

# Youth Attitudes Towards Goals of a New Sustainable Development Agenda

## Postawy młodzieży wobec celów Nowej Agendy na rzecz zrównoważonego rozwoju

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### Abstract

The whole world adopted a global strategy as the only possible one – a global development strategy based on the principles of sustainability. This strategy includes not only all types of politics, economies and societies, but is also an integral part of life and wellbeing of all people. A new sustainable development agenda for the period 2015-2030 identifies youth not only as a category much more sensitive to sustainability, but in each of its 17 goals of sustainable development emphasizes the role of young people and the need for their active participation in the promotion and realization of these objectives and its targets. Bearing this in mind, the research presented in the paper deals with young people's knowledge on sustainable development, the strategy of sustainable development, and their attitudes towards the goals of sustainable development in the context of what they themselves find most important. Obtained results in the case study of the Republic of Serbia, not only show the results of the analysis of young people's viewpoints on these crucial issues but also of a good way to continue research in this area not only by the authors of the paper but other researchers who are engaged in activism and participation of youth in sustainable development as well.

**Key words:** youth, youth attitudes, sustainable development, sustainability, sustainable development goals

### Streszczenie

Społeczność międzynarodowa przyjęła strategię rozwoju globalnego opartą na zasadach zrównoważoności. Uwzględnia ona nie tylko wszystkie występujące typy polityk, ekonomii i społeczeństw, ale także dobrostan wszystkich ludzi. Nowa Agenda dla zrównoważonego rozwoju obejmująca lata 2015-2030 wskazuje na młodzież jako na grupę bardziej wrażliwą na zagrożenie zrównoważoności. W każdej z 17 grup celów zrównoważonego rozwoju podkreśla rolę, jaką powinni w tych ramach odgrywać młodzi ludzie i wskazuje na potrzebę ich aktywnego uczestnictwa w promocji i realizacji założonych celów. Niniejsza praca prezentuje wyniki badań odnoszących się do wiedzy młodych ludzi o zrównoważonym rozwoju, strategii zrównoważonego rozwoju, a także ich postaw odnośnie celów zrównoważonego rozwoju i ich własnych przekonań. Badania przeprowadzone w Republice Serbii omawiają opinie młodzieży na te ważne tematy, a ponadto wskazują na ważny kierunek badań nie tylko dla autorów tego artykułu, ale także innych naukowców zaangażowanych we włączenie młodych ludzi w pracę dla zrównoważonego rozwoju.

**Słowa kluczowe:** młodzież, postawy młodzieży, rozwój zrównoważony, zrównoważoność, cele rozwoju zrównoważonego

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## 1. Introduction

In 1992, the governments participating at the Earth Summit made a historic agreement on sustainable development, indicating it as an economic system that promotes the health and survival of both people and all ecosystems (Roseland, 2005; Wheeler & Beatley, 2009). The definition of sustainable development which is commonly used, gave Lester Brown, founder of the Worldwatch Institute. This definition can be found in the report *Our Common Future: Sustainable development is development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs* (WCED, 1987).

On this definition lie all the efforts of international policies, not only in relation to the environmental protection, but also in relation to the global sustainability of all societies (Borojević, Petrović, & Vuk, 2014). The concept of sustainable development was proclaimed in 1989 at the Ministerial Conference (Bergen Convention) organized by the Government of Norway in cooperation with the United Nations Economic Commission, the following year (1990) the concept of sustainable development was adopted by the European Union. In 1993 United Nation's Commission for Sustainable Development was founded with the principal aim to oversee the implementation of the adopted documents and other acts. Then, after a series of conferences, in August 2002 the World Summit on Sustainable Development in Johannesburg (Earth Summit, 2002) was organized. At this Summit, the participating states agreed that they will in the shortest time possible approach the formulation and adoption of national strategies for sustainable development. Then the definition of sustainable development was last amended by gaining a new dimension – the environmental protection, the first time economic and social goals on the road to achieving development at the local and global levels were added. Thus laying the foundations for the development of a framework, value systems and indicators with the aim of understanding, motivating and evaluation of sustainability (Berg, 2009; Roseland, 2000; Roseland, 2005).

