

Perspectives on the Development of Green Social Entrepreneurship at Universities in Poland

Iwona Lupa-Wójcik and Wojciech Maciejewski

University of the National Education Commission, Krakow, Poland

iwona.lupa-wojcik@uken.krakow.pl

wojciech.maciejewski@uken.krakow.pl

Abstract: Green social entrepreneurship is becoming an increasingly important component of sustainable development, as it combines economic objectives with environmental protection and social inclusion. In Poland, universities play a crucial role in promoting this concept; however, comprehensive research on its potential remains limited. The growing interest in the green economy and social entrepreneurship within academic settings highlights the need for deeper analysis. This study aims to evaluate perspectives on the development of green social entrepreneurship at Polish universities, with a particular focus on students' perceptions of its potential, based on the case of the University of the Commission of National Education (UNEC) in Kraków. The main hypothesis assumes that universities in Poland have significant potential to promote green social entrepreneurship, but lack the necessary tools and institutional support, including knowledge of how to apply artificial intelligence (AI) in this field. The study is based on a questionnaire survey conducted among students. The results indicate that universities, such as UNEC, possess considerable potential to advance green social entrepreneurship, although this requires enhanced intersectoral cooperation and improved access to relevant resources. The findings also show that students increasingly recognize the importance of green entrepreneurship for sustainable development. These insights may contribute to the formulation of strategies that support the growth of green social entrepreneurship at Polish universities, including the integration of AI tools to promote sustainability and innovation.

Keywords: Social Entrepreneurship, Green Social Entrepreneurship, Sustainable Development, Universities, AI

1. Introduction

In the face of escalating environmental and social challenges, the role of universities in shaping sustainable and socially responsible attitudes is becoming increasingly significant. Green social entrepreneurship emerges as a promising approach that integrates environmental protection, social inclusion, and innovation within academic ecosystems.

The aim of the article is to evaluate perspectives on the development of green social entrepreneurship at Polish universities, with particular emphasis on students' perceptions of its potential, using the case of the University of the Commission of National Education (UNEC) in Kraków. The article is divided into three main sections: the first reviews the relevant literature, the second outlines the research methodology, and the third presents the key findings of the survey; the article concludes with a summary of conclusions, research limitations, and suggestions for further studies.

2. Literature Review

The role of entrepreneurship in economic development, and its broader understanding, was emerging with Schumpeter's 1949 publication (Schumpeter, 1949). This was a kind of turning point in the perception of entrepreneurship as not only related to starting and running a business (Mehmood et al. 2019). Since then, the scientific world's development of entrepreneurship research has contributed to an increasingly better and more precise understanding of this phenomenon, and has allowed the discovery of new areas in which the importance of entrepreneurship is recognised (Nor, 2024, Klarin, Susneo, 2022, Dacin et al. 2010, World Bank, 2017). One of the research issues closely related to the topic of entrepreneurship is the formation of appropriate pro-entrepreneurial attitudes among young people, as well as the challenges faced by educational institutions (Kurzewska, 2023). Schools, or universities, play a kind of transfer role, the latest achievements, knowledge, innovations and competences to the development of social capital (Audretsch, 2014), which should consequently create an entrepreneurial society. Thus, it should be recognised that educational institutions have a key role in fostering entrepreneurial attitudes. However, what effects will be achieved in the educational process depends on the methods adopted (Marvel, Davis, Sproil, 2016), studies indicate that the most effective method is a combination of practice-oriented and theory-oriented methods (Piperopoulos, Dimov, 2015, Bechar, Gregoire, 2015, Fletcher, 2007). The selection of appropriate educational methods is one element of a properly composed educational model, an equally important element is to follow trends in the economy and, in line with the previous statements, to ensure that students have access to the most up-to-date knowledge in the field as well as the needs of the economy.

