

Article

Sustainable Entrepreneurship for Business Opportunity Recognition: Analysis of an Awareness Questionnaire among Organisations

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Abstract: An important challenge for the future is focusing on sustainability in life and business. The three elements of sustainability (economic, environmental, and social), defined in 17 factors by the United Nations (UN) as the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), may, therefore, be the main drivers of business competitiveness and opportunity recognition. The main aim of the article is to identify the awareness level of sustainability and sustainable development goals in the context of business opportunity areas by analysing the results of a survey of organisations in six countries (Finland, Slovakia, Italy, Austria, Spain, and Turkey). A multilingual questionnaire, administered in six participating countries, was used as a collection tool to determine the organisation's level of awareness regarding the SDGs. A research questionnaire was filled in by 238 respondents, providing a cross-cultural view of their attitudes, knowledge, and future interest in sustainability and the SDGs. The obtained results indicate differences in the approach to sustainability issues, the scope of knowledge, interest, competencies in sustainable development and SDGs, and the content of implementation of sustainability and SDGs in organisations in different sectors, regions and countries. Further statistical evaluation of the research hypotheses states the significant relationship between the two variables: sustainable strategy and the designation of a responsible employee in each organisation $r_s = 0.677$ ($\alpha = 0.05$). It is essential to eliminate the gap in the cross-cultural approach and knowledge in engaging with sustainable strategy and its implementation in current and future organisation activities in the context of sustainability and SDGs, in order to enhance opportunities for the growth of sustainability-focused entrepreneurship across different sectors and countries.

Keywords: sustainable entrepreneurship; business opportunity recognition; sustainable development; sustainable development goals (SDGs); statistical analysis



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1. Introduction

Sustainability, in its economic, environmental, and social dimensions, is the ultimate aim of any organisation for surviving in the longer term [1]. Future organisational development is, therefore, closely associated with sustainability issues. An important part of sustainability implementation is to deal with the practices that preserve biodiversity, eliminate social inequalities, and prevent the unsustainable use of limited resources [2]. Various authors focus on economic sustainability [3–5], environmental sustainability [6–9], and social sustainability [10–13]. However, for a better 2030 and beyond, the United Nations (UN) double-clicked on the three elements of sustainability, defined it in 17 factors, and named them the Sustainable Development Goals (hereafter SDGs) by 2015. The sustainable development process is primarily influenced by the sustainable development goals (SDGs),

formally adopted by the 193 UN member states on 25 September 2015. It is based on 17 goals, including 169 partial areas that can be analysed, explored, and innovated. The UN and its member states are committed to achieving the sustainable development goals by 2030 [14].

However, since the first release of the SDGs, mainly international organisations, governments, or NGOs have been committed to achieving them by publishing annual reports. Many multinational corporations or large companies have also shown the importance of engaging with the SDGs. However, a considerable gap exists in the literature regarding the dissemination and internalisation of the SDGs by a broader business world, requiring field research. As a result, business enterprises' or individuals' degree of awareness or engagement with the SDGs remains unclear. The lack of knowledge of the extent of the business world regarding its acceptance of and attention to the SDGs makes the following cross-cultural research unique.

This preliminary study provides evidence of the business world's perceptions from six countries about their intent to recognise business opportunities through the SDGs. The data gathered from organisations in Finland, Slovakia, Italy, Austria, Spain, and Turkey present the potential in business opportunity recognition related to awareness about sustainability and sustainable development goals. The analysis indicates the significance of assumptions/preconditions for recognising business opportunities, such as current awareness of the sustainable development (SD) and SDGs, and their applications in different countries and sectors through strategy and practice.

The main aim of the article is to identify the awareness level of sustainability and sustainable development goals in the context of business opportunity areas by analysing the results of a survey of organisations in six countries (Finland, Slovakia, Italy, Austria, Spain, and Turkey).