Later on, these frameworks are improved with values that refer to natural, physical, economic, human, social and cultural capital (Roseland, 2005) in which an important, if not crucial, role play the young people, because not only that there was an understanding of the necessity of increasing the democratic decision-making and public involvement in all issues of vital importance for sustainability, but also to test various mechanisms for introducing this process into daily decision making that will actively involve young people (Borojević, Petrović, & Vuk, 2015; UNECE, 1998). When it comes to young people it should be emphasized that *there is no universally accepted and one definition of 'youth', thus, youth may be defined as a relatively particular ensemble which*

*each society identifies as such, and generally represents the age group, the so-called young generation ranging from 14 to 30 years of age* (Borojević, Vuk, Petrović, & Slović, 2015).

Further on, *sustainability is heralded worldwide as an idea, a process, a strategy and/or an objective that allows to address the current situation of concatenated ecological, social and economic crisis, labeled together as 'global change'* (Biggs, Biggs, Dakos, Scholes, & Schoon, 2011; Hugé, Block, Waas, Wright, & Dahdouh-Gueba, 2016). Also, there is much discussion about how one *defines sustainability*, and related concepts (Costanza, 1991; Costanza and Patten, 1995; Hugé et al., 2016; Pearce and Atkinson, 1993; Pezzey, 1989; WCED, 1987). Besides that, it is important to note that sustainability is a multidimensional concept that involves the consideration and integration of economic, social and environmental aspects (e.g. Pawlowski, 2010; WCED, 1987). Also, all definitions of sustainability must meet the following criteria (Sustainable Measures, 2016):

- *Living within the limits.*
- *Understanding the interconnections among economy, society, and environment.*
- *Equitable distribution of resources and opportunities.*

Some definitions of sustainability are:

- *Sustainability refers to improving the quality of human life while living within the carrying capacity of supporting eco-systems* (IUCN and WWF, 1991).
- *Sustainability is the as long-term health and vitality of a region, including the cultural, economic, environmental and social aspects as one whole* (Sustainable Seattle, 2016).
- *Sustainability calls for a decent standard of living for everyone today without compromising the needs of future generations* (UN, 2016a).
- *Sustainability is based on a simple principle: Everything that we need for our survival and well-being depends, either directly or indirectly, on our natural environment. To pursue sustainability is to create and maintain the conditions under which humans and nature can exist in productive harmony to support present and future generations* (EPA, 2016).
- *Sustainability is comprehensive and systemic concept with goal to maximize the welfare of environment, economy, and society* (Maletič, Maletič, Dahlgaard, Dahlgaard-Park, & Gomišček, 2014; Vallance, Perkins, & Dixon, 2011).
- *Sustainability is development that meets the needs of the present while safeguarding Earth's life-support system, on which the welfare of current and future generations depends* (Griggs et al., 2013).

It should be noted that *recently, literature has paid attention to developing an integrative framework to*

*define and evaluate sustainability practices* (Amini and Bienstock, 2014; Ilyana et al., 2015; Maletic, Maletic, Dahlgaard, & Dahlgaard-Park, 2015).

## 2. The role of youth participation in sustainable development

The importance of youth participation in issues of importance for sustainable development, and the need for active participation of young people in solving the problems of environmental sustainability is reflected in the fact that in 1983. in Stockholm formed an organization of the Youth and Environment Europe – Y E. This organization is a platform of many European youth organizations, dealing with the nature or ones that are active in environmental protection. Within YEE participate organizations from 28 countries. Activities of this platform include two main areas (YEE, 2016):

1. Support the work of member organizations through the promotion of exchange of information, ideas and experiences through publications and European coaching courses (eg. sustainable development, ecology and economy, sustainable tourism, energy, climate change...).
2. Coordination of member organizations' activities through the promotion of direct cooperation between individuals on topics of common interest and to the European working group, as well as through the organization of joint actions and campaigns related to environmental problems of European importance. These campaigns are campaigns on climate, campaigns on energy campaigns on sustainability, ozone (such as the following big campaign: Climate Campaign, Green Energy Go Campaign, Sustainability Campaign, Ozone Campaign).

The participation of youth stands out as a significant factor in achieving the goals of sustainable development set out in *Agenda 21* (UNSD, 1992), with an emphasis on openness, participation and democracy, while stressing its importance in the sustainability (Beatley, 1998; Berg, 2009; Chavis and Wandersman, 1990; Conroy and Berke, 2004; Granvik, 2005; Innes and Booher, 2001; Roseland, 2005; UNCHS, 1996). Also, the participation of young people must be one of the key approaches in the development of sustainability, bearing in mind that on the one hand, their involvement in the solution of sustainable development is not only important for their healthy growth, but also for more successful and better functioning of any society (Borojević, Petrović, & Vuk, 2015), on the other hand young people are the present and the future of every society, as well as the source of innovation and driving force of development (MOS, 2015).