One trend increasingly present in the economy is sustainability and green competence (Barth, et al. 2007, Dudur, et al. 2024). This is due to the challenges posed by economic, environmental and social realities, in which increases in productivity and competitiveness take place while reducing the environmental footprint (Biekša et al., 2022). Sustainability is a concept closely related to economic development and these concepts should be seen as complementary, as this approach leads to the creation of economic innovation and improved environmental performance (Voronina, 2024). This cannot be achieved without the proper formation of the human resources that will be the actors of these changes in the future, hence many studies point to the necessity of including courses shaping so-called green competences in educational programmes (Sipos, Battisti, Grimm, 2008, Svanström, Lozano-Garcia, Rowe, 2008, Weik et al., 2011, Mochizuki, Fadeeva, 2010). The very awareness of lecturers and students is also not insignificant, pointing to the need for training in this field, the creation of evaluation tools to measure, among other things, students' green competences in the context of their use in professional practice, as well as interdisciplinary approaches, critical thinking, creativity of managing emotions, social interactions, or teamwork for sustainable development (Cebrián, Junyent, 2015). The development of the aforementioned competences, and consequently of a modern and innovative social capital, is a key role of universities necessary to create spaces for green economic solutions (Ma, 2022). The plethora of research on entrepreneurship, social entrepreneurship, green competences or sustainability points to the relevance of these issues in the contemporary economy. A corollary to this relevance is the importance of education and the involvement of universities in the process of preparing future human resources to effectively create solutions that generate simultaneous economic and social development while reducing the environmental footprint.

3. Methodology

The aim of the research is to evaluate perspectives on the development of green social entrepreneurship at Polish universities based on the opinion of students from the University of the National Education Commission, Krakow (UNEC), Poland.

The following research questions were formulated:

1. How do students at Polish universities engage with and perceive the importance of sustainability in their academic and professional development?
2. To what extent are UNEC students familiar with the concepts of social entrepreneurship and green social entrepreneurship?
3. How do UNEC students perceive the role and effectiveness of their university in promoting green social entrepreneurship?
4. What is the level of awareness and perceived usefulness of artificial intelligence tools in supporting sustainable and socially oriented initiatives among UNEC students?
5. What types of support, educational activities, and workshop formats do UNEC students expect in order to effectively develop competencies in green social entrepreneurship?

It has been hypothesized that universities in Poland have significant potential to promote green social entrepreneurship. However, there is a lack of necessary tools and institutional support, including knowledge of how to utilize AI tools in this area.

The research was conducted at the University of the Commission of National Education (UNEC) in Kraków, Poland, in April and May 2025. The study employed a quantitative method in the form of a survey. A custom-designed questionnaire was developed specifically for the purpose of this research, consisting of 20 questions, both closed and semi-open. Four of these were demographic questions regarding gender, type of studies, year of study, and study mode.

The survey questionnaire was preceded by a short introduction explaining the topic and purpose of the study, the target group, and the voluntary and anonymous nature of participation. Respondents were informed that the survey aimed to gather student opinions on the development prospects of green social entrepreneurship at Polish universities. The instruction also provided contact information for the researchers in case of questions.

The research sample consisted of 224 students from UNEC. Among the respondents, 78% identified as women and 22% as men. In terms of study level, 83% were enrolled in first-cycle (Bachelor's) programs, while 17% were pursuing second-cycle (Master's) studies. The majority of participants (58%) were in their first year of study, followed by 36% in the second year, 4% in the fourth year, and 2% in the fifth year. Regarding study mode, 83% of students were attending full-time programs, and 17% were enrolled in part-time studies. These characteristics

offer a clear overview of the student population surveyed and form a relevant context for interpreting the results related to green social entrepreneurship.

4. Findings

The following section presents the research results structured around the research questions.

How do students at Polish universities engage with and perceive the importance of sustainability in their academic and professional development?

Interest in environmental topics was explored through students' responses on their engagement with sustainability and environmental protection (Figure 1).

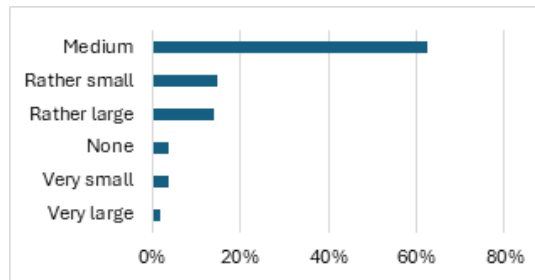


Figure 1: Interest in environmental protection and sustainability topics in the opinion of respondents

Source: own.

The data shows that a clear majority (63%) described their interest as medium, indicating a general awareness and openness to these issues, though not necessarily strong or specialized engagement. About 14% students declared a rather large interest, while roughly 15% reported a rather small interest. Only a marginal number of respondents indicated very small, very large, or no interest at all. This distribution suggests that while most students are moderately interested, relatively few have developed a deeper, more active involvement with environmental protection and sustainability topics.

4.1 To What Extent are UNEC Students Familiar With the Concepts of Social Entrepreneurship and Green Social Entrepreneurship?

When asked whether they had encountered the term social entrepreneurship during their studies, students provided a range of responses (Figure 2). This offers insight into how widely the concept is disseminated within the academic environment.