The article's structure is as follows: after the introduction Section 2 presents theoretical backgrounds of the SDGs and sustainable entrepreneurship; Section 3 introduces research methods, the population sample for the questionnaire as the data collection tool, and a workflow for conducted current state analysis in the awareness of the SDGs; Section 4 describes two research questions, the two research hypotheses, the development of the article's main aim, and an analysis and discussion of the results, using statistical methods; finally, Section 5 considers the main conclusions, including insights regarding future trends and potential developments.

2. Sustainable Development Goals and Sustainable Entrepreneurship

We live in a time when the economic aspect is not the only one that can be perceived, but sustainability is also at the forefront [15]. The sustainability system consists of the environmental, social, and economic aspects linked to the individual approaches [16,17]. In order to achieve sustainability, it is necessary to ensure the process of sustainable development. Achieving sustainability requires support and action from all sectors of society, including businesses [18].

This section presents the most relevant studies regarding the SDGs. During the elaboration of the theoretical part, we found that the research and reviewed scientific articles consider mostly only one or two features of specific SDGs, omitting a general overview of the sustainable development goals and their interconnections. From our point of view, it is necessary to deal with all SDGs and their interactions. Therefore, we consider it essential to summarise them fully, with the conclusions and findings from previous scientific articles related to a specific SDG, to bring added value for future opportunity recognition.

No Poverty (SDG1) mainly uses developing countries as the target of this goal, as they suffer from acute poverty and food insecurity [19]. One of the remedial measures is to increase development aid and support the inflow of foreign investment, which positively affects poverty reduction [20–23]. Zero Hunger (SDG2) is a complex goal, and its achievement must be supported by multilateral efforts [24]. This goal provides a basis for accelerating progress in reducing malnutrition, although there are gaps in knowledge,

implementation capacity, and funding for this goal [25]. Good Health and Well-being (SDG3) focuses on ensuring a healthy life and promoting the well-being for all ages [26]. Quality Education (SDG4) is explained by the shortage of adequately trained teachers, poor school conditions, and equality issues related to the opportunities provided to rural children [27]. Gender Equality (SDG5) states that sustainable work should facilitate varied employment opportunities for men and women [28]. Gender segregation and gender equality are two key elements that need to be improved to achieve gender equality [29,30]. Clean Water and Sanitation (SDG6) recognises the existing lack of fair access to clean water for all through current sanitation systems [31]. Capacity and wastewater treatment will need to be expanded in developing regions [32]. It is also appropriate to create an incentive to use more sophisticated wastewater recycling and desalination technologies as a solution to reduce withdrawals from surface and groundwater [33]. The SDG6 targets are causing changes in the long-term strategy to mitigate climate change [34]. Affordable and Clean Energy (SDG7) strives to ensure affordable, reliable, sustainable, and modern energy for all, with action needed at both international and national levels [35,36]. Ten principles have been developed to ensure energy justice, representing a comprehensive conceptual framework [37,38]. Decent Work and Economic Growth (SDG8) requires sustainable and inclusive economic growth as well as full and productive employment, emphasising decent work for all. While emphasising the importance of universal labour rights, there is also significant tension. Despite many criticisms of the shortcomings of growth indicators, GDP per capita is still at the forefront. GDP excludes much of the reproductive social work and, therefore, puts SDG8 under tension with SDG5, which recognises the values of unpaid care and domestic work [39]. Industry, Innovation, and Infrastructure (SDG9) uses the field of industry to focus mainly on resource efficiency [40,41], modernisation to more environmentally friendly and clean technologies [42], and the development of intelligent, energy- and cost-saving technologies [43–46]. Reduced Inequalities (SDG 10) aims to reduce inequalities within and between countries, especially in income, age, race, gender, and economic status. Differences within countries can negatively impact sustainable development, also slowing the achievement of higher sustainable development goals [47]. Research [48] has focused on analysing indicators that capture the socio-economic indicators of the European Union countries and conclude that progress has been made in reducing inequalities between countries. However, income inequalities persist or have even worsened. Sustainable Cities and Communities (SDG11) addresses urban development and sustainability; cities should be sustainable and efficient, regardless of their size, and address existing inequalities between them [49]. Responsible Consumption and Production (SDG12) looks at food as the most important area of consumption that impacts the environment [50]. This goal represents a consensus on the desired goals of sustainable consumption to do more and better for less and to improve the quality of life, ensuring that no one is left behind. Nevertheless, it is not entirely clear what and how it should change [51]. Climate Action (SDG13) calls on the world to take urgent action to combat climate change and its effects [52]. This objective offers an opportunity to combine action at various levels on climate change, consistent with the other development goals. The effects of climate change are known in all countries. They have also unevenly affected developing countries, where the extent to which they are prepared to respond to related challenges is unknown [53]. Life Below Water (SDG14) lays the foundations for integrated and sustainable ocean management [54]. However, there has also been a need to inform the public and enhance learning about the oceans [55]. Life on Land (SDG15) focuses on the urgent challenges and priorities of biodiversity protection that are preventing and eliminating land degradation to restore degraded land [56]. Currently, the global challenge is to protect the environment [57]. However, many studies point out that the environment is being negatively affected by the increase in the demand for tourism [58]. Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions (SDG16) focuses on and supports peaceful and inclusive societies while also attaching importance to responsible and inclusive institutions [59]. Fragile countries affected by conflict face the most difficulty in achieving this goal [60]. Partnership for the Goals (SDG17) should