In addition, in the *World development report 2007: Development and the Next Generation* it is emphasized that the youth represents the next generation of environmental, economic and social participants

(UN, 2007; World Bank, 2006) in the achievement of the Millennium development goals (UN, 2015a), and the Sustainable development goals (UN, 2015b). Thus, six of the eight Millennium Development Goals that were in force until 2015, are directly related to the standard of living of young people: Eradicate extreme poverty and hunger, Achieve universal primary education, Promote gender equality and empower women, Combat HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases, Develop a global partnership (UN, 2015b). Goals that Reduce child mortality and Improve maternal health are directly about young people.

## 3. Youth attitudes towards goals of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development: A case study

The General Assembly of United Nations adopted a new sustainable development agenda *Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development* for the period 2015-2030 on 25th of September 2015. The new agenda has 17 sustainable development goals and 169 targets which are integrated and indivisible and balance the three dimensions of sustainable development: the economic, social and environmental (UN, 2015c).

The new 17 Sustainable development goals are (UN, 2015c):

- Goal 1: End poverty in all its forms everywhere.
- Goal 2: End hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture.
- Goal 3: Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages.
- Goal 4: Ensure inclusive and quality education for all and promote lifelong learning.
- Goal 5: Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls.
- Goal 6: Ensure access to water and sanitation for all.
- Goal 7: Ensure access to affordable, reliable, sustainable and modern energy for all.
- Goal 8: Promote inclusive and sustainable economic growth, employment and decent work for all.
- Goal 9: Build resilient infrastructure, promote sustainable industrialization and foster innovation.
- Goal 10: Reduce inequality within and among countries.
- Goal 11: Make cities inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable.
- Goal 12: Ensure sustainable consumption and production patterns.
- Goal 13: Take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts.
- Goal 14: Conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources.

- Goal 15: Sustainably manage forests, combat desertification, halt and reverse land degradation, halt biodiversity loss.
- Goal 16: Promote just, peaceful and inclusive societies.
- Goal 17: Revitalize the global partnership for sustainable development.

When it comes to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the new 17 set objectives, it should be said that they are all directly related to young people and their essential role in their achievement because *children, young women and men are critical agents of changes and will find in the new Global Goals a platform to channel their infinite capacities for activism into the creation of a better world* (UN, 2015c).

### 3.1. Methodology

During the October of academic year 2016/2017, solely in scientific and academic purposes, an online research was conducted in the organization of the Centre for environmental management and sustainable development of the Faculty of Organizational Sciences – University of Belgrade, the Republic of Serbia. The starting point of research was the fact that the very concept of sustainable development is a relatively new concept in the Republic of Serbia (Milošević, 2016). Although the National strategy of sustainable development of the Republic of Serbia was adopted in 2008, there is not enough data, and not enough research in regards of the public, let alone the youth's attitudes and perception about this crucial issue (Borojevic, Petrovic, & Vuk, 2014; Borojević, Petrović, & Vuk, 2015; Borojević, Vuk, Petrović, & Slović, 2015). For these reasons, and taking into account all of the above, the aim of our research was to explore the youth's views on sustainable development, the National strategy of sustainable development of the Republic of Serbia, and new sustainable development goals. This survey included respondents from the following official statistical regions of the Republic of Serbia: Belgrade Region, Region of Vojvodina, Region of Sumadija and Western Serbia, and Southern and Eastern Serbia (Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia, 2013).

For the purpose of this study, an electronic questionnaire was used on a sample of youth aged from 15 to 30 years old. The questionnaire consisted of 23 questions in total. The first four questions were general. From question five to question six, the examinees were asked to give their response on their views on sustainable development and the Strategy of sustainable development of the Republic of Serbia. From question seven to 23, the examinees were asked to rank the listed 17 sustainable development goals by using a five point scale (1 – the most significant, 2 – very significant, 3 – significant, 4 – not so significant, 5 – the least significant/insignificant). These questions fall into the category of the most significant

ones because they directly refer to the main goals of our research.