Figure 2: Familiarity with the term "social entrepreneurship" during studies according to respondents

Source: own.

The majority of respondents (63%) declared that they have come across the term "social entrepreneurship", indicating a noticeable level of exposure to the concept within their academic environment. A smaller but still significant portion of students (23%) stated that they do not recall whether the term was mentioned, which may suggest limited emphasis or a lack of clarity in how the topic was introduced. Meanwhile, a minority of respondents (14%) explicitly answered "No", indicating they had not encountered the term at all.

Awareness of green or eco-social entrepreneurship was also evaluated (Figure 3).



Figure 3: Exposure to the concept of green or eco-social entrepreneurship during studies as reported by respondents

Source: own.

Data shows that 47% of respondents have encountered the concept of green or eco social entrepreneurship during their studies. However, a significant group of respondents (30%) indicated that they are not sure whether they had encountered this concept, which may point to a lack of clarity in how the topic is presented or discussed during classes. A smaller but still notable portion of students (23%) answered “No”, suggesting that for some, the idea of eco-social entrepreneurship remains outside their educational experience.

4.2 How do UNEC Students Perceive the Role and Effectiveness of Their University in Promoting Green Social Entrepreneurship?

Perceptions of the importance of green social entrepreneurship for sustainable development were also measured (Figure 4).

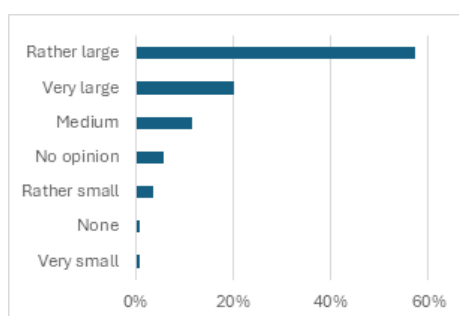


Figure 4: Perceived importance of green social entrepreneurship for sustainable development according to surveyed students

Source: own.

The majority of respondents (57%) believe that the importance of green social entrepreneurship for sustainable development is rather large, and an additional 20% consider it very large, indicating that a vast majority view green social entrepreneurship as a key factor in driving sustainability efforts.

An interesting discrepancy arises when comparing the perceived importance of green social entrepreneurship (with 77% of respondents viewing it as important or very important) and the significantly lower familiarity with the concepts themselves. This suggests a gap between general values and specific knowledge, possibly due to inadequate integration of these concepts into university curricula or low visibility of practical applications within the university ecosystem.

In relation to the role of universities, students shared their views on how actively such institutions should promote green social entrepreneurship (Figure 5).

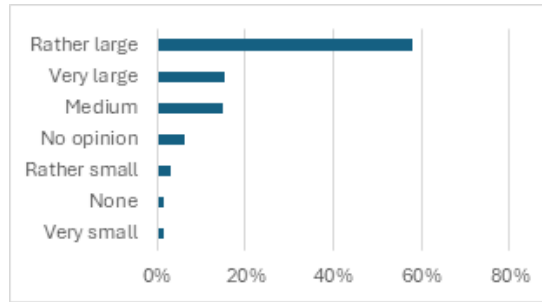


Figure 5: Views on the role of Polish universities in promoting green social entrepreneurship in the opinion of respondents

Source: own.

The results show a strong consensus in favor of active institutional engagement: 58% of respondents rated the desired level of university involvement as rather large, while around 15% selected very large.

Students were also asked how well their university currently supports topics related to environmental protection and sustainability (Figure 6).

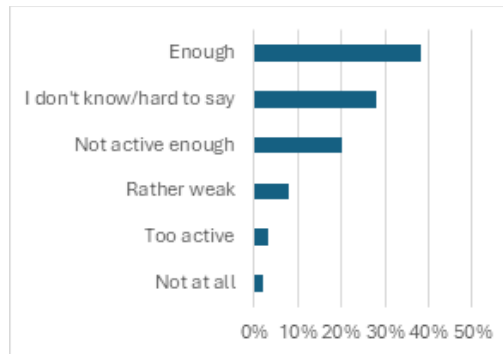


Figure 6: Perception of university engagement in environmental and sustainability topics according to surveyed students

Source: own.

The most common response, selected by nearly 40% of respondents, was that the university does “enough” to promote topics related to environmental protection and sustainable development. Around 30% of students indicated that they don’t know or find it hard to say, which may point to limited visibility or clarity of environmental initiatives on campus. Meanwhile, approximately 20% felt that the university is not active enough, and a smaller group described the activity as rather weak. Only a very small number of respondents perceived the university as too active or not active at all.