involve cooperation among stakeholders (businesses and sub-national authorities) [61]. Within the private sector and non-governmental organisations, great attention is also paid to the contribution of science [62]. It is also necessary to emphasise that scientists should focus their research on social responsibility and sustainability [63].

The SDGs are strongly interconnected [64–66]. Recognising opportunities for sustainable development is critical as part of the sustainable entrepreneurship [67]. Sustainable entrepreneurship seeks to create market-based solutions that implement and seize opportunities for sustainable development. Entrepreneurship offers market-oriented sustainable solutions that combat environmental degradation and correct social injustice and inequality with profit. [68,69].

Most of the specific SDG implementation articles present particular case studies, while some deal with the relationship between competitiveness and sustainability [70,71].

Sustainable entrepreneurship is a unique research area that combines potentially opposing aspects: creating economic, social, and environmental value with the simultaneous care for the well-being of future generations [72]. In this respect, it is a noteworthy finding that the positive attitudes of the youth in Serbia regarding the social environment, awareness of incentives, and environmental assessment might negatively affect the younger generation's intentions regarding entrepreneurship [73].

A sustainable entrepreneurship model has been developed, consisting of several phases: identification of a social or environmental problem; recognition of social or ecological opportunities; solution development; financing and forming a sustainable business; creation of or entry into a sustainable market [74]. Definitions of sustainable entrepreneurship indicate environmental, social, and economic implementation to create shared value.

Companies have three areas of responsibility: environmental, social, and corporate governance. Corporate responsibility can be characterised by three levels: required, substantial, and distinctive [75]. In order to support the sustainable development of the economy, companies must implement activities related to environmental aspects at a high level [76].

3. Materials and Methods

For this study, data were collected and analysed to determine the level of awareness of sustainable development and SDGs in organisations in cross-cultural dimensions and to identify sectors with potential sustainable entrepreneurship opportunities. The collected data focus on the extent of awareness, interest, and knowledge of employees in organisations about Sustainable Development (SD) in general and the SDGs specifically.

3.1. Description of Collection Tool

The primary data were collected anonymously using a structured questionnaire between April 2021 and June 2021 from employees in organisations. Data were collected using the Webropol software for the possibility of an online multilingual questionnaire to achieve a broader sample by remaining inclusive and a higher response rate. Figure 1 illustrates the workflow of the current state analysis process.

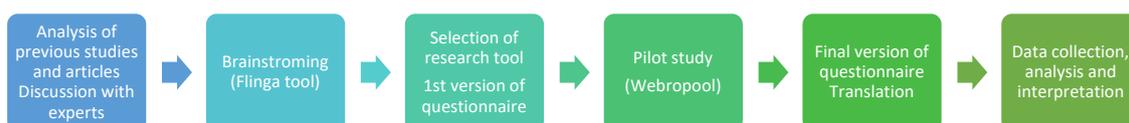


Figure 1. Workflow for the current state analysis (own elaboration, 2021).