Main goals of the study were to gain answers to these three research questions:

- RQ1: Whether or not the youth is familiar with the term *sustainable development*?
- RQ2: Whether or not the youth is familiar with the goals of the Strategy of sustainable development of the Republic of Serbia?
- RQ3: How do young people evaluate the importance of sustainable development goals according to the new sustainable development agenda for the period 2015-2030?

In order to evaluate results of the questionnaire, we used statistical software package SPSS 24. Descriptive statistics have been used in order to analyze the characteristics of the sample. The relationship between categorical variables has been explored by Chi-Square test. The p value is used to indicate if the differences between particular groups that were in this research are statistically significant (where  $p < 0.05$  is considered statistically significant at the 95% confidence level).

### 3.2. Results and discussion

The representative sample included 1,586 respondents, and out of that number:

- female – 69 percent,
- male – 31 percent.

Age of respondents is the following:

- from 15 to 19 years – 17 percent,
- from 20 to 25 years – 41 percent,
- from 26 to 30 years – 42 percent.

Current status of education of respondents is:

- high school students – 16 percent,
- four-year high school completed – 27 percent,
- occupational school completed – 5 percent,
- college completed – 7 percent,
- students – 32 percent,
- faculty completed – 13 percent.

It must be noted that our sample was representative, except for the females/males ratio, because of the significantly larger number of female respondents. The reasons for this lies in the fact that (even though in the Republic of Serbia 51.3 percent out of the total youth population is comprised of women, (Statistical office of the Republic of Serbia, 2014a; Statistical office of the Republic of Serbia, 2014b) which makes the number of females in our sample for 17.7 percent higher) previous research showed that females are more likely to participate in surveys than males (Curtin, Presser, & Singer, 2000; Moore and Tarnai, 2002; Singer, van Hoewyk, & Maher, 2000; Smith, 2008). Also, knowing the fact that patterns in willingness to answer on surveys vary, however, depending on the survey topic (Amundsen and Lie, 2013) and that environmental and social pillars are the two of three pillars of sustainable development

and that females generally stressed that the protection of nature and the environment is an important aspect of human existence as well as females' behavior and beliefs focus more than males on social context (Eisler, Eisler, & Yoshida, 2003), resulting in an increased interest in the topic by women proved by the results of our research which found that 87.4 percent of female respondents are acquainted with the term sustainable development as opposed to males in which case this percentage is 77.3 (10.1 percent less), and that is what leads to a greater share of female respondents in our sample. In addition, although the goal of our research was not to deal with gender issues and sustainable development, such a large number of interested female respondents speaks of the need to continue this type of research, especially bearing in mind that previous research in this area is rather fragmented from a gender perspective because they are only focused on empowering women, achieving gender equality, and maximizing the economic, social and environmental role of women (Eisler, Eisler, & Yoshida, 2003; OECD, 2008; UNDP, 2017). For these reasons, in our research special attention was paid to the analysis of the results relating to the responses of females and males.

According to the goals and gained results of our research, we highlight the following observations:

1. Results of the responses to the question whether or not the youth are familiar with the term *sustainable development* are given in Table 1.

Table 1. Are you familiar with the term *sustainable development*?

Answer	%
Yes, I know it well	29.1
I have heard of it	55.1
No, never heard of it	15.8
Total	100.0

A third of the respondents believe that they are well acquainted with the term *sustainable development*, more than a half of them stated that they have heard of it, and 15.8 percent of participants have never heard of the term. This last group of respondents who never heard of the concept of sustainable development is further analyzed and the results are that there is no significant difference in responses by gender, age and regions, and that when it comes to the education of the respondents, the results are as follows: secondary vocational schools – 27.8 percent, university students – 38.8 percent, graduates – 33.4 percent. These results, that do not associate the level of education with the correct answer to the research question, lead to a previous research related to environmental education in the Republic of Serbia, in which it was concluded that the data about educational curriculum and programs has shown an evident lack of formal and permanent environmental education at all levels of formal education. (Klemenovic, 2004; Pavlovic, 2011; Petrovic, 2010;

Petrovic, Jeremic, Petrovic, & Cirovic, 2014; Sakac, Cveticanin, & Sucevic, 2012; Trumic, Petrovic, & Radojicic, 2009). This is particularly important to point out, bearing in mind that environmental education programs contribute to educational reform in the sense of sustainability and sustainable development (Reilly, 2008; UNSD, 1992).