Further insights were gathered on how students evaluate their university’s potential to promote green social entrepreneurship (Figure 7).

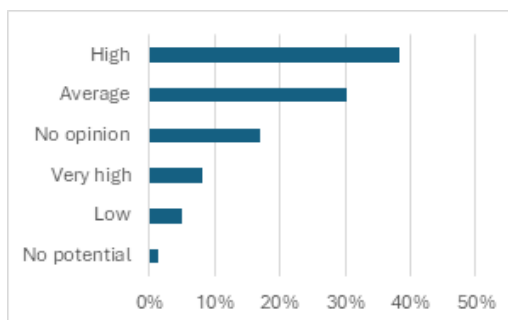


Figure 7: Assessment of university potential in promoting green social entrepreneurship as perceived by respondents

Source: own.

The most frequent response (38%) was “high”, indicating a strong belief in the university’s capacity to engage in and support the promotion of green social entrepreneurship. Additionally, about 30% of respondents rated the university’s potential as “average”, showing a generally positive yet more moderate level of confidence. Approximately 17% of participants selected “no opinion”, which could suggest uncertainty, lack of awareness, or limited exposure to existing initiatives.

4.3 What is the Level of Awareness and Perceived Usefulness of Artificial Intelligence Tools in Supporting Sustainable and Socially Oriented Initiatives Among UNEC Students?

Key barriers and deficits in university support were identified by students (Figure 8).

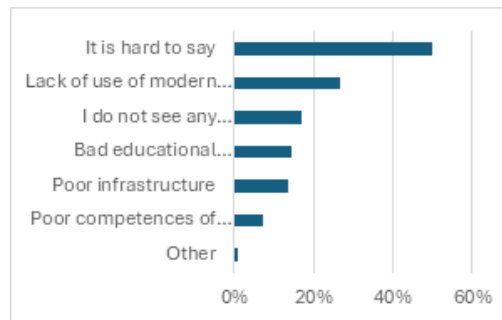


Figure 8: Key deficits in university support for green entrepreneurship in the opinion of respondents

Source: own.

The most frequent response (50%) was “It is hard to say”, suggesting a significant level of uncertainty or a lack of awareness regarding how the university supports (or fails to support) green entrepreneurship. This may reflect either insufficient communication from the institution or a low level of student engagement with the topic. The most commonly indicated concrete deficit was the lack of use of modern technology, selected by around 27% of respondents. This points to a perceived gap in the digital or innovative infrastructure needed to effectively support green entrepreneurial initiatives. Other notable concerns include bad educational programs (14%), poor infrastructure (13%), and the perceived lack of competences among staff or lecturers (7%).

When asked about the role of artificial intelligence (AI) in supporting green social entrepreneurship, students showed varied perceptions (Figure 9).

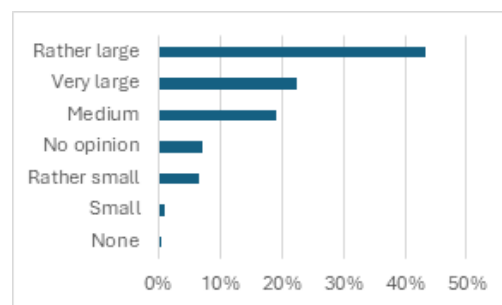


Figure 9: The role of AI tools in supporting green social entrepreneurship according to respondents

Source: own.

According to 43% of surveyed students, the potential of artificial intelligence (AI) tools in supporting the development of green social entrepreneurship is considered “rather large.” This indicates a widespread belief in the usefulness of AI for advancing environmentally and socially responsible entrepreneurial initiatives. An additional 22% rated the potential as “very large”, further emphasizing strong optimism about AI’s role in this area. Around 19% of respondents selected “medium”, showing that while they recognize the possible contributions of AI, they may view them as more limited or conditional on specific factors such as implementation quality or context.

4.4 What Types of Support, Educational Activities, and Workshop Formats do UNEC Students Expect in Order to Effectively Develop Competencies in Green Social Entrepreneurship?

Interest in acquiring knowledge about AI in ecological or social contexts was also explored (Figure 10).

