of efficient infrastructure and sustainable urban centers
 - c. Education, innovation, and sustainable economic growth
 - d. Global peace and improvement of justice systems
 - e. Improvement of health and well-being
 - f. Mitigation and adaptation to climate change
 - g. Reduction of hunger and poverty
 - h. Reduction of inequalities among individuals and between nations
 - i. Restoration of terrestrial and marine environments and protection of biodiversity
4. How important do you think it is that the University takes concrete action to address these challenges?
 - a. Not at all important
 - b. Not very important
 - c. Quite important
 - d. Very important
 - e. I don't know

5. Which of these challenges do you think Ca' Foscari can make a decisive contribution to?
 - a. Achievement of gender equality
 - b. Development of efficient infrastructure and sustainable urban centers
 - c. Education, innovation, and sustainable economic growth
 - d. Global peace and improvement of justice systems
 - e. Improvement of health and well-being
 - f. Mitigation and adaptation to climate change
 - g. Reduction of hunger and poverty
 - h. Reduction of inequalities among individuals and between nations
 - i. Restoration of terrestrial and marine environments and protection of biodiversity
 - j. None of the above

6. What steps does the University need to take in the future to meet these challenges?
 - a. Develop research that offers solutions/perspectives to global social and environmental problems
 - b. Enhancing student services and rights to study
 - c. Improving gender equality and work-life balance
 - d. Increase green purchasing and improve separate waste collection
 - e. Increase training activities on sustainable development issues
 - f. Making buildings more sustainable and reducing consumption
 - g. Promoting the health and well-being of students and staff
 - h. Taking action against inequalities both internally and externally at the university.
 - i. To foster a deeper understanding and application of the University's Code of Ethics and Behavior.
 - j. Undertake multiple initiatives (e.g. applied research, knowledge transfer, events, concrete projects) with a positive impact on the territory
 - k. Undertake multiple initiatives of the same type, but with a positive impact that also goes beyond the territory

7. How important do you think it is that your Department takes concrete action to address these challenges?
 - a. Not at all important
 - b. Not very important
 - c. Quite important
 - d. Very important
 - e. I don't know

8. To what extent do you think your Department is already doing this?
 - a. Not at all
 - b. Slightly
 - c. Moderately
 - d. Very much
 - e. I don't know

9. In your role, how much can you help improve Ca' Foscari's commitment to these issues?
- a. Not at all
 - b. Slightly
 - c. Moderately
 - d. Very much
 - e. I don't know
10. If so, through which activities have you contributed?
- a. By changing the way I carry out my work tasks
 - b. By participating in initiatives proposed by the Ca' Foscari community on these issues
 - c. By personally proposing initiatives on these topics
 - d. Directly through the content of my work (e.g. conducting research on these topics, promoting organizational innovations)

Declaration on the use of Artificial Intelligence (AI) tools

The undersigned, Bizzotto Francesca, student ID number 975878, enrolled at Ca' Foscari University in the Master's Degree Programme in Global Accounting and Finance, author of the master's thesis entitled *"Tackling SDGs in higher education: the case of Ca' Foscari University"*, supervised by Professor Silvia Panfilo, aware of the penalties provided for by Article 76 of the Consolidated Act (Presidential Decree No. 445 of 28/12/2000), and of the forfeiture of benefits set out in Article 75 of the same Consolidated Act in the event of false or misleading statements, under her own personal responsibility pursuant to Articles 46 and 47 of Presidential Decree No. 445 of 28/12/2000,

HEREBY DECLARES

that she has made use of generative artificial intelligence technologies to support various aspects of the research and writing of her master's thesis, in particular:

- ChatGPT-5, version released in August 2025;

This tool was used throughout all sections of the thesis as a linguistic support for the revision of the English language, with particular reference to checking grammatical correctness.

The correctness of the texts was verified through personal proofreading and comparison with academic sources and reliable lexicographical tools.

FURTHER DECLARES

that all AI-generated material has been carefully checked, reviewed, and revised by the author, who assumes full responsibility for the quality, accuracy, and scientific integrity of the work.