2. Results of the responses to the question whether or not they are familiar with the goals of the Strategy of sustainable development of the Republic of Serbia are given in Table 2.

Table 2. Are you familiar with the goals of the Strategy of sustainable development of the Republic of Serbia?

Answer	%
Yes, I know them well	17.7
I have heard of them, but know nothing about them	46.8
No, never heard of them	35.4
Total	100.0

As it can be clearly seen from the answers gained, more than a third of respondents do not know anything about the goals of the Strategy of sustainable development of the Republic of Serbia, while 46.8 percent have heard of them but are not informed as to what they are about. Only 17.7 percent of respondents are familiar with these goals. The results show that there is no significant difference in responses by gender, age, region and education level. Unfortunately this percentage is more than poor since it shows that nearly 80 percent of respondents are not familiar with the goals of sustainable development, and it shows, like in the case of the research question 1, the need for adequate formal and informal education, whose main theme must be sustainable development and the goals of sustainable development. It should be noted that when education for sustainable development is in question, it must be directed to some of the many existing sustainability issues (e.g. biodiversity, climate change, equity, and poverty). Ideally, efforts to reorient education will be based on national or local sustainability goals. A properly re-oriented curriculum will address local environmental, social, and economic contexts to ensure that it is locally relevant and culturally appropriate (UNESCO, 2012)

3. In the context of this study, subjects were asked to rank the 17 goals of sustainable development formed by the United Nations as a new global development Agenda for Sustainable Development, for the period until 2030, by importance. The results of their evaluation are presented in Table 3.

Based on the answers of respondents the following can be concluded:

- The most important sustainable development goals were found to be: End hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture; Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages

Table 3. The results of evaluation of sustainable development goals

Sustainable development goals	Arithmetic mean ( $t_n$ )	Rank
End hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture	2.07	1
Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages	2.14	2
Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls	2.19	3
Promote inclusive and sustainable economic growth, employment and decent work for all	2.27	4
End poverty in all its forms everywhere	2.33	5
Ensure access to water and sanitation for all	2.34	6
Ensure sustainable consumption and production patterns	2.34	6
Ensure inclusive and quality education for all and promote lifelong learning	2.34	6
Sustainably manage forests, combat desertification, halt and reverse land degradation, halt biodiversity loss	2.37	9
Take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts	2.40	10
Ensure access to affordable, reliable, sustainable and modern energy for all	2.40	10
Build resilient infrastructure, promote sustainable industrialization and foster innovation	2.44	12
Reduce inequality within and among countries	2.47	13
Make cities inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable	2.51	14
Conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources	2.56	15
Revitalize the global partnership for sustainable development	2.61	16
Promote just, peaceful and inclusive societies	2.77	17

and Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls with marks of high importance: 2.07, 2.14 and 2.19. It can be said that these results were expected, bearing in mind that they are in the most direct connection with youth. Unfortunately the goals End hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture and Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages, are logically separated by high marks of significance considering that the Republic of Serbia belongs to poor countries, according to the data relating to economic indicators: gross domestic product (GDP) per capita, and level of actual individual consumption (AIC) *per capita*. These data are calculated by Eurostat for following

countries: the 28 EU Member States, three EFTA Member States (Iceland, Norway, and Switzerland), five EU candidate countries (Montenegro, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Albania, Serbia and Turkey) and one potential candidate (Bosnia and Herzegovina) for 2012, 2013, 2014 and 2015. When taking into account both the above economic indicators, the Republic of Serbia takes up an unenviable place – 35 out of 37 countries (Eurostat, 2016). In addition, knowing that the Republic of Serbia is a postmodern traditional patriarchal society in transition in Southeast Europe, as well as looking at the position of women and gender roles that distinguish this society (Brunnbauer, 2002; Stojanović-Jovanović and Jovanović, 2015), and bearing in mind that a larger number of respondents are female (69 percent) it was to be expected that the goal Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls got a mark of high importance.