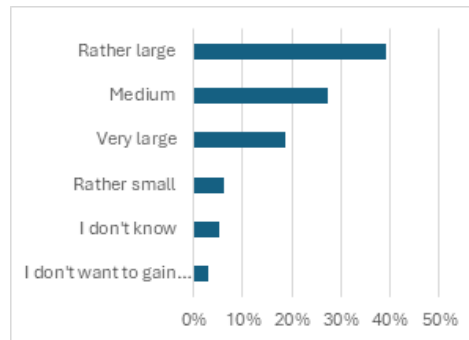


Figure 10: Interest in learning about the use of AI in environmental or social initiatives as expressed by respondents

Source: own.

The most common response, selected by 39% of students, was “rather large”, indicating a strong overall willingness to explore how AI can contribute to environmental and social initiatives. Approximately 27% of respondents expressed a medium level of interest, while around 20% showed very large interest, which together reinforce the idea that this is a highly relevant and engaging topic for the majority of students.

Students proposed various actions that universities could take to better support green social entrepreneurship (Figure 11).

The sum of the response percentages in the chart is greater than 100% because respondents could choose more than one answer.

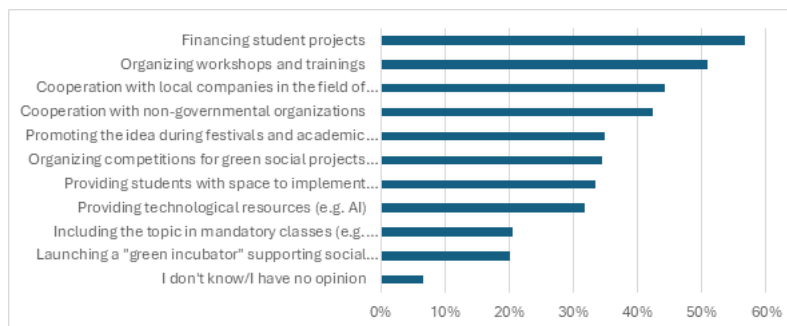


Figure 11: Suggested university actions to better support green social entrepreneurship in the opinion of respondents

Source: own.

The most frequently selected answers—selected by 57% of respondents—was financing student projects, clearly signaling that access to funding is seen as a key enabler for student-driven initiatives in this area. Closely following were suggestions such as organizing workshops and trainings (51%) and fostering cooperation with local companies (44%) and non-governmental organizations (42%) involved in green entrepreneurship. These results emphasize the importance of building practical skills and creating connections between the university environment and real-world stakeholders. Other frequently mentioned actions include promoting green social entrepreneurship during festivals and academic events, organizing competitions with prizes, and providing students with space and resources (including technology such as AI) to implement ecological and social projects.

As part of this support, students were also asked to indicate which training topics or workshop themes they would find most relevant (Figure 12).

The sum of the response percentages in the chart is greater than 100% because respondents could choose more than one answer.

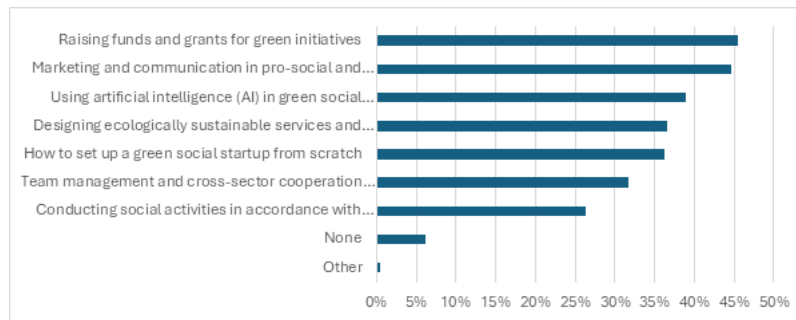


Figure 12: Training or workshop topics in green social entrepreneurship of interest to respondents

Source: own.

The most frequently selected themes—each chosen by nearly half of the respondents—were raising funds and grants for green initiatives (46%) and marketing and communication in pro-social and ecological projects (45%). These results indicate a strong interest in acquiring practical, actionable skills that are essential for launching and sustaining successful green social ventures. Other highly valued topics include the use of artificial intelligence (AI) in green social entrepreneurship (39%), designing ecologically sustainable products and services (37%), and how to start a green social startup from scratch (36%). These preferences reveal that students are not only interested in theoretical knowledge but also in tools and methods for innovation, implementation, and digital integration. Additionally, students expressed significant interest in team management and cross-sector cooperation (32%)—particularly between NGOs, universities, and businesses—as well as conducting social activities based on zero waste principles (26%), showing a broader awareness of operational and collaborative dimensions of sustainability.