Based on the sequence of steps, shown as a workflow of the current state analysis in Figure 1, a literature review was first carried out for the proposed questionnaire and for defining the research questions. After determining the research questions, the first version of the questionnaire was designed via brainstorming using an online whiteboard called Flinga. The data collection methods, sampling, and digital platforms to be used

were determined by consensus. The multilingual versions for cross-national analysis were then created in Webropol, a program designed for creating online questionnaires, in official languages in six countries (Austria, Finland, Italy, Slovakia, Spain, and Turkey). A pilot study was conducted, whereby the questionnaire was reviewed by experts from participating organisations. They made minor modifications to the wording of the questions. Accordingly, pre-testing the questionnaire obtained new improvements, enabling progress at national levels after the final distribution, collection of data, and analysis.

The final questionnaire consists of three parts, addressing different aspects of the state-of-the-art analysis. The first block of questions deals with classification issues (region/country, sector of organisation, position, and seniority of respondent). In addition to general classification questions, the questionnaire contains specific questions. The second part of the questionnaire considers the scope of knowledge, interest, competencies in sustainable development and SDGs, and the content of implementation of sustainability and SDGs in organisations using a five-point Likert scale with the following options: “Very much; To some extent; A little; Not at all; Not sure”. Finally, the questionnaire considers current and future organisation activities in the context of sustainability and SDGs to enhance opportunities for the growth of entrepreneurship regarding sustainable development goals, using a five-point Likert with the following options: “Significantly more; To some extent; No need for additional content; A little; Not sure”. Both closed and semi-open as well as single- or multiple-choice questions were used in the questionnaire.

3.2. Description of the Research Sample

In order to achieve the aim of the research, the sample consists of 238 organisations in six countries (Austria, Finland, Italy, Slovakia, Spain, and Turkey). The research sample is similar to published research studies regarding SD, SDGs, and sustainability in a business environment [77–82]. The authors of the paper are aware of the limitation of the sample. However, while it does not allow us to draw universal conclusions, it enables us to identify potential for business opportunity recognition regarding the SDGs in organisations.

First, the distribution and characteristics of the organisation (private or public) from the questionnaire were analysed using relative and absolute frequency. With nearly 82% of respondents, the organisations in the private sector prevail over the public sector (18.07%); sectors/specialisations of the organisation are featured in Table 1 below.

Table 1. Distribution of the respondents, according to the sectors of the organisations (own elaboration, 2021).

Sector of Organisation	Absolute Frequency	Relative Frequency (%)
Manufacturing	90	37.82
Services	82	34.45
IT	16	6.72
Agriculture	6	2.52
Other	44	18.49

Second, we analysed the respondents’ job positions in the organisation. The respondents of the questionnaire work as employees in organisations of various specialisations, primarily in manufacturing companies (nearly 40%), services (34.45%), IT (7.14%), and agriculture (2.52%); 8.82% of respondents did not specify (see Table 1). Furthermore, the authors classified the structure of respondents, according to their job classification (Table 2).

Table 2. Characteristics of the respondents, according to their job position within their organisations (own elaboration, 2021).

Job Position of Respondent in Organisation	Absolute Frequency	Relative Frequency (%)
Specialist	64	26.89
Managerial	55	23.11
Administrative	39	16.39
Executive	39	16.39
Customer/client-facing	13	5.46
Ancillary service provider (e.g., estates management, catering, cleaning, etc.)	4	1.68
Other	24	10.08

The respondents work in organisations in the following job positions: specialists (nearly 27%), management (more than 23%), administrative and executive (each almost 17%). Customer/client-facing and ancillary service providers comprise more than 7%, and with no position specification or option, others have more than 10% (Table 2). Within the respondents' declared job positions, up to 87 (36.55%) indicated that they have an employee responsible for sustainability practices in the organisation. On the other hand, 112 (47.06%) employees stated that they do not have a designated person in the organisation responsible for sustainability practices, and 39 (16.39%) respondents answered that they are not sure that such an employee is in the organisation. The following Table 3 describes the variability characteristics of the respondents.