- The least essential objectives of sustainable development were found to be: Conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources; Revitalize the global partnership for sustainable development and Promote just, peaceful and inclusive societies with marks of importance: 2.56, 2.61 and 2.77. When it comes to the relatively small relevance score assigned to the goal Conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources, this is quite understandable since the Republic of Serbia has no outlet to the ocean or the sea. What is worrying is that young people are assigning the lowest ratings to the goals relating to Revitalize the global partnership for sustainable development and Promote just, peaceful and inclusive societies. On the other hand, this is understandable bearing in mind that the results showed that 15.8 percent of participants have never heard of sustainable development. Furthermore, these results may lead to similarities with the results of the research related to youth activism – a case study of Belgrade region. A representative sample of 1,427 respondents showed *that more than a half of the respondents do not like to deal with social problems and more than one-third showed a mainly passive attitude towards issues of personal and social activism* (Borojević, Vuk, Petrović, & Slović, 2015).

Further on, one of the issues raised in this research is whether gender influences the series of questions asked. As for the first two set research questions: Are you familiar with the term *sustainable development*? and Are you familiar with the goals of the Strategy of sustainable development of the Republic of Serbia? our results showed that no difference occurred in the issue of familiarity by gender with the goals of the Strategy of sustainable development of the Republic of Serbia ( $p > 0.05$ ): 61 percent of male re-

Table 4. Answers by gender on question Are you familiar with the term *sustainable development*?

			Yes, I know it well	I have heard of it	No, never heard of it	Total
Sex	Male	Count	177	203	112	492
		% within Sex	36.0%	41.3%	22.8%	100.0%
		% within Are you familiar with the term <i>sustainable development</i> ?	38.3%	23.2%	44.8%	31.0%
		% of Total	11.2%	12.8%	7.1%	31.0%
	Female	Count	285	671	138	1094
		% within Sex	26.1%	61.3%	12.6%	100.0%
		% within Are you familiar with the term <i>sustainable development</i> ?	61.7%	76.8%	55.2%	69.0%
		% of Total	18.0%	42.3%	8.7%	69.0%
Total	Count	462	874	250	1586	
	% within Sex	29.1%	55.1%	15.8%	100.0%	
	% within Are you familiar with the term <i>sustainable development</i> ?	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	
	% of Total	29.1%	55.1%	15.8%	100.0%	

spondents are acquainted with the goals of the Strategy of sustainable development (24.4 percent know it well, 36.6 percent have heard of it) while 39 percent never heard of it; 64.6 percent of females are acquainted with these goals of the National strategy of sustainable development (15.6 percent know it well, 49 percent have heard of it) and 35.4 percent never heard of it. In contrast to these results, in terms of the responses by gender to the question *Are you familiar with the term sustainable development?* our results showed a difference (Pearson Chi-Square=58.473, df=2,  $p<0.01$ ). Answers by gender to the question whether or not they are familiar with the term *sustainable development* are given in Table 4. Analysis of the results shows that when it comes to males: 77.3 percent of respondents are acquainted with the term sustainable development of which – 36.8 percent of the respondents is well acquainted with the concept and significance of sustainable development, 41.3 percent had heard of sustainable development, while 22.8 percent, or one quarter had never heard of the concept of sustainable development. When it comes to females, the results are as follows: 87.4 percent is acquainted with the term sustainable development (10.1 percent more than males), 26.1 percent is well acquainted with the concept of sustainable development (which is 9.9 percent less than males, and speaks of the need to strengthen gender knowledge needed to achieve sustainable development and its goals, UN, 2016b), the highest percentage – 61.3 has heard about the sustainable development which corresponds to the research by Eisler, Eisler, & Yoshida (2003) that speak of the interest of women for the two pillars of sustainable development and for the environment and its protection as well as the social component because females' behavior and beliefs focus more on social context, and *traditionally females take more*

*responsibility for social needs and are more oriented towards the everyday social and physical environment* (Archer, 1996; Bussey and Bandura, 1999; Eisler, Wester, Yoshida, & Bianchi, 1999; Eisler, Eisler, & Yoshida, 2003; Maccoby and Jacklin, 1974; Moller and Serbin, 1996). In the end, only 12.6 percent of females never heard of the concept of sustainable development which is almost twice less than the percentage of males.