Finally, students’ willingness to participate in a university-led program supporting green social entrepreneurship was measured (Figure 13).

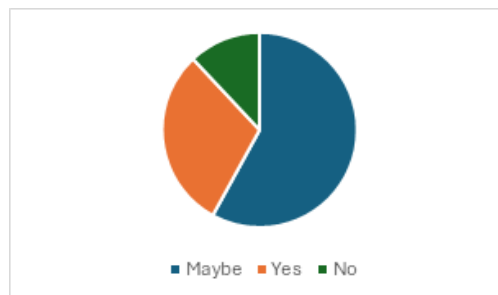


Figure 13: Willingness to participate in a program supporting green social entrepreneurship according to respondents

Source: own.

The majority of respondents (58%) selected “Maybe”, indicating an openness to participation, though likely dependent on specific program details such as format, content, time commitment, or perceived value. A considerable portion of students (30%) also responded “Yes”, which demonstrates a clear interest and motivation among part of the student body to actively engage in such initiatives. This confirms the relevance of green social entrepreneurship as an area worth developing within university support structures.

5. Conclusion

The results of the study lead to several important conclusions. They indicate a solid foundation of awareness among students regarding environmental protection and sustainability, while also revealing potential for universities to further nurture this interest through targeted education and institutional support. The concept of social entrepreneurship is moderately disseminated within higher education, highlighting an opportunity for universities to enhance its visibility through curriculum integration and student engagement.

The findings reveal strong student support for a proactive university role in promoting green social entrepreneurship. This reflects an expectation that higher education institutions not only share knowledge but also model values consistent with sustainability and social responsibility.

Students generally perceive their universities as having a reasonable foundation for advancing green social entrepreneurship; however, they also identify gaps, particularly in communication and visibility of existing initiatives. Addressing this requires structural improvements—such as integrating modern technologies—and greater transparency about current efforts.

Another key insight relates to the perceived role of AI in supporting sustainable, socially conscious business models. A high level of student recognition suggests growing awareness of how technology can address ecological and social challenges. This opens opportunities for universities to develop curricula that connect AI with sustainability.

Students also express interest in learning how AI can be applied to ecological and social causes. This highlights the need for interdisciplinary programs that bridge technology with sustainable development goals.

There is a clear desire for more structured and visible institutional support. The findings reflect a strong call for universities to adopt a well-resourced, practical approach to fostering green social entrepreneurship through funding, mentorship, infrastructure, and partnerships.

Finally, the results underscore demand for interdisciplinary, future-oriented education that combines sustainability, entrepreneurship, technology, and communication. This offers universities clear direction in designing workshops and training aligned with student interests and global challenges.

Overall, students demonstrate a generally positive or cautiously optimistic attitude toward participating in green social entrepreneurship programs. This provides a strong foundation for targeted initiatives that foster innovation and sustainability while meeting student expectations.

The main hypothesis assumed that Polish universities possess significant potential to promote green social entrepreneurship but lack tools, institutional support, and AI-related knowledge. Findings from UNEC confirm this, highlighting the need for strategic actions, improved communication, and enhanced resources.

This study was limited to students of a single university (UNEC, Kraków), which may affect the generalizability of results. The self-reported questionnaire also introduces possible bias. As a cross-sectional study, it captures a single moment in time. A larger, more diverse sample would improve the robustness of the findings.

Although the study offers valuable insights, it does not exhaust the topic. Future research should include multiple institutions, regional comparisons, and longitudinal or qualitative approaches to explore the evolving role of green social entrepreneurship in higher education.

These findings are consistent with previous studies (e.g., Klarin & Suseno, 2022), which emphasize the need for structured institutional frameworks to operationalize sustainability goals within academic entrepreneurship. Therefore, while students' perceptions are subjective, they reflect broader educational and policy trends.

Ethics Declaration

In accordance with ethical research standards, each participant was presented with a consent statement. This included confirmation of being informed about the purpose and nature of the study, their right to withdraw at any time, and the assurance that the data collected would be used solely for research purposes. A separate clause informed respondents about personal data processing in compliance with applicable data protection regulations.

AI Declaration

Artificial intelligence (AI) tools were used during the preparation of this article to support the revision process. Specifically, AI-assisted language models (such as ChatGPT by OpenAI) were employed to check grammatical accuracy, improve stylistic consistency, enhance clarity, and ensure coherence throughout the text. All intellectual content, research design, data interpretation, and conclusions were generated and validated by the authors. The use of AI was limited to editorial assistance and did not replace the authors' critical analysis or academic responsibility.

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