Josep M. Vilalta and Rajesh Tandon

Josep M. Vilalta, GUNi Director and Executive Secretary of the Catalan Association of Public Universities

Rajesh Tandon, Founder-President at PRIA and Dean at PRIA International Academy

They both will participate as speakers at the International Conference on Sustainable Development Goals: Actors and Implementation next 18-19th September in Barcelona.

Josep M. Vilalta and Rajesh Tandon answer questions on the role of Higher Education and the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals

How does GUNi understand the 2030 UN Agenda and what actions is GUNi taking?

Josep M. Vilalta: GUNi considers that the United Nations 2030 Agenda stands for a set of objectives on a global scale that directly call on the global commitment of Higher Education Institutions. In this regard, GUNi endorses the 2030 Agenda defining a strategic line of work for the coming years based on the analysis and debate on the role of knowledge, higher education and scientific research and the implementation of SDGs.

We want universities around the world to take an active role in the implementation and monitoring of the SDGs.

We will be launching several initiatives and projects in the coming years in this regard in collaboration with other networks and organisations.

Which are the expected outcomes of the 'International Conference on Sustainable Development Goals: actors and implementation'?
Josep M. Vilalta: The Conference aims to become a biannual meeting point for people, institutions, universities and research centers working with the SDGs, in a global, national and local scale. The conference will gather academic experts in diverse areas as well as practitioners and policy makers. We strive to build an interdisciplinary discussion around how to apply the SDGs and how universities and research centers can be a major actor in their implementation. We want to promote a joint agenda of work with public and academic institutions working on the implementation of the SDGs.

How can Higher Education Institutions participate in the achievement of the SDGs?

Rajesh Tandon: The role of Higher Education Institutions (HEIs), which has been historically recognized as a public good, has assumed increasing importance, especially in light of its function of producing knowledge for societal development and sustainability. Therefore, as public institutions, HEIs need to explore their responsibilities beyond their core roles as educational and research institutions. They need to view themselves in the larger societal context and be able to incorporate diverse demands and diverse stakeholders into their own agendas. This should be done through their three missions of teaching, research and service. However, the achievement of SDGs requires an innovative approach towards these missions, and the latter needs to be moulded in a way which helps achieve SDGs in the long run. In this light, being engaged in a mutually beneficial way is important. What the HEIs should strive for, is engaged teaching/research/service. This involves adopting an engaged pedagogy including revision of curriculum, and introducing new courses linked to various SDGs; co-conducting locally-relevant research on topics which can help achieve SDGs and indulging in service/experiential learning in relation to SDGs, which helps the students to advance their curriculum goals as well.

What can international networks and associations of universities and their leaders do to promote engagement with SDGs?

Rajesh Tandon: At this critical juncture for human and sustainable development for the world, it is imperative that we harness the potential of international networks and university associations to inform progress and achieve SDGs. Most importantly, the networks can inform and mobilize their members to focus on SDGs. The work of most of such international networks indicates a large aggregate trend to unite HEIs, civil society, university associations, governments, research institutions and other relevant stakeholders in common efforts to co-create knowledge, mobilize it to inform practice and policy, and enhance the social, economic and environmental conditions of people, communities, nations and the world. This gives them a unique opportunity to facilitate the achievement of SDGs through canalizing resources and consolidating efforts from several quarters. Such networks and associations give their member institutions, particularly the HEIs, a common platform, for sharing best practices, exploring funding opportunities, knowledge mobilization, and generation of applied and evidence-based
policy for addressing SDGs and other public policy priorities. Further, networks, associations and their leaders can be seen as local catalyzers that give visibility to and strengthen local action, and research partnerships, and aim to better connect academic work to community needs, in relation to various SDGs, through the missions of teaching, research and service.