Table 3. Variability indicators of the respondents, according to seniority–years in job position (own elaboration, 2021).

Seniority of Respondent	N Valid	221
	N Missing	17
Mean		7.996
Median		5.000
Std. Deviation		7.432
Range		39.833
Minimum		0.167
Maximum		40.000

Table 3 shows that we have results about respondents' years in job position from 221 valid answers, with 17 missing this information. The mean value is 7.996 years. The median is five years. The standard deviation, representing the variability, is 7.432. The range of values is 39.833, and the minimum value of seniority is 0.167 years, which means two months, while the maximum value is 40 years.

3.3. Description of Research Methods

The content of the questionnaires reflected the findings of an earlier review of the current state of the theory (scientific articles in journals, conference proceedings, monographs). The IBM SPSS v. 23.0. (Statistical Package for Social Science) and Microsoft Excel spreadsheets were used for data processing and statistical analysis. The analysis includes both quantitative and qualitative variables.

First, descriptive statistics are presented in the tables above for the research sample. Then, the qualitative analysis of data is presented using a graphical representation (bar charts, trend diagram, and radar graph) and a tabular representation (absolute and relative frequencies and crosstabs). We used descriptive statistical analyses applying characteristics of central tendency (mean, median, range, and minimum and maximum value) and variability (standard deviation), including graphs and inferential statistical methods as

statistical nonparametric tests (Spearman's rho) to process hypotheses. The Spearman's correlation coefficient is more robust to outliers than is Pearson's correlation coefficient. The significance of tests was $\alpha = 0.05$ (95% confidence interval).

4. Results and Discussion

The authors identified two research questions. The first research question is as follows (RQ1): *What is the current state of awareness of sustainability and sustainable development goals in selected countries?* This was to identify the awareness of sustainability and the UN's SDGs regarding the sector of organisation distribution within participating countries. The second research question is as follows (RQ2): *What is the current state of implementation of sustainable development (sustainability features/characteristics) in the organisational structure and strategy in selected countries?*

4.1. Evaluation of Research Questions

Based on a previous literature review and practical experience, the authors identified the research questions mentioned above and analysed them using descriptive and inferential statistical methods.

RQ1: *What is the current state of awareness of sustainability and sustainable development goals in selected countries?* For the evaluation of RQ1, we used basic descriptive statistics, as shown in Table 4.

Table 4. The data comparison about awareness of the SDGs, according to the sector (private or public) of the organisation (own elaboration, 2021).

SDGs Awareness	Private Organisations		Public Organisations	
	Absolute Frequency	Relative Frequency (%)	Absolute Frequency	Relative Frequency (%)
Yes	78	40.00	15	34.88
No	88	45.13	18	41.86
Not sure	29	14.87	10	23.26
Total	195	100.00	43	100.00

Based on the results from 238 respondents regarding their familiarity with the UN's SDGs, we identified minor differences between the private and public sectors. The data in Table 4, with relative and absolute frequency, indicate that respondents from the private sector answered positively with a relative frequency of 40% and respondents from the public sector answered positively with a relative frequency of nearly 35%. Employees responded negatively about familiarity with the SDGs, with 45.12% (private organisations) and 41.86% (public organisations). Most previously published studies have focused on the private sector [77,79,81–83], and our research comprises both public and private sector organisations to fill this gap in research. Our next step is to analyse the data distribution about awareness of the SDGs, according to the participating countries (Austria, Finland, Italy, Slovakia, Spain, and Turkey) in Figure 2.

As can be seen from the results structure, according to participating countries in Figure 2, most respondents from Finland (59.09%), Italy (54.05%), and Austria (42.86%) answered positively about their awareness of the SDGs published by the UN. These countries are known for their long-standing focus on sustainability aspects and issues [84–86]. Respondents from the other participating countries reported in contrast, negatively, so we can assume evidence of the possible regional differences in awareness of the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals.