Analysis of the results of males and females in relation to their ranking of the 17 goals of sustainable development by their importance, showed differences ( $p<0.01$ ) occurred in the importance of the two sustainable development goals: Build resilient infrastructure, promote sustainable industrialization and foster innovation; and Conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources. These results indicated that the validity of these two goals dependent on the category of gender. The results showed following: males better ranked the goal Build resilient infrastructure, promote sustainable industrialization and foster innovation (2.14) than females (2.74); females better ranked the goal Conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources (2.41) than males (2.71). These differences could be explained in the case of the first goal with the results of previous research that speak about the traditional model of the gender division of labor within society which is based on a clear separation between gender in which, unlike women, men are primarily concentrated in productive activity (Barrientos, Kabeer, & Hossain, 2004), as well as the fact that the Republic of Serbia is a postmodern traditional patriarchal society in transition in which in the population of economically active population, males makes up 73.9 percent and females only 26.1 percent (Statistical office of the Republic of Serbia, 2016) which speaks of the reason why men assigned greater importance

to this objective in particular as regards to sustainable industrialization. When it comes to the other sustainable development goal, the results show that the females ranked it much better according to importance than males. This can be explained with the study results of the authors Eisler, Eisler, & Yoshida (2003) which speaks of gender differences in the perception of nature and the environment in favor of females, and particularly females perceived better the sea, than the males.

Further object of our analysis was the age of respondents. For the division of respondents into three groups the valid division of the Republic of Serbia was used (Tomanović and Stanojević, 2015): from 15 to 19 years, from 20 to 25 years and from 26 to 30 years. Our results showed that no difference occurred in the issues of familiarity with the term sustainable development by age and the goals of the Strategy of sustainable development of the Republic of Serbia ( $p > 0.05$ ). The respondents most acquainted with the concept of sustainable development is the category of respondents aged 20 to 25 years – 37.9 percent, while the least familiar is the category aged 15 to 19 – 16 percent; when it comes to the goals of the Strategy for Sustainable Development of the Republic of Serbia, the category of respondents aged 20 to 25 years knows them the best – 21.1 percent, while they are completely unknown for the category of respondents aged 15 to 19 years – 58.3 percent. Bearing in mind that respondents from the category of 15 to 19 years old were high school students, and that they demonstrated the worst results, it can be concluded that in the Republic of Serbia it is necessary to integrate education for sustainable development into primary and secondary schooling. Education Development Strategy in Serbia until 2020 speaks of this as well (*Sl. glasnik RS*, no. 107/2012, 2012) stating that the quality of teaching and learning at all levels of education must be established based on modern forms of work with the aim of developing the country on the principles of smart, sustainable and inclusive development. This is certainly possible because *reorienting a curriculum to address sustainability can take place at a classroom or national level* (UNESCO, 2006, 2012).

Further, analysis of the ranking marks by age of respondents of the 17 goals of sustainable development by their importance, showed differences ( $p < 0.01$ ) occurred in the importance of the three sustainable development goals: Ensure inclusive and quality education for all and promote lifelong learning; Take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts; and Sustainably manage forests, combat desertification, halt and reverse land degradation, halt biodiversity loss. In other words, the validity of these three goals dependent on the category of age, while the validity of the other goals did not depend on age categories. The results showed following:

- Respondents in the group of 15 to 19 years have given the lowest mark of importance – 2.49 to the goal Ensure inclusive and quality education for all and promote lifelong learning, while the respondents from 20 to 25 years assigned a rating 2.48, and those from the group of 26 to 30 years gave it the highest score of 2.04. It is expected that the results, especially for the second part of the objective, show that the group of respondents aged 15 to 19 years lower valued promotion of lifelong learning as opposed to the oldest group of respondents with the highest rating.
- When it comes to the goal Take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts, assessment by groups of respondents are relatively approximate: 2.42, 2.39 and 2.39. Although, on this question the lowest mark of importance was given by the subjects of groups of 15 to 19 years, which once again confirms the need for the introduction of education for sustainable development into formal education in primary and secondary schools.
- The goal Sustainably manage forests, combat desertification, halt and reverse land degradation, halt biodiversity loss got a mark of 2.35 from the group of 15 to 19 years old, by a group of 20 to 25 years it got a grade 2.43 (which is the lowest score), and those from the group of 26 to 30 years gave it 2.32 mark, again the highest one.

When it comes to the sizes of the places of residence, according to the Law on Territorial Organization of the Republic of Serbia territory of the Republic of Serbia is divided into municipalities, cities and the city of Belgrade (*Sl. glasnik RS*, no. 129/2007, 2007; no. 18/2016, 2016). Surveyed respondents, depending on the place of residence, were divided into two groups: city and municipality. Within the division of cities there are all cities together with the city of Belgrade. Our results showed that no difference occurred in the issues of familiarity with the term sustainable development and the goals of the Strategy of sustainable development of the Republic of Serbia ( $p > 0.05$ ) by the sizes of the places of residence of the respondents.

