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The Evolving Role of the University in Providing Up-to-Date Sustainable Skills the Case of Florida Gulf Coast University

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This paper explores the evolving role of higher education institutions as pivotal agents of change for local cohesion and regional sustainable development, with a specific focus on social sustainability. While many universities limit their sustainability efforts to research and infrastructure, this study highlights the importance of experiential and practice-based learning as a means to foster community cohesion and social justice. Through the analysis of a case study related to Florida Gulf Coast University in the US, the paper investigates how institutional tools, such as the “Service Learning” program, among others, integrate students into the local fabric of the area, in particular Southwest Florida. Utilizing qualitative methodology, based on literature reviews and face-to-face interviews with key academic actors, the research demonstrates that “living laboratory” approaches not only enhance students’ career readiness and ethical grounding, but also directly address regional needs and improve the community in which they are applied. Florida Gulf Coast University provides an example in which sustainability is conceived as a tool for the creation of social justice. The findings suggest that by institutionalizing such practices within strategic plans, universities can effectively bridge the gap between academia and society, equipping future decision-makers with the necessary skills to tackle complex global and local sustainability challenges.

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Conflict of Interest

The author declare that there is no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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