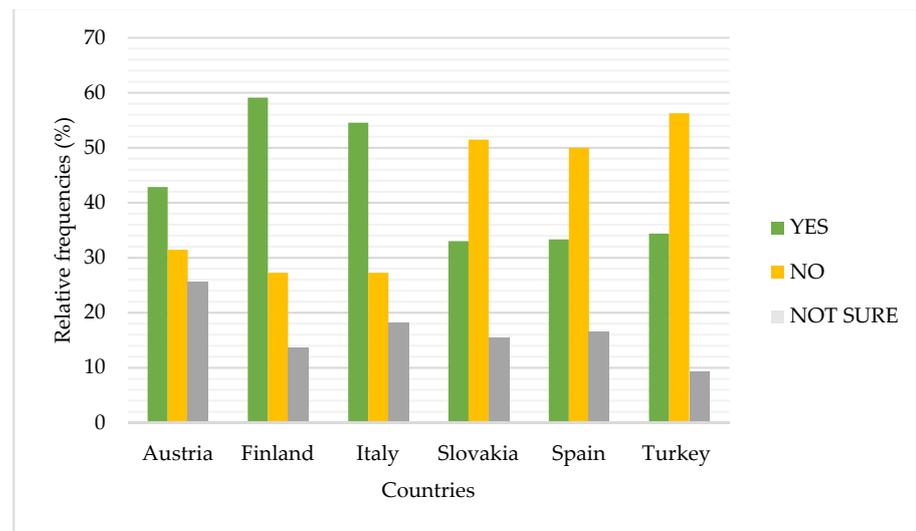


Figure 2. The data visualisation about awareness of the SDGs, according to participating countries (own elaboration, 2021).

Next, we studied the distribution of answers according to the sector of the organisations represented. The data from the questionnaire involved respondents from various sectors: nearly 40% respondents were from manufacturing companies, 7.14% from IT, 34.45% from services, 2.52% from agriculture, and 21 respondents did not specify sector (other). In the next steps of our analysis, shown in Figure 3, we focused on specific sectors when addressing awareness of the UN's SDGs.

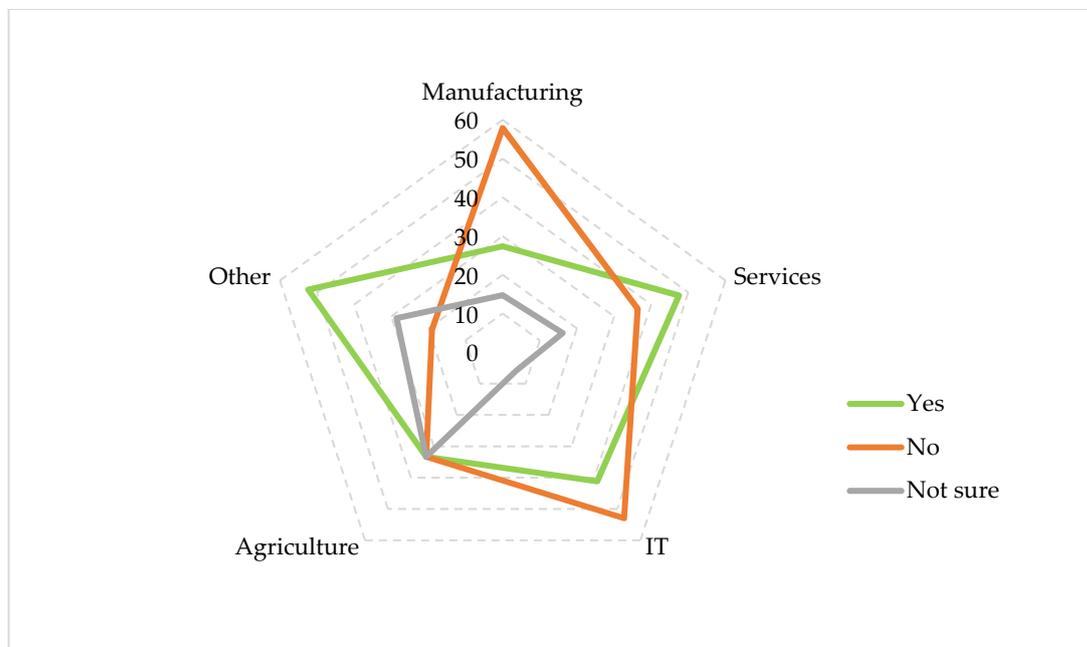


Figure 3. The data visualisation about awareness of the SDGs, according to a sector of the employer (own elaboration, 2021).

According to the results illustrated in Figure 3, the most familiar are respondents from services (47.48%) and the information technology (IT) sector (41.18%). We can assume that an opportunity to raise knowledge and interest of the SDGs exists in the manufacturing (27.37% are familiar) and agricultural sectors (33.33% are familiar).

The next part of this section will address RQ2: *What is the current state of implementation of sustainable development (sustainability features/characteristics) in organisational structure and strategy in selected countries?* For evaluation of RQ2, we used basic descriptive statistics, which can be seen in Table 5.

Table 5. The data comparison showing the extent to which the sustainability principle guides the work in the organisation, according to participating countries (own elaboration, 2021).

Likert's Scale/ Countries	Austria Relative Frequency (%)	Finland Relative Frequency (%)	Italy Relative Frequency (%)	Slovakia Relative Frequency (%)	Spain Relative Frequency (%)	Turkey Relative Frequency (%)
Very much	37.14	40.91	50.00	27.18	33.33	43.75
To some extent	42.85	45.45	40.92	40.79	33.33	28.14
A little	14.29	13.64	4.54	25.24	25.00	18.75
Not at all	2.86	0	4.54	0.97	8.34	9.36
Not sure	2.86	0	0	5.82	0	0
Total	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00

Almost three-quarters of all respondents from participating countries stated that the sustainability principle largely guides, or to some extent, the work in their organisations. Less than 24% of participants responded that little or no sustainability awareness guides the work in the organisation. The data in Table 5 indicate some regional differences in this area. The following Table 6 presents the data comparison of how the sustainability principle informs the work in organisations, according to participating countries.

Table 6. The data comparison of the extent to which the sustainability principle informs the work in an organisation, according to participating countries (own elaboration, 2021).

Likert's Scale / Countries	Austria Relative Frequency (%)	Finland Relative Frequency (%)	Italy Relative Frequency (%)	Slovakia Relative Frequency (%)	Spain Relative Frequency (%)	Turkey Relative Frequency (%)
Very much	42.86	22.73	40.91	15.54	25.00	28.13
To some extent	37.14	72.73	40.91	51.46	33.33	43.75
A little	11.43	0	18.18	25.24	33.33	18.75
Not at all	5.71	4.54	0	3.88	8.34	9.37
Not sure	2.86	0	0	3.88	0	0
Total	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00

According to the data analysis of obtained results, the sustainability principle largely, or to some extent, informs the work in more than 72% of organisations. Approximately 25% of respondents answered that the sustainability principle informs the work in their organisation a little or not at all. Based on the data presented in Table 6, some regional differences might appear; for example, respondents from Italy and Austria tend to indicate that the sustainability principle informs their work very much.

4.2. Evaluation of the Research Hypotheses

In our study, we determine the following research hypotheses:

Research Hypothesis 1 (RH1). *There is a significant relationship between the existing sustainable strategy and the designation of a responsible employee.*

The evaluation of RH1 can be found in Table 7 below.

Table 7. Evaluation of RH1 (own elaboration, 2021).