The analysis of the ranking score of respondents by the sizes of their places of residence of the 17 goals of sustainable development by their importance, showed a difference ( $p < 0.01$ ) that occurred in the importance of only one sustainable development goal: Build resilient infrastructure, promote sustainable industrialization and foster innovation. The results showed that the validity of this goal dependent on the category which refers to the place of residence. Respondents whose place of residence are cities allocated to this goal the average score of 2.51, while respondents whose residence are municipalities assigned to this objective the average score of



2.37, which argues that residents of the municipality due to its underdevelopment in relation to the cities, however, attach greater importance the construction of infrastructure, sustainable industrialization and innovation.

Analysis of the obtained results has opened up many issues of crucial importance for the development of sustainability and the role of young people in its achievement, and justifies the need to continue with this kind of research in the future, with a larger number of participants (especially male) and use of broader and more detailed research. This implies the use of expanded and enhanced methodology and questionnaire in this crucial area of youth development and of the entire Republic of Serbia, with the necessary consideration of gender issues.

#### 4. Conclusion

On one hand, youth represents a valuable resource in achieving sustainability goals in any society, and should be viewed as such:

- With their participation, they are able to develop and reach their own potential, while the emphasis would be on their contribution in the field of creativity and innovation.
- Active youth participation in decision making and actions, both on local and state levels, is of essential importance if we want to build a democratic, open, richer and sustainable society.

On the other hand, based on our research, several issues came to attention as urgent discussion topics:

- 15.8 percent of participants stated that they have never heard of sustainable development.
- More than a third of respondents do not know anything about the goals of the Strategy of sustainable development of the Republic of Serbia, while 46.8 percent have heard of them but are not informed as to what they are about.
- Obtained marks for youth attitudes towards goals of a new sustainable development agenda singled out the following goals as the most important ones according to young people: End hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture; Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages and Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls had marks of high importance: 2.07, 2.14 and 2.19. While the least important goals were: Conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources; Revitalize the global partnership for sustainable development and Promote just, peaceful and inclusive societies with marks of importance: 2.56, 2.61 and 2.77.
- Gender roles are significant predictors of perception of sustainable development and sustainable development goals.

From this we can conclude that it is necessary to work on the development of formal and informal education of the youth in the Republic of Serbia, especially when it comes to terms like sustainable development, sustainable development goals and sustainability strategy, having in mind that *a basic premise of education for sustainability is that just as there is a wholeness and interdependence to life in all its forms, so must there be a unity and wholeness to efforts to understand it and ensure its continuation* (UNESCO, 2012), as well as fact that moving towards the goal of sustainability is critically dependent on education. This conclusion coincides with the fact that sustainability has attracted increasing attention in education since the Brundtland report from 1987 was published (WCED, 1987) which criticized the existing educational systems that do not teach about sustainability issues, emphasizing the need for educational programs that must incorporate education for sustainable development and sustainable society (Figueiró and Raufflet, 2015). Also, this education has to provide the knowledge and skills for promotion of sustainable development, sustainable lifestyles, human rights, gender equality, culture of peace and non-violence and global citizenship.

Further on, the youth should not only be informed and educated in the field of sustainable development, sustainable development goals and sustainability, but they should gain an opportunity to actively participate, which is at the same time, a goal of sustainable development itself. Youth participation is not just about developing active citizens or building democracy for the future. If participation is to be meaningful for young people, it is crucial that they can influence and shape decisions and actions when they are young and not only at some later stage in life. This means among other things that the views, attitudes of young people must be respected and be included in all decisions, particularly those of relevance to the implementation of sustainable development which *supports inclusive globalization* (Pawłowski, 2010). By carrying and encouraging youth participation, we contribute to the integration of the younger generation into the society, by helping them to not only cope with the challenges and pressures of being young, but with the problems of modern society and strategies of sustainability and sustainable development as well. Finally, *when youth are engaged, particularly when empowerment and development opportunities are provided, there are multiple benefits for society* (Ho, Clarke, & Dougherty, 2015; Maconachie, 2014; Powers and Tiffany, 2006).

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