Spearman's Correlation Rho		Existing Sustainable Strategy	Designation of Responsible Employee
Existing sustainable strategy	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	0.677 **
	Sig. (2-tailed)		0.000
	N	238	238
Designation of responsible employee	Correlation Coefficient	0.677 **	1.000
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.000	
	N	238	238

** indicate statistical significance at the 5% level.

Based on the results of the non-parametric 2-tailed Spearman's correlation test, we can assume that there is a moderately strong ($r_s = 0.677$) statistically significant relationship (at the significance level $\alpha = 0.05$) between the existing two conducted variables: sustainable strategy and the designation of a responsible employee. Based on this, we do not reject RH1 at a given level of significance α , and we can indicate that if the organisation has an existing sustainable strategy, it also has a person responsible for sustainability practices. In order to create new business opportunities and better competitiveness [87], it is necessary to define and implement a sustainable strategy, and an important prerequisite for successful implementation is the designation of a responsible employee in the organisation [88,89].

Research Hypothesis 2 (RH2). *There is a significant relationship between an employee's job position and awareness of the sustainable development goals.*

The evaluation of RH2 can be found in Table 8 below.

Table 8. Evaluation of RH2 (own elaboration, 2021).

Spearman's Correlation Rho		Employee's Job Position	Awareness of SDGs
Employee's job position	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	-0.101
	Sig. (2-tailed)		0.121
	N	238	238
Awareness of SDGs	Correlation Coefficient	-0.101	1.000
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.121	
	N	238	238

Based on the non-parametric 2-tailed Spearman's correlation test, we can assume that there is no tendency ($r_s = -0.101$), given the statistically insignificant relationship between the existing two observed variables: employee's job position and awareness of the SDGs. Based on this, we must reject RH2. Based on the rejection of RH2, the paper's authors may assume the importance of the inclusion of SD and awareness of the SDGs at all levels of the organisation, regardless of job position. Therefore, it is necessary to educate and increase students' interest in sustainability issues as future employees of organisations and increase awareness and knowledge of current employees at all management levels through lifelong learning [90–92].

5. Conclusions

Sustainability issues are highly topical and important for organisations' current and future development and competitiveness. The main aim of the article was to identify the awareness level of sustainability and sustainable development goals in the context of business opportunity areas by analysing the results of a survey of organisations in six

countries (Finland, Slovakia, Italy, Austria, Spain, and Turkey). An examination of the current situation has shown minor differences in sustainability awareness between private and public organisations. Descriptive analysis indicates regional differences within the monitored countries, with the highest awareness and implementation level of the sustainability principles in Finland and Italy. On the other hand, a lower awareness and implementation level of the sustainability principles has been shown in Turkey and Spain. The statistical analysis confirmed the relationship between the existence of a sustainable strategy and the designation of a responsible employee for sustainable practices. As mentioned above, information and education of the employees at all levels in the organisation contribute to the successful implementation of a sustainable strategy. In this case, the designation of a responsible employee for the sustainable practices plays an important role in this process. Purposeful information and education of employees at all levels in the organisation, through knowledge management tools, will increase the level of awareness of sustainability and SDGs. It is essential to create and develop a good knowledge of the sustainable development issues in organisations, with implications for the role of universities, and to synergistically link research, education, and innovation in the science triangle. There was no statistically significant relationship between the employee's job position and awareness of the SDGs. We can state that, regardless of the job position or position in the organisational structure, it is necessary to educate and involve employees in the SDGs, overall sustainability, and their implementation in practice.

The presented results of the paper were created as an output of the international project Knowledge Alliance for Business Opportunity Recognition in SDGs, which contributes to cooperation and sharing of experience in the field of sustainability within the European Business Area, EU Member States, and potential member states.

The limitations of current research are mainly the size and representativeness of the sample; varying effects can be expected to some extent. For a lower average, we propose to expand the sample in the future so that it is proportional in the cross-cultural context between countries. Recognising and even creating new business opportunities that increase sustainability may require more active involvement and support of the public sector through targeted measures that are, as far as possible, part of a coherent and long-term industrial strategy in line with sustainable development goals.

Future research should focus specifically on industry, in particular the manufacturing sector and agriculture, raising awareness of the SDGs and the associated recognition and implementation of business opportunities, and measuring the performance of organisations in the context of sustainability in different countries through testing of significant hypotheses. The main issue will be addressing the impact of SDG use in organisations in the context of Industry 4.0 implementation and introducing innovations to increase the competitiveness of sustainable entrepreneurship